

# A Pastoral Letter On Evangelization

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Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

**On the Inauguration of the  
Evangelization Initiative  
2005**

*“We have heard for ourselves, and we know  
that this is truly the savior of the world.”*

*John 4:42*

**Evangelization  
Initiative**



Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Evangelizing is  
in fact the grace  
and vocation proper  
to the Church, her  
deepest identity.

Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

**To the Catholic Faithful of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis:**

It is a great privilege to be able to write to you at this time. I consider the words you are about to read to be some of the most important I have ever written. They are at the heart of who I am, who God is in Jesus Christ and who you are. It is my fervent hope that from these words you will be encouraged to more fully embrace your faith and that you will respond positively and energetically to the invitation to participate deeply in the Evangelization Initiative as it begins with the Awaken phase this year and unfolds through steps of Transformation and Witness in the next several years to come.

To start, I invite you to ask yourself, “What am I looking for in this life?” I believe with all my heart that you and I are looking for the same things in this life; we share a deeper longing of the human heart for that which this world does not and cannot give.

I remember the first time I saw a peculiar plaque on a desk. On the surface, there was an odd arrangement of small wooden pieces, seemingly random in their placement. Then, with a sudden moment of recognition, I saw that the pieces of wood outlined the letters of the word “Jesus”. Now, whenever I see this familiar plaque, I always see “Jesus” and I have to stare for some time to remember how it looked before I recognized that it said “Jesus”.

I am always moved by the beautiful stories people tell me about their journey to a deeper practice of the faith. I recall when I was teaching at Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, on one occasion I visited a state hospital in western Maryland. A nurse’s aide came up to me and asked me if I knew the whereabouts of a certain Sister. She mentioned her name but I did not know her whereabouts. I told her that I would find out. At any rate, this nurse’s aide told me that when she was a young child this Sister kept telling them in the classroom that they were made to the image and the likeness of God. She repeated that so often that it almost became a mantra in the classroom – the children were made to the image and likeness of God.

This young lady graduated from school and came upon very difficult times in Baltimore. She became a prostitute. She told me that throughout all of that work as a prostitute that Sister’s face kept coming back to her and telling her: “You are made to the image and the likeness of God.” Finally, she could stand it no longer and she left Baltimore and she went to western Maryland where she took a job in a state hospital as an aide. She was making very little money but, nevertheless, she was experiencing a deep peace.

I found out that this Sister had long gone to her reward. However, she had made an impression on this person’s life. That Sister saw Jesus Christ very deeply and passed that on to this other young child where it would reap fruits in years to come. What an expression of evangelization.

What is common in these and other of our life-changing experiences is that once people recognize Jesus Christ truly present in this world, they can never again look at the world without seeing Jesus in every moment – moments of great challenge as well as moments of abundant blessings; moments of profound sadness as well as moments of joy;

moments when the shadows of death darken our lives as well as moments when new birth brings a light and renewed hope for all life.

It is an awakening. Not only are our eyes opened to the presence of Jesus Christ in every moment, but also our imperfect eyes are given a set of glasses – prescription lenses, so to speak – that focus our view of our own lives and our view of the world around us. It is the lens of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is through the Gospel that we see our world and ourselves in a new and different way.

It is no small challenge to look at all that is wrong in this life and see all things made right in Jesus Christ. It is truly a change of perspective; a moment of conversion. Through the lens of the Gospel, we look at sin and see forgiveness; we look at hate and violence and see the greater power of unconditional love; we look at death and see the promise of eternal life given to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We look upon the cross of Jesus Christ and see not an instrument of torture, suffering and death; rather we see the symbol of our salvation. We see God's love perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ who gave His life that we all may have eternal life. And from this central mystery of our faith, we continually, time and time again, in each and every moment of our lives, seek this vision of faith that transforms us and changes our perspective on the world around us.

Yes, our eyes are imperfect. There are times when it is so easy to see Jesus Christ in every moment that we cannot even imagine how the world would look without Jesus Christ. Yet there are also times when God may seem absent from our lives; when we stare in those difficult moments trying to find any glimpse of hope, any sign that God is with us. We join each generation from the Garden of Eden to the Shepherd's Field in Bethlehem to our own, and we too ask those basic questions: Who is God? How does God work in this world? Who am I?

To have questions is to be human. To find the answers in Jesus Christ is to believe and following on belief, to be His disciple.

In the Gospels [Matthew 16:16ff; Mark 8:29ff; Luke 9:20ff] Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Many answers are given, but it is Simon Peter who exclaims, "You are the Christ". Indeed, Peter recognizes Jesus as the Messiah.

Likewise, in the Gospel of John [John 20:24-29] the Apostle Thomas expresses his doubts that Jesus has risen from the dead. But resulting from Thomas' encounter and after placing his hands in the wounds of the Risen Christ, he exclaims, "My Lord and my God!" In this very same passage, Jesus tells Thomas that which is meant for all disciples of Jesus Christ, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

From the other side of that curtain through which our imperfect eyes cannot see, our Lord Jesus Christ is reaching out to us to hold us and comfort us. His joy is being with us at every moment, making visible in our lives the love of the God we cannot see.

