

DISCIPLES IN MISSION GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES



JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES: “GO...AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS” (MATTHEW 28:19). THEY ACCEPTED THIS COMMISSION AND WENT FORTH, TRUSTING JESUS’ PROMISE THAT HE WAS WITH THEM. THEIR TRUST AND FAITHFULNESS CHANGED THE WORLD. SO TOO CAN OURS—BEGINNING IN OUR HOMES, CHURCHES, AND COMMUNITIES.

Planning

Easter seems so much more gracious than Christmas. Sure, there is less hype and hoopla at Easter, but that’s part of its charm. Fewer parties to attend, fewer gifts to purchase and wrap, fewer cards to send, and, for parents, no need to figure out how to assemble all those impossibly complicated toys.

While some of us are blessed with the ability to imagine how pieces fit together, most of us get unsettled when we see an assortment of parts and screws and a long sheet of instructions. We approach them like a jigsaw puzzle, randomly putting piece with piece, hoping that the combination is right. The assembling process, however, has no mercy: we usually have to go back to the instruction sheet and follow it step by step.

Few things in life are exactly like following a recipe or assembling toys or furniture. Most things, though, do require planning. We have to know what we are setting out to do and generally how to get there.

An Evangelization Plan

In 1992 the U.S. bishops approved a plan for evangelization after more than three years of research and consultation. This plan, called *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, is not like a recipe or a long instruction sheet for assembling a toy.

But it is like the important plans in our life. It identifies particular goals that can guide the evangelizing activity of Catholics in the United States. It begins with Pope Paul VI’s definition of evangelization, which talked about trying to convert the individual and social consciences of people through the power of the Gospel. The bishops then explore how to go about doing that in our society.

This plan has three goals or three overall aims that are intrinsically connected in one broad approach to Catholic evangelization. These aims spring from the conviction that evangelization is the essential mission of the Catholic Church and, as such, permeates all that we do.

As Pope Paul VI summarized, “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, no. 14).

Goal I

The first goal of *Go and Make Disciples* reads, “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” (p. 7).

It’s about ourselves and our renewal in faith. It’s about how active Catholics grow in faith as disciples through prayer, Scripture, and worship so that they continue to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This power arises from our union with Christ in faith, and it helps us see that our faith cannot be kept to ourselves. It must be spread. And, while we invite people to Jesus in our Church, we continue to ask, “What kind of Church are we inviting people to?”

Goal II

The second goal elaborates on the process of reaching out to others. It reads, “To invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the

message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith” (p. 8).

This goal speaks about our ability to be a welcoming and inviting parish so that people may (a) get to know us Catholics, (b) get to know our faith, and (c) feel invited to be part of our church. The bishops, in putting this goal forward, emphasize ecumenical sensitivity to faith that already exists, but they also emphasize the 80,000,000 people in our society who do not practice a faith, of whom almost 18,000,000 are Catholic. Our faith surely bids us to be inviting to these millions, and to be welcoming to everyone.

Goal III

The third goal reads, “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” (p. 8).

This goal says that faith should sustain our daily lives, characterize the way we treat others and reach out to the poor, and belongs in our homes and our workplaces. It says that faith must be in our actions as much as our words for, through them, we demonstrate to others the kind of Gospel we preach. Just as Jesus’ miracles made his message real, so our actions of service make our Good News real.

Reflection

Look over these three goals. With which one are you most comfortable? Try to imagine all the goals in action at the same time in your parish and community. Does this give you a sense of God’s saving power at work?

Action

Decide on one direct action that you will take in response to each goal. Make this personal action practical and doable. Keep these goals in front of you for frequent reference as your study of evangelization continues.

Prayer

HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD. MAKE ME YOUR DISCIPLE. GUIDE ME. ENLIGHTEN ME. MAKE ME HOLY. MAKE ME UNAFRAID TO LIVE AND TO SHARE MY FAITH, THAT ALL PEOPLE MAY BECOME YOUR DISCIPLES.