

Following the Path of Faith along with Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski

By Fr. Joseph G. Roesch, MIC

I have been asked to speak to you today on the topic, "Following the Path of Faith along with Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski". As we know, we are coming to the end of the *Year of Faith* which Pope Emeritus Benedict had proclaimed in his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, (the Door of Faith). Since you are celebrating the 15th Anniversary of the International Meetings of the Association of Marian Helpers, Rome was chosen as the site for this year's meeting. It has been an exciting *Year of Faith* here. As you know, in February, Pope Benedict resigned from his office and in March, Pope Francis was elected. Pope Francis has frequently spoken about, *il cammino* as we say in Italian. This is a phrase which means, the pathway, the journey, the pilgrimage. Life is a pilgrimage and we have to keep moving forward with Christ. Along the way, he sends us some companions on the journey, including our brothers and sisters in the faith who have gone before us.

During this talk, I would like to look at the life and the writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski, the founder of the Marians, to examine the particular path of faith which he followed and which he left for us. I will especially focus on the charism of the Marians, a particular way that he gave us to live out our faith in Christ. Blessed Stanislaus would also like to accompany us and to help us along this pathway since we are his spiritual sons and daughters - the members of his religious community, and the laity who are associated with our spirituality.

St. Paul once taught us that we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). None of us knows what the future holds. We don't know all of the obstacles and difficulties that we will meet along the way. But we can't get too far ahead of ourselves because we know that the Lord only gives us the grace necessary for us as we need it. Our Lord once said, "so do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Mt 6:34 New Jerusalem Version). I think there is a lesson in this for us as to *how* we are to follow the pathway of faith: trusting in the Lord, taking one step at a time, and not looking too far into the future with fear and concern. The Lord knows where the bumps and the ditches in the road ahead are and He has already made provisions to help us to get past them.

Early Life

The Founder of the Marians, was born into a good Catholic family in the village of Podegrodzie, which is located in the south of Poland around 45 miles from Cracow. In the early Middle Ages, 2 fortified settlements or strongholds called *gords* existed in this area. A gord usually consisted of a group of wooden houses, built either in rows or in circles, surrounded by one or more rings of walls made of earth and wood, and possibly a fence-wall or a moat. The name of the village, Podegrodzie basically means a settlement under the gord. Because of these settlements, one of the oldest Roman-Catholic parishes was created in the area dating to the year, 1014. So there was a long history of the Catholic faith existing there from long before the birth of our Founder in 1631.

The village is set in a beautiful rural area, surrounded by mountains, woods and fields. The family home was in view of the nearby Dunajec River. Once, while his mother was still carrying Bl. Stanislaus in her womb, she was returning home from the town of Stary Sacz when a storm approached. While in the ferryboat, a strong wind blew and almost overturned the boat. She offered the child in her womb to Jesus and Mary as she prayed for their safety. The boat did eventually overturn throwing her and the ferryman into the water, however in God's providence, they were close enough to the shore, that they were able to make it to dry land safely. When he was born, he was given the Baptismal name Jan (John) after John the Baptist. Nothing happens by chance in the plan of God. The fact that he was dedicated to God while still in his mother's womb is certainly significant.

Young Jan had a number of difficulties in school as a young boy. He was a pious youth but he seemed to have no aptitude for school. He turned to Our Lady in prayer at the age of 7 and he received the special grace that all of his obstacles to learning seemed to disappear. We can learn a lesson from him here. Our Lady is a powerful intercessor and we should all turn to her in our need. This did not mark the end of his educational challenges however. He fell off a ladder while climbing a roof one day and he almost died. He recovered but he then lost interest in school again for about a year. He worked as a shepherd boy, a job which was not easy since he was exposed to the elements, but he persevered at this task. He eventually decided to return to school. He later changed schools but ran into more troubles when it became clear that the teacher was an immoral person and a source of scandal to the pupils. He eventually obtained his education through attending various different schools. However, he also experienced a terrible episode in his youth while away from home in which he suffered from high fevers for four months. He was taken care of by a woman in the boarding house where he was staying. However, when his sickness persisted

and he became covered with scales and sores, the landlord asked him to leave and he found himself homeless. He prayed and God was merciful. People took him in and cared for him and miraculously, the dogs licked his wounds, causing them to heal.

