

2026-03-20: Preaching & Evangelism I

In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.

Who, What, Where, When, How of Evangelism

Introduction

Background

The first idea for this topic came over a year ago after the 2024 OCAD. Many of our youth - most are servants - came to me in the Youth Meeting and talked about their struggles at OCAD. They felt ill-equipped for some of the conversations that happened or the people who approached the table. Some were even discouraged at the end of the day...

At the same time, there was a lot of excitement around OCCM and the influx of catechumens and the potential to baptize youth. And a lot of excitement about bringing catechumens and inviting them to every meeting and every convention and every outing, etc. but without seeking any guidance.

And there were several other interactions that I had with various youth since then that felt a little off...

One time there was a guy who came into the Church because he was just looking for someone to talk to. He wanted to talk to the priest... so I sat with him for a little while in private, and then he left. That evening, I heard the youth talking and excited and someone asked me about "the new catechumen."

One time I was telling the youth on Thursday that we have a baptism tomorrow before liturgy, try to make it! And there were excited faces as they asked "is it an adult baptism??" But a look of disappointment when I said "no, it's a baby."

We all rejoice when there is a new member in the Body of Christ, and when someone has gone through the catechism and decided to dedicate his life to Christ and to the Orthodox life. But the process itself requires a lot of wisdom and a lot of cooperation with the Holy Spirit to do it right.

At the same time, many youth - and especially young men - are coming to the Orthodox Church inquiring and seeking. Many of them are seeking something different than what the society in the US has to offer... the society is emasculating them and diminishing their value because they are men. So how are we to interact with these people? How are we to respond to them? Should we just

baptize everyone who comes our way? Will that save them?

These are some of the ideas we will discuss in this Retreat

First topic: Who, What, Where, When, How of Evangelism

Second topic: Characteristic of the Evangelist

What is Evangelism

We'll start with the word itself: Evangelism.

εὐαγγελίζω - euangelizō - Evangelism - Preaching the Gospel

εὐαγγέλιον - Good News - (eu = good, angelion = message (like angelos = messenger))

Gospel - Godspel - God (Good) Spel (News, Narrative, Speech - reciting/speaking something)

Evangelism refers to the preaching or spreading of the Gospel - good news.

- Every time that I give a sermon, I am preaching the Gospel == I am Evangelizing.
- Every time I give a Sunday School lesson, I am preaching the Gospel == I am Evangelizing.

Why?

Why Preach the Gospel?

(See "The Harvest is Plentiful")

1. Evangelism is a Commandment
 - "Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15)
 - "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." (John 17:18)
 - "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14)
 - "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (Matthew 5:13)
2. Evangelism is Love
 - If we love God, then we must love our neighbor; and if we love our neighbor, then we must care for their salvation. We would do all we can to rescue them!
3. Evangelism is the Mission of the Church
 - The Book of Acts!
 - Some people say that the time of Evangelism is ended... that's preposterous!
 - "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)
4. Evangelism is the Outcome of the New Life

- Evangelism is for the sake of those we are serving... I don't gain anything from it. Is that not the outcome of my dedication to the New Life of Baptism? Is that not denying myself, taking up my cross and following Him?

5. Evangelism is the Greatest Mission

- Think of worldly missions... a doctor is trying to prolong life. A lawyer or judge is trying to bring about justice. A Software developer is trying to facilitate communication and knowledge. Artists are trying to bring joy to people.
- All of this is temporary... but the mission of the Evangelist is eternal life. So it is greater than those other missions.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

St John Chrysostom - "There is nothing colder than a Christian who does not try to save others."

Are we Slacking? Why doesn't Orthodoxy recruit? Why doesn't she advertise? Why doesn't she evangelize the way others do? Why doesn't she simplify? Why doesn't she scale?

A world saturated with marketing, messaging and "growth strategies" Orthodoxy is obscure...

- Quiet Churches
- Long services
- No Slogans
- Not compromising in its teachings
- Entrance requires time, patience and submission to a way of life

The Church is NOT an organization or an institution... it is not a place that is trying to have many numbers and big quantity, but it is a place focused on quantity. It is the Body of Christ - not metaphorically, but literally. And it accepts members who want to join it, and then heals them. The Church is a hospital for sinners - when the sinners approach the Church, they get the treatment they need through the Sacraments.

John 6

What?

Why Bring People In?

Activity: Why do you want to bring others into the Church?

Some say "I don't want them to go to Hell."

