



ANGELUS

FORMING EVANGELIZERS

A look ahead at the 2020
Religious Education Congress





VICTOR ALEMAN

BOB ROLLER/CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

The exhibit hall at the 2017 Religious Education Conference.

KEEPING EVANGELIZATION SIMPLE

Three key speakers at this year's Religious Education Congress share their thoughts on the Church's most urgent mission

BY PABLO KAY / ANGELUS

As the universal Church prepares to enter Lent at the end of this month, thousands of American Catholics are preparing for another yearly milestone in the life of the Catholic Church in Southern California: the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, which this year is taking place Feb. 20-23 at the Anaheim Convention Center.

The theme chosen for this year's congress is "Live Mercy – Be Holy." For this year's "Congress issue," Angelus News spoke to three of this year's speakers — a bishop serving along the U.S.-Mexico border, a laywoman working for a diocese, and a layman teaching at a prestigious Catholic university — about what this year's gathering means to them in the context of the Church's most urgent mission: evangelization. ♦



Connecting charity with credibility

Bishop Daniel E. Flores

It's been exactly 10 years since Bishop Daniel Flores was installed as the bishop of Brownsville, Texas, one of the poorest Catholic dioceses in the country.

Since then, he's earned a reputation among his brother bishops as an outspoken advocate for immigrants, the unborn, and the poor. But the bilingual native Tejano has also shown himself to be one of America's most articulate thinkers when it comes to talking about the Church's teachings to a variety of audiences, whether they be Washington, D.C. intellectuals, recently arrived immigrants, or his 5,000-plus Twitter followers.

At this year's congress (his first), Bishop Flores will preside at a Friday afternoon Mass in English and give a keynote address in Spanish at a worship and praise session Saturday morning.

For this issue, he spoke to *Angelus News* about what he's seeing on the border, how patristic theology and detective novels both help him "keep going," and why he thinks we need to be thinking a lot more about something he calls "disinterested generosity."

How have you been preparing for the congress, and also for Lent (which

starts three days after the congress)? Any good books on your nightstand (or in your suitcase)?

One thing I've been doing is meditating more, focusing on the basis of Lent and on the daily Gospels, on hearing the rhythm of the Lord's words to us these days.

I really take the reality of the daily Gospel of the Mass to be the Lord's word to us in the Church, and how it comes personally for us on that day. It's preparatory, but it's also kind of fun as you get closer to Lent, preparing us for that journey we make with him for 40 days.

I've been reading on my iPhone recently the "Tractates on the Gospel of John" by St. Augustine. I go back to that a lot. There are very beautiful expositions of the Gospel of John there, and more recently I've been feeling a call to spend some more time with St. Augustine.

When talking about John, St. Augustine goes into the mystery of the glorification of the Son, and I find it very deep and enlightening: how the Church understands the whole mystery of hope. In Lent we enter into this mystery of Christ in his glorification, which also includes his self-emptying.

I always have to have a novel with me to keep going, too. One of the novels I've been working on is "The Sixth Lamentation" by William Brodrick, a detective novel that I find to be very deep. He's very interested in historical memory, especially of the 20th century.

I had read another book of his recently called "A Whispered Name," set during World War I, which I found very moving, the way he talks about the realities that people faced and questions of faith, because these books deal with that and the questions of God in very dark places.

I think novels can be very helpful in engaging some of those human anxieties and fears and realities that we sometimes don't want to face.

You hosted Archbishop José H. Gomez and a delegation of U.S. bishops in your diocese in the summer of 2018 for a visit to assess the humanitarian response to the situation on the U.S.-Mexico border. The trip included a meeting with federal officials, a visit to a migrant detention center, and a stop at the Catholic Charities Humanitarian Respite Center. How has the situation on the border in your diocese changed since then?



Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, in a photo July 10 with youth volunteers who serve and prepare meals for unaccompanied children from Central America.

Since that visit, the government has changed policy quite a bit to what's known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy.

In the past, a lot of the Central American families that were presenting themselves at border crossings were being allowed to pass into the United States to make their asylum claim, as was the legal requirement at the time. Agencies like Catholic Charities would help deal with those families and get them connected to relatives in the country.

But right now, the "Remain in Mexico" policy requires them to make their petition and then go back to Mexico and wait there for a decision, which could be several months down the road.

