



# Disciples of the Lord: Sharing the Vision

*A Pastoral  
Letter on  
The New  
Evangelization*

To the Clergy,  
Religious and  
Laity of the  
Archdiocese of  
Washington  
by  
Most Reverend  
Donald W. Wuerl  
Archbishop of  
Washington





# The New Ev





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Grace and peace to you in Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

**C**HRIST IS THE WAY. When Jesus first came among us, he offered a whole new way of living. The excitement spread as God's Son, who is also one of us, announced the coming of the kingdom. The invitation to discipleship and a place in the kingdom that he held out to those who heard him, he continues to hold out to you and to me today. But, for many, the invitation has lost its appeal.

"This is like hearing it all over again for the first time," the young man said with some surprise. I was meeting him and his wife in preparation for the baptism of their baby. Like his wife, he was raised Catholic and indicated that he had even gone to some form of parish religious education as a youngster. But he also admitted that what he had been taught did not mean much to him.

This pre-baptism discussion made me think of a conversation I had with another young adult in a plane not too long ago. The man in the seat next to me told me he was going to his niece's first Holy Communion. He made it clear that this was not something he found particularly exciting. "I am going," he said, "because it's my younger brother's kid and because my mother told me she was really counting on me being there." Like the young father at the baptism, he, too, said he had received some Catholic education during elementary school, but admitted he really didn't know much about the Catholic faith. Yet, just as a baptism got a young father interested in learning more about what baptism really means, so too did an upcoming First Communion get my seatmate interested in learning more about that sacrament, and we spent the flight talking about what the Church believes and what spiritual reality transpires in the sacrament.

At the end of the flight, the man on his way to the First Communion said to me, "Father, thanks for talking to me. This Holy Communion thing is cool." Then, after a pause, he added somewhat apologetically, "I mean, 'great.'"

We all know people like the young couple or the man on the plane. In spite of the genuine and sometimes heroic efforts on the part of parents and teachers in our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs, we all have to admit that sometimes the first time around, the message simply isn't heard.



Today, however, there are many opportunities for people just like the man at the baptism of his baby to hear all over again, this time for the first time, who Jesus is, what he accomplished for us and how in his Church and sacraments, he is present to us today. What we call the New Evangelization is all about retelling the story, this time awakening a sense of meeting Jesus.

Pope Benedict XVI used the word “repropose” to describe the New Evangelization.<sup>1</sup> Somehow in what we do and how we express our faith, we have to be able to repropose our belief in Christ and his Gospel for a hearing among those who are convinced that they already know the faith and it holds no interest for them. We have to invite them to hear it all over again, this time for the first time.



life and to hear the words of truth, words that endure forever.

This new way of seeing life and this novel way of living touched the hearts of people who became the Lord’s disciples. You and I have heard that Gospel, have been excited by the vision, have come to encounter in the intimacy of our hearts the Lord Jesus. The excitement that was a part of that early Church as Jesus formed his followers into his new body remains with us today.

Christ is still with us in his Church — his new body — alive in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church into which you and I have been baptized and which we have come to love empowers us to stay connected to the Gospel message, to the teaching of the Apostles and, therefore, to Christ.

Yet, for some who initially heard this incredible proclamation, the message has become stale. The vision has faded. The promises seem empty or unconnected to their lives.

All of us, clergy, religious, lay women and lay men in every walk of life, to some degree, know those who have drifted away from the practice of the faith. In this letter, I want us to reflect together on how we can stir into flame the embers of the Gospel message and Christ’s love in our own hearts in such a way that we not only grow in our own faith, but invite others to



## The Kingdom Coming to Be

In the Sermon on the Mount presented in Matthew’s Gospel, we hear of a new way of life and how it involves the merciful, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who mourn, the peacemakers, the poor in spirit. Here we learn of the call to be salt of the earth and a light set on a lamp stand. Later in that same Gospel, we hear the extraordinary dictum that we should see in one another the very presence of Christ. Jesus’ disciples are challenged to envision a world where not only the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given drink, the stranger is welcomed and the naked are clothed, but also most amazingly sins are forgiven and eternal life is pledged.

That same vision is held out for us today when we open the pages of the Gospel and read about the invitation to you and to me to be branches connected to the vine of the Lord, to eat of the bread of everlasting

hear once again, maybe all over again for the first time, the exciting invitation of Jesus — “Come, follow me.”

Jesus beckons us. The joy we experience compels us to share it with others. We are not only disciples, we are evangelists. Like those first disciples, we are called to envision ourselves walking alongside Jesus as the sower of the seeds of a new way of living, of a share in a kingdom that will last forever (cf Mt 13:1-9, 18-23; Mk 4:3; Lk 8:5).

The Lord’s call, original and living, promises us that “the harvest is abundant.”<sup>2</sup> If the harvest is abundant, how much more so the seeds from which the harvest springs? The Lord Jesus frequently used the image of the seed to describe the hidden presence of his Word already among us.<sup>3</sup> My brothers and sisters, we are called to water, to nurture and to cultivate those seeds already sowed, or to plant new seeds where we recognize the opportunity. The ground may be rocky, filled with thorns or readily trod upon, but we can make a difference. Our effort is part of what today we call the New Evangelization. We can help people we know, neighbors, coworkers, even, in some cases, family members, hear all over again, this time for the first time, the good news.