- "if you don't do xyz you will go to Hell." It boils down my relationship with God to be that of a slave - owner. I obey because of fear of punishment. This is preaching a fear (scaredness) of God.

Some say "I want them to have a Heavenly Reward."

- "If you do xyz you will get all these blessings and reward" This boils my relationship with God to that of an employer-employee. I obey because of anticipating a reward.

According to St Basil, both of these are missing the mark...

- "Who can please God? Either we please Him fearing tortures and then we are in the state of a slave; or we fulfill the commandments of God in hope of reward, for our own benefit, and therefore we are like hirelings; or we do good for the sake of good itself, and then we are in the state of a son. For, when a son reaches mature age and reason, he fulfills the will of his father not because he fears punishment, and not in order to receive a reward from him, but because he cherishes a special love for him and reveres him as his father, he loves him and is convinced that all the possessions of his father belong to him also. Such a one is able to hear (Gal. 4:7), *Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*. Surely he no longer fears God, as we have said, by that initial fear, but he loves Him, as also St. Anthony said, "I no longer fear God, but I love Him."

Activity: What is the Gospel Message?

- Every religion, every faith, every worldview, has and tries to answer these questions about the human condition:
 - What is the problem? (undesired effect) - symptoms
 - What is the cause of the problem? (undesired cause) - diagnosis
 - What is the solution? (desired effect) - prognosis
 - What is the way to the solution? (desired cause) - treatment plan
- Plato
 - Problem: Vice, we are not good
 - Cause: Ignorance
 - Solution: Virtue, be good
 - Way to Virtue: Knowledge (opposite of cause)
- Buddha
 - Problem: Suffering
 - Cause: Greed and Selfish Desire
 - Solution: Extinction of the Selfish desire (Nirvana)
 - Way of extinction: "Noble eightfold path" of purification
- Marxism
 - Problem: Alienation
 - Cause: Capitalism
 - Solution: Classless Society
 - Way to Solution: Socialism

- Freud
 - Problem: Neurosis & Psychosis
 - Cause: Conflict between identification and superego
 - Solution: Balanced Personality
 - Way to Solution: Psychoanalysis

What is the Gospel?

- "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14)
- Whenever Christ met someone, He was turned that meeting into an encounter with God's Kingdom. He would enter into a conversation or respond to a question or an obvious need, and begin opening that person to the presence of God. He never talked down to or judged the person He encountered, and He never pushed them to do anything.
 - Samaritan Woman - He led gently, point by point, to a recognition of who He was
 - Wealthy Young Man (Matthew 19:16-30) - could not accept the call to follow Jesus, the Lord was saddened by his reaction but did not condemn him
 - Nicodemus - His conversation with Nicodemus was presenting the Gospel of the Kingdom to Him
 - NOTE: Might need an appendix on the Syro-Phoenician Woman
- How can we, who are fallen and living in sin, enter this holy and eternal Kingdom?
- Christian Answer (Good News)
 - Problem: Death
 - Cause: Sin
 - Solution: Life
 - Way to Solution: Christ
- Christ
 - "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." (John 10:10)
 - "as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:21)
 - The preaching and evangelism of the Apostles in the 1st Century was three focuses: Christ Died, Christ is Risen, Christ will Come Again.
 - Christ Died for Us
 - "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8)
 - We were separated from God, but Christ died that we may be reconciled with Him
 - Christ is Risen
 - If Jesus had come, shared life with us, and then died... it would have been a story of great tragedy, but we would not be restored to God

- Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and gave eternal life to those who were in the grave
- Christ will come again for Us and for Our Salvation
 - This focus was so strong that some first-century believers expected it to happen any day now. Some of them stopped working and were living off of others (Thessalonica) and St Paul had to remind them that the Second Coming would occur in God's good time
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15
 - Christ will do two things:
 - Judge the living and the dead, determining who will go to Paradise (sheep) and who will go to Hades (goats)
 - Matthew 25:31-33
 - Bring about the final reconciliation between God and His Creation
 - Revelation 21:1-4
- The Gospel Message is very simple. It's not complicated apologetics. It's not theological minutiae.
 - Sometimes our evangelism is talking about other things...
 - Why Orthodoxy is the True Church
 - Icons
 - Councils
 - Styles of Worship
 - Ecumenical Councils
 - We conflate Evangelism and Catechism, preaching up front what should not be taught until someone has decided to join and are being shepherded into the Church.
 - Evangelism is about taking those **first steps** toward a relationship with God - proclaiming that God is with us. If we are not preaching Christ, but instead trying to persuade people, we will fail.

How?

