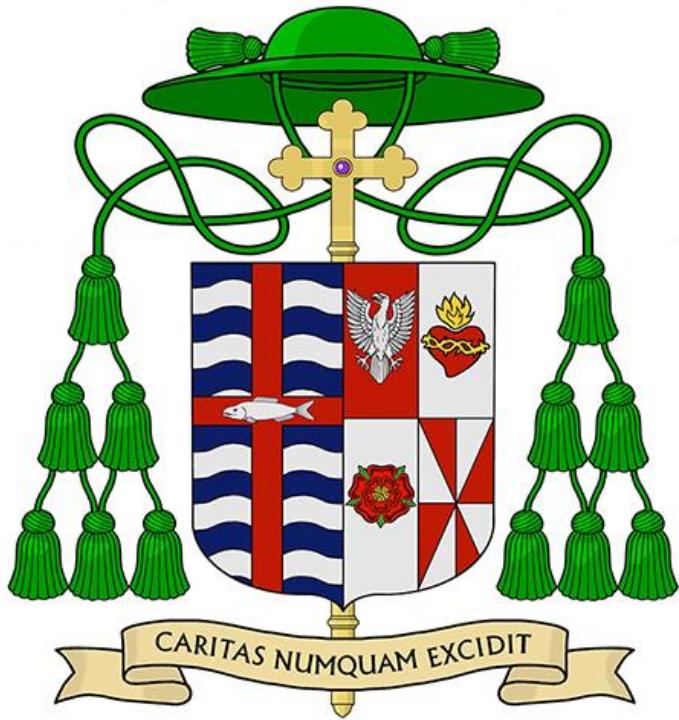

GO MAKE DISCIPLES



A COMMON VISION FOR EVANGELIZATION,
AS PROPOSED BY
THE MOST REVEREND DONALD J. HYING,
BISHOP OF MADISON
MARCH 2020

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GO MAKE DISCIPLES

Prologue

Missionary discipleship has become the organizing focus in the Catholic Church recently, the prism through which believers discuss evangelization, catechesis, prayer, service and virtue. In His final words of the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations!” (Matt. 28:19-20), Jesus Christ calls all of the baptized to proclaim the liberating and saving Gospel to others, forming our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Faith that we treasure.

As I travel around our Diocese, the same questions arise: How can I live my Catholic Faith with authenticity and joy? How do I develop a living relationship with God that truly centers my life? How do we pass on the Faith to our beloved young people? How do we transform the poverty and suffering of the world and change society for the better? How can my parish move from maintenance to mission, becoming more welcoming, energized, active and participative? How do we reach all of the people who have simply checked out of Church and religion all together?

For some years now, the Holy Spirit has been stirring the hearts of believers throughout our country and world to ask these fundamental questions. The emerging answer is the reality of missionary discipleship which coalesces the multiple facets of the Church’s faith and life into a coherent response to Christ’s personal invitation to follow Him.

So we raise the essential question: What is missionary discipleship?

We find the answer in the pages of the Gospel as we study the lives and experiences of those first followers of Jesus who appropriately served as the primary models of what this discipleship looks like. The Twelve Apostles, especially Peter, James and John, the Seventy-Two disciples, the women who followed Jesus and ministered to his needs, especially Mary Magdalene and ultimately the Blessed Virgin herself, show us this path of relationship, holiness, service and witness that we seek to emulate today.

Whether they were fishing, such as Peter, collecting taxes, like Matthew, or plotting the downfall of Rome, like Simon of the Zealot party, Jesus encountered His apostles in the ordinary activities of life and boldly called them to follow Him. The astonishing fact that they immediately did so points to the charisma and attractiveness of Jesus’ loving personality, the divine authority of His words and the impulse of active grace.

This following of Christ unfolded over the course of years, as this motley collection of mostly illiterate, lower class folk traveled and ate with the Master, listened to His preaching and parables, experienced the wondrous power of His miracles, watched Him cast out demons and came to an initial grasp of the Father’s mercy and the nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus called them to Himself, and this relationship with the Son of God became the fundamental meaning of their existence.

Coupled with Jesus’ call to, “Follow me!” is the other imperative, “Go forth!” Jesus sends both the Twelve, and then the Seventy-Two, on missionary journeys, commanding them to preach the Good News of God’s merciful love, to heal the sick, raise the dead and be witnesses of the Kingdom, while stressing the need for

conversion and change. They are to take nothing for the journey, trusting in God's providence and the integrity of their purpose.

