

Steps for Starting Evangelization in the Parish

Wondering where to start? In answering these questions the first step involves an examination of one's objectives in light of a Catholic understanding. In one sense, Catholic evangelization is nothing less than "bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself" (Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*). How is this practiced? How can busy parish leaders be most effective? How do leaders enlist parishioners for this agenda?

In *Go and Make Disciples: A National Strategy and Plan for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops gave direction to the work of evangelization through three essential goals:

Goal I: To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.

Goal II: To invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith.

Goal III: To foster gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ.

This is what Catholics mean by sharing the Good News.

With such lofty goals how does one start? What is the most important task? How can a parish encourage its people to be evangelizers? These are some of the questions and choices that were important at St. Gregory the Great in Williamsville and this is how Eileen Warner, who at the time was parish director of evangelization, responded:

1. Gather evangelization resources that include tools for assessing the current strengths and weaknesses of the parish. (Many of these tools are available from the Office of Parish Life)
2. Educate the staff (and if necessary the pastor) on what evangelization is and that the entire parish community needs to be a part of creating an evangelizing community.
3. Consider the times and events where people come into contact with the parish. Are these "contact points" warm and welcoming? Examples of these contact points might be a funeral, a wedding, baptism of a child, marriage preparation. All these are ideal contact points where the parish can welcome or extend loving concern to those who have fallen away or evangelize parents who have become inactive in their faith. Are your bulletin and web sites welcoming and people friendly? Do they invite people and encourage them to learn more about your faith community?

4. Evaluate the current parish mission statement. Does it reflect the direction in which you want the parish to go with regard to evangelization? What is the priority?... to build a vibrant faith community; to form a community of discipleship among the parishioners; to reconcile with others who are hurt, confused, and ambivalent about us or to invite those who have no experience with the Catholic faith.
5. Consider your method for welcoming, orienting and registering new parishioners. Do you offer to meet their needs as a family and then encourage them to find a way to get involved within the parish? (The Office of Parish Life has some ideas)
6. Educate the parishioners in the pews on how they can be evangelizers. Offer them concrete ways to talk about their faith and encourage them to bring a friend or family member to Mass or to a parish event. Read more at [Everyday Evangelization](#).
7. Consider how your parish community treats C&E (Christmas and Easter) Catholics. The pastor can offer gentle reminders to the usual Mass attendees to be as warm and welcoming as possible to those that only come on Christmas and Easter. If they are welcomed and supported, they may think about returning more often.
8. Offer programs, workshops, retreats, lectures on topics that deal with the needs, hurts and confusion of those in your parish and those in the community. These topic oriented evenings will often bring in those who have not been attending, but are looking for guidance in their lives.
9. Develop good adult faith formation within your parish. If the current parishioners are fed and nourished and challenged in their faith lives, they will be the ones to reach out and share their love of the Lord and their parish with others.
10. Hospitality is an important component of being a welcoming parish. Offering babysitting at Mass times, or at parish functions helps to draw in young families. Offering coffee and doughnut socials or shared suppers, invites an intergenerational mix of parishioners and offers the seniors a chance to share a meal with others.
11. Constructively look at each ministry and activity in your parish and determine how it could be adapted to include an element of evangelization. Just about every ministry, activity or event in your parish can evangelize.
12. Pray, Pray, Pray, that the Holy Spirit will inspire your leadership and the hearts of your faith community so that they can genuinely see Christ in others, be Christ for others and invite them into relationship with the Lord.

Interested in learning more about these strategies? Contact the Office of Parish Life, 795 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14203, Phone: 716-847-5531, Fax: 716-847-2206.