In the years since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Holy Spirit has continued to make known the call to discipleship with greater and greater clarity. As we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, expressed in the authentic teaching of the Church, we clearly discern the call to evangelize that comes to us from the very nature and essence of the Church and forms our primary mission. Today, we hear this call directed to a specific purpose and in a new direction. We are first to arouse and to motivate in an even deeper manner our own faith commitment. We then invite to a more profound faith experience our brothers and sisters who have already

heard and who have made an initial response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the midst of their first response, they may have grown distant or cold, and begun to drift away from the call of Jesus and the practice of the faith they received in baptism. Strengthened by the summons of Jesus and by love of our neighbor, it is our call to reach out again, in charity and truth, to our brothers and sisters who have been away from the practice of their faith so that the Church may bear abundant fruit for each person, each parish and for our society.

To help in our reflections on who we are and what we have been called to do, chapter one begins with some observations on the evangelizing mission of the Church. Chapter two explores the idea of the New Evangelization and how we can understand it as an invitation to repropose to people the Gospel of Christ and an encounter with him. The third chapter invites consideration about what the New Evangelization will actually mean for us here in the Church of Washington as we try to channel our discipleship into effective activity. Finally, in chapter four I ask that we together reflect on our involvement in the New Evangelization and what it means for our personal renewal, the vitality of our parish family and the regeneration of our society.

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## Evangelization: From the Very Nature of the Church



*"You will be my witnesses."*

—Acts 1:8—

*"Go and make disciples of all nations...  
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."*

—Mt 28:19-20—



The embrace in the love of Jesus and the joy of his Gospel of new life are meant to be savored, cherished and shared.

Everything the Church is, she has received from Christ. The first and most precious of his gifts is the grace bestowed through the Paschal Mystery: his passion, death and glorious Resurrection. Jesus has freed us from the power of sin and saved us from death. The Church receives from her Lord not only the tremendous grace he has won for us, but also the commission to share and to make known his victory. We are summoned to transmit faithfully the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The Church's primary mission is evangelization.

The word "evangelization" comes from the Greek word for "Gospel," εὐαγγέλιον or *euangelium*. The Gospel is the announce-

ment of the "good message" or "good news" that Jesus is God's son and our Savior.

Jesus himself establishes evangelization as of the very nature and essence of the Church when he gives his disciples the commission to evangelize that is, to announce this good news "to all the nations,"<sup>4</sup> and to spread the Gospel by going forth "into the whole world" and to "proclaim the gospel to every creature."<sup>5</sup>

The Church never tires of announcing the gift she has received from the Lord. The Second Vatican Council has reminded us that evangelization is at the very heart of the Church. In *Lumen Gentium*, the fundamental text and nucleus of the Council's expression on the life of the Church, the Council Fathers emphasized, "The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the





Apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth.”<sup>6</sup> The Council spoke eloquently of the truth that the divine mission that Jesus entrusted to the Church continues through the Apostles and their successors and will last until the end of the world.<sup>7</sup>

The duty to proclaim the saving truth is not just the responsibility of clergy and religious. On the contrary, the Council highlighted the important role of “every disciple of Christ” in the mission of “spreading the faith.”<sup>8</sup> The Council Fathers accentuated the crucial and vital participation of every Catholic, especially through the eager dedication and gifts of the lay faithful to the mission of evange-

lization: “The laity go forth as powerful proclaimers ... when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.”<sup>9</sup>

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI drew on the teaching of the Council when he affirmed that the Church is “a community which is in its turn evangelizing. The command to the Twelve to go out and proclaim the Good News is also valid for all Christians, though in a different way ... the Good News of the kingdom which is coming and which has begun is meant for all people of all times. Those who have received the Good News and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it.”<sup>10</sup> In this historic document, issued ten years to the day of the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI discerned the need for “a new period of evangelization.”<sup>11</sup>

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The Venerable Servant of God Pope John Paul II, reminding us that evangelization is “the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity,”<sup>12</sup> took up the commitment begun by Pope Paul VI to an evangelization, “new in ardor, methods, and expression.”<sup>13</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI has affirmed that the discernment of “the new demands of evangelization” is a “prophetic” task of the Supreme Pontiff.<sup>14</sup> He emphasized that “the entire activity of the Church is an expression of love” that seeks to evangelize the world.<sup>15</sup>

The plan and strategy for Catholic evangelization of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples*, lists three goals:

- to bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others;

- to invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation so that they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith, and
- to foster Gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family and the common good of our society so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ.

The local Church in the Archdiocese of Washington, just as the Church does in every age, discerns the opportunities and the obstacles that lie in the field of the world. Even in the midst of rocks, weeds and hard soil, the Church seeks to provide the freedom of rich soil, the goodness of refreshing water, and the truth of the light that warms and draws the seed to the beauty of pastoral fruitfulness.





