

EVANGELISATION



Witnessing Christ in the World

No. 3

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

This is the third in the series on evangelisation – witnessing Christ in the world. Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* says that evangelisation cannot be reduced just to proclamation, or to catechetical instruction, or to working for human liberation. It is something that the church does and that the church receives. In Australia today, that is multifaceted, but it is done by walking with people on their life's journey and together seeking life to the full.

Stephen Bevans SVD (Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia, 2005)

“Some things have to be believed to be seen”

St Augustine 354 AD – 430 AD

I have been freed from fear

I remember one lady in a shire town on the east coast. She was a single mum in the fishing village who ran a beer hall that also offered a few other services at night. A friend asked her to a “Come and See” information night. She arrived totally overdressed. She was nervous. But she hung in, studied the Scriptures and catechism, sang the hymns and said the prayers, chatted with her sponsor, learnt about a God who was on her side, and eventually she was baptised. I asked her how she was finding it being part of the Catholic community. She said, “Father, I have received a great gift. I have been freed from fear. I have spent my whole life being afraid of what other people think, afraid for my children, afraid of good and bad luck spirits. But I realise now that I am not alone, that God is with me every moment guiding me and giving me courage. I have to work out some changes for my business, but I am not afraid.” This was a story of Good News and the Power of the Gospel to make a difference. Fr Charles Rue baptised this lady in Korea.



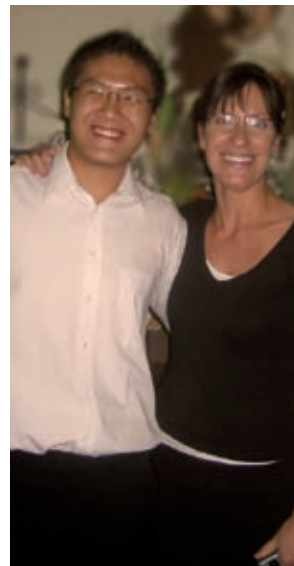
We hang out together

I was born in Jakarta where I went to Catholic schools though my Chinese parents were Buddhist. I was Buddhist, but never practised. I had a good grounding in Catholic teaching, but I took it for granted. I couldn't connect with people who spoke in religious language, but respected them. I believed in God and would randomly go to church, I really couldn't be bothered. I was just a crazy, happy-go-lucky person who wanted to have fun.

Then some things happened in my life where I couldn't find answers. I wasn't close to my parents, so I brought my problems to the church to talk to God. I always prayed every night. Three times I joined the catechumenate: first when I was twelve, then when I was fifteen, but I didn't finish because I thought it was too long. I thought “Why is it so hard to become a Catholic?” Four years ago I decided to come to Australia with my ex-girlfriend, but after two years we broke up. I was by myself and felt emptiness. I asked “Why is it so different? Why did I lose direction?” My desire to be a Catholic grew stronger, but I still couldn't be bothered. I'm a good guy but I was asking myself “Why is God giving me this situation? It doesn't make sense.”

At Easter, I decided to go to mass at Randwick and saw others being baptised. Afterwards I went straight up to the priest and said, “I want to be baptised.” After a while I joined the RCIA and it clicked straight away. It was a good thing: no more hesitation! I kept going. My sponsor and I are really close. I am twenty three and she is like an older sister. We talk about life, everything. She doesn't lecture. She answers my questions about my faith and is always there. We hang out together.

I have been baptised and it's getting better and better. I feel more certain. I am happy to belong in a Catholic community. I hope to share my experience with others in the RCIA, to give something to them. *David Herlambang is from Kingsford, Sydney.*



Mission is one and undivided, having one origin and final purpose... Looking at today's world, we can distinguish three situations...

First, peoples, groups and social-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel is not known...secondly, Christian communities (where) the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care...

Thirdly...where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of faith... in this case what is needed is a 'new evangelisation' or 're-evangelisation'.

Redemptoris Missio,
Pope John Paul II, 1990, # 31-33
www.vatican.va/edocs

Jesus was sent by God to proclaim Good News and he told his disciples to do the same. He set the style on how it was to be done. Jesus evangelised in an organised way. He attended weddings and read in the synagogue. He methodically travelled from village to village, gathered a band of disciples and later sent them out in pairs to do as he had done.

Catholics received a great gift when the adult catechumenate was revived at Vatican II. It is called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Each national church was called to create a locally relevant RCIA process, with communities of the faithful as the primary evangelisers. More than a set of liturgical norms, the RCIA is a journey led by the Holy Spirit - reaching out to others as Jesus did, listening to them and their concerns, witnessing to them with our lives as well as words.

