For 38 years, Unbound has been a catalyst for good in the world. That’s largely because of the commitment of our preachers, the hospitality of pastors who welcome them, the generosity of parishioners who respond to their invitation to become sponsors, and the willingness of hardworking people to embrace opportunities that sponsorship provides.

This issue of Spirit celebrates the relationship we’ve long enjoyed with the Catholic community in the U.S. Within these pages are stories that lift up two values at the heart of that relationship: the importance of human solidarity and the God-given dignity of every person.

Unbound has thousands of such stories. If you were to trace the roots of most of them, somewhere along the line you’d find a pastor who said “yes” to our request to share the Unbound message with his community. From the beginning, we’ve never taken that “yes” for granted. We never will.

Pictured at left: Jose, 16 (left), his mother, Martha (center), and sister, Diana, 18, sit outside their home in Bolivia. Jose and Diana are both sponsored through Unbound. Martha, a widow, received livelihood training through her local mothers group and the family recently used their sponsorship benefits to add more space onto their home.

On the cover: Wycliff, 18, helps out at his mother’s fruit stand in Nairobi, Kenya. He became sponsored by Charles in Tennessee when Unbound preacher Father John Ighacho visited Charles’ parish. His mother started a fruit-stand business with a loan from her local Unbound mothers group.
A conversation with Unbound preachers

OPENING DOORS INTO GOD’S PRESENCE

Four of the priests who preach for Unbound gather for an interview at the annual preachers conference last August at the organization’s headquarters in Kansas City. From left are Father Mike Rieder, Father Jerry Hackenmueller, interviewer Larry Livingston, Father Art Kirwin, O.P., and Father John Graden, O.S.F.S.
This coming Sunday, someone will stop at a table in a church and look at an assortment of folders, each with the image of a different person in need. They’ll choose one, perhaps for reasons beyond their immediate understanding, and a life-giving relationship will begin.

The 36 Catholic priests who preach for Unbound at parishes throughout the United States witness that act hundreds of times over the course of a year, and it’s their invitation that draws people to begin those relationships. Senior writer/editor Larry Livingston sat down with four veteran preachers at Unbound’s annual preachers conference in Kansas City to discuss their experiences.

Joining Larry were Father John Graden, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales from upstate New York, Father Jerry Hackenmueller of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Father Art Kirwin, a Dominican friar living in Atlanta, and Father Mike Rieder of the Diocese of Rockville Centre on Long Island. Following are excerpts from the conversation.
**WHAT DO YOU THINK UNBOUND HAS TO OFFER THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AT THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY?**

Father Mike

That’s easy. It’s a response to the commission at the end of Mass: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” That’s a great way for us to do it. It’s really a shot in the arm for the Church. I don’t know anybody who’s ever been involved with Unbound who hasn’t said their heart has grown from it — maybe not in those words, but that’s basically what it boils down to. So, it kind of makes Christianity more contagious.

**WHAT WAS IT THAT FIRST DREW YOU TO PREACH FOR UNBOUND?**

Father Jerry

I’ve been in Hispanic ministry all my life, so I was looking for a way to continue that after retirement. And Unbound just fit so perfectly in many ways, but particularly in Hispanic ministry. Almost all [my] assignments have Spanish Masses, so it’s a way to keep in touch with what I’ve done all my life.
WHAT IS ONE PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE MOMENT YOU’VE HAD PREACHING FOR UNBOUND?

Father John

One memory that sticks out for me was in a place in Minnesota. I thought I was going to be in the backwoods, and I discovered this huge in-the-round church that has a grade school with 800 kids in it, an elderly housing unit and plans to build a nursing home. I remember having 50 folders with me ... and after the first Mass, the people came out and for the whole 16-foot length of the two tables, they were four deep. [I wondered] what’s going on in this community? Well, they’d had the same pastor for 25 years ... and he had consistently preached the social Gospel.

WHAT DO YOU MOST ENJOY ABOUT THE WORK, ESPECIALLY ABOUT VISITING PARISHES?

Father Art

I love to preach. ... And then I love to meet the folks at the table after Mass. I have to say, since the late 90s until now, I’ve never had a bad experience [preaching for Unbound]. In the church, after the Mass, in the preaching, coming to our conferences, going on [organized Unbound] trips — I’ve never had a bad experience. There have been inconveniences, of course, from being on the road, but I’ve just really felt the presence of the Spirit with Unbound.
I always make sure to say [at the end of the homily], “Unbound is an example of what this Gospel is about,” and make that final connection. This is Unbound. This is what we’re about. This is what we do, living out the Gospel today. So, it’s always that last connection.

In addition to the Gospel, I connect [the Unbound message] to the celebration. At the altar we hear the words, “do this in memory of me,” and it’s not just about coming to Communion. It’s about living the way Jesus did, about being in communion with him in his mission, and his mission was to draw people into the presence of God. And then I tell them about how sponsorship has opened doors into God’s presence for me, even as it’s opened doors out of poverty for the people I sponsor.
IS THERE ANYTHING THAT HAS SURPRISED YOU ABOUT YOUR WORK WITH UNBOUND?

Having been a chaplain most of my life in prisons and hospitals, it really puts me in touch with the parish — the whole reality of parish, everybody who makes the Mass — the ushers, musicians, sacristans, readers, the people at the [Unbound] table afterward, people who already sponsor. You see every kind of parish, from small to mega-church. ... It broadens my own perspective on the Church.

