**New Evangelization Plan for Year One**

**Saint Stephen Martyr Parish, Chesapeake, Virginia**

# Introduction

Just prior to His ascension to heaven, Jesus commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations.”**[[1]](#footnote-1)** Founded in this great commission, the New Evangelization is a call to the Catholic Church to recommit to her primary purpose: to lead all people into a relationship with Jesus Christ and into full participation in His Body, the Church which He established. Then, as they live out this ongoing encounter with Jesus, to lead them to grow in holiness, progress in communion, and participate in His ongoing mission.

Evangelization is not new to our Church. The Church is missionary by nature and called to lead all men and women to Jesus Christ. The New Evangelization is directed toward those in the Church, recognizing the need for an authentic renewal of the whole Catholic Church and all of its members - including the lay faithful. It then aspires to enlist them into the ongoing mission of the Church, leading them to exercise, with urgency and a spirit of excitement their vital role in its primary mission of sharing the Gospel in both word and deed.

By virtue of our baptism, we all participate in the threefold ministry of Jesus as priest, prophet and king. Whether ordained or lay, every Catholic is called to share in this ministry of Jesus Christ. “What is new about the New Evangelization is the focus on those already coming to Church, who may have become as Pope Francis warned, *lukewarm in their faith*.”**[[2]](#footnote-2)** Pope Francis further highlights an urgent need to re-evangelize all baptized Catholics and especially to welcome back those Catholics who are currently lost or alienated.**[[3]](#footnote-3)** We are also called to share the joyful message of the Gospel with those who are unchurched and to walk and work with Christians of other communities with whom we share a baptismal bond.

When we learn information, we obtain knowledge. When we come to know a person, when we encounter a person, we develop relationships that have considerable influence on our lives. Recognizing that all Catholics are in a continual state of conversion, the New Evangelization calls all of us to grow in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ by encountering Him - the very foundation of our faith. Then, we are to fully participate in the new life in Jesus Christ as members of His Body, by immersing ourselves in His Word and receiving the grace provided through the sacraments. Thus, this personal relationship will draw us into an ever deepening relationship with Jesus, in His Body, the Church, of which we are members, and with those to whom we are joined in Him. It will also inspire us to learn more about Him and to introduce Him to the people around us.

The New Evangelization emphasizes a commitment to make Jesus Christ known in ways best suited for the modern world. It is a call to find the best ways possible of making this message known amidst the secularized and relativistic culture of our day. Saint John Paul II called for an evangelization that was new in “ardor, method, and expression.” The Catholic message does not and cannot change, but the way in which we say it can and must be adapted so that people today are able to truly receive it.

Bishop DiLorenzo recently published his Pastoral Plan on implementation of the New Evangelization within the Diocese of Richmond (*Encounter the Joy of the Gospel and Set the World Ablaze - http://www.richmonddiocese.org/*). The Diocesan Pastoral Plan establishes a five-year agenda for implementation of the New Evangelization. It recognizes the need for individuals to know the person of Jesus Christ on a personal level and begin evangelization of the domestic church before they can begin to effectively share the joy of the Gospel outside the walls of Church. Highlights of the five-year plan include the following:

**Year 1 (2014): Personal Encounters with Jesus Christ**. Year 1 is intended to introduce “active” parishioners to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through a call to continual conversion.

**Year 2 (2015): The Domestic Church**. Year 2 is intended to strengthen marriages and establish a foundation for evangelization within the family.

**Year 3 (2016): Equipping the Parish**. Year 3 is intended to introduce programs that encourage personal contact with parishioners as well as implementation of strategies to “welcome back fallen away Catholics.

**Year 4 and Year 5 (2017-2018): Missioning Disciples Locally and Globally**. Years 4 and 5 are intended to begin to expand the reach of parish communities to non-Catholic and the unchurched within the local area and abroad.

