

Creating an Evangelizing Parish

talk given by Jason Simon

Evangelization is the essential mission of the Church. The magisterium has been very clear, starting with Vatican II and followed up with Pope Paul VI and his *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. See paragraph 14 which defines evangelization for Catholics. It states: Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.

Check out also the book "Simple Church - Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples by: Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger

Also The General Directory for Catechesis document (contextualizes evangelization within the RCIA Rite) which says evangelization calls people to conversion in faith; begins with the proclamation of the Gospel, and the call to conversion and in its fullness evolves into catechesis.

Hope to give 4 principals to organize and align your parish activities along the axis of evangelization. These will move people into discipleship; that would draw people into the Church.

Smorgasbord parishes do not work. New comers do not know where to begin once they say "Yes" to discipleship. They need direction. They do not know to start at maybe a retreat or small group session before they go into deep bible study.

Pre-Evangelization: Lays the ground work for evangelization such as coffee after Mass or welcoming ministries at Mass, church pot-luck etc. but they don't work alone. Nothing should be on an island. We miss opportunities if they are. Every step of this should have a hand-off. Always ask yourself "Where is the hand-off?" It becomes the sign that says, "eat this now". What tastes good after this retreat? Man a small group really tastes good after a retreat." Be sure to include all four steps in order.

Evangelize: People who already have this fire burning in their hearts and who have zeal to do something. These people can be equipped to reach out to others in the parishes, to the baptized and then to the others in our world. Equip them according to there charisms and their talents to reach out to baptized and then unbaptized in our parishes.

Four Principles for intentional evangelization in parishes taken from a book called: "Simple Church".

1. **Clarity:** How do we evangelize? What do we do well? Is is hospitality? Music?....
2. **Movement** built into your parish ministries to bring people along there journey in discipleship. They need direction in what to do, where to go next to develop their discipleship relationship.
3. **Align** the parish staff and clergy with that movement. Everyone all agrees that when people come into our parish they start here than go here and so on.
4. **Focus** once there is a good sense for this. Then you need to say 'no' so many things and 'yes' to others as long as they are alined with evangelized. The announcements at Mass should be things that are going to evangelize people such as small groups and retreats.

Using the analogy of the game of baseball; you cannot go to 2nd base before 1st base and if you leave a runner stranded on 3rd base you do not get points. Use this model for the 4 principles above.

First step: Evangelize your people.

To make a believer, convert. These people have made the decision to be disciples of Jesus. It arouses the beginnings of faith. A good homily can do this as well as retreats, parish reflection days, advent reconciliation days.

Second Base: Establish: Or another word could be Catechesis

Makes a disciple. Someone intentionally living their life for Jesus.

There are two parts: Initiatory Catechesis and Permanent Catechesis

Initiatory Catechesis: is those things which are common to the tradition. They are not speculative; there is no question about them. Things like all Catholics believe: you should pray, read the Bible, love their neighbour, receive the Sacraments. Entry level stuff.

Permanent Catechesis continues the ground the believer. By means of a period of formation in an apprenticeship style....such as bible study courses.

Third Base: Equip Disciples

Helping disciples discern their charism, their gifts, and then begin to serve the body of Christ. Some called to administration, to catechesis, some to evangelization. To helping get people from home base to first base. This makes workers.

Home Base: Engage

Have the whole parish engaged.

One example:

Small groups are a really easy way into this type of movement. It is a really easy entry way into the Church. Some kind of welcoming event Parish pot-luck. At that welcome event someone would do a short 2 minute testimony to talk about small group. He says he was maybe reluctant to be part of a small group but went anyway and how good it was for him. and then he encourages those there to sign-up as the clip-board goes around the room.

Look for a discussion guide that has this look worked into it: from evangelization to establishment. It might only be 6 weeks but it can be done. Multiply from there. In nearly all small groups there are leaders, to encourage that person to consider being the next small group facilitator in the spring. These new facilitators then have a training session a few weeks before lent when the next group will begin. This continues. These equipped people then engage others and the cycle continues.

An Evangelizing Parish Needs:**1. Evangelizing People:**

- 1.1. The clergy or staff cannot do it all so the first level of baptized parishioners sitting in your pews need to be evangelized.

2. Intentionality:

- 2.1. Can't just be a smorgasbord. That Catholic Ministries folder is good only if it is strategic and says: "New parishioners come to_____". Otherwise they will start in at the wrong place and get lost. Proof that focused churches are thriving from the authors of "Simple Church" says you need to be relational. They use the analogy of the 'front porch'. You greet people at the front porch of your home but don't leave them there to 'come in when they are ready'. You invite them into your living room and engage in good conversation, you invite them to your dining room table and continue the good conversation and if things work out they help with the dishes where even more intimate conversation is shared. This is where they learn where you put your cutlery, your glasses and begin to feel 'at home'. Our parishes need to be like that.

3. Fruitful Effective Ministries:

- 3.1. We need our catechesis to be excellent. We need our retreats, our liturgical ministry training to be excellent. Then the movement will make sense to people and they are drawn deeper and won't be turned away.