

Family Retreat: Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings as Evangelizers

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Purpose

The goal of this retreat is to create a prayerful forum for family members to reflect on their baptismal call to holiness and their mission to evangelize. It will take ninety minutes to two hours.

Materials Needed

- A prayer table with a cloth, Bible, candle, and cross or crucifix; baptismal candles and garments to display on the table (optional)
- Holy water
- Paper and pens for each participant and crayons for children
- CD player and music; suggestions include
 - “Come to the Water” by John Foley (Oregon Catholic Press)
 - “Come, Holy Ghost” by Rabanus Maurus (World Library Publications)
 - “Wade in the Water” by Diana Kodner (GIA Publications)
- A table for refreshments
- A podium for the leader (optional)
- Copy of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA)
- Copy of the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (optional)
- Television and DVD player
- *Catholicism*, episode one, DVD, directed by Fr. Robert Barron (Copies may be available at your parish, local library, or through your diocesan religious education office; the entire set may be purchased from www.wordonfire.org.)

Preparation

- Prepare the room by arranging the furniture as needed.
- Set up the prayer table and the refreshment table.
- Make copies of handouts A-C.
- Place paper and pencils on the tables.
- Set up and test the DVD player.

Schedule

- Introduction and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)
- Evangelization Activity (20 minutes)
- *Catholicism* Video and Discussion (20 minutes)
- Break (10 minutes)
- “Triangle Activity” (20 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Retreat

Introduction and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone and, if multiple families are in attendance, ask family members to introduce themselves. Lead an opening prayer from the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, 368-69, or use the following prayer.

(Before beginning, divide the group into side A and side B to alternate stanzas when reciting the prayer below. All make the Sign of the Cross to begin the prayer.)

Leader: As baptized disciples of Christ, we have all been called to holiness, and we are all called to carry out the Church’s mission of evangelization in and through the circumstances of our daily lives. Let us begin by praying the words of one of the great evangelizers in the history of the Church, Blessed John Paul II. *(Recite the prayer on Handout A.)*

Leader: Today, as we reflect on our call to be “evangelizers,” let us listen to a reading from the Gospel of Matthew. *(Leader reads Matthew 28:19-20.)*

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

(Time of silent reflection, followed by shared prayers of intercession for those who help bring the Good News to all the nations.)

Leader: Let us join together in our Lord’s Prayer.
(All pray.)

Leader: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of new life in Christ, your Son. We ask for continued grace as we strive to bring the Gospel to all those we meet, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Evangelization Activity (20 minutes)

1. Evangelized Evangelizers

Leader: When you hear the words “evangelizer” or “evangelization,” what comes to mind? (*Encourage responses from several people.*) Thank you.

Evangelization is basically a matter of proclaiming the Gospel, in word and deed. The bishops of the United States have described evangelizing as “bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself. At its essence are the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the response of a person in faith, which are both works of the Spirit of God” (*Go and Make Disciples [GMD]*, no. 10).

In Baptism, we become adopted sons and daughters of God, in and through the Son. As members of God’s family, we are then sent out to proclaim the person of Jesus Christ and to invite others into communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

This is the Church’s mission of evangelization, and “the purpose of this evangelization is to bring about faith and conversion to Christ” (*National Directory for Catechesis [NDC]*, no. 17A). Whether the person who has been evangelized is a brand-new Christian or someone who is returning to the faith, the experience of evangelization necessarily leads to catechesis. In other words, once evangelization has awakened a love of the Lord, we desire a deeper intimacy with and knowledge of Christ. “The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ” (NDC, no. 19B), and so the process of catechesis forms people as Christian disciples who are then prepared to go out and evangelize others.

As we begin our reflection on how the Lord is sending us out to evangelize, let’s first discuss how we ourselves have been evangelized and how we have heard our Christian calling. (*Use the USCCA, 134-37, for more ideas if needed.*)

(Ask those present to begin by sharing the names of people who have been evangelizers in their lives through words, actions, or example. Ask them to consider what characteristics these evangelizers embody.)

2. Identifying and Sharing the Good News

Leader: Now that we have pictured evangelizers we have known, as well as ways they have helped us hear the Gospel, let’s consider how we would summarize the Good News. In your own words, describe the basic message the Lord wants all people to share. (*Encourage responses from several people; or, for a larger group, ask participants to discuss this with a partner and then gather sample responses from some of the teams.*) Thank you. There may be different ways to describe *what* the Good News is, but all of them lead us back to *who* the Good News is. Ultimately, the Catholic faith is founded not

on a teaching or an idea or a lesson to be learned, but on the very Person of Jesus Christ. Through his life, Death, and Resurrection, Jesus reveals that God is self-giving and merciful love. Christ calls each of us to make a sincere gift of our self and to be agents of God’s mercy in the world. The bishops of the United States offer this rationale for evangelizing: “We evangelize so that the salvation of Christ Jesus, which transforms our human lives even now, will bring as many as possible to the promised life of unending happiness in heaven” (GMD, no. 30). Once we have been evangelized and have “heard the Word,” we naturally want to “echo this divine word faithfully and completely”; catechesis is “this ‘echo’ of the Word of God” (NDC, no. 15). Once we have encountered Christ, we want to learn more about him in order to live in deeper communion with him—and then to help bring others to him.

