

Re-connecting People with the Lord

"Road To Emmaus" Approach

Almost every Catholic family has at least one member who has either become inactive or formally left the Church. The rest of the family feels hurt and is often confused.

There is a great temptation to try and find a quick and easy solution to this problem. Sadly, there is no quick fix. The reasons Catholics become inactive or leave are many and varied. Each person has his or her own story to tell and challenges to overcome.

Rarely will a person return to the Church when someone lectures him or her on how the person "is not being a good Catholic." Instead, to help someone back to the Church two things must be kept in mind. First, it is the Holy Spirit that moves people back to the Church. Second, the role of the person trying to reinvigorate the inactive Catholic is to help the person recognize that God is in fact calling him or her back.

Entering into a friendship with the inactive Catholic is essential. Having someone to talk to, share burdens with and ask counsel of softens the heart.

"Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." (Luke 24:13-16)

Some Catholics simply drift away. They used to be involved, but withdrew for no apparent reason. There is no one reason, but a general lack of interest. Other Catholics may have issues with Church teaching or have gone through a divorce or a member of the Church may have hurt them in one way or another.

"He asked them, 'What are you discussing as you walk along?' They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?' And he replied to them, 'What sort of things?'" (Luke 24:17-19)

Understanding a person's challenges and being able to meet him or her on the road of doubt often requires us to leave our own comfort zone and venture where we would not normally go. Here again, friendship is the key. In today's busy society few people have any real true friends. Friendship provides the Christian witness that often was lacking before the person left the Church. Relationships prepare the ground for the seed of the Word of God to be proclaimed.

"Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in the scriptures." (Luke 24:27)

As friendships mature and the Gospel is able to be proclaimed among two friends there comes a time when the person can be asked to return to the extended family, reconcile and fully take part in the Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the summit of Christian living.

"As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him..." (Luke 24:28-31)

Throughout the Archdiocese of Washington, programs are being created to help inactive Catholics return to the Church. In light of the diversity of the people in the Archdiocese, programs are being developed that meet the needs of each local parish.

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Evangelization and the Mission of the Parish

Preparing the Laity for the Mission of Evangelization

Parishes are at the center of the evangelizing mission of the Archdiocese of Washington. In and through our parishes, not only is faith shared, but at the heart of parish life is the initiation of all people who have heard the Good News into active participation in the sacramental, charitable and social life of our parishes. The mission is accomplished through three distinct goals as outlined in the U.S. Bishops' vision for evangelization called *Go and Make Disciples*

Go and Make Disciples

Evangelization is most successful when it becomes more of a mindset than a program. Programs have their place, no doubt. However, each baptized person is called to share the Gospel and no program, no matter how dynamic and well run, can squeeze everyone into it. The

programs the Coordinator for Evangelization offers are not aimed at evangelizing the world, but instead at teaching our people to evangelize the world.

To help parishes and individuals become better equipped to spread the Gospel message, the Archdiocese of Washington is implementing the USCCB evangelization strategy, "Go and Make Disciples." This is a joint strategy between the Archdiocese and the parish. Training, guidance and speakers are provided by the Archdiocese. The most important part, dedicated Catholics, is provided by the parish. Customizing the strategy to each parish is essential since each parish is unique. One size does not fit all.

While we are a diverse Archdiocese, we all can focus together on three broad areas or goals in this strategy.

Goal One: To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others. (*Go and Make Disciples*, no. 89)

There are Catholics who, while they have not rejected Christ, certainly are not very enthusiastic about their faith. Reaching out to these Catholics and helping them to better understand their faith and live it is essential. Catholics who are enthused about their faith are more likely to provide a good witness and position themselves, and the Church, to better proclaim the Gospel.

"The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." (Luke 1:49)

Goal 2: To invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith. (*Go and Make Disciples*, no. 109)

The Church, Her liturgy and the Sacraments are all gifts. Certainly, we should want to share them! In the hustle and bustle of people's lives there is an emptiness and hollowness that can only be filled through Jesus. Every person should be invited to salvation in Jesus and His Church. He is the head and everyone should be invited to be part of the body.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

Goal 3: To foster gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ. (*Go and Make Disciples*, no. 117)

Pope John Paul II tells us that the solution to every problem in the world is Christ. We know that if all people lived Christ-like lives the problems would disappear.

Those who are living Christ-centered lives discover they can find Jesus in the face of the hungry, the thirsty, those without proper clothing, the homeless and the sick and imprisoned. As Catholics we respond to these challenges by instructing the ignorant, encouraging the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, readily forgiving others, comforting the afflicted and praying for both the living and the dead.

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Go and Make Disciples is not a program that supercedes existing programs. Instead, it works in unison with them to help make sure that we do not lose the forest for the trees. Implementing *Go and Make Disciples* requires the support of key parish leaders.

Preparing Evangelizers

The Department for Evangelization and Family Life assists parishes in developing tools and programs that foster the evangelizing mission of the parish. Resources include:

- Training workshops for parish evangelization teams
- A resource guide of successful English and Spanish programs for welcoming back Catholics
- Lectures/workshops on the implementation of *Go and Make Disciples* in the parish
- On-line resources related to Evangelization and training for evangelizers

Sharing My Faith with Others

Awareness & Witness: Discovering My Experience of God

Each baptized person has a responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to those around them. Considering the challenges that the world poses us all it is information that the world desperately needs.

Part of the challenge of sharing our faith is that we often have to do it at unexpected times or in strange places. It is at a child's soccer game, a business lunch or in the food store when people comment on the number of children hanging off the sides of the shopping cart that we have an opportunity to share Christ with others.

A Learned Skill

Sharing our faith with others comes naturally to some but to most it is something that must be learned. A common mistake that people make is to try and evangelize like someone they have seen on TV or heard on the radio. While we can all certainly learn some things from famous evangelists we have to admit there is a big difference between talking about God over the phone to a friend and speaking in a stadium filled with eighty thousand people!

It is essential that the person who is sharing their faith is providing an authentic witness. An authentic witness springs from the heart of the person who has taken the time to become aware of God in their own life.

Awareness & Witness Retreats

Awareness and Witness Retreats are one-day events that lead people through a review of their life where they reflect on God's presence and activity in their lives. After building an awareness of God in their life they learn how to witness this to others around them.

In addition to reflecting on all the good God has done for us in our lives the retreat teaches people how to tell the story of Christ's action in their life in their own way. Instead of trying to evangelize like someone else the participants learn to share the faith in a way they feel most comfortable with.



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