

EVANGELIZATION AND PARENTS

**“I sense that the moment has come
to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ‘ad gentes.’
We experience a society that is more and more ‘me’ centered
and less and less God centered.
The new evangelization is all about making Jesus the center of human history.” (Pope John
Paul II)**

Over the course of the last decade there has been intense attention given to maximizing our efforts and enthusiasm to make sure that our Catholic schools are Catholic. Catholic identity will continue to demand a considerable amount of time and attention. However, the next important and imminent challenge for Catholic schools is to be evangelizing Catholic schools.

Evangelization is the process whereby the individual is led to accept the person of Jesus Christ and His Way. Evangelization means helping people develop an intimate relationship with the Lord. As a Catholic school we wish to build upon your children’s initial relationship with Jesus and to deepen it and bring it to maturity as they grow into adults.

All teachers, administrators and parents need to be much more enthusiastic and intentional about sharing their faith in Jesus Christ and His Church. Our goal this year is to assist in that growing enthusiasm.

You will be hearing more and more about the evangelizing nature of the school in which you have chosen to enroll your children. There are seven characteristics that have been identified as integral to the life of an evangelizing school.

We encourage you to join in our efforts as we seek to develop in your children a more personal and intimate relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. The flyers we will be sending home will give you information about our school as we concentrate on its evangelizing nature and will give you suggestions as to your participation in those efforts.

Your own creative energies and the way you now live out your baptismal call in your family life will enhance our efforts as together we bring your children more fully into the life of the Catholic Church and consequently into a deeper relationship with Christ Jesus.



PARENTS
FIRST CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing school is a Catholic faith community where all are welcome, opening itself to receive children and parents who desire Catholic religious formation and education, helping them to know they are children of God, made in His image and likeness and, therefore, to be valued.

“What does an evangelizing Catholic school look like?” Seven characteristics have been identified as integral to the life of a Catholic school. The characteristics are a major focus of our efforts to broaden our understanding of evangelization and our attempts to truly bring our faculty, students, families and parishioners into a deeper and more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Prior to 1975, evangelization was described very narrowly as the art of **“making new Catholics.”** The term evangelization was associated with bringing new people into the Church. In 1975, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, by Pope Paul VI and later *Catechesis in Our Time*, by Pope John Paul II expanded the meaning of evangelization to mean leading others **“to accept Jesus and His way.”** While it is our desire to welcome and invite people into the Catholic Church which possesses the fullness of God’s revelation, we know that the first step is to know and accept Jesus Christ.

As the spiritual leader of the parish school, I am charged with the responsibility and the privilege, under the direction of the pastor, to ensure that every function or activity in the school helps to foster and deepen a person’s relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ.

What you can do!

1. Take an active interest in your child’s religious education each evening. In addition to talking about the latest fad in electronics or the big game coming up this weekend, ask your children what’s going on in their religion class. Show them how interested you are in their faith development. Speak with them about the sacrifices your family makes to send them to a Catholic school and why it’s so important to you. Use this discussion as a springboard to a discussion on your own faith and what it has meant to you over the years and how it has sustained you.
2. The sacredness of life is a beautiful concept that is integral to our life as a Catholic. We believe that every person is a gift from God who deserves the right to be respected and loved because they are made in the image and likeness of God. Speak with your children about this concept and what it implies: respect, honesty, love and acceptance of everyone. Spend some time having each member of the family write down on a piece of paper the ways that they show respect, love and acceptance of the other members of the family. Then discuss the answers in an honest and respectful way. Use the Scripture quote, **“It is no longer I that live but Christ who lives in me”** as the goal for each of us in accepting others and being accepted.

PARENTS

SECOND CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing Catholic School employs only those leaders and teachers who wholeheartedly and enthusiastically accept the mandate to evangelize young people through their witness to and proclamation of their belief in the Triune God, an incarnate God in the person of Jesus Christ, who established the Catholic Church to complete His mission.

We accept this responsibility with great pride! The faculty of your school and I have already accepted Jesus Christ in our lives and are authentic disciples of the Lord giving guidance to your children on their road to conversion. Each of us, regardless of the subject we teach and the role we have accepted, feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to share our faith with your children.