So right now, for example, we're directing our humanitarian effort to help these families. Many of our volunteers and people from across the Rio Grande Valley cross the border into Matamoros (which is right across the bridge in Mexico) on a regular basis to help these families who are basically living in tents on the Rio Grande River.

It's quite a desperate and very difficult situation. I've been over there, but

the people who see it will tell you it's a vastly different situation. There are people on the Mexican side living in tents who are waiting for their court date. So the situation has changed in terms of what these families are going through.

As a bishop on the border, you have a front-row seat to some of the harshest consequences of the divisions in this country right now, especially when it comes to the issue of immigration. At times, it seems that this kind of division is also present in the Church, too. What, in a few words, is a Christian supposed to make of times like these?

Our challenge is to let the teaching of the Church, our faith, the Gospel, the person of Christ himself, be the light by which we organize our politics and our involvement in the political field, and in the political world.

We have to be involved in society, but the Gospel has to be the principal lens through which we judge things. But sometimes — and we aren't even always conscious of it — we allow our politics to be the lens by which we judge the Gospel. And I think that's

one of the sources of the division within the body of the Church.

As a bishop, what I ask people to do with respect to the "hot-button" issues, whether it's immigration, abortion, or the death penalty, is to look at these issues first in terms of the basic responsibility of a Christian to respond to the human being in front of you with mercy and compassion.

That doesn't mean that there's no law or order when it comes to these things, but rather that when it comes to the person we're looking at, especially the person in distress, that our response should be as to Christ himself. And then we can figure out how to make the policies in a way that expresses that sense of concern and mercy.

But that's all the way across the spectrum of difficult [political] issues that cause division nowadays. Those are what I call the "human condition issues" of people who are in great distress, like mothers who have difficulty in finding any support in bringing a child into the world, or immigrant parents with children who are afraid they'll get killed or kidnapped.

We have to respond to that human reality first, and then craft the laws that

ROSE YBARRA/THE VALLEY CATHOLIC VIA CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

respond to those things in a compassionate way in which the suffering of the human person does not get eclipsed in our conversation.

That has to be the first thing we think about. That doesn't mean that we're going to agree necessarily on the best policies to address these situations on the public level, but at the very least we're starting from the same starting point, which is to find a way to address these things with compassion.

Within the Church, we also have a special responsibility to treat each other calmly and without rancor, and I think that's sometimes difficult when political tensions get very, very high.

You shepherd one of the poorest dioceses in the country, and one where there is a remarkable amount of human suffering. Despite this, what do you see that gives you the most hope?

Well, you know that hope is a theological virtue that comes from faith in a God who loves us.

I see that evidenced in a lot of very difficult situations in my diocese where people pull together and respond in a generous way to each other: volunteers who give up their time to help families,

to wash clothes for migrant children, or mop floors.

Distress can cause us to kind of give up and despair, and say, "Well, the world is a terrible place and I can't do anything, so I might as well just try to take care of myself."

But I see a lot of people who are inspirations to me, who just do what they can to help others. Yes, there is suffering and distress. But in Spanish we say, "Los pobres son los más generosos" — that the poor are often the most generous in terms of responding to the situation of somebody else who's in an even worse condition.

That's what I see, and to me, that's a sign of how God's grace can change our response.

We can have hardened hearts, or we can have fleshy hearts — that's the kind of option that the Scriptures give us. If we want fleshy hearts, we have the Holy Spirit to give us that, and then can we do something. That's what gives me hope.

Your schedule at the congress includes a "Mass for the Evangelization of All Peoples" and a talk in Spanish on the theme of mercy. What message are you hoping to get across to

"congressgoers" this week?

I want to tie in how we live our Christian lives with the themes of evangelization and mercy. I want to approach that from a few different angles because ultimately, our credibility as followers of Jesus, especially in the world today, is inextricably tied to the integrity of our "disinterested generosity," which is another word for charity.

This kind of love is the response to the human need, a call to alleviate, to the extent we can, the distress of another.

It's our response to Christ, who speaks to us from the cross and through the resurrection so that our hearts are touched by the mystery of love. That's evangelizing.

Christ says, "Love one another; even as I have loved you." And it's that responsiveness to Christ and to the distress around us that are inseparable.

This is so central to the Gospel that we have to find ways to talk about it. But I am convinced that the credibility of the Church depends on whether there is such a thing in the world as a love that gives without asking for payment in return.

