



## The Primacy of Evangelisation

### Introduction

Evangelisation is the task of proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ in such a way that people are drawn into a relationship with him. Having said that, it would be wrong to think of this proclamation as if it were another 'task' or 'ministry' within the Church. Still less an activity delegated to a 'parish evangelisation team'. Evangelisation is the Church's response to the Great Commission where Jesus tells his followers to "Go and make disciples" and as such it is the responsibility of the whole Church. Pope Paul VI taught that evangelisation is the "Church's deepest identity" and that "the Church exists to evangelise". Therefore, rather than valuing evangelisation as something the Church does, it needs to become part of our methodology and in that way affect everything we do.

Sometimes people say the way they evangelise is by living their faith. And it is true, there shouldn't be any other way than to start with that. But sometimes they also quote a phrase attributed to St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words". It's a quotation that is problematic for three reasons: first of all, St Francis never said it; secondly, it is not true; and thirdly it is not what he did: St. Francis used words all the time - and when people wouldn't listen to him he preached to the birds! Pope Paul VI said in Evangelii Nuntiandi, "sooner or later the witness of life must give way to the Word of life". In other words, what begins with witness must lead to the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ - otherwise it is not true evangelisation.

Since there is a tendency for evangelisation to get overshadowed by tasks such as catechesis, we need to be intentional about spending a disproportionate amount of our time, energy and resources in the work of evangelisation. If this is not a conscious effort on our part the Church's most important task of making, forming, equipping, and sending disciples will get drowned out by everything else that clamours for our time, resources and attention.

## **Evangelisation, Discipleship & Catechesis**

Sometimes we can use words in different ways and so it is helpful to have a common understanding of what we mean by evangelisation and discipleship.

### **1. Evangelisation**

Evangelisation is the act of bringing the Gospel of Jesus, the Good News, to people in such a way that they can make a choice to follow him and become disciples.

### **2. Disciple**

A Disciple is someone who has encountered the transforming power of Jesus in their lives and have surrendered to his will and chosen to follow him.

It is sometimes helpful to distinguish, at least notionally, between a 'beginning disciple', a 'growing disciple', and an 'equipped (or missionary) disciple'. Someone at the beginning of their journey of discipleship may need more support, encouragement and formation than someone who is already some way along that path. Often new disciples are particularly enthusiastic about sharing their faith with others but all disciples can be equipped to be more effective in that task.

### **3. Catechesis**

Catechesis is the systematic presentation of the faith in such a way that it resonates in the heart of the disciple being catechised.

Evangelisation (making disciples) needs to precede Catechesis (forming disciples). The aim of catechesis is not that people should know about God but that people should know God. In that sense Catechesis should always have an element of evangelisation, of inviting people into a relationship with the God being revealed to them.

As a Church we have traditionally put a lot of effort and resources into teaching (Catechesis), often with disappointing results. We have a culture of catechesis (especially children's catechesis) but what we need is a culture of evangelisation. How might we introduce an evangelising dimension to our catechetical programmes, and especially our sacramental preparation?

## **A Culture of Evangelisation**

If evangelisation is to permeate everything we do, we need a culture of evangelisation whereby everything we do puts first the needs of those not yet evangelised. This means we have to ensure there is an element of evangelisation in every aspect of parish life.

### **1. Paradigm Shift**

In the past people went to church because they believed. They expected their experience of church to confirm them in their efforts to live Christian lives. Often they went to church without seeking any real connection with the priest or their fellow worshippers. This was the “Believe, Behave, Belong” paradigm.

Today research suggests people who go to church occasionally are looking for some connection or a place where they can be valued and make a difference. If they feel comfortable they may open themselves to the possibility of faith. If they come to faith they are more disposed to change their lifestyle. In other words, the modern paradigm is “Belong, Believe, Behave”.

How might this ‘paradigm shift’ have an impact, for example, on the content of our homilies?

### **2. Hospitality**

If the most important thing in the new paradigm is ‘Belonging’, then it follows that the most important ministry in our parishes is that of Hospitality. How can we be intentional about hospitality at all our events? Do we have people designated to welcome people who attend any event in our parish? What refreshments do we serve (how many parish events have you attended where they served stale Custard Creams?). Hospitality includes the way people are greeted but it is much more than that. It is also about ensuring that our facilities are clean, tidy and in good order. And that our homilies and announcements we avoid ‘insider language’ that of its nature excludes the outsider.

### **3. Guests or Hosts?**

Do our parishioners see themselves as ‘guests’ or ‘hosts’ when they come to church? A guest naturally expects to be waited upon and looked after. A host on the other hand makes an effort to receive people and care for them. A host prepares and makes sacrifices (eg gives up their seats), a host welcomes guests and puts them at ease, and - most importantly - a host invites people to come to the celebration.

#### **4. The Mass is not Evangelisation**

A beautiful celebration of Mass can have a profound effect on non-believers, nominal believers, and even un-evangelised Catholics who attend. It is not, however, in itself, designed as a tool for evangelisation. It is a celebration whereby the Christian Community are called to be formed by God's Word, to unite their prayers and sacrifices to that of Christ and, as a consequence, to anticipate union with God in heaven by receiving Jesus in Holy Communion as *cibus viatorum* - food for the journey towards heaven.