He eventually joined the Piarists, a religious community whose charism was to educate poor children. He received the religious name: Stanislaus of Jesus Mary when he entered the novitiate. After he professed his first vows, he was sent as a seminarian to Warsaw, where he almost lost his life once. The Swedes had invaded Poland. He was returning home through the streets of Warsaw with another seminarian one day. A passing Swedish soldier drew his sword on them. His friend fled for his life. Stanislaus instead, dropped to his knees and bared his neck while he prayed, ready to die a martyr's death. The soldier struck him in the neck with the sword three times with great force, attempting to kill him. It caused him intense pain but he was not wounded. He would later write in his will that he was saved "by a decree of Divine Providence"^[1].

He was eventually ordained and gained a great reputation as a preacher, a teacher and confessor. However there were internal problems in the Piarist community. Since so many poor people wanted their children to be educated, something that had only been a possibility for the rich in the past, the community opened many schools very quickly. Not all of the members of the community received an adequate religious formation. Many candidates were accepted and formed hurriedly to provide enough teachers for the schools. Bl. Stanislaus sought to make sure that the community lived out its rule of life as their founder had envisioned. But not all wanted to hear this necessary corrective. Fr. Stanislaus was branded a zealous troublemaker and a "firebrand" and he suffered a great deal at the hands of his fellow community members. We can learn a lesson from him here. Sometimes, we are called upon to say and do the right thing, even when it will not be readily accepted by others.

While all of this was going on, The Congregation of the Piarist Fathers was raised by the Holy See to the rank of an Order with solemn vows. The members, who had all been in simple vows up until that point, were given the possibility of deciding if they wanted to accept the solemn vows or to leave the Order. Fr. Stanislaus decided to take the option to leave. He sought to obtain a release from his simple vows, however, more misunderstandings followed. He was forcibly removed from a monastery, abducted and taken on a journey in the middle of winter without the proper clothing. He spent three months in a monastery prison and suffered other indignities. Eventually, he was able to leave the Piarists and to receive an official dispensation from his vows after having endured a great deal of turmoil.

He had a desire in his heart to found a community dedicated to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. The first thing he did was to make a solemn oblation to God, offering and consecrating himself to God and to Our Lady stating his desire to found our Community and adding a vow of obedience and poverty. He made a profession of faith and a vow of blood to defend the honor of and devotion to the Immaculately Conceived Blessed Virgin Mary. He felt called by God to follow this path and he began down this new road by making this solemn "oblation" or offering of himself. There is an important lesson for us here. Blessed Stanislaus began down this path by making an act of surrender to the will of God. He knew that if he was to succeed, it would be through the grace of God. So he offered himself in such a way as to leave room for God to act in his life. Certainly, much would be required of him and he would have to *do* many things to live out his vocation. But he knew that the *initiative* is always from God, not from us. So rather than beginning by doing something and setting out on his own path, he began with an act of *surrender* so that the Holy Spirit could lead him on the correct path.

The path was not always clear. He eventually found a group of hermits who seemed like good candidates with which to begin the community. But he soon found them to be lazy and unwilling to live a disciplined life in order to grow in holiness. Three times through the years, he would eventually try to return to the Piarists, thinking that he had been mistaken and perhaps he was meant to pursue his calling to promote devotion to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception in that community. He loved the Piarists and it had been very difficult for him to have had to leave that community despite all that he had suffered there because of some of the members. However, the Piarists were not willing to change their charism and Blessed Stanislaus eventually realized that he was called to pursue his vocation to found the Marians with all the challenges that would accompany this call, including trying to form the poor candidates at the very beginning. He persevered through many difficulties.

There is not enough space to reflect on all of the other challenges that he faced during his life in seeking to receive approval for the community and to help the early candidates to grow. However, he persevered to the end, eventually being able to make his vows in the community after they had received papal approval. It was not as he had hoped, since it was not possible for his rule of life to be accepted. New communities at that time in Church history had to come under already established rules and communities. However he humbly accepted as the will of God, the *Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, a rule from a women's religious community, the Annuciades in France, which was adapted to the Marian Statutes. He made his vows on June 6, 1701. He died several months later on

September 17, 1701. He had sought to follow the path of faith laid out for him by Our Lord throughout his life. It was not always easy to follow the path and he was not always sure which way to go since he came to many forks in the road. However, he always sought the Lord's will in prayer and the Lord enlightened him as to which path to follow.

