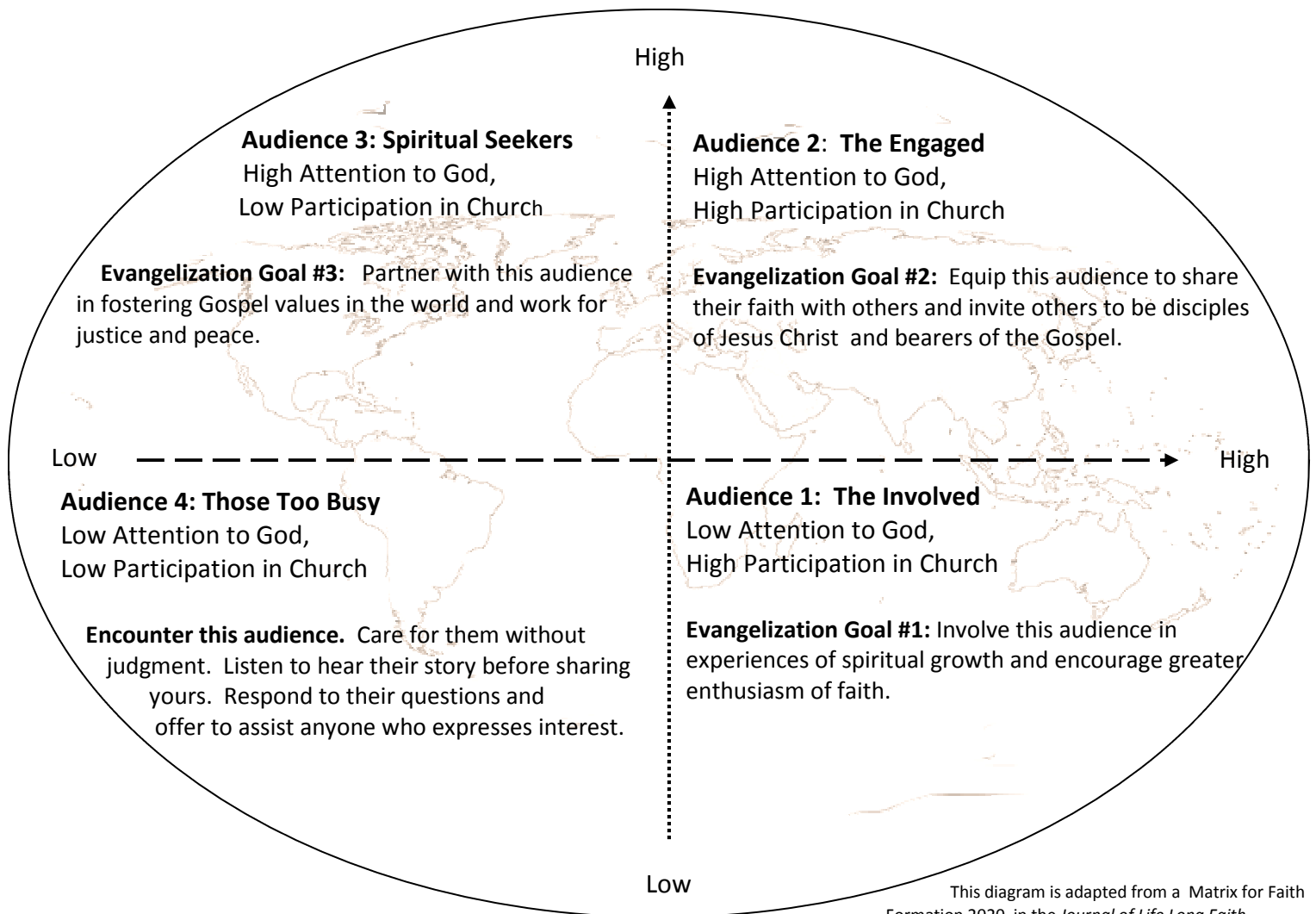


Responsive Evangelization

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



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)

