

A Reduced List of Practical Principles of Orthodox Evangelism

Original List compiled from various sources by Joseph Kormos, Parish Development Ministry Leader, Archdiocese of Western Pennsylvania, Orthodox Church in America.

This list is the result of brief discussions at the 2019 Parish Development Forum. It began from a longer list. Found [here](#) and [here](#).

1. Evangelism is Orthodox

We who claim to hold the apostolic faith, we who are disciples of Sts. Cyril, Methodius, Herman and Innocent, cannot say that mission and evangelism are not Orthodox words. Evangelism – the spreading of the Gospel --is not a “Protestant” concept.

2. Evangelism is Everybody’s Job

Far from being the exclusive ministry of the clergy, evangelization and church growth is the calling of every Orthodox Christian. Just as the Holy Spirit equipped the apostles to proclaim the risen Christ, the members of the Body of Christ –clergy and laity alike – also are equipped with gifts and functions by which the Gospel might be proclaimed.

The attitude that says “God does not need me to make the Church grow,” is wrong. We are all called to work with Christ to reach others. All those who hear the gospel are expected to proclaim it. Just as faith, hope and charity are virtues every Christian needs and strives for, so the responsibility for Church growth is that of every Orthodox Christian.

Growth and evangelism cannot be delegated to a clergy specialist like repairing the roof. Much of the day to day to work of evangelization can and should be done by the laity. Laity are more numerous than clergy. Laypersons usually have more contact with unchurched through jobs, schools and civic organizations than clergy.

3. Evangelization Requires Corporate (Parish) and Personal Effort

Orthodox Evangelism is not something that the parish does. Evangelism is most effective when each Christian has a part in responding to God’s desire to bring all men and women to salvation. Likewise, without concerted effort by the *parish* the effectiveness of personal efforts will surely be diminished. It takes both dimensions to work in tandem for Orthodox evangelism to become effective.

4. Finding Those Who’ve Moved to the Suburbs is NOT Evangelization

Often mission parishes are formed without real missions. They simply look to serve current Orthodox Christians who have moved to another area. Many parishes claim to grow when they

actually are only receiving transfers from other Orthodox parishes - a zero sum game for the Church. Increased convenience and shorter drive times are fine but true evangelism is about reaching the unchurched and those who have fallen away.

5. Prerequisites

Before undertaking a parish evangelization effort there are clear pre-requisites.

- **Know God** –Our first task in helping the Church grow is to enter into and be in the reality of God – to be in personal communion with Him. The goal of evangelism is “growth in life and faith and spiritual understanding”. That growth finds its beginning in our knowledge of God and our conviction that Jesus Christ is the very center of our lives. “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** – Our second priority is to manifest a spiritual quality of life throughout the whole community. Where there is hatred, bitterness, resentment and hostility, the community of love is destroyed; and without love the spiritual character of the Church is destroyed. Evangelization efforts will be useless without a receptive and caring parish.
- **Proclaim and Serve** – A third prerequisite is to go out into the world proclaiming the message of God by serving human beings in distress and providing for their essential needs in this world. The light of God must be allowed to illumine *through us* and God’s goodness must be made to season our life *by our activity*. We proclaim faith through actions that shine in the surrounding world.

6. Don’t Wait for Perfection

Just as most laypersons and some clergy are unsure of their preparedness for personal evangelism many parishes will seem (and all are) imperfectly ready for evangelism. It is possible that *your* parish is not ready for an intentional evangelization effort.

As with persons however, *waiting until we’re ready* almost always assures us of never being ready. Every parish is called upon to exercise in its special way every one of the ministries of the body of Christ. (I COR 12). 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.

7. Catechesis is Linked with Evangelism

Evangelization efforts are often considered successful if it culminates in a cultic rite not a lifelong commitment. We must take responsibility for those to whom we have preached. Jesus told his apostles to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... teaching

them..." (Mt 28:16ff). After Pentecost the disciples "were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." (Acts 4:2). No one can teach about the Kingdom of God without evangelizing and no one can properly evangelize without teaching. As receptive persons begin to truly seek Christ the teaching role of the parish becomes more important.

8. You Do *Not* Have to Be an Expert

You *do* need to be credible, likable, humble and yet confident. You need to listen, smile and be patient. And, you need to be capable of articulating the basics of the gospel in a way that invites further inquiry. Yes, you need to know your faith – and you can probably never know too much – but you will, conversely, never be perfectly ready. If you wait until you know enough you will never get started. In almost all endeavors we learn best by trying and teaching. Get started.

9. You Almost Always *Need* to Use Words

"Preach the gospel and, when necessary, use words", is a quote familiar to many. It is attributed, perhaps inaccurately, to St Francis of Assisi.

The most effective evangelism approach is a life that shines with the light of Christ. Practically speaking however when bringing others to the Church you need to use words at some point. Words help to indicate that you care. Words help to convey an understanding of the other person's needs. Words help to express the hope that is in you -- what you believe and why you believe it.

According to Michael Green, author of "Evangelization in the Early Church" the evangelization methods and approaches used by the apostles always included a combination of both "life and lip" -- behavior and belief.

10. Evangelization is an Authentic Dialogue Tuned to the Needs of the Other Person

People come from different backgrounds and have various needs, doubts and aspirations. Just as an inspiring speech or presentation starts with an understanding of the audience, effective Orthodox evangelization begins with connecting with the person with whom you are having a conversation. It is an honest two way process based on an honest concern for others. Orthodox evangelization demands that we listen *as well as* proclaim.

We enhance the other person's receptivity to the message of salvation by engaging them at pace that is appropriate to gaining their trust and engendering a spirit of openness. If we try to advance the conversation to 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.

11. Job 1: Develop Curiosity

We needn't feel we must be equipped to guide a person completely through the process of embracing the faith. We can't all be capable of answering every question. For most of us our necessary competency level is to be able to engage honestly with others, to sense a need, and engender curiosity by explaining the hope that is in us. Often that comes down to explaining why we are Christians and specifically why we are Orthodox Christians.

Summary: Principles of Orthodox Evangelization	
1. Evangelism is Orthodox	
2. Evangelism is everybody's Job	
3. Evangelism is Not Optional	
4. Proselytizing is Not Evangelism	
5. Evangelism requires corporate (parish) and personal effort	
Parish Related principles	Personal Principles
6. Parish is not a closed community	17. You are sharing good important news
7. Evangelism is more than planning	18. You do not have to be an expert
8. Not about the roof	19. Everyone can do this better
9. Finding those moved to the suburbs is not Evangelization	20. Beware the spiral of silence
10. Prerequisites: Know God, Loving community, proclaim and serve	21. You almost always need words
11. Don't wait for the parish to be perfect	22. Network of communication
12. Evangelism will change the Parish	23. Not manipulative or hard sell
13. Evangelization requires intentional structured effort	24. Not an interrogation, argument or conquest
14. Define a clear process – an Evangelization cycle	25. Not a justification of our choice
15. Catechesis is Linked with Evangelization	26. Not a Monologue
16. Beauty is Our secret Weapon	27. An authentic dialogue tuned to needs of other person
	28. Job 1 develop curiosity
	29. Accentuate the Positive
	30. Not peddlers of God's word