

Running a Door-To-Door Evangelization Initiative

Considering a door-to-door evangelization initiative in your parish to distribute Papal Visit Door Hangers and invite neighbors into your community? Here are best practices, suggested methods for door-to-door evangelization, and other ideas for distributing door hangers in your neighborhood, based on the experiences of parishes in the Archdiocese of Washington.

General Recommendations and Best Practices

Connect the event to our mission as Christian disciples to go out and share the Good News. Before, during, and after the evangelization event, help volunteers connect the experience to their own spiritual lives and the life and mission of the parish. By recruiting volunteers from across ministries and communities in the parish, the event can also foster parish community.

Plan ahead, including spiritual preparation, practical training for volunteers, and logistical preparation like routes and target areas.

Send volunteers out “two by two” (Mark 6:7), or in larger groups if appropriate for an area, but never alone. Volunteers should be trained appropriately and equipped with maps and door hangers. In addition to engaging and inviting those people they encounter, volunteers can hang the door hangers on doorknobs or mailboxes, stick them in door frames, hand them out to pedestrians, tack them on community bulletin boards, etc.

Invite neighbors to a specific event as a doorway into community life. Consider the perspective of someone receiving the door hanger who may be considering your parish or the Catholic Church for the first time in a long time. Many will find a community or hospitality event to be a more approachable entry point than immediately engaging with the sacramental life of the parish. Focus on invitation, not proselytization. Volunteers should always be friendly and non-confrontational. Redirect any people with frustrations or challenging questions to the pastor. Provide a positive encounter and witness to the joy of faith-filled life!

Expect fruits from the Holy Spirit. Anticipate that neighbors will respond to the invitation. Approach people with that sense of expectation and hope. Think through the experiences you are inviting them into. How will you welcome visitors when they come? What will be their experience of your hospitality? How will it integrate them into parish life? Be prepared for fruits!

Door-to-Door Evangelization Method 1: Widespread Distribution

This method focuses on distributing as many door hangers as possible to as many people and homes as possible. Volunteers distribute door hangers, and the door hanger acts as the invitation. The benefits are 1) more people are reached and receive a door hanger than via the second method, and 2) less training is required for volunteers, making it easier to recruit more parishioners to participate. The primary tradeoff is that the encounters and invitations are not as personal as method two, since the invitation comes through reading the door hangers rather than via personal contact. This method works best when the invitation is to a specific parish event, such as a picnic or other community event, where visitors can then experience that personal encounter.

Volunteers Needed:

- **Street Evangelizers:** Volunteers who walk/drive the neighborhoods to distribute door hangers.
- **Prayer Team:** Volunteers who pray in the church for the street evangelizers and for all the people they encounter, that the Holy Spirit will be at work in all of their hearts. Intercessory prayer is an important part of the day's effort!
- **Food Team:** Volunteers who prepare and host a meal for the street evangelizers and prayer teams after the event is over, in order to reinforce community, share experiences, and celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conducting the Door-to-Door Evangelization Event:

Prior to the Event:

- Order door hangers!
- Identify date and announce the event (bulletin, pulpit announcements, email lists, etc.).
- Recruit team leaders and volunteers.
- Prepare a timeline for the day: Initial gathering and prayer, evangelization start time, evangelization end time, gathering and recap time.
- Prepare food plans / order food for the post-event gathering.
- Prepare maps dividing the target area into different neighborhoods or sections so that the street evangelization teams can be divided among the different sections.

On Event Day:

- Gather all volunteers for prayer or Mass.
- Provide instructions to all volunteers, including area assignments for the street evangelization teams and the best practices listed above. Especially note how to handle any challenging or potentially confrontational situations.
- Send out the street evangelization teams to their assigned areas with maps and sufficient numbers of door hangers.
- Evangelization teams go door to door distributing door hangers. Prayer teams pray in the church. Food team prepares the closing meal.
- All teams re-gather at the parish at the designated time for prayer, a meal, sharing of experiences, and fellowship.

Door-to-Door Evangelization Method 2: Knocking on Doors

This method involves volunteers knocking on doors and extending personal invitations to those they encounter. The door hangers are shared as resources for more information or are left on the door if no one is home. The benefits are the opportunities for personal encounters, invitation, and conversation. The tradeoffs are 1) fewer people are reached by the effort since each encounter is longer, and 2) volunteers need more extensive training to effectively engage in conversations about the Church and their faith with others, including knowledge of handling potentially challenging situations.

Volunteers Needed:

- Street Evangelizers: Volunteers who walk/drive the neighborhoods to knock on doors, encounter the people in their assigned neighborhood/area, invite them to connect with the parish, and distribute door hangers.
- Prayer Team: Volunteers who pray in the church for the street evangelizers and for all the people they encounter, that the Holy Spirit will be at work in all of their hearts. Intercessory prayer is an important part of the day's effort!
- Food Team: Volunteers who prepare and host a meal for the street evangelizers and prayer teams after the event is over, in order to reinforce community, share experiences, and celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conducting the Door-to-Door Evangelization Event:

Prior to the Event:

- Order door hangers!
- Identify date and announce the event (bulletin, pulpit announcements, email lists, etc.).

- Recruit team leaders and volunteers.
- Schedule and conduct street evangelization training workshops to equip the volunteers, including practicing the focus (joy, community, invitation not proselytization) and positively handling situations of challenge or conflict (positive experience, not engaging in argument, redirecting tough questions to the pastor, offering prayer and kindness no matter what). Mock encounters and role playing are helpful aspects of this preparation.
- Prepare a timeline for the day: Initial gathering and prayer, evangelization start time, evangelization end time, gathering and recap time.
- Prepare food plans / order food for the post-event gathering.
- Prepare maps dividing the target area into different neighborhoods or sections so that the street evangelization teams can be divided among the different sections.

On Event Day:

- Gather all volunteers for prayer or Mass.
- Provide instructions to all volunteers, including area assignments for the street evangelization teams and the best practices listed above. Especially note how to handle any challenging or potentially confrontational situations.
- Send out the street evangelization teams to their assigned areas with maps and sufficient numbers of door hangers.
- Evangelization teams go door to door knocking, engaging residents, and distributing door hangers. Prayer teams pray in the church. Food team prepares the closing meal.
- All teams re-gather at the parish at the designated time for prayer, a meal, sharing of experiences, and fellowship.

Other Ideas and Uses for Door Hangers

A door-to-door evangelization initiative is not the only way to use door hangers to invite neighbors into your parish community. Consider these suggestions as well:

- Give one to each parishioner and empower them to take it and invite one person to Mass or a parish event.
- Stick door hangers on car windshields at nearby parking lots, sports events, on the street, etc.
- Hand out door hangers at community events such as fairs, festivals, or block parties.
- Share door hangers on public posting bulletin boards such as in community centers, coffee shops, etc.
- Hand out door hangers in high-traffic public places, such as Metro stations, shopping centers, etc.
- Utilize existing parish information distribution networks, such as sending door hangers home in school backpacks, including door hangers in welcome packets, etc.
- Target outreach to people who have recently moved into the parish territory through resources such as Paulist Evangelization Ministries' "New Movers Program."

All of these ideas are only starting points! Adjust them to the locale, situation, and charisms of your parish and volunteers.

Questions? Contact Mike Owens, Coordinator of Evangelization Initiatives, at owensm@adw.org or 301-853-5347.