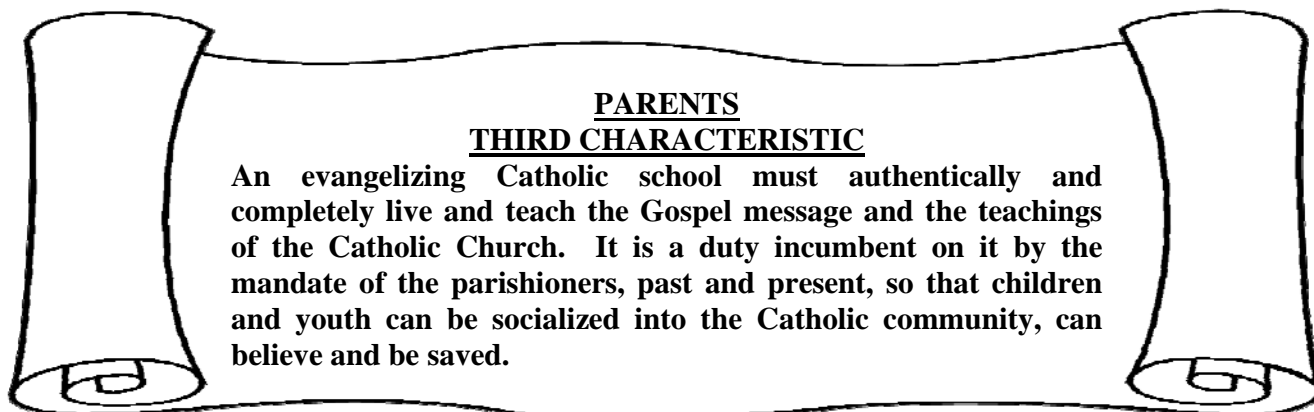
We strive to do this in a number of ways. As teachers and mentors of your children our attitudes, actions and lives must be a witness to them, encouraging them to model their lives after the life of Jesus Christ. To that end we strive to treat everyone in the faith community with the respect due them as a child of God and to support them with compassion and love as they walk their journey towards intimacy with the Person of Jesus.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in their statement *Go and Make Disciples* said: "Schools are often the only face of the Church some people see." Therefore, it is imperative that we see ourselves not only as support staff, instructional leaders, teachers, counselors and coaches but primarily as spiritual leaders and mentors committed to walking with your children as they come to find Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church.

As we journey together with your children as they come to accept Jesus Christ and His teachings, we encourage you to pray for us so that in accepting this responsibility we may be found worthy. We, in partnership with you the parents, will pray for you so that together our children may come to accept the Person of Jesus in their hearts.

What you can do!

1. We encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity to meet your children's teachers and the administration of the school. There are multiple opportunities already available: at the time of back to school nights; report card nights; special sacramental meetings; award ceremonies; class celebrations of the Eucharist and others. In addition, we encourage you to contact your children's teachers with questions about their religious education and to spend time each week reviewing the content covered in class. We would then encourage you to speak with your children about that content and what difference that knowledge makes in how they interact with others.
2. Spend some time at dinner each evening reinforcing the values and the knowledge that your children are receiving at school. Praise your children's teachers for their dedication and their ministry in the Catholic school. Tell your children that Jesus calls everyone to a life of service and that teachers have responded to that call by helping them to become all that they were created to be. Don't forget to listen to your children and help them to understand that teachers, just like parents, sometimes need to be disciplinarians, which requires them to do things that they would rather not do. Be strong supporters of your children's teachers in your attitude and in your actions when talking with your children.



PARENTS
THIRD CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing Catholic school must authentically and completely live and teach the Gospel message and the teachings of the Catholic Church. It is a duty incumbent on it by the mandate of the parishioners, past and present, so that children and youth can be socialized into the Catholic community, can believe and be saved.

This is perhaps the most crucial characteristic of an evangelizing school. The whole purpose for sending your children to a parish school is to ensure that they receive the best religious education possible building upon the Gospel values you instill in them at home.

The Catholic Church's mission is to evangelize. The Catholic school as an extension of the Church must be an evangelizing institution where the Gospel message and the Church's teachings are authentically and completely taught. In the culture of today so often we are invited to choose what is most attractive and to discard or ignore that which is not. It's a smorgasbord approach! Our goal in the school is to present to your children the entire truth of the Gospel message and the teachings of the Catholic Church in such a way that your children will come to know and appreciate the entire truth as revealed by Jesus Christ.

We also expect that the teachers of religion in our school are certified and that they update themselves in theology and religious education as prescribed. Knowledge is further enhanced and developed through in-service programs in the teachings of the Catholic faith both locally and through the Archdiocese, through prayer and retreat days and through the development of their prayer lives, both personal and communal.

What you can do!

1. In order to be certain that the truths of the Catholic faith are taught, one must have knowledge of those truths. For many, formal religious education ended in eighth grade and for some it extended into college. We encourage you to find ways to update your knowledge of the Catholic faith that will fit into your busy schedules. Perhaps for some it might be a formal course through Paul VI Catechetical Institute or a course at one of the local universities. Using excellent media (DVDs, etc) from the Archdiocesan Media Center, free of charge, would be an excellent resource. Another good resource is "Prayers by Heart," the St. Louis Archdiocesan Catholic Children's Prayer Book from Saint Mary's Press. A variety of books, pamphlets and other reading materials are available through some of the Catholic bookstores in the area. In addition, there are adult faith opportunities in your own parish that will assist you. A wealth of information can be obtained through using the Internet.
2. Develop a love for the Scriptures and encourage your family to do the same. Spend some time each week as a family reading the Scriptures. Possibly you could single out a particular book and each time you gather let one of the family members pick a favorite passage. Then read the Scripture selected out loud. For a short period, be silent and then discuss what you think God is saying to you. Then discuss what impact that passage should have on your life.



