

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Synod 2014

Background Paper:

***The Call of the
New Evangelization***

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Table of Contents

- I. Introduction: Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity

This section was written Bishop Donald J. Hying, the Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, and it serves as the introduction for all eight Synod background papers. Bishop Hying presents “intentional discipleship” as our fundamental Catholic identity and the singular focus for all of our Synod considerations and challenges us to view all aspects of the Church in light of “formation for discipleship.”
- II. The Call of the New Evangelization: Introduction and Overview
- III. The Call of the New Evangelization: Current Cultural Realities
- IV. The Call of the New Evangelization: Theological Foundations
- V. The Call of the New Evangelization: Other Related Information
- VI. The Call of the New Evangelization: Key Issues to Be Addressed
- VII. The Call of the New Evangelization: Key Questions for Consideration
- VIII. The Call of the New Evangelization: Conclusion

I. Introduction: Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity

Introduction written by Bishop Donald J. Hying

In the Gospels, Jesus confronts us with a fundamental question: Who do you say that I am? As Christians and members of the Church, we answer with Simon, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” In faith, we can add Savior, Light of the world, the Word made flesh, the Resurrection, the Prince of Peace. Through the saving activity of Jesus’ Incarnation, life, death and resurrection, we become adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, all in the mystery, communion and sacrament of the Church. The relationship that Jesus enjoys with the Father by nature of who he is, we receive as a pure offer of grace.

Baptized into the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, we proclaim Christ’s saving Gospel through a faith lived out in the words, actions, work, relationships and values of our lives. Our fundamental identity as disciples of Jesus Christ gives focus and method to the important activity of the new evangelization. As we painfully know, too many Catholics have not really been evangelized to know and experience the personal love of Jesus Christ, have been poorly catechized in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, and do not participate in the sacramental life of the Church in any meaningful way. If we seek to change this disturbing trend, parishes must continue to grow in their fundamental identity as dynamic communities of faith which form intentional disciples. If we are not focused on formation for discipleship, we are failing the mission of Christ.

What do intentional Catholic disciples look like? How do they act? What is qualitatively different about their lives and personalities? The answer is clear yet challenging. Disciples are ordinary people who have experienced the love, forgiveness, presence, consolation and challenge of God poured out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. They have fallen in love with the Lord and find their deepest identity in their relationship with him. They find God and the mission of his Kingdom to be the fundamental purpose of their lives and, having a strong **Catholic identity**, find the whole Catholic experience of the Scriptures, sacraments, moral life and prayer to be the transformative means of their ongoing conversion. As Paul discovered on the road to Damascus, they are people loved and forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Disciples instinctively **evangelize**, that is they naturally share their experience of God and their faith in him with others. The power of moral example itself evangelizes, as others intuitively sense that such a person lives from a very different center of meaning and purpose than secular society. In addition to witnessing by example, disciples are both courageous and articulate in their proclamation of Jesus and the difference he has made in their lives. They will freely pray with others, do volunteer work, witness to how the Lord has worked in their daily experience, offer moral advice when asked, share spiritual books, CDs and DVDs with family, friends and co-workers, all the while actively cultivating a discipleship response in those around them. The power of one Catholic who knows, practices and proclaims the faith is truly remarkable.

An intentional disciple is a good **steward**, knowing that everything in life is a superabundant gift freely bestowed upon us by the Lord, both to enrich us but also to bless and benefit others. This deep conviction of existence as a gift leads to a profound gratitude that pours itself out in deeds of mercy, love and healing. Like Mary who anoints the feet of Jesus with an extravagant costly perfume that cost 300 days' wages, we are compelled to break open and pour out the gifts of our lives in loving service of others and so fill the world with the sacred fragrance of Christ.

An intentional disciple is a Catholic maximalist, not asking what the minimum is that **must** be done in order to be saved, but rather asking what **can** be done for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Like St. Paul, a disciple has moved from the obligation of the law into the astonishing freedom of Christ, who liberates us to do every good work. In this context, the Blessed Virgin Mary is clearly the first and premier disciple who responds in total faith to the seemingly impossible proposal of the angel, places her entire being at the service of God and gives flesh to the Incarnate Word.

