

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- A relationship with Jesus is fundamental to conversion.
- We are called to share the good news.
- The Church prepares us for the mission of evangelization.

Evangelization

"One day at lunch, a group of us started talking about religion. I started challenging Margaret, who was Catholic. I thought I knew what Catholics believed. Margaret very patiently explained what Catholic beliefs really are. Years later, I remembered what she said."

"I'd been going to a Catholic church for a couple of weeks but felt out of place so I just sat by myself. One day, a woman introduced herself and helped make me feel like I belonged."

"After my brother became Catholic, he sent me a lot of books by Merton, Chesterton, and others. I just put them on a shelf. One day years later, I started to read those books, and they made sense."

In each example, a Catholic was evangelizing. We've all encountered people like them, people who witness to the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evangelization is something God calls all the baptized to do. As Pope Francis wrote in the *Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, "We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize" (EG 266). Evangelization becomes part of us, part of who we are, so much so that we sometimes evangelize without even realizing we're doing it.

- *Did another person help introduce you to the Catholic faith? Describe your encounter with this person.*



What Is Evangelization?

Evangelization comes from the Greek for "to bring or to announce the good news." To evangelize means to testify and proclaim the mystery of God's salvation of humanity in Christ Jesus.

Evangelization involves much more than bringing the gospel to people who've never heard the good news. It also means bringing Christians to a deeper awareness of Jesus Christ and his love for them. Through evangelization, *hearers* of the word of God become better equipped to become *doers* of the word. Thus, evangelization forms the basis for all ministry within the Church.

Evangelization is a concept as old as Christianity itself. Christ's last words to us before ascending into heaven were about evangelizing:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19–20

For someone to become a disciple of Christ, it helps if they have a relationship with a person who has already embraced the good news and is a member of the Church. That can make a crucial difference.

- *Who has been that person in your life?*
- *Can you begin to see how you might become that kind of person for another?*



How Do We Evangelize?

Here’s a five-step plan for evangelization based on the teachings of Pope Paul VI in *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*. All quotations in this lesson not otherwise cited are from this document.

Step One: Witness Christ

Our first step in becoming evangelizers is to live lives that **witness** our faith in Christ to those around us. Pope Paul VI pointed out that “Modern [people listen] more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if [they do] listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41).

The positive witness of a loving, caring, and forgiving Catholic is the strongest method of attracting people to Jesus and the Church. Love is our most powerful argument for conversion. It will lead others to Jesus Christ.

- *In what ways may you be called to share the good news of Jesus’ love for those around you?*



Step Two: Share Our Faith

The second step in evangelization is explaining the teachings of Christ in terms of what it means to be Catholic. Silent witness isn’t enough, for “even the finest witness will prove ineffective...if it is not explained, justified...and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus” (EN 22).

Jesus was the greatest witness that ever lived, yet his witness wouldn’t have reached us if he hadn’t ceaselessly explained what salvation means for daily life. His Sermon on the Mount, parables, and dialogues with people show us how to share what we believe.

Many Catholics are hesitant to evangelize. Bible studies, adult faith formation programs, and small faith-sharing and prayer groups are all great opportunities for sharing our faith. These activities increase participants’ confidence and comfort in explaining and sharing Catholic teachings. The more a Catholic studies and understands the Bible, especially in a community setting, the more active that Catholic will be as an evangelizer.

- *What activities might help you become a better evangelizer?*



“The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others...It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn” (EN 24).

Step Three: Offer the Option for Love

Pope John Paul II told America's youth on a visit to the United States, "I propose to you the option of love, which is the opposite of escape. If you really accept that love from Christ, it will lead you to God" (Mass on Boston Common, October 1, 1979).

This is the third step in evangelization, the core content of our sharing: "To evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit" (EN 26).

The best way to do this is on a person-to-person basis. People attract people. Love begets love. Faith in action becomes love, and love takes the shape of service. The greatest service we can give is to offer Christ's invitation to salvation from death and sin through a life of love, justice, and mercy.

- *With whom might you be called to share Jesus Christ? A spouse? A friend? A child? A coworker?*



Evangelization = Love

Pope Paul VI reminds us that to evangelize is to love. He notes three signs of love in the process of evangelization:

1. Respect for the religious and spiritual situation of those being evangelized.
2. Concern not to wound the person, especially if that person is weak in faith.
3. Effort to transmit not doubts and uncertainties arising out of improper study and incomplete knowledge, but certainties that are anchored in the word of God (see EN 79).

Step Four: Challenge Our Culture

Our Catholic witness should affect the values of our society, causing us to be countercultural when necessary. Evangelization involves "affecting and... upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (EN 19).

Jesus challenged the hypocrisy of those who planned to stone the woman accused of adultery. He spoke against the powerful who would lay burdens on the poor. He condemned religious leaders who reduced the faith to minor practices and "neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity" (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus asks us to bring the gospel to bear on our society, to speak up on behalf of the poor and the homeless, to strengthen the place of marriage and family, to raise our children with a spirit of peace, and to hold dear the virtue of forming nonviolent societies. We cannot segregate our religious life from life in our culture, for the hidden energy of the gospel has the power to transform culture.

- *To which of these areas of the culture might the Holy Spirit be calling you to assist in a work of gospel transformation?*



MYSTAGOGY **Step Five: Make the Good Better**

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The fifth step involves taking what's positive in our society and putting it at the service of the gospel. Culture must "be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel" (EN 20). This is our Christian responsibility and is now your responsibility as well. We must do what we can to see that advances in medicine are used at the service of life and not for abortion or euthanasia; to make certain tax dollars that support a massive defense establishment are used to maintain peace in the world; and to find ways to move our economic system toward benefiting members of our society and the world that depend upon us.

What's good in our culture can become better when touched by the transforming power of Christ's good news. People still hunger for love, affection, and salvation. They still crave the good news of Jesus Christ. That's why the Second Vatican Council said we should face the modern world with joy and hope, with the optimism of the transforming gospel.



On your own or with a group, create a list of questions you think others may have about the Catholic faith. Include questions you had about the faith before becoming Catholic. Pick one or two questions and research the answers. Use lesson handouts, your notes, the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and any other resources you have access to. If you don't find an answer by the end of this session, keep searching.

- Describe one area of your life where you really could make a difference to others.
- How can you serve as an example of Christ?

- What are some ways our culture supports the dignity of human life, the sacredness of marriage, the beauty of God's world?
- How might God be calling you to make that good thing even better?



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