## The New Evangelization: Re-proposing to People the Gospel of Christ and an Encounter with Him



*"To be true disciples of the Lord, believers must bear witness to their faith, and witnesses testify not only with words, but also with their lives."*

— Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* (26)—

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8) and, as such, he makes "all things new" (Rev 21:5). At the heart of the Easter mystery we learn that "all time belongs" to Christ.<sup>16</sup> This time includes the many moments in evangelization. The first is the mission *ad gentes*, that is, the announcement of the Gospel to those who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Another moment in evangelization is the New Evangelization, which begins with the renewal of our own faith and then the pastoral outreach to those who have heard of Christ and begun to practice the faith, but have, for one reason or another, discontinued.<sup>17</sup>

The first evangelization of Europe and America took place over several centuries.

Members of religious communities and local clergy traveled long distances and visited vast territories bringing Word and Sacrament to early settlers who were deeply devoted to living the faith of their ancestors in a new land.

As growth continued, more and more dioceses were established. Local parishes maintained regular patterns of worship, devotional practices, community and instruction. The Catholic parish in the local neighborhood became the center of social life for Catholics and provided an immediate venue for passing on the faith. In a society which often looked on Catholics with suspicion and prejudice, the parish was particularly attuned to missionary outreach to those who had immigrated to America.





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The system of Catholic education based on the local Catholic school became an extensive and formidable network to evangelize and catechize. The dedicated religious women and men who staffed the school as sisters, brothers and priests were more numerous than today. Societal standards and resources affirmed and supported marriage and the family to provide a stable and predictable home life. The pace of life allowed for the gradual formation so vital to the development and sustenance of Catholic identity.

But times change. The contemporary culture has reached a point where it turns off what is not immediately accessible. Our society prefers to listen in sound bites, rather than in semesters. Slogans replace thoughtful explanations. The broad advances of globalization over a relatively short span of time have had significant effects on daily life. The Church has experienced a considerable decline in the numbers of priests and religious. The significance of neighborhood and local relationships seem less important to a highly mobile society.

Entire generations have become disassociated from the support systems that facilitated the transmission of faith. Tragically, the sins of a few have encouraged a distrust in some of the structure of the Church itself.

Two generations of secularization have fashioned this time when some do not even know the foundational prayers, or understand the most basic of Catholic devotions, including Marian devotions, and many have not been introduced to the lives of the Saints. Still others do not sense a value in Mass attendance, fail to avail themselves of the Sacrament of Penance, and have often lost a sense of mystery.

Living out a life of faith and attempting to share the excitement of our experience of the Lord brings us into contact with many obstacles and barriers. Pope Benedict XVI,



during his visit to our archdiocese in April 2008, underlined three challenges the Gospel faces in our society today. In his homily at vespers with the bishops of the United States during a meeting at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, he reminded us that we are challenged by secularism, the materialism around us and the individualism that is so much a part of our culture.

“While it is true that this country is marked by a genuinely religious spirit, the subtle influence of secularism can nevertheless color the way people allow their faith to influence their behavior...Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel.

“For an affluent society, a further obstacle to an encounter with the living God lies in the subtle influence of materialism, which can all too easily focus the attention on the hundredfold, which God promises now in this time, at the expense of the eternal life which he promises in the age to come (cf. Mk 10:30). ... People need to be constantly reminded to cultivate a relationship



with him who came that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).

“In a society which values personal freedom and autonomy, it is easy to lose sight of our dependence on others as well as the responsibilities that we bear towards them. This emphasis on individualism has even affected the Church (cf. *Spe salvi*, 13-15), giving rise to a form of piety which sometimes emphasizes our private relationship with God at the expense of our calling to be members of a redeemed community. ... If this seems counter-cultural, that is simply further evidence of the urgent need for a renewed evangelization of culture.”

The Pope diagnoses the struggles which we face. The full transmission of the faith to recent generations has encountered rocks, weeds, and a soil at once hard and dry. The illusion that lurks behind many of the contemporary trends and tendencies has disrupted authentic religious experience.

Consumerism suggests that our worth is found in the things we accumulate.<sup>18</sup>

Individualism demands that we rely on no one but ourselves and our personal needs always take first place.<sup>19</sup> Skepticism pressures us to trust only what we can observe and measure, and purports to destroy the classical and time-tested relationship between faith and reason and threatens to reject the basic right to religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

The attempt to recast human sexuality as casual and entirely recreational has led to an untold weakening of and continued assault on marriage and family life.

Autonomy convinces us that fidelity to faith only restricts us.<sup>20</sup> The popular absorption with constant activity leads us to believe that unless we are always busy and hectic we are behind schedule. In this setting it becomes commonplace to treat the human person as an object to be used and







to focus almost exclusively on material gain. The swift decline in standards of entertainment has exposed our youngest children to repeated displays of intense violence.