I would now like to look at some specific aspects of his particular path, the Charism that the Lord gave to him as the Founder of the Marians.

Charism of the Founder

I will first say a word or two on what a charism is. Pope Emeritus Benedict was once addressing a Council in Rome of the heads of various men's and women's religious communities and the Congregation at the Vatican which deals with the religious life. He said an interesting thing to them: 'Rediscovering the spirit of the origins, deepening the knowledge of the Founder or Foundress, has helped to impress upon the Institutes [of the Consecrated Life] a promising new ascetic, apostolic and missionary impetus. There are long-established works and activities that have thus been revived with new nourishment; there are new initiatives of an authentic actualization of the Founder's charism. It is necessary to continue on this path, praying to the Lord that he will bring to fruition the work he has begun.'^[2] The Pope Emeritus was indicating that many others are meant to follow religious founders down a particular path to holiness.

St. Paul used the word charism a number of times in the New Testament "to define the gifts which the Holy Spirit gave to men so they may serve God in the community of the faithful."^[3] Fr. Bernard Hylla, CR, the Superior General of the Resurrectionist Fathers, distinguishes between a founder's charism and the charism of the founder. The *first* is a personal charism which is non-transferable – something which defines a person and the special gift granted by the Holy Spirit to be at the foundation of a new religious family, regardless of its future historic realization and the characteristics of its spirituality. The *second* is the charism which the founder has for his new community. This defines the specific matter of the charism of the founder that needs to be understood, accepted, interpreted and realized in a concrete, historical situation. "What can be transferred is the specific path of the spiritual life of the disciples and the initial community, which are rooted in the so-called 'founding experience'".^[4]

Fr. Hylla states that if the charism of the founder and the first generation is passed down from generation to generation, it becomes the charism of the institute. I believe this is what has happened in the case of the Marians. I would therefore like to examine this charism of the institute that we have inherited and discuss how we can continue to live this out today.

Charism of the Institute

In the first Chapter of his *Norma Vitae* (Rule of Life), Blessed Stanislaus wrote about the reason why he founded the community: "First, consider diligently and assiduously what the aim of your Congregation is. [It is] the one that all the Orders have in common with you: the greater increase of God's glory, and care for your own salvation combined with serious striving for perfection. What does it profit a man, teaches the Savior, 'if he gains the whole world, but suffers the detriment of his own soul?' (cf. Mt 16:26)"^[5]. So he begins with an aim that the Marians share in common with all other religious, the need to strive for holiness. The Second Vatican Council spoke about the universal call to holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 5). Religious men and women have a special calling to assist the Church to grow in holiness. The Council Fathers wrote that those who profess the evangelical counsils (poverty, chastity and obedience) belong to the life and holiness of the Church.^[6] "Let everyone who has been called to the profession of the evangelical counsils take earnest care to preserve and excel still more in the life in which God has called him, for the increase of the holiness of the Church, to the greater glory of the one and undivided Trinity, which in Christ and through Christ is the source and origin of all holiness."^[7] Blessed Stanislaus was wise to emphasize this point at the beginning of his rule. We Marians and all of the laity associated with our community would do well to follow him down this path to holiness.

How can we grow in holiness? The Marians have in our Constitutions many helps – daily prayer practices such as the Mass, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, a half hour of mental prayer, an examen of conscience twice daily, spiritual reading, the rosary and prayers before and after meals. Additionally, we should go to confession 2x per month, make a monthly retreat day and an annual silent retreat lasting about a week, among other helps. The laity, associated with our spirituality, could adapt some of these practices for themselves. The key is to strive for regularity and consistency. Having some type of set schedule or practice helps us to persevere in our goals. God can use many different means to assist us, but He needs our openness of heart.

In his Rule of Life, the Founder then turned to three more specific points which we can say have become the charism of the institute. He wrote about them as follows: "But lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord (cf. Mt 20:31), to the utmost of strength you will promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, and with utmost zeal, piety and fervor assist the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains – especially the souls of soldiers and those

who died of pestilence.

(3) Since the contemplative life is not binding you so strictly, although you are founded in the eremitical status, those gifted with such talents will not be prevented from humbly helping pastors in their church work, if they would be called upon by pastors, and have previously obtained faculties from the Ordinaries and the Superiors." (*Norma Vitae*, Chapter 1, #2, #3).

