Responsive Evangelization

The Great Commission - "Go make disciples of all nations." (Mt. 28:19)

Jesus gave us the Great Commission and he demonstrated the method to accomplish it. Jesus shared the Good News that each person needed to hear in the particular way that they needed to hear it. He responded to real people with real needs. Jesus knew that the world is made up of all kinds of people and God loves us all (the vertical faith relationship). Jesus also knew that to accept God, people needed to experience love with others (the horizontal faith relationship). The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus doing this. He entered humbly into the lives of people knowing how much God loved them and he enfleshed that love. He invited people of all kinds to join him in sharing that loving purpose for all God's people. He used a person-first approach. This is responsive evangelization.

Likewise, today different people have differing degrees of interest in God and in the church. These do not always coincide. Some have joined the church but have not tapped its capacity to draw them to God. They are merely "Involved" (Audience 1). Others actively pursue a call to holiness which they only see possible for those who are "Engaged" in the church (Audience 2). Some are "Spiritual Seekers" though they may be uncertain about the value of church as a resource in that quest (Audience 3). And lastly there are "Those Too Busy" who are currently too distracted to pay much attention to God or consider belonging to a church (Audience 4). For the sake of our work in evangelization, we can examine the unique needs of each audience in response to God's call (Evangelization). The U.S. Catholic Bishops give us three goals which correspond to the needs of each audience in their national plan on evangelization entitled, *Go and Make Disciples*.

- Dennis Mahaney, Office of Parish Life

Audience 3: Spiritual Seekers

High Attention to God, Low Participation in Church

Evangelization Goal #3: Partner with this audience in fostering Gospel values in the world and work for justice and peace.

High

Audience 2: The Engaged

High Attention to God, High Participation in Church

Evangelization Goal #2: Equip this audience to share their faith with others and invite others to be disciples of Jesus Christ and bearers of the Gospel.

Low

Audience 4: Those Too Busy

Low Attention to God, Low Participation in Church

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Audience 1: The Involved

Low Attention to God, High Participation in Church

Evangelization Goal #1: Involve this audience in experiences of spiritual growth and encourage greater enthusiasm of faith.

Low

Key:

Attention to God (the vertical faith relationship)

Participation in Church (the horizontal faith relationship) — —

This diagram is adapted from a Matrix for Faith Formation 2020 in the *Journal of Life Long Faith Formation*, LifelongFaith Associates, (Summer 2009, p. 14); and applies insights from the analysis of Albert Wiseman in *Growing an Engaged Church: How to Stop Doing Church and Start Being Church Again* (Gallup Press, 2006)

Who we are is how we evangelize!

Who we are is how we evangelize. Some evangelize like St. Peter who was bold and vocal in his witness and wrote, "Always be ready to give an accounting for the hope that you have in Christ Jesus." Others evangelize like Saint Francis who said, "Preach the Gospel always. When necessary use words." Like the great evangelists, most of us evangelize out of our strengths. But perhaps an equally good approach was promoted by St. Paul. In so many words, he said, "Who *they are* is how we should evangelize." This is the strategic norm that has been applied in the irresistible churches of our day.

Think about it. St. Paul recited salvation history to a Jewish audience in the synagogue. To the Athenians he spoke with eloquence about their Unknown God. He was responsive in his approach because he knew that different people have differing levels of interest in God, which do not always correspond to their level of participation in church. St. Paul demonstrated that evangelization efforts must respond to the unique needs of each audience to be effective. Effective parish evangelization starts with recognition of these distinctions. It follows then that each audience requires a different approach and different skills. Name your inner evangelist by using the personal reflection below:

In which audience do you belong? Do you know someone in a different audience?

To which audience is your parish best equipped to respond? Which one needs more of your attention?

