

How to Evangelize in Your Parish

The parish or local faith community is the place where we live out our calling as evangelists most fundamentally. It is the Catholic answer to the lack of answers in the secular culture. Through the parish, Catholics from all walks of life have created a culture that is not just a response to the world around us, but offers its own dynamic vision and worldview centered around Christ.

Our Catholic culture offers many things that are “good, true, and beautiful,” Bishop Loverde states. “These treasures—great literature, art, architecture, and music, among others—help us to see the glory of God’s creation and can move our hearts to love God and to understand our role in his creation.” The parish is the ideal place to express and share this Catholic culture.

The bishop continues, “Perhaps the most insidious message of the [secular] culture’s ‘anti-evangelization’ campaign is that the ‘institutional Church’ is to be ridiculed and rebelled against, like an unjust and old-fashioned parent.” The parish community needs to be ready to counteract this mentality and offer a positive vision of Christianity.

“Amid such brokenness, Pope Francis’ analogy of the Church as a ‘field hospital’ has never seemed more fitting.”

In his letter to parishes in the Diocese of Arlington, Bishop Loverde recommends that parishes ask themselves the following questions:

Parish Checklist

1. Do all members of our parish feel the personal love of God?
2. Do visitors to our parish experience an atmosphere of joy in us when they arrive for Mass on Sunday?
3. Does our parish have a sense of “mission” when participating in activities?
4. Does service in our parish offer an opportunity for participants to grow in relationship with Jesus?
5. Are there areas of sin in the lives of members of our parish that are common enough to warrant a teaching series on the topic?
6. Are there routine (weekly or monthly) opportunities to build fellowship among all age groups in our parish?
7. Does our pastoral team consciously use special events (such as weddings, sacraments, and funerals) as opportunities to teach everyone, including guests, about Christ?
8. How much do parishioners in our parish value the Eucharist?
9. Is there a growing acknowledgment in our parish of a need to improve our relationship with Jesus through the forgiveness of sins?
10. How often does our parish have groups getting together to engage in Eucharistic Adoration, *lectio divina*, devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Marian devotions such as the Rosary?
11. How does educating our youth (through our Catholic school and religious education program) support the networking of families in our parish?
12. Do adults in our parish know about opportunities to study the Catholic Faith?



Finally, the bishop asks, “Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, are you ready to accept your commission to evangelize in the twenty-first century? ... We go forth, with hearts on fire! ‘Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord’³ today, tomorrow, and every day until we see him face to face in our eternal home!” ■

This article is an abridged version of “Go Forth with Hearts on Fire,” a pastoral letter by Bishop Paul Loverde of the Diocese of Arlington.

³ Roman Missal, Order of the Mass, 144.