The presence of Jesus Christ in our lives continues through ordinary and everyday experiences. And in and through these experiences we come to know that stirring of our hearts; the quiet and unexpected sense of peace when we pray; that glimpse we sometimes get in which we honestly feel that everything will be all right; that our God in

Jesus Christ is encouraging us to love God and to know deep in our hearts God's love for us.

I invite and encourage you to look closely at your life through the lens of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at each and every moment and see where you recognize Jesus. For some of you, this may be the first step toward looking at your life in a new and different way. For others of you, this is a continuation of many steps along our pilgrimage of faith.

Just as I believe in the presence of Jesus Christ in each and every moment of my life, so too do I believe that when people take the time to share the stories of life's most profound experiences, the presence of Jesus Christ is beautifully discovered. Some have the gift to point to His being in the stories of others; others simply have their stories and the desire to find in them a deeper meaning. We all have something to share in the life of faith when we go beyond our individual experiences and seek to know and love Jesus Christ.

That is the challenge I invite you to through the Evangelization Initiative. I do not extend this invitation to you lightly. There is some risk in telling those stories that are most personal. But I believe that when people searching for God come together with people who have found God in Jesus Christ, a marvelous thing happens! The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the many ways that Jesus Christ is known and loved in our time.

To be awake and alive in Christ, means that our eyes are opened to the many ways that this world may be keeping us asleep. In our own culture, we have the influences of secularization and relativism; fear and judgmentalism; apathy and individualism. One way or another, each of these "cultures" closes the eyes of faith and blinds us to the presence of Jesus Christ, especially how Jesus is present to the broken lives of those rejected by this world.

As we listen to the stories of others and recognize in them the presence of Jesus Christ, we hear the Word of God proclaimed in a most personal way and our eyes are opened to the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Yet at the same time, we find our true selves and our purpose in the community of believers – the Body of Christ – the Church. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is inseparable from our relationships with each other. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is inseparable from the call of our Baptism to reach out to those most in need. For we find our wholeness and our holiness in community; in communion with each other. As we build up the lives of those knocked down by this world, we are even more awake to how Jesus Christ is working in and through our lives.

This has already been the experience of participants within those parishes that have begun the Evangelization Initiative process. Their wonderful testimonies speak of how this time together strengthens and deepens faith in Jesus Christ so that we may live out the Gospel in every moment.

In the Gospel of John [John 4:4-42] Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman at a well. Through her experiences of the challenges of life, Jesus opens her eyes to who He is, the Messiah. The woman leaves her water jar and goes to her townspeople to share her encounter with Jesus and to have others affirm for her that this is indeed the Christ. Many people of that town come to believe in Jesus because of her testimony. Others listen to Jesus themselves and come to believe. "We no longer believe because of your

word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world”.

This is my prayer for you; that as you progress through each phase of the initiative that you may hear for yourselves, in the stories of your own life and in the stories of others, an awakening to the gift of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ. And that as these stories penetrate your hearts that the Spirit might transform you and take you to that place of witness where you too may echo the words of recognition proclaimed by St. Paul as you affirm: “Jesus Christ is Lord!”

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This letter represents the first of four through which Archbishop Flynn will expand on his vision of the Evangelization Initiative for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis as it develops in the coming years.

## Archdiocesan Evangelization Prayer

Holy God,  
Fill our hearts with the fire of your love.

Awaken us, Holy Spirit,  
to witness to the presence of Jesus  
in every moment of our lives.

Renew us, Lord, so that our homes,  
parishes, neighborhoods, and world are transformed  
into your kingdom on earth,  
where peace and justice reign.

Amen.

### En Español

Dios Santo,  
Llena nuestros corazones con el fuego de tu amor.

Despiértanos, Espíritu Santo  
para que seamos testigos de la presencia de Jesús  
en todo momento de nuestras vidas.

Renuévanos Señor así nuestros hogares,  
parroquias, vecindarios y mundo sean transformados  
en tu reino en la tierra,  
donde la paz y la justicia reinan.

Amen.

## **Implementation Assistance Resources**

Parish Implementation Guide

Recruiting support – Bulletin inserts, homily helps and testimonials

Evangelization Prayer Cards in English and Spanish

Additional translations of the prayer available in Korean, Hmong, Vietnamese and Swahili

Pew Registration Cards

“Awake” Poster (11x17)

“Awake” Phase Guides in English and Spanish

Small Group Facilitator Tips in English and Spanish

Initiative Logos

Recommended Reading

All the materials above are available online at  
[www.archspm.org/evangelization/resources](http://www.archspm.org/evangelization/resources)  
or contact:

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