

Bringing Christ to Others, Person-to-Person

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“Today, as the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal, there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbors or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, something along the lines of what a missionary does when visiting a home. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey” (EG, 127). This paragraph is found under the “Person to Person” heading in the Joy of the Gospel. Pope Francis’s wisdom that evangelization is often a person-to-person endeavor is both reassuring and challenging to us as catechetical leaders.

How do we create an environment in which such person-to-person evangelization is likely to happen within our parishes and by our parishioners? I have had many opportunities in the past few years to talk with parish leaders about this, and the conversations are often surprising. We tend to think about adult faith formation and evangelization programmatically, and certainly there is a programmatic aspect to what we do.

There is, however, a more informal element which Pope Francis notes, and which the bishops recognize in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* as well: “To be effective ministers of adult faith formation we will first, like Jesus, join people in their daily concerns and walk side by side with them on the pathway of life. We will ask them questions and listen attentively as they speak of their joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties” (8).

RECOGNIZING CHRIST IN OUR MIDST

Our programs are important; they invite people to learn and grow in faith, to acquire greater understanding, and to appropriate our Catholic-Christian worldview in their daily lives. Often, however, we miss a step in the process. In order to be ready for many of the adult faith formation processes we offer, people first need an encounter with Jesus Christ, and that encounter often begins through an encounter or relationship with a member of Christ’s body, the church. This is where the surprise often comes in my conversations with leaders.

Because we think so programmatically, we often fail to recognize our own responsibility for reaching out, drawing in, meeting people in the daily circumstances of their lives, helping them to recognize Christ in their midst. We also miss opportunities to help those with whom we serve, catechists,

committee members, those who are already involved in ministry, to recognize and appreciate their role in bearing the Good News to those around them.

INFORMAL EVANGELIZATION

As a friend often reminds workshop participants, “This is not about an either/or. It is about an and, and more!” Adult formation processes and programs have their place. So does an intentional process of raising awareness of the need for the more informal ways of bringing Christ to others, person-to-person. Like our formal faith formation processes, informal evangelization and catechesis require planning and implementation. A typical plan often includes the following elements:

- ✱ Convene leaders: draw together those with whom you serve: staff members, catechists, committee or commission members, others who are involved in catechetical ministry;
- ✱ Inform them: provide background such as the quotes above, along with paragraph 24 of *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which Pope Francis speaks of the role and nature of the evangelizing community;
- ✱ Invite conversation: talk together about the impact of relationship in the openness to encounter, acquisition of faith, living faith in daily life. Through dialogue, help participants to recognize their responsibility in day-to-day evangelization and faith formation;
- ✱ Practice: role-play scenarios in which people practice talking about faith in daily life. This is often key for those who are reticent to invite friends or to discuss faith with others. Invite participants to be playful with one another as they practice, and also to share previous experiences — positive and negative — in which they have been a companion on another’s journey;
- ✱ Develop strategies: consider entry, or re-entry, points for newcomers. Provide contact information for the RCIA, annulment, sacramental preparation, parents groups, retreat processes, and religious education;
- ✱ Connect faith with daily life: offer occasional adult faith formation processes in which people have the opportunity to witness to, question, and deepen the ways in which their faith informs and shapes their daily lives. ■

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