3. Symbols of Evangelization

Leader: To conclude this initial activity, please find something in the house that symbolizes evangelization. It could be a religious item that reminds you of, or “echoes,” Christ’s message; or it could be an everyday item that reminds you of an evangelizer you know. *(Allow several minutes for people to find something; then ask each person to explain what they found and why they selected it. If the retreat is not being held in a home, ask the participants to draw a symbol or image that represents evangelizing.)*

Catholicism Video and Discussion (20 minutes)

Leader: One of the great evangelizing efforts of our time is Fr. Robert Barron’s video series entitled *Catholicism*. We are going to watch a ten-minute section from the first episode to help us reflect further on Christ’s message and the call to be his witnesses.

(Show chapters 2-4 of Episode One [10 minutes]; then ask participants to share insights or images that struck them, and how they relate to their understanding of evangelization. If the video is not available for the retreat, move directly into the break and the next activity.)

Break (10 minutes)

Triangle Activity (20 minutes)

1. Evangelizing with “Head, Heart, and Hands”

Leader: In our Baptism, each of us has been called to holiness and to mission. As “evangelizing disciples,” we are challenged to know, love, and serve both God and our neighbors. This alone will bring us true happiness—a happiness that we cannot make or buy on our own. We are also called to help bring others to Christ, so that they might share in this authentic happiness. Just as Jesus used his teachings, stories, miracles, and witness of selfless service to touch people in body, mind, and soul, so we need to reach out to others in a variety of ways. We can use our “head,” or mind, to grow in and share knowledge of the faith. We can use our “heart” to worship, love, and pray. We can use our “hands” to serve the Lord and one another. When we evangelize, we can invite others to encounter Christ through all three of these dimensions of the human person—through knowing, loving, and serving. When we catechize, we should strive to inspire their minds, hearts, and hands as well.

2. Introduction of Activity

(Distribute Handout B, "Triangle Activity," to each member of the family. If multiple families are present, distribute one copy to each family. Use words such as the following to lead the participants through the activity.)

Leader: This activity asks us to think of concrete ways we can contribute to the Church's evangelizing mission. In *Go and Make Disciples*, the bishops of the United States suggest a number of different strategies for evangelization: studying the Scriptures, welcoming and greeting others at your parish, worshipping reverently at Mass, being active listeners, developing a regular prayer life, and participating in service work or social justice projects. *(Discuss whether these examples are more a matter of the head, heart, or hands.)*

With a partner or partners (or with your family), please work on the "Triangle Activity" handout and list additional examples of evangelization, using the three dimensions of the human person as a framework.

3. Discussion of Activity

(After everyone has finished, ask groups to take turns sharing their ideas. Some responses for each area might be discussing the Sunday Gospel or homily [head]; visiting the sick or homebound [heart]; and planning a mission trip [hands].)

Leader: Now that we have heard a number of different ways to evangelize by using our heads, hearts, and hands, I invite each of you to identify which of these areas most interests you and to commit to one specific way that you could evangelize. We have all received the faith thanks to others who have handed it on through their words, witness, and love, and today the Lord sends us out to do the same!

(If time allows, or if the Catholicism video is not available for the retreat, distribute Handout C on "Evangelization and the Mission of the Family." Have family members answer each of the questions individually or with a partner, and then ask them to share one or two of their answers with the group.)

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

(Prayer adapted from the English translation of the Roman Missal, Third Edition)

Leader: Dear friends, through the Paschal Mystery we have been buried with Christ in Baptism, so that we may rise with him to a new life. Now let us renew the promises we made at Baptism when we rejected Satan and his works. Please respond with "I do." And so: Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you reject the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

All: I do.

Leader: God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit and forgiven our sins. May God also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Leader: Finally, as we play/sing the closing song (“Come to the Water,” “Wade in the Water,” or “Come, Holy Ghost”), we will conclude with a reminder of our baptismal call to holiness and our mission to help others know Christ. I now invite everyone to bless themselves with the holy water as a sign of their personal recommitment to be witnesses to Christ’s self-giving love.

RESOURCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd ed.), Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000.

