

VISION FOR EVANGELIZATION

DISCIPLES MAKE DISCIPLES

"Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize..."

-Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14

THE MOMENT

A call to missionary conversion

"We are not living in an era of change but the change of an era" – Aparecida Document

Reading the signs of the times and responding to the discernment the Church asks of us (EG 26), we must be willing to undergo a missionary conversion at all levels of our archdiocese.

"I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self- preservation."

- Joy of the Gospel, 27

We must recognize that evangelization cannot simply be the work of an individual office within the curia or a specific ministry of a committee at a parish— it must become the deepest identity of who we are as a Church, both institutionally and individually. This requires a radical paradigm shift in our parishes and our programs.

THE MESSAGE

Proclaiming the Good News

In the Church, the initial proclamation of the Gospel is often called the Kerygma - the core gospel message. We must be convicted of the reality of what this message represents as we set out in our day to day ministry.

Pope John Paul II defines the Kerygma as "the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith". This core message has to be at the heart of all we do, finding ways to incorporate it into our parish life and programs.

This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.

- Joy of the Gospel, 164

THE MODEL

A Path of Discipleship: Pre-Evangelization | Encounter | Grow | Witness

Recognizing that Evangelization is “a complex process made up of varied elements” (EN 24), we must help our parishes develop pathways for individuals to walk as they journey into the Catholic faith. This recognizes that different people in our parish boundaries have different needs and will be served best by different programs. There is no one-size fits all approach or silver bullet.

Parishes must help those they serve *Encounter* Christ (initial and ongoing encounter), *Grow* in their relationship with him and their preparedness for mission and then send them forth to *Witness* him constantly in their day to day lives and through the activities of the parish. We must help our parishes create a path of discipleship to meet the needs of all those in their boundaries.

THE METHOD

Accompaniment & Discipleship

While there is often a tendency to focus on programs or what the activities of our parishes are, the way these programs are conducted matters greatly. This is *the little way of evangelization*. This recognizes that any program we run can be an evangelization tool if it is filled with Missionary Disciples who are willing to witness Christ to others through lived relationships.

“With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Often, we share life with people -in our families, parishes and communities, but we don't share the Gospel. Or alternatively, we try to share the Gospel with people, but we don't actually share life, we don't share our “our very selves”. If we are to grow as evangelizers - we must always be willing to do both – meeting people where they are and walking with them on their journey of faith. We must incorporate a Discipleship methodology into our programs and structures.

Path of Discipleship

We need to build **pathways of discipleship** both individually and institutionally to help everyone grow in their relationship with Christ and His Church.

It might be helpful to simplify this idea to a few phases that we can focus on in our daily lives to help us understand evangelization and what this pathway looks like. Here's a simple paradigm: **Encounter. Grow. Witness.**

One definition we've used around the Archdiocese of St. Louis to highlight what evangelization looks like practically is that each of us is called to **encounter** Christ, to **grow** in our relationship with him and to **witness** him to others.

As we are evangelized ourselves, we are sent out to help others encounter, grow and witness. Before we can invite someone into an encounter with Christ, we often need to lay the groundwork of a meaningful relationship to help make this invitation more meaningful and effective. This is often called pre-evangelization.

Pre-Evangelization (*Thresholds of Conversion*)

The thresholds of conversion represent stages that people often go through on their journey to faith. Identifying where individuals are can help us better understand the needs of those on the path to faith. These thresholds of conversion are taken from the book *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry Weddell. These thresholds are:

Initial Trust | Spiritual Openness | Spiritual Curiosity | Spiritual Seeking | Intentional Discipleship

Encounter

We want to help individuals have a meaningful Encounter with Christ - and then decide to follow Him in their everyday lives. Each of us must respond to the call of Jesus in the Gospels to "*repent and believe in the Gospel*". When the Catechism of the Catholic Church talks about repentance it talks about a "*radical reorientation of our whole life*" (CCC 1431).

We do this through our initial encounter with Christ - where, like the apostles Christ calls us to drop our nets and follow him. We also do this through our ongoing daily encounter with Christ - through prayer and the sacraments- where we daily re-commit our lives to following Jesus.

Path of Discipleship

Grow

After this encounter & the decision to follow Jesus we must then grow in our relationship with Christ and in understanding His teachings given to us and lived in the life of the Church. The more we come to know about our faith, the more fully and freely we can love and follow Jesus.

As we grow closer to Christ by initiating him and his Holiness, we also must grow in imitating him in his mission to redeem the world. To be Christlike means to be in intimate relationship with the Father and to be sent to the world to invite them into the same relationship. Each of us is called to Holiness and Mission - and we must grow in our readiness for each.

Witness

This witness is lived in the world by both word and deed. One without the other is incomplete. While we may often want to “let our actions do the talking”, the Church asks us to also proclaim the Gospel message - the kerygma:

“The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.”

-Evangelization in the Modern World, 22

The world needs our invitation to life in Christ! We can't assume that simply being around our Christian community will make clear to someone the tremendous offer of grace that God has for them. It's important to note - we can never do this by force - we must propose the Gospel, not impose it upon others.

The lived witness of Christ's mercy should be ever present in our communities by our Christian Charity. If we are not living the mandate that Christ gave us that 'whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' then our proclamation of the Gospel rings hollow.



PARISH EVANGELIZATION PLANNING

Form Leaders

Do you have the leaders capable of helping you set a vision and become an evangelizing parish? *This includes parish staff, key volunteers, and lay leaders.*

- Personal Holiness
- The Mission of the Church
- Practical skills & strategies

Quick Wins

How can you inspire those in your parish with a sense of hope and possibility? What can you do to change the momentum in your parish?

- Encounter oriented events
- Staff Changes (Director of Evangelization)
- Visible changes to Sunday Experience/ parish facilities
- Create a missionary culture
- What are simple things we can do to engage people?
- Stop doing things that distract you from your mission

Make a plan

Gather your key leaders and create a plan for how your parish can evangelize and create a path of discipleship.

- Who are we trying to reach?
- How can we reach them?
- What is the pathway for those who say yes to our invitation?
- What are we doing that distracts us from our mission?

Faithful Execution & Accompaniment

There are no silver bullets in evangelization. Becoming an evangelizing community takes time and intentional effort. Be faithful to your plan, but willing to adjust as needed.

- Provide Resources
- Clear expectations/ measures
- Accountability
- Expect fruitfulness

PARISH TRANSFORMATION

Seven Characteristics of an Evangelizing Community *

1. The leader champions the vision of evangelization constantly.
2. The Leader models the vision of evangelization.
3. The church or ministry frequently offers ministry training geared toward helping members evangelize.
4. Members of the church or small group engage in giving and receiving regular coaching.
5. The church's or Ministry's small groups function as disciple-making teams.
6. The church or ministry regularly offers evangelistic events.
7. Those seeking to evangelize are characterized by abundant prayer.

*as defined by Dr. Bob McNabb,
Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World