High Audience 3: Spiritual Seekers Audience 2: The Engaged High on God, High on Church High on God, Low on Church This audience consists of those who are spiritually hungry and searching For this audience faith and church are inseparable. This audience for God, but who, for a variety of reasons, are not registered or regularly consists of people who have found a spiritual home in the church. They are spiritually committed and find in their faith cause for their satisfaction involved with an established church. For them the church may lack spiritual with life. Vibrant churches provide this audience with a variety of ways to tolerance or lack concern for the poor and marginalized. Many in this grow in faith, live out their vocation in life, and contribute to the church's audience are emerging adults (in their teens and twenties). They use the ministries. An evangelizing church equips this church for outreach. Evangelizing internet to address spiritual questions (and find a place of worship). An churches offer themselves as a resource to spiritual seekers and gain prominence evangelizing parish equips this audience to know God, discover God's will and use their gifts for a meaningful life. Any church that addresses the big questions of life in the community as the Engaged Christians live out their baptism in the world. in a non-doctrinaire fashion will prove itself a reliable resource to spiritual seekers. Audience 1: The Involved Audience 4: Those Too Busy Low on God, High on Church Low on God, Low on Church These are people who enjoy belonging. They are frequent in attendance at This audience consists of people who do not recognize their need for God. As a sacramental events and church activities. Their intention is more social than result they also have little interest in typical church activities. Programmatic spiritual. Many of those worshiping at church may be such cultural Catholics. outreach efforts with this audience can be exhausting, even for the most

result they also have little interest in typical church activities. Programmatic outreach efforts with this audience can be exhausting, even for the most energetic of parishes. This audience can remain aloof and unmoved by such invitations until their own lives are disrupted by significant events or tragedies. It is at such times that others serve as spiritual mentors or caring companions. While the Engaged are most likely to feel comfortable in responding in such circumstances, all people are

naturally equipped to witness through the corporal works of mercy. This witness has the potential to move hearts and be heard by all who have ears to hear the Good News.

These are people who enjoy belonging. They are frequent in attendance at sacramental events and church activities. Their intention is more social than spiritual. Many of those worshiping at church may be such cultural Catholics. Some refer to their own church membership at parties with tongue in cheek as an eternal insurance policy. Because belonging leads to believing, evangelizing churches see themselves having the greatest leverage with this audience. Evangelizing churches help those who are involved to find spiritual meaning and purpose in life through worship, faith formation, small group prayer, sharing, and service experiences.

Low

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Think — Delivery System

Jesus practiced responsive evangelization. He started with real people, in unique situations, who had particular needs. He was strategic in the method that he chose to deliver a message of Good News. To some Jesus shared a message of challenge. To others, it was a vision of hope. And to others, it was a word of comfort. He delivered the Message at banquets, along the road and in synagogues, through parables, healing, or signs. He took his disciples on field trips to deserts, lakes, and foreign lands. He called them by name, formed them as a team and he sent them out two-by-two to the ends of the earth. Jesus did everything with the listener in mind. He was responsive.

Today the choice of how to communicate the Gospel message is just as challenging. Evangelization starts with an understanding of the audience, their situation, their unique needs, their attitude toward. God and their relationship with the church. Consider the options below to discern your next steps. Just as Jesus humbly entered into the lives of others and responded to real needs, so too, we must care enough about God's people and God's message to do the same.

What are your parish strengths? What program or strategy are you considering? Why did you choose it? For which audience will that strategy be most effective? How do you know?

Audience 3: Spiritual Seekers High on God, Low on Church

Because God is a high priority but church is not, evangelizing parishes feed the spiritual hungers of this audience through personal contacts and Web 2.0 technologies (e.g. Facebook, Google Groups, blogs and podcasts on spiritual questions, or inspirational tweets, or Facebook threads) that both invite responses in virtual spaces and invite action and friendship in physical places.

High

Audience 2: The Engaged High on God, High on Church

The Engaged stay connected with the church through a variety of means although they rely most on some form of small, intimate community where they receive support, pray, learn and do service. In such groupings, the Engaged receive spiritual confirmation, comfort and correction. Evangelizing parishes coordinate the activities of these groups and provide these groups with leadership and resources.

Low

Audience 4: Those Too Busy Low on God, Low on Church

Because this group is the least motivated and often at the greatest distance from most churches, Engaged Catholics should partner with the Involved or Seekers to make personal connections and get to know people personally. With this audience we must examine our intentions, put people first, get acquainted, demonstrate respect and discover how God is already present and active in their lives. There is no program to accomplish this.

Disciples are hand-made.

Audience 1: The Involved Low on God, High on Church

Because Faith is only one of many priorities for this audience an evangelizing parish provides faith formation in physical places with support in virtual spaces:

- Face-to-face opportunities
- Neighborhood gatherings
- Small groups (prayer, study, support)
- Focus groups (listening and planning)
- Books clubs & web-based resources

Low

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High