These trends coalesce and govern our every thought with a cruel relativism, and fuel ideologies that lead to a worldview of pervasive secularism.<sup>21</sup>

In this context, Pope John Paul II referred to a “crisis of civilization”<sup>22</sup> and raised the question as to whether religious indifference, de-Christianization and atheism were not found in their most widespread form in secularism.<sup>23</sup>

But no darkness, no matter how dense, can thwart or shroud the seed of new life waiting to emerge in this fresh moment. The missionaries in the first evangelization covered immense geographic distances to spread the Good News. We, the missionaries of the New Evangelization, must surmount ideological distances just as immense, oftentimes before we ever journey beyond our own neighborhood or family.

Just as he diagnosed the problem, so too does our Holy Father present a practical solution and a challenge. Earlier this year, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a homily on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. On the feast

of the great Apostles of Rome, in the Basilica dedicated to the great missionary Apostle, the Holy Father summoned the entire Church to the timely and timeless call of the New Evangelization.

That evening, our Holy Father announced that he had decided to create a Pontifical Council whose principal task will be to promote the New Evangelization. The Italian word that the Holy Father chose to describe this work identifies for us the very nature and task of the New Evangelization. This word is *riproporre*: “to repropose.” We are summoned, in the words of Pope Benedict, “To repropose the perennial truth of Christ’s Gospel.”<sup>24</sup>

The Pope further specified the work of the New Evangelization as the reproposal of Jesus Christ and his Gospel “in the countries where the first proclamation of the faith has already resonated and where churches with an ancient foundation exist but are experiencing the progressive secularization of society and a sort of ‘eclipse of the sense of God’...”<sup>25</sup>

There are numerous people, particularly in the Western world, who have already heard of Jesus. Our call is to stir up again and rekindle in the midst of their daily life and concrete situation, a new awareness and familiarity with Jesus. We are called not just to announce, but to adapt our approach so as to attract and to urge an entire generation to find again the uncomplicated, genuine and tangible treasure of friendship with Jesus.

The first movement of any evangelization originates not in a program, but in a Person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Church maintains that “[I]t is the same Lord Jesus Christ who, present in his Church, goes before the work of evangelizers, accompanies it, follows it, and makes their labors bear fruit: what took place at the origins of Christian history continues through its entire course.”<sup>26</sup>





We rely first and always on Jesus. He alone is the cornerstone. As we approach those who have grown cold or distant in their faith, the touchstone is the simplicity of instruction that motivates and speaks to the depth of the human person. We turn to our sisters and brothers who have received baptism, and yet, no longer participate in the life of the Church.

How we communicate must gain access to hearts in a way that the Holy Spirit can reacquaint our sisters and brothers to friendship with Jesus, who alone “is the key, the center and the purpose of all human history.”<sup>27</sup> At the archdiocesan level we are developing our communication and outreach capacity in order to support the efforts of the New Evangelization. This includes the recent establishment of the Office for Evangelization, Outreach and Information to work alongside the Communications Office and Carroll Publishing. Each of these entities has a specific area of concern, yet all three will collaborate to ensure the widest diffusion of our message by means that reflect the current state of social communications. The development of a more engaging website that is designed to help Catholics deepen their relationship with Christ and a new email communications system that gives parishioners the opportunities to stay informed of current events from a Catholic perspective are just two efforts now underway through the Office of Evangelization, Outreach and Information. The goal is to use the new media to invite, engage and teach.

At the parish level, this effort will include the use of the “indicators of vitality” to be discussed later in this letter. At the individual level this action may be through a deepening of our own personal faith as well as outreach to others: a direct conversation about Catholicism, extending an invitation to Mass, or providing simple witnesses such as blessing ourselves before a meal in a restaurant, offering to pray for someone in need, keeping a devotional item on our desk at work or wearing a crucifix for others to see.

This is our mandate: to witness to others so that they reawaken to and rediscover the vital and inexhaustible friendship of Jesus Christ. Sisters and brothers, our eagerness and zeal for the task can be both the invitation and support for those who take their first steps back to the community of faith, as the ever deepening life within the seed is drawn to the light.

The life within the seed changes and incorporates even that which would seem to impede it. As the inward structure of the seed germinates, it begins to transform every obstacle as it serves its own upward surge. In this the potential of the seed is unlocked and revealed. The seed becomes a source of new life to the world around it.

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## Our Part Here at Home in the New Evangelization

Our outreach  
requires an infusion  
of creativity and  
faithful imagination.



*“Let us trust in the Spirit’s power to inspire conversion,  
to heal every wound, to overcome every division,  
and to inspire new life and freedom.”*

— Pope Benedict XVI, Papal Mass in Washington, DC, 2008—

In the Acts of the Apostles where we recognize the beginning of the Church and the gathering together of people from every land and nation who will become one in the Holy Spirit, we read:

*“We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” (Acts 2:9-11)*

In my words of welcome to Pope Benedict at the beginning of Mass for nearly 50,000 people gathered at Nationals Park in April 2008, I made reference to the same phenomenon taking place in this great archdiocese.

