

EVANGELIZATION AT THE PARISH LEVEL

Since evangelization is the essential mission of the Church and the parish is the Church present in a given place, all parishes should have evangelization teams, or at least individual evangelizers, working closely with the pastor, council, and staff. An evangelization team is not a luxury or an addition, but a part of normal parish planning, normal parish life. Making this fundamental point to the pastor and parish leadership is perhaps the most important act of evangelization diocesan designates perform. The long-term effectiveness of their ministry depends on how successfully they can move evangelization from the “take-it-or-leave-it” margin to the “must-do” core.

Developing a Parish Evangelization Team

The diocesan evangelization designate... can assist the pastor and any parish staff in discerning the membership of the parish team. The pastor should take a very active role in this discernment, since he will be working very closely with parish team members as they carry out their mission. In general, the parish evangelization team will include active Catholics with a real enthusiasm for their faith and the ability to draw people into the love of Jesus and the Catholic way of life. They will resemble the diocesan evangelization designate in outlook, though they are volunteer rather than professional evangelizers. Those who have been through a conversion experience (RCIA, Cursillo, Charismatic Renewal, Marriage Encounter, Renew, Search, Youth 2000, etc.) often make excellent candidates for the parish evangelization team, as do people with experience in small Christian communities. The RCIA/Catechumenate process in general makes a fine preparation for the ministry of evangelization. Participation of the pastor or his representative as a member or faithful consultant is most helpful for highlighting the central place of evangelization in parish life and supporting its proclamation from the pulpit. Finally, better-off parishes may be able to afford part- or full-time staff for the team, which greatly increases its range and effectiveness.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL EVANGELIZERS

In order to be successful, designates must lovingly and enthusiastically embrace Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church. While this may seem obvious, it deserves special emphasis. Catholic evangelizers represent the Church to Catholics who wish to join the apostolate and to non-Catholics seeking a spiritual home. Their work begins in fidelity to Catholic faith and practice and ends with bringing people into visible communion with the Church.

Having been sent and evangelized, the Church herself sends out evangelizers. She puts on their lips the saving Word, she explains to them the message of which she herself is the depository, she gives them the mandate which she herself has received and sends them out to preach. . . . There is thus a profound link between Christ, the Church and evangelization. During the period of the Church that we are living in, it is she who has the task of evangelizing. This mandate is not accomplished without her, and still less against her. (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Nos. 15-16)

Catholic evangelizers also witness to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and to the groundbreaking encyclical *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. They have good “people skills,” relating to individuals from varied social, economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Prayer is important to them, both individual prayer and prayer in common. They are generally familiar with the mission of the Church and interested in learning of its various ministries. Finally, they are flexible and creative, realizing that God’s grace flows like water and can neither be directed nor contained.

*Excerpts from “Thy Kingdom Come” – A Manual for Evangelization Staff
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