

Taking Evangelization to the Streets

It was around 6:00 PM in the evening as I was standing on a busy street corner in downtown Phoenix, AZ. I was surrounded by Catholics who had just completed a two day workshop on how to share their faith and now here we are, in the middle of the city, actually doing the work of evangelization. It seemed crazy—Catholics doing street evangelization. Could this possibly work? There had been objections, claims that street evangelization normally doesn't work and could push people away from the faith. So what would happen tonight? Let's take a look at a ministry that has spawned over two hundred local chapters or teams in just three years.

St. Paul Street Evangelization (SPSE) was founded in 2012 in response to the call of St. John Paul II to commit all of the church's energies to a New Evangelization. SPSE is a grassroots, non-profit Catholic evangelization organization, dedicated to responding to the mandate of Jesus to preach the Gospel to all nations by taking our Catholic faith to the streets. We do this in a non-confrontational way, allowing the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of those who witness our public Catholic presence.

A local team consists of two or more Catholics who evangelize for a couple of hours on a busy street corner, festival, parish event, or local shopping centers or airports. They never stand on soap boxes or use megaphones, but instead seek to listen, form new relationships, and build a bridge of trust from the public square to the local parish.

Armed with rosaries, miraculous medals, pamphlets, Bibles, and other items both fun and spiritual, SPSE team members listen, befriend, proclaim the Gospel, and invite people to come and encounter Jesus Christ through the church he founded. As Catholics we are rediscovering our roots to be apostles in the modern world. St. Paul went to Athens (Acts 17:16-32), and in the midst of a bustling metropolis proclaimed that Jesus is the one true God and Savior. When he planted seeds, some converted, others mocked, and some said that they would "hear from him again." Our evangelists have gotten the same response as they go to the street.

The modern world presents unique challenges in evangelization, but two-minute conversations with others can bring about conversion, or plant a seed at the very least. Raymond Cardinal Burke recently said of us: "This apostolate ... is doing a tremendous work in bringing Christ and his truth and love to all parts of the United States and also in other nations. I give my wholehearted support to the work and I pray for it daily that it will continue and grow for the sake of the salvation of many souls... I am happy on this occasion to recommend to you St. Paul Street Evangelization and urge you to become involved with it."

So what happened as I was standing on a Phoenix street corner? My friend and SPSE Regional Missionary, David Tucker, and I were sharing the rosary with people passing by during the city's "First Friday" event that drew thousands outside. A young woman approached me and opened with, "Thank you so much for not being like that guy down the street, because I do have questions." That guy down the street? What guy? Where? She had run into another street evangelist with a different group that was screaming at pedestrians, holding a Bible in hand, and telling them that they were sinners who were going to hell. This only frustrated the woman standing in front of me who did have questions on her mind and heart about God, but needed someone who was calm to talk to. Someone who would listen to her.

"You see, I have a lot of questions about God, and I never knew who I could ask. If you have a minute, I



want to ask you.” Well, certainly, I told her. That is why we are here. “I have been a scientist my whole career and it would be wrong to say that scientists do not think about God. Many of us approach the subject of God with a critical eye and an air of suspicion. I have always felt that God was used to explain our gaps in the understanding of the universe, and the more we discovered, the less we needed God. I am no longer comfortable with that explanation. Could you help me understand why you believe in God?”

It is a common mistake to think that you have to be an expert apologist or have all of the answers in order to be a great evangelist. In my own journey ten years ago into the Catholic faith I met Catholic apologists who kept me away from the Catholic faith longer by the way they treated me. Just like those street preachers who still stand on soap boxes and yell “sinner” at passersby, how you treat people really matters. We must be bold in calling people to repentance and conversion, but we can do so with a sense of solidarity and compassion.

I took the time to get to know the person I was talking to. She wouldn't be the first or the last to thank us that night for being approachable, joyful, and kindhearted as Christians. I always tell my first time evangelists (who are usually a healthy mix of excited and terrified) not to worry about making any converts. I tell them to go and have fun. “Let others see your joy and good humor.” Pope Francis remarked:

“When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment. For ‘here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means’. Consequently, an evangelizer must never look

like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that ‘delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ’” (*Joy of the Gospel*, 10).

