

Following is a blog entry from **Catholic Sistas**, an online publication which “seeks to reach Catholics and non-Catholics where they are in their understanding of the Faith, and to challenge readers to stretch, grow and immerse in the Faith more deeply.” We share it as a source of inspiration and guidance, as we strive to be intentional in bringing others into a close relationship with Christ.

## AN INTROVERT’S GUIDE TO EVANGELIZATION

*A blog contribution by “Mary”*



Several months ago, my husband became involved with a ministry called St. Paul Street Evangelization. He goes out into the community and talks to random passersby, handing out rosaries or other religious items. Recently, he asked me if I wanted to go. My answer was a firm, unhesitating “no.” As someone who is both introverted and shy (despite popular belief, those are not synonymous), the last thing I want to do is go up to strangers and start conversations with them. Yet, evangelization is a requirement of the Christian life. We are not meant to keep the light of Christ and the joy of the Gospel to ourselves, but to go out and spread them to others. And our society needs this so badly right now.

So, what is a shy introvert to do?

I’m not an expert on evangelization, as I am just starting to make a more conscious effort at it. It’s been difficult for me to think about reaching out to others while I’m deep in the trenches of raising and homeschooling young children. I used to use this fact (along with my personality) as an excuse to avoid the mandate to spread the Gospel outside of the four walls of my home. But, lately, God has been calling

me out of that mindset. Here is what I’ve learned about how to evangelize as an introvert:

- Get out from behind the computer screen. If it were up to me, I’d just sit at my computer and stick to the written word as a way to reach out to others (like most introverts I know). Introverts can articulate their thoughts much better in writing. And, internet evangelization takes off so much of the pressure of social interactions. But more often than not, attempts at keyboard evangelization fail to bear truly good fruit. True evangelization requires making connections with people. And the irony of social media is that it can be a barrier to that. The internet certainly has its place (I am writing on a Catholic blog, after all). But, even in this digital age, human-to-human interaction is still the best way to make those connections and spread the love of Christ. Don’t be fooled into thinking you are doing your part simply by posting an article on Facebook or engaging in a combox debate on a theological or cultural issue
- Seek out opportunities to evangelize in a one-on-one or small group situation. For example, my husband and I recently started volunteering

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for our parish's marriage preparation ministry by becoming a sponsor couple. This means that we invite one couple at a time into our home and help them prepare for marriage one-on-one. Although this is not always comfortable, it is a better fit for my personality than some other forms of evangelization. Since the couple is coming to our home, knowing what we are there to discuss, there's no need to figure out how to start the conversation nor to make a lot of small talk. This is much easier for me than going out into the street and striking up conversations with strangers. It's also more suited to me than standing up in front of a large group and talking at them. (That was the format of the marriage preparation that my husband and I went through when we were engaged). Introverts are good listeners, and we also articulate our thoughts better when we have some time to think about them. Therefore, the one-on-one format of being a sponsor couple is a good use of my gifts.

- Be ready to go outside your comfort zone. Like he summoned Peter out of the boat onto the raging sea, God often calls us to stretch ourselves and do things that seem scary. Maybe one day he will call me out into the streets with my husband. In the meantime, he still wants me to do things that are not easy for me. Like I said, I'm not always comfortable in one-on-one settings, either. When it comes to marriage preparation, I'm particularly nervous about discussions related to hard teachings such as cohabiting and contraception. But this discomfort makes it easier for me to lean on the Holy Spirit and let him do the hard work. If we are completely confident and at ease, we might not leave room for the Lord to work through us. Which brings me to my next point...
- Realize that you are just a conduit through which the Holy Spirit works. Understanding and accepting that other people's conversion of heart is not in our control reduces the pressure of evangelizing. As an introvert (and a perfectionist!), I'm prone to stressing over what I'm going to say to people so that it's "just right," and over-analyzing conversations after the fact to see where I might have gone wrong. Putting the situation in the Lord's hands makes it easier to let go of that stress.

- Pray. This is the key to the previous two points, and to the whole endeavor or evangelization. I pray often for the couples that I am helping to prepare for marriage. God is the only one who can truly equip them for marriage, changing and strengthening them where necessary. He is the only one who can equip us for the job of helping him.
- Evangelize without words. I've been forcing myself lately to smile at strangers when I'm out and about. This probably seems silly to extroverts, but it takes a lot of willpower for me to do it. Generally, I prefer to keep my head down and avoid eye contact with people out in public. Though making eye contact and smiling at strangers is a lot easier than talking to them. (Contrast this with some extroverted relatives of mine who strike up conversations with everyone they meet!) When I do smile at people, some of them look at me strangely and maybe give a half-hearted smile back (probably fellow introverts!). But some of them light up, and respond with a genuinely warm smile. This small, seemingly insignificant interaction doesn't impart any theological knowledge, but it does brighten their day and possibly make them feel more loved. This is a form of evangelization, too. Making a similar effort at warmth and kindness toward people you see on a regular basis but have no real relationship with (such as co-workers) eventually might lead to direct, verbal evangelization. They will be drawn to you and the light you exude. This will open the door for you to give an explanation for the hope that is in you. (1 Peter 3:15)

To everything, there is a season. Maybe you aren't in a season of life where you can volunteer for ministries in your parish, such as marriage preparation. But don't do what I did and use your personality as an excuse to not do God's work. I often think of Moses, who God called to confront the Pharaoh despite his protestation that he was not a good public speaker. Trust in the Lord to show you how to make use of the gifts he has given you, and to equip you for whatever task to which he calls you.

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