PARENTS
FOURTH CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing school is one that celebrates God's action and presence in the lives of people through the sacraments and through prayer.

The Sacraments are foundational to the life of the Church, especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist. As a faith community, we have a distinct responsibility and privilege to immerse your children into the life of the Church through experiencing the Sacraments on a regular basis.

By their baptism, you committed them to a life in Christ. To further that commitment you enrolled them in this Catholic school and entrusted them to our care. You asked us by virtue of that enrollment and your agreement with the mission and the philosophy of the school to help your children develop into young Christian men and women. We are excited about that trust and want you to know that we are proud to help your children develop as a member of the faith community.

The celebration of the Eucharist is central to our life as a faith community. It is for that reason that we celebrate Mass as often as possible throughout the year. Our Eucharistic celebrations are planned carefully by the students to make them meaningful, with the assistance of faculty. You are always encouraged to attend these celebrations and share in your children's love for the Eucharist.

Additionally, we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with your children at various times throughout the year. We strive to make certain through our teaching and the celebration itself that your children are aware of God's great love for them even though they sin. We want them to know that God's love is unceasing and that no matter what happens that love will never end.

Developing your children's prayer life is also a prime concern of ours. Through prayer services, prayer before classes and other means we seek to help your children come to appreciate a deep and intimate love for the Person of Jesus Christ.

What you can do!

1. Take advantage of sacramental opportunities. Make certain that you attend Mass as a family, especially on Sundays. Some parishes have baptisms once a month during a particular Mass and you could attend this particular Mass as a family. Or if there are baptisms held after Mass, perhaps you could stay afterwards for the celebration. This could be a great opportunity to revisit with your children their own baptism and their entry into the faith community. Celebrate Reconciliation with your children and teach them by example the value and the need for forgiveness with others and with God. Sometimes parishes celebrate the sacrament of Anointing. If you have the opportunity, attend this Mass with your children.
2. Renew your commitment to praying as a family. Stress the importance of prayer through your own example and through praying with your children. Don't forget evening and morning prayers, prayers before and after meals, and prayers of thanksgiving for gifts received. A good resource is "Prayers by Heart," the St. Louis Archdiocesan Catholic Children's Prayer Book from Saint Mary's Press.

PARENTS
FIFTH CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing Catholic school reaches out to students and families with various backgrounds and needs in order to bring God's love into their lives.

Our Baptism initiates us into the Christian community! From this point on, our lives are a response to the call of Jesus Christ to come and follow Him, living our lives according to His teachings and the teachings of His Church.

In response to our baptismal call and recognizing the uniqueness of every individual, we as a faith community feel called to promote the sacredness of human life in all its forms. We, therefore, promote the values of respect, compassion, equality, acceptance and love, teaching the ways of Jesus Christ to all entrusted to our care.

Our school community is open to all who accept our Mission and Philosophy! The Scriptures show us how to be an accepting and loving community to all who grace our doors. Jesus welcomed all people and encouraged them to accept His Father and the love he offered as a free gift. There were no strings attached except to have faith and to believe in God's undying love for His people. We offer that same love and acceptance in the Spirit of Jesus Christ as a community of faith.

All children come with their own gifts, talents, and, yes, even problems and special circumstances. Some come from homes where only one parent is present; others from homes where serious illness is part of their daily lives. There are children who belong to our faith community where one parent is not of the Catholic faith or from homes where parents do not practice their Catholic faith for one reason or another. There are children of various cultural or racial and ethnic backgrounds; children from families who are struggling with unemployment or financial difficulties and are unable to provide the basic necessities of life. We are a diverse community. But we are one!

Our school faith community teaches everyone, faculty and students alike, to be sensitive to others who are facing the challenges of life, to be respectful of all differences, and to see all people as made in the image and likeness of God.

What you can do!

1. Promote openness in your family! Children are very observant and learn more from what you do than from what you say. Be fair in your treatment of all people, always keeping the belief that all peoples are created in the image and likeness of God. Teach your children that diversity is good and that all peoples are equal in the sight of God. Welcome new and diverse families into your neighborhood. Help them to meet others and to follow up on their integration into the community. If they are un-churched or interested in the Catholic faith, mentor them and introduce them to parish life.
2. When members of your family or neighbors in your community experience difficulty in their personal lives, be there for them. Offer your assistance. Sometimes people who are hurting are reluctant to accept help, so doing something for them anonymously through your local church or community activist group might be preferred. Always keep your children a part of your efforts and share your reasons for helping others. Share your beliefs with them even if the only thing you can do is pray for them.



