

1 Evangelizing Youth: Witness, Outreach, and Sharing

Evangelization is one of those words that conjures up a variety of images. For some, the word evangelization surfaces memories of the fire-and-brimstone preachers that used to arrive once a year and preach the parish mission. To others, Billy Graham comes to mind: preaching to thousands in an arena, supported by professional music ministers and a large staff. Some people remember the retreats they were a part of or the youth retreat teams that visited their area. Some people conjure up the image of a peer or mentor who shared faith with them.

Evangelizing “means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18). Evangelization with young people is bringing the Good News of the Gospel into contact with their daily lives.

[The starting point for the ministry of evangelization] is our recognition of the presence of God already in young people, their experiences, their families, and their culture. Through the Incarnation of God in Jesus, Christians are convinced that God is present within and through all of creation, and, in a special way, within humanity. Evangelization, therefore, enables young people to uncover and name the experience of a God already active and present in their lives. This provides an openness to the gift of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

(National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, pp. 7–8)

Evangelization is the energizing core of all ministry with adolescents. All of the relationships, ministry components, and programs of comprehensive ministry with adolescents must proclaim the Good News. They must invite young people into a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus and empower them to live as his disciples.

(USCCB, *Renewing the Vision*, p. 36)

What Do You Think?

What images, words, phrases, or feelings come to mind when you hear the word *evangelization*?

What Do You Think?

How would you describe or define *evangelization* in your own words?

What Do You Think?

How do you currently see the evangelization efforts of witnessing, outreach, and sharing happening in your community?

Even though evangelization is central to all ministry with adolescents, we also need to be intentional in our efforts by creating and implementing strategies for witnessing, outreach, and sharing the Good News. The ministry of evangelization, as defined in *Renewing the Vision*, includes the actions of:

- bearing witness that the Reign of God has become realized in and through Jesus (witnessing)
- inviting young people to hear about the Word made flesh (outreach)
- sharing the Good News of the Reign of God (sharing)

(P. 36)

Witnessing, outreach, and faith sharing can be seen as the legs of a three-legged stool. If any one of the legs is missing, the stool is not sturdy and is unable to bear much weight. Without all three areas being intentionally developed and planned for, our evangelization efforts will not be solid or complete.

Sharing the Good News is about connecting the lives of young people to the power of the Gospel by bridging their life story with the faith stories, relationships, and challenges of the Gospel. Ultimately, this sharing is about putting young people “in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ” (*General Directory on Catechesis*, no. 80).

Nathaniel was trying to describe to his friends at school on Monday morning what he had been up to all weekend at the parish’s annual youth ministry retreat. It had been his first retreat experience, and he was still trying to sort through all the challenges and experiences the weekend had held out to him. He found himself saying to his friends, “This weekend was unlike any other Church experience that I’ve had. First of all, I was surprised that the retreat team leaders were so welcoming to me and talked so comfortably about how Jesus was a part of their life. It was not boring at all, even fun. I was even more surprised by my own experience of Jesus on the weekend—I can honestly say now that I feel comfortable in talking with Jesus in prayer, and I know now that I want him to be a part of my life.”

Outreach is about going to where young people are—school, work, coffee houses, and so on—and inviting them into relationship.

A mother was telling her pastor of her daughter’s surprise at seeing the parish’s youth minister at her hockey play-off game. “Elyssa was so surprised to see the youth minister from our parish cheering her on at her game. She told me how good it felt to know she was important enough to the parish that someone from there was willing to spend time watching her participate in something she loves. Elyssa doesn’t attend the youth ministry programs here at the parish, so it was extra special to her that someone still sought her out.”

What Do You Think?

Do you feel comfortable sharing your faith with others? Why or why not? How have you shared faith with others?”

Scriptural connections

“Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord” (2 Tim. 1:8).

What Do You Think?

- ◆ Where is the world for the young people of your parish? Where can they be found? Which young people do you naturally have contact with—family members or friends of family?

The third leg of evangelization is becoming a “living witness that the reign of God has become realized in and through Jesus” (*Renewing the Vision*, p. 36, emphasis added). All that we are needs to proclaim loudly and clearly that Jesus is the Lord of our lives, that who we are and what we do is in sync with the Good News of the Gospel. Witness is no easy challenge to live out—how do our faith communities, our youth programs, and our personal lives give witness to Jesus?