In this going forth, we see the second part of missionary discipleship. Even as we are deeply formed in our identity as followers of Christ, we must take the Gospel forth, inviting others to become disciples through our loving witness and joyous service.

This going forth reaches its culmination in the Pentecost event, in which the Holy Spirit propels the early Church into the public square to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ as the new meaning of human existence, to preach and baptize, heal and bless, live the new communion of love and thanksgiving in the formative power of the Eucharist.

Tradition tells us that Peter went to Rome, Thomas to India, James to Spain. These spiritual giants were called by the Lord, formed in Christ, anointed in the Holy Spirit and sent to make other disciples. This dynamic process of vocation is the essence of missionary discipleship.

Over the centuries, Catholics have, at least partially, lost the intrinsic linkage of call, formation, anointing and sending. Most of us were baptized as infants, catechized in the faith, made the sacraments and embraced Catholic belief and practice. Few of us experienced a dynamic evangelization when we heard a bracing proclamation of God's love and the truth of our personal call by the Lord.

Many times, Christian formation was either all head-knowledge, such as the sole memorization of a catechism, but with little integration, or all heart-knowledge, based on feelings or experiences, but with little substance. As Catholics, we do a great job celebrating sacraments, but sometimes without a context of relationship with Jesus Christ or a sense of the mission of discipleship. We relied for decades on a thriving Catholic culture to form new members of the Church, but have not always felt that urgently personal call to witness the faith ourselves.

Lack of true evangelization, an often disjointed Christian formation, a celebration of the sacraments without an understanding of consequent call to mission, a faith often privatized and hidden, and significant cultural shifts, which have challenged religious practice and morality, are some of the reasons why the Church has experienced institutional decline in the West. We can no longer rely on a Catholic culture, unquestioning obedience, loyalty to the organization and a fear of hell to hold people in the Church. By using the example and experience of those first followers of Jesus as missionary disciples, we can rediscover the original and necessary connection between hearing the Lord calling us, embracing a life-changing spiritual formation, surrendering to the graced anointing of the Holy Spirit and understanding our baptismal call to witness the love, truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus Christ to every person we meet.

In this context of missionary discipleship, we are poised to embrace a bold evangelizing initiative here in the Diocese of Madison, to equip our leaders and engaged Catholics to proclaim the Gospel to those who have drifted away from the Church as well as the vast numbers of people who still need to hear the fullness of the Good News. Coupling this endeavor with the 75th anniversary of the foundation of our diocese, we are launching a four-part process including the ongoing spiritual and intellectual formation of our priests and their leadership teams in the urgency, nature, and methods of evangelization, an effort to extend that formation to those Catholics already engaged, the creation of a parish plan for evangelization in every one of our 102 parishes and then the fruitful implementation of that plan.

This focus on evangelization and missionary discipleship is not another program nor is it just one activity of the Church among others. The proclamation of the Gospel is the mission of the Church, its reason to be and its inspiration to go forth in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ. These efforts will always be the front and center of everything our diocese prioritizes, creates and acts upon. I joyfully and prayerfully invite every baptized member of our local Church to hear this call to discipleship anew and respond with faith and generosity. When we set the sail of our lives to the mighty wind of the Holy Spirit, God will lead us forth to do the work of Christ, as we proclaim, pray, serve and love in His Name.



Bishop Donald J. Hying

March 9, 2020

A Common Vision for Evangelization

The goal of this document is to offer a common vision for evangelization in its broad outlines and rooted in the magisterial teachings of the Church with a view toward local adaptation as each parish develops its own implementation plan.

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1. What Is the Gospel?

The very core of the Gospel can be summed up in four points. First, God freely created men and women out of love and for the sake of love. Every individual human being is known personally and loved intimately by God, who calls each of us to enter into loving **relationship** with him. Second, because of the original sin of our first parents and because of our own personal sins, we find ourselves alone and far from God, amidst the **ruin** of suffering and brokenness, unworthy of his infinite love. Third, in his great mercy, God sent his only Son into the world as a man to suffer and die for us in order to heal our wounds and forgive our sins so that we could be **reconciled** to God and restored to right relationship with him as his beloved sons and daughters. Fourth, the offer of forgiveness and redemption that is available to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ requires from us the **response** of faith and the conversion of our hearts and lives so that we might live in lasting friendship with God. All this is summarized beautifully in the first paragraph of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life.¹

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [hereafter: CCC] (Aug 15, 1997), 1.

