

Pastoral Letter to St John the Baptist Parish
On
The New Evangelization

“Evangelization is the supreme duty of every baptized Christian.”
John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 77



The joy of being a Christian cannot be overstated! How blessed we are to be in relationship with a personal God who created the universe and each one of us out of sheer love. This God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit delights to call us his children thereby including us in his Kingdom. To ensure that we will be with him forever, God pours out his love even more abundantly by sending his Son Jesus Christ who takes on our flesh and submits to the cross. This God loves you and me so much that he would rather die than live without us. In response, we praise the Lord for his goodness and desire to share this joy with everyone. Just as when we have met a special person who has brought joy into our lives we want to share that joy with our family and friends, all the more we desire to share the joy of our intimate friendship with Christ. As

the [Catholic Organization for Life and Family](#) states, “One who knows he or she is a son or daughter of God, who has experienced God’s love and mercy, feels the urge to share the happiness and to convey the love received.” This is at the root of the New Evangelization.

The word evangelization comes from the Greek word for “Gospel”. Thus it means presenting the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament Jesus makes evangelization the central mission of the Church when he commissions the apostles to go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to every person. The first evangelization means presenting the Gospel to people who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. This has been the Church’s traditional missionary work from the day of Pentecost, 2000 years ago, to the present. It is sometimes referred to as the mission “ad gentes” or “to the nations”.

As distinguished from the “first evangelization”, ever since Vatican II, the Church has been calling for a “New Evangelization”. This term means sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have heard the Gospel and have been baptized but who have drifted away from the faith and the Church.

Again and again the Popes since Vatican II have emphasized the need to re-evangelize peoples and cultures, especially in the first world which has lost the faith. As John Paul II stated in " [Redemptoris Missio](#) " I sense that the moment has come

to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples." (Rm 3)

What does this mean for the parish of St. John the Baptist? As baptized believers we each have a duty and responsibility to evangelize. This should not be something to fear. Evangelization simply means living our faith in such a visible way that people see Christ in us. This witness can be through our everyday good actions and by our words. As lay people you have the privilege of bringing the truths of the Gospel to every profession and walk of life, to businesses, arts, science, sports, entertainment etc. As parents you have the joy of handing on the faith to your children so that a new generation of disciples can renew our Church and society. As parishioners, neighbors and friends we must be our brother's keeper as regards the faith. (See Appendix [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) for concrete examples) This does not mean imposing the Gospel through aggressive means, manipulation or proselytism. Rather we invite others always respecting their dignity and God given freedom. We propose the truth by sharing how God has worked and is working in our lives. Authentic personal testimony backed by visible evidence of joyful living is the best way to evangelize. In other words, it is as simple as sharing our good news story of faith from our life!

To be effective in the new evangelization, the parish of St. John the Baptist must ensure that we do not get trapped in a "model of maintenance". In general terms, a maintenance-oriented parish is primarily one where parishioners think that the parish exists to provide services only for themselves. Such a parish is inner directed where faith becomes a self-centered activity and the parish an end in itself. The parish is set up to take care of its own members, like an insulated club. There is an "us and them" mentality; those on the inside and those outside. Maintenance parishes typically organize themselves along these inclusion / exclusion lines. The parish seems to exist for the sake of the membership where evangelism is optional. They see Baptism as entitlement. In some ways they are consumer Catholics who come to church to get what they need to get to heaven. They have little sense of their missionary calling. Pastors of these maintenance parishes typically feel that people who are really interested will come to the parish and that the parish does not need to seek them out. Lay leaders will think that the parish is already too busy without doing the additional work of evangelization.

A "mission-oriented Church" on the other hand is one that, while not neglecting the pastoral needs of its parishioners, also looks outward to those who do not practice the faith. Thus through preaching, catechesis, stewardship ministry, small group formation and the liturgy, a mission parish looks to evangelize both its members and others in the wider community and beyond. Such a parish understands that evangelization will bring as much to the parish as it offers to others, including ongoing renewal and conversion. Every ministry and office within such a parish will think in terms of evangelization. For example, lectors will practice reading Sacred Scripture for the following Sunday not only as if ordinary parishioners were listening to it but as if a stranger / outsider / unbeliever were listening to it for the first time.

Each ministry will consider itself from an outsider's point of view, an unbeliever or visitor who is searching, and ask, "How would a visitor be invited to respond?" "Would they feel welcome?"

For further information on the distinction between a maintenance and mission model for parish ministry you are invited to read the book [*From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish*](#) by Robert S. Rivers.

As regards our parish of St. John the Baptist, we are definitely more on the side of a mission-oriented model but the challenge is to continue our outreach efforts and avoid the temptation to slide towards a maintenance model. To this end we have formulated a [*Vision Statement*](#) to ensure that the New Evangelization is kept at the centre of our identity as a parish.

