



SESSION 4: IN THE TRENCHES

Segment 1 Video: “The Art of Invitation”, Leah Darrow

Call to Prayer

“Lord Jesus, you always hear us when we call and listen to our prayer. Help us to listen to others well as we journey with them. Give us hearts that are not set on the fruit of our work but that embrace our journey with those we engage in relationship with. Help us to be bold when the time comes to proclaim the Gospel and to, by our actions and words, always communicate how much we care about those we serve. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Summary

Evangelization requires a relationship, and relationships require conversation. Initiating and sustaining a conversation is an art that has become difficult as technology has increasingly replaced face to face interaction for many. As evangelists, building interpersonal relationships based on conversation is key to inviting someone into a relationship with Jesus.

Evangelization requires that we show those with whom we are talking that we genuinely care about them. If they do not believe we truly care about them, nothing we say will matter. Understanding body language is an important part of conversation with people as well. As it helps us understand if what we are saying is impacting the person we are talking to or if we need to redirect the conversation.

Listening is critical. Listening is not merely waiting to speak; it is foundational to building a relationship. Asking questions expresses our interest in that person’s life. You must also be brave when the Holy Spirit prompts you to speak and reach out to someone. Also, be prepared to give a reason for your hope when someone asks you about your faith. We need to be patient, not expecting to see immediate fruits from our evangelization efforts. We need to be prepared to walk with people long term joyfully.

Personal Reflection:

- ◆ In conversations, do you attentively listen to the other person or are you thinking about what you are going to say next? Why is listening so challenging?
- ◆ What communication challenges exist in our current culture? How can we overcome these challenges personally and in evangelization?
- ◆ Describe a time you felt someone really listened to you—why was this an important moment?
- ◆ Which of Leah’s three tips for relationships do you struggle with most—listening, asking questions, or being bold? Why?

Frequently, we talk about ourselves rather than engaging with the other person because we want affirmation. This can get in the way of evangelization. This week, journal about some ways you can affirm those who are close to you in terms of their gifts and talents. Be intentional, focusing on the person you are speaking with. keep redirecting the conversation back toward them. If making small talk is difficult for you, write down several questions you can use to get the person to speak about themselves. Try to remember them if the conversation seems to be dying down or if someone is going to start asking questions about you.



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Segment 2 Video: “Young Adults”, Fr. Mike Schmitz

Call to Prayer

Lord Jesus, bind us together as a community. Through the Holy Spirit, give us aid to support one another, bear the burdens of one another, and rejoice with one another. Provide us with wisdom as we discern how to build communities within our parish that will help people grow as disciples, experience your presence, and go forward to share the Gospel. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Summary

Community doesn't just happen. Building community requires intentional time, effort, perseverance, and strategy. It also requires the right environment to grow. Simply grouping people together does not guarantee success. We need to create environments that are supportive to the growth of community and have the ability to sustain it.

There are several ways to foster environments that support small group communities. Sharing meals creates an environment that is welcoming and allows people to be open. Vulnerability is an essential component of creating a small group community and this requires leaders to model vulnerability. Being overly judgmental in a group can destroy authentic sharing, so we need to charitably correct any tendencies towards judgment.

Small group communities are not social clubs or support groups; rather, they are supportive communities that help people grow as disciples. Every small group community must have Jesus at the center. When a group drifts away from being focused on the Lord, it quickly loses its purpose and will become ineffective.

Personal Reflection:

- ◆ Does our parish currently have small group communities? How effective have these communities been? What has been successful? What needs improvement?
- ◆ What small group communities are you a part of? Think about groups of friends, co-workers, people you see at the gym, etc. How did these groups form? What qualities do they have in common? How are they sustained?
- ◆ Have you ever experienced failure in a small group setting or were you ever a part of a small group community that fell apart? What happened?

We are all part of at least a couple of small groups. Our families, co-workers, and other people we interact with often. How do you invest in these relationships? Many people are hungry for being part of a community, but they're waiting for someone to start it.

Pick one of the groups you're a part of. For the next month, introduce some of the ideas from this week's video (shared meals, vulnerability, less criticism or judgment, be more Christ focused). Assess your progress weekly.



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Segment 3 Video: “An Invitation to Freedom”, Mario Pablo

Call to Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are calling us to freedom. You never place burdens on us that are too heavy to carry. You provide us the grace we need to pursue holiness and break chains that bind us. Be with us as we enter into this invitation to freedom and guide our discussion. Keep us open to the way you want to move in our community and make us bold in proclaiming your truth. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Summary

The gap between the moral law, which has been given to us by God, and civil law, which is handed down by human authorities, has been widening in recent decades. A result of this is the Church’s teaching on moral law—is increasingly being seen as irrelevant and as an obstacle to progress. Many call on the Church to revise teachings to “keep up with the times.” To the modern secular mind the Church is seen as closed-minded, restrictive, judgmental, and outdated.

The moral law, as given to us by God, commands a standard of conduct that respects the inherent dignity of every human person. It seeks to promote true human freedom rather than restricting it. But many do not see that in the moral law, as taught by the Church. Some people struggle with a particular teaching, others have had poor experiences with the Church or its ministers, others find the idea of unchanging, God-given morality difficult to accept.

Civil laws are usually easier for people to accept because they concern immediate realities and consequences. They impact our “external” freedom. Breaking a law results, upon conviction, in some legal punishment—or fine or imprisonment or both. The moral law, though, is ultimately concerned with “interior” freedom. It is rooted in a deeper spiritual reality that leads us to be truly free.

Our encounter with the freedom Jesus brings us must be shared with others. We have been called to share with them the “truth that sets us free” so that they might experience authentic, love, joy, and freedom.

Personal Reflection:

- ◆ All of us know people who struggle with the moral teaching of the Church. In your view, what is the origin of this struggle? Is it truly a struggle with a particular teaching or a poor experience with the Church, and its members?
- ◆ What are some of the most challenging moral questions facing those in your community? Are we doing an effective job providing them with guidance? Discuss ways we can be more effective.
- ◆ Do you seek to meet people where they are? Are you engaging with the topics they struggle with or care about?
- ◆ What are the most difficult moral teachings to address? Discuss any fears or obstacles to presenting these teachings.

In Genesis, Jacob wrestles with a mysterious figure throughout the night (see Genesis 32:22-30). At the end of this struggle, Jacob realizes that he was contending with God and receives a new name—Israel, which means “to strive (or struggle) with God.” Many rabbinic sources view this narrative as permission to engage in a struggle with God. One might struggle with some of the Church’s moral teachings. If we try to run from these struggles, we will never grow in our faith—or we will simply ignore a particular teaching. Instead, we need to wrestle with those moral laws we find difficult. This involves asking questions and listening to answers, all while maintaining trust in the Church—and, more importantly, in the Holy Spirit that lives within and guides the Church.