Although this document pertains to Year 1 of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, the actions described are expected to continue and expand indefinitely. The actions will serve as a foundation for implementation of Years 2-5 of the Pastoral Plan. Saint Stephen Martyr Parish is focused on three primary goals during Year 1:

* Facilitate personal encounters with Jesus Christ
* Develop a culture of evangelization
* Establish a leadership body to guide implementation of the New Evangelization within the Parish

# Goal 1: Facilitate Personal Encounters with Jesus Christ

**Objective 1-1:** Improve understanding of the Liturgy as a means to encounter Jesus Christ

**Vision and Purpose:**

Jesus Christ is present to us throughout the liturgical celebration. He is present in the Liturgy of the Word since it is He Himself who speaks as the Holy Scripture is read in church. As the source and summit of the Christian experience, the Eucharistic Sacrifice affords the opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ in the consumption of His Body and His Blood. We also encounter Jesus Christ in the company of other faithful parishioners as He promised: “where to or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst” (Matt 18:20).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Implementation will be focused on establishing periodic teaching Masses which can be aligned with youth faith formation programs and offered to the larger adult congregation through scheduled and advertised opportunities. Teaching Masses also provide an evangelization opportunity for the faithful to invite friends and family members to attend rekindle their appreciation for the Liturgy and subsequently rekindle their relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

The ultimate goal is for every member of the Parish to view the Liturgy as a keenly anticipated and desired opportunity to experience the very real presence of Jesus Christ as they consume His Word, His Body and His Blood. Upon departure from Mass, parishioners will be aware that they are spiritually nourished the members of His Body sent back into their homes, neighborhoods and workplaces to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.

**Current State:**

* Teaching Masses are currently incorporated into some youth faith formation classes
* Adults are invited to participate in RCIA classes which address the significance of both the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist

**Action Steps**:

* Incorporate teaching Masses into all youth faith formation programs
* Schedule quarterly teaching Masses
* Advertise relevant blocks of instruction from RCIA

**Success Indicators**:

* Number of parishioners who attend teaching Masses
* Periodic surveys to assess the effectiveness of the teaching Mass
* Long Term: increased Mass attendance

**Start Date**: 1 October 2014

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: Father Brian Rafferty

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* TBD

**Objective 1-2:** Increase number parishioners who participate in Small Faith Groups

**Vision and Purpose:**

Small Faith Groups are mechanism for both conversion and spiritual growth. People will choose to become disciples of Jesus Christ because somebody they know, trust and love has shared (through word and/or action) the positive impact that conversion has made on their own life. Groups offer a means to sustain conversion by encouraging members to continue to grow in their faith. Small Faith Groups will enable individuals to recognize their spiritual strengths and shortcomings and foster an environment of mutual prayer and encouragement throughout the group.

Initially, the Small Group effort will leverage existing small groups and those that will be formed as part of ChristLife. The structure of the groups will be largely driven by the desires of the members. The New Evangelization Council will facilitate the development of Small Faith Groups by providing information, training and resources.

The ultimate goal is for every member of the Parish to be an active participant in a Small Faith Group

**Current State:** Small Faith Groups currently exist through the following programs:

* Cursillo
* Bible Studies
* Book Clubs
* Working on Women’s Spirituality (WOWS)
* Growing in Faith Together (GIFT)

**Action Steps**:

* Identify current Small Faith Groups
* Develop a strategy to grow and manage Small Faith Groups
* Implement ChristLife (based on Small Faith Groups)

**Success Indicators**:

* Number of Small Faith Groups
* Number of parishioners who participate
* Number of leaders trained
* Long Term: increased Mass attendance, increased participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, increased participation in parish community, increased willingness to share the Gospel with others.

**Start Date**: 1 July 2014

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: Michael Siedlecki

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* Implementation of ChristLife
* Continue with Cursillo Small Groups
* Continue with Growing in Faith Together
* Continue with Working on Women’s Spirituality

**Objective 1-3:** Implement ChristLife

**Vision and Purpose:**

ChristLife is designed to facilitate development or renewal of an authentic personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then to guide individuals through the process of becoming a disciple of Christ and finally to provide the tools necessary to share Christ with others. ChristLife is a process and not a program. Although ChristLife is conducted in the small group environment, the participants will develop and mature at their own pace. ChristLife is intended for implementation in three 7-week modules which are each intended to build upon the previous module to bring the individual from an initial encounter with Jesus Christ through development as an intentional disciple. The three modules include: Discovering Christ, Following Christ and Sharing Christ.

