

# Creating New Witnesses for New Evangelization

Terrie M. Baldwin



Since Pope Paul VI wrote, “On Evangelization in the Modern World” in 1975, the church has been talking about the importance of sharing the gospel message throughout the world. While Pope Paul VI states in this document “it is important to proclaim the gospel through wordless witness so as to stir

up irresistible questions to those who see how Christians live,” he also states the need for explicit proclamation. “Even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified — what Peter called always having ‘your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope you have’ — and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life... This proclamation — kerygma, preaching or catechesis occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization” (22).

In the 1990 encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer*, he raises a need for evangelization in three areas, one of which is the new evangelization, “an intermediate situation particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his gospel. In this case, what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization’” (33). The awareness that the people of God within our churches need evangelization is becoming evident; the faithful themselves seem uncomfortable or unable to witness.

Finally, fast forward to the year 2012, where the *Lineamenta* points to a direct need for the new evangelization for the transmission of faith and asks for “new methods and means for transmitting the Good News to people in our world today with a renewed enthusiasm proper to the saints, who were joyous witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The document states,

A reassessment of our experiences and attitudes concerning evangelization, not simply at the practical level, will lead to an improvement in our practice

and approach to proclamation. On a deeper level, this process will allow us to ascertain the caliber of our faith, to determine our sense of ‘feeling’ and ‘being’ Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ, who are sent forth to proclaim him to the world, and of our being witnesses filled with the Holy Spirit and called to make disciples of all nations (2).

## AUTHENTIC AND ARTICULATED FAITH

When discussing the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith, the one thing that needs to be developed is each person’s authentic and articulated faithful witness of the presence of God, their relationship with Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in community with one another. The process proposed is a simple method using prayer, sharing from an authentic witness, and scriptural questions allowing the faithful to begin reflecting on their own Trinitarian experience and thereby being so inspired by their own interior joy and self-knowledge are able to share their faith in 30-second, three-minute, and 30-minute stories to all those whom they meet.

Evangelists of many faiths use the “three-minute story” as a model for evangelization to create witness statements from their faithful. Through the process of reflecting on a moment of faith conversion, they are asked to write and/or speak about a three-minute story. I would like to suggest borrowing part of this idea and reflecting on the faith-life of an individual asking questions about their love of God, personal relationship with Jesus, and the effect of the Holy Spirit in the community of their lives. The reflections can be used as inspiration to re-evangelize themselves and engage in the new evangelization of others around them. This Trinitarian method is affirmed in the National Directory for Catechesis in the section on *The Transmission of Revelation*.

From the beginning God has made known the inexhaustible mystery of his love in order to give us a share in his own divine life. In doing so, God summons a response in faith from his people... God reveals himself to us gradually and in stages drawing us ever closer in order to prepare us to welcome the culmination of God’s self-revelation in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. The

pattern of this Revelation unfolds through “deeds and words, which are intrinsically connected...the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain...Through the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ is alive in those who believe, helping them to understand their experiences in light of faith (NDC, 16).

## A WAY TO BEGIN

The following is the proposal as a way to begin the new evangelization for the transmission of faith within a parish or faith community. It is designed to draw out the ways in which God is made known in each person's life so that each can make a faith-filled response for the mission of the church. This is a brief synopsis of a process which could be adapted for use in as few as two hours, or for as long as a weekend retreat:

Begin with an opening prayer to set a reverent tone for the experience. Second, share from the Gospel of John these three stories demonstrating times when Jesus used approximately each of these time frames to follow his way.

### **30-second encounter by Jesus (Jn 1:35-41):**

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah”.