2. What Is Evangelization?

Proclaiming Jesus Christ Risen from the Dead

Evangelization is “the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life.”² To evangelize simply means to spread the Gospel (the Good News) of Jesus Christ—to proclaim the saving power of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, for the purpose of leading those who hear the divine message to repentance, faith, baptism, and growth in discipleship. In the words of Pope St. Paul VI:

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: “Behold I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that ***the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.***³

The Bishops of the United States paraphrased these same words in their national plan and strategy for evangelization when they said: “Evangelizing means bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself. At its essence are the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the response of a person in faith, which are both works of the Spirit of God.”⁴

3. What Is the *New* Evangelization?

The Re-Evangelization of Lapsed Catholics

The term ‘new evangelization’ was popularized by Pope St. John Paul II, who distinguished three situations in which the Church exercises her apostolic mission:

The fact that there is a diversity of activities *in the Church’s one mission* is not intrinsic to that mission, but arises from the variety of circumstances in which that mission is carried out. Looking at today’s world from the viewpoint of evangelization, we can distinguish *three situations*.

1. First, there is the situation which the Church’s missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in

² CCC 905.

³ Pope St. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Dec 8, 1975), 18.

⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Nov 18, 1992), 10.

their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term.

2. Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care.

3. *Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization.”*⁵

4. Why Should We Evangelize?

For the Glory of God and the Salvation of Souls

The two greatest commandments, love of God and love of neighbor (Matt 22:36-40), both impel us to evangelize. Evangelization is a requirement of love.

1. *We evangelize for the glory of God*

First, and most importantly, we must evangelize out of a sincere love for God and a desire to be obedient to his will, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, he entrusted to his disciples this mission:

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

As modern day disciples of Jesus Christ, these words are also addressed to us. When we evangelize, we glorify God by humbly and faithfully fulfilling his command.

2. *We evangelize to save the souls of others*

Second, love for our neighbors also impels us to evangelize. Authentic love is not just a passion or emotion. “Love is to will the good of another.”⁶ If we truly love others, we desire their good, and especially their ultimate good, which is eternal life with God in heaven. And this ultimate good of

⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (Dec 7, 1990), 33.

⁶ CCC 1766.

eternal life and supernatural happiness can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. As the Catechism teaches: “Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation.”⁷ If we listen to the words of Jesus himself, we can come to no other conclusion: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16); “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

3. We evangelize to save our own souls

Finally, our own salvation is also at stake. Jesus our Lord says to us: “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32-33). Hence St. Paul says: “If I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). St. Augustine understood this well, saying to his people:

If I speak out to you, I save my own soul. For I am not merely in great danger if I hold my tongue but I am already condemned to destruction. But when I have spoken out and thus fulfilled my duty look you to your own danger. For what do I desire or wish? What yearnings have I? Why do I address you? Why do I sit here; nay why do I live at all except for this one object, that we may live together in Christ? This is my one desire, my glory, my honor, my joy, my one possession. But if you do not hear me and if I have not held my tongue, I shall save my soul. But I do not wish to be saved without you.⁸

In the end, there are only two paths: the way of salvation through faith as a disciple of Jesus Christ, which leads to eternal life with God in heaven, and the way of perdition, which leads to eternal death in hell. As Jesus himself said: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt 7:13-14). God sets before each of us a choice between life and death. The stakes could not be higher. So let us choose life! And let us never cease to urge others to do the same!

⁷ CCC 161.

⁸ St. Augustine, Sermon 17 on Psalm 49.

5. Who Should Evangelize?

All the Christian Faithful

Evangelization is the primary mission of the Church. This mission is entrusted first and foremost to bishops⁹ and priests,¹⁰ but it extends also to all the baptized. All Christians are obliged to participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. This call to mission is one of the proper effects of baptism, which is completed and perfected by the sacrament of confirmation.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. *The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.* Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.¹¹

One engages in the apostolate through the faith, hope, and charity which the Holy Spirit diffuses in the hearts of all members of the Church. Indeed, by the precept of charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, all the faithful are impelled to promote the glory of God through the coming of his kingdom and to obtain eternal life for all men—that they may know the only true God and him whom he sent, Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3). *On all Christians therefore is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world.*¹²

6. Who Needs to Be Evangelized?

Practicing Catholics; Lapsed Catholics; Non-Catholics

Practicing Catholics need to be more thoroughly **conformed** to the Gospel and then **formed** as missionary disciples to sanctify their homes and workplaces and to work for the evangelization of those whom they encounter in their daily lives; fallen away Catholics need to be **re-evangelized** to bring them back to a living relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church; non-Catholics need to be **evangelized** so that being converted to faith in Jesus Christ they may enter into his Church.