These three points have come to be known as the Charism of the Community. I would like to briefly look at each of them and examine how we can follow Blessed Stanislaus down this particular path.

The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception

The Marians were founded by Blessed Stanislaus in 1670. The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined by the Church in 1854. Throughout the centuries, there was a long theological debate about the Immaculate Conception. The principle objection stems from something that St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: "Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned..." (Rom 5:12a). The argument is: how can we claim that Mary never sinned or was touched by the stain of original sin if St. Paul claims that all have sinned? The worry was that this would detract from Christ's glory as the Redeemer of all mankind. A Franciscan, John Duns Scotus was able to help the Church to eventually see that God could redeem Mary before she was ever touched by sin by anticipating the merits that would someday be gained from Christ's death on the Cross. There is no past, present or future for God. So Jesus is Mary's Redeemer and she is saved in a most extraordinary way. The words that Mary proclaims when she visits her cousin Elizabeth echo this, "my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Lk 1:47).

Some theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, had believed that to preserve Christ's sovereignty as the universal Redeemer of all mankind, Mary would have had to have been touched by original sin at least for an instant, so that Christ could save her. Others argued that God could save Mary without her ever having to be touched by original sin at all. Blessed Stanislaus was a follower of this latter group. In his Oblation that he made after leaving the Piarists, he declared his readiness to give his life to defend his belief in the Immaculate Conception.

Several years ago, during a General Visitation in the United States, the Superior General and I visited with a Bishop in a diocese where the Marians have a house. He asked about our charism and when we told him the three aspects, he declared that there was nothing further to be done regarding the first aspect, spreading devotion to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, since the Church had declared this as a dogma in 1854. He then went on to discuss with us the other aspects of our charism during our brief visit. However, is this true? Did Blessed Stanislaus found the community to promulgate this truth, but now that it has been officially declared as a dogma of the Church, there is no need to do anything further?

In fact, as Marians, we believe there is more to be done. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception involves God's saving activity in the life of Mary at the first moment of her conception. It reminds us that all life is a gift from God and that God alone is the Lord and giver of life. It is providential that the reanimation of a child in the womb of his mother was the miracle which led to the canonization of Blessed Stanislaus. There are many issues around the sanctity of human life from conception to death which are very much in debate now. Countries are debating in-vitro fertilization, and there are new questions arising about genetic testing and engineering. Pre-natal testing which discovers Down's syndrome leads to the death of 90% of these babies through abortion in the United States. There are therefore, many questions about conception which are as relevant as ever today.

The Marians in various countries are involved in Pro-Life work. In Poland, at the Marian Shrine in Lichen, there is a Fertility Support Clinic (http://www.lichen.pl/pl/277/wsparcie_plodnosci) which assists couples to attain a pregnancy in a way which is compatible with the teachings of the Church. This is a creative and modern way to live out the Marian Charism in today's world. They use the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System which is also known as Napro-technology.

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception also deals with the merciful way in which Mary was preserved from all stain of sin from the first moment of her conception. It was a completely gratuitous, unmerited gift from God in light of her vocation as the Mother of God's Son. It reminds us of the primacy of grace, that all is gift. God is always the initiator and the giver of every gift. We as creatures are called to be open and receptive to His gifts. This is an important lesson that mankind needs to learn, since we are constantly seeking to impose our will on others, and acting like we are God in deciding what is right and wrong. This was the original sin and mankind repeats it again and again throughout the ages.

We can learn something about this mystery from the Marian Constitutions. In point #6 in the first chapter, we read that, "the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is and has been from the beginning of the Congregation, a particular sign, strength, and joy of the Marian vocation. By this mystery, Mary

urges the members to trust in the unlimited fruitfulness of the work of redemption, to avoid all sin, even the slightest, to hold in highest esteem purity of heart, to imbue life fully with divine grace and charity, and to so upbuild the Church in unity 'that it be holy and immaculate'" (Eph 5:27). That is a path that we can all seek to follow for the rest of our lives, both the Marians and our associates! Blessed Stanislaus was quite correct in his perceiving a great depth to this mystery!