The ChistLife process and materiel will be leveraged to form multiple small groups within Saint Stephen Martyr Parish. Small groups that are formed within the ChristLife process will be encouraged to remain together indefinitely with successive ChristLife modules or other supplemental media.

The ultimate goal is to give every parishioner the opportunity to participate in ChristLife.

**Current State:** ChristLife is currently being implemented in Saint Stephen Martyr Parish. The Discovering Christ Module is currently planned for implementation in during the following periods:

* September - November 2014
* January - March 2015
* June – July 2015

**Action Steps**:

* Implement Discovering Christ in the large group format in September of 2015 and January 2015.
* Encourage small groups formed in Discovering Christ to remain together and work through Following Christ and Sharing Christ in a home-based format.

**Success Indicators**:

* Numbers of participants in Discovering Christ
* Number of participants in Following Christ
* Number of participants in Sharing Christ
* Growth in number of small groups
* Long Term: increased Mass attendance, increased participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, increased participation in parish community, increased willingness to share the Gospel with others.

**Start Date**: 29 September 2014

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: Barbara Robinson and Linda Estepa

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* New Creation Catholic Community
* Saint Matthews Parish in Virginia Beach

**Objective 1-4:** Encourage Participation in Cursillo - and the many other Ecclesial Movements

**Vision and Purpose:**

Cursillo is a Spanish word which means "a short course in Christianity". The essence of the Cursillo is the living out, in one's daily life, the Gospel values of Christ. The purpose is to develop in adult Christians an awareness of their power and calling to become leaders in the work of Christian renewal and love. The Cursillo, a worldwide Christian Movement, is a powerful instrument of spiritual conversion in the Catholic Church. By concentrating on the person, along with the teachings of Christ, the Cursillo provides a living understanding and appreciation of basic Christian truths and the desire to serve the Church community.

The Cursillo experience begins with a weekend retreat. The retreat offers a full

schedule of activities to include discussion, private and communal prayer, great music and fun. Eucharistic liturgy is celebrated daily and reconciliation is provided. This is a joyous workshop in the environment of a living Christian community. After the weekend, Cursillistas (those who have attended a Cursillo weekend retreat) sustain their conversion experience through routine participation in “group reunions” where a small group of friends meet to pray and share their spiritual lives, friendships and faith grow. In this atmosphere of grace-filled support, enthusiasm for a Christ-like lifestyle is not only maintained, it is energized. Those who group will testify this weekly gathering is the key to apostolic activity. Inspired by their personal conversion, Cursillistas invite friends and acquaintances to join the movement by attending their own weekend Cursillo retreat.

Saint Stephen Martyr Parish has enjoyed a growing community of Cursillista’s who are well represented on numerous parish ministries and activities to include those associated with the New Evangelization. The Cursillo Movement will continue to support our community because of its familiarity within our Parish community, its consistent success in facilitating conversion, and minimal resources required from the Parish.

**Current State:**

* Saint Stephen Martyr currently has 55 identified Cursillistas
* Two Men’s Cursillo weekends and two Women’s Cursillo weekends are normally offered each year by the Greater Hampton Roads Cursillo Community.

**Action Steps**:

* Continue to encourage parishioners to participate in Cursillo
* Encourage Cursillistas to remain active in “small group reunions.”
* Encourage Cursillistas to remain active as team members on Cursillo weekends
* Invite leaders of other ecclesial movements to speak at SSM

**Success Indicators**:

* Number of parishioners who attend Cursillo weekends
* Number of Cursillistas who remain active in “small group reunions.”
* Number of Cursillistas who remain active in parish ministries
* Long Term: increased Mass attendance, increased participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, increased participation in parish community, increased willingness to share the Gospel with others.