The benefits of the RCIA are many. The adult Catholic who invites another adult person to join the community often takes on the role of a sponsor. Together they enter a spiritual quest that leads to conversion, a change of heart on both sides. Each catechumen benefits too. To be freed from fear, to grow in compassion, to gain a faith-family, to consciously join with the rhythms of God are some of the gifts. Lastly, the faith community benefits as it gains a unifying purpose in the RCIA and new dynamism.

Some may object that evangelisation is imposing on others. They are right if the RCIA means pestering people with a narrow set of beliefs and practices. A true RCIA presents the breadth of Catholic faith and practice. It witnesses, not imposes. The Gospel tells of a God who creates this world and each person in it as an outpouring of love, who gives freedom, freedom even to choose sin, but a God who is on our side and never abandons us. In Jesus, God is seen as lifting us up, forgiving and journeying with us every day. The Gospel is not about imposing rules but about Life. That is to be the RCIA story and process, and that is to be the life of the church community.

“Faith in Jesus can help many to accept the meaning of life and the human adventure, offering them those reference points that they often lack in a frenetic and disoriented world”

Benedict XVI Address La Civiltà Cattolica 17.2.06

Prayer.

You O God are the one who calls us into community with each other to love and work, to support, to heal.

Learn More @

Find out about the RCIA process eg St Ignatius Parish, Norwood, SA <http://users.senet.com.au/~nparish/groups/rcia.htm>

Catholic Australia www.catholicaustralia.com.au

National Church Life Survey

Occasional Paper No 6: Spirituality and Wellbeing in Australia. www.ncls.org.au

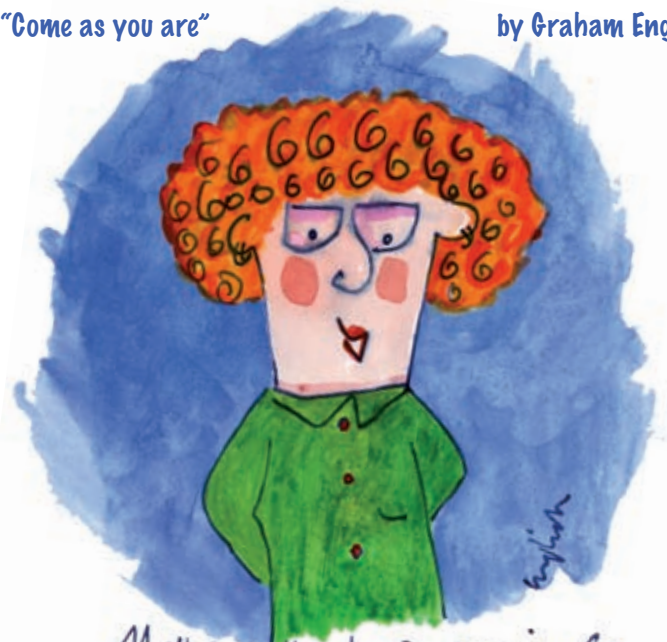
Read The RCIA: Transforming the Church, A Resource for Pastoral Implementation, Thomas H. Morris

Find out about the Cardijn Lay Community www.cardijn.info

“What can you say about a society that says that God is dead and Elvis is alive?” Irv Kupcinet

“Come as you are”

by Graham English



Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts.

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Chat Points:

- Discuss “The RCIA is the responsibility of the whole Christian community.”
- In what ways do you share your faith experience with others? In what ways do you learn from the values and hopes of others?
- How can the RCIA become part of your own faith development and bring life to your community?
- If you were an RCIA sponsor, how would you respond to challenges like, “Why are Christians killing people?”
- There is an old saying “The longest part of the journey is said to be the passing of the gate.” Discuss the metaphor of the gate as an opening or a blockage in the journey of following Jesus. Talk about gatekeepers who either open the way or shut people out?
- Discuss this statement in the context of the RCIA “When I am weak then I am strong”. (2 Cor 12: 10) This overturns the logic of a culture like ours which tends to say that when I am strong, then I am strong, and when I am weak, then I am nothing.” Bishop Mark Coleridge, 2006.

“We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us, it’s in everyone. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fears, our presence automatically liberates others.”
Nelson Mandela’s inaugural speech 1994

What Can I Do?

Find out where an RCIA program is being run.

Reflect on what you have to offer the RCIA program.

Take part in a “Come and See” gathering.

Look around. Is there someone whom I could sponsor?



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