Therefore, we need to offer appropriate events in our parishes to which we can invite outsiders, make them feel welcome, and give them space to be themselves and to ask questions.

#### **5. Tools for Evangelisation**

A tool for evangelisation is something we use to create the space for people to open up and be drawn into a relationship with Jesus. Different tools work in different settings. One effective tool used globally is Alpha.

#### **6. The Importance of Testimony**

Testimonies can foster a culture of evangelisation by normalising it. Priest and lay people can share stories of inviting people to events such as Alpha. It is important to stress that the 'win', the success being celebrated, is the act of inviting not whether the person accepts an invitation. People who have come to faith through the parish can share their story.

Sharing testimonies also has a supernatural dimension: they acknowledge God's power and blessing and enable us to thank and praise him. They also inspire us to ask in prayer with greater confidence. That prayer of petition will in turn bear fruit in more blessing and so intercession and honouring of God's goodness also becomes part of our parish culture.

### **Alpha**

Alpha is not a programme of catechesis. It is a tool for evangelisation. Alpha can be thought of as a space we invite people into where they can investigate and ask questions about what it means to have faith. Alpha helps parishes live a culture of evangelisation by providing something to which people can *invite* their un-churched friends. Alpha models radical hospitality. It also allows people to be themselves as they investigate questions of faith and open

themselves up to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. It is also a way of introducing people to the importance of community and to the joy of service. As more people do Alpha the culture of a parish begins to change.

N.B. Alpha is not designed for 'insiders'. You should aim for at least 50% of your Alpha cohorts to be non-believers. Be convinced that the best Alpha guest is the one who says on the first night, "I don't know why I'm here, I'm not religious".

## **Thresholds of Conversion**

From the Church's perspective we can sometimes talk of 'pre-evangelisation', 'evangelisation' and 'formation' or 'ongoing catechesis'. Another way of looking at Evangelisation is from the perspective of the individual's journey of faith. Sherry Weddell, in her book Forming Intentional Disciples, speaks of the 'thresholds of conversion' that lead to discipleship. Put very crudely, they are as follows:

### **1. Trust**

A non-believer needs to come to a point where he trusts his Christian friend. Without that trust there will always be a barrier. The Christian, therefore, needs to learn that incarnation evangelisation begins with true and authentic friendship. We are friends with people for their sake, not because they are a potential conversion scalp!

### **2. Curiosity**

In time a non-believer may, once a relationship of trust is established, become curious about different aspects of their friends lives. When the friend is a Christian it is natural that this curiosity extend to their Christian faith.

### **3. Openness**

Openness occurs where there is a shift away from curiosity about another person's faith to a recognition that it may bring with it some good which they would be happy to enjoy as well. It is not yet belief but a shift in gear that says, it is not such a bad thing after all and might even have some benefits.

### **4. Seeking**

Seeking is the next step. It is a conscious movement away from being open to the possibility of faith to a conscious desire for it. It is a time when people may be encouraged to pray for the gift of faith.

### **5. Conversion**

Conversion is the start of a new journey based on the conscious acceptance of Jesus into their lives. That 'Yes' is followed up by baptism, or by the new beginning offered in the Sacrament of Confession. It is the beginning of the journey of discipleship.

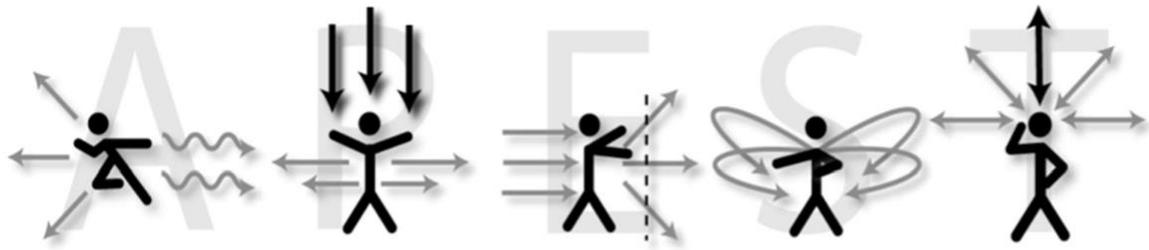
One of the reasons Alpha is so successful as a tool for evangelisation is that it gently leads people through these various thresholds over a journey of almost three months.

## **Additional Resources**

- Please refer to page 7 for an example draft of a "roadmap" produced by St Elizabeth of Portugal Parish in London, England to help it's parish leaders understand the discipleship pathway in their context.
- Please refer to page 8 for definitions around the vocational callings that make up APEST.