Pope John Paul II, *The Church in America (Ecclesia in America)*, Washington, DC: USCCB, 1999.

Go and Make Disciples, Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002.

National Directory for Catechesis, Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005.

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006.

Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, rev. ed., Washington, DC: USCCB, 2007.

Handout A

Blessed John Paul II's Prayer for Evangelization

(A) We thank you, Lord Jesus,
because the Gospel of the Father's love,
with which you came to save the world,
has been proclaimed far and wide in America
as a gift of the Holy Spirit
that fills us with gladness.

(B) We thank you for the gift of your Life,
which you have given us by loving us to the end:
your Life makes us children of God,
brothers and sisters to each other. . . .

(A) Grant us to be faithful witnesses
to your Resurrection
for the younger generation of Americans,
so that, in knowing you, they may follow you
and find in you their peace and joy.
Only then will they know that they
are brothers and sisters
of all God's children scattered
throughout the world. . . .

(B) May families always be united,
as you and the Father are one,
and may they be living witnesses
to love, justice and solidarity;
make them schools of respect,
forgiveness and mutual help,
so that the world may believe;
help them to be the source of vocations
to the priesthood and the consecrated life,
and all the other forms
of firm Christian commitment. . . .

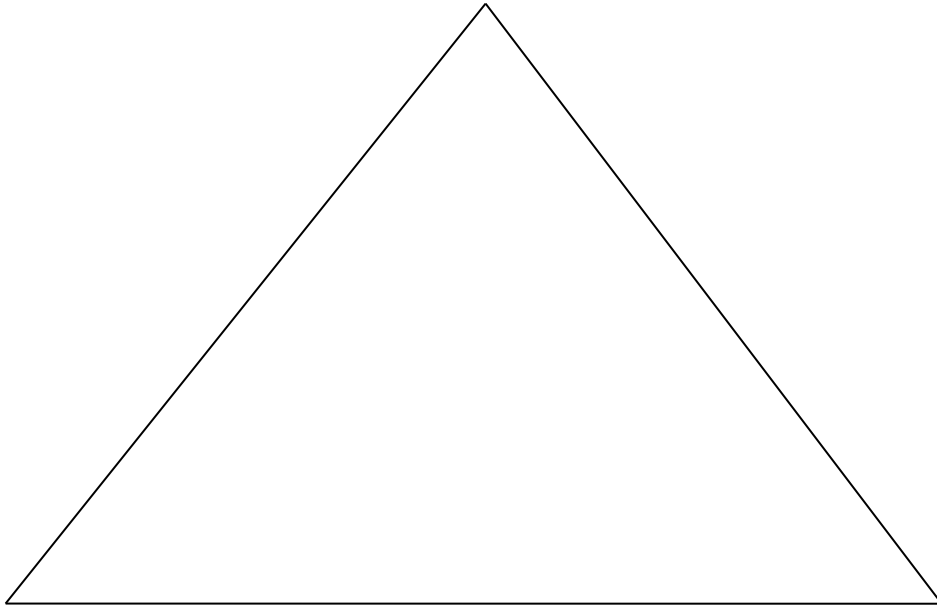
(A) Teach us to love your Mother, Mary,
as you loved her.
Give us strength to proclaim
your word with courage
in the work of the new evangelization,
so that the world may know new hope.
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America,
pray for us! (*Ecclesia in America*, no. 76)

Handout B Triangle Activity

With a partner or in a small group, discuss specific ways that we can use our “Hands, Head, and Heart” to bring the Good News to others. Write your ideas next to each category.



HEAD or MIND
(Knowing)



HEART
(Loving)



HANDS
(Serving)



Handout C
Evangelization and the Mission of the Family

“The Christian home is the place where the children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family is rightly called ‘the domestic church,’ a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1666).

“Living out one’s Baptism is a lifelong responsibility. Growing in holiness and discipleship involves a willingness to continue to learn throughout one’s whole life about the faith and how to live it. It also involves a willingness to support and encourage others who share the faith and who have committed themselves to the ongoing process of conversion of heart and mind to God, which results in the holiness to which we are called” (USCCA, 196-97).

“The basic task for which Jesus sends out his disciples is the proclamation of the Good News, that is, evangelization (cf. Mk 16:15-18). Consequently, ‘to evangelize is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her most profound identity.’ . . . In accepting this mission, everyone should keep in mind that the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery” (*Ecclesia in America*, no. 66).

Handout C (continued)
Family Discussion Questions

What are practical ways to evangelize others?

The following saying is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach always; if necessary use words.” How can we preach without using words? When we speak, what words should we use and how should we use them?

What are effective ways of helping others come to know, love, and serve Christ?

What can we do as families to nourish our faith to be better prepared to evangelize?

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