

# Many are seeing the light

In the classic baseball movie “Field of Dreams,” Kevin Costner’s character hears a voice that assures him, “If you build it, they will come.” These words affirmed the baseball-loving character’s leap of faith in digging up the Iowa corn fields that provided his living and replacing it with a baseball field on which past legends would play and that people would flock to see.

The phrase strikes at a seemingly obvious, but often over-looked premise: namely that people are willing to do many things, but sometimes they just need to be asked.

We asked the good priests of this Archdiocese to help us test this notion when we replicated the successful Archdiocese of Washington campaign, The Light is on for You. By offering the sacrament of Reconciliation each Wednesday evening at every parish in the Archdiocese this Lent, we took our own leap of faith. We were asking Catholics – active and non-active alike – to return to the sacrament and to hear one message: “God loves us just the way we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way. The Light is on for You.” I am proud to say the Catholic people of this local Church heard our message and have responded beyond all expectation.

Though there are a number of parishes we haven’t heard from, we estimate that 1,000 people went to confession at parishes throughout the Archdiocese on the first day of the campaign, March 4 – with some parishes experiencing 30, 40, or 50-plus people coming to confession. In addition, we have heard from many parishes that the number of people coming to confession has increased significantly from week to week. Likewise, they were impressed by both the quality of the confessions, as well as the number of people who had been away from the sacrament for several years.

“I had people waiting when I got to church to open up, and confessions went on for almost 75 minutes. I think some were looking for something like this,” one priest wrote me following the first night of the campaign. Of the people who came that first night one priest told me, “They were what the program was designed for.” Another priest who serves at a parish in the city said of the 15 people whose confessions he heard, “Almost all of them had been away from the sacrament for decades ... I can only tell you that as a priest, it was one of the most rewarding evenings spent

celebrating the sacrament ... talk about the power of God's grace ... one man broke down in tears at the end, saying how he felt a tremendous burden that he has carried for so many years literally lifted off his shoulders."

Organizing any archdiocesan-wide campaign is challenging and involves a great deal of work and coordination. This particular initiative, however, puts a strain on the schedules and limited resources of our parishes and priests. It requires parishes to alter their normal Reconciliation schedules and many of our priests, whose days off fall on Wednesday, were asked to make other arrangements. Further, they were asked to help us promote the campaign by displaying posters and brochures and by preaching about sin and the healing love of God's forgiveness and mercy. I am grateful for their efforts. It is gratifying to hear from many who have witnessed the fruits of their labors with great priestly joy.

"I admit that I was not a big fan of the Wednesday confessions," one priest wrote. "I thought it was just one more thing to do, and it would never work anyway. I was really wrong. Last night the lines were so long they were out the front doors. Really amazing. I've never seen anything like it."

What fine priests we are blessed to have in this Archdiocese.

Getting the word out to our people that "the light" was on for them was a challenge, but not as challenging as reaching our sisters and brothers who have been away from the Church. Thanks to the generous support of the Catholic Communication Campaign, we were able to take our message to the streets – literally. By purchasing advertising space on buses, billboards, as well as radio and television stations, people heard a message they hadn't heard for a long time, if ever, and were finally being asked to think about returning to God through the sacrament. They were driving home on I-83, looking out their office window, or listening to the radio or watching television, and their Church was asking them to come home, to embrace God's love and to experience a spiritual renewal.

This is the "new evangelization" we are called to practice, and one of the unexpected joys that have come from this campaign is the response we have received to the Catholic Church's public presence.

“Our Church is finally coming to the front proclaiming the beauty of our faith and of the sacrament of Penance,” one woman told us. Of the television ad she said, “It brought tears to my eyes, because for so long I have not seen someone bring to the front the truths of our faith.” One man wrote, “This morning, as my wife and I were getting ready for work, we were surprised, but absolutely delighted, to hear your spot about The Light is on for You ...on the radio. ... By doing this you bring the faith right into the center of people’s daily lives.”

After all, isn’t that what being an evangelist is all about – bringing the Word of God to the people, wherever they are? People are willing to do many things, sometimes all you have to do is ask.

*The last evening of “The Light is on for You” campaign is Wednesday, April 1. For more information, contact your parish or visit [www.archbalt.org](http://www.archbalt.org).*