

Beginning to Focus on Evangelization at St. Mark's

My current focus on Evangelization at St. Mark's began after I returned from the North American Institute for Catholic Evangelization in Cincinnati in July of 2006. I met with Fr. Thomas Mangieri, our administrator at the time, and we put together a flyer for the parish bulletin asking who might like to work on evangelization in the parish. A group responded and over the next year we read resource books I'd gotten at the Institute in Cincinnati, wrote some goals and objectives, and came up with a plan based on outlines and ideas we got from the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association. They can be found on the internet at pncea.org.

I'd like to say our early ideas worked out perfectly. They didn't. I won't list all our flops. However, Fr. Tom's patience and the enthusiasm of the group did help us learn several things.

First, it was difficult to begin to think about whom all the missing people were, where they were, what their concerns might be, and how we might get the word to them. It was also difficult for us to change our mindset from what we had to offer as Catholic Christians to how we looked to those looking in at us from outside.

Second, it's great to read about all the great things other parishes around the country have done with evangelization, but as the Paulist priest, Fr. Ken Boyak, pointed out in Cincinnati, establishing an evangelization consciousness in a parish needs to be seen as a seven year process. Further, he's noted that no two parishes are the same and finding what works in our particular parish has been a bruising experience, much as he predicted.

Third, we began to look for ways to begin a process that needed to be sustained for a number of years. We looked to existing programs in the parish, but also saw that some programs had definite evangelization potential such as our Women's Bible Study Group. We resolved to work to establish a Men's Bible Study Group to match the women's group. We also resolved to try to Cornerstone Retreats to the parish as about 42% of those going to Cornerstone are returning Catholics. We also took a long-term view of informing our "regulars" at Mass by doing regular articles for the bulletin and having regular outreach Sundays. We're pleased to say that our new pastor, Msgr. Joseph Goode, has given us a page in the bulletin for evangelization and matches it with his personal outreach appeal the fourth Sunday of every month.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, evangelization isn't finished at St. Mark's, and it's not even beginning to be finished, but it is the end of the beginning. Let's pray it continues.

-Deacon Ray Biersbach, St. Mark the Evangelist,
Long Valley

Focusing Evangelization at St. Mark's

In the fall some of us from St. Mark's went to a workshop on evangelization with Fr. Frank DiSiano, a Paulist priest. One of the points he made was about the three goals the American bishops set for evangelization in the United States, namely,

Goal 1: 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.

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.

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.

Fr. DiSiano pointed out that although the work of the church is always ongoing, American Catholics are actually pretty good at goals #1 and #3. In St. Mark's, for example, we have a thriving religious education program, work very hard to provide good liturgy, and regularly offer adult education programs. Or, to look at goal 3, St. Mark's does a lot of outreach to those in need.

However, as part of our study it become clearer that we have work to do on goal 2 especially:

- ◆ In making our parish more welcoming.
- ✓ ◆ To help Catholics in the parish feel more comfortable about sharing their faith by telling their story so that others may feel invited to discover faith in Jesus.
- ◆ To learn how to share our faith stories within families more effectively.
- ◆ To train and empower active Catholics to exercise their baptismal call to evangelize.
- ◆ To have special times in parishes and families to invite people to faith effectively invite people to our Church.
- ◆ To cultivate an active core of the baptized to serve as ministers of evangelization in our parish, and in their workplaces, and homes.
- ◆ To continue to work at designing programs of outreach for those who have ceased being active in the Church.

The main point in thinking about evangelization at St. Mark's was thus to continue work the community was doing in spiritual renewal, instruction, and service and add new skills in reaching out to those who need to hear Jesus' message of salvation.

-Deacon Ray Biersbach, St. Mark the Evangelist,
Long Valley

Learning To Tell Our Stories As A Basic Evangelization Skill At St. Mark's

A central skill in evangelization is for "...every Catholic feel more comfortable about sharing their faith by telling their story so that others may feel invited to discover faith in Jesus." As we looked at evangelization at St. Mark's I've become aware that we Catholics try to be comfortable about sharing our faith, but too often we end up describing our faith in terms of:

1. some doctrine we believe that distinguishes us from other believers such as our Right to Life work or the church's stance on some moral issue
2. when and how we made sacraments such as, "I was baptized at this parish or confirmed at that parish"