



Go and Make Disciples: A Vision and a Plan

What the Parish Staff Needs to Know

1. Evangelization is at the center of parish life. The staff and ministry leaders should attempt to correct inadequate definitions of this process. In his encyclical *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii nuntiandi)*, Pope Paul VI provides a broad definition of evangelization as “bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”¹ Invite parishioners to reflect on this definition and on the explanation found in the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ document, *Go and Make Disciples*, which spells out the three major goals of evangelization. These goals can and should be addressed simultaneously because they complement one another.
2. **Goal I:** *To bring about such an enthusiasm for their faith in Catholics that, in living it out, they share it freely with others.*² The pastoral staff should be conscious of themselves as a primary example of what it means to believe in God and to evangelize. We offer a successful witness of faith by fostering a warm, inviting parish environment, by encouraging people to share faith experiences at meetings and functions, and also by offering day-to-day examples or stories of faith in homilies, teachings, and written communications. Healthy, evangelistic parishes are a direct reflection of the capacity of the leadership to share faith with the parish community.

Choosing small communities as an integral part of parish life brings us a step closer to meeting this goal since they provide a setting for faith sharing and an opportunity for mutual evangelization.

3. **Goal II:** *To invite everyone to hear Jesus’ message of salvation, whatever might be their social or cultural backgrounds, in order that they may join us in the Catholic faith.*³ It is not proselytizing that involves persuading another person at all costs. It is sharing the Good News with others in ways that invite dialogue, so that our conversation is in itself a sign of the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is always a loving invitation. The Vatican Council II document, *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis humanae)* can be a helpful resource in setting guidelines for this kind of evangelization.

Small Christian communities provide an environment that encourages and supports this invitation, since inviting others is generally facilitated when people are able to share a rich communal and conversion experience, and have a warm, welcoming, informal community to invite others into.

4. **Goal III:** *To promote values of the gospel—dignity of the human person, importance of family, common good—so that our society will continue to be transformed by Christ’s saving power.*⁴ This means that evangelization involves working toward the reign of God, especially within our geographical boundaries. Christian discipleship is never lived in isolation. The love we experience in our relationships with Jesus is meant to overflow into actions that foster justice and equality, that express social concern for the poor and needy in our society, and reflect a prophetic, global stewardship of our environment. Evangelization also involves our efforts as a universal Church, so parish ministries should explore ways to affirm and connect with evangelization efforts of other parishes, diocesan organization, and global missionary groups.

Small Christian communities support an integrated spirituality with gospel values being promoted in all phases of everyday life. Participating in small communities leads to the root causes of injustice being addressed by participants committed to living out gospel values.

5. New members of the parish, RCIA candidates, parents of newly baptized, and those who move into the area should be welcomed and introduced to the ways they can live and share their faith. Perhaps these people can be introduced to leaders of the various church groups and ministries, as well as faith-sharing options through a parish video or a visit. An introductory packet could also include a few faith stories by parishioners of different ages. Ministry groups and small communities could invite new parishioners to gatherings as a way to meet people and interact with the faith community.

Note: for a regular supply of great ideas for use in your parish on evangelization, see <http://www.parishlife.com/GIGP%20Newsletter%20Site%20and%20E-zine/home.htm> (*Great Ideas from Great Parishes Great Ideas* is a bi-weekly e-zine that will bring you best practices and pastoral ideas from parishes throughout the country and beyond.)

¹ Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii nuntiandi)*, 18.

² U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992), p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*