⁹ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (Nov 21, 1964), 24: “Bishops, as successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord, to whom was given all power in heaven and on earth, the mission to teach all nations and to preach the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain to salvation by faith, baptism and the fulfilment of the commandments.”

¹⁰ CCC 1565: “Through the sacrament of Holy Orders priests share in the universal dimensions of the mission that Christ entrusted to the apostles. The spiritual gift they have received in ordination prepares them, not for a limited and restricted mission, ‘but for the fullest, in fact the universal mission of salvation ‘to the end of the earth,’ ‘prepared in spirit to preach the Gospel everywhere.’”

¹¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (Nov 24, 2013), 120.

¹² Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3.

Outwardly evangelization addresses those who have not heard the Gospel or who, having heard it, have stopped practicing their faith, and those who seek the fullness of faith. It calls us to work for full communion among all who confess Jesus but do not yet realize the unity for which Christ prayed. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on missionary activity, summed up the three objectives of mission:

1. to proclaim the Gospel to all people;
2. to help bring about the reconversion of those who have received the Gospel but live it only nominally;
3. and to deepen the Gospel in the lives of believers.¹³

7. What Is the Goal of Evangelization?

Conversion of Hearts and Lives: Repentance and Faith

The basic proclamation of the Gospel consists in a call to repentance and faith: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). Genuine repentance and true faith require a complete change, that is, a conversion, or re-orientation of our ways of thinking, acting, and living.

Faith radically changes our way of thinking. By faith we offer our minds to God, believing all that he has revealed to us in and through his Son Jesus Christ because of our complete trust in his perfect wisdom and perfect truthfulness.

Repentance radically changes our way of acting. By repentance we offer our hearts to God in a way that necessarily involves (1) acknowledgement of personal sin; (2) true sorrow for our sins; (3) a firm and sincere intention not to sin anymore; (4) and for Catholics, the intention of going to confession.

Conversion, therefore, involves a complete transformation of our whole lives:

Conversion is the change of our lives that comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit. All who accept the Gospel undergo change as we continually put on the mind of Christ by rejecting sin and becoming more faithful disciples in his Church. Unless we undergo conversion, we have not truly accepted the Gospel.¹⁴

This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! We must respond to Jesus Christ. And we must be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit who will continue to convert us as we follow Christ. If our faith is alive, it will be aroused again and again as we mature.¹⁵

According to Sherry Weddell, there are five key thresholds of conversion:

1. **Initial trust:** 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 *not* the same as active

¹³ USCCB, *Go and Make Disciples*, 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.¹⁶

2. **Spiritual curiosity:** A person finds himself *intrigued* 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.¹⁷
3. **Spiritual openness:** A person acknowledges to himself or herself and to God that he or she is open to the *possibility* of personal and spiritual change. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a postmodern nonbeliever. Openness is not a commitment to change. People who are open are simply admitting they are *open to the possibility* of change.¹⁸
4. **Spiritual seeking:** 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 are 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.¹⁹
5. **Intentional Discipleship:** This is the decision to “drop one’s nets,” to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder one’s life accordingly.²⁰

8. How Should We Evangelize?

Be Holy and Talk to People about Jesus

Evangelization consists in proclaiming Jesus Christ risen from the dead “by word and the testimony of life.”²¹ The two keys to evangelization, therefore, are these: to become holy and to talk to people about Jesus. It is a simple formula but not an easy one. For most of us, growth in holiness is a long, slow work-in-progress. And it can often be very difficult to talk to people about Jesus, especially when we are afraid that our words will not be well received by the other. But “perfect love casts out fear,” as St. John teaches us (1 John 4:18). And we pray in the Psalms: “The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life: of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps 27:1). Therefore, we should take comfort and heed the words of our Lord, who says to his disciples: “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent” (Acts 27:24).

¹⁶ Sherry A. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 129.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ CCC 905.

A. Be Holy

Personal holiness is absolutely necessary in order to proclaim Christ effectively by the testimony of our lives. Pope St. Paul VI spoke beautifully about the importance of giving an authentic living witness to the faith we believe and proclaim:

Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization.²²

Our first priority, therefore, must be to commit ourselves in a serious way to strive for real holiness in our daily lives. But what does that look like? What are the first steps to take on the path to holiness?