As we got to know one another, I provided the woman who had stopped to talk with some reading material and information on the Catholic faith about science. I tried to explain that the Catholic Church is a patron of the sciences and is not opposed to scientific pursuit. Nor do we see it as a threat to faith. She thanked me for her time and told me she was seriously considering becoming Catholic. Once a person shows interest, our teams can accompany them through the journey of discipleship.

In order to build a civilization of love, we must first create a culture of evangelization. Many people approach our teams with urgent spiritual and worldly needs. There is a brokenness and hunger for God in the world. We meet them where they are, try to put them in touch with the many charities of the church, and pray for them on the spot. Many people are not sure where to turn, outside of state aid, for assistance. When we evangelize on the street we can invite people into our community for help. All Catholics are called to be evangelists, and evangelists are called to be holy, sharing their lives with other people in the spirit of abandonment and the cross. It is only in giving our lives as a gift to others that we find true joy.



How It Works

- 1** A team of at least two Catholic evangelists choose a place in their city or town with a moderate to high level of pedestrian traffic. Examples of suitable locations include an open-air market, such as an art fair or farmers' market; a bus stop or subway station platform; a public park.
- 2** The evangelists "set up shop" with a sandwich-board sign and a collection of materials: assorted pamphlets on aspects of Catholicism, holy cards, rosaries, Miraculous Medals, etc. A small table or blanket is often useful for displaying the materials and drawing the attention of passersby, but it is not essential.
- 3** The evangelists then say a prayer, invoking the Holy Spirit to guide their efforts for that day, asking to be courageous, humble, and docile to his promptings. They ask through Our Lady's intercession for the Lord to send them the people he desires them to encounter, and they pray that all may be done for the greater glory of God.
- 4** At this point, the evangelists simply wait for passersby to draw near and offer them free rosaries. When someone stops to take a rosary, the evangelizers also provide a pamphlet on how to pray the rosary and attempt to further engage the person. A question that is often effective is, "Are you Catholic?" as the answer can provide a springboard for further conversation in many different directions. By asking follow-up questions, the evangelizer can discover whether a person is a practicing Catholic, fallen away Catholic, Protestant, New Ager, atheist, etc.—information that is key in guiding a conversation to meet that person where he or she "is at."
- 5** The evangelist then shares the Gospel with the person. We share the good news (that God loves you and has a plan for your life), the bad news (that we are separated from a relationship with God because of sin and sin leads to hell), the good news (that Jesus Christ died for our sins and it is through faith that we are saved), and the invitation (that Jesus stands ready to give us God's grace and we can approach him in prayer, repentance, and join the family of God.)
- 6** The evangelist makes an invitation to the faith, welcomes them to any local parish events or to other follow-up opportunities, and asks if the person has any prayer requests. Each team keeps a prayer request book and offers to pray for each person they meet.

"Recently, my office hosted Saint Paul Street Evangelization's Basic Evangelization Training (BET) workshop. It is an event that I recommend for a diocese or parish for a number of reasons.

"The workshop was genuinely 'basic' in the sense that it did not presume prior formation in evangelization. This made the workshop accessible to anyone who wished to attend.

"The workshop also gave attendees basic evangelization knowledge and skills that are applicable to all forms of evangelization, not just street evangelization. The skills that were developed can be used in the setting of parish, school, family, and door-to-door, as well as in the street.

"Finally, the content of the workshop was authentically Catholic. The BET roots everyone in an understanding of Christ-centered evangelization that proceeds from the heart of the Church. Attendees came away with a stronger sense that evangelization relies on prayer as its source of efficacy and it showed them what gifts and tools are available to us in the Church to help us evangelize. Of particular importance was the instruction in the use of sacramentals for efficacious evangelizing.

"I recommend the Basic Evangelization Training as a practical and genuinely effective aid in igniting the new evangelization in a diocese or parish."

—Meghan Cokeley, Director, Office of the New Evangelization, Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Resources Provided by SPSE

1 Live Evangelization Training Workshops—SPSE provides live evangelization training, not just for street evangelists, but for everyone. Parishioners who feel ill-equipped or lack confidence do not get involved in the work of evangelization. We can help you overcome that hurdle in your parish. We travel to parishes throughout the country offering one- and two-day workshops. We also offer conference talks and retreats. The workshops include Basic Evangelization Training, the Catholic Hospitality Training Institute, 10 Ways to Be a Great Evangelist, Evangelical Apologetics, and more.

2 Local Teams—SPSE has two hundred local teams worldwide. It is very easy to set up a new local team in your area, and we will provide the resources and training you need to be successful. Many parishes order our parish starter kit to run a team out of their own church.

3 Regional Missionaries—SPSE has more than two dozen highly trained regional missionaries who are ready to help street teams, parishes, campus ministries, and others in their goals to create a culture of evangelization.

4 Member Website—SPSE has a comprehensive member website with hundreds of free and downloadable evangelization resources, including online training.

5 Team Development—SPSE offers team development resources for street evangelists, diocesan offices, parishes, door-to-door ministries, and individuals. From short monthly formation guides for parish groups to evaluation resources, every parish will find something useful to its evangelization efforts.

6 Publications—SPSE has dozens of handouts, pamphlets, audio tracts, books, and more that are free to download, copy, and distribute for all of our members.

7 Online Store—SPSE offers an exclusive online store for Supporting Members with evangelization materials such as holy medals, holy cards, T-shirts, pamphlets, and more.

We Need Your Help

As a grassroots apostolate we are a collaboration of ordinary Catholics seeking to evangelize in the world in which we live. We need your help to be able to continue our work:

1 Follow us: Join our newsletter and follow us on social media such as Facebook. We provide weekly updates on stories from our teams, the latest news, and prayer requests.

2 Pray for us: We provide an avenue for people to come together and pray through our prayer warrior page on Facebook. You can read prayer requests from the street there, and add your own.

3 Join us: Go to streetevangelization.com to learn where our teams are and to start a new team or join a current team. You'll be surprised at how easy and fruitful it is and how much fun you'll have.

4 Support us: Our work is funded by monthly supporters who pray for us and give a donation out of the gifts God has given them. Consider going to streetevangelization.com and becoming a monthly supporter today.



Adam Janke is Vice President and Program Director of St. Paul Street Evangelization. After converting to Catholicism from biblical fundamentalism, Adam obtained his BA in theology and catechetics from Franciscan University of Steubenville. While working as a full time Director of Religious Education and Coordinator of Youth Ministry, he also obtained his master's in theology from Franciscan. He has been active not only in parish ministry, but also served as a team member for Lansing 40 Days for Life and diocesan coordinator of the National March for Life. Adam has been featured on EWTN Television and Radio, Catholic Answers Live, the Radio Maria Network, The Son Rise Morning Show, The Mike Allen Show, as well as in several Catholic news publications. He resides in Michigan with his wife and five children.

Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (required by 39 U.S.C. 3685) of Connect! (ISSN 0055-0330), published bimonthly by Liturgical Publications Inc, P.O. Box 510817, New Berlin, WI 53151 (the owner). General business offices of the publisher are located at 2875 S. James Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151. The editor is Trezor Wolfe, Liturgical Publications Inc, 2875 S. James Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151, and the managing editor is Carin Winghart, Liturgical Publications Inc, 2875 S. James Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151. There are no known bondholders, mortgages, or other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amounts of bonds, mortgages, or other securities. Annual subscription price, \$79.95. Printed in USA with second-class postage paid at New Berlin, WI and additional mailing office. The status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding twelve months. Extent and nature of circulation (average figures denote the average number of copies printed each issue during the preceding twelve months; actual figures denote actual number of copies of single issue published nearest filing date: October–November 2015.) 15a. Total number of copies (Net press run): average 900; actual 875. 15b(1) Paid/Requested Outside County: average 340; actual 335. 15b(2) Paid/Requested Inside County: average 10; actual 11. 15c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: average 350; actual 346. 15d(3). Free distribution Mailed at Other Classes through the USPS: average 2; actual 5. 15e. Total free distribution: average 2; actual 5. 15f. Total Distribution: average 352; actual 351. 15g. Copies not Distributed: average 500; actual 500. 15h. Total: average 852; actual 851. 15i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: average 99.43%; actual 99.58%. 16a. Paid Electronic Copies: average 375; actual 364. 16b. Total Paid Print + Electronic Copies: average 725; actual 710. 16c. Total Print Distribution + Paid Electronic Copies: average 727; actual 715. 16d. Percent Paid: average 99.72%; actual 99.30%.