“This Church from all of America — as it gathers in worship and seeks to reflect your call to be a people saved in hope — shows a face reflective of Africa, Central and South America, India, Asia, Europe as well as our own Native Americans and those who trace their families to people who came in successive waves of immigration going all the way back to the arrival of the first Catholics in this part of the world at Saint Mary’s, Maryland.”

In his homily, the Holy Father went on to speak to us of our need to recognize the Church as the instrument of Christ’s work in the world today, mediating the action of the Spirit for all of us. He invited us “to consider the growth of the Church in



America as one chapter in the greater story of the Church's expansion following the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. ... In every time and place, the Church is called to grow in unity through constant conversion to Christ, whose saving work is proclaimed by the Successors of the Apostles and celebrated in the sacraments. This unity, in turn, gives rise to an unceasing missionary outreach, as the Spirit spurs believers to proclaim 'the great works of God' and to invite all people to enter the community of those saved by the blood of Christ and granted new life in his Spirit."

How does all this happen? How is it that Christ continues to reach us in and through his Church and touch us in the sacraments? It is precisely in the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Apostles and through them on the Church that this wondrous action of God continues to be present in our lives. The Holy Father continued in his homily with that reminder.

"Through the surpassing power of Christ's grace, entrusted to frail human ministers, the Church is constantly reborn and each of us is given the hope of a new beginning. Let us trust in the Spirit's power to inspire conversion, to heal every wound, to overcome every division, and to inspire new life and freedom."

Our archdiocesan efforts to share the good news and invite others into the joy of new life in Christ are not simply a new program — one among many. I hope all of us will see the New Evangelization as a lens through which we see everything that we are doing but now in the light of our understanding of how important it is for each of us to tell the story, share the excitement and be that leaven where the faith has gone flat and that salt where the faith has lost its zest.

The New Evangelization can be the outlook that impels all of us to discover fresh

resources, to open original avenues and to summon new strength to advance the Good News of the Lord. We cannot simply invite from a distance. Instead, we search actively and carefully for our sisters and brothers who are away from the practice of their faith.

Our outreach requires an infusion of creativity and faithful imagination. But, it does not mean that we have to reinvent our structure. We must recover what is properly ours. The Church, in her rich tradition, has all the necessary resources. For instance, the New Evangelization thrives on the model of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). This ancient rite, replete with original elements of the Patristic Era, is very effective in evangelizing those who seek to know Jesus and become members of the Church. Its elements — smaller community, ongoing discussion and listening, motivational instruction and systematic catechesis on the basics of the faith, and grassroots and personal witness over time — can be integrated into our own personal pastoral outreach to those who have fallen away from the practice of the faith, to invite them to experience the Word and Sacrament which always remain the twin channels by which the seed of faith is nourished and grows.

The field is rich and the seeds are plenty. Those who have fallen away from the practice of the faith are all around us. We meet them in our workplace. They stand next to us in the grocery line, at the bus stop and on the Metro. They are in the car next to ours as they wait to pick up their children from sports practice and band rehearsal and as we go about our daily and weekly errands.

Our routine and commonplace tasks can be transformed into an urgent quest. The Holy Spirit in urging us to begin, without hesitation, this conversation with our





neighbor will provide us openings, coaxing us to initiate the invitation, to invite our neighbor to come to Mass, to encourage them to come to Bible Study or a small faith group, to ask them to consider discussing what might keep them away. Wounds heal through exposure to light and air. The Holy Spirit invites us to speak about our Catholic faith, to have the courageous, and sometimes awkward, conversation. He even wants us to reach out and invite others by name, with a smile and a friendly welcome.

At the heart of our archdiocesan efforts for the New Evangelization is an attitude, a way of looking at life, a lens through which we see reality, seeing what Pope Benedict said in his June 28, 2010 talk: “To find the adequate means to repropose the perennial truth of the Gospel of Christ.”

As we are reminded in Pope John Paul II’s exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, “Lest the search for Christ present in his Church become something merely abstract, we need to indicate the specific times and places in which, in the Church it is possible to encounter him.”<sup>28</sup>

One example of such a personal meeting is our archdiocesan pastoral effort to invite people back to the sacrament of penance. “The Light Is On For You” is the name given this Lenten pastoral initiative. During the Lenten season, beginning with the Wednesday of the first week of Lent until the Wednesday of Holy Week, priests are available in every church throughout the Archdiocese at a specifically announced time in order to hear confessions. The light that is on in churches throughout the Archdiocese is a symbol of the welcome that awaits those who come and a beacon of hope, reconciliation and absolution.<sup>29</sup>

## Indicators of Vitality

One of the signs of the spiritual strength of our local Church is the vitality of the 140 parishes, plus the additional missions, as well as the numerous programs, agencies and institutions throughout the District of Columbia and the five Maryland counties that make up this archdiocese. Over the past few years I have had the privilege of making nearly 400 visits to every one of our parishes for Sunday Masses, the installation of a pastor, the anniversary of the parish, church or school, or during the week for the sacrament of confirmation, deanery visits or other parish celebrations. Here I experience firsthand the vibrancy of the faith throughout the region.