1. Obey the Commandments

The first and most basic step on the path toward holiness is a firm resolution to obey the commandments of God. As Jesus himself says: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Matt 19:17). Hence we must do all in our power to avoid at least all grave sins. To do that we must obey the Ten Commandments. As the Catechism reminds us:

Since they express man’s fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbor, the Ten Commandments reveal, in their primordial content, grave obligations. They are fundamentally immutable, and they oblige always and everywhere. No one can dispense from them. The Ten Commandments are engraved by God in the human heart.²³

Avoiding all mortal sin is no small challenge. The Ten Commandments require us both to avoid individual grave sins (such as not killing, lying, or stealing) and to extricate ourselves from situations of ongoing grave sin (such as living in a state of unmarried cohabitation or in an adulterous second union). But no matter how difficult or seemingly impossible, with the grace of God all things are possible (cf. Luke 1:37): “For God commands not impossibilities, but, by commanding, he both admonishes you to do what you are able, and to pray for what you are not able, and he aids you so that you may be able; whose commandments are not heavy; whose yoke is sweet and whose burden light (cf. Matt 11:30).”²⁴

²² St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21.

²³ CCC 2072.

²⁴ Council of Trent, Session VI, *Decree on Justification*, 11.

2. Receive the Sacraments

We will not be able to obey the commandments of God consistently without regular devout participation in the sacramental life of the Church, which means attending **Mass** at least every Sunday and holy day of obligation, and even more often if possible; making a good **confession** frequently—ideally every month or at least every time one is conscious of having committed a mortal sin; receiving Jesus Christ frequently and worthily in **Holy Communion**, taking care to examine oneself carefully so as not to approach unworthily. For we are taught in Sacred Scripture that: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor 11:27-29).

3. Pray Every Day

In addition to receiving the sacraments frequently and worthily, we should also commit to a daily routine of prayer, at least **15 minutes** per day. Those who have already established the habit of 15 minutes of daily prayer should strive for 30 minutes or even an hour. Those who can should make a weekly holy hour in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Pope St. John Paul II was especially ardent in encouraging eucharistic **adoration**:

It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the beloved disciple (cf. John 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the “art of prayer,” how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament?²⁵

Our daily routine of prayer should include vocal and mental prayer: “Through his Word, God speaks to man. By words, mental or vocal, our prayer takes flesh. Yet it is most important that the heart should be present to him to whom we are speaking in prayer.”²⁶

Mental prayer begins with meditation, which “engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire.”²⁷ Spiritual reading is especially helpful in order to sustain the attentiveness required for fruitful meditation: “We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the **Sacred Scriptures**, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality,” etc.²⁸

The Church “forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful . . . to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of

²⁵ St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Apr 17, 2003), 25.

²⁶ CCC 2700.

²⁷ CCC 2708.

²⁸ Ibid.

Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles.’”²⁹

4. Deny Yourself

The Catechism reminds us that holiness cannot be acquired without mortification, the practice of dying-to-oneself on a daily basis: “The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the *ascesis* and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes.”³⁰ The experience and example of the saints teach us the same thing. According to St. Philip Neri, “Where there is no great mortification there is no great sanctity.”³¹ The practice of making voluntary sacrifices, big and small, has to inform our whole lives and not be limited just to the season of Lent. For the Lord Jesus says, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

At a minimum, the penitential nature of Fridays throughout the year must be re-claimed: “Friday should be in each week something of what Lent is in the entire year.”³² The Bishops of the United States have determined that Catholics are free to choose a form of weekly Friday penance other than abstinence from meat: “since the spirit of penance primarily suggests that we discipline ourselves in that which we enjoy most, to many in our day abstinence from meat no longer implies penance, while renunciation of other things would be more penitential.”³³ Hence Catholics who choose to eat meat on Fridays throughout the year must perform some other voluntary act of penance in order to observe the penitential nature of Friday. However, the traditional practice of abstaining from meat on all Fridays throughout the year is still particularly recommended:

Among the works of voluntary self-denial and personal penance which we especially commend to our people for the future observance of Friday . . . we give first place to abstinence from flesh meat. We do so in the hope that the Catholic community will ordinarily continue to abstain from meat by free choice as formerly we did in obedience to Church law.³⁴

We will not fully reclaim **Sunday** as a day of worship and holy leisure in honor of our Lord’s Resurrection if we do not also reclaim **Friday** as a day of penance in remembrance of his saving Passion.

5. Do Good Works

Finally, in order to allow the testimony of our lives to be a living witness to the saving truth and beauty of the Gospel, we must be actively engaged in good works, especially the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. According to the Second Vatican Council:

²⁹ CCC 2653.

³⁰ CCC 2015.