To implement the [*Vision Statement*](#) our Pastoral Council has drafted and submitted to the Diocese the [*Pastoral Plan of St. John the Baptist*](#) which outlines how we will respond to the Pastoral Plan for the Dioceses of London.

What specifically have we accomplished as a parish in an effort to implement the New Evangelization? The following ten points are only some of the steps taken so far to keep our parish mission-oriented.

1. We have increased the number of Masses being offered. This is important since it is at the celebration of Holy Eucharist that an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ is particularly present. This is at the heart of the New Evangelization. We now offer Mass in addition to our regular Tuesday-Friday schedule, on every Monday, holiday, and on the first and second Saturday of every month and have increased the number of Masses in our schools and nursing homes. The allowance of prayer intentions increases attendance at our morning masses. We have also increased the availability of memorial masses.
2. Through the Stewardship Ministry of Time, Talent and Treasure we have increased the number of ministries and outreaches our parish offers and the volunteers to share in the mission. This is important to keep our parish attractive, dynamic and welcoming for our existing parishioners and those new members who join our community. See the [*Ministry Booklet*](#) for a list of what we offer.
3. We have increased the opportunities for prayer which is essential for the success of the New Evangelization. The most important of these initiatives has been our [*24 hour Eucharistic Adoration*](#) each Monday in our new Eucharistic Chapel following morning Mass and the Divine Mercy Hour each Friday afternoon.
4. We have increased the frequency of Parish Missions from every other year to yearly.
5. We have increased the number of Catechetical opportunities that teach the Catholic faith including multiple Bible studies, the Confident Catholic Series,

- School of Evangelization Workshop, year-round RCIA and our Questionnaire at Mass and the Pastor's Corner Responses.
6. The [Sacramental preparation](#) program has been augmented by including an intergenerational approach using the "Strong Catholic Families, Strong Catholic Youth" resource. This is to provide opportunity for the whole family to be formed in faith and to deepen their engagement in the faith community.
 7. Our parish staff and Pastoral Council have included an evangelization component in their meetings that studies the Church documents and other resources to help us implement the New Evangelization in our parish.
 8. We have embraced the new technology/ social media to make our parish more accessible to a wider audience by implementing a more detailed and up to date Website, a weekly e-newsletter, interactive blogs and Facebook for our [youth ministry](#) and parish.
 9. We have increased the number of parish socials to celebrate our community including the State of the Parish Dinner, fundraising dinners, Ice Cream Socials and the Gathering of University Students.
 10. We have increased the number of encounter opportunities for our youth including the [Notre Dame Summer Conference](#), [Steubenville Summer Conference](#), [Catholic Christian Leadership Camp](#) and COR. As well, the Parish Youth Commission has restructured our entire youth ministry to include more opportunities for evangelization and catechesis.

As mentioned, our effort to implement the New Evangelization at St. John the Baptist is part of a larger Diocesan initiative as set forth in its Pastoral Plan entitled [Embracing a Future Full of Hope](#) and in Bishop Fabbro's Pastoral Letter *Trusting in the Spirit who Leads Us*, dated March, 2009. This in turn is part of the Universal Church's overall urgent call to implement a New Evangelization in all aspects of Church life, society, culture and in our families. In addition the [Vatican](#) has recently started a Pontifical Council for promoting the New Evangelization and next year, 2012, will hold a General Synod of Bishops devoted entirely to the theme entitled "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."

If you desire to gain a richer understanding of the New Evangelization, we have assembled the following links to encyclicals and other documents including the most recent [Lineamenta](#) which is the preparatory paper for the upcoming Synod.

[Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December, 1975](#)

[Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, December, 1988](#)

[Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, December, 1990](#)

[U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, November, 1992](#)

[Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, January, 1999](#)

[Dave Nodar, *What Are the Characteristics of the New Evangelization*, 2000](#)

[Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January, 2001](#)

[Bishop Jose Gomes, *You Will Be My Witnesses*, February, 2010](#)

[Bishop Sean O'Mally, *A New Pentecost: Inviting All To Follow Jesus*, June 2010](#)

[Fr Brian Jane et al, *The New Evangelization*, August, 2010"](#)

[Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta for 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization*, March, 2012](#)

Please also view the following three links to appendices containing practical suggestions on how to share your faith in the family, at the workplace and in your neighborhood. God bless you in your efforts to learn more about the New Evangelization and to implement these insights in living out your baptismal call to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Appendix I

- [How to Share the Christian Faith with your Children](#)

Appendix 2

- [How to Share your Faith at School or in the Workplace](#)

Appendix 3

- [How to Share Faith with Your Neighbors and Community](#)

Pastoral Team

Pastoral Council

August, 2012