

TRANSFORMING *FIRE*



Study Guide for Bishop Doerfler's Pastoral
Letter on Evangelization

2017

About this Study Guide

This study guide is drawn from Most Reverend John F. Doerfler's Pastoral Letter on Evangelization, *Transforming Fire*. It is intended for pastors to use with their parish leadership teams as they work to implement the vision of this letter in their community. It can also be used for personal and small group reflection, formation, sharing, and conversation.

Format

- 1- Each section of this guide corresponds with a section of the letter. Sections begin with a key quote or thought from the document for reflection and prayer followed by several questions.
- 2- Each section contains Scripture references. We encourage you to pray these using Lectio Divina, which is explained on page 19.
- 3- The questions have been developed to be open-ended and prompt discussion. The facilitator of the discussion should be prepared to ask additional questions to lead a deeper and more fruitful conversation.
- 4- This study guide does not explore Section 2 of the pastoral letter, as that section contains concrete action steps, not material for reflection.

Below is the Prayer for the Formation of Spirit-Filled Evangelizers. This should be used as opening and closing prayer for each session.

O Holy Spirit come into my life and my heart.

By the fire of your love,
transform me and all Catholics
throughout Michigan's Upper Peninsula
into Spirit-filled evangelizers.

I pray that more and more people may come to know the love of Jesus Christ
and make a personal decision to follow him.

I pray for all the people that I know who are not practicing any faith.
Touch their hearts with your love, O Holy Spirit.

Work through me so that they may have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ
and follow him in faith. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Be a friend of Jesus: Personal Encounter

“The foundation for the formation of a Spirit-filled evangelizer is our personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit.” We need to quiet ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and direct us toward Jesus.

1. Offer your definition of “encounter” to those in the group. The *Random House Dictionary*[™] defines encounter as: “to come upon or meet with, especially unexpectedly.” In what ways does this definition align with or challenge your understanding of encounter? Reflect on the examples of how people encounter God in the Bible found in the pastoral letter.

2. Share a time in your life when a personal encounter with Jesus was particularly real for you.

3. Reflect together on times when you personally encounter Jesus each day. Discuss ways that you can consciously dispose yourself to encounter Jesus.

4. Bishop John invites us to open our hearts to the love of God by bringing ourselves to Jesus as we are. How can we do this?

Scripture Passages on Encounter:

- Luke 24:26-35
- Mark 1:16-20
- John 20: 11-181
- Kings 19:9-13

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Be a friend of Jesus: Prayer

“The personal encounter with Jesus is deepened and renewed through the celebration of the Sacraments and a life of daily prayer.” To build any relationship, we spend time with a person. Spending time in prayer is how we build a relationship with Jesus.

1. Reflect on your prayer life. Share any regular prayer habits which are currently a part of your life. How does your regular prayer practice involve the dimensions outlined in paragraph eight of the pastoral letter’s section on Prayer?

2. Bishop John encourages all Catholics to participate prayerfully in Mass each Sunday and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, such as monthly but at least twice a year. How can you invite Jesus more deeply into your heart through these practices?

3. People turn to prayer during times of challenge or crisis. How can you encourage them to continue to live a life of prayer after the crisis has passed?

4. Discuss the importance of personal prayer, prayer in the family, and prayer in the larger community.

5. In the final paragraph in the Prayer section select one of the efforts or apostolates listed and offer your prayers for their ministry for one month.

Name of the effort for which I am praying.

Scripture Passages on Prayer:

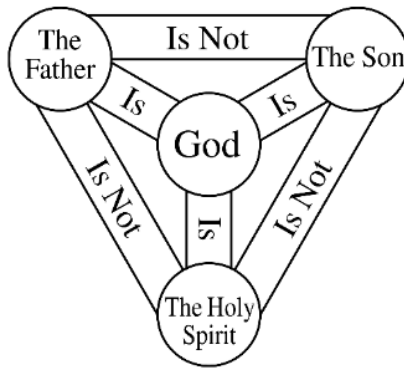
- Mt. 6:5-8
- 1 Thess. 5:16-18
- Ps. 105:4-5
- Ps. 130

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Make a friend: Building a Community of Love

“Spirit-filled evangelizers are so filled with the love of God that they long to share that love with other people.” Sharing God’s love with others, even with friends, can be intimidating; this requires boldness that only the Holy Spirit gives. Pray for the courage to be a Spirit-filled evangelizer!

1. Reflect on your family, your most basic community. How do you build or strengthen a community of love within your family?