This is the key, because the world we live in is very cynical about that. It tends to want to deconstruct everything and even deconstructs love in such a way that there's even a certain sort of cynicism.

If young people, for example, don't have an experience of generosity around them from very early on, they kind of give up on this love, and basically life becomes all about what you can get out of it and it doesn't matter who you step on to get it.

Jesus says to do good to those who can't repay you. I think that that's at the heart of the credibility of the Church's witness, the witness of grace in the world.

There's a great need in the Church for us to recover our own sense that there's something new in the world called the grace of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, and we have to make that visible by our own generosity. ♦



Pope Francis greets Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, during a meeting with U.S. bishops from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas during their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Jan. 20.

VATICAN MEDIA/CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE



People, not programs or plans

Julianne Stanz

Although born and raised in her native Australia, mother of three Julianne Stanz now lives and works in a very different part of the world: Green Bay, Wisconsin, where she serves as director of Discipleship and Leadership Development for the city's Catholic diocese.

Her insights on evangelization have brought her not only to the Religious Education Congress in recent years, but also to meetings of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, whom she advises on catechesis and evangelization.

What have your past experiences at the Religious Education Congress been like, and why are you back this year?

I have spoken several times at the congress through the years and have always appreciated the opportunity to learn from the wisdom of others such as Cardinal Luis Tagle, Sister Briege McKenna, and other speakers from around the world. The congress has always provided me with lots of ideas for ministry and connected me with others in the work of evangelization and discipleship.

This year, the congress is doing some-

thing a little different with its Friday keynote talk. Instead of having one person address the audience, there will instead be a keynote consisting of five presenters, including myself, sponsored by Loyola Press on the topic of my new book "Start with Jesus."

In addition, I will also be emceeding a conversation between Archbishop Gomez and Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the apostolic nuncio to the U.S., on Saturday morning, and I will present later in the afternoon on the topic of spiritual self-care.

Finally, at my Saturday workshop, I hope to create a "space for grace" to have a conversation about healthy spiritual living. I see so many ministers tired and worn out. This workshop will offer participants a place to be renewed and refreshed in their walk as a disciple.

One of the things you're known for writing and speaking about is the relationship between religious education and evangelization. Both are terms that can be defined broadly and get thrown around a lot in Catholic circles these days. In a few words, how would you define that relationship in a way ordinary Catholics can understand?

We use lots of complex terminology in the Church, which can be off-putting to those who we are trying to reach. I live by the "KISS philosophy" when it comes to breaking down the Church's teachings for others: Keep it simple, sweetie.

The word "evangelize" comes from



the Greek word meaning “to bring the good news.” Seems simple enough, right? And yet it seems that many Catholics are afraid of the word evangelization and barely use it at all.

“Isn’t there a better word than evangelization?” I have often been asked. “Something not so scary or intimidating, perhaps?” “Maybe we can call it something else?” The word “it” holds the key to why many Catholics find it difficult to share their faith with others: Part of the difficulty lies in thinking about faith in “it” terms rather than in “who” terms.

At the heart of evangelization is nurturing a personal relationship with Christ, who is the same “yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Evangelization is the deepest identity of the Church, and so many wonder how does religious education or what is called catechesis fit in? Good question.

The old adage that you shouldn’t “put the cart before the horse” is one that we need to be mindful of when we speak of the relationship between evangelization and catechesis. Both evangelization and catechesis build upon each

other and work together in the life of every person to bring him or her to a mature faith. One does not replace the other.

The word “catechesis” comes from the Greek word to “echo” — we echo the teachings of the Church but also the person of Jesus Christ in his message. Evangelization and catechesis are the means by which the Catholic Church passes on the faith from one generation to the next.

Last November, you spoke to the Catholic bishops of the U.S. during their fall meeting in Baltimore as a consultant to the USCCB Committee on Catechesis and Evangelization. What was that like, and what do you hope they took away from your remarks?

Even though I regularly speak across the country, whether it is in a small parish or a room full of bishops, I get very nervous.

I asked the Holy Spirit to be with me during that time, to help others to be open, to give me the words that were needed, but also to give me the strength to keep silent when that is more prudent.

It was a nerve-wracking experience but also bore a lot of fruit. Several bishops contacted me later, sharing insights and wanting to dialogue about my remarks. My main point was that we need to see this as a moment of opportunity to go out to a world that is in need of healing with the merciful love of Jesus. Programs, ideas, events, and plans do not make disciples, people do.

