

Evangelization



A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil; and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding a hundredfold.

Mark 4:3-8

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Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I
have commanded you; and lo, I am with
you always, to the close of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

A friend, who has been away from the Church for years, starts to reminisce about growing up Catholic. A co-worker tells you that she was baptized Catholic but never received any other sacraments. A neighbor begins to ask questions about God after the death of his wife. A family member joins a non-denominational Bible study and begins to criticize the Catholic Church. A stranger sitting next to you on an airplane admits that he was raised Catholic, but no longer goes to Mass.

These common, everyday events are all opportunities for evangelization. Unfortunately, too many Catholics don't understand their role in the evangelization process. As a result, people who are struggling in their relationship with God or the Catholic Church are often ignored.

**There exists today the clear need for a
New Evangelization.**

Pope John Paul II

WHAT IS EVANGELIZATION?

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, evangelization means "bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation." Evangelization leads to conversion.

As Catholics we believe that conversion is an on-going process throughout our lives that brings us into closer union with God and the gospel message. Sometimes, conversion is a dramatic event that shakes us to the core of ourselves. Other times, it happens quietly as we are drawn toward new understandings and insights. Conversion is always the work of the Holy Spirit. But

the Holy Spirit uses ordinary people and events to bring about conversion. When you allow the Holy Spirit to work through you to bring someone to conversion, you have discovered the essence of what it means to evangelize.

What we say does not matter, only what God says to souls through us.

Mother Teresa

WHY DO WE NEED TO EVANGELIZE?

Before ascending into Heaven, Jesus commanded us to evangelize when He said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19-20).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus used a variety of images about the need to evangelize. He talked about catching fish (Luke 5:10), sowing seeds (Mark 4:1-9), lighting a lamp (Mark 4: 21-25), and how few workers there were for the harvest (Luke 10:2). He told stories about great rejoicing over a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a prodigal son (Luke 15:1-32).

Jesus was the first and greatest evangelizer. He came to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. We see in His teaching, His miracles, His interaction with people, and His sending out of the disciples, the example of His own evangelizing activity. If we want to follow in the footsteps of Christ, then we must become evangelizers, too.

It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.

Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

WHO NEEDS TO BE EVANGELIZED?

Children need to be evangelized in order to grow in faith and understanding. Inactive Catholics, who no longer attend Mass regularly, need to be evangelized so that they can return

to a life of active faith. Alienated Catholics who have left the Church need to be evangelized so they know how much we miss them and want them to return. People who have no faith need to be evangelized so they can be welcomed into a new life with Christ and the Church. Most of all, we need to be evangelized ourselves in order to strengthen our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church.

The fruit of evangelization is changed lives and a changed world.

U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples*

HOW DO WE EVANGELIZE?

There are four essential elements in the process of evangelization.

- 1. Listening.** The most sacred thing a person can share is his or her own story. When we listen, we enter into a person's heart, mind, and soul. We see their search for meaning. We catch a glimpse of their struggle or their pain.
- 2. Sharing our faith.** We can share what our faith means to us in words by telling others how the Holy Spirit has worked in our lives. We can also share our faith through actions that demonstrate the ways in which we try to live authentically the gospel message.
- 3. Extending an invitation.** It might be an invitation to come to Mass or to some Catholic devotion, to talk with a priest or spiritual advisor, to read a book or pamphlet, to listen to a lecture, to assist in some ministry, to pray together, or to attend a parish social event.
- 4. Praying.** Pope John Paul II tells us, "There must be unceasing prayer to nourish the desire to carry Christ to all men and women."

While all of these elements are essential, the important thing to remember is that there is no step-by-step recipe for evan-



gelization. The Holy Spirit will use your natural gifts and talents for the work of evangelization if you are open and willing. Before long, you'll begin to see that you've developed your own style of evangelization!

WHAT KIND OF EVANGELIZER ARE YOU?

People have different preferences for how they evangelize. Here are some examples:

■ Some people are active. They might help clean the church or help with the parish clothing drive. They evangelize by inviting others to join them. One woman decided to become Catholic after a friend invited her to help at the parish soup kitchen.

■ Some people have had difficult lives and they can relate to others in similar situations. They evangelize by sharing how their Catholic faith helped them through a death in the family, an illness, or some other difficulty.

■ Some people are willing to share their own personal story of being away from the Church for a while and finding a new life in Christ when they returned.

■ Some people like to study the Catholic faith and share what they've learned with others.

They evangelize by becoming catechists, RCIA team members, or by becoming involved in adult education and apologetics.

■ Some people love to meet new people. They evangelize by helping to make the parish more welcoming. One lapsed Catholic came back to the Church after someone in the pews asked if he would like to join the choir.

■ Some people join the evangelization ministry in their parish and develop creative ways to invite inactive Catholics and people who are unchurched to parish events.

■ Some people casually bring God into the conversation at work or in the community without being overbearing or offensive.

■ Some people are willing to pray with people who are going through a difficult time.

You should be constantly on the lookout for people who may be open to a conversion experience.

SEVEN SIGNS THAT SOMEONE IS OPEN TO EVANGELIZATION

1. The most common sign is when people begin to ask questions about God, good and evil, or the meaning of life.

2. Reminiscing about Catholic school, nuns, priests, or parish activities is another sign that someone may feel drawn toward God or the Church.

3. Asking about where they can find Catholic reading materials is yet another sign. It's a good idea to keep a supply of Catholic books, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets on hand.

4. Comments about the Pope, the Church, or parish activities can be someone's way of starting a conversation with you about faith.

5. Major life events or crises such as illness, death, the birth of a baby, graduations, a job loss or transfer, moving to a new home, separation and divorce, financial difficulties, tension, and other stress-related situations can trigger a desire to find a closer connection to God or the Church.

6. Experiencing the presence of God during a Mass, a funeral, or the celebration of a sacrament can stir feelings.

7. Noticing your faith, love, and deep sense of inner peace can capture the attention of people who are searching for God. Don't be surprised if people begin to ask about your spiritual life. At that point, you'll know that you are truly an evangelizer and the Holy Spirit is working through you.



PHOTO BY COMSTOCK

A CHALLENGE FOR TODAY

The word *evangelization* comes from the Greek word, *evangelizo*, which means “to spread good news.” The early Christians used the word when they spread the news about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, evangelization has played a key role in converting people to Christ. Some of the greatest saints sacrificed their lives to spread the Good News of Jesus.

Today, evangelization is becoming an increasingly important part of Catholic life under the direction of Pope John Paul II, whose call for a “New Evangelization” has captured the minds, hearts and imaginations of Catholics all over the world.

**For the disciple of Christ
the duty to evangelize
is an obligation of love.**

Pope John Paul II



WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*)

Pope John Paul II, *Go into All the World* (*Euntes in Mundum*)

Pope John Paul II, *On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (*Redemptoris Missio*)

Books

DeSiano, Frank, C.S.P. *The Evangelizing Catholic: A Practical Handbook for Reaching Out*, Paulist Press, 1998

Duquin, Lorene Hanley, *When a Loved One Leaves the Church*, OSV, 2001

Duquin, Lorene Hanley, *Could You Ever Come Back to the Catholic Church?* Alba House, 1998

Duquin, Lorene Hanley, *Could You Ever Become a Catholic?* Alba House, 2001

Madrid, Patrick, *Answer Me This*, OSV, 2003

Martin, Ralph and Peter Williamson, *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization*, Ignatius Press, 1995

Welborn, Amy, *Prove It! God*, OSV, 2001

Also see www.osv.com for additional Catholic resources or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet.

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