

## **THE CALL TO EVANGELIZE**

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20). The early Church clearly understood that this missionary mandate of Jesus Christ gave the Church its reason for being. The Holy Spirit propelled those who knew Jesus to go out, to teach, to preach, to baptize, to make disciples; in short, to spread the Good News of Salvation to the ends of the known world.

The Church, today, continues to respond to this missionary call given in Matthew 28 and has reconfirmed, in many recent Church documents, that evangelization is the very heart of the Church’s mission. “The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (EN, 14).

Evangelization is not the task of a few persons, called to a specific ministry of evangelization; it is the responsibility of the whole Church. The Second Vatican Council clearly states that “...the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God” (AGD, 35). Evangelization is not another subject to be taught, committee or office to be established, or program to be designed. Evangelization is a dynamic reality. It is a “process by which the Church, moved by the Spirit, proclaims and spreads the Gospel throughout the entire world” (GDC, 48). Evangelization is not AN agenda item for every parish; evangelization is THE agenda. An evangelizing spirit needs to be integrated into the life and ministry of each believer and into the vision and direction of every parish community.

In 1992, in an effort to make American Catholics aware of the need for evangelization and their responsibility in the process of evangelization, the United

States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued Go and Make Disciples, a National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States. The goals for Evangelization as set out in this National Plan are:

1. To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others;
2. To invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith;
3. To foster gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ. (See GMD, 1993.)

Go and Make Disciples proceeds to outline several objectives and suggested strategies for meeting each goal. Many dioceses and parishes use this document as a tool to determine how the Bishops’ goals for Evangelization can be integrated in the lives of Catholic Christians. Parishes implementing the goals of this document will form disciples who will, in turn, go out and make more disciples.

In the Diocese of San Diego, parishes are challenged, in policy form, to promote a process of evangelization which is sensitive to persons of various cultures, races, language groups, ages, abilities and disabilities. For example, when there is a significant Hispanic community present in the parish, programs in English and in Spanish should be provided. Parishes are encouraged to review each aspect of parish life and ministry through the “lens of evangelization.” It is highly recommended that parish leadership study Go and Make Disciples and determine how an evangelizing spirit can be integrated into all parish activities so that the goals of this important document can be achieved. It is not necessary for parishes to create a myriad of new programs, but rather to see how each liturgy, each program, each gathering can become more of a “moment” for evangelization. A study of the document provides an opportunity to review how even a seemingly insignificant event such as a phone call, an appointment, or a parent registering a child for a sacrament, can become an “evangelizing moment.”

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry provides resources,

See  
Policy 400  
Policy 402

See  
Practical  
Help 19  
Evangelizing  
Parish

leadership inservices, periodic workshops and training sessions to assist parishes in becoming evangelizing communities. Representatives of parish evangelizing ministries are invited to be members of the Commission for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry, advising the OECM Staff on ways to integrate evangelization into policies and programs and strengthen the commitment to evangelize.

While the evangelizing spirit is evident in many persons, programs and parishes, we are still far from having our parish communities filled with the enthusiastic evangelists called for in Go and Make Disciples. In the Foreword to the Tenth Anniversary Edition of this document, it is noted that while we have made some strides in evangelization, “we are still only beginning to implement [the plan] in our parishes and dioceses” (GMD, 2002, ix).

## **EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS**

When the General Directory for Catechesis was promulgated in 1997, it formed a cohesive unity with On Evangelization in the Modern World (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), the apostolic exhortation on evangelization issued by Pope Paul VI in 1975 and On Catechesis in Our Time (*Catechesi Tradendae*), the apostolic exhortation on catechesis issued by Pope John Paul II in 1979. The General Directory, a document for the entire Church, fully situates catechesis within the context of evangelization and notes that catechesis is an “essential moment” in evangelization. The Directory states that catechesis “receives from evangelization a missionary dynamic which deeply enriches it and defines its own identity. The ministry of catechesis appears...as a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus” (GDC, 59).