I also shared the point that discipleship is not a program or a class but a way of life and our parishes ought to reflect that reality.

Priests, parents, catechists, even bishops seem to be looking for ways to both keep young people engaged with the Catholic faith and call back those who have strayed or “lapsed.” What, in your opinion, is the first step to take?



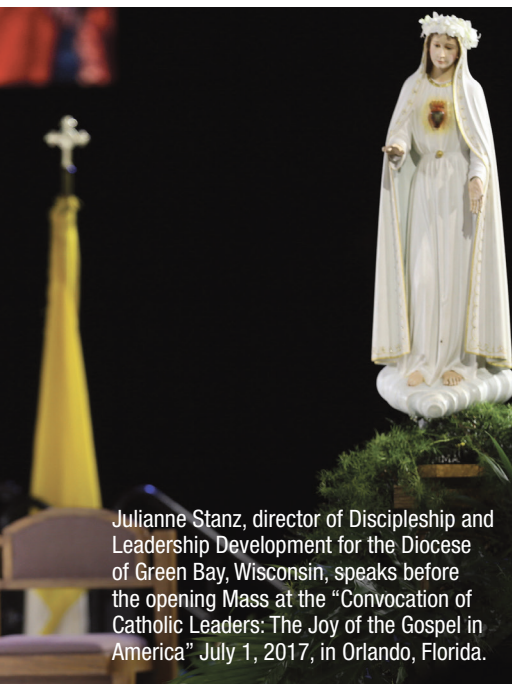
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE/BOB ROLLER

Julianne Stanz speaks during the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore Nov. 11, 2019.

We all know that we can no longer sit and wait for people to ring the doorbells of our parishes. Instead, we must go out and encounter all people with the love of Jesus in our hearts. Many people today have never read sacred Scripture or encountered Jesus through the beauty of the Mass.

The first step is to actually take a first step, away from our offices, to where people are. We must be nimble and flexible in employing new ways to encounter people when they present themselves to us. We sometimes tend to shy away from being creative and taking a risk for fear of failure. It is easier to play it safe than to “put ourselves out there.”

But when you consider the experiences of the early Church, particularly St. Paul, who was imprisoned, shipwrecked, and beaten, getting out of our comfort zone is critical if we hope to reach people today. Be bold, keep moving, and make noise: those are all things that Pope Francis is asking us to do. ♦



CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE/BOB ROLLER

Julianne Stanz, director of Discipleship and Leadership Development for the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, speaks before the opening Mass at the “Convocation of Catholic Leaders: The Joy of the Gospel in America” July 1, 2017, in Orlando, Florida.



MCGRATH INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH LIFE

'A place where new charisms arise'

Timothy O'Malley, Ph.D.

For Timothy O'Malley, Ph.D., this year's stop at the Religious Education Congress is just one stop in the busy schedule of a very busy theology professor.

A native of Tennessee, O'Malley researches and teaches at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, in the areas of liturgical-sacramental theology, marriage and family, catechesis, and spirituality. He also works as the director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life and academic director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy.

He has written books and gives frequent talks on a wide range of subjects. Just days before coming to LA for the congress, he visited Ireland and Scotland for speaking engagements. Angelus caught up with him to discuss how he sees the Church responding to the biggest challenges in evangelizing today's world.

Tell us a little bit about how you first ended up speaking at the congress, and why you're back this year.

Last year, I was invited to speak at the congress through my relationship with Our Sunday Visitor. I spoke on young adults and the liturgy, how liturgical

formation might enable young adults to develop a form of life dedicated to human flourishing. For me, coming to the congress is always an opportunity for learning.

My institute at Notre Dame, the McGrath Institute for Church Life, describes itself as a bridge that connects the academy and the Church. If that bridge is to function well, we need to bring the concerns of the Church back to the academy, reflecting on pastoral needs from those involved in pastoral work. The congress is the best place to do this kind of bridge-building in the Church today.

In a book review for America magazine last November, you wrote about the post-Vatican II "tide of disaffiliation" and secularism, saying that "it is possible ... that it is the post-conciliar Church alone that will have the resources to respond to the real crisis, the one that the council fathers could not have recognized."

In your view, what is the "real crisis," and what should U.S. Catholics in 2020 be focusing on most when it comes to evangelization?