2. Honestly examine the questions in the second paragraph in the section on Building a Community of Love. Reflect on how your actions support or detract from sharing the love of God with your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Choose one area you could work on to better witness the love of God with others.



Scripture Passages on Community:

- Jn. 15:4-5
- Rom. 9:4-5
- Rom. 12: 4-5
- Ps. 22:23-24

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Make a friend: Forming Welcoming Parishes

“Welcoming parishes are formed when the priest and the people desire to share the love of Jesus with everyone who walks through the doors of the church or has contact with the parish in any way.”

1. Reflect on Sunday Mass at your parish. How have people made you feel welcome? Share with the group.

2. Outside of Sunday Mass, what is something you would like to do, to welcome people, especially those on the fringes?

3. Reflect on the questions put forth in paragraphs three and four of the section on Forming Welcoming Parishes; determine one of your personal strengths and share it with your group.

Love ♦ ONE ♦ *Another*

Scripture on Welcoming Parishes:

- Heb. 10: 24-25
- Heb. 13:2
- 1 Pt. 4: 8-10
- Rom. 12: 15-16

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Introduce your friend to Jesus: Faith Formation/Catechesis

“To evangelize means helping people encounter Jesus by sharing the Gospel message so that they make a personal decision to follow him in faith....The more we know our faith, the easier it is to explain it to others who ask us about it.”

1. Growth in the knowledge of our faith is on-going. What formal and informal ways are you using to expand your knowledge of the faith? Discuss the opportunities your parish offers to all parishioners to help them grow in knowledge of the faith. What are the fruits of these offerings?



2. How does encountering Jesus motivate you to grow in knowledge and love of him and his church?

Scripture on Faith Formation:

- Lk. 24:32
- Ps. 119:1-2
- Ps. 119:33-35
- Acts 2:42



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Introduce your friend to Jesus: Formation for Mission

“If we love Jesus, we will want to tell others about him..... Sharing our faith with others is an essential element of following Jesus. It is not optional.”

1. By virtue of our Baptism, we are called to be missionary disciples. “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.” One of the best ways to do this is personal witness. Begin developing a one minute personal story that bears witness to your encounter with Jesus and understanding of his love. Write your thoughts below.

2. Evangelization is done through and in relationships, witnessing what Jesus has done for us, praying for people and accompanying them in their search for truth, and inviting them to join us in activities where they can encounter Jesus. Share a time when the Holy Spirit has worked through you to reach out and evangelize.

3. Share your understanding of the basic Gospel message; that is the “kerygma.” Now look at what St. Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. Does this affirm or challenge your initial understanding? How do St. Paul’s words support your personal witness from question 1 above?

Scripture on Formation for Mission:

- Ps. 78: 2-4
- Jn. 7:14-17
- Dt. 31:12

KERYGMA

Sample Kerygma statement: The Basic Gospel Message

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Mankind is separated from God by sin, because of self-centered pride, which leads to eternal death. Jesus Christ became man, died for our sins, and rose again so that we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our life. We must receive Christ in faith for our salvation. Christ established the Church as the normal means to receive God’s life.

How to Share the Kerygma: The Basic Gospel Message

1. The Plan: God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Most people live out their lives in a state of turmoil, always looking for “more.” This is because of:

2. The Bad News: Mankind is separated from God by sin because of self-centered pride, which leads to eternal death.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ... and the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23, 6:23).

We were created to have a loving, trusting relationship with God, but instead we’re born broken and sinful. We live self-centered lives. Without a relationship with God, we will experience eternal death separated from him forever.

3. The Good News: Jesus Christ became man, died for our sins, and rose again so we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our life.

God proves his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to Peter, the twelve Apostles, and more than 500 witnesses. He is the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except by Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

4. The Invitation: We must receive Christ in faith for our salvation. Christ established the Church as the normal means to receive God’s life.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8)

Jesus doesn’t want just a part of our heart, but wants us to surrender ourselves to his love.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20)

When we make an act of the will and receive him in faith, he gives us His very life, called grace. He calls us to conversion, to repent of our sins, to be Baptized, and experience being born again (Mark 1:15). He calls us to receive the fullness of his life.

Through his letter, *Transforming Fire*, Bishop John invites people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church; to inspire and equip them for a lifetime of Christ-centered evangelization, discipleship, and friendships in which they lead others to do the same. Thus, the Bishop's prayer is to inspire each person who reads the document, reflects upon it, and discusses it, to become a Spirit-filled evangelizer and bring one person to Jesus Christ in the way they know best. Below are steps to accomplish this task:

- Begin by asking, “*Holy Spirit*, who are *you* calling me to reach by sharing the Gospel?”
 - That person may not even be