

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.



- Who first introduced you to the Catholic faith?
- Why was their example so compelling?



Evangelization is something God calls all the baptized to do. As Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation *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.

What is Evangelization?

Evangelization comes from the Greek word *euangelizomai*, which means “to bring or to announce the good news, the *euangelion*.” When we evangelize, we’re proclaiming the mystery of God’s salvation of humanity in Jesus.

Evangelizing can mean the missionary work of bringing the gospel to people who’ve never heard the good news before. However, evangelization isn’t limited to just this kind of mission. We can also evangelize by bringing the people around us, including other Christians, to a deeper awareness of Jesus Christ and his love. In fact, evangelization is the basis for all ministries within the Church because it equips those who hear the word of God to go out and live the word.

Evangelization has been important to the Church since its beginnings. Even Christ’s last words to us before ascending into heaven were about evangelizing:

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. Something about it stuck with me, and I decided I wanted to know more.”

“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 writers like Merton and Chesterton. I wasn’t that interested, but as I started to read them I realized they made a lot of sense.”

The Catholics in these anecdotes were evangelizing. In one way or another, they were witnessing and sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"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

Someone's willingness to join the Church often has a lot to do with whether he or she already has a positive relationship with someone who is an active member. This example can make a crucial difference. That's why it's important for us to make our faith a public part of our lives, not just something we do in private.

- *Who has been an evangelizer to you?*
- *How can you be that person to someone else?*



How Do We Evangelize?

So now that you see how important evangelization is to faith, how do you get started? There are many ways to evangelize, but below is a five-step plan to get your started. This plan is based on the teachings of Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*.

Step One: Witness Christ

Jesus evangelized by proclaiming and witnessing the good news of God's love, justice, and mercy, and by sharing the hope of our salvation from sin and hopelessness.

Our first step in becoming a worthy evangelizer is to be a **witness**, to live our faith in Jesus Christ. 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 to the Church. Our love leads others to Jesus Christ.

- *How are you already a witness to the good news?*
- *How can you love more like Christ?*



Step Two: Share Your Faith

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

Jesus didn't only live faith in God every day, he talked about what that faith and salvation meant for our daily lives. Jesus spoke with people about faith, he answered their questions and challenged them to live lives centered on God. His Sermon on the Mount, his parables, and his interactions with people show us how to share what we believe with others.

We can't dialogue about the faith well if we don't understand it. That's why the Church asks all those who are fully initiated into the Church to continue growing in faith. Many parishes offer youth groups that explore different areas of faith formation and provide opportunities to keep your spirituality fresh. The more you know about your faith, the more confident you'll be as an evangelizer.

- *What are some areas of the faith you'd like to learn more about?*



Step Three: Offer the Option for Love

This is the third step in evangelization; the reason we share our faith. Through evangelization we lead people to love in Christ. "To evangelize is to witness to God revealed in Jesus Christ, in the Spirit."

The best way to offer the option of love is person to person, face to face. People attract people. Love begets love. Love in action takes the shape of service. Even the simplest act of kindness can have a profound impact. The greatest act of kindness we can do for another is to offer them Christ's invitation of salvation from death and sin through a life of love, justice, and mercy.

- *Who might you be called to evangelize to?*
- *How can you bring them the option for love?*



EVANGELIZATION = LOVE

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

1. Respect for the religious and spiritual situations of those being evangelized. Our message of Christ's love shouldn't come through insults of another person's religion or spiritual beliefs. Debating with someone isn't a bad thing and can lead to strong conversion, but any disagreements should be handled respectfully and with knowledge of the situation and topic being discussed.
2. Concern not to wound the person, especially if that person is weak in faith. We are all in different places in our spiritual lives and we should present our faith as a space that offers forgiveness and mercy.
3. The effort to spread certainties anchored in the Word of God, not doubt and uncertainty because of our own lack of knowledge or improper study. This is why the call to continue our own education in the faith is so important.

Step Four: Challenge Our Culture

Our Catholic witness should affect the values of our society. Step four challenges us to be countercultural. 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 hypocrisy, spoke against the powerful who took advantage of the poor, and 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 do the same. We are called to bring the gospel to our society, to speak alongside the poor and homeless, to strengthen the place of marriage and family in our society, and to show respect for life. We can't do any of these things if we try to separate our religious life from life in our culture.

- *Where do you feel called to bring the gospel in your life?*



Step Five: Make the Good Better

The final step urges us to take what is positive in our society and put it at the service of the gospel. "Culture must be regenerated by an encounter with the gospel." This is our Christian responsibility. We must do what we can to see that advances in medicine are used at the service of life, and not to destroy it. We must work to make decisions that benefit the poor and abandoned in our global communities. We must sometimes sacrifice our own wants for the needs of others.

There is a lot of good in our culture, but that good can be made even better when touched by the transforming power of Christ's good news. We all still long for love, affection, and salvation. We still crave the good news of Jesus. That is why Vatican Council II said we should face the modern world with joy and hope, with the optimism of the life-giving gospel.

- *What are some ways our culture supports the good?*
- *How can this good be made even better through an understanding of the good news?*



Evangelize Ourselves First

When all is said and done, the first audience for evangelization is the active Catholic. Convinced Catholics will convince others. Caring Catholics will attract others. Our conversion is more than a once-in-a-lifetime event or the peak experience of being "born again." Evangelization is a process. Christ's call to build his Church must be offered again and again to Catholics through every stage of life.

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 previous lesson handouts or 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.

- How can you evangelize to the Catholics you know?



Describe one area of your life where you really could make a difference to others.



- How can you serve as an example of Christ?



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