

# Let us evangelize: Six strategies

Leisa Anslinger



What does the new evangelization have to do with our ministry to and with parents? How do we keep evangelization in our mind's eye in our day-to-day comings and goings with parents and with all whom we meet?

A few years ago, Dan Mulhall, Fr. Jan Schmidt, and I facilitated a day-long workshop for pastors and catechetical leaders. During Dan's talk, he mentioned the new evangelization, which was still a somewhat new concept at the time. One of the priests became very agitated, saying that we have always evangelized. "Why do we need a 'new' evangelization? Isn't the 'old' evangelization good enough?" he asked. That encounter has stuck with me, perhaps because his question rings true in many ways.

We are and have always been called to evangelize. Perhaps part of the reason we need the new evangelization is that we did not effectively evangelize in the past. We all bear some responsibility for this. We did not realize how great the pull of the wider culture could be, nor did we anticipate the dramatic secularization of that culture in so short a span of time.

Yet there is a larger question, one that has bearing on all of us as people of faith. Did we, do we, have a real relationship with Jesus Christ, which compels us to share? Do the people who meet us now meet Christ through our actions, our responses to their need, our prayer with and for them? Do parents meet Christ through us and through the Christian community?

Much of the focus of the new evangelization is on those who are no longer with us, or those who are on the edges of the parish, coming to Mass only occasionally, with good reason. We know the statistics: among those who were baptized Catholic, 68 percent remain Catholic; 15 percent are now in some Protestant denomination; 14 percent are now unaffiliated; 3 percent belong to some other religion (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Project, Faith in Flux, February, 2011). Not only do we know this from statistics, we are experiencing this "leaking out" among our parishioners, family members, friends, and co-workers.

Yet what we sometimes miss when we discuss the new evangelization is that evangelization begins with each of us, as people of faith, as people who have and must grow in a deep relationship with Christ. As I write this, I think of the song, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me" and sing instead, "Let us evangelize, and let it begin with me."

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

With this in mind, how do we evangelize those parents who most seem to need to be touched by Christ's love, mercy, forgiveness, and peace? Let us apply the principles of engagement in order to glean insight and develop strategies:

1. Prayerfully re-commit ourselves to a rich, passionate relationship with Christ, lived through sacramental participation, prayer, deeper understanding of our Catholic Tradition and service, rooted in our local parish and diocesan community;
2. Reach out to those who are already on the path. They are the ones who will touch those on the edges, through their attention and invitation;
3. Offer moments in which those who are already deeply connected may be renewed, strengthened, and energized. During those opportunities, also help them realize their role in reaching out to others;
4. Set the expectations high, yet reasonable, and be pastoral. Help parents understand why specific things are asked of them and why, and remind them that you want to be their partner as they bear the responsibility for forming their child(ren) in living faith;
5. Meet parents in their need. Often this requires us to enter into their daily circumstances, helping them recognize the grace that is present, inviting them to respond to that grace in their daily lives;

Pope Francis painted a picture of this sort of evangelization:

Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage. (*America* magazine, September 19, 2013)

As catechetical leaders who wish to evangelize the parents and all whom we meet, may we find those new roads. May evangelization begin with us, as people who have fallen in love with God and who cannot help but share that love with others! ■

*Leisa Anslinger is the director of Catholic Life & Faith, an online resource for helping leaders engage real people in real faith, catholiclifeandfaith.net. Contact her at leisaanslinger@gmail.com.*