**Equipping the Saints; How St Elizabeth's builds intentional disciples who joyfully live out the mission of Jesus Christ**

Stages	WIN			BUILD		SEND		
	A. Prepare the Soil	B. Sow the Seed		C. Tend the Vine		D. Bear Fruit		
Parish Needs to Provide	Hospitality	Evangelisation		Discipleship		Apostleship		
Profile of Individuals	<b>Looking For:</b> Acceptance A Place of Welcome A joyful community Personal Recognition Beauty & Goodness	<b>Looking For:</b> Deep Friendships Answers to Questions Safe Spaces to talk freely Transformative Encounter Inspiring Personal Testimonies		<b>Looking For:</b> Ongoing Learning Foundational Prayer Life Personal Transformation Help Discerning Charisms Support from other Disciples		<b>Looking For:</b> Radical self-giving Universal call to holiness Missionary Opportunities Ways to exercise charisms Other people to Evangelise		
Thresholds of Conversion	INITIAL TRUST	CURIOSITY	OPENNESS	SEEKING	BEGINNING DISCIPLE	GROWING DISCIPLE	MISSIONARY DISCIPLE	DISCIPLE MAKER
	1. <b>Initial Trust:</b> a person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is <i>not</i> the same as active personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.	3. <b>Openness:</b> a person acknowledges that he or she is open to the <i>possibility</i> of personal and spiritual change. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a post modern nonbeliever. Openness is not a commitment to change. People who are open or simply admitting that they are <i>open to the possibility</i> of change.		5. <b>Beginning Disciple:</b> has had a change of attitude towards Jesus Christ and the church he established, a change of attitude towards sin, has made a verbal profession of commitment to Jesus Christ to others, has a desire to grow spiritually, and has received the sacraments of initiation or has gone to confession if they are already a Catholic.		7. <b>Missionary Disciple:</b> has decided to answer personally the call to take part in the mission of the Church, and is actively striving to spread the Gospel message.		
	2. <b>Curiosity:</b> a person finds himself <i>intrigued</i> by, or desiring to know more, about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some aspect of the Christian faith. This curiosity can range from mere awareness of a new possibility to something quite intense. Nevertheless, a person at the threshold of curiosity is not yet open to personal change. Curiosity is still essentially passive, but it is more than mere trust.	4. <b>Seeking:</b> the person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know the God who is calling him or her. It is, if you will, "dating with a purpose" but not yet marriage. Seekers asking, "are you the one to whom I will give myself?" At this stage, the seeker is engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he or she can commit to Christ in his church.		6. <b>Growing Disciple:</b> has developed a heart for God that motivates his or her attitudes and actions, is willing to make any sacrifices to grow, is committed to continually growing in the basic habits of the Christian life, including but not limited to: seeking interior growth through daily prayer with scripture and spiritual reading, growing in sanctification through the reception of the sacraments, building character through the Beatitudes and virtues, practising the spiritual and Corporal works of mercy, and an openness to the Holy Spirit.		8. <b>Disciple Maker:</b> has led someone to commit his or her life to Jesus Christ and his mission and is helping them engage in the work of evangelisation, has developed a heart for God's people and is willing to make any sacrifice to help another grow, and makes life decisions based upon how he or she can most effectively fulfil the Great Commission.		
Parish Vision Statement	"We are striving to become a joyful, invitation community"	"where people of all ages can encounter and entrust themselves to Christ"		"grow through formation and the Holy Spirit"		"and be encouraged to find practical ways of witnessing to God's one in the world"		
Five Systems	Worshipping Community	Evangelisation		Discipleship		Ministry		
Parish Tools	Parish Culture; Sunday Experience; Beauty; Family Based Catechesis	Alpha		Connect Groups; Discipleship Groups, CCO Canada Courses		Formation for Mission; Incarnational Evangelisation; Depth Chart		



**APOSTLES** extend the gospel. As the “sent ones,” they ensure that the faith is transmitted from one context to another and from one generation to the next. They are always thinking about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in new contexts, developing leaders, networking trans-locally. Yes, if you focus solely on initiating new ideas and rapid expansion, you can leave people and organizations wounded. The shepherding and teaching functions are needed to ensure people are cared for rather than simply used.

**PROPHETS** know God's will. They are particularly attuned to God and his truth for today. They bring correction and challenge the dominant assumptions we inherit from the culture. They insist that the community obey what God has commanded. They question the status quo. Without the other types of leaders in place, prophets can become belligerent activists or, paradoxically, disengage from the imperfection of reality and become other-worldly.

**EVANGELISTS** recruit. These infectious communicators of the gospel message recruit others to the cause. They call for a personal response to God's redemption in Christ, and also draw believers to engage the wider mission, growing the church. Evangelists can be so focused on reaching those outside the church that maturing and strengthening those inside is neglected.

**SHEPHERDS** nurture and protect. Caregivers of the community, they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock, cultivating a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships, making and developing disciples. Shepherds can value stability to the detriment of the mission. They may also foster an unhealthy dependence between the church and themselves.

**TEACHERS** understand and explain. Communicators of God's truth and wisdom, they help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will, guiding others toward wisdom, helping the community remain faithful to Christ's word, and constructing a transferable doctrine. Without the input of the other functions, teachers can fall into dogmatism or dry intellectualism. They may fail to see the personal or missional aspects of the church's ministry.