

LeJeune shares his passion for evangelization

By MARY P. WALKER
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

"When we die, we are going to be judged by what we believed, what we've done and who we've loved. This can be summed up in one question: Who did we bring with us into heaven?" said Marcel LeJeune, a lay Catholic whose passion for evangelization is drawing national attention.

Known as "The Catholic Evangelist," LeJeune is driven to help people grow closer to Christ. He travels to parishes and conferences speaking on a range of topics that both educate and challenge listeners to spread the Gospel message. Stephanie Grasso, youth minister at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Cedar Park, heard LeJeune

speaking at the diocesan Young Adult Ministry Conference last October and said, "When Marcel talks, it's not boring! He's both creative and practical in his approach."

His presentations highlight the importance of personal spiritual growth and sharing the riches of the Catholic faith with others. Citing Pope Paul VI, who said the church "exists in order to evangelize," LeJeune explains that evangelization is not an "optional" component of one's spiritual life, but an integral part of what it means to be Catholic.

When Catholics think of evangelization, the image of going door-to-door to discuss their faith with strangers often comes to mind. While such activity, properly done, can be effective, LeJeune said, "Evan-

gelization doesn't have to be dramatic. It means looking for opportunities to share our faith. Christ is our model. He shared himself with us when he lived on earth. He continues to share himself with us in the Eucharist."

Simply letting others know of one's Catholic faith can open the door to further discussion. For example, many non-Catholics attend Catholic weddings and funerals. If they know you are Catholic, they may ask you questions about what to expect at these events, he said.

Another way to help others to connect with Catholicism is by inviting them to attend Mass with you. After experiencing this highest form of Catholic worship, many return again and again and ultimately join the

church, LeJeune said.

He emphasizes that through our baptism and confirmation, the Holy Spirit gives us the tools, graces and gifts we need to evangelize. Our responsibility is to know the basic teachings of Catholicism and be willing to share them with others. Studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and attending parish and diocesan classes are good ways to learn these basics or delve deeper into the truths of the faith.

In addition, he contends an active prayer life, frequent reception of the sacraments of penance and Communion, eucharistic adoration and other devotional practices not only help us grow spiritually, but also aid our outreach to others. For example, observing Catholics praying the rosary has influenced many non-Catholics to gain a deeper appreciation of the role of Mary in salvation history.

LeJeune encourages parishes to make evangelization a priority through evangelization committees and learning the techniques of approaching others. "We shouldn't be afraid of failure or hearing 'no' to our approach. Rather we should fear saying 'no' to God as he calls us to this holy work," said LeJeune.

When he speaks of evangelization, LeJeune not only means reaching out to non-Catholics, but also reaching out to those who are culturally Catholic but do not practice their faith or reject some of the teachings of the church. "We have to go to those people who need to hear the truth — even if they don't know it or don't want it at the time," said LeJeune.

One effective technique of approaching others is simply asking if they have any prayer requests. "You'll be surprised

that many of the people you ask are Catholic and haven't been to church in years," said LeJeune. This non-threatening approach provides the opportunity to introduce them to the parish and invite them to Mass or other activities.