**Start Date**: Ongoing

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: Ron Adamo (Parish Cursillo Representative)

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* Sustain the Cursillo Success

# Goal 2: Develop a Parish Culture of Evangelization

**Objective 2-1:** Establish a Praise and Worship Event

**Vision and Purpose:**

The phrase attributed to St Augustine, that “when we sing to our Lord, we pray twice” has inspired us to promote Praise and Worship. We recognize that people will be open to ongoing conversion and encountering the presence of the Lord in different ways. With that in mind, we will offer praise and worship through prayer and music in combination with exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every month. It offers another opportunity for parishioners to encounter Jesus Christ in a deep and profound manner. Parishioners will experience in another way the joy of exercising the primary purpose for which they were created: to worship our God. Songs will often resonate with participants for days after the gathering and continue to connect them with the presence of our Lord. Praise and worship events also provide a signature event for parishioners to exercise evangelization as they invite friends and family members to attend, enjoy the experience, and hopefully experience an encounter with Jesus Christ. The familiarity of praise and worship music will inspire participants to listen to Christian music as an alternative to the secular music of our day.

The long-term vision includes a weekly praise and worship event that draws parishioners and guests to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and enhances their ongoing growth in holiness and full liturgical participation.

**Current State:** The Sunday 5:00 pm Mass is identified as a Praise and Worship Mass due to its association with the Youth Ministry that meets on Sunday Evenings.

**Action Steps**:

* Begin a monthly Praise and Worship event after the 5:00 pm Sunday Mass and invite parishioners to attend.
* Conduct a weekly Praise and Worship event after familiarity with the monthly event has grown throughout the Parish.
* Encourage parishioners to invite friends and family member to attend the Praise and Worship Event

**Success Indicators**:

* Number of attendees to the Praise and Worship Events
* Long Term: increased Mass attendance, increased participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, increased participation in parish community, increased willingness to share the Gospel with others.

**Start Date**: October 2014

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: James Cowan

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* Saint Joan of Arc Parish in Yorktown Virginia
* Franciscan University, Steubenville, Ohio
* Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, Florida

**Objective 2-2:** Create a Welcoming Environment for Guests the Parish

**Vision and Purpose:**

Every week, guests attend Mass at Saint Stephen Martyr Parish and in many cases, these guests are not always fully recognized and welcomed. Studies show that 85% of guests to a parish will not return for a second time; of those who do return, 85% will become members of the parish. The lesson here is that first impressions are critically important. We want to take advantage of every opportunity to greet our guests as long-lost family members and welcome them into our place of worship. We want to provide information that describes the activities of the parish along with points of contact and provide information about how to join the parish.

The long term vision includes creation of an environment where every parishioner is accustomed to greeting all those who are unfamiliar to them – whether guests or follow parishioners. An information booth inside the Parish Commons will be manned before and after Masses to answer questions and provide information that is relevant to the guests.

**Current State:** The Hospitality Ministry currently has greeters at the entrance of the Church and information sheets for some ministries are randomly displayed within the Parish Commons.

**Action Steps**:

* Encourage every parishioner to become accustomed to greeting all those who are unfamiliar to them – whether guests or follow parishioners.
* Consider implementing a visible practice, such as inviting guests to identify themselves through a hand waive or by standing, so they can be recognized as guests to the Parish
* Establish a movable information booth inside the Parish Commons will be manned before and after Masses to answer questions and provide information that is relevant to the guests.
* Establish a process for a follow-up contact with guests to invite them to return to the Parish a second time and ensure that all of their questions are properly answered

**Success Indicators**:

* Number of visitors identified each week
* Number of welcome packets distributed
* Number of new registered parishioners
* Number of follow-up contacts completed

**Start Date**: September 2014

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: Chris and Ann Emsley

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* Nativity Parish, Timonium Maryland
* Holy Spirit Parish, Atlanta, Georgia

**Objective 2-3:** Personal Witness and Testimony

**Vision and Purpose:**

Culturally, many members of the Catholic Lay faithful are not comfortable with the idea of discussing their faith with other people. We often feel like we would be imposing our views on other people. While Catholics go to Mass together, we sometimes know very little about our fellow parishioners or their journey of faith. Delivery of personal testimonies in front of the congregation provides the opportunity for the witness to be lifted in his or her faith through the process of sharing it. Members of the congregation will be moved by the example of their brother and sister in Christ who demonstrates how to share their journey of faith in a sincere and nonthreatening manner. Members of the congregation will also be moved by their ability to relate personally to the success, failures, feelings and experiences described by the witness. Witnesses from the various demographics will most likely relate best to other members of the congregation from that same demographic: youth, women, men, elderly, etc..

Each personal testimony should be approximately three minutes in length and describe the following:

* Life prior to a conversion experience or encounter with Jesus Christ
* Description of a conversion experience
* Description life after the conversion experience
* Description of the most pertinent joyful elements of the Gospel which impacted their journey
* Describe how others can experience a similar conversion experience

The long-term vision is for members of the Parish to develop a personal testimony and a degree of comfort in sharing that testimony both within and outside the confines of the Church.

**Current State:** Over the past few decades, some expressions of Catholic culture and the growing hostility of secular culture has discouraged Catholics from discussing their faith or sharing their relationship with the Lord.

**Action Steps**:

* On a monthly basis, a parishioner will provide a three-minute personal testimony after the Masses
* Encourage parishioners to develop and share their personal testimony of faith in small group and large group settings.

**Success Indicators**:

* Number of personal testimonies shared in front of the congregation
* Number of personal testimonies shared in small group settings
* Long Term: increased Mass attendance, increased participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, increased participation in parish community, increased willingness to share the Gospel with others.

**Start Date**: September 2014

**End Date**: Indefinite

**Accountable Party**: Christine Bacon

**Best Practices and Lessons Learned**:

* To be determined
* Draw upon the experience of the multiple ecclesial movements which have developed the practice and successfully implemented it.

# Goal 3: Establish a leadership body to guide implementation of the New Evangelization within the Parish

*“We need a wide spectrum of opportunities because there is no single silver bullet. We need to have a variety of different paths or doors to discipleship available and visible so that most people will find at least one way to connect with or draw closer to Christ. Instead of thinking of these ministries as separate, siloed endeavors run by different parish interest groups, we need to see all of our ministries in light of our primary call to make disciples. Armed with this vision and an understanding of the thresholds, we will begin to recognize amazing opportunities. We will realize that almost everything we do can be quite easily “reframed” for maximum evangelizing impact.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*

The Saint Stephen Martyr New Evangelization Committee has been formed to serve and advise the Pastor on matters pertaining to the implementation of the New Evangelization at Saint Stephen Martyr Parish, taking its place as a part of the renewal of the evangelical mission of the Catholic Church. The New Evangelization Committee, guided by the Holy Spirit, will seek to build a culture in which members of the Parish experience a dynamic and sustained personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Recognizing the universal call to holiness and the missionary nature of the whole Church, the Committee will also work to equip the faithful with the tools of evangelization and thereby encourage the sharing of the faith within the Parish community and beyond, into family, living, and work environments.

**New Evangelization Committee Guiding Principles**:

* Personal Relationship with God through Jesus Christ
* Centrality of the Eucharist
* Primacy of the Sacraments
* Ongoing Catechesis and Faith Formation
* Culture of Evangelization
* Small faith communities
* Evangelistic outreach to those who are not practicing their faith and the unchurched

**New Evangelization Committee Primary Activities**:

* Facilitate personal encounters with Jesus Christ
* Promote events which inspire, equip and commission the faithful
* Promote the evangelical mission of the Catholic Church within all aspects of Parish Life and beyond.

**New Evangelization Committee Membership:**

Rev. Brian Rafferty Rob Huysman Christine Bacon

Deacon Keith Fournier Barbara Robinson Ann Emsley

Deacon Kevin Trail Mike Siedlecki Chris Emsley

Greg Branigan (Chairperson) Linda Estepa Scott Turbitt

John Gray

1. *Matthew 28:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bishop Francis DiLorenzo, *Encounter the Joy of The Gospel and Set the World Ablaze*, Pastoral Plan for the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 12 January, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Guadium*, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Blessed Pope Paul VI, December 4, 1963 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sherry A, Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)