In some of the parishes, a self-assessment takes place that allows the pastor and parish leadership, together with the faithful, to plan for the future while also identifying and addressing more immediate needs. To assist parishes in this type of self-assessment, the archdiocesan Secretariat for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns developed a tool known as the Indicators of Vitality. This instrument allows parish-rooted discernment based on identifiable, objective norms in the areas of worship, education, community life, service and administration.

We should not be surprised that the first indicator of vitality, **worship**, relates to liturgy, sacraments, renewal efforts, devotions, prayer and other such opportunities provided by the parish. We can readily see how significant liturgy is. We come together so that we might not only profess our faith and listen to the Scriptures, but also to worship the Father as Christ’s new Body — members and Head.

A second indicator of vitality is **education**. Here we look at all of the efforts to ensure that ongoing faith formation in the belief and teachings of the Catholic Church are



provided to parishioners of all ages. Catholic education in all of its forms has as its primary task communication of the person and message of Christ to adults, youth and children. This unfolds through a wide range of efforts, but the goal is always the same. In our Catholic elementary and secondary schools, parish religious education programs, adult faith formation, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, sacramental formation programs, and the many forms of youth ministry and evangelizing outreach, the threads of the encounter with Christ and his life-giving message are woven into the fabric of our human experience.<sup>30</sup>

**Community life** is another gauge of parish vitality. It relates to a parish's efforts to build a sense of community by actively including all members of the parish, by reaching out to Catholics who may have fallen away from active membership in the Church and to those in the local community who do not belong to any church, and by recognizing the diversity of talents and needs of the parishioners.

In his encyclical *Deus caritas est*, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, writes: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her threefold responsibility: proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments,



and exercising the ministry of charity.”<sup>31</sup> Thus we see as another indicator of vitality, **service**. This dimension of parish life includes serving the poor, the marginalized, elderly, hurting families and other needy people in the community both in and beyond the parish. It is in this area of parish life that peace, justice and advocacy for those in need are actively pursued.

Finally, we come to **administration** and those aspects of Church life such as leadership, stewardship, management and decision-making processes of the parish, as well as the relationship of the parish to the rest of the Church.

As our efforts at the New Evangelization develop, my hope is that every parish, faith community and program, both archdiocesan and local, will utilize the Indicators of Vitality as a measuring stick not only for our collective effectiveness but also for our own personal growth.

One of the signs of the spiritual strength of our local Church is the vitality of the 140 parishes...that make up this archdiocese.





## Personal Ministry

The pastoral ministry of priests and deacons and the teaching ministry of catechists cover a wide field. Many of those who have fallen away come to baptism or marriage preparation class, make appointments to have their children baptized, attend evening meetings for back-to-school preparation, or attend Confirmation retreats with their children. They may come to Mass on Christmas and Easter, or on the anniversary of the death of a loved one. We see them on our pastoral rounds in hospital visitation.

These are moments to invite not to scold. These are times which are, by the power of

the Holy Spirit, already made new and contain a summons for us tirelessly to invite and cheerfully to welcome, in a personal and caring way, the return of someone we have missed for a long time so that they may willingly recommit to the Lord.

In this way we become “an instrument of his presence and action in the world.”<sup>32</sup>

In this we live the words of *Lumen Gentium* “God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.”<sup>33</sup>





## Our Involvement: Agents of the New Evangelization



*“Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds.  
‘The kingdom of heaven may be  
likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field.’”*

— (Mt 13:24)—

As we have already noted, the New Evangelization is much more an outlook on life than it is a program. While there will be programmatic aspects to this effort to bring new zest to what has gone stale and new energy to what has gone flat, so much of what we are embarking on in this process is, essentially, that turning and returning to the Lord that is at the heart of Christian conversion.

In every action, our starting point and goal is Jesus Christ. Jesus calls this generation to follow him in discipleship and real friendship. Our response to his call can never remain simply a private or partial acknowledgment. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to

proclaim him, to ‘evangelize’ and to lead others to the ‘yes’ of faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>34</sup> God’s plan always outdoes human projects. For this reason, the New Evangelization is not a passing project, short-lived slogan or fleeting theme. It is not a transitory program, but a permanent mystery.

This pastoral initiative dedicated to the New Evangelization is the threshold of our own renewed, solid commitment, as a local Church, to the summons of Jesus.

As we accept his promise of life in abundance, we also lean upon his promise so that we might find strength in every situation as we are called in new and, perhaps untried, directions.

Our personal commitment does not rest on our own individual resolve alone.

The First Letter of Saint Peter reminds us:



“You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

In this highly opportune time, the Holy Spirit enlivens our commitment as we seek to rediscover the overwhelming truths expressed in the Creed. The Spirit strengthens us as we entrust ourselves to the life of grace and virtue promised in the Sacraments. The Spirit bolsters our confidence as we open the deeper places of our heart so that his gifts might strengthen us to live our faith. This is our earnest and genuine prayer.

For each of us personally, our prayer life becomes the font of living waters from which we drink as we set out to walk with the Lord in sowing the seeds of the Gospel message.