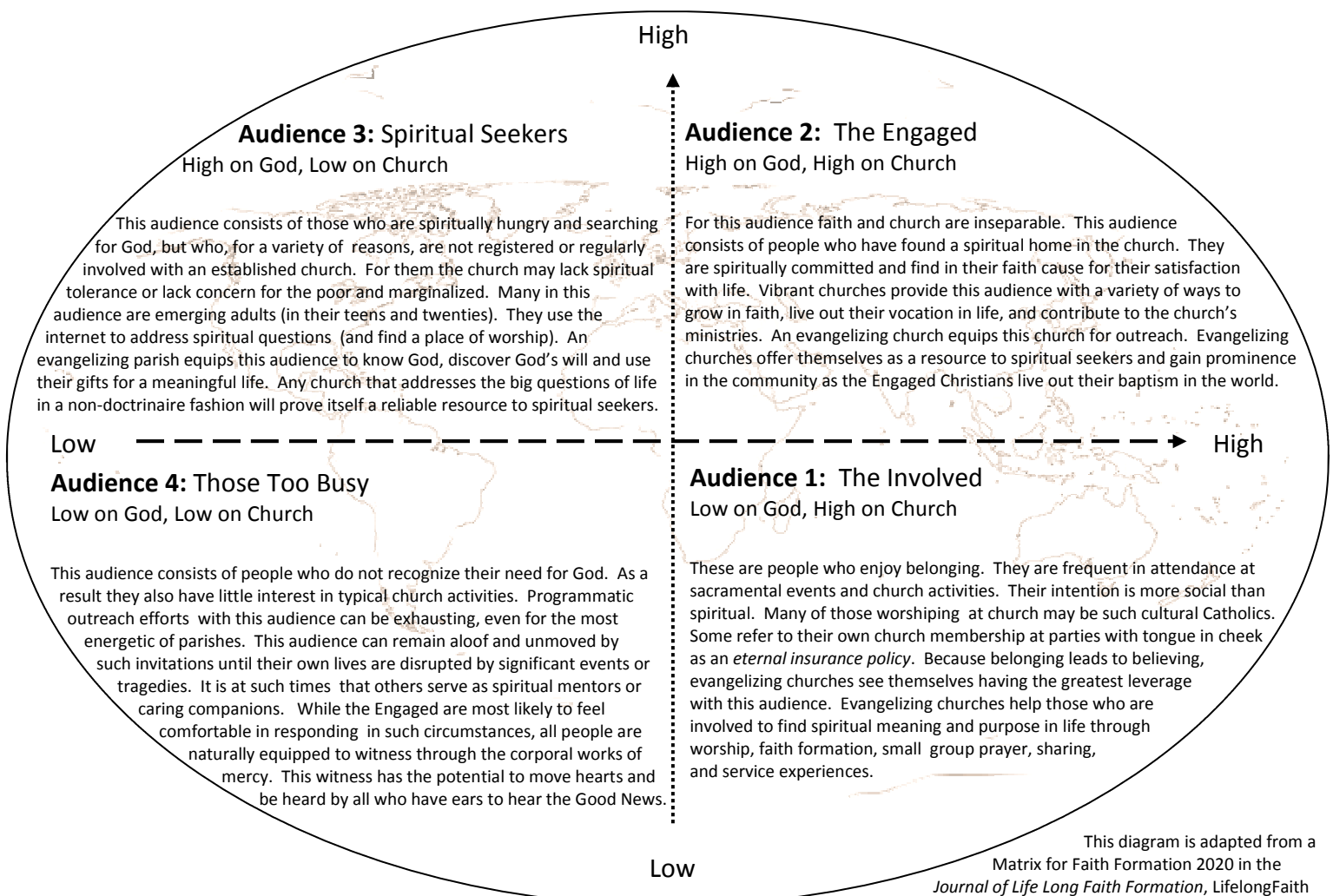
Who we are is how we evangelize!

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?



