

DISCIPLES IN MISSION PLAN TO EVANGELIZE



THIS FOURTH WEEK OF LENT, PARISH MINISTERS ARE INCREASING THEIR EFFORTS AND PLANNING FOR EASTER. THE MUSIC, THE SERVICES, THE FINAL PREPARATION OF THOSE WHO WILL ENTER THE CHURCH AT THE EASTER VIGIL—ALL THIS AND MORE MUST BE DONE FOR THE GREAT FEAST.

Building the Kingdom with Plans

The pastor looked around the room. It was late on a Saturday afternoon and the pastoral council had spent several hours talking about the future of the parish.

“Well,” he said, “it seems very clear that if we continue doing the same things, we are going to keep getting similar results. If we want to do and be something different, then we have to try new and different things.”

While most of us want our parishes—like the rest of life—to become better, we also want them to remain the same. We don’t want to face the changes that are necessary for improvement. So change doesn’t seem to happen at all, or it happens only with much stress. Or, worse yet, when changes come, they are not good ones.

Perhaps our problem is that we don’t really believe that parishes need to develop and follow the same planning processes that other organizations do. We think that church happens without planning.

And then we’re surprised when nothing changes for the better.

The Power of Planning

We all admire people who have the capacity to get things done. “How do you do it all?” we ask. Invariably, they say it’s planning: the ability to look ahead, see what’s required, estimate the resources that are necessary, and then bring people and resources together to a desired end.

A pastor, for example, realized that his parish had to do new things to reach new people. He and his evangelization team realized that young people in the neighborhood, because of drugs and other urban plagues, were hurting badly. The team and the pastoral council organized a healing Mass. The team made posters; parishioners spread the word. Scores of young adults came that spring Sunday, to be prayed over and receive a sign of hope.

All parishes need planning. The pastoral council that absolves itself from planning will be the pastoral council that merely maintains—if it’s lucky—the status quo. The major efforts of a parish, particularly in worship and education, require careful planning. So do finances and a host of other parish activities.

This is all the more true when it comes to evangelization. Although it is the fundamental mission of the Church, parishes are so unaccustomed to evangelizing that, without plans, nothing new is likely to happen. And new things *need* to happen. Right within the parish's boundaries are people searching for the Gospel, people thinking about returning to the Church, uninvolved youth needing to be formed in the faith, and parishioners looking for a deeper experience of the Gospel. Often parishes, with their usual planning, or lack of it, don't reach these very people.

Only planning can make these and other activities possible. Of course, plans by themselves will do nothing. A parish community empowered by the Holy Spirit, centered on Christ and living for God's kingdom, must first be formed. Only then can the Church's mission be carried out. But planning, too, is essential.

The bishops highlight planning in *Go and Make Disciples*: "We envision groups of Catholics reading this plan together, discussing its implications, and being stimulated by the range of suggested strategies. We see these groups seeking to do things, both within and beyond their

own Catholic communities, in ways that make sense for their locale and situation" (p. 11).

Steps

Planning helps a parish translate its vision into practical steps. It lays down goals, objectives to help attain those goals, strategies to move toward those objectives, and tasks for committed parishioners to work on together in a system of sharing, support, and accountability.

Even the most difficult programs come down to the same thing: understanding and carrying out the steps involved.

Disciples in Mission asks your parish to plan for evangelization. Discussion, preaching, reflection, and prayer create the basis on which a parish plans evangelizing activities. These activities build new relationships that provide the resources for parish planning.

As you grasp what evangelization means, grasp as well what planning for evangelization can mean in your own parish community.

Reflection

Read Luke 14:28-32. Reflect on how planning plays a part in these parables.

Action

Try to plan one change in your personal life. Write out a goal, develop some objectives and strategies, and form a schedule to carry them out. What are the results?

Prayer

THE LORD ANSWER YOU IN TIME OF DISTRESS, THE NAME OF THE GOD OF JACOB DEFEND YOU! MAY GOD SEND YOU HELP FROM THE TEMPLE, FROM ZION BE YOUR SUPPORT. MAY GOD REMEMBER YOUR EVERY OFFERING, GRACIOUSLY ACCEPT YOUR HOLOCAUST, GRANT WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART, FULFILL YOUR EVERY PLAN. MAY WE SHOUT FOR JOY AT YOUR VICTORY, RAISE THE BANNERS IN THE NAME OF OUR GOD.

(PSALM 20:2-6)