

Pastoral Letter

On Evangelization

Year 2 – “Follow Me”



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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*

Evangelization is:
Making Jesus Christ known and
loved in our time by choosing to
live out the Gospel in every
moment.

Evangelization Initiative
Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
2005 – 2009

Pastoral Letter On Evangelization

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Introduction

The Evangelization Initiative is my invitation to every person in the Archdiocese to enter a process of guided reflection and conversation that moves progressively through three key phases.

1. **Awakening** to a profound consciousness of Jesus Christ present in daily life.
2. **Transformation**, on both personal and communal levels, that reflects commitment to discipleship of Jesus Christ. This is organized over two years with the first year entitled "Follow Me" and the second entitled "Live in Me."
3. **And Witness** in daily life, both personal and communal, that flows naturally from that discipleship.

2005 marked the official start of this archdiocesan-wide effort. Some 20,000 people in 180 parishes joined small groups that met five times during Lent. In these sessions they were guided in friendly conversation, sharing their stories of how God has been present in their lives.

2006 involves entering the first year of transformation/discipleship entitled "Follow Me."

Also, Parishes are encouraged to invite more people to the process who would begin with year one of the process, "Awake."

If you are already participating, thank you. If you would like to begin, welcome. To get involved, contact your parish's Initiative Core Team.

If your parish doesn't have a Core Team, call the Office for Evangelization at (651) 251-7727 for further assistance.

January 19, 2006

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

It is with a thankful heart that I write to you as we begin this second year of the Evangelization Initiative in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. I have heard so many beautiful stories, throughout the Archdiocese, from many participants who have, either for the first time, or become more deeply, in touch with their relationship with Jesus Christ. This has brought a great joy to my heart and I offer my prayers of gratitude to God for all who have been involved in this initiative.

I particularly enjoyed the comments from a Catholic School teacher who participated in the Evangelization Initiative with some other teachers. The teacher pointed out, "Where else to learn about evangelization than with the people you work with and see every day?"

The teacher then taught one of the great lessons of life: "For me, evangelization is not about knocking on doors...it is about seeking to live my life the way God wants me to live and having the courage to talk about my faith with the people I meet every day."

These words and so many other powerful words have been spoken or written about this important initiative. We live in a world of words. It would be impossible to count all the words we hear, read and speak. We know that words affect us.

Just think of the times that someone's kind words stirred in your heart a feeling of affirmation or comfort. Too often, harsh words hurt our hearts, even though we were taught as children that only sticks and stones can break our bones. We live in a world of words where those we hear, read and speak can break hearts, divide us against one another, bring fear and intimidation, and punctuate the violence in our world.

We know that words have a power to change how we feel. We experience this in almost every moment of our lives. In our encounter with Jesus Christ, we are experiencing the very Word of God made flesh. God's Word! How beautiful is the Word of God seeking to be those words that have the greatest effect on who we are and how we see each other. Could there be any other words, in a world of words, which we would rather hear?

Jesus uses the words, "Follow Me" and in these two simple words is the power to change our lives. "Follow Me" begins with an important question in the life of faith: Now that I have come to know Jesus Christ, how does this change my life?

The choice to follow Jesus is a way of life; a way of making choices. Why would our encounter with Jesus Christ change us? In the Book of The Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 55, beginning with verse 6, we are reminded that God's ways are not our ways. Yet it is God's way to accomplish God's will in and through us.

“For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes from my mouth; it shall not return to me void but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it”. Isaiah 55:10-11

The Word of God is made flesh in Jesus Christ. It is the way of the Gospel to transform us. It is the will of God that we are changed by our encounter with Jesus Christ. The life of faith is not a rest stop from the burdens and challenges of busy lives. The life of faith is a journey; a pilgrimage to our eternal home.

Along the way, the Gospel gives us a set of glasses through which we look at our world. These lenses change our perspective and we look at our families, communities, nation and world in a new and different way. Through the Gospel, we are given a different perspective on who we are and our purpose in this life. We are given a different perspective on being a witness of the presence of Christ that draws people to Jesus Christ.

It is this inner transformation that people are drawn to. Draw close to God and then draw others to God. It is not just with our words that we draw others to God. It is our witness to the joy of our faith. It is our message of hope that comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

In a world of cynicism and the harsh tone of unrelenting criticism, we can sometimes fall into the frustrating trap of speaking negatively about our selves, our families, our communities, parishes, nation, world and Church.

But is not our faith the source of our greatest joy? Then our witness to our faith in Jesus Christ is one of joy and hope. In a world desperately seeking signs of hope, people are drawn to those who have found true joy and a hope that is real.

Years ago, I had a group of priests over to my home for a luncheon. It was a time for me to get to know the priests of this Archdiocese and enjoy the conversations of priestly and parish life. There is a lot of laughter at these gatherings.

One of the priests had just found out that the bread on the tables was homemade – by me! He asked me if I had a bread-making machine. A bread-making machine? I was pierced. And I said to the good Father, “I made that bread from scratch. I kneaded the dough with my own hands, prepared it to rise and then baked it in my own oven!”

The priest seemed slightly embarrassed and tried to recover by saying that he did not think I had the time to make bread from scratch. He said that bread from machines taste very much like homemade bread. To which I replied, "Bread from machines might taste like homemade bread, but there is no love in it!"

