

Mission and evangelism are not the same thing. Mission is concerned with all God's purposes for the world. Evangelism is that part of mission whereby men and women become disciples of Jesus Christ.

There are many different ways of evangelizing, but in each the message of God's love for the world revealed in Jesus is made known so that people respond and become part of God's Church, i.e. that community of disciples which participates in the mission of God.

Catholic evangelism is particularly shaped by a belief in the converting power of worship, an emphasis on the beauty and attraction of holiness, an understanding of evangelism as an accompanied journey, a passionate concern for justice, and a conviction that coming to Christ also means being part of the Church.

Developing a ministry of evangelism in the local church

Some people are brought up in a Christian home and nurtured within the life of the Church. That is the way that they become disciples. Many people do not have this experience. They have little or no understanding of the Christian faith. For these becoming a Christian will be like a journey. Therefore the ministry of evangelism is best understood as helping people make the journey.

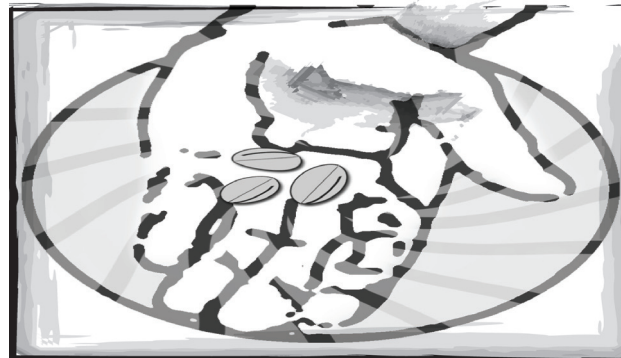
'The journey starts where people are and with their concerns and perplexities.'

This journey has four broad stages:

1. Introducing the Christian faith so that people can take a first (often tentative) step on the Christian way

- one-off events that gather people together around a common issue or interest, such as an evening for parents at the local school, or a lunch for pensioners
- making the most of the church year through liturgies planned with 'new' as well as 'old' churchgoers in mind at Harvest or Thanksgiving, All Souls' tide, Christmas, etc.
- liturgies of healing and reconciliation
- weekends of mission and outreach
- pastoral care of those who do not yet come to church through, for example, visiting and the opportunities given by baptisms, weddings, funerals

The journey starts where people are and with their concerns and perplexities. This is the model Jesus gave us when on the road to Emmaus he began by asking: 'What are you discussing . . . while you walk along?' (Luke 24: 17, NRSV) Each church needs an evangelistic programme which encourages people to begin the journey.



2. Developing a place of nurture where people can explore the Christian faith and experience Christian community

- nurture courses such as Emmaus or Alpha
- home grown courses
- liturgical opportunities to find out about faith, such as a teaching Eucharist

Because people know so little about the Christian faith they usually need a place where questions can be explored and faith explained. Often belonging comes before believing. Being made to feel welcome is therefore vital.

3. Making a commitment to Christ within the household of the Church

- the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation
- the affirmation of baptismal faith
- using the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) as part of people's coming to faith

Conversion is a sacred mystery. It is not something we can engineer or control. God is the evangelist. All have to make their own decision about how they respond to the call of the gospel. Each church needs to provide opportunities, both informally and liturgically, for people to respond in the way that is appropriate.

4. Growing as a disciple of Christ

- ongoing programmes of teaching and formation
- helping people to learn to pray
- service to the local community

The best evangelism is ordinary people witnessing to Christ by the lives they lead. This happens when people, and especially new members of the Church, are given help to grow in their faith and discipleship, and to discover their share in the mission of God.

Catholic evangelism is gentle and alluring. The truth and beauty of the gospel are seen in the life of the Church, through its members and through its service to the community. People are attracted to this and are then accompanied on a journey that leads to Christ and is lived out in the Church.

FURTHER READING

Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (1982)

Peter Ball and Malcolm Grundy, *Faith on the Way: A Practical Parish Guide to the Adult Catechumenate* (2001)

Stephen Cottrell, *From the Abundance of the Heart: Catholic Evangelism for all Christians* (2006)

Dear Lord, let me preach thee without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to thee. Amen.

Adapted by Mother Teresa of Calcutta from a prayer by John Henry Newman.

Catholic Evangelism

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