PARENTS
SIXTH CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing school is actively conscious of forming and transforming children and youth according to the social teaching of the Church.

We are a faith community within a faith community. Our school is part of the parish; part of the archdiocese; and, part of the Catholic Church instituted by Jesus Christ. We are members of the same Body and when one member suffers the other members suffer as well. Therefore, we teach your children about their responsibility to help those who are less fortunate, promoting assistance locally and globally.

As a school dedicated to promoting the values of Jesus Christ we strive to immerse your children into those teachings and to illustrate how Jesus' values are the same values that we must emulate in our daily lives. Jesus was a compassionate person who placed the lives of every individual He encountered first. Christ healed! He prayed, individually and communally with His disciples! He understood the plight of the people and gently encouraged them to reconcile themselves to the Father and to seek forgiveness. Jesus showed the people of His time that they were not solely responsible for themselves alone but that they had a responsibility to take care of and to help others as they traveled the road to salvation.

We are a Beatitude school! We help your children to understand that true happiness comes from living lives of service. During the year we sponsor food drives, collect monetary contributions for the Missions, and a variety of other school sponsored activities that are designed to help the students realize that their baptismal call demands sacrifice and the sharing of their very selves with others.

We strive to help them integrate the demands of their daily lives with the demands of the Gospel. In our attempts to respond and promote Gospel values we encourage them to discuss and participate in activities that are intended to benefit society, both in the community in which they live and in the wider world.

What you can do!

1. As a family, decide on some activity through which your entire family can offer assistance to others. You might work in a soup kitchen or volunteer your family's services at a local home for the aged, reading to those who are lonely or unable to do for themselves. You might become a big brother or sister to those children who have no adult figure in their lives and make that person a part of your family. There are varied opportunities in the local community where your help is needed and where your assistance, even on a limited basis, will be invaluable.
2. Sharing our financial resources can be a great teaching tool to show our children that we who have been blessed have an obligation to share with others who have nothing. At school we have activities where we ask your children to share their resources with others. At home, you can reinforce those values by tithing and deciding upon a family activity where each person contributes something of their own, each week throughout the year. It might be part of their allowance or a portion of money received for a birthday or Christmas gift, but every member should contribute to this fund according to their own means. At the end of the year or designated period of time, donate it as a family.



PARENTS
SEVENTH CHARACTERISTIC

An evangelizing school is one that makes known the Good News of Jesus to others and invites school families into the Catholic faith community, especially those who are inactive or those who are un-churched.

“The Catechists water the seed which the Evangelists have planted, but God gives the growth.” (National Directory for Catechesis)

As a faith community we know that all things are possible with God and without Him, nothing is possible. Through personal and communal prayer we attempt to interpret the Word of God and to see its implications in our lives and the lives of our school community. We believe that we are special voices who articulate the Word and that this interpretation depends upon our efforts and our example.

We know that faith is a gift from God. We know it does not come all at once but continually grows throughout life, deepening as our relationship with the Incarnate God evolves. The seeds are planted at our baptism but continue to be nurtured throughout our lives. Parents, teachers, friends, and environment are the factors that contribute to that nurturing.

Evangelization is a series of encounters, of conversions, with the Lord. Those encounters come in all shapes and sizes and are not limited to the dramatic experience of Saint Paul as related in the Scriptures. Personal transformation occurs in the individual as the person enters into a deeper and more intimate relationship with the Person of Jesus through participation in sacramental worship, the development of a mature ethical and social conscience, ongoing catechesis, and a deeper and more profound integration of faith into all areas of life.

Respecting the beliefs of all peoples, it is incumbent upon us to expose them to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, encouraging them to accept Jesus in their hearts and, in turn, to gently encourage them to a life in and for Christ. Believing that the best path to salvation comes in and through the Catholic Church, it is always our hope that they will feel welcomed and encouraged to join us on our journey.

What you can do!

1. Spend some time finding ways to increase your knowledge of other faiths. You don't have to come to a complete understanding of the tenets of other faiths but can come to know the basic beliefs and contrast them with the beliefs of the Catholic faith. Talk with your children about the various religions and how we must respect other people's beliefs. But do not be hesitant to tell your children that the fullness of truth and salvation in Jesus Christ resides in the Catholic Church, has been promised to all and that the Catholic faith is the only valid response to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society.
2. Invite a family who does not practice their faith into your home for a light dinner or dessert and coffee. In a relaxed, pleasant and non-threatening conversation, talk with them about your Catholic faith. Possibly at the conclusion of this conversation you could gently invite the family to attend Sunday Mass with your family.