



Break the Dam! Release the River!

A SAMPLE "GO FORTH" INITIATIVE

Did you know that nearly half of all practicing Christian millennials refuse to evangelize? Not only will they not do it, they think it's morally wrong because they've too easily fallen prey to the modern maxim that "you shouldn't push your faith on others."

Is it any small wonder that so many of our church pews are disproportionately filled with senior citizens? In fact, if you think in terms of percentages, senior citizens are probably the most significant and rapidly growing demographic in the Church. Not Hispanics, Asians, or young adults... older folk! Old maybe, but still solid in many respects... some as solid as oaks!

"Some of my kin look just like trees now, and need something great to rouse them; and they speak only in whispers. But some of my trees are limb-lithe, and many can talk to me."

-- Treebeard, J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

Yeah, I tapped a pop culture reference first before a Bible quote, but *The Lord of the Rings* was not only a major pop culture phenomenon, it was also quite the evangelization tool. Simply consider that battle in the Two Towers (Chapter IX - *Flotsam and Jetsam*) where the ancient race of Ents (trees) finally woke up and sprung into action to help defeat the evil Saruman and his army of Orcs.

Now for that Bible quote:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

-- Matthew 9:36-38

Jesus made it a point to let us know that evangelization is a crucial aspect of our faith. But what does it actually look like in our daily lives?

Whether you're completely new to evangelizing or looking to deepen your outreach, here are some tried and true methods and tools to help you go forth, build more meaningful relationships, boldly share the faith, and help fulfill that great mission that Jesus has entrusted to us all.

Break the Dam! Release the River! *(continued)*

Before getting into more detail and finding yourself overwhelmed, here's a handy reminder:

Acknowledge God, take the next right step, and be a sign of hope. -- Charlie Johnston

Or if you prefer the step-by-step synopsis:

Trust God, rest in that trust with your audience to help build trust through friendly conversation, progress to more intentional conversations on important matters, ask meaningful questions, and gradually win the right to evangelize and present the Gospel.

Here's even more details, and it's probably a whole lot easier than you think:

1. PRAY FOR PEOPLE BY NAME

Chances are, you already know people who have fallen away from the Faith or who haven't yet heard the Gospel message. Bring their names to God in prayer. God *"at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."* -- Ephesians 3:20.

Ask Him for opportunities to evangelize and trust His timing as you build relationships with people in advance of those conversations.

2. GET OUT AND AMONGST THEM

Don't just hang out on Catholic sites, comments threads, or in other Catholic bubbles. Like-minded friends are important to nourish our faith, but we can never forget our duty to invite others into the family. Jesus gives us this Great Commission: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."* -- Matthew 28:19.

Jesus became incarnate, lived among us, and evangelized tirelessly; we follow His example when we do the little we can, go out, and meet other people where they are, whether in work, a social club, the gym, or even in our own churches.

3. BE BOLD

Sure, it can be a bit scary for some to put it out there, even going so far as introducing yourself to a complete stranger. Be not afraid! Since He's anything but stingy, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the words you need.

Have courage! It might be awkward at first (stretching those old and stiff 'tree limbs'), but more often than not, people will appreciate you showing even the slightest bit of interest in them.



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4. EXTEND SOME INVITATIONS

How many invitations do you have sitting in a box right now? And how many do you actually plan on responding to? Chances are the events you attend are the ones where someone took the time to seek you out and invite you. Why not invite someone to an event with you?! Your personal invitation might just reach the very person God intends you to be a friend to when they need it the most.

5. SHARE LIFE

Find things that you can do together, even if their not among your preferred activities. Sacrifice your own tastes to do the things they really enjoy. Remember, evangelization isn't just a remote, intellectual exercise. It's best done up-close and personal, and in the ordinary course of life! As you spend time with others doing things they enjoy, you're also earning the right to be heard. They may start trusting your recommendations in small things such as movies, books, restaurants, etc. As your faith continues to shine in word and deed (even before you attempt to proselytize) they will definitely see that you live your life differently – that your joy, trust, and confidence in Jesus make you somehow different from other people they know. Chances are, they will want to know why.

6. SHARE STORIES

Stories can be powerful. Especially your story! If you've never thought about it before, consider writing down how you came to know Jesus. How did you decide to follow Him? Saint Peter tells us to *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for your hope."* -1 Peter 3:15. Always be ready to share when someone asks!

7. BE HOSPITABLE

Hospitality is a key aspect of Catholic evangelization, because folks won't necessarily remember what you said, so much as how you made them feel. You can make others feel welcome with thoughtful gestures, like starting a friendly conversation or introducing a new face to the group. Hospitality isn't just about bringing treats – it's also about inviting a more reserved person to be comfortable enough to accept the first healthy course.

8. SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH AN INVITATION

Sharing the Gospel is the main course of evangelization. The heart! There are a lot of ways to share the story of Jesus, but at its core, the Gospel includes four main points:

- You were made for a relationship with God.
- Sin creates a chasm between you and God.
- God became man in Jesus, and he died for your sins to repair your relationship with God.
- Every human person has the opportunity to have a relationship with God if they accept God's invitation!



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9. ENCOUNTER CHRIST TOGETHER

A commitment to making Jesus the center of your life isn't a one-and-done deal. Continue to invite them to spend time with you and to come to know Jesus more deeply. This might mean starting a Bible study, going on a retreat or a pilgrimage, attending RCIA together – and, of course, continuing to spend time together doing the ordinary things you love to do. Those things could also include any of the other “Go Forth” initiatives here. All the better!

10. PASS IT ON

Help your friends become better evangelizers too, and do it together! Saint Paul writes, *“What you have heard from me...entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.”* -2 Timothy 2:2. Jesus sent His apostles into the world by reaching out to individuals who would be able to teach others.

By integrating these evangelization strategies into your daily life, you can share the faith effectively and ultimately build lasting relationships that reflect the love, joy and hope found in Jesus Christ. Every small next right step helps fulfill the Great Commission and deepen your life in Christ.

SOME ADDITIONAL TIPS:

Stop inviting non-Catholics to Mass.

That might sound counterintuitive, but the Mass is not intended to be an evangelization tool. It is meant for the disciples of Jesus in the Church to come together, worship God, and be strengthened to go back into the world, where we evangelize others.

Stop treating others as evangelization projects. Your job isn't to fix others or to get them to convert to your way of thinking. Your job is to love other people.

Have a sense of timing. Know the proper time and place for using apologetics. Apologetics (the reasonable defense of your faith) is a good tool to have at your disposal. That doesn't mean it is appropriate for every situation. In fact, it can be detrimental at certain times.

Ask questions. In fact, ask more questions of others than they do of you. If you know the content of your faith well, then you might just gain a reputation, which means folks seek you out to ask you questions. Furthermore, everyone likes a good listener and someone who is genuinely interested in hearing what they have to say. Be that person.

Understanding and agreeing are not the same thing.

Realize that understanding someone else's position does not necessarily mean you agree with it. You don't have to compromise your own beliefs just to understand someone's viewpoint.



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You will never be a perfect evangelist.

None of us will, but all of us can get better. And it doesn't have to be awkward or scary. It can simply mean being a better friend and Christian.

"And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.""

-- Matt 9: 10-13

Don't worry if your story seems ordinary; every testimony of God's work in your life is worth sharing and celebrating. Even small acts of faith can be as impactful as dramatic conversions.

"Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." –Pope St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