St. Augustine insists that when a Christian disciple places the whole mystery and gift of life at the service of God, the Lord Jesus takes flesh within that person and is offered to the world once again. For us as Catholics, in this critical moment in history, we cannot afford to proceed with business as usual. All over the world, millions of Catholics are asking the same questions:

- How can I have a deeper and more authentic relationship with Jesus Christ?
- How can I more effectively live out my faith in such a way that it actually makes a difference in the lives of others, especially my family and friends?
- How can we continue to insert Gospel values into the public square of politics, economy, health care and education?
- How can we bring back all of those Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of the faith?

In millions of different ways, intentional disciples are living out the exciting answers to these important questions. If the Gospel is the script of our lives, the new evangelization is the urgent challenge to act out with fresh enthusiasm and generosity the great drama of Christ's salvation.

Synod 2014 invites us to consider anew how to be intentional disciples, especially in the areas of Catholic Social Teaching, Cultural Diversity, Evangelization, Formation, Leadership, Liturgy, Marriage and Family, and Stewardship.

II. The Call of the New Evangelization: Introduction and Overview

Intentional disciples embody the call of the New Evangelization, because evangelization is at the very heart of what Catholic intentional disciples do. Put another way, evangelization is the lifestyle of the Catholic intentional disciple. Evangelization is Catholic identity set in motion through a life of intentional discipleship empowered by the overflowing gifts of the Holy Spirit.

For many, if not most, Catholics, the simple mention of the word, “Evangelization,” elicits a visceral reaction of fear, confusion, suspicion, and negativity. There are many reasons why this is so. The word itself is not part of our everyday Catholic lexicon. It is as if “evangelization” is a word from a foreign language that we have never learned. In an ironic twist given its etymological roots, we find ourselves saying, “It’s all Greek to me!” (“Evangelization” comes from the Greek word meaning “Proclaim the Good News”).

There are many other reasons why we may have negative associations with the word and concept of evangelization. Perhaps it conjures up images of certain questionable televangelists who ask for money in the name of the Lord to support their excessively affluent lifestyles. Maybe we think of people coming to our door at inconvenient times stubbornly promoting their beliefs. Or maybe we think of that friend or relative who keeps quoting Scripture from memory and asking us if we have accepted Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior.

Because of these negative associations, and perhaps others as well, we may resist or even reject the idea of evangelization. But Catholic evangelization is really not any of these things, and it certainly is not something to be feared. In fact, evangelization, properly understood, is something quite normal and natural for all Catholics. Strange as it may seem, evangelization is simply who we are and what we do as everyday Catholic believers.

The simplest and best definition for Catholic evangelization is this: “Doing What Jesus Does!” We do what Jesus does because, through the Sacrament of Baptism, we have been immersed into his life, death, and resurrection. The identity of Jesus is our new and normal Catholic identity. As St. Paul asserts, “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (II Cor. 5: 17).

Evangelization is “Doing What Jesus Does” in three specific ways. We do what Jesus does in the **intentional practice** of our lives, letting ourselves be conformed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to his values, attitudes, and actions. We do what Jesus does through our **intentional witness**, sharing the Good News of the Gospel through our words and deeds. Finally, we do what Jesus does when we **intentionally invite** others to join us in following his ways.

So evangelization is the normal everyday Catholic practice of “Doing What Jesus Does” through intentional practice, intentional witness, and intentional invitation. Another name for this threefold intentional lifestyle is “intentional discipleship.” Intentional disciples evangelize through the practice of Christ, the witness for Christ, and the invitation to Christ. Simply put, evangelization is what intentional disciples do.

So for us to become a Church filled with energized intentional disciples, we need to heed the call of the New Evangelization and cultivate a lifestyle of evangelization in every Catholic. Evangelization is the key because evangelization gives birth to discipleship. Evangelization calls disciples, forms disciples, and sends disciples to make new disciples. This focus on evangelization for discipleship is the succession plan of Jesus and the succession plan of the Church.

Our commitment to evangelization for discipleship not only builds up the Church, it actually is the Church in her essence. Pope Paul VI puts it this way, “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, no. 14). Through evangelization, we become the Church!

This paper will examine the call of the New Evangelization through the following perspectives:

- Current Cultural Realities
- Theological Foundations
- Other Related Information
- Key Issues to be Addressed
- Key Questions for Consideration

III. The Call of the New Evangelization: Current Cultural Realities

The mission of evangelization is as old as the Church herself, going back to the Great Commission when Jesus sent out the first disciples with these words, “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” (Mt. 28: 19-20). Since that time, the message and mission of evangelization has not changed.

