



## The New Evangelization and Youth Ministry

by Fr. Pollard

In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued the Church's latest document that addressed the issue of mission work or evangelization. It was called *Redemptoris Missio*. That document was the culmination and summation of 22 years of the Pope's preaching, teaching and personal example regarding evangelization. It, as well as other documents of the Church, contains four ideas about evangelization that are essential to every work of the Church and therefore to youth ministry as well.

1. Evangelization describes the overall effort of the Church to offer Christ to people. Whether we are talking about speaking to people who have never heard of Christ, to teenagers attending religion class in a Catholic high school or a Catholic talking to his Buddhist friend about the Church's teachings on abortion, all are examples of evangelization.

2. The first step in evangelization is personal spiritual renewal. This must be more than "I'll pray harder or read the Bible some more." The Holy Father reminded us that we must first radically recommit ourselves to Christ, cooperate with His grace and truth, leave all sin behind, embrace a challenging and practical spiritual life and deliberately pursue holiness. If we aren't at least committed to and beginning that project, then our evangelization is fraudulent.

3. Evangelization must be part of every work of the Church. If we invite people to a prayer meeting, to help with a parish play, or to bring food to the poor, some active effort of outreach with the Word of God, motivated by the love of God, must be consciously included in that work.

4. The New Evangelization specifically describes the mission work of the Church done in those places where the culture was once, but is no longer, Christian in its foundation. In other words, the New Evangelization is meant specifically for Europe and the Americas. It implies an admission of failure on the part of the institutional Church in those places. Specifically, people and institutions were not adequately served by the Church nor were the people and institutions so open to the Church for the Faith to be effectively understood, embraced and carried into daily life.

5. The Pope described the context for the New Evangelization by referring to St. Paul's sermon in the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). St. Paul came to the people of Athens where they gathered, and spoke to them in words, concepts, and images already familiar to them. Thus, the Pope admonishes us that we must find the modern "Areopagoi" (the places where people gather) and speak to them in their own idiom about the reality of who Christ is.

**Thus, there are a few practical ways to apply the New Evangelization to Youth Ministry:**

1. Youth ministry must have a component of reaching out into:
  - the lives of the youth;
  - the lives of their families;

- the life of the parish and the life of the community.

If youth ministry only serves those who come to the Church, there is no outreach.

2. Those in youth ministry need commitment and support to begin to lead the Gospel life without compromise. This includes: sincere daily prayer; regular reception of the Sacraments; the ongoing study of the Word of God; discerning and faithfully living one's vocation; embracing the Cross; supporting the work of the Church; and participating in the works of the Church (the corporal and spiritual works of mercy).
3. Every work of youth ministry must have some component of offering Christ and what He gave the Church, the Deposit of Faith. Hence, works that are purely social aren't ministry.
4. Youth ministry programs and workers are called upon to examine themselves and their work to see how effectively they are authentically living and offering Christ. We must apply to ourselves the words of Christ: "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13:52).
5. Youth ministry programs and approaches have the two-fold challenge of accommodating themselves to culture and circumstances of young people, both individually and collectively, while at the time faithfully offering Christ in His fullness. St. Paul describes this when he says: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

*Fr. Pollard is the Parochial Vicar of St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Springfield.*