The General Directory for Catechesis begins with the “Parable of the Sower” (Mark 4:3-8), which it calls the “inspiration” for evangelization. The Sower, casting seeds with broad strokes, sows the seed allowing it to fall where it will. All of the seeds do not yield results, but some of them produce abundant results. The seeds of faith today need to be sown no less broadly. The General

Directory states three specific situations in which the seeds of the Gospel need to be planted:

- a) those persons and situations in which Christ and his Gospel are not known. These persons need to be invited to initial conversion.
- b) those persons who have heard the word and want to grow and mature in faith. This refers to the ongoing catechesis with children, youth and adults which leads them to mature faith and makes evangelizers of those who have been evangelized.
- c) those who have lost a living sense of the faith. They may have been baptized but no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life removed from Christ and his Gospel. These persons are in need of a “new evangelization.” (See GDC, 58.)

Following the publication of the General Directory, each Conference of Bishops was invited to prepare a directory which would be based on the General Directory and be sensitive to the needs and cultural makeup of their own countries. In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published the National Directory for Catechesis (NDC). This document, intended to be a “source of inspiration for catechesis” (NDC, p. 17), has three basic purposes:

1. To provide those fundamental theological and pastoral principles drawn from the Church’s Magisterium and apply them to the pastoral activity of catechesis
2. To offer guidelines for the application of those fundamental theological and pastoral principles in this country in order to continue the renewal of catechesis
3. To set forth the nature, purpose, object, tasks, basic content, and various methodologies of catechesis.

This important resource for the American Church provides vision and direction for catechesis and places great emphasis on the importance of the outward orientation of the Church. It reinforces the dynamic nature of the evangelizing mission of the Church, noting that the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ is “urgent, determined, and led by the Holy Spirit” (NDC, p. 3).

Catechesis, as an essential moment in evangelization, shares in the central characteristics of evangelization, but expresses them in a particular manner. The

intent of catechesis is to make a person’s faith become “living, conscious and active through the light of instruction” (AGD, 14). Our National Directory, quoting *Catechesi Tradendae* makes it clear that all our evangelizing, catechizing activity has one object or “definitive” aim—“to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (CT, 5; NDC p. 55).

Catechesis must form informed disciples (GDC, 56) in a systematic way to carry out the Church’s missionary call to transform the world. For the disciple, faith must be “known, celebrated, lived and expressed in prayer” (NDC, p. 60).

Catechesis carries out six fundamental tasks and “all efforts in evangelization and catechesis should incorporate these tasks” (NDC, p. 60):

1. “Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith” (NDC, p. 60). It faithfully instills in the believer a knowledge of the content of God’s self-revelation which is found in Sacred Scripture, in Tradition and in the Creed.
2. “Catechesis promotes knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments” (NDC, p. 60). The believer comes to know Christ in the liturgy and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Catechesis fosters the “full, conscious and active” (SC, 14) participation in the liturgy of the Church. It prepares people for the initial celebration of the sacraments and provides deeper understanding and enrichment following their reception.
3. “Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ” (NDC, p. 61). It transmits the content of the moral teachings of Christ and invites believers to transformation and conversion as they conform their lives to Christ. Catechesis encourages faithful witness to those teachings in everyday life and the public, social arena.
4. “Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ” (NDC, p. 61). It invites conversion to Christ and communion with him. Catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, using the “Our Father” as the model for all prayer and a summary of the Christian life.
5. “Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate

actively in the life and mission of the Church” (NDC, p. 61). It fosters a spirit of community and active participation in the life and mission of the Church and encourages apprenticeship in Christian living that is based on Christ’s teachings about life in community. Catechesis affirms Catholic identity, while fostering the longing for unity among all Christians. It deepens our understanding and desire for dialogue with persons of other Christian traditions (ecumenism).

6. “Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society” (NDC, p. 62). It empowers the faithful to fulfill their vocation in the world and to understand their role in bringing Christ to all environments. Catechesis nourishes the evangelical attitude of Christ, which seeks out to develop believers who are compassionate, merciful and just. (See NDC, pp. 59-63 for further amplification.)

### **MATURITY OF FAITH—THE INTENT OF ALL CATECHESIS**

Catechesis strives to lead all persons to a deep and mature faith. In Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, a Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States, the Bishops note that “maturity of faith is the intent of all catechesis from the earliest years” (OHWB, p. 13). Adult formation is the “principal form of catechesis because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form” (CT, 43). While the Bishops emphasize that they in no way wish to weaken the commitment to catechetical formation for children, they also make it abundantly clear that adult faith formation is a priority and that “catechesis needs to give more attention to adults than it has been accustomed to do” (OHWB, p. 14). This priority of adult formation is reinforced in the National Directory when it notes that “the catechetical formation of adults is essential for the Church to carry out the commission given the apostles by Christ” (NDC, p. 187) and that formation needs to be addressed to

adults in “different stages in the development of their faith” (NDC, p. 187). The Directory also delineates the goals, tasks, content and methodology for adult catechesis (see NDC, pp. 188-193).