The call to discipleship involves us welcoming Jesus into our everyday lives. We can do this by beginning and ending our days in prayer, by reading Scripture each day and hearing God’s word and reflecting on how to make it a part of our life. We draw closer to Jesus by faithfully attending Mass and receiving our Lord in the Eucharist, and by accepting his love and mercy in the sacrament of penance.

But at the same time, we should also experience a communal renewal, a revitalization of our whole archdiocesan Church as each parish and each faith community, each program and each pastoral effort seeks to look deep into its mission and assess its vitality. This provides us also an opportunity to renew our understanding of our participation in the very body of Christ. For it is that communion of the Holy Spirit that bonds us one with each other that is something far greater than any one of us individually are capable of becoming.

Today’s disciples in this Archdiocese walk with Jesus along the city streets, the rural

countryside and in suburban neighborhoods, bringing Christ’s love and hope to their homes, their schools, their workplaces and their world.

The personal commitment of every member of the Archdiocese is transformed, by God’s grace and assistance, into a pastoral concern that leads us beyond ourselves: “He who announces the Gospel participates in the charity of Christ ...”<sup>35</sup> That which begins as a personal commitment is immediately transformed into a communal pledge to safeguard and spread the Good News of friendship with Jesus; this communal commitment gathers us as one so that we, as the faithful of this local Church, may then act as a leaven in society.<sup>36</sup> Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that, “The presence of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are events capable of engaging every cultural reality and bringing to it the leaven of the Gospel. It follows that we must be committed to promoting the evangelization of cultures, conscious that Christ himself is the truth for every man and woman, and for all human history.”<sup>37</sup>

The leaven of the Gospel arises from the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Strengthened by the Eucharist, every sacrifice we make participates directly in the Cross of Jesus. Sacrifice is the path to newness. The Holy Father makes clear that it is the Eucharist that brings newness to human life.<sup>38</sup> The Eucharist strengthens our unity and draws our personal commitment to become united with our sisters and brothers throughout the Church. From the Eucharist we gain the strength and readiness to approach inactive Catholics with friendly persistence. Once we come to know Christ we have a responsibility to foster, promote and contribute to “the renewal of culture.”<sup>39</sup>

The New Evangelization should overflow into the very society in which we live. In





his talk to the bishops of the United States in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that we live in a land of strong faith where religious freedom was practiced and protected.

“America is also a land of great faith. Your people are remarkable for their religious fervor and they take pride in belonging to a worshipping community. They have confidence in God, and they do not hesitate to bring moral arguments rooted in biblical faith into their public discourse. Respect for freedom of religion is deeply ingrained in the American consciousness — a fact which has contributed to this country’s attraction for generations of immigrants, seeking a home where they can worship freely in accordance with their beliefs.”

He tells us that our knowledge of our faith is important so that we can truly be a “leaven” in society. “Even more important, though, is the gradual opening of the minds and hearts of the wider community to moral truth. Here much remains to be done. Crucial in this regard is the role of the lay faithful to act as a ‘leaven’ in society. Yet it cannot be assumed that all Catholic citizens think in harmony with the Church’s teaching on today’s key ethical questions. Once again, it falls to you to ensure that the moral formation provided at every level of ecclesial life reflects the authentic teaching of the Gospel of life.”

Culture is the field of the New Evangelization. Culture refers to the daily ethos, the various networks of understanding and meaning that give rise to the many everyday connections between the person, community and society. Culture forms the deeper and more vital link that relates the person to the community and the community to society. Today’s culture, this great field, has too often been the scene of hard surfaces, dry soil and painful thorns that delay and constrict the full meaning of the human person. Worry, alienation and

emptiness disrupt our growth and easily overwhelm our natural energies. The current generation has been taught to expect and even demand automatic result; that we should be able to get what we want at the press of a button. Yet, we know that life simply does not work this way.

The growth of the seed takes time. The intentional choice and deliberate action for diligent and consistent outreach to inactive Catholics on a personal level will plant new seeds in our parish life. The long-standing and far-reaching commitment of strong parishes will continue to infuse the Archdiocese with gifts and concentrates new strength at every level.

Together, our personal, parochial and archdiocesan commitment will spread and extend the immense pastoral fruitfulness of the Gospel. Together, as faithful citizens, we are strong enough to adjust even the cultural climate in our society so that the temperature is right for the substantial flourishing of the new Springtime of which Pope John Paul II spoke.<sup>40</sup> The transformation of culture is the rich and loose soil by which the seed grows to serve the common good of humanity and the stability of civil society.



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## CONCLUSION

**T**he Sower entrusts the seeds to us. He already knows our difficulties and tensions, our restlessness, our faults and our human weakness. Nonetheless, he calls us and places the seed in our hands and entrusts it to our stewardship. The seed is the beginning of fruitfulness.

Planting the seed may mean that we learn new styles of communication, open our hearts to a more culturally diverse community, study more deeply the mysteries of the faith, reach out with confidence and invite a neighbor to attend Mass, forgive a long-held grudge, or focus on a new and more influential approach with a son or daughter, father or mother, or spouse who is away from the practice of the faith. Every moment becomes a new opportunity to connect another person with the abundant Springtime that God promises. In this, we are protagonists of hope.