Mary is the highest among all creatures because of the gifts which Our Lord bestowed upon her and because of her openness to these gifts. She shows us that if we will only surrender to God's plan as she did, we too can rejoice in our Marian vocation and in our Marian spirituality. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is a sign for us and for the world: God saved Mary and He wants to save each of us. He did so for her through the Immaculate Conception. He does so for us through the sacraments of the Church. This mystery is our strength! We are weak but we can do all things in Christ! Nothing is impossible for Him! He can bend time to redeem someone! And this mystery is our joy! Despite our weaknesses, God has chosen us for a special task just as He chose Mary. He will work with us, despite our weaknesses, just as He did with the apostles.

Mary urges us to trust in the unlimited fruitfulness of the redemption! There is no sin that cannot be conquered. There is no bad habit that cannot be overcome. Christ's death on the Cross is enough to save ever person that has ever lived, if only we will open our hearts to the graces that are so abundantly available! We are also urged to avoid all sin, even the slightest and to hold in highest esteem purity of heart. One of the Beatitudes states, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God" (Mt 5:8). Purity of heart doesn't just have to do with modesty and chastity. It also means being single minded in our wanting to do only God's will. Our Lady is a wonderful model for us in this as is St. Faustina. We do not want to have a divided heart. Once, in her spiritual diary, St. Faustina wrote on one page, the words, "My Will". Then she crossed out the whole page and reflected that from then on, her own will did not exist, she only wanted to do God's will. We can also imitate Our Lady on this path to happiness as we seek to surrender ourselves completely to God's will in our lives.

On our path, we are to, "imbue life fully with divine grace and charity". Each of us is weak, but with the help of God, all things are possible. God extends His graces and His love to us and He asks us to share these gifts with all who we meet. Some synonyms for the word imbue are: to saturate – to soak – to pervade – to permeate. We can think of a sponge that is saturated with water. We want our lives to be completely saturated with God's grace and His love. When a sponge is completely soaked, it can't help but wet all the things around us. To borrow an idea from Blessed George, we can be like a dishrag which can be used to clean up one tiny corner of God's Church. [8]

Finally, we are to "so upbuild the Church in unity 'that it be holy and immaculate'". The Holy Spirit gives the gift of unity to the Church. Unity comes from all of us striving for holiness and striving to do the will of God. Mary is the model of the Church. Her receptivity to the gifts of God indicates to us which path we should take. This is the path that Blessed Stanislaus wishes us to follow.

Since I have been mentioning some Marian Apostolates which beautifully embody our Marian Charism, I can't fail to mention the Marian Formation Center, "Salvatoris Mater" which is run by Fr. Janusz Kumala, MIC at our Marian Shrine in Poland. (<http://www.salvatorismater.home.pl>) They publish many materials to help form the laity in our Catholic Faith, following the example of Blessed Stanislaus.

Praying for the Souls in Purgatory

The second thing that our Founder asks us to do "lest we remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord" is to "with utmost zeal, piety and fervor assist the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains – especially the souls of soldiers and those who died of pestilence." From the founding of our Community, the Marians having been praying for the deceased. The Marians were initially approved as hermits and they thus had the *duty* to pray the *Office of the Dead* daily. This was part of their penitential and ascetical life, but it was not yet part of the charism of the Order.

Blessed Stanislaus had some personal mystical experiences with the souls in Purgatory. This inspired him to encourage the Marians to fervently practice this devotion and to find ways to assist the Poor Souls. There was a real practical need for this at that time because of Poland's political history. There were constant wars with a variety of adversaries. There were also natural disasters, famines and epidemics which caused thousands of people to die, many of them unprepared to meet the Lord. Blessed Stanislaus felt called to pray for the souls of fallen soldiers, often praying at their graves. It is believed that many souls came to him, asking for prayers. He also apparently had mystical experiences with the souls at the Shrine of Our Lady at Studzianna. In 1675, a few years after the founding of the Marians, Blessed Stanislaus wrote that God had endowed him with a "profound devotion to the souls in purgatory." [9] He then wrote this into his *Norma Vitae* – the Rule of Life for the Marians in the following year, 1676. There is also a tradition that Blessed Stanislaus had a mystical experience during a dinner with the Karski family, a noble family to whom he had been the family chaplain in the past. He apparently had an ecstasy during the meal with everyone present. He is then said to have left the room, by walking right

through the table and he then returned to the Marian monastery. Upon arrival, he told the Marians, "Brethren, pray for the dead!"^[10] He then locked himself in his room for several days to pray and fast for the dead. He later revealed to his host that during his ecstasy, he had visited purgatory and he had seen the suffering of the souls. Tradition tells us that Blessed Stanislaus would often encourage his religious brothers as well as the lay faithful in his sermons to come to the aid of the souls of the dead. It obviously was something that was near to his heart because he fervently preached these sermons, sometimes with tears in his eyes.