The crisis for U.S. Catholics today is twofold. It's not secularization as it has

often been presented by sociologists, as a kind of disenchantment. Human beings remain enchanted but just by the wrong things. They're enchanted by money, by advertising, by violence and addiction.

The second dimension of the crisis is a loss of faith in institutions. Certainly, the Church has lost institutional credibility over the last 20 years, particularly around the sexual abuse crisis. But,



U.S. citizens seem to distrust a variety of institutions: colleges and universities, the government, newspapers, and the media as a whole.

The Church today has the capacity to respond to both crises. We offer something to worship outside of the gods of mammon, of Instagram influencers, and drug use. At the same time, the Church is not another bureaucratic institution.

It's a place where new charisms arise, where the Spirit flows through Christ's body. These charisms take shape in the institution of the Church, becoming a concrete way of "gospelizing" the world.

That's the heart of evangelization: It's not just inviting your neighbor to go to Mass (that is a very good thing, of course). Evangelizing is creating a culture where divine love is the meaning of life.

You've written and spoken quite a bit about "hookup culture." In fact, you'll be speaking about it at this year's congress. How do young people you meet at Notre Dame and elsewhere react when you discuss such a potentially "icky" subject?

For the most part, no one likes

hookup culture. This is because hookup culture is ultimately not about sex per se, but about a loss of communion, a fear of intimacy with another person.

People engage in noncommitted sexual encounters because they're afraid to commit to a concrete relationship with another person, one that unfolds over the course of time. They want intimacy, but they've been formed to be terrified by the mundaneness of commitment.

Yet, that's what we're made for: communion with God and with one another. Once you give young people a space to talk about what they don't like about hookup culture, to be critical of it, they find new possibilities for human relationships. It's why my class at Notre Dame that addresses hookup culture directly has grown to nearly 300 undergraduates.

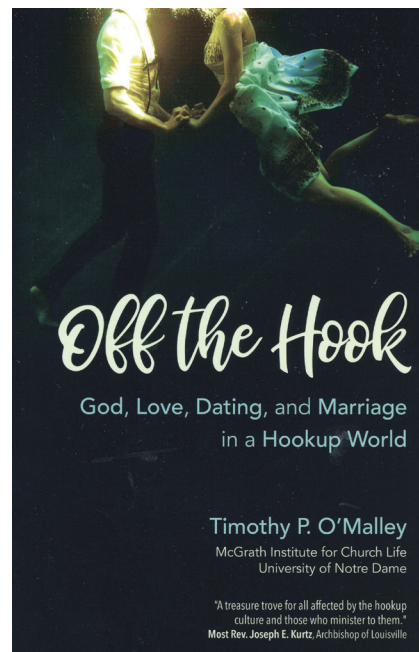
You teach, speak, and write about Christian marriage often. How does being married (with children) help inform what you have to say on the subject?

My marriage and my family are everything to me. For my students at Notre Dame in particular, it's important to me that they know that my primary vocation is to be a husband to my wife and a father to my children.

When we study the history of marriage and family, I want them to see this history not as some archaic past but as offering them wisdom even today. For this reason, my life is always part of what I propose to the students, the ultimate hypothesis that I give them.

I want them to see that the theology of marriage and the family we're studying is salvific not just in the abstract but in my particular life.

In this year's election cycle, many Catholics seem to be fretting about their "political homelessness," a subject you've written about in the past. What's your first piece of advice to



CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Catholics feeling confused, dismayed, or better said, "homeless" during the election cycle?

My doctoral work was related to St. Augustine of Hippo. His famous quote, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you, O God," is often evoked by those speaking about the spiritual life. But it's also true for Catholic engagement with politics.

The temptation of the current political climate in the United States is to put our ultimate hope in a platform of a particular political party. For the Catholic, this is absurd.

Politics is not salvation, and elections are not sacraments. Catholics are, for this reason, politically homeless because our homeland is life with God, love unto the end. We engage in the political realm with this ultimate end in mind.

The Catholic vote should be highly confusing to our polarized age, defending the life of the unborn, the flourishing of the migrant who comes to our borders, the man sentenced to death, and the elderly whose life is not valued. This is the kind of politics that won't always result in wins. But we order ourselves to the logic of the cross, rather than the data suggested by polling. ♦



Timothy O'Malley, Ph.D., discusses Pope Francis and the American Catholic Church with NBC's Anne Thompson.

MCGRATH INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH LIFE