How to Preach Christ

- Luke 4:17-21 - Christ goes to the Synagogue where He reads from Isaiah. He closes the book, gives it to the attendant, sits down. And He says "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
- Apostles did the same thing... go to the Synagogue, read the Scripture of the Jews, and answer them: "This prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus Christ."
- St Paul did the same things... passing through the pagan city of Athens... "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you." (Acts 17)
- St Mark did the same thing...
- St John did the same thing... Greek Philosophy taught the concept of Logos - the universal mind, the divine reason, the source of all truth; Stoicism saw Logos as the active and rational principle that organizes, permeates and governs the entire cosmos. So what did

St John say? "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was in the beginning with God." (John 1:1-2). You are looking for the Logos? I'm here to tell you that the Logos is Jesus Christ.

- Evangelism in the Early Church - Michael Green
 - "The content of their proclamation was none other than the person of Jesus Christ. They made use of all the cultural and intellectual pathways which would facilitate the reception of this message. Intensely sensitive to the felt needs of the listeners, the thought world in which they moved, the very language which would strike the clearest note in their minds, their aim nevertheless remained both simple and direct; to introduce others to Jesus Christ. It is the same if we are listening to the apostle Paul on Areopagus or the monk Macarius in the Egyptian deserts." (pp. 383-384)
- St Paul met them where they were at
 - "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you." (1 Cor 9:19-23)

How the Church Preaches the Gospel

The Church has a responsibility towards every single person in the world - not only toward the believers. Three groups of people in the world. Active Believers, Lost Sheep (who are believers but are lost) and the Non-believers.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

The Church service can be classified into three ministries - Jerusalem, Samaria, End of the Earth:

1. Ministry of Spiritual Care (Active Members)
 - Preventative: How to prevent them from being lost
 - Nurturing: How to nurture them to grow into spiritual maturity
2. Ministry of the Lost Sheep
 - Outreach: Searching for the Lost Sheep
 - Healing: The Lost Sheep who returns will be full of wounds - how to accept him and prepare a godly and therapeutic atmosphere to promote his healing
3. Ministry of Evangelism (Non-Believers)
 - Preaching the Gospel
 - Grafting (Catechism)

What about Apologetics?

- Apologetics is more of a discipline than a formal "service." It is relevant in ALL categories of church service.
 - 1a because it's tackling difficult topics that may arise in the future.
 - 1b and 3b because it prepares faithful to be able to "give a defense"
 - 2a & 2b because many of Lost Sheep drift because of doubt, intellectual confusion, etc.
 - 3a because when preaching the gospel, some may desire to debate or to raise points of confusion
- There is a BIG difference between Apologetics and Preaching & Evangelism
 - Although Apologetics involves "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), it is focused more on an intellectual or logical discussion, debate. That's why it's only ONE component of any service - because the pastoral is MORE important
 - Apologetics can help someone overcome any intellectual barriers to the faith, but it CANNOT (on its own) bring someone to the faith.

Who?

Who is the Evangelist?

Tomorrow we will discuss the characteristics of the Evangelist, but for now it suffices to know that NOT EVERYONE is called to Evangelize in every way or at all times.

All Christians are called to Evangelize by our good deeds, actions, words, manner of speech, manner of dress, modesty, virtue, etc.

NOT All Christians are called to Evangelize by the word...

“And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11)

On top of that, some wisdom is needed when getting into Debates or Discussions. These require a different setting (e.g. NEVER Alone, NEVER with Multiple People). I have heard from many of our youth: “I attend a Bible Study with my Protestant friends and I am trying to bring them to the fullness of the faith.” What can come out of this setting? And it’s usually someone who is NOT consistent with Sunday School or Bible Study or even Liturgy. And as they are “trying to bring people” they are getting further and further from the Church. They are having more and more questions.

NOT All Christians are called to Evangelize by the word, and the one who is, needs some characteristics and some preparation which we will talk about tomorrow.

Where?

Where to Evangelize

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

1. Jerusalem: Your circle; your workplace; your school/classes

- "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)
 - By your good deeds, clean language, modesty in dress, high moral standard, smile, peace even in tribulation, joy even in suffering, patience even with a difficult personality
- We, as Christians, permeate our society...
 - Careers: Medical Field, Engineering, Retail, Real Estate, Business, Law, etc.
 - Hobbies: Gyms, Fields/Clubs, Stores,
 - Think of all the places you go, all the people you interact with... how many of them do you see regularly? How many see something different in you?
 - Like Christmas lights
- We will be asked...
 - "What is the reason for the hope that is in you?"
 - "How are you able to smile so much?"
 - "How are you able to be so patient with that person (e.g. my boss, my coworker, my employee, etc.)?"
 - "Why aren't you eating meat?"
 - "Why aren't you going out drinking with us?"
 - "What are you doing this weekend?" - "What did you do last weekend?"