Fr. Tadeusz Rogolewski, MIC, a Marian historian wrote the following about Blessed Stanislaus: "He claimed that there were a lot more souls suffering in Purgatory than there were people in the whole world. He said that they suffered terribly as they tried to requite God's justice. Therefore, he offered all his illnesses, pains, labors, persecutions (and he suffered so many of them), mortifications, and all other pious works, in sacrifice for the souls in Purgatory. He instructed his brothers to always remember this duty of mercy towards the dead and to commend them to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Immaculately Conceived as to the most gracious Mother and the most merciful Potectress of the souls in Purgatory."^[11] In this way, we can see how closely inter-related are these two aspects of the Charism. We can also see how we, following the example of Blessed Stanislaus, can do some very simple, practical things to assist the souls in their need.

The Marian Helpers Center in the United States has done a wonderful job of promoting this aspect of the Charism through their Holy Souls Sodality website. The internet address of the website is <http://prayforsouls.org> They do a lot to educate the faithful about this important need and they also do much to ensure that Masses are being offered for the souls. This both helps the souls and it also serves to support the Marians as we live out our charism. The Polish Province has done a lot to practically help the dying through a home care hospice program in Warsaw (hospicjum.domowe.prv.pl) and a hospice facility at our Marian Shrine in Lichen (<http://www.lichen.pl/pl/168/hospicjum>). No doubt there are more wonderful ways that we can live out this timely charism in a world which glorifies perpetual youth and which doesn't want to face the reality of death. Bereavement groups and support groups which help people to grieve and to face the reality of an impending death are some possibilities.

Assistance to the Diocesan Clergy

The third aspect of the Charism which our Founder lists in his *Norma Vitae* is to humbly assist the pastors in their church work. I have always appreciated this aspect of the Marian charism since I believe that the diocesan clergy have challenging lives. They don't have the support of brothers in a religious community. They don't have community members with which to eat, to pray and to recreate. I think their lives can be lonely ones and the challenge to maintain their prayer lives on their own is not an easy one. Marian priests can live out this aspect of our charism in various ways, for example, by helping out in parishes on a regular basis or especially when a diocesan priest needs time off to make his retreat or to take a vacation. Marians in various parts of the world also assist diocesan priests by offering parish missions in their parishes. At times, diocesan priests come to our Marian houses and shrines to find some time of rest and refreshment in the midst of their work.

We might ask, is it possible for the laity to live out this aspect of the Marian charism in any way? I would answer positively and I would add that it is already being done in a variety of ways. There are many different ways to assist the pastors in their work. There is only so much that a pastor can do to form his parish. There are many ways of assisting him in his work. For instance, for many years now, the Eucharistic Apostles of the Divine Mercy (EADM), founded by Dr. Bryan Thatcher, has been helping to form Catholics around the world through their formation manuals and cenacle meetings. (<http://www.thedivinemercy.org/eadm>) The Marian Helper's Center in the United States has initiated some exciting parish renewal programs under the guidance of Fr. Michael Gaitely, MIC. They are parish based programs for the new evangelization. These are faith renewal programs for people meeting in small groups. (<http://www.allheartsafire.org>)

Formation for the laity is also offered in various ways through the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (<http://www.padrimariani/en/laity/confraternity.php>) which is coordinated by Br. Andrew Maczynski, MIC. Through the writings, the publications, the classes and the online work of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy and the work of Dr. Robert Stackpole (<http://www.thedivinemercy.org/jpii>); through the Mother of Mercy Messengers (MOMM) and the work of Joan and Dave Maroney in their publications and parish based missions (<http://www.thedivinemercy.org/momm>); and through the Health Care Professionals for Divine Mercy and the work of Marie Romagnano. They offer specialized training for doctors, nurses and health care professionals as well as spiritual retreats for them. (<http://www.thedivinemercy.org/healthcare>)

I can't fail to mention all of the books, magazines and publications that the Marian Helpers Centers throughout the world have put out through the years to help form the laity. A great deal has also been done through the TV, radio and the internet. The work that the Marians and our associates do in our Shrines throughout the world is another important way that we assist the Diocesan clergy. Many people

can rediscover their faith through pilgrimages to shrines. They can then return to their parishes with a desire to live their faith more fully.