Nonetheless, beginning with the Gospels themselves, the Church has shaped the timeless proclamation of the Good News of Jesus to speak to the audience and cultural context of the day. The U.S. Bishops put it this way, “Evangelization occurs most effectively when the Church engages the culture of those she evangelizes” (*Disciples Called to Witness*, USCCB, p. 6)

That is why today we speak of the “New Evangelization,” the mission championed by Pope John Paul II, who recognized that modern realities necessitate an evangelization that is “new in its ardor, methods, and expression” (1983 Address to CELAM, Pope John Paul II, no. 9). He, like his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, saw the urgent need to “re-propose” the Gospel in light of our post-Christian culture, especially to lukewarm and lost Catholics.

What are the current cultural realities giving birth to the New Evangelization? Not that long ago, there was a common cultural matrix upholding the importance and practice of religion. That built-in cultural support is now gone. Meanwhile, the culture now promotes many anti-Gospel values. The respect for the life and dignity of the human person are negotiable values in our society due to abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, capital punishment, violence, human trafficking, and poverty.

Anti-Gospel cultural strains are also manifested in a host of “isms” that distort right relationship with God, neighbor, and self. Materialism idolizes the consumption of material goods. Moral relativism holds that there is no permanent, knowable moral truth. Individualism dismisses the social mortgage that the individual owes to the common good of the group. And secularism idolizes science, technology, and the material world to the point of dismissing the very reality of God.

In the midst of all of these anti-Gospel trends, there also exists the volatile mix of aggressive atheism, systematic attacks on the Catholic Church, widespread ignorance and misinformation about the faith, and a grossly under-informed Catholic constituency.

And then there are the cultural seismic shifts relative to attitudes toward faith and the practice of religion. Religious identity has become fluid, with the “unaffiliated” or “nones” becoming the fastest growing religious demographic in the U.S. (PEW “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” 2008).

In our modern culture Catholicism is struggling. The research indicates that only 23 percent of U.S. Catholics attend Mass each week (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), “Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among U.S. Catholics”). While many still enter the Church, the number of adult converts dropped over 35% from 2000-2009 (*The Catholic Church in the United States at a Glance*, USCCB, 2009).

Many Catholics have left the Church and today they tend to leave at a very early age. Research indicates that most who become unaffiliated (79%) or Protestant (66%) leave the Church by age 23 (*Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell, p. 33). Catholics do not stop attending Mass in response to controversial doctrinal issues. Instead they just gradually slip away from the faith for a variety of reasons (*Disciples Called to Witness*, USCCB, pp. 1-2).

Alarming, many of the Catholics who remain in the Church do not believe they can have a personal relationship with God. Only 60% believe in a personal God and only 48% are “absolutely certain” that a personal relationship with God is possible. The number drops to only 40% for Catholics 18-29. And there is a strong correlation between not having a personal relationship with God and not attending Mass. (all statistics from PEW “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” 2008).

In response to these very challenging cultural realities, our task is to heed the call of the New Evangelization. As the U.S. Bishops state, the call is threefold: “The New Evangelization seeks to invite modern man and culture into a relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. The New Evangelization strives to engage our culture and to help us draw our inspiration from the Gospel. The New Evangelization calls all Catholics first to be evangelized and then in turn to evangelize” (*Disciples Called to Witness*, USCCB, p. v).

The mission is daunting, but the Holy Spirit is with us: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8).

IV. The Call of the New Evangelization: Theological Foundations

The theology that undergirds the call of the New Evangelization is best articulated in direct reference to a comprehensive description of the “act of evangelizing.” Evangelization, as the central mission of Jesus and Church, is “theology in action.” It is Scripture and Church teaching “on the move.” By looking at the movement of evangelization, and its requisite components, it is possible to name the theological engine that drives the mission of evangelization forward.

The movement of the New Evangelization can be summarized in the following way:

Catholic Evangelization is the action of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, in the community of the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, inviting personal conversion and intentional discipleship, through witness and proclamation, for the transformation of the world.

Evangelization is the action of “Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.” As the apex of God’s loving plan of Salvation History, Jesus is, in his person, message, and redemptive sacrifice on the cross, the ultimate saving good news for us. Jesus embodies the “Gospel,” indeed the very Good News of God.

This is made eminently clear in Luke’s Gospel when Jesus chooses this passage from Isaiah to explain his mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Lk. 4: 18-19).

Thus, the New Evangelization places the proclamation of Jesus center stage. Pope Paul VI says it this way: “Evangelization will always contain—as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Paul VI, no. 27).