### **Three-minute encounter by Jesus (Jn 1:43-51):**

The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Phillip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Phillip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Phillip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Phillip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him. “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are

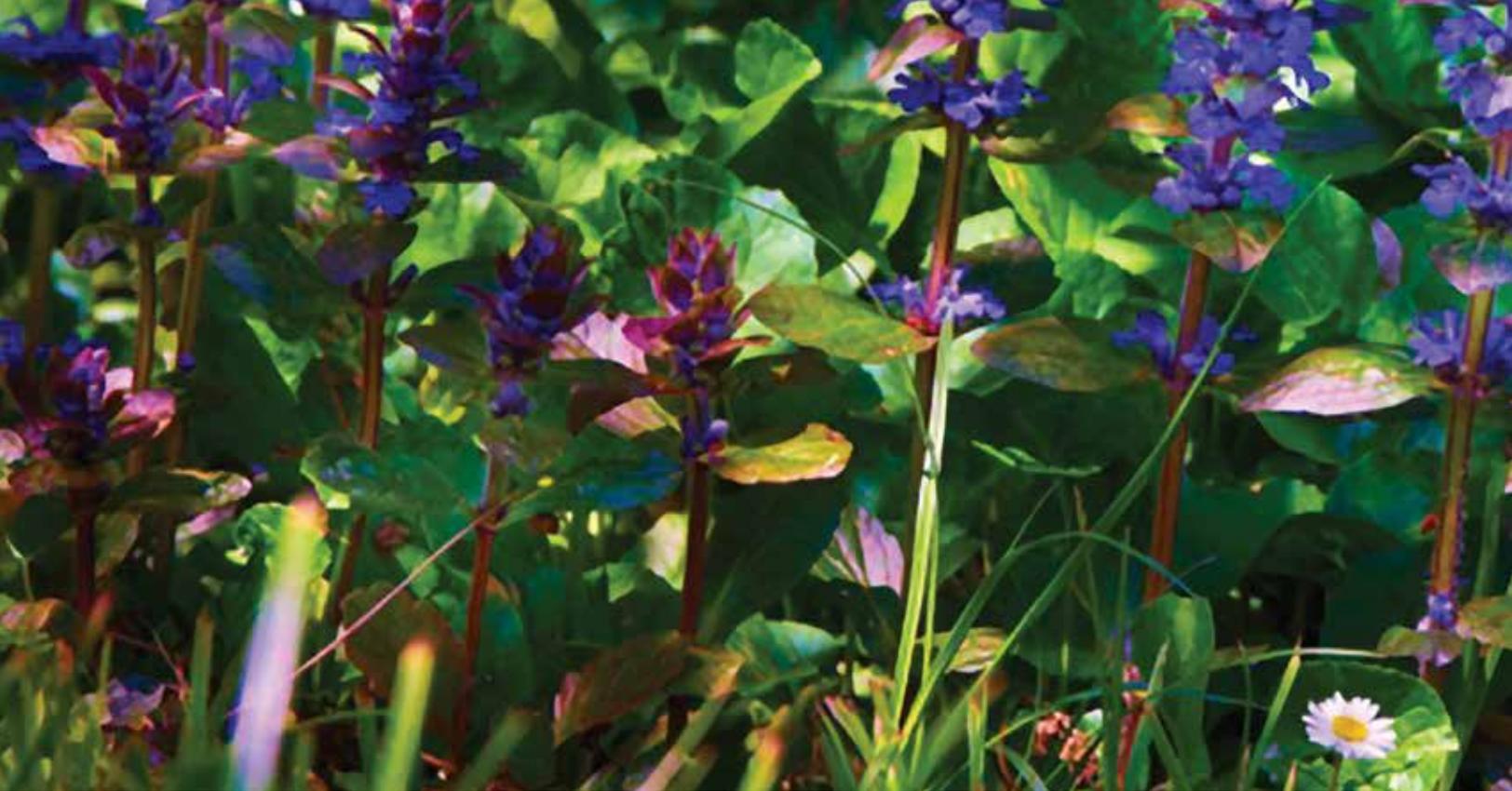
the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

### **30-minute encounter by Jesus (John 4:1-30):**

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” although it was not Jesus himself, but his disciples who baptize, he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him. “How is it that you a Jew ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her. “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir give me this water so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshippers will



worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

Next, explain to the participants that evangelization is a process where God works with you. In these three stories, it is illustrated how sometimes it takes only a few seconds to evangelize, sometimes a few minutes longer, and sometimes even longer. Each person needs to do only the part that they are able. Evangelization is God’s work done in God’s time and may not come to completion in the timeframe one expects.