DO YOU WANT TO PREACH FOR THOSE ON THE MARGINS?

If you are a priest nearing retirement, or if your ministry allows you some free weekends, preaching for Unbound could be an ideal way to supplement your income while helping people in poverty.

Contact Paco Wertin at 913-384-7123, or email him at PacoW@unbound.org.
What Sponsors Say

On a 2017 awareness trip to Kenya, Sharon Hanshaw (right) visits Wangari, the sponsored friend of Sharon’s mother-in-law. Sharon is also a sponsor.
We had just heard a presentation by an Unbound priest visiting our parish, Church of the Risen Christ in Denver. He called us to join in the mission of empowering an individual to live to their fullest, God-given potential. Looking at [elder] Zenaida’s profile, my parents and I agreed that the mission could be applied at any point in a person’s life, regardless of age. To this day, I believe God was calling us to empower Zenaida. So began our sponsorship and our friendship.

— Abby Marie R. Harris, Colorado

Through our own baptism, we’ve been called to reach out to those in need, and that helps to fulfill our Christian duty. We feel that God has sent these children to us. We’re so blessed to get to know these children deeply and to be able to share their life, and for them to be able to share in our lives.

— George Moll, Indiana

We started sponsoring kids 20-plus years ago while raising four of our own, and I personally feel a great responsibility towards our sponsored children, which motivates me. .... We also really enjoy the personal communication with our sponsored children.

— Callan Ackerman, Nebraska

We had just heard a presentation by an Unbound priest visiting our parish, Church of the Risen Christ in Denver. He called us to join in the mission of empowering an individual to live to their fullest, God-given potential. Looking at [elder] Zenaida’s profile, my parents and I agreed that the mission could be applied at any point in a person’s life, regardless of age. To this day, I believe God was calling us to empower Zenaida. So began our sponsorship and our friendship.

— Abby Marie R. Harris, Colorado
Solidarity and ingenuity: A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

The support of parish communities has always been important to Unbound’s mission to “walk with the poor and marginalized of the world.” When someone in the U.S. offers encouragement and support to a person across the world by sponsoring them through Unbound, they provide access to resources that those who live in poverty are often denied. Sponsorship offers sponsored persons opportunities for education, dignified housing, medical care, better nutrition and the support of a caring community. But sponsors might not realize how much they also help the families of sponsored persons.

Pictured at left: Lucy mixes cake batter in the kitchen of the parish church in Bolivia where she works. The pastor offered her use of the facilities for her baking business because she lacks adequate equipment at home. Lucy begins baking early in the day so she can be finished in time to start her regular job at the church.
"Everything I have and learn is from my mother."

For Lucy in Bolivia, it’s been a source of great support. Lucy works at a Catholic church where she cleans and takes care of the grounds. She is the mother of four children, the youngest of whom, 20-year old Anny, is sponsored through Unbound. Anny’s sponsor, Rodolfo, lives in Georgia.

With her older children grown and on their own and Anny in university, Lucy wanted to do something for herself. She found the opportunity through her local Unbound mothers group. These groups provide support for the mothers of sponsored children in a variety of ways, often including training for new livelihoods that provide more income for the family. When the opportunity to take a baking class arose, Lucy took advantage of it.

“I took a one-month course,” she said. “I learned cakes, doughnuts. I was really interested in cakes. I love the challenge of preparing different sizes and flavors. One day, I prepared some cakes for catechism groups and they exclaimed, ‘Who made this? Where did it come from?’ I did it. Orders started to come in.”

The priests at the church where Lucy works supported her new endeavor. They knew she lacked adequate facilities for her baking business, so they offered her the use of the church kitchen, which had the space and equipment she needed. Now, in addition to being a member of the church staff, she’s also an independent entrepreneur.

Lucy’s days are long. She begins her work for the parish around 8 a.m., but when she has baking orders to fill, she comes in at 4. She makes sure that all her personal business is finished by the time she starts her church work.

For now Lucy continues her work for the church, but she hopes to soon be able to devote herself fully to her baking. “My biggest dream is to have my own house and a little shop to show my cakes and bakery,” she said. “That is my dream.”
One of the joys of Lucy’s baking is that it allows her to spend time with Anny, who helps her mother when she isn’t involved in schoolwork. Anny has a deep admiration for all her mom has accomplished.

“I see a great woman, an admirable, outstanding woman,” she said. “I dream about having a job to be able to help my mom financially. I am a strong person. Everything I have and learn is from my mother.”

In addition to her personal ambitions, Lucy also has high hopes for Anny, who is studying to become an accountant. “I want her to be a successful woman, for her to have everything I don’t,” Lucy said. “A successful woman has to have values, have skills, not a luxurious or wealthy lifestyle but a valuable one. She has a profession and is outstanding. That is the life I dream for her.”
HELP YOUR PARISHIONERS BE A LIGHT FOR OTHERS

At the end of every Mass, pastors send the faithful forth to love and serve the Lord. Unbound offers a proven and trustworthy way to do that by sponsoring a child, youth or elder in need.

Invite an Unbound priest to your parish for a weekend of your choosing, and give your parishioners an opportunity to form a relationship that will bless them, those they sponsor and your faith community.

CALL: (800) 466-7672
EMAIL: parishcontact@unbound.org
VISIT: parishvisit.org

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