

St. Louis Church Inviting the Flock Home Methods of Invitation

*“All you who are thirsty,
come to the water!
You who have no money,
come, buy grain and eat;
Come, buy grain without money,
wine and milk without cost!
Why spend your money for what is not bread;
your wages for what does not satisfy?
Only listen to me, and you shall eat well,
you shall delight in rich fare.
Pay attention and come to me;
listen, that you may have life.”*
Isaiah 55:1-3a

In [*Evangelii Nuntiandi*](#), Pope St. Paul VI calls us to revise our **methods** to ones that work in our modern world to “bring the Christian message to modern man” (3, cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35, 43).

Methods of Invitation

For target audience (TA) #1, we already have our established Fruit of the Vine gatherings and the new Grounded in Faith summer series as well as our men’s and women’s groups. (consideration for locally produced online offerings like videos and podcasts should be given for those who say they are too busy to attend in-person activities on a fixed schedule. [Formed.org](#) is also an option for them). All of this can fall under the **new evangelization**, which recognizes the need to “re-evangelize” those involved in church. (Materials produced for TA #2-6 may or may be helpful to TA #1.)

For TA #2 and 3, the Fruit of the Vine gatherings are available for them. However, they may not feel ready for that. Or they may think they already know what they need to. For the former, materials for #4, 5, and 6 might be appealing.

For TA #2, 3, and 4 we should realize that what they *may* need first is *Pre-Evangelization* (see EN, 51). This should influence the moments of contact we have with them such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals as well as anointing calls (esp. “last rites”). These should never be done in an assembly line fashion. We might here think of the families who “come back” for faith formation, First Communion, and Confirmation after years away. We need to help them *encounter God*. It is not enough to offer them the Sacraments. We need to *evangelize* (see Mallon, *Beyond the Parish*, Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press. 2020. 261). To do so, we must meet them where they are at and invite them into the fold. If we do this well, then they will be more likely to stick around instead of disappearing until the next time a sacrament is due.

On the theme of *encourage*, Pope St. Pope VI writes, “she thus causes an *encounter* with the mystery of divine paternity that bends over towards humanity” (EN, 53) and Pope Benedict writes, “being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the *encounter* with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est*”. December 2005).

Regarding the Sacraments as part of evangelization, Pope St. Paul VI writes, “and this communion in its turn is expressed by the application of those other signs of Christ living and acting in the Church which are the sacraments. To live the sacraments in this way, bringing their celebration to a true fullness, is not, as some would claim, to impede or to accept a distortion of evangelization: it is rather to complete it. For in its totality, evangelization - over and above the preaching of a message - consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist” (EN, 28).

And later continues, “Evangelization thus exercises its full capacity when it achieves the most intimate relationship, or better still, a permanent and unbroken intercommunication, between the Word and the sacraments. In a certain sense it is a mistake to make a contrast between evangelization and sacramentalization, as is sometimes done. It is indeed true that a certain way of administering the sacraments, without the solid support of catechesis regarding these same sacraments and a global catechesis, could end up by depriving them of their effectiveness to a great extent” (EN, 47).

In the same way, we need to think about the parents who drop their children off for faith formation on Sunday and leave without being offered the gift of faith themselves. We might also consider here how we approach people in irregular marriages and/or those who come seeking convalidation of a civil marriage.

To evangelize TA #4, 5, and 6, it is not enough to wait for them to come to us. We need to find ways to be visible in the world beyond our church walls. I see this having several possibilities:

1. We need to create an *irresistible enthusiasm* for our Catholic faith in those who already regularly come to Mass and are involved in other activities so that they will naturally *witness* to their family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.
2. We need to be visible in the community. What opportunities *might* there be to help people know we are here?
 - a. Community events
 - b. Local newspapers, online presences (includes our own website and social media pages and but it also other places. It might also include paid advertising on social media like Facebook beyond those who follow our social media pages)
 - c. Mailings (postcards, flyers, bulk vs. 1st Class)
 - i. To “registered” parishioners – geared to non-attendees
 1. Christmas, Easter, special events

- ii. Every local address – this brings a challenge of not appearing to be trying to “steal” parishioners from other Catholic churches, other denominations, or religions
- d. At Christmas/Easter Masses invite those who do not come often to an “event” a couple of weeks after.
- e. Signs in front of church (need to consider zoning issues)
- f. Street Evangelization
 - i. Google AI definition – “Street evangelism involves publicly sharing the Christian message in places like sidewalks, parks, and transit hubs. It spans from one-on-one conversations and handing out tracts to open-air preaching. Many practitioners emphasize that relational, conversational approaches centered on love and active listening are the most effective.”
 - ii. One example of this is <https://streetevangelization.com/>.

3. *Empower parishioners*

- a. *to invite:*
 - i. Family
 - ii. Friends
 - iii. Children
 - iv. Grandchildren
 - v. Co-workers
 - vi. Neighbors
- b. Sharing Social Media posts from our parish
- c. Be welcoming to those you see in church/parish events
- d. To speak from their own experiences
 - i. “In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?” (EN, 46). Small Christian Communities can be a place where we learn to express our faith.
 - ii. Testimonials
 - 1. Ask existing parishioners
 - a. Did you have a time in your life when you stopped going to church?
 - b. What God you back? Did you used to Go? Why did you stop?
 - c. Belief in the Real Presence
 - d. What gives you hope?

4. Witness

- a. Pope St. Paul VI writes
 - i. “She remains as a sign – simultaneously obscure and luminous – of a new presence of Jesus” (EN, 15).
 - ii. “To evangelize is first of all to bear witness...to bear witness that in his Son God has loved the world” (EN, 26)
 - iii. “the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life” (EN, 41)
 - iv. “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”[67]” (EN, 41).
 - b. Is Christ visible in your home? (Domestic church)
 - c. The Eucharist as the source and summit of our faith
 - d. Proclaiming the gospel in word **and** deed
 - i. “Who do you say that I am?” ([Matthew 16:13-20](#))– actions speak louder than words
 - e. [Revelation 3:15-16](#) – “I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”
 - f. Being a strong **remnant**
 - g. Bishop Bonnici’s 4 L’s – **Listen, Learn, Love, and Live**
 - h. Fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit
5. Go in peace glorifying the Lord by Your Lives --> from the Eucharist to discipleship
6. Does the annual parish picnic provide an opportunity for evangelization?

To be inviting we need to be visible in the community:

- 1) Parishioners take the faith into the world instead of priests/deacons/staff waiting for the world to come to the church
 - a) Parishioners involved in groups like Habitat for Humanity and other local groups doing Corporal Works of Mercy

Is there any parish history of evangelization outreach?

- 1) In the past we have had success with large groups of small Christian communities for 6 weeks in duration, and then a coming together at the end of the small group discussion periods.
- 2) Christ Life was a three-year process that drew outsiders in somewhat successfully.

What place does letting the public know our church is open from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm for prayer have in our invitation to come and join us (especially Adoration)?