I have highlighted what is *already* being done in order to indicate that there are many more things that *could* be done. Not all parishes are model parishes. There is room to grow everywhere. The parish is the basic cell of the Church. To the degree that our parishes are healthy and vibrant, our Catholic Church will grow in holiness and in fervor.

Conclusion

I believe that our promulgation of the Divine Mercy message and devotion is another way of following the path of faith which Blessed Stanislaus has indicated for us. Helping people to believe in and trust in God's great mercy can open them to reflecting on the teaching on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Christ saved Mary and He desires to save all of us through His Paschal Mystery – the mystery of His suffering, dying, rising and being exalted forever. The mystery of the Divine Mercy is centered on the Paschal Mystery. The mystery of the Divine Mercy also reminds us of the need to trust in God's grace, as does the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

We are exalting God's great mercy when we assist the souls of those suffering in Purgatory. God always wants to give everyone every opportunity possible to reach Heaven. It is also an act of mercy to pray for the deceased and to assist the dying.

Our assistance to the Pastors is also an important work of mercy. The Divine Mercy revelations to St. Faustina are a way in which Christ wishes to prepare the world for his second coming. [12] All that we can do in any way to re-evangelize the world and to help people to discover Christ's mercy and to grow in their faith and trust is a great help to the Pastors.

At the end of his days, Blessed Stanislaus suffered a serious illness which eventually took his life. He was known to pray, "Increase, O Lord, my sufferings, that You may diminish the punishment of the souls in Purgatory." [13] He had the heart of a pastor and of a shepherd until the end. He considered the souls suffering in Purgatory as part of his flock which he wanted to shepherd safely home to Heaven. On his death bed, he received the sacraments, he grasped and kissed his crucifix and he uttered his last words, "Into Your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit." [14] He died just at sunset on September 17, 1701, the date on which St. Francis of Assisi had received his stigmata. All of us would like to die such a holy death, having fulfilled God's will despite all of the challenges and difficulties of our lives. Blessed Stanislaus has blazed a beautiful path that we can follow.

The Venerable Servant of God, Casimir Wyszynski wrote this about Bl. Stanislaus's death: "Throughout his entire life, Fr. Stanislaus was a great venerator of the Blessed Virgin Mary and an ardent defender of her honor. Therefore, Our Lord Jesus Christ bestowed a double privilege upon him. First, that he died after he had made his profession on the *Rule of the Imitation of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, and second, that he was laid to rest at a place similar to the one where the Blessed Mother ended her days, i.e. the Lord's Cenacle in Jerusalem." [15] It seems to me, that Blessed Stanislaus would want to entrust all of his spiritual children into the hands of Our Lady, knowing that she will lead us on the right path.

[1] Casimir Krzyzanowski, MIC, *The Illustrated Story of Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski* (Stockbridge: Marians Press, 2012), 43.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Council for Relations between the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the Men's and Women's International Unions of Superiors General*, Rome, February 18, 2008 (www.vatican.va).

[3] Bernard Hylla, C.R., "The Marians: Where Are You Coming from and where Are You Going? Ways of Interpreting the Founding Charism," in *Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski, Father and Guide of the Marian Vocation*, ed. Jan Mikołaj Rokosz, MIC, (Warsaw-Rome: Marian Printing House, 2011), 12.

[4] *Ibid.*, 16.

[5] Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski, *Norma Vitae*, Chapter 1, #2, #3.

[6] cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 6, #44.

[7] *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 6, #47.

[8] cf. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, trans. and ed. Sister Ann Mikaila, MVS (Stockbridge, Marian Press, 2003), 60 (January 13, 1911).

[9] Krzyzanowski, 81.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[11] Tadeusz Rogalewski, MIC, *Stanislaus Papczynski (1631-1701) Founder of the Order of Marians and the Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality* (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2001), 222.

[12] cf. *Diary of St. Faustina*, #s 429, 848, 965, 110, 1588, 1146.

[13] Rogalewski, 306.

[14] *Ibid.*, 307.

[15] *Ibid.*