2. Judea and Samaria: Your community

- "Come and See" - needs someone to "Go and Tell"
- E.g.
 - Nursing Homes
 - Prisons
 - Orphanages
 - Women's Shelters
 - Homeless Shelters
- Find those who are "in need" and show them Christ, who will satisfy their needs
 - "The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."
 - Do I know someone who is poor? Or if I don't, do I know where to find the poor?
 - Do I know someone brokenhearted? Struggling... just lost someone in their family, or just found out about a hard diagnosis, or just lost their job, or going through a difficulty? Lonely? Did I preach the Gospel to them? Did I go and tell them about the Lord Christ who can satisfy their needs?

- Do I know someone in captivity? Or do I know where to find the captive? Or someone who is spiritually captive?
- Do I know someone who is oppressed?

3. The end of the earth: Global Missionary Work

Process of Catechism

1. Inquirer

- Bring him/her to the Divine Liturgy.
 - Not the Youth Meeting. Not Sunday School. Not Servants Meeting. Not Bible Study. Liturgy. "Come and see."
- Prepare them in advance (communion, men and women seating, hair covering, appropriate attire, etc.)
- Be there and ready to accept them
- Let them meet Abouna!

2. Catechumenate

- After many weeks of attending liturgies, asking questions, forming a relationship with the priest, they may be ready to become a catechumen
- Catechism has three components:
 - Doctrinal Formation (catechism classes)
 - Liturgical Formation (liturgical praxis)
 - Spiritual Formation (spiritual canon)
- Later in the Catechumenate
 - Community Integration
 - Service Integration
- No less than one year
 - Discipleship
 - Liturgical Experience
 - Adequate time to learn
 - Scriptural Study
 - Time to get to know them
 - Moral Transformation
 - Doesn't end in baptism
 - Giving the best chance to succeed as a Christian
 - "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.⁴⁸ But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:47-48)
 - "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks

judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep." (1 Cor 11:27-30)

- "*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

3. Christian Initiation

- Sacrament of Confession
- Sacrament of Baptism
- Sacrament of Chrismation (Myron)
- Sacrament of Matrimony*
- Sacrament of the Eucharist

4. Catechism after Initiation

- Receiving the Sacraments
- Cultivating friendships
- Discovering the imperfection of Orthodox faithful
- Dealing with Convert Burnout
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFrgS81Dlog>

Workshop #1

Activity #1

A man enters the Church. You introduce yourself, and welcome him. He says "My name is Jack, I go to a non-denominational Church." How do you respond?

Scenario from work

Scenario from school

Scenario from tabling

Activity #2

For each category of church service, list services that would fall under it that you can think of.

- Confession - 1a
- Liturgy - 1a
- Bible Study - 1b
- Sunday School Class - 1b
- Visitation - 1a
- Aghapy Meal - 1a
- Liturgy Sermon - 1b
- Youth Meeting - 1b
- Phone Calls - 1a
- OCCM GBMs - 1a, 1b, 2a, 3a

- OCCM Tabling - 3a
- OCCM OCAD - 3a
- Catechumen classes - 3b
- Sports Ministries (CFCBL) - 1a, 2a
- Global Coptic Day - 3a

Resources

- St Habib Girgis
 - Preaching: Its History and Importance in the Christian Church Generally, and in the Coptic Orthodox Church Specifically
- Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty
 - Evangelism and the School of Alexandria
 - Preaching in the Post-Apostolic Era
 - Evangelism: 1 Corinthians
 - Evangelism: 2 Corinthians
- Michael Keiser
 - Spread the Word
- Fr Daoud Lamei
 - The Harvest is Plentiful
- HG Bishop Antonios Marcos
 - Theology of Mission
- When you fast
 - Page 29
- Alexander Schmemmann
 - Church, World, Mission
- Eugene Gotwalt, PhD
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFVQIN1uQ-s> - Why Orthodoxy does not recruit - and why that matters
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFrgS81Dlog> - Convert Burnout

Revision #35

Created 2026-02-09 03:27:53 UTC by Fr.Maximus Wahba

Updated 2026-08-19 21:54:20 UTC by Fr.Maximus Wahba