

Notre Dame of Mt. Carmel
Cedar Knolls, New Jersey

EVANGELIZATION

“Evangelization” is a term we have been hearing a lot lately, not only in homilies, but in various ministry activities. It is a term widely misunderstood, typically conjuring up images of zealous souls going door-to-door, aggressively promoting their beliefs with bibles in hand. Nothing could be more different from true evangelization! What follows is the first in a series of articles intended to enhance and deepen our understanding of what should be our primary mission in living our faith: becoming disciples of Jesus.

What is it and why is it important?

Evangelization has both an inward and an outward direction. Inwardly it calls for our continued receiving of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our ongoing conversion both individually and as Church. It nurtures us, makes us grow, and renews us in holiness as God's people. Outwardly, evangelization addresses those who have not heard the Gospel or who, having heard it, have stopped practicing their faith, and those who seek the fullness of faith. It calls us to work for full communion among all who confess Jesus but do not yet realize the unity for which Christ prayed. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on missionary activity, summed up the three objectives of mission: to proclaim the Gospel to all people; to help bring about the reconversion of those who have received the Gospel but live it only nominally; and to deepen the Gospel in the lives of believers.

We know that the word "evangelization" sometimes raises uncomfortable images for Catholics -- especially in the culture of the United States, where evangelism has sometimes meant only an individual response to enthusiastic preaching, a style of mass religion, a contrived way to recruit new members, or, at its worst, a way to play on people's needs. Still, we use the word "evangelization" because its root meaning is "Gospel" (Good News) and because it calls us, even if it is uncomfortable, to live the faith of our baptism more openly and to share it more freely.

Evangelization means something special for us as Catholics. We can see what it means by looking at what happens to evangelized people. Not only are they related to Jesus by accepting his Gospel and receiving his Spirit; even more, their lives are changed by becoming disciples, that is, *participants* in the Church, celebrating God's love in worship and serving others as Jesus did.

Some might think of evangelization solely in terms of Jesus and our relationship with him. Yet our relationship with Jesus is found in our relationship with the community of Jesus—the Church. The way to Christ is through the community in which he lives. Did not Jesus say, "I am with you always" and "Whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me"?

We must evangelize because the Lord Jesus commanded us to do so. He gave the Church the unending task of evangelizing as a restless power, to stir and to stimulate all its actions until all nations have heard his Good News and until every person has become his disciple.

Excerpted from “Go and Make Disciples” – Document on the New Evangelization from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

(OVER, PLEASE...)

Our Pastoral Council, throughout this past year, has engaged in a process of prayerful, thoughtful discussion and discernment in exploring how to make our Parish Mission Statement more reflective of our overall mission of evangelization. We have carefully read “Go and Make Disciples” and have participated in small group discussion related to various aspects of the document.

Throughout our group discussions and sharing, we as a Council spent much time examining and assessing the relevance of our current parish mission statement, which reads as follows:

EXISTING PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

“We are a Catholic, Christian Community growing in faith, guided by the Spirit and dedicated to meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our parish family and all God’s people. We do this through Eucharistic celebrations, prayer and caring parish ministries ‘That in all things God may be glorified.’ ” (RB)

Reflection on the bishops’ evangelization document – and taking into account our shared conviction that we at Notre Dame *have already made great strides* in becoming an evangelizing parish – we focused on the three essential components of evangelization: **Conversion** (deepening and strengthening our own faith); **Welcoming** (inviting others to share the Good News); and **Transformation** (changing the world around us by putting our faith into action). We offer this new, reworked Parish Mission Statement that we believe more meaningfully reflects who we are and what we believe:

NEW PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

“We are a welcoming Catholic Christian community alive in the faith! Through Baptism, we are called to become the heart, the hands and the voice of Jesus. We do this through Eucharist, liturgical celebrations, prayer, and nurturing parish ministries, ‘That in all things God may be glorified.’ (Rule of St. Benedict)”

The Pastoral Council welcomes your comments and feedback on this new version of our parish family’s mission! If you wish to send us your thoughts, please call John Bradley, Pastoral Council President, at 973-829-1154, or e-mail John at jbrad17665@aol.com.