The New Evangelization is rooted in the call of Jesus, in continuity with our heritage and legacy as a local Church. The faithful and intrepid disciples of our Lord who embarked from the Ark and the Dove to establish the colony of Maryland in 1634 carried with them the seeds of the Gospel. As they celebrated the first Mass at Saint Clement's Island, the seeds freshly planted in the New World were nurtured. This first evangelization has borne great fruit.

This past summer I had the joy and privilege of celebrating the 300th anniversary of Saint Aloysius Parish in Leonardtown. This southern Maryland parish is part of an earlier planting of the faith at Saint Mary's County, in Newport. Before that there were even earlier cultivations now reflected in Saint Cecilia's at Saint Mary's City, whose roots can be traced back to the first parish established in Maryland in 1634 under the title of Saint Ignatius. We are asked today to be as zealous as were our ancestors in the faith in planting, nurturing, watering and cultivating those seeds for a new harvest.



May the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by her inspiration and counsel, clear our hearts of anxiety, distraction and obstacles so that we might respond with humble faithfulness to even the smallest detail.

May the seeds of the New Evangelization be buoyed up on the winds and rhythms of our world by the breath of the Holy Spirit. May this seed then spread forth to find a niche and a furrow in our own earnest outreach, so that, nourished by the grace of God, the seed may develop and its fruit ripen. Then little by little, step by step, faith, hope and love will again break through the surface of our lives. May we glimpse new movement as the inner life of the seed stirs up prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance in our hearts and actions. The kernel of the Kingdom unfolds and stretches forth in our midst!

As God was with those who first accepted the challenge, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), so God is with us as we accept the summons to be witnesses today in all that we say and do. We renew our commitment in the sure expectation that God’s grace working through each of us can bring about a renewal of faith and a rebirth of life in the Spirit. In this way we can once again in our proclamation of the faith, the celebration of the sacraments and works of charity, testify to the life, energy and well-being of the Church in the Archdiocese of Washington.

*Faithfully in Christ,*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donald Wuerl", preceded by a small cross symbol.

Archbishop of Washington

August 23, 2010  
Saint Rose of Lima  
“The New World’s first flower of holiness”<sup>41</sup>



- <sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, First Vespers, Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome (June 28, 2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Lk 10:2; Mt 9:37; Jn 4:35.
- <sup>3</sup> Mk 4:3-9; 14-20; 26-29; 30-32; Mt 13: 1-9; 18-23; 31-32; Lk 8:4-8; 11-15; 13:18-19; Jn 12:24, 1 Cor 15:36; Jas 5:7; see LG, 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Mk 13:10; Lk 24:47.
- <sup>5</sup> Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20.
- <sup>6</sup> LG, 17.
- <sup>7</sup> LG, 20.
- <sup>8</sup> LG, 17.
- <sup>9</sup> LG, 35.
- <sup>10</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 13.
- <sup>11</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the Assembly of CELAM, March 9, 1983; *Redemptoris missio* 3, 30; *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 21; *Ecclesia in America*, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 12.
- <sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 19.
- <sup>16</sup> The Easter Liturgy, Service of Light, Easter Vigil.
- <sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 34. See also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization (December 3, 2007) 12.
- <sup>18</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 22,34, 51, 61 and 68; Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 23, *Ecclesia in America*, 44, 63.
- <sup>19</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 42; Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 23.
- <sup>20</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 70; Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 19, 20, 64.
- <sup>21</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 56; Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 11, 21; *Ecclesia in America*, 6, 16, 67.
- <sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 52; *Evangelium vitae*, 11. See Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 32.
- <sup>23</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles laici* 4, 34; see also, *Ecclesia in America*, 6.
- <sup>24</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, First Vespers, Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome (June 28, 2010).
- <sup>25</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, First Vespers, Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome (June 28, 2010).
- <sup>26</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization (December 3, 2007) 1.
- <sup>27</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 10.
- <sup>28</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 12.
- <sup>29</sup> cf. Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, *God's Mercy and the Sacrament of Penance*, p. 17, (Pastoral Letter, 2007).
- <sup>30</sup> cf. Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, *Catholic Education: Looking to the Future with Confidence*, p. 5 (Pastoral Letter, 2008).
- <sup>31</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 25.
- <sup>32</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization (December 3, 2007) 1.
- <sup>33</sup> LG, 9.
- <sup>34</sup> CCC, no. 429.
- <sup>35</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization (December 3, 2007) 11.
- <sup>36</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 31; Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 15.
- <sup>37</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 78, see also, 67.
- <sup>38</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 71-73.
- <sup>39</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ad Limina Address to the Bishops of Baltimore, Washington, Atlanta and Miami* (March 17, 1998).
- <sup>40</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 86.
- <sup>41</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 15.

**Archdiocese of Washington**  
P.O. Box 29260  
Washington, DC 20017-0260  
301-853-4500  
[www.adw.org](http://www.adw.org)