³¹ Jill Haak Adels, *The Wisdom of the Saints: An Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 173.

³² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence* (1966), 23. Cf. Code of Canon Law (1983), can. 1250: “The penitential days and times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.”

³³ Ibid., 20.

³⁴ Ibid., 24.

There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. ***The very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men to belief and to God;*** for the Lord says, “Even so let your light shine before men in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).³⁵

We proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ by sharing his love with those we encounter in visiting the sick and lonely, in providing for the poor and needy, in supporting our parishes by tithing, in supporting good community works, either directly by our participation or indirectly by our charitable giving, and in so many more ways.

B. Talk to People about Jesus

The witness of a holy life is a good beginning, but it is absolutely necessary also to use words. Why are words so important? In the first place, the spoken word allows the witness of a holy life to be correctly understood and interpreted. But even more importantly, the preached word is the seed by which faith is sown in the heart. As St. Paul says to the Romans:

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? . . . So, faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. (Rom 10:13-14,17)

Hence the Second Vatican Council stresses the inadequacy of silent witness alone:

An apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one’s way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life.³⁶

And Pope St. Paul VI makes the same point in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

Nevertheless, this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified—what Peter called always having “your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have”—and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. ***There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.***³⁷

However, we must also remember that evangelization is most effective in the context of personal relationship. God created us in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26); and he is in himself a Trinitarian relationship of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; hence it follows that we too have been made for relationships. What this means for evangelization, then, is that more programs (by themselves) are not

³⁵ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22.

the answer. Rather, in a culture that is becoming increasingly isolated and lonely, we must learn anew to build healthy Christ-centered relationships, both with other believers so that we will find strength in authentic Christian community and with non-believers so as to introduce them to the God who dwells within us by grace. In short, in an individualistic culture where many people instinctively distrust institutions, including religious institutions like the Church, our evangelical efforts must be rooted in authentic personal relationships and Christian friendship, much like that of Jesus with the twelve apostles.

Not all of the following examples will apply to every individual or to every stage or state of life. They are intended as a general outline of the relationships in which we are called to talk to people about Jesus.

1. Talk to Your Immediate Family about Jesus

Evangelization begins at home. Not all of us are called to travel to the ends of the earth as missionaries, but we are all called to share the Gospel with those closest to us. This applies especially to parents:

By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, ***the first heralds of the Gospel for their children.*** Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ—both the Eucharistic and the ecclesial Body—they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit’s renewal flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.³⁸

2. Talk to Your Extended Family about Jesus

When extended families are divided over matters of faith, it can be especially challenging to talk about Jesus on account of the fear of disturbing the peace of a family gathering or of damaging relationships that we care about deeply. Of course we must use prudence in discerning the right time and place for sensitive conversations, but the depth of our love for our extended families and our concern for their ultimate salvation will not allow us to remain silent forever.

3. Talk to Your Friends about Jesus

The scope of our efforts to evangelize through our words should extend as far as the circles of our influence, and that certainly includes our friendships. Our friends are usually the people we speak to most often after our immediate family members. Friendships usually develop around shared interests and so we naturally want to talk to our friends about whatever those interests are, whether books, or movies, sports or politics, gardening or anything else. All this is natural and good, but conversation about Jesus should not take the last place in our friendships. Ask your non-Catholic friends (in a non-threatening way) what they believe about God and why. Be prepared to share your faith with them as well. Ask your fallen-away Catholic friends why they have stopped going to church, or why you have not seen them recently at church? Be prepared to listen patiently and gently encourage them to come back. Ask your Catholic friends about the challenges of their day-to-day experience of following Jesus: how do you make time for prayer? What spiritual books are you reading? What do you do for evening or bedtime prayers? How often do you go to confession or to Mass? By asking questions such as these

³⁸ Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), 39.

you can encourage your friends in their own pursuit of holiness and you might also learn things that challenge you to greater holiness of life as well.

4. Talk to Your Co-Workers and Fellow Parishioners about Jesus

For many of us, the people we interact with most on a daily basis are our co-workers, who range from casual acquaintances to close friends. In our own parishes as well there are usually some who are close friends and others whose faces we may recognize but whose names we might not even know. While it is not necessary (nor even possible) to be close friends with everyone, we should strive to build positive relationships with those around us, so that we can more easily engage our non-Catholic co-workers in conversation about Jesus, especially about how we have experienced his love and what a positive difference following him makes in our own lives. Building our relationships with Catholic co-workers and fellow parishioners likewise makes it easier to engage in conversations about Jesus that can mutually challenge, encourage, and inspire us in our journeys of faith and conversion.