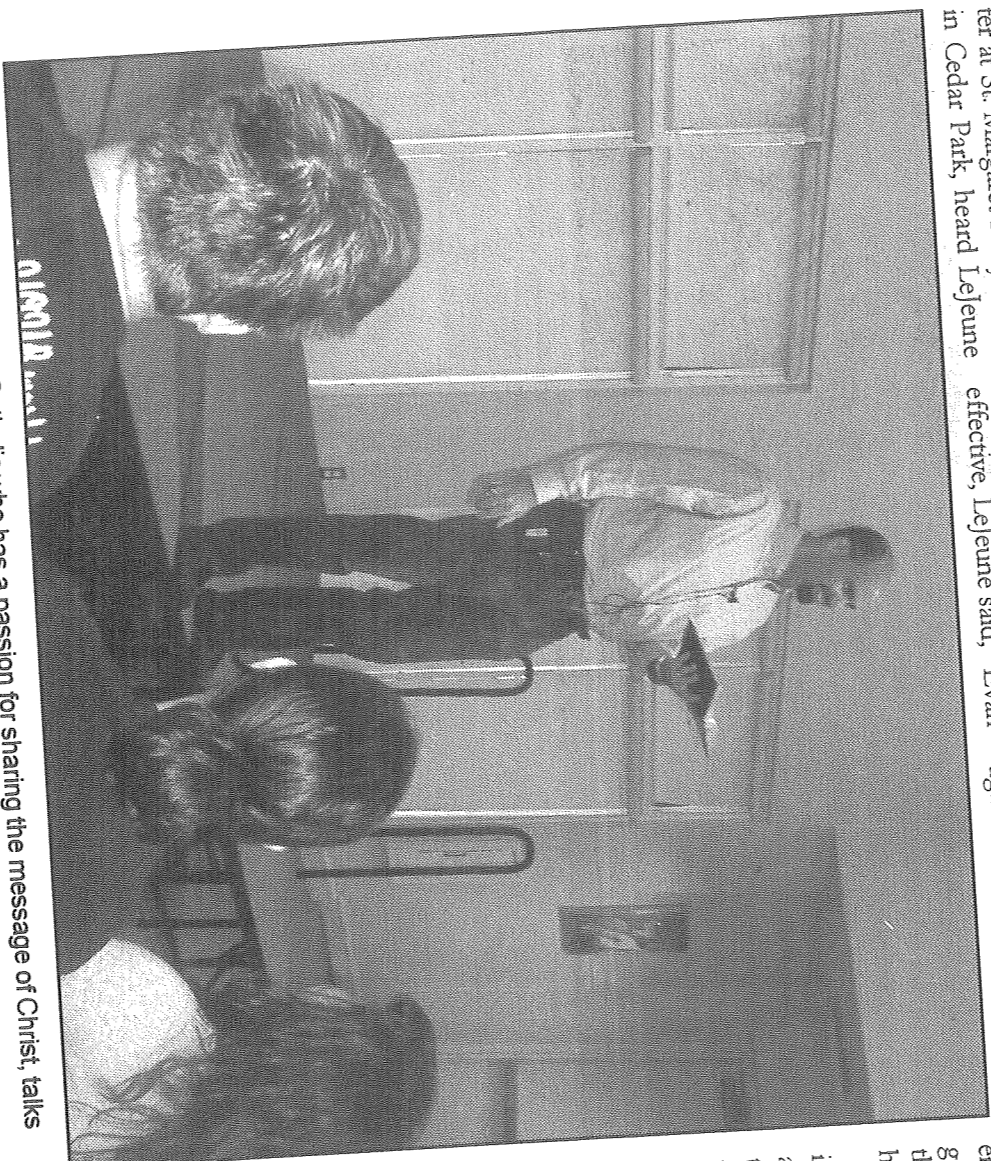
LeJeune also explained the importance of evangelization by example, especially by the laity. Although priests and those in religious life are powerful models of dedication to God, their responsibilities within their vocations differ from those of the laity. It is up to lay Catholics to provide examples of holiness as husbands, wives, single adults, parents, teens, children and employees.

LeJeune has many opportunities to share his faith as a husband, father of five and in his "day job" as assistant director of campus ministry at St. Mary Catholic Center, which serves more than 11,500 Catholic students at Texas A&M University and Blinn College.

On campus, he created an innovative way for students to learn about Catholicism. "Ask a Catholic a Question," is a popular program in which trained teams of Catholic students are available at designated times on campus to answer questions about the faith. This friendly format allows the questioners to approach the students without feeling threatened.

Although cultural pressures can hinder our efforts to bring others to Christ, LeJeune expresses hope, stating, "Every generation has its challenges. We are seeing a renewal in the church. It's up to church leaders and evangelists in the field to do the work of Christ."

For more information about LeJeune and his ministry, visit www.thecatholic-evangelist.com.



MARCEL LEJEUNE, a Catholic who has a passion for sharing the message of Christ, talks with a group of young adults. (Photo by Kimmy Skerik)