



DIOCESE  
OF ST. CATHARINES

# Evangelization Vision Strategy and Planning

We are blessed in this diocese to have an amazing shepherd who has set before us the incredible vision of setting hearts on fire with God's love! Imagine what our parishes and communities will look like as our diocese brings this vision to life: parishes that are the centerpiece of their communities, filled with joy and life, where parishioners and visitors feel welcomed, like they belong, and like this is a place where they are valued, invited, involved, and able to contribute to the mission of the church.

Parishes where anyone would want to be, and would be eager, proud, and excited to invite others to. Places that are full of well-formed missionary disciples who are brought in to the mission of the Church and are passionate about going out and serving the lost and the least. Churches that are spoiled for choices when it comes to volunteers, who are running programs that meet the needs of their parishioners, teaching them truths of the faith and drawing them deeper in their relationship with God.

Parishes where God is worshipped with reverence and love – a place that anyone would love to be a part of and would be happy to give their time, talent, and treasure to. Communities packed with average Catholic families who are proudly living their faith. This is what Hearts on Fire looks like! When people have Jesus at the center of their lives and are engaged in their baptismal call to evangelize – to live and proclaim the Good News – it will radically transform our parishes and our diocese.

Wonderful... so, how are we getting there? This question is massive – it is reminiscent of the question “How do you eat an elephant?” (one bite at a time) that is used to illustrate the point that when facing a seemingly overwhelming task, the trick is to strategize and then start somewhere. In the case of Hearts on Fire, from the perspective of the Office of Evangelization and Faith Formation, there are three key areas that we are focusing on:

1. To foster a culture of evangelization: to make evangelization everybody's business, and to equip parishioners with the skills needed to do the work of evangelization.
2. To accompany pastors who have discerned a call to become an evangelizer of evangelizers, especially through the implementation of an evangelization tool.
3. To raise up (identify, train, and accompany) lay Catholic leaders who are competent and effective in forming and catechizing missionary disciples.

Let's dive a little deeper into what each of these strategic anchors look like in practice:

### **Fostering A Culture Of Evangelization**

Fostering a culture of evangelization means providing opportunities for parishioners across our diocese to understand what evangelization is, who is called to do it, and how to actually do the work of evangelization. We are looking at accomplishing this goal through the following measures:

- Hosting a large evangelization conference for the whole diocese. This conference will begin with an experience of being evangelized, continue with amazing speakers who help to answer the questions of what evangelization is and who is called to do it, and conclude with workshops that teach the skills that are needed to do the work of evangelization. This will create some understanding and excitement around evangelization and will help parishioners to begin to be comfortable and confident in going out and making disciples.
- To build on the momentum of the conference, we will offer deanery-based workshops for any parishes that are interested in having their catechists and parish teams grow deeper in their understanding of the mission of the Church and sharpen their skills in the area of evangelization.
- We will also offer a parish-based retreat day for any parishes that would like to provide a mini version of the conference for their parishioners. This is important because vision leaks – we all need regular reminders of why we are doing what we are doing, as well as opportunities to hone our skills.

The hope with these initiatives is that the people in our diocese will become truly missional – focused on going out and setting Hearts on Fire! Moreover, they will understand how to meet people where they are, build trust with them, recognize the grace-filled moments where an invitation will be effective, and accompany them along their journey in faith.

### **Accompany Parishes In The Work Of Evangelization**

Evangelization is a mission that is lived out in so many facets of our life, but especially in our parishes. As a lay Catholic, if I journey with a friend or family member to the point where they are open to exploring the possibility of faith in Jesus, it is helpful to have a soft-landing place at my local parish that I can invite them to. This means ensuring that our parishes are warm, inviting, welcoming places, where we can worship God and be involved in the mission of the Church. In particular, it is important that our parishes have something that we can invite un-churched individuals (those who have never belonged to the Church) and de-churched individuals (those who used to belong to the Church) to that will meet them where they are in their faith journey.