In each of the stories, it is illustrated that seeds of faith were planted either before the arrival of Jesus as in the story of Andrew and Peter, were sewn as the story unfolded as in the story of Nathanael, or were left to be grown as in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

Let the participants know they are co-workers in the work of evangelization with God. Explain how Jesus acted with courage and love in sharing his story. Jesus desired faith for those that he knew well, with people he just met, and in his culture

with people with whom he really should not have been talking. Evangelization is a process to be used in all situations with all people.

The next part of the process would be for a witness to share three positive stories illustrating how this method can easily be used in everyday encounters. The following are examples of three personal stories as examples of experiences that could be shared by a witness:

### **30-second witness story:**

While at a retreat at a hotel, I was carrying a Bible and some materials back to my room. A stranger met me at the elevator and asked what that book was in my hand. I replied, the Bible. As we rode up to our floors, the stranger asked what a bible is, and I replied, “The story of Jesus Christ and salvation.” The stranger thanked me and got off of the elevator.

### **Three-minute witness story:**

At the line in the grocery store, a woman caught a glimpse of the cross on my necklace that was full of rhinestones, but did not have a body on it. She asked me why some crosses had a body on it and mine did not. I explained to her that the crosses with bodies were called crucifixes, but mine was just a cross with rhinestones, and it meant a lot to me. She asked what it meant. I said that it was Eastertime and this is the time we celebrate being resurrected people, which means people who reflect the light of Jesus. I said that the rhinestones reminded me of this and in my words and actions to live like Jesus Christ, for he has



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no feet or hands but ours. She said, “Hmmm,” and away she went with her groceries.

### **30-minute witness story:**

My son surprisingly volunteered our family to have dinner for the foreign exchange teacher who was teaching French at his school. He told me that the man had special dietary requirements so we could either kill a chicken in the garage or prepare fish by a recipe he would give to us. Reluctantly, I said yes and we went with the fish. When the gentleman arrived, we began talking over dinner, and he said that he was grateful that we welcomed him. I said of course, he was welcome. He said that he had a confession: he chose Sam, my son, to host him; the system was “rigged” as to what child got to host the teacher. I asked why and he continued to say that he himself was Muslim and wanted to eat with and get to know a Christian family. (I was so proud that someone saw something that resembled a Christian in my son enough to have asked for us.) Even more is that he asked because he found out that I was working for a church. I asked why this was important to him, and he said that he was a Muslim living in a village that did not allow Christianity and he so often wondered what was so horrible about the Christian religion that it would not be allowed? I said nothing. He asked if he could see a Bible. I brought one to him, and he was fascinated by it, mostly by the New Testament. He read a few of the stories, and I sat for a long time with him explaining some of the basics of the story of Jesus Christ and salvation. I made an offer to him that he could take the Bible with him.

He thanked me and took it. I also offered him my book on Christian Scriptures and Christology as I was taking these courses that semester. He took those as well.

A few weeks later, he asked to meet with me again to return the books, and I met him and he said to me, “I see nothing in these books that would make me understand why we are not permitted to practice Christianity in my village.” I agreed saying, “It is a book filled with love.” He thanked me and returned the books. I told him to keep the Bible and pass it on to those in his village if he would like to do so. He accepted the gift and said he would pass on the story of Christianity.

It is in everyday occurrences that the opportunity exists to evangelize; to share our experiences and stories to people who come into daily contact as they occur. I believe God places people in our paths that have the seeds of faith planted, ready to be sown. It is not “rocket science” to evangelize. It happens first by knowing the scripture and our faith tradition, in order to reflect on one’s own story, in order to be a missionary in one’s own hometown. Everyone is called to the mission of the church, to evangelize, using their own gifts in their own sphere of influence.

