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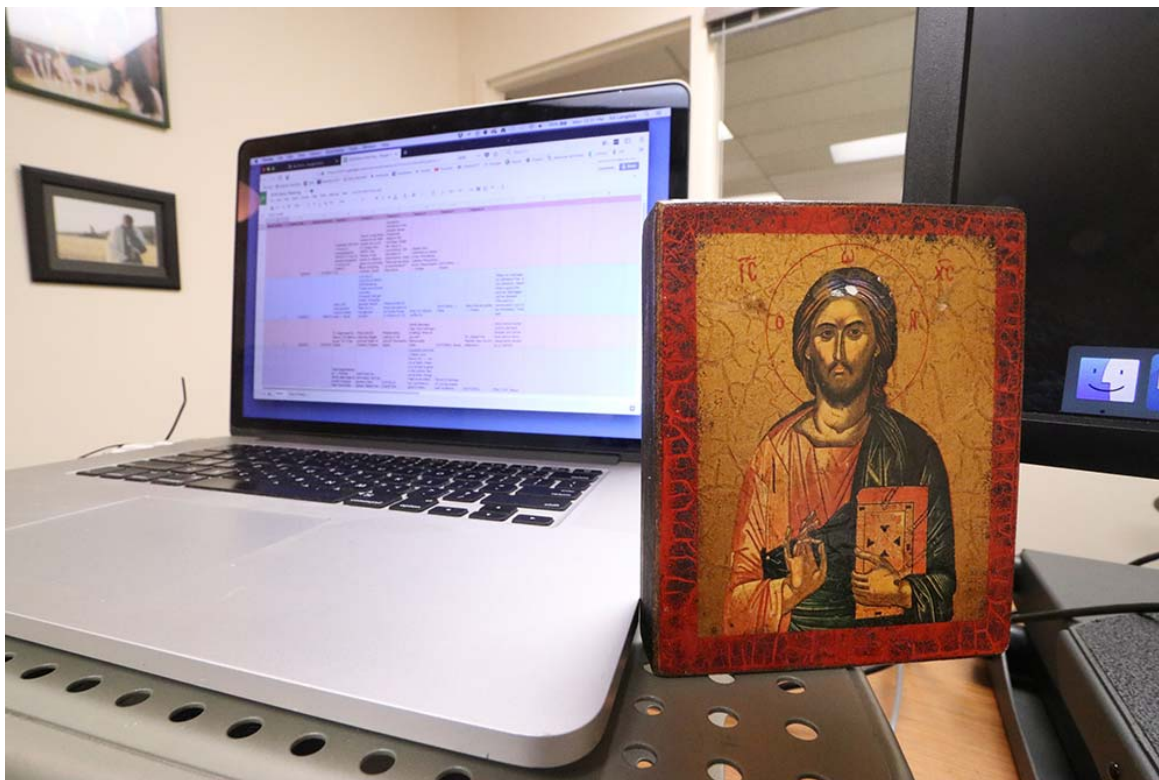
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EVANGELIZATION 101

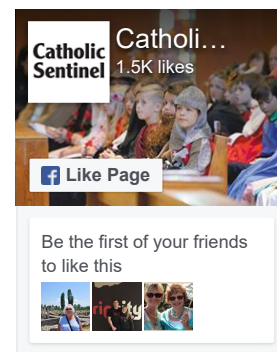
What is it? Why does it scare me? How do I do it?



An icon of Jesus sits next to a laptop computer on a worker's desk. Evangelization experts say lay Catholics are called to bring Christ to others in the home, neighborhoods, workplaces and marketplaces. (Ed Langlois/Catholic Sentinel)



Ed Langlois, Of the Catholic Sentinel
1/6/2018 11:58 AM



The essential mission of the church is to bring the world the stunning message of salvation in Christ. That was the gist of an interview Portland Archbishop Alexander Sample gave last year on Mater Dei Radio.

"God loves you so much he is not going to allow you to live in sin and death. He rescued you," the archbishop said. "We have what the world is looking for."

Archbishop Sample says it again and again in his travels through western Oregon: Every baptized Catholic is called to be a missionary disciple — in homes, neighborhoods, workplaces and marketplaces.

"We have such reason to have joy in our hearts and in our lives," he told the radio audience. "We have a personal encounter with Christ and he means everything to us."



Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers



How to evangelize

Here are excerpts from Bishop Robert Barron's seven suggestions on evangelization. An author and speaker, he is auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

1 – Lead with the beautiful.

We are a beautiful religion. Truth/goodness make people defensive. You can come to learn to love from beauty.

2 – Don't dumb down the message.

Evangelize by being clear, articulate, and smart – with the full arsenal of our tradition.

3 – We have to preach with ardor.

People only listen to a really excited speaker. The risen Jesus is the Good News. People don't die for myths, legends, and literary devices – they do it for a resurrected Jesus.

4 – Tell the great story.

There is something haywire in presenting Jesus without the Old Testament. If you de-Judaize Jesus, he becomes just another spiritual teacher. Evangelization is a subversive message — there is a new king in town!

5 – God does not need us – and loves us anyway.

God is not a rival to us or wanting to get something out of us. He wants us to be fully alive.

6 – We are made for God.

We are wired to want a relationship with God. The church needs to be the new Elijah who publically and vigorously challenges the priests of the false gods (wealth, pleasure, honor, power).

7 – Use the new media.

Immerse ourselves and others in the tradition of the church, but we would be horribly derelict if we don't use the tools we have before us. The majority of those who become atheists are doing so through new media.

Paulist priests like Washington, D.C.-based Father Frank DeSiano have been working for decades to help Catholics see themselves not primarily as parishioners, but as disciples on a mission. "We have to help Catholics get in touch with the relational side of their faith," said Father DeSiano, president of Paulist Evangelization Ministries. "We want them to see themselves as having accepted faith, not see faith as something that happened to them."

Father Sean Weeks, pastor of St. Pius X Parish in Portland, one of Oregon's largest Catholic communities, has the same goal. He remembers a parishioner who received a distressed message from a friend whose marriage was hitting the rocks. The parishioner asked the priest to call the troubled couple. Father Weeks said he would be glad to reach out, but noted that the anguishing friend had called the parishioner for help, not the parish. "Maybe the Lord is calling you to serve," the priest explained. Father Weeks often reassures Catholics that they are worthy to bring others to Jesus.

"We can't keep the faith in the church," said Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, a Catholic television speaker from Immaculate Heart Parish in Portland. "We may not be on street corners but when we encounter people and they ask us about our beliefs, we need to share our life in Christ."

What is evangelization?

Before the Second Vatican Council, evangelization was seen largely as the job of clergy and religious. But in "On Evangelization in the Modern World," an encyclical published in 1975, Pope Paul VI said evangelizing means bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation. That required all Catholics, especially laity.

David Renshaw, director of communications for the Archdiocese of Portland, said 1 Peter 3:15 offers a good, concise definition of evangelization: "Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have."

Renshaw says another passage, John 3:16, explains that hope: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

In their 1992 plan on evangelization, the U.S. Catholic bishops said the evangelizing task always needs to be linked to Jesus. Renshaw affirms that. "Evangelization can be working in a soup kitchen or giving clothes to the homeless, but I need to show it is Christ working through me," he said.

"Evangelization is kindling the fire of love for Jesus in the heart of another," said Mary Sharon Moore, who has spent more than 20 years as a traveling Catholic evangelist. A member of St. Thomas More University Parish in Eugene, Moore is sometimes called "St. Paul with lipstick."

"Evangelizing is not a separate thing we do," Moore said. "It is intentionally living the whole of the gospel, embracing our Christian life. Evangelizing isn't about learning more; it's about taking Jesus seriously."

The New Evangelization, a phrase used by St. John Paul II starting in the 1980s and carried on by Pope Benedict XVI, refers to evangelizing in a culture that is increasingly secular.

Why do Catholics fear it?

Catholics have long gotten shaky knees when it comes to evangelizing. They don't want to be associated with hollering street preachers or Christians who go door-to-door with condescending messages, Renshaw said.

Experts say the fear may subside when people learn the difference between proselytizing and evangelizing.

"Proselytizing is refusing the Holy Spirit's role and trying to drag the person into the faith," Renshaw said. Proselytizing, Moore adds, can make people feel cornered or drive them away.

"Proselytizing is looking at the other person as if somehow they are inherently defective and saying, 'Because of that, you need to be part of my church,'" explained Father DeSiano.