This is what an evangelization tool is designed to do! Evangelization tools are programs that are kerygmatic (present the Good News of God's love) soft-landing places (non-threatening spaces that are easy to invite others to) that foster community and journey with individuals through the process of discovering and responding to God's love. These programs are designed to meet the un-churched and de-churched in our communities, and help them to fall in love with God, inviting Him to be at the center of their lives.

### **Programs Examples**

Alpha, The Search, Rescue Project, Discovery, etc. To accomplish the goal of supporting parishes in having a well-run evangelization tool, we are taking the following steps:

- Working with pastors to identify people of capacity in their parishes who would be amazing at assisting at or taking the lead with an evangelization tool.
- Coaching parishes through the process of selecting and implementing an evangelization tool and helping them to understand the various best practices that enable these programs to truly be fruitful.

In addition to these steps, we will strive to form individuals to become experts in the implementation and execution of evangelization tools as staff resources to parishes.

The hope with these measures is that parishes will be supported in providing a place where those who are outside of the Church can easily be invited and where they can experience transformational encounter with our Lord.

### **Raise Up Catholic Leaders, And Assist Parishes In The Work Of Forming Missionary Disciples**

As a diocese, one of the greatest resources that we have is the incredible people in our parishes. To achieve the beautiful vision of Hearts on Fire with God's love, we will need to form and empower our parishioners to use their God-given talents in service of building up His Kingdom here on earth. This is the important work of raising up Catholic leaders – forming missionary disciples. Alongside the essential role of evangelization is the process of ongoing discipleship and catechesis. This is the process by which we come to know and love the truths of our faith.

Evangelization helps us to establish a relationship with God, and faith formation builds on that relationship by drawing us deeper into His Word, as we explore such things as the mysteries of the faith, the sacraments, the saints, salvation history, Catholic social teaching, morality, etc. When you enter into a relationship with someone, it is natural to have a desire to know them more fully – this is also the case with our relationship with God. For that reason, it is important for our parishes to have programs that meet these needs, such as: Baptism, Communion, Confirmation and Marriage preparation courses,

RCIA, Bible studies, faith formation courses, etc. In order to assist parishes in meeting these needs, and raise up leaders who can ensure the longevity of these programs, we are taking the following steps:

- Developing course material for RCIA and all sacramental preparation programs. There will be a particular focus on designing and implementing a marriage preparation program in each deanery that accompanies candidates before and after marriage.
- Hosting regular diocese-wide training sessions for all catechists and evangelists. These training sessions will delve into theology and will have practical workshops where pedagogical, accompaniment and evangelization skills will be learned and practiced.

The training will underscore the importance of weaving evangelization into the beginning of all sacramental preparation programs and highlight the need to be intentional about knowing and accompanying the people who are in the programs. They will also have the benefit of bringing together all catechists and evangelists in our diocese for fellowship and the sharing of best practices.

- Assisting parishes in building longevity and stability into their programs by coaching them on how to maintain their leadership pipeline: that is, how to identify and invite others who God may be calling to serve in these ministries, and providing formation to help prepare them for ministry.

This means having courses available through the diocese where parishes can send their future (or current) evangelists, catechists, youth ministers, etc., that will enable them to become well-formed missionary disciples.

The hope with these steps is that parishes will be supported in the process of faith formation so that they can continue to confidently and competently form missionary disciples, and so that their programming will be sustainable through the regular generation of new Catholic leaders.

This is, admittedly, a daunting list, however, we are not alone in this important mission! God is with us, and He desires the salvation of souls – which is the precise task that we are setting out to accomplish! I wanted to end this letter by personally thanking you for your role in supporting this mission with your time, talent and treasure.

I have been blessed to experience firsthand the impact that evangelization and faith formation done well can have – it helped instill in me faith, joy, a sense of purpose, and, most importantly, established my relationship with God.

So, thank you! The most precious resource in this diocese is the people – we cannot do this without you! There is literally no greater mission that I can think of to support – the mission of lives changed, people set free, the actual salvation of souls, and the fulfillment of our very purpose in life: what we are talking about is hearts set ablaze with the love of God.

Thank you and may God bless you abundantly.

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