Key:
 Attention to God (the vertical faith relationship) ↑
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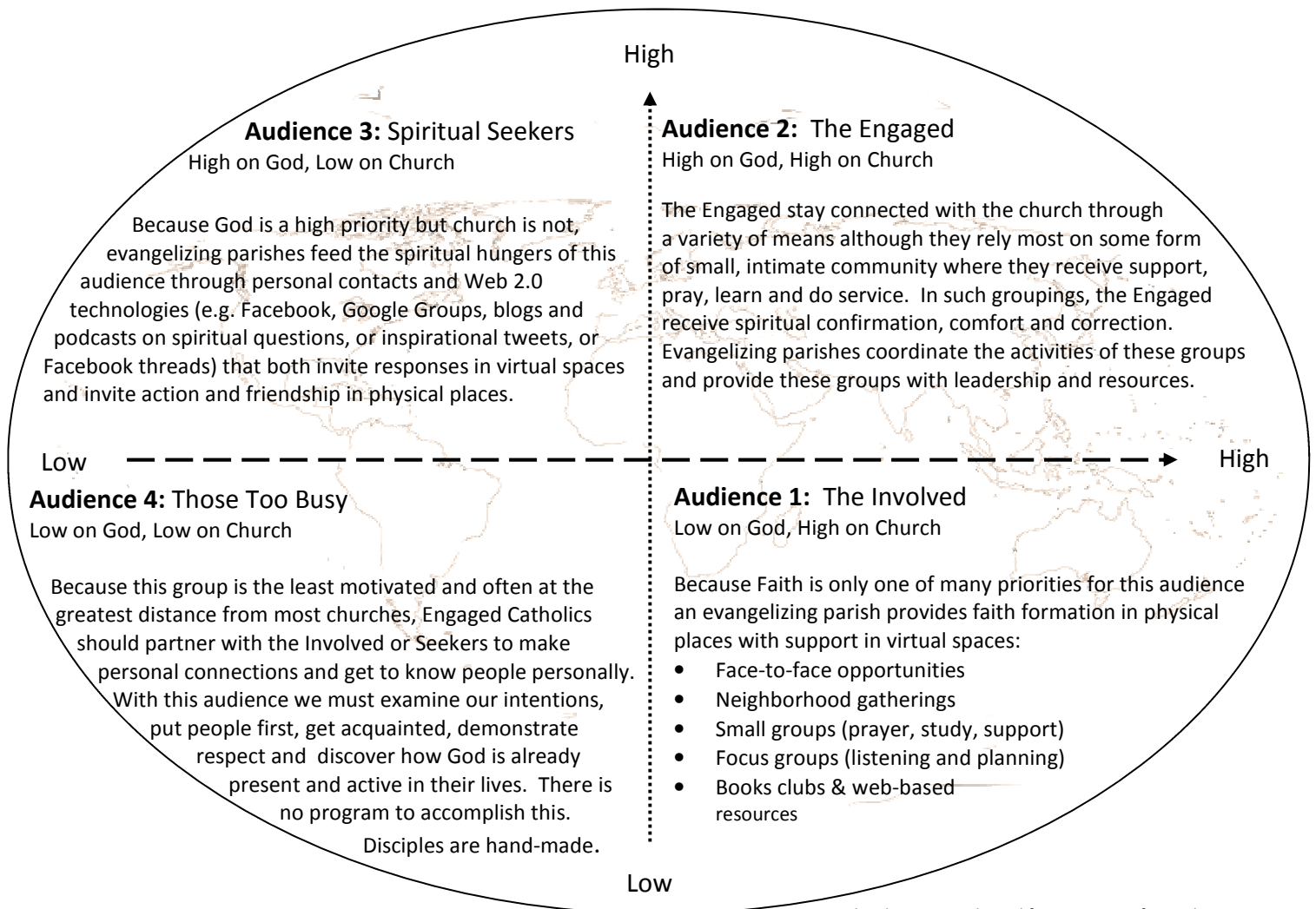
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Think — Delivery System

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?



Key:
 Attention to God (the vertical faith relationship) ↑
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