### **NAME YOUR EXPERIENCE**

The next step in the process of learning to tell a story is to offer participants an opportunity to get in touch with their own experience through a reflection of their Trinitarian experiences. This can be helped along by asking for responses on paper to the following questions:

- ❖ How has God been known to you? Who first told you about God? Who was a person you can recall in your life who has told you about the presence of God? Name a time when you've seen God's presence in your life.
- ❖ When did Jesus become real to you? Name one experience where you felt Jesus by your side? Describe your best experience of Eucharist. How has your personal relationship with Jesus changed your life? What does it mean to you to be part of the Body of Christ?
- ❖ When have you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit? Describe a time when you felt connected to another person in a spiritual way, when they may not have been in your presence. How have you felt connected to another person or a group of people?

The next step in the process would be upon completion of these questions, the participants would be asked to share one 30-second or three-minute version of a story that they wrote down with those around them in a small group format. Next, as a large group process, ask if one person would like to tell their story to those gathered.

Finally, a few suggestions could be made regarding practicing the experience or story with others after leaving:

- ❖ Practice first with a friend or close relative.
- ❖ Ask to share with someone who has been away from the church for a while.
- ❖ Share the witness on a personal social media site, like Facebook, Twitter, or in video format on YouTube.
- ❖ Pray and wait for an opportunity for God to use you for the work of evangelization.

The *Lineamenta* tells us “a new evangelization means to rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the church's beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16). This passion will not fail to stir in the church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of ‘specialists’ but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those

who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups” (24).

Here are a few suggestions on how to use the stories and

experiences for a parish community who might use this as a total parish process:

- ❖ Collect the stories and use them as a feature in the Sunday bulletin.
- ❖ Use the stories in a parish newsletter.
- ❖ Create a webpage or YouTube channel where the stories could be accumulated and read or viewed by others.
- ❖ Use the stories on a regular basis on a Facebook or Twitter page.
- ❖ Share the stories in blog format on the front page of the parish website.

Imagine how the stories could be read or seen and how they might inspire others to share their experience also in the context of a parish community. Evangelization, both new and old, is what would happen! Remind the group that together with God, the work of evangelization occurs. St. Augustine was known to have said about evangelizing, “Pray as if God were responsible, and work as if you were.”

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## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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Finally, conclude with a sending forth prayer or commissioning of the participants to go in peace and love to carry out the mission of the church as they share their stories.

### MY EXPERIENCE

Recently, I practiced this method on two large groups of adults and in both, the spirit of the groups were the same. People understood the scriptural basis, enjoyed the real stories of the witness, and enjoyed the quiet, retreat-like time allowed to get in touch with their own personal stories. As they left, many said they felt inspired and comfortable to go out and share their story.

I asked the second group that gathered, how many of them knew of someone who had been away from the church? Every hand in the room went up. I then asked if they would feel comfortable sharing one of their positive experiences of church with one person that they knew was no longer attending. Most responded in the affirmative. Then I asked, “What would it be like if each of you were able to bring one person back to the church?” The man in the front row answered, “It would be like Christmas.” Wouldn’t it be great if every day could be Christmas in our churches? It seems to me that this process could birth something new; it would birth a new process for evangelization and with the addition of a new transmission using the technology of social media, that in finding and sharing our personal stories, that is being witnesses to our faith, it really could be Christmas every day.

In the General Directory for Catechesis it states,

The Apostolic Tradition is perpetuated in the Church by means of the Church herself. The entire church, pastors and faithful, are responsible for its conservation and transmission. The gospel is conserved whole and entire in the Church: the disciples of Jesus Christ contemplate it and meditate upon it unceasingly; they live it out in their everyday lives; they proclaim it in their missionary activity. As the Church lives the gospel, she is continually made fruitful by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit causes her to grow constantly in her understanding of the gospel, prompts her and sustains the task of proclaiming the gospel in every corner of the world (43).

While this one method is not an answer to the whole issue of what is needed for the new evangelization, it seems that this process of connecting people’s lived experiences with an emphasis on a reflection of the Trinitarian God is a start toward creating authentic, credible witnesses for the transmission of the faith. It is a process for the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian faith; deepening the faith of the faithful and preparing them to do the work of evangelization within the church, and in the wider community. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, it is the hope that by embracing and participating in this preparation process for evangelization, the people of God will share their faith freely and willingly in order to build up the church, which is her mission. ■

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