5. Talk to Strangers about Jesus

Finally, we should not overlook the example of so many saintly apostles and evangelists throughout the ages who did not hesitate to speak about Jesus even to strangers. This can take various forms, such as street preaching or going door-to-door, or simply striking up conversations with strangers wherever you happen to be: in coffee shops, airports, waiting rooms, check-out lines, and so forth. Parishes can send attractive postcards with Mass and confession times to houses in their area or to addresses on their registration lists, inviting people to come to church. Teams of people can walk through neighborhoods handing out pamphlets with Mass and confession times, inviting people to attend parish events, or asking people if there is anything they would like us to pray with them for. The invitation to prayer is often especially powerful.

9. Focus Areas for Parish Evangelization Plans

Catholic parishes play an indispensable role in the evangelization of their own local communities. Parishes are called to participate in the mission of the universal Church, which is, in the words of Jesus himself, to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20).

Parishes, as part of their regular planning process, need to examine their activities in light of this plan [for evangelization]. They should consider how to give their present ministry a clearer evangelizing focus and how new ministries might be formed to achieve the goals of this plan. Each parish should have an evangelization team trained and prepared to help the whole parish implement the goals and objectives of this plan. These teams could help train Catholics in evangelization and provide resources to individuals, families, and parish groups. Parishes might even consider designating a trained person as a full-time coordinator of evangelization.³⁹

Here are outlined some focus areas for parishes to consider in developing their own evangelization plans, taking into account the unique gifts, strengths, and needs of each parish.

³⁹ USCCB, *Go and Make Disciples*, 136C.

1. The Power and Appeal of Beauty

Beauty has a universal appeal. We should lead with beauty, especially in the liturgy, so that people experience something evidently sacred and are given a sense of encountering the divine. The Church purports to put people in touch with the divine, but what someone sees and hears when he enters a Catholic Church does not always reflect this. There should be outward visible signs of reverence to indicate to an outsider that the people here believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

2. Sacramental Preparation

Times of preparation for receiving the sacraments are golden opportunities for evangelization. Sacramental preparation must of course include some necessary catechetical instruction, but we must not lose sight of the fact that many people approaching the Church to receive the sacraments have never really been effectively evangelized. Hence preparation for the sacraments should always include a basic proclamation of the kerygma (the core Gospel message). Sacramental preparation should be aimed both at the head (catechetical instruction) and at the heart (personal encounter with the love of Jesus Christ) so that it results in a real desire to live an active Christian life as part of a local parish community. When people consistently disappear from the parish community shortly after receiving a sacrament, this is a good indication that our preparation programs are not doing what they should.

3. Works of Justice and Mercy

Works of justice and mercy have a powerful appeal, perhaps more than ever in our time. We should engage people, especially young people, in doing works of justice and mercy. As Bishop Robert Barron recently said, “We have a very powerful tradition around doing the works of justice, and young people like it. I think we should lead with it.”⁴⁰

4. Intellectual Formation

Truth has a powerful appeal as well. We should take advantage of the intellectual tradition of the Church rather than dumbing down the faith. To quote Bishop Barron again, “We have a very smart tradition, but we have not communicated that effectively to our young people.”⁴¹ Catholic schools and parish religious formation programs for people of all ages play an indispensable part in this. As one example, a more thorough and engaging presentation of apologetics can be very helpful in equipping people to answer common objections against the truth of our faith.

5. Engage Families and Young People

The family is the domestic church. Parents are the first teachers and evangelists of their children. We should do all we can to shift our primary emphasis away from directly teaching children, often without the parents’ involvement, to equipping parents to teach the faith to their own children. We also need to engage young people, who are often more open and seeking than their elders. Great good can be done by getting motivated young people together. And in many cases, parents can be indirectly evangelized through their children.

⁴⁰ Gretchen R. Crowe, “Bishop Barron’s five paths for bringing the unaffiliated back to the Church,” *Our Sunday Visitor* (Nov 11, 2019).

⁴¹ Ibid.

6. Missionary Perspective

We need to reorient our perspective from inward looking to outward looking parishes, from a dynamic of serving the people who come to us, to one of finding people to serve. Every parish should be an outward looking missionary society that seeks out the lost and marginalized in order to proclaim the love of Christ to them: “People typically aren’t going to come to us. We have to go out to them.”⁴²

7. New Media and Technology

We have to reach people where they are. And in our time that requires effective use of new media and technology. “Using this tool, which didn’t exist even 10 years ago, we can now reach into their world. We should invest a lot of time and money in getting really good people to work our social media.”⁴³

10. Summary and Recapitulation

1. What Is the Gospel?

The basic Gospel message can be summarized in four points: God made us for **Relationship** with him; by sin we have **Ruined** that relationship; in his great mercy God sent his Son to **Restore** us to right relationship with him as his beloved sons and daughters; this requires from us the **Response** of repentance and faith.

