Dear Friends,

Last Tuesday, September 1, we had a meeting with all the members of the Parish Council, Finance Council, Stewardship Commission, Liturgy Commission, staff, members of the Hispanic Community and a few other people I personally invited, to discuss ways that we can more effectively evangelize our community. I gave a talk explaining the need for evangelization, and a good friend of mine, Bob Pfundstein, who works for the Stewardship Development office of the Rockford Diocese, led us through a planning session called S.W.O.T. This acronym stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. In any planning session it is good for us to be able to analyze the strengths and weaknesses that are within us so that we can best "play within ourselves." It is also good for us to be able to look at what opportunities are "out there" while being aware of the threats they pose.

This process was a little bit cumbersome at first, but we were all quick learners and did a wonderful job of being able to look at the need for evangelization and to see how we can more effectively carry out the mission of proclaiming the gospel in this community. We based the S.W.O.T. process on one goal that comes to us from the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops 1992 document GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES which says that we are to **"[B]ring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they will freely share it with others."** This goal had thirteen distinct objectives and we spent the evening analyzing our own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that we found in each of these objectives. It was an eye-opening experience for me, especially as Jill Hansen and I put all the data together.

The leadership of our parish had many profound insights into the need for evangelization in our parish and I have been able to see that there are a lot of excellent ideas found within the data we collected. During the next couple of months each organization is going to be asked to look at the data, and come up with ideas on how we can best implement the objectives for this goal.

How enthusiastic are we for our faith? This goal really challenges us to look deep within ourselves and to see how much we value the gift of our faith. It is a precious gift. Our faith is that kind of gift that grows in value the more we give it away. We do put that gift to good use in our lives here at St. Catherine of Genoa Parish, but we can definitely do better. People like the Mass: many are enthused about the fact that we have become more of a multi-cultural, multi-generational parish. We have weaknesses, though. We need to establish more prayer groups; we need to invite people into a deeper, more prayerful relationship with God. There are all kinds of wonderful opportunities for retreats, parish missions and days of reflection; there are prayer books available and ways to learn more about prayer that we can take advantage of. But the deepest threat going is apathy, which is an attitude that says, "Who cares? We're too busy, there are too many other things to do, watch, listen to and participate in."

So, we're going to spend this year looking at ways by which we can evangelize the evangelized. We need to work on that enthusiasm factor before we start to welcome in those who stand outside. We have a lot of work to do.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel