ORTHODOX EVANGELIZATION PRINCIPLES

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11/6/2023

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Getting Acquainted

- “Converts”? “Cradles”?
- Parishes receiving greater number of inquirers/ converts recently??
- Reactions to the *‘Convert Survey’?*
- Current practices?

Questions I Had…

- Is Evangelism Orthodox?
- When, how and why should we go about sharing the ‘hope that is in us’ with others?
- What should be our proper motivation in doing so?
- How should we view the mandate to “go forth” from a personal and parish wide perspective?

Evangelism: Do Something!

"Do something. If it works, do more of it.
If it doesn't, do something else."

FDR

Dwight L. Moody
American Evangelist;
founder Moody Bible Institute

"It is clear you don't like my way of doing evangelism. You raise some good points. Frankly, I sometimes do not like my way of doing evangelism. But I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it."

DL Moody

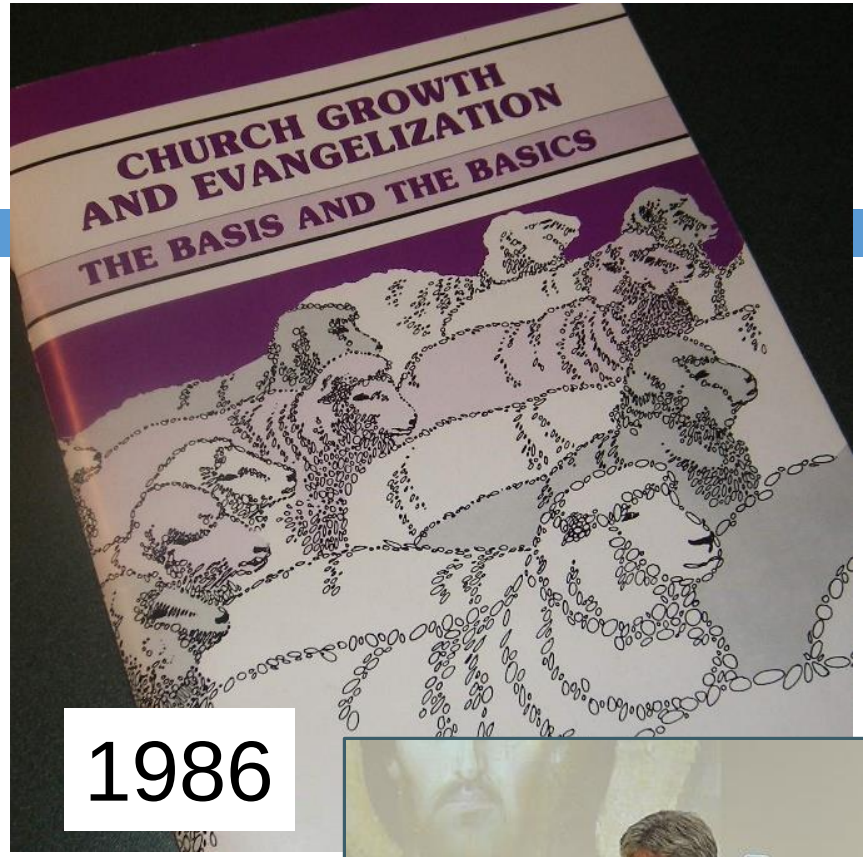
Obstacles to Evangelization Efforts?

Top Ten?

1. “Door to door? No!”
2. Not good at “Selling”
3. “Don’t know enough”
4. Fear of rejection
5. Concern(s) about your parish (inconvenient; small; old, insular etc.)
6. “I don’t have non-Orthodox friends/ unchurched”
7. Indifference; successful people
8. Priest opposition?
9. “People have a right to be left alone?”
10. “God doesn’t need my help.”

Some “Principles”

- Most ideas borrowed from other (mostly) OCA sources.
  - OCA AAC >> Growth Doc>> “Principles” Doc
- Common sense
  - Undoing misconceptions
  - Fundamentals AND practical approaches
  - Why and how.
- Not what you know… what you do!
- I’m learning with you.



Orthodox Evangelization Principles

1. Evangelism Is…

- Sharing

  of “Good, (important) News” of Christ with others.

- Utilization & application

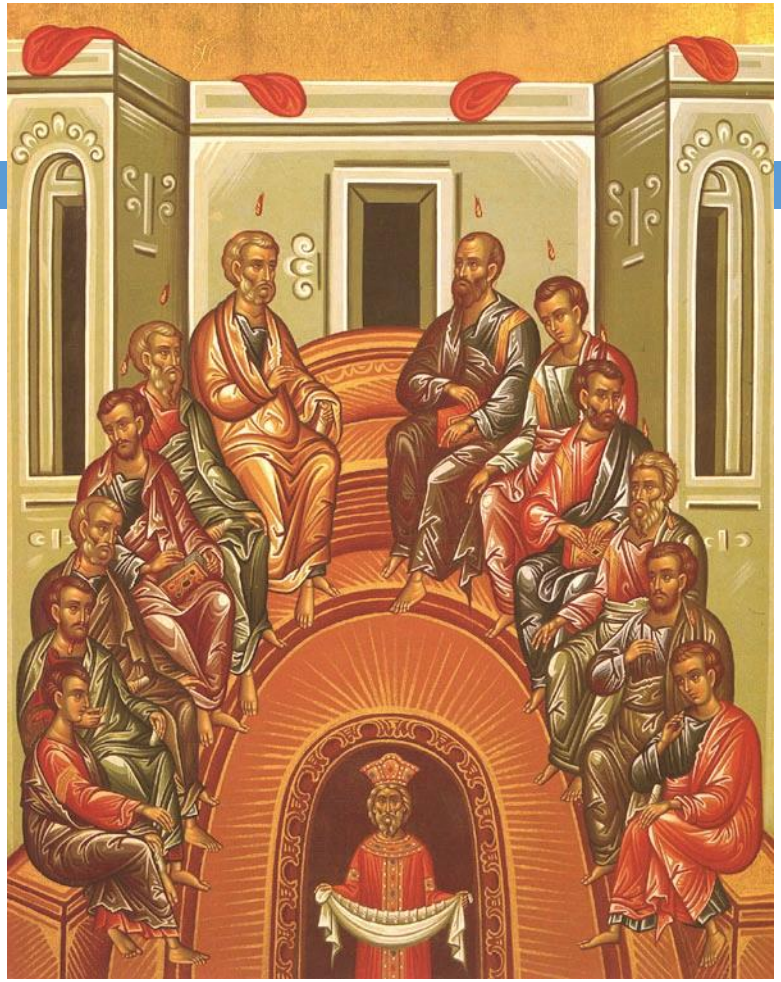
  of our faith in our day to day activities, behavior, & relationships

- Being open to any encounter.

  Prepared if God gives the opportunity

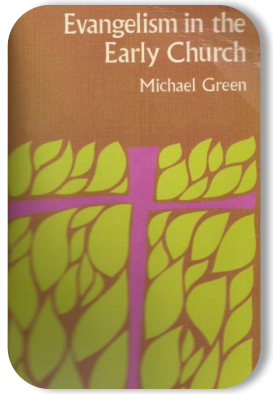
1a. Evangelism is Orthodox

- Not a "Protestant thing"
- Descendants of many Missionaries
  - Ss. Cyril and Methodius
  - Ss. Herman and Innocent
- One, Holy, Catholic, *Apostolic*



Our Challenge Pales Compared to the Apostles

- Jesus commissioned…
  - 11 men to carry on his work to bring the Gospel to the whole world…
- They were…
  - Not distinguished
  - Little education
  - No influential backers
  - "Nobodies" from a second class, backwater province



Some scholars project early Christian growth at 40% per decade
40AD = 1000 Christians >>>> 350 AD = 34M!

2. Evangelism Is Not Optional

- Christ's death and resurrection were public events
  - Precisely because they were to become publically proclaimed.
  - Cannot separate the personal Christ from His resurrection
  - Cannot separate our faith in & experience of the risen Christ from our calling to proclaim His resurrection "to the end of the earth".

The Good News becomes an intellectual exercise if we refuse to share it.

2. Evangelism Is Not Optional…*cont'd*

- Scriptural Examples
  - Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." MT 28:16-20
  - "…**and you shall be witnesses to Me** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth."** ACTS 1
  - "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own People, **called to declare the wonderful deeds** of Him who called you out of darkness into His Marvelous light."1 Peter2:9,10.

2. Not Optional…*cont'd*

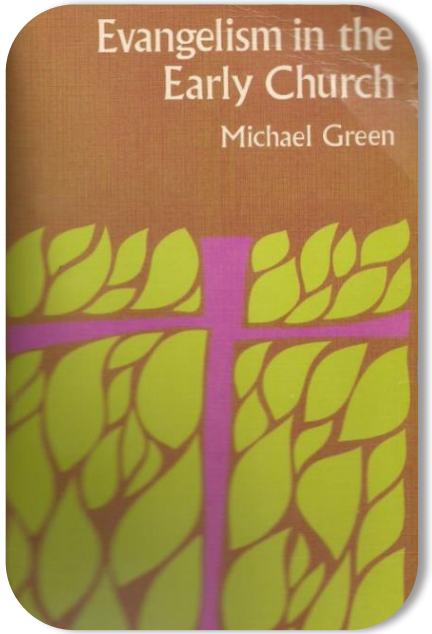
- Pascha: Candle; Procession
- *Jesus* went after the Lost (the 1 vs 99 sheep)
  - The *Church* went after the Lost (e.g., Cyril & Methodius et al)
- What if Mary said No?

3. Evangelism is Everybody's Job

- Holy Spirit equipped the apostles to proclaim the risen Christ -- clergy AND laity alike –
  - all are equipped with gifts and functions by which the Gospel might be proclaimed.
- "God does not need me to make the Church grow," is wrong.
- Not the priest alone.
  - We are all called to work with Christ to reach others.
  - Laity more numerous; have more contact with unchurched through jobs, schools and civic organizations than clergy.

In the Apostolic era…

- Evangelism was the prerogative and duty of every church member.
  - not seen as the preserve of the zealous or the officially designated evangelist.
- Christianity was supremely a lay movement spread by informal missionaries.



Today

Growth and evangelism cannot be delegated to a clergy specialist like repairing the roof.

4. You Are Sharing Good, Important News

- "What you have received, give as a gift".

Apostle Paul to Timothy

- People *need* the Good News
- *At a certain point if we would call ourselves Christians, we have to decide whether alienation from God, the teaching of His Kingdom, the resurrection of His Son really make a difference.*

Your favorite new restaurant…

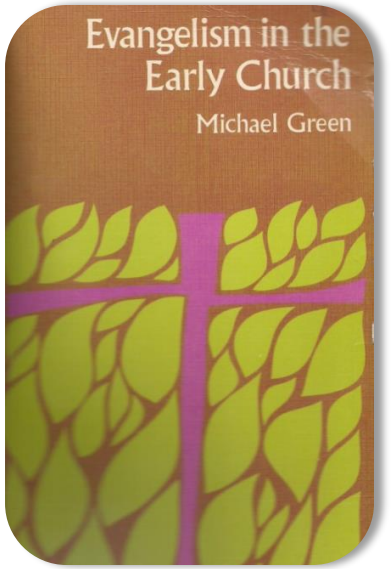
5. Many possible wrong evangelistic motivations

- No
  - “Growth”
  - Pay the bills
  - Accommodate those moved to suburbs
  - Attracting transfers from other Orthodox parishes
  - A ride to church!
- True evangelism:
  - Reaching the unchurched and those who have fallen away.

Apostles Motivation

"They really believed that men without Christ might suffer *eternal and irreparable loss.* This thought drove them to unremitting labors to reach them with the Gospel."

- Gratitude
  - Overwhelming appreciation of the love of God experienced through Jesus Christ
- Responsibility
  - To share the message of God's love
- Concern
  - For the well being of the unevangelized – a lively awareness of the peril of those without Christ.



6. *Proselytism* is NOT Evangelism

- Evangelism
  - Act of proclaiming the Gospel to those who have yet to hear it, either in full or even in part.
- Proselytizing
  - The act of actively encouraging those of other faith traditions to reject their faith traditions, not out of a conviction that they hear the fullness of the Gospel, but for the sake of making a convert.
- With true evangelism there is a commitment to lead people to the truth.
  - Apostles nowhere told Jews and pagans that they need to leave their traditions simply for the sake of making the early Church grow.

7. Spreading the Gospel: Personal and Parish Effort

Personal Tools & Skills

- Love & Kindness
- Personal Narrative
- Conversion Stories & References
- Active Listening
- Helpful Probing
- Situational Fluency
- Comparative Knowledge

Parish Tools & Skills

- Evangelization & Growth Cycle
- Focus: Understanding the religious landscape in your community
- Annual growth planning
- Inquirer Event Development
- Awareness/ “Findability” Tactics
- Strengths Assessment

8. Prerequisites

- Know God
  - "Let your life testify to the presence of God within you." *St Gregory of Nyssa.*
  - The best evangelization approach is living an Orthodox life.
- Community of Love
  - Manifest a spiritual quality of life throughout the whole community –without hatred, bitterness, resentment and hostility.
  - Evangelization efforts useless without a receptive and caring parish.
- Proclaim and Serve
  - Proclaiming the message of God by serving human beings in distress and providing for their essential needs in this world.
  - We proclaim faith through actions that shine in the surrounding world.

PARISH DEVELOPMENT FORUM 10th year OUR PARISH AND THE FUTURE

Characteristics of Early Christians that Made Such an Impression on the World

Their Fellowship

- Rich & poor
- Slaves & aristocrats
- Special consideration for lowly, sick needy;
- Contributions: Voluntary & proportionate

Their Joy!

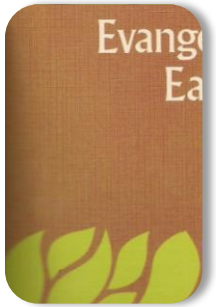
- This new faith did not make them miserable.
- Jesus promised His joy as a permanent possession of the Church. Can't be taken away.

Their Transformed Character

- Chastity
- Hatred of cruelty
- Holy living – Christ likeness of life

Their Power

- Shear power of the name of Jesus healed.
- Done by directing prayer to the Lord.
- No sophisticated training needed.



9. Our Parish is Not a Closed Community

- Each parish:
  - is a local Church of God.
  - actively seeks and welcomes new members
- Not
  - for ‘Our people’ but rather for all mankind.
  - Closed community; “keep to ourselves”

10. Evangelism will change your parish

- Not seeking “replacements” … “just like us.”
- New members are, in all probability, going to be different in many ways than current parishioners.
- Unchristian for a parish to seek new members unless it willing to accept them fully into the community.

11. Evangelism is More Than Planning

- The Church is not a business.
- Evangelism not simply about having the right strategy or a good plan.
- All need to be involved and committed to personal growth in Christ…
  - …otherwise no chance that we will succeed in bringing others to Christ

12. Good Evangelism Needs Intentional, Structured Effort

- Can't simply *want* to grow -- must be something more.
- Find ways to translate the Christian evangelistic impulse into a specific plan of action
  - Evaluate performance
    - Who is responsible? Current procedures? Results?
  - Survey: gifts, talents and skills
  - Set goals: specific, measurable, etc.

"Evangelistic Strategy"

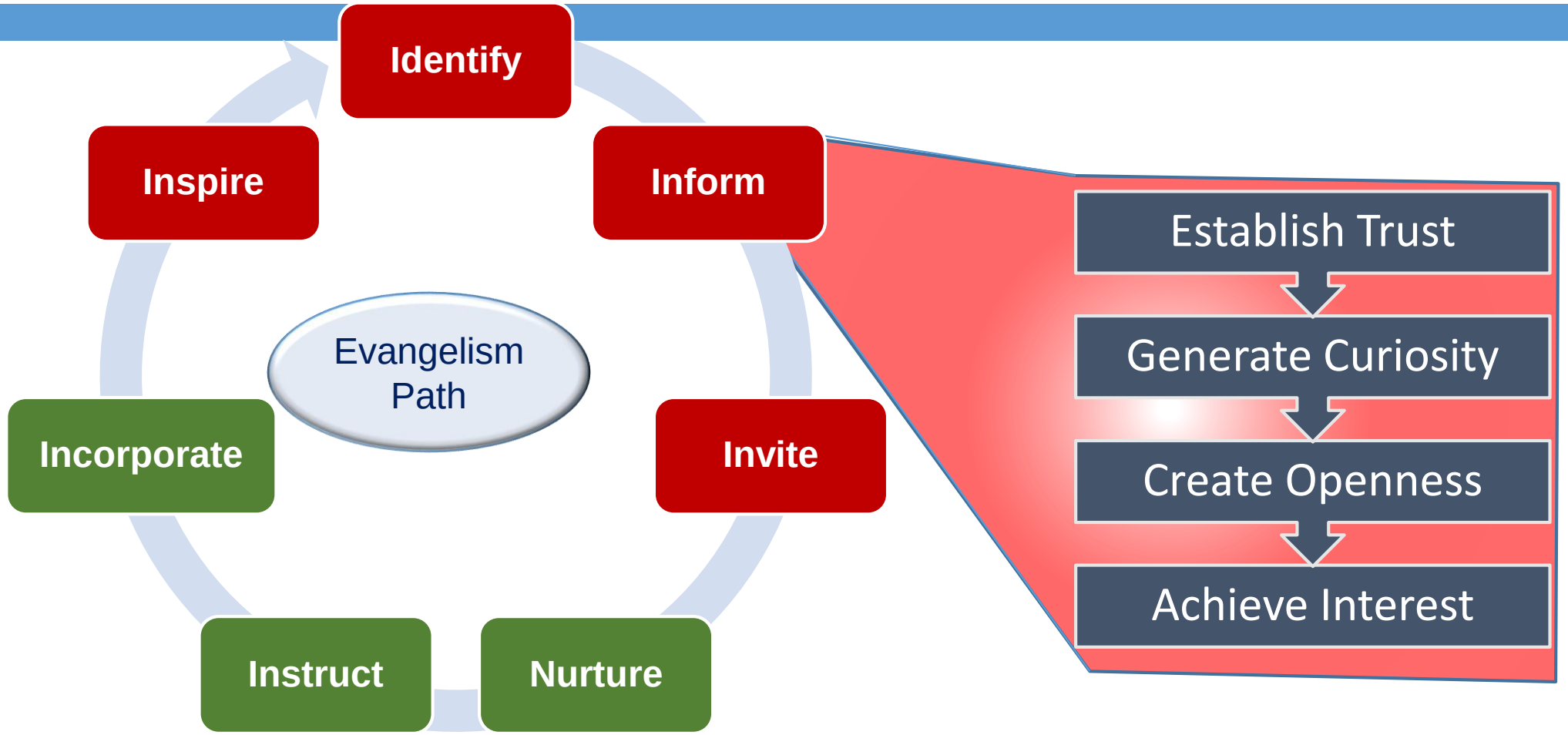
"Strategy! Sounds Like "business"! Manipulative!"

Consider:

- Paul focused on cities that were important centers of:
  - Administration
  - Greek civilization
  - Commerce
- Paul preached to influential people – ones who could be valuable if converted.
  - Justin, Clement, Origen, Tertullian… then followed this approach.
- Implies a strategy or "plan of attack"

Is it not appropriate for Orthodox in America –and Orthodox parishes – to have a *plan of attack*?

New Member Evangelism "Path"



13. Don't Wait for Perfection

- Many persons and parishes feel imperfectly ready for evangelism.
  - It is possible that your parish is not quite ready for an intentional evangelization effort.
- Waiting until we're ready almost always assures us of never being ready.
- The parish's work for the spiritual growth of its own members is inseparable from its mission to bring all people to the knowledge of the Truth. Neither is ever completed.
- You can't wait until your parish is perfect.

14. Catechesis is Linked with Evangelism

- Evangelization goal -- lifelong commitment not a cultic rite.
- Take responsibility for those to whom we have preached
  - "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them … **teaching them**…" (Mt 28:16ff).
  - No one can teach about the Kingdom of God without evangelizing and no one can properly evangelize without teaching.
- Teaching role of the parish becomes more important

15. Beauty is Our Secret Weapon

- Orthodox worship sensory …strong on beauty.
  - Icons, candles, chanting, incense.
- An atmosphere of beauty teaches wordlessly about the nature of God.
  - He is not a *concept* to be endlessly discussed.
  - At some point our capacity to grasp Him intellectually fails and we fall before Him in worship.
  - Beauty opens our heart and stirs us to a hunger for God.

"We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. …. and we cannot forget that beauty."
St. Prince Vladimir Emissaries

Beauty

Babylon Bee

Museum Of Great Protestant Works Of Art Just Large Empty Building

Or this?

Also this…

16. You Do Not Have to Be an Expert

- You *do* need to:
  - Be credible, likable, humble and yet confident.
  - Listen, smile and be patient.
  - Be capable of articulating the basics of the gospel in a way that invites further inquiry.
- Get started
  - You will never be perfectly ready.
  - If you wait until you know enough you will never get started.
  - We learn best by trying and teaching.

17. Not Everybody Can Do This Well

Most Everybody Can Do This Better

- We all have different gifts and talents.
- All may not have the gift of evangelizing
- We all can reflect on how God has worked in our life...
  - …and have the conviction to confidently *express that hope* to others.

18. Beware of the Spiral of Silence

- We are conditioned to believe that people deserve to be left alone
  - We don’t share our faith or ask about their needs.
  - Proclaiming Christ --intrusive or judgmental.
- Yet that person may be facing trying situations requiring God’s help the most.
  - Your concern can be important to them.
  - Your invitation can assist them in coping with their circumstances through the grace of God and the fellowship of the Church.

19. You Almost Always Need to Use Words

- "Preach the gospel and, when necessary, use words",
  - Most effective evangelism approach is a life that shines with the light of Christ.
- Apostolic evangelization approaches always included a combination of both "life and lip" -- behavior and belief.
- Practically speaking when bringing others to the Church you need to use words at some point. Expresses:
  - concern; understanding of their needs; what you believe and why you believe it.

Some Messages Are Better Delivered In Person

Scoreboard invitation?

20. Your Network: FRAN

- A bare bones paraphrase of the events in John 1:35 is as follows:
  - Jesus told Andrew and another “Come and See” and they did.
  - Because it was important Andrew went and found his brother Simon Peter and brought him to Jesus.
  - Jesus told Philip, “Follow me,” and he did.
  - Because it was important, Philip went and found his friend Nathanael and told him, and Nathanael came to Jesus.
- Potential members most likely to come from the network of those who you already know. *Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbors*

21. Not Manipulative or Hard Sell

- Orthodox Evangelization ≠ typical evangelization tactics
- NOT
  - door to door
  - car window leaflets
  - buses through the neighborhood
  - free car washes
  - manipulative
  - based on emotional appeals
  - carefully prepared questions
  - high pressure tactics.

"Ding-Dong! Orthodoxy Calling!"

22. Also Not…

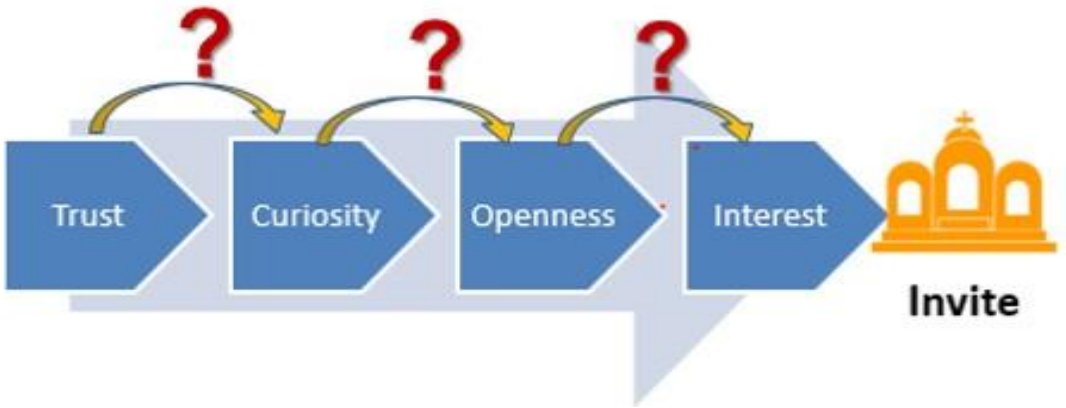
- A Monologue, Interrogation, an Argument, a Conquest
  - Correct understanding facts does not necessarily bring about a positive response or commitment on the part of the hearer.
  - Accepting God requires more than receiving information about Him.
  - Orthodox Christianity is a total lifestyle; not a set of doctrinal definitions.
    - Spiritual *experience* takes precedence over spiritual *understanding*.
  - Need to always see a human person not an object to be conquered.
- Debate/ “Winning”
- Packaged, simplified “pitch”. A “challenge”.

23. Authentic Dialogue Tuned to the Needs of the Other Person

- Understand the audience… connect with the person with whom you are having a conversation
  - Different backgrounds needs, doubts and aspirations.
- An honest two way process based on an honest concern for others.
  - Listen *as well as* proclaim.
  - Engage at pace appropriate to gaining trust and a spirit of openness.
  - If too quickly a barrier occurs when the other person feels you are operating on them with an objective of taking them from where they are to somewhere they don't want to go.

24. Job 1: Develop Curiosity

- Most not equipped to answer every question.
- For most:
  - sense a need
  - engender curiosity
  - explaining the hope that is in us:
    - why we are Christians
    - Why we are *Orthodox* Christians.



Personal Narrative

Personal Tools

- ➔ The most powerful tool you have
- Authentic faith: Is this for real?
- What does God mean to me?
- Why do I have faith/why do I believe?
- Why am I an Orthodox Christian?
- Why do I attend St. Ignorus parish?

25. Accentuate the Positives

- Contrasts to other faiths are inevitable and often helpful
- Focus on the *positive qualities* of Orthodox Christianity not the negatives of an alternative.

Summary

- Yes Its Orthodox
- Everybody's job - early church a lay movement
- Sharing Good news
- Assume your parish will change
- Personal AND Parish effort
- Strategy /plan;
- Understand needs of other person
- Develop curiosity
- Good impression

- Offer comparisons; emphasize positives
- Tell the whole difficult story
- Dialogue
- Using words usually necessary
- Beauty is secret weapon
- Catechesis Integral
- Your network: FRAN
- Everybody can do this better
- Personal narrative

Not

- A Protestant thing
- Optional
- Proselytism
- improper motivations (Fix Roof)
- Experts
- Manipulative; Interrogation, argument, conquest; "Winning"
- Avoid highly critical descriptions of alternative
- Selling a product
- Debate or monologue

- “Unless there is a transformation of contemporary church life so that once again the task of evangelization is something which is seen as incumbent on every baptized Christian, and is backed up by a quality of living which **outshines the best that unbelief can muster**, we are unlikely to make much headway through techniques of evangelism. Men will not believe that Christians have good news to share until they find that bishops and bakers, professors and housewives, are all keen to pass it on. And men will continue to see the church as an **introverted society composed of “respectable” people, bent on its self-preservation** until they see in church groupings, and individual Christians, the caring, the joy, the fellowship, the self sacrifice and the openness which marked the early church at its best.”
- To quote Fr. Thomas Hopko, "basically decent people doing basically benign things."

QUESTIONS? DISCUSSION?

Parish Action

Plan of Attack

1. Commit … should we:
- Explore Evangelization effort?
- Become an Evangelizing Parish?

2. Create Core Group
- Align Clergy/ Lay leaders/ All

3. Collect
- Past Practices
- Numbers
- What/How we communicate

4. Identify

- Strengths
- What holds Us Back
- **Decision: Are we ready for this?**

5. Select
- A few goals

6. Plan Action
- Propose/select
- Ease vs. impact

7. Do it 1-2 items MAX
- Classes/ videos?
- Outreach? inviting ? communicating?

8. Evaluate
- What worked
- Didn't work

9. Celebrate!
- Catch breath
- Start over

= Communicate to parish

11/3/2023

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OUR PARISH AND THE FUTURE