The New Evangelization proclaims Jesus in order to bring people into a direct personal encounter with Jesus. Faith and conversion are born of an encounter with Jesus. Pope Benedict says it plainly: “Faith is above all a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, and to experience his closeness, his friendship, his love; only in this way does one learn to know him ever more, and to love and follow him ever more. May this happen to each one of us” (General Audience, Pope Benedict, October 21, 2009).

Evangelization is the action of proclaiming Jesus Christ “In the community of the Church.” The New Evangelization recognizes that in order to bring people into an encounter with Jesus, we need to bring them into an encounter with the Church. In her Sacraments, teaching, and service, the Church acts as the incarnation of Christ in the present day. Referring to the Church, St. Paul says it succinctly: “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (I Cor. 12: 27).

The faith and conversion sought by evangelization always happen within the communal ecclesial context. Pope Francis reminds us, “By its very nature, faith is open to the ‘We’ of the Church; it always takes place within her communion” (Lumen Fidei, Pope Francis, no. 39). In other words, the act of believing in Jesus requires belonging to Christ in his Body, the Church.

Evangelization is the action of proclaiming “Through the power of the Holy Spirit.” “It must be said that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization...” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI, no. 75).

Like the first apostles at Pentecost, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the language for evangelization: “Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2: 3-4).

The Holy Spirit not only empowers us to speak the message of evangelization, but also prepares the hearts of those receiving the message. “It is the Spirit who opens people’s hearts so that they can believe in Christ and confess him” (*Mission of the Redeemer*, Pope John Paul II, no. 46). The New Evangelization calls us to radical humility and surrender, allowing the Holy Spirit to proclaim the message and open the hearts of those receiving the message.

Evangelization is the action of “Inviting personal conversion and intentional discipleship.” The New Evangelization calls us to engage specifically and intentionally in the mission of Jesus and the Church: to do the work of “making disciples.” Our marching orders from Jesus are clear: “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” (Mt. 28: 19-20).

To fulfill this mission, we must direct our individual and communal efforts, singularly and completely, toward calling disciples, forming disciples, and sending disciples to make new disciples. This is how Jesus forms, sustains, and grows the Church. It is his succession plan. “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16: 18).

The call to intentional discipleship born of the New Evangelization is ultimately a call to deep, profound personal conversion. It is leaving our old life behind and following in apprenticeship of the Master. “He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him” (Mt. 4: 21-22). Pope John Paul II says it this way: “The proclamation of the Word of God has Christian conversion as its aim; a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith” (*Mission of the Redeemer*, Pope John Paul II, no. 46).

Evangelization is the action of “Witness and proclamation.” Jesus moved from town to town speaking explicitly about the good news of God’s Kingdom and acting explicitly according to the ways of that Kingdom. In other words, he evangelized in word and deed. The New Evangelization calls all of us to be more intentional and explicit in the ways we speak about and live our faith.

Catholics have a long and committed history of witnessing to their faith through heroic acts of charity and justice. An integrated life of deep faith expressed in servant action is the first movement of Catholic evangelization: “...for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one’s neighbor with limitless zeal” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI, no. 41).

Because they are less inclined to do so, the New Evangelization challenges Catholics to make a new commitment to proclamation which is the second, and equally important, movement of evangelization. By speaking explicitly about their faith, Catholics provide the important “why” for their actions. Paul VI reminds us that the verbal sharing of how faith makes a difference in our lives “is indeed always indispensable” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Paul VI, no. 42).

As we see from the preaching of Jesus, the verbal expression of our faith is the essential act of passing on the Gospel and inviting others into lives of discipleship. To reinforce this point, Paul VI asks us this challenging rhetorical question: “In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one’s personal experience of faith?” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Paul VI, no. 46).

Evangelization is action “for the transformation of the world.” God has a saving plan of love for all humanity. From the divine truth written into creation itself and the timeless moral teaching of the Sinai covenant to the corrective message of the prophets and the universal redemption of Jesus through the cross, our God has been meeting us in history for the salvation of history.

Evangelization is the act of bringing the beauty, truth, and goodness of God to bear on the social institutions of our world, so as to shape those institutions in accordance with the ways of the Gospel. “For the Church, evangelizing means bring the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making new: ‘Now I am making the whole of creation new’ (Rev. 21: 5)” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Paul VI, no. 18).

The Call of the New Evangelization is to marshal the commitment and resolve of our faith, and put all of these integrated aspects of evangelization into action in ways that are “new in ardor, methods, and expression” (1983 Address to CELAM, Pope John Paul II, no. 9). Evangelization is “theology in action!”