2. What Is Evangelization?

Evangelization is essentially the proclamation, by words and deeds, of the hope of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, aimed at the conversion of those who hear the divine message.

3. What Is the New Evangelization?

According to Pope St. John Paul II, the term “new evangelization” refers to the “re-evangelization” of lapsed Catholics. This is the mission which the Church carries out in situations “where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.”⁴⁴

4. Why Should We Evangelize?

Evangelization is a requirement of love. In the first place, we must evangelize out of a sincere love for God, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Second, our love for others implies that we sincerely desire their good, and especially their ultimate good, which is eternal life with God in heaven, which can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. And finally, our own salvation is also at stake. For Jesus says to us: “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32-33).

⁴² Crowe, “Bishop Barron’s Five Paths.”

⁴³ Crowe, “Bishop Barron’s Five Paths.”

⁴⁴ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 33.

5. Who Should Evangelize?

The mission of evangelization is entrusted first and foremost to bishops and priests, but it extends also to all the baptized. All Christians are obliged to participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. This call to mission is one of the proper effects of baptism, which is completed and perfected by the sacrament of confirmation. In the words of Pope Francis: “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.”⁴⁵

6. Who Needs to Be Evangelized?

All of us need to be evangelized in some way: practicing Catholics need to be more thoroughly **conformed** to the Gospel and then **formed** as missionary disciples to sanctify their homes and workplaces and to work for the evangelization of those whom they encounter in their daily lives; fallen away Catholics need to be **re-evangelized** to bring them back to a living relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church; non-Catholics need to be **evangelized** so that being converted to faith in Jesus Christ they may enter into his Church.

7. What Is the Goal of Evangelization?

The goal of evangelization is to bring people to repentance and faith, which implies a radical conversion to a life of continual growth as an intentional disciple of Jesus Christ. By faith we offer our minds to God, believing all that he has revealed to us in and through his Son Jesus Christ because of our complete trust in his perfect wisdom and perfect truthfulness. By repentance we offer our hearts to God in a way that necessarily involves (1) acknowledgement of personal sin; (2) true sorrow for our sins; (3) a firm and sincere intention not to sin anymore; (4) and for Catholics, the intention of going to confession. Conversion, therefore, involves a complete transformation of our whole lives.

8. How Should We Evangelize?

Evangelization consists in proclaiming Jesus Christ risen from the dead “by word and the testimony of life.”⁴⁶ The two keys to evangelization, therefore, are these: to become holy and to talk to people about Jesus. The pursuit of holiness, which is necessary in order to proclaim Christ effectively by the testimony of our lives, involves (1) obedience to the commandments of God; (2) regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church; (3) daily prayer; (4) daily mortification; and (5) doing good works, especially the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. This silent testimony of a holy life, however, is not enough if we do not also use words to talk to others about Jesus. In the words of Pope St. Paul VI: “The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.”⁴⁷ Hence we should talk about Jesus (1) with our immediate family, especially parents with their own children; (2) with our extended family; (3) with our friends; (4) with our co-workers and fellow parishioners; and even (5) with strangers.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

⁴⁶ CCC 905.

⁴⁷ St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22.

9. Focus Areas for Parish Evangelization Plans

Catholic parishes play an indispensable role in the evangelization of their own local communities. Parishes are called to participate in the evangelizing mission of the universal Church. Parishes should, therefore, “as part of their regular planning process . . . examine their activities in light of this plan” for evangelization. “They should consider how to give their present ministry a clearer evangelizing focus and how new ministries might be formed to achieve the goals of this plan.”⁴⁸ Particular areas for parishes to focus on in developing their own evangelization plans, taking into account the unique gifts, strengths, and needs of each parish, include the following: (1) the power and appeal of beauty; (2) sacramental preparation; (3) works of justice and mercy; (4) intellect formation, both in Catholic schools and in parish religious formation programs for parishioners of all ages; (5) the important role of the family as a domestic church; (6) the missionary perspective of the parish; and (7) the use of new media and technology is being able to reach people where they are.

⁴⁸ USCCB, *Go and Make Disciples*, 136C.