As he struggled to maintain his composure, Benjamin tried to put into words his feelings about being part of the youth leadership training all week. “Well,” he said, “I don’t usually let myself express my feelings in public, but I just can’t seem to control myself today. I am feeling so lucky to be a part of this group. In the town that I come from, I usually feel excluded from church things and church people most of the time. I know I dress differently and look rough, and I think people are often scared of me. I thought you all would be scared of me too, but since I walked in that door four days ago, no one has avoided me or said ill of me. You have witnessed to me that Christians can be welcoming by the way you have all accepted me for who I am this past week. Thank you!”

Ministering with young people demands a willingness to live all areas of your life so that all that you are bears witness to the glory of God.

We hope that this resource manual on evangelization will assist you to touch the lives of the young people in your communities with the power, challenge, and beauty of the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Note: Permission to reprint this article for program use is granted.

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- ◆ Where do you naturally have contact with young people—your work place, local community organizations, and so on?

Scriptural connections

- ◆ “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).
- ◆ “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Pray It!

God, the challenge you have put before us is not an easy one. Bless us with the grace we need to live our lives with integrity and with the values of the Gospel so that all we meet will meet you. Amen.

Pray It!

God, help me to be attentive, to remember, And hold close to my heart The stirrings, experiences, and events That have been planted in my life. Help me to pass them on to the young people Whom you have entrusted to my care. Help me to be willing to reveal Some of the chapters of my life.

Hopefully, in the sharing
We all will see you in a new
way.
Amen.

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Key Points About Evangelization

The ministry of evangelization has a specific focus. It incorporates several essential elements: *witness, outreach, proclamation, invitation, conversion, and discipleship*.

Evangelization with adolescents . . .

- **proclaims** Jesus Christ and the Good News so that young people will come to see in Jesus and his message a response to their hungers and a way to live. Remember: "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 22).
- **witnesses** to our faith in Jesus Christ in all aspects of our lives—offering ourselves and our community of faith as living models of the Christian faith in practice. (Young people need to see that we are authentic and that our faith in Jesus guides our lives.)

- **reaches out** to young people by meeting them in their various life situations, building relationships, providing healing, care and concern, offering a genuine response to their hungers and needs, and inviting them into a relationship with Jesus and the Christian community
- **invites** young people personally into the life and mission of the Catholic community so that they may experience the support, nurture, and care necessary to live as Christians
- **calls** young people to grow in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to make his message their own, and to join us in the continuing process of conversion to which the Gospel calls us
- **challenges** young people to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship—shaping their lives in the vision, values, and teachings of Jesus and living his mission in their daily lives through witness and service
- **calls** young people to be evangelizers of other young people, their families, and the community

(This resource is adapted from *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Department of Education [Washington DC: USCCB, 1997], page 37. Copyright © 1997 by the USCCB, Inc. All rights reserved. Emphasis added.)

The elements of the ministry of evangelization are drawn from *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization: Called to Be Witnesses and Storytellers*, by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc. [New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1993.] Copyright © 1993 by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

The quotation from Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is from www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html, number 22, accessed May 21, 2003.)

Evangelization Reflections

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI, 1975)

Evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new. . . . The purpose of evangelization is . . . precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert¹ . . . both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs. (Number 18)

. . . It is a question . . . of affecting and as it were 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. (Number 19)

The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization: Called to Be Witnesses and Storytellers

Drawing from Jesus' example, evangelization involves the community's pronouncement and living witness that the reign of God has become realized in and through Jesus. (Page 3)

Evangelization is both:

initial and	ongoing
proclamation and	witness
explicit and	implicit
geared toward the un-churched and	geared toward the un-Gospeled
an invitation to relationship and with Jesus	an invitation to relationship with the community
acts of individuals to youth and	acts of community to each other and world

Evangelization involves the following elements:

- proclamation
- outreach
- conversion (metanoia: hunger, search, encounter, response)
- witness
- invitation
- discipleship

Evangelization must be employed through all the components of youth ministry:

- advocacy
- catechesis
- community life
- evangelization
- justice and service
- leadership development
- pastoral care
- prayer
- worship

An evangelizing community:

- celebrates the story
- tells the story
- is the story
- offers hospitality
- values young people
- invites responsible participation
- calls for involvement of adults
- is inclusive

Evangelization is done by:

- family
- parish
- Catholic school
- young people
- leaders in ministry

1. Cf Rom 1:16; 1 Cor: 18:2-4.

(The quotation from Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is from www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html, numbers 18 and 19, accessed May 21, 2003.

The quote on Jesus' example is from *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization: Called to Be Witnesses and Storytellers*, by The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc. [New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1993], page 3. Copyright © 1993 by Don Bosco Multimedia.)