V. Other Related Information

Two other necessary areas to consider relative to evangelization are “the journey into discipleship” and “creating a culture of intentional discipleship.” We need to understand that discipleship is a journey of falling in love with Christ over time in a series of stages. Simply stated, becoming intentional disciples is a process. With that in mind, our evangelization strategies need to be linked to the nature and needs of each stage.

The National Directory for Catechesis describes the five stages of evangelization that correspond to the stages of growing into intentional discipleship (*National Directory for Catechesis*, USCCB, pp. 49-50). The stages are Pre-Evangelization, Missionary Preaching, Initiatory Catechesis, Mystagogical or Post-Baptismal Catechesis, and Permanent or Continuing Catechesis.

Pre-Evangelization is evangelization that forms relationships, meets human needs, and builds trust. Missionary Preaching is evangelization that proclaims the central Good News or Kerygma of the Gospel. Initiatory Catechesis is evangelization that introduces “the life of faith, the Liturgy, and the charity of the People of God to those being initiated” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, USCCB, p. 50).

Mystagogical or Post-Baptismal Catechesis is evangelization that leads people deeper into the practice of the Christian Life, the celebration of the Sacraments, the practice of prayer, and a life of mission. Finally, Permanent or Continuing Catechesis is evangelization that presents the truths of the faith and the practice of Christian living in a systematic and thorough fashion. So our evangelization must be strategically and intentionally linked to the stages discipleship.

We also need to pay special attention to cultivating a culture of evangelization for intentional discipleship. In other words, we need to align everything we do in parishes around the practice of evangelization for calling, forming, sending, and making new disciples. Evangelization for the formation of disciples needs to “become the air we breathe.” All our parish practices need to be reshaped to accomplish this singular purpose. Any parish endeavors that do not form disciples should be eliminated because they do not serve the mission of Christ and the Church.

VI. The Call of the New Evangelization: Key Issues to Be Addressed

In response to the call of the New Evangelization, there are four pivotal issues that need to be addressed relative to forming the parishes throughout the archdiocese for the work of evangelization and forming intentional disciples:

- First, a **communication plan** needs to be formulated to persuasively and systematically communicate the vision of evangelization for the formation of intentional disciples to ordained and lay leaders through the archdiocese.
- Second, an **implementation plan** needs to be developed so that parishes have a clear roadmap for embarking on the mission of evangelization for the formation of intentional disciples.
- Third, a **leadership plan** needs to be developed to identify the process for forming and multiplying leaders who can promote the vision and shepherd the implementation plan.
- Finally, a **resource development plan** needs to be articulated for developing the personal, family, small group, and leadership resources that support the journey into intentional discipleship.

All four of these plans need to be formulated with **specific, observable, and measurable short and long term strategic goals.**

VII. The Call of the New Evangelization: Key Questions for Consideration

The key questions for consideration emerge in direct correlation to the four key issues as articulated in the previous section. These questions are designed to focus discussion on specific strategies for actualizing the four plans.

- 1a. How can we formulate a creative and compelling communication plan on the vision of evangelization for the formation of intentional disciples?
- 1b. What personal and material resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 1c. How can this plan be delivered to foster alignment among ordained and lay parish leaders?
- 1d. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?

- 2a. How can we develop a user-friendly road map for diverse parishes to implement the mission of evangelization for the formation of intentional disciples?
- 2b. What personal and material resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 2c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?

- 3a. How can we develop a leadership plan for forming and multiplying leaders to promote the vision and shepherd the implementation plan?
- 3b. What personal and material resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 3c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?

- 4a. How can we develop the necessary variety of quality resources to support people in their journey into intentional discipleship?
- 4b. What personal and material resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 4c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?

VIII. The Call of the New Evangelization: Conclusion

Evangelization is why the Church exists. Evangelization is the mission of the Church. And the mission of evangelization is as simple and compelling as this: “Go and make disciples...” (Mt. 28: 19-20). We evangelize to call, form, send, and make disciples. Simply put, evangelization is what we as Catholics do. And do we must! The New Evangelization calls us into action.

It is time for a new Pentecost! Let us pray that, like the first disciples, the Holy Spirit will come down upon us as in tongues of fire to make our hearts burn with love for the Gospel, such that we overcome our fear and find our true voice for proclaiming the Good News of Jesus within the Church and to the wider people and culture of our day!

Come Holy Spirit!