

‘Go and Make Disciples’ Why Aren't We There Yet?

“Are we there yet?” asked our six year old son Tim about one hour into a nearly 1500 mile trip from Northern Wisconsin to Long Island, New York. Then about two hours later, he asked the same question again. And finally, at about six hours into the trip he asked, “Why aren't we there yet?”

“Why aren't we there yet?” is a question that participants in evangelization training workshops are also asking about Catholic evangelization efforts. Some of their frustration stems from the realization that 2010 marks the 35th Anniversary of the worldwide call for Catholic evangelization in Pope Paul VI's, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (1975). Others realize that it was nearly 20 years ago that the United States Conference of Bishops' published *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*. So, their question and the frustration behind it are very important to consider.

One way to answer this question is to consider the 2009 USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis survey of U.S. dioceses about how *Go and Make Disciples* has been implemented. The survey consisted of three questions focused on the three goals established in *Go and Make Disciples* (Sections 46, 53, 56). Dioceses were asked to, “Please describe any diocesan or parish initiative which has been successful in:

Goal 1—Creating an enthusiasm among practicing Catholics to live their faith better and to want to share it with others.

Goal 2—Fostering a desire among inactive Catholics to return to the practice of the faith, or in fostering a desire among non-Catholics to become part of the Church.

Goal 3—Helping the Catholic faithful bring Church teaching and Gospel values to bear on public life.”

The survey summary, “Results of the Diocesan *Go and Make Disciples* Survey,” lists an impressive array of evangelization, catechetical, and ministry initiatives, including: Catechetical Institutes/Schools/Courses, Parish Based Evangelization Initiatives, Diocesan Wide Evangelization Initiatives, Reconciliation Services/ Welcome Back Masses, RCIA, Diocesan Training Programs on How to Evangelize, Parishioner to Parishioner Visits, Outreach to Immigrants, Catholic Charities/Direct Service Opportunities, State Catholic Conferences, and Faithful Citizenship Workshops/Lectures. (See the entire summary at <http://www.usccb.org/evangelization/goandmake/results-diocesan-go-make-disciples-survey.pdf>.) This listing gives us much to be thankful for and affirms the work of the Holy Spirit among us!

But another study, a more humbling study, must also be considered at the same time. It is the 2008 *Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among US Catholics* study that reports that only 23% of Catholics are regular Sunday Mass-goers (<http://cara.georgetown.edu/sacraments.html>). So how do we consider the results of both studies in order to answer the question, “Why aren't we there yet?”

The USCCB “Survey” presents several ongoing challenges to initiatives in evangelization. We believe that CARA survey underlines just how important it is that we find answers to these

challenges soon. Perhaps your parish or arch/diocese can identify with some of these challenges. (To eliminate repetition we have combined and numbered these as, "15 Challenges to Catholic Evangelization Initiatives.")

15 CHALLENGES TO CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION INITIATIVES

Lack of Formation of Laity:

1. Belief that evangelization is something other Christians do
2. Being uncomfortable with speaking to others about their faith
3. Lack of an adult level of faith education
4. Being busy with work, family and school activities

Lack of Resources/Distance:

5. Distance from parishes to the location where events were held
6. Parishes lacking the financial resources to support evangelization activities and/or hire a staff person
7. Cost of producing diocesan wide programs

Lack of Formation of Clergy:

8. Pastors are overwhelmed with day to day parish tasks
9. Lack of a cohesive diocesan vision of evangelization

Secularity:

10. Growing numbers of people opposed to religious traditions
11. Secular media's portrayal of religious beliefs
12. People's belief that the Church should comment on moral issues not political ones

Lack of Understanding about Social Mission of the Church:

13. Lack of knowledge about the social mission of the Church

14. People willing to donate money to charitable causes but uncomfortable with engaging in direct service to the poor
15. Uncomfortable with the importance of social justice issues, especially as they relate to the common good

Individual Activity—3-5 mins.

- A. Place a check mark in front of the five challenges above that you are **most concerned** about on this list.
- B. Draw a circle around the challenges that you believe your parish and/or diocese is doing a good job on working to overcome.
- C. Underline the **top three challenges** that you believe your parish and/or diocese needs to work on next.

Reflection Questions for Small Group Sharing—4 or 5 people (25-40 mins.)

- Which of these 15 challenges to Catholic evangelization initiatives do you believe your parish and/or diocese is doing a good job on working to overcome? How?
- What are the **top three challenges** to evangelization that you are struggling with in your parish or (arch)diocese? Why?
- What are some concrete things you might do to deal with one of the three top challenges that your parish or diocese faces?
- Who can you seek help from in your (arch)diocese or region to work on or to overcome each of these challenges?