Pope Francis rejects the hard sell. In "Joy of the Gospel," a 2013 apostolic exhortation, he called for a "respectful and gentle" personal dialogue in which the person is allowed to voice his or her life's concerns and only later will the evangelizer humbly share a Scripture passage or story.

"Pope Francis has made it less a culture war kind of thing but rather far more intent on disciples engaging the other," said Father DeSiano.

Father John Kerns, pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Lake Oswego, said Catholics do want to avoid "in your face" proselytism but need to be brave enough to invite people to faith. That can be difficult in a society in which everyone is left to do what they want.

"We are afraid to tell our story," Father Kerns said. "But if we realize all that Christ is offering us and the beauty of our Catholic faith and how essential it is for this life and the next, why aren't we inviting people to that?"

People fear evangelization because it removes them from a comfort zone, said Father Weeks. But he noted that one of the first things Jesus did in his public ministry was call on people to change and repent.

Many Catholics fear evangelizing because they feel they need to know the catechism back and forth and need to quote the bible, said Renshaw. He reassured Catholics that simply sharing belief and the relationship with Christ is powerful.

Even so, evangelizers do open themselves to the risk of ridicule and rejection. "We live in a society that says vulnerability means weakness," said Deacon Burke-Sivers. "But when you are weak, that is when Christ can become strong."

How do we evangelize?

The experts agree that personal prayer and formation are vital before anyone can evangelize. Moore cites Dorothy Day, who read Scripture for an hour and attended Mass before starting her work with homeless people.

"We must be converted — and we must continue to be converted!" the U.S. bishops wrote in "Go and Make Disciples."

The witness of our life is far more effective than our words, Archbishop Sample told radio listeners last year. "For me it comes down to having a supernatural perspective on life," he said, explaining that we must help people in strife, but also let them know that this life is not the end-all.

"The heart of being a disciple is to be set on the things of heaven," the archbishop explained. "To keep that perspective in mind, that is the good news we bring. Otherwise, people will be aimless."

He offered a suggested response when someone asks why we attend Mass: "I have fallen in love with God. That's why I go to church."

Such personal testimony is more powerful than catechesis at the initial points of evangelizing, experts said.

Moore volunteers regularly at a St. Vincent de Paul warming center for homeless people in Eugene. During one overnight shift, she started praying the breviary silently in the open room. A guest awoke and asked if she were reading a letter. She told him she was praying a psalm. "I thought so," the man said, obviously intrigued.

"Evangelizing is showing up and giving the Holy Spirit something to work with," said Moore, who rides the bus instead of driving a car so she can have more possible evangelizing encounters. "We don't have to be heroes. We have the be present. It's all about stories. They have to be our stories and they have to be true."

Instead of dazzling people with knowledge, those who evangelize should simply explain who they are and what faith means to them, said Renshaw of the archdiocese.

He sees opportunities to evangelize in the workplace, like keeping holy cards on one's desk. Coworkers are bound to ask and a simple explanation is a good form of evangelization. Ash Wednesday offers great potential. A bank teller once informed Renshaw that he had dirt on his forehead; that gave him a chance to explain what the ashes mean.

Renshaw says small acts may be a good way to start: Saying "Merry Christmas" or praying before a meal at a restaurant.

Deacon Burke-Sivers said the disciple's job is not to carry out full conversions, but to "throw seeds" so the Holy Spirit can get to cultivating.

He urges parents and grandparents to make it no secret that they are praying, even fasting, for their non-practicing progeny to return to church.

"Do you throw canon law at him? No. Do you start hitting him over the head with the catechism? No. You start telling your child about your relationship with Jesus Christ. Explain what Jesus means to you in your lived daily experience. They need to see the faith lived out."

Father Weeks at St. Pius X said Pope Francis has been a "game changer" in evangelization. The pope's bold forays to the peripheries and his embrace of the poor have challenged all Christians to evangelize by action. Similarly, Father Kerns in Lake Oswego said the church must show that accepting the Gospel makes a difference in this world, creating a more just society, increasing mercy and prompting charity.

Parishes can help prepare Catholics to be evangelizing disciples, said Father DeSiano. "Parishes that have small group activities and home visits are the ones with the most energy," he explained, noting that few parishes have an evangelization team. In the United States, only 15 percent of parishes keep up their RCIA welcome year-round.

This is the first in a year-long series on evangelization.