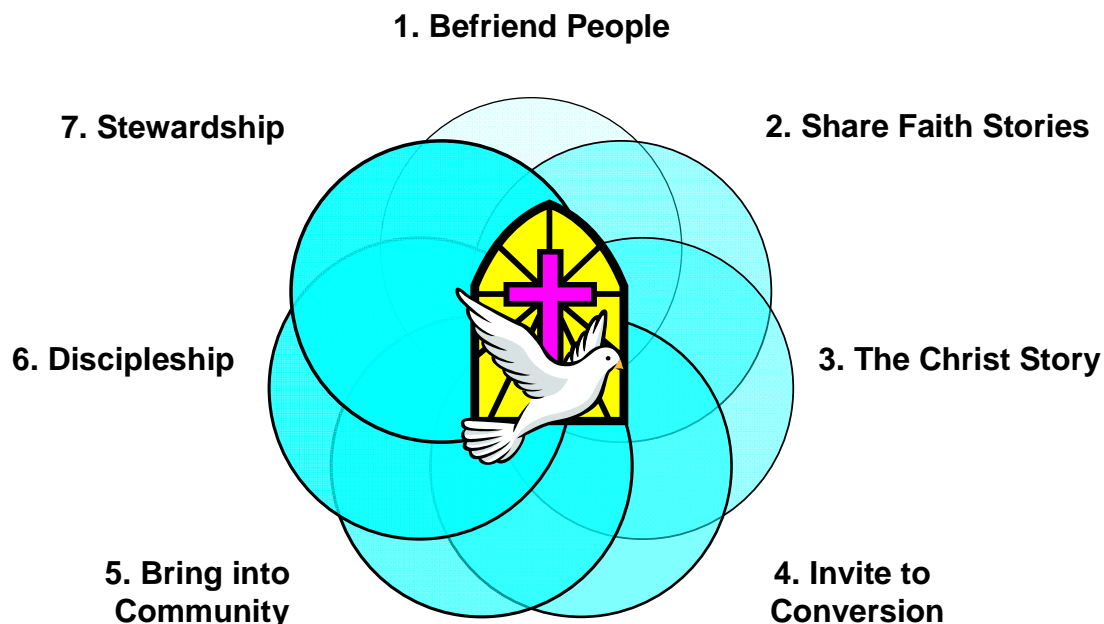


Stages in the Evangelization Process

When we hear the “great commission” of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, 28:19-20, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...,” it may seem clear cut. But as we try to live out this evangelizing mission in parish and diocesan life, we suspect that there is much more to this than we ever imagined. How do we translate this into action? How do we know if we are making any progress?

One helpful tool is an awareness of stages in the process of parish evangelization. This awareness helps us understand the importance of a particular pastoral activity and helps us grow through each of the stages. There are at least seven stages that are rooted in the New Testament and church documents (Vatican Council II, "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity," Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World, General Directory for Catechesis*, etc.). They are: befriending others, sharing faith stories, sharing the Christ story, inviting a person to conversion, bringing them into community, discipleship, and discipleship’s fruitfulness lived out in stewardship. Descriptions below are given in terms of what the average person can do to contribute to this process. Organizations, ministries, staffs, and parishes will need to draw out the implications for their current and future efforts.

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1. **Befriend People**—The whole process begins with befriending others, whether it is at the doors of the church, through parish programming or through efforts to build quality relationships. Befriending is also our aim when we go outward to serve others through

works of charity and social justice.

2. **Share Faith Stories**— As we get to know someone and have listened in a caring way, we might share similar experiences and how God has been present in our own lives or in a saint's life. Or we may simply affirm a step that someone has taken toward God.
3. **The Christ Story**—When the time is right, we can share who Jesus Christ really is, what he has done for us, and what he wants to do. The Good News, at the heart of the Gospel message, is that we are not alone. We are not orphans. When we share this news, we put flesh on the Apostle's Creed, our Baptismal Vows, and even the Sign of the Cross.
4. **Invite to Conversion**—When someone is unaware of Christ's presence, we can invite him or her into reflective silence (to look within), share how we see God acting, and then invite this person to pray aloud or in silence. Conversion is a lifelong journey that involves hundreds of encounters with Jesus Christ in a wide variety of circumstances.
5. **Bring into Community**—We respect each person's particular journey toward God. We trust that Jesus is already present to the person we are serving. We affirm the actions Holy Spirit. When the time is right, we invite a person into our faith community (small group, large group, or liturgy as appropriate). If our invitation is rejected, we refocus on God's unconditional love for this brother or sister in Jesus Christ.
6. **Discipleship**—We, as individuals and as a community, allow Jesus to transform every part of our personalities, our actions, our relationships and our choices. We choose to live as disciples of Jesus through the witness of a Christian life, through loving others, and through faithfulness to our vocation of married, single or religious life. Discipleship in daily life is the primary way that we transform the world around us, and apply Gospel values at home, in the community, and in society at large.
7. **Stewardship**—The fruit of discipleship is stewardship. This means that after a person has given his or her whole life to Jesus the next step is to act out that surrender by placing one's resources at the apostles' feet like the early Christians did in the Acts of the Apostle (Acts 4:35). One hundred percent is given to God first and we take back only what we need in order to live and to continue the mission of Christ.

The whole process is both a journey inward, toward the depths of Christ's presence, and outward towards those in need. The stages are not necessarily sequential. One may start at any one of the stages and then move on to others, skipping around according to the way the Holy Spirit moves us and in response to different circumstances. The process is something that we experience together, with different people being at different stages. They are most evident in the RCIA/Catechumenate, but are also present in the larger parish community. We need to continually ask how each stage is deeply rooted in the Gospel? And are we experiencing them in a life-giving fashion that points to Jesus Christ?

The parish evangelization process is not only the ministry of a few individuals or of a small group. It is everyone's call! Everyone's gifts are needed. Any small action in any one of the stages can provide a doorway for entering or return to full participation in the parish. We are called to go and make disciples especially by "evangelizing as we go" through everyday life. We are called to befriend people, to share faith stories, to tell the Christ story, to invite each person to turn to and love Jesus, to usher people into the faith community, to encourage

discipleship, and to act as good stewards of the Gospel of Christ every day and in every way we can.

For Small Group Sharing—25-30 minutes :

1. Which stage of the process of evangelization has been a doorway to deeper life in Jesus Christ and the parish for you? How?
2. Which stage is most suitable for using the gifts you have to offer?
3. What might you do to become a more faithful steward of your gifts in your parish?
4. Which two stages of the evangelization process is your parish most successful in using to bring people closer to Jesus and the Church? Why?
5. What stage(s) does your parish struggle with the most? What might be done to strengthen this stage of the process?

Take an Evangelization Challenge:

Sign up as an individual or group for the next offering of “**Keys to Reaching Inactive Catholics**” online training to explore the “stages in the process of parish evangelization” in-depth. Or take one of the other courses offered by the Paulist Evangelization Training Institute. Go to:

http://www.pncea.org/store/index.asp?DEPARTMENT_ID=68