How can we be the Body of Christ without love? How can we be followers of Jesus Christ without joy? Or without hope? It is this inner transformation of our very being by the love of Jesus Christ that gives rise to our witness of love, joy and hope. People are drawn to this inner transformation just as we are drawn together as an evangelizing community.

In a world of words, we hear the Word of God, Jesus Christ, invite us to "Follow me." Our discipleship changes our perspective on the world around us and this changes our priorities for the lives we are living. As we are transformed, so too do we experience in the Celebration of the Eucharist the movement from the Gospel of Life to the Bread of Life. From Word to Sacrament.

St. Augustine preached over seventeen centuries ago, and yet it is so true for us today:

"If then, you wish to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle as he says to the faithful, 'You are the body and the members of Christ.' "If then, you are Christ's body and his members, it is your own mystery which is placed on the Lord's Table; it is your own mystery which you receive. It is to what you are that you reply, 'amen', and by replying you consent. For you are told: the Body of Christ, and you reply, Amen. Be a member of the body of Christ, and let your "amen" be true."

It is our own mystery that is placed on the Lord's Table. Each time we are at Mass, we unite our hearts, sufferings, sacrifices and our very lives with the life Jesus Christ offers to us. The life of Christ is a life of joy, hope, and great love.

And what would love do? Love would come to us. Love would feed us. Love would become us so that we might become Love. There is so much love in the Eucharist. There is so much love in the Bread of Life. There is so much love in Jesus Christ that we open our hearts and lives to this love so that we may bring this love to share with others.

At each Celebration of the Eucharist, the priest invites us to "Lift up your hearts" and the people respond by saying, "We lift them up to the Lord". We present our open hearts to the real presence of Jesus Christ and, during Communion, how beautiful is that simple word, "Amen". Our "yes!" to this great Sacrament of Love; our "yes!" to the invitation of Jesus Christ: "Follow Me".

In a world of words, we could spend our entire lives deepening our understanding of this one word – Amen. By saying "yes" to our Lord, we are opening the doors of our hearts to the love of Jesus Christ. Just as the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, so too are we transformed when we are fed by this great Sacrament of Love.

By accepting Jesus Christ into our lives, we are accepting a life-changing transformation. One of the outward signs of this inner change is found in our day-to-day choices. It is consciously choosing to love because we have first experienced God's love in Jesus Christ. When we seek to imitate the love of Jesus, our priorities change; our views of others and the world around us change; our very lives are changed as we share from our hearts the love of Jesus Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the love of Jesus Christ is rooted in self-sacrifice:

"Love -- 'agape' in Greek, 'caritas' in Latin -- does not mean first of all a charitable act or sentiment, but the spiritual gift, the love of God that the Holy Spirit infuses in the human heart and that leads in turn to giving oneself to God himself and to one's neighbor..."

"Jesus' words in the cenacle anticipated his death and manifested the consciousness with which he faced it, transforming it into a gift of himself, in the act of love that gives itself totally. In the Eucharist, the Lord gives himself to us with his body, with his soul and with his divinity, and we become one with him and among ourselves."

"Our response to his love therefore must be concrete, and must be expressed in a genuine conversion to love, in forgiveness, in reciprocal acceptance and in attention for the needs of all. Many and varied are the forms of service that we can offer our neighbor in everyday life, if we pay a little attention. The Eucharist becomes in this way the source of the spiritual energy that renews our life every day and, in this way, renews the love of Christ to the world."

(Pope Benedict XVI, September 25, 2005, to crowds gathered for the midday Angelus at Castel Gandolfo)

Why would we imitate the love of Jesus Christ if it leads us to giving up our very lives? We can pursue every possible earthly possession – whether it is material items, sources of power, or impressive financial success – and still want more. We can and do have so much, yet our awakening to the presence of Jesus Christ demonstrates how the things of this world cannot feed our hearts.

Our hearts long for that which satisfies us. Our hearts long for what this world cannot give us. And our hearts long for that which this world cannot take away from us.

We find our heart's desire in Jesus Christ. The love of Jesus opens our lives to the greater power over sin and death. In Jesus Christ, it is love that overcomes any and all sins; it is love that overcomes death itself.

There is no greater love than the love of Jesus Christ. There is no greater peace than the peace of Jesus Christ. There is no greater hope than the hope given to us in Jesus Christ. And there is no greater joy than to live our lives with the love, peace and hope of Jesus Christ.

Jesus invites us to “Follow Me”. And we follow Jesus Christ first with our love. Then we know a joy that nothing else in this world can give us; a peace that nothing in this world can take away from us; a hope, born out of our relationship with Jesus Christ, as God’s greatest gift to us.

This is the Good News to be shared! Life is to be truly celebrated with great joy! By sharing what we have been given, we bring to others the gifts of love, peace and hope. We bring to others the gift of Jesus Christ.

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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.

Oración de Evangelización

**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.

Resources for implementing the Evangelization Initiative

Parish Implementation Guide

Recruiting support – Bulletin inserts, homily helps and testimonials

Evangelization Prayer in English, Spanish, Korean, Hmong, Vietnamese, Swahili

Pew Registration Cards

Initiative Poster (11x17)

Initiative Banners

Initiative Logos

Recommended Reading – Pastoral letters, pertinent Church documents, addresses

Small Group Facilitator Tips in English and Spanish

Small Group Discussion Guides in English and Spanish

Information about all these materials, and in most instances free downloads of them, are available online at www.archspm.org/evangelization

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