Parish leaders are challenged to view catechesis as a lifelong task beginning at birth and extending throughout the entire life cycle. “...It means calling and equipping all Christians of every age and stage of life to fulfill their baptismal call to holiness in family, Church, and society—their mission is to evangelize and transform the world into a more caring and just society. Ongoing faith formation is essential to accomplish this mission; it does not end at Confirmation or Graduation but continues until one’s death” (OHWB, p. 14).

Catechesis for all levels and for all ages is a continuous process of being formed and informed by the Word of God, by the sacramental life of the Church, by the Church's rich tradition and by the Catholic value system. It is "an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted...in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life" (CCC, 5).

In Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, the Bishops pledged their support for adult faith formation and promised a “renewed commitment to adult faith formation, positioning it at the heart of ...catechetical vision and practice” (OHWB, 2). Parishes in the Diocese of San Diego are encouraged to use this important document as a tool to examine their own “vision and practice” in terms of catechetical formation and to determine if adult formation is at the heart of their formational efforts. The goals for adult faith formation, as put forth in this document, do not mean that parishes necessarily need to initiate many new programs. The document encourages parishes to examine existing programs to determine how their programs meet the goals for adult formation to:

- invite and enable ongoing conversion to Jesus in holiness of life;
- promote and support active membership in the Christian Community;
- call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world. (See OHWB, pp. 22-24.)

Many parishes in the diocese have programs of sustained Scripture study, in-depth adult formation classes on specific topics, seasonal offerings during Advent and Lent, parish missions and retreats. Several parishes are strengthening their “womb to tomb” approach to catechesis using an assembly model which brings together the whole community for catechesis. It is the responsibility of each parish to provide for the formation of their parishioners. This is affirmed in Canon Law (CCL, 773, 776, 777) and Diocesan Policy.

In addition, some parishes in the diocese have responded to the challenge of providing systematic formation for adults by forming small church communities which provide adult parishioners with an ongoing opportunity to pray, to study Scripture and apply the Sunday readings, to deepen their commitment to Christ and to carry out their discipleship through service and apostolic ministries. These groups of approximately eight to twelve persons build families of faith which provide a sense of community and an opportunity for ongoing conversion.

Diocesan policy affirms the development of these small communities, but cautions that these groups should not become isolated or self-serving and must remain in union with the local and universal Church.

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry (OECM) assists parishes in providing adult faith formation for their parishes by providing courses, workshops, inservices and resources for parish leadership on topics pertinent to adult faith formation; by offering periodic study days on documents which affect adult faith formation; and by providing consultation to develop adult faith formation programs. When OECM programs are developed, the goals for adult catechesis—“a living faith, an explicit faith, a fruitful faith” (OHWB, pp. 16-20)—provide a vision and structure. OECM courses and workshops use current adult learning techniques and take into consideration the various learning styles and needs of adults.

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry also provides an extensive Video/DVD Library for use in adult faith formation programs. A catalog of Video/DVD acquisitions is available on the OECM Website. Materials can be

See  
Policy 200

See  
Policy 402

See  
OECM  
Website  
Staff Listing

See  
OECM  
Website  
for Media  
Catalog/  
Policies

reserved by email, by fax, or by phone. Representatives of adult faith formation ministries are members of the Commission for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry and advise the office on matters pertaining to adult faith formation. While the OECM does not maintain a “speakers list” of persons who provide adult faith formation, the staff will work individually with parishes to suggest speakers for specific topics or needs.

In addition to the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry, many other diocesan offices offer opportunities for adult ministers to grow in the understanding of their respective ministries through regular training programs, inservices and courses. The San Diego Diocesan Institute provides theology formation for adults seeking diocesan certification for ministry, enrichment of their faith life and continuing education in theology and pastoral ministry. Visit the Diocesan Website for information regarding program offerings and certificates.

**See  
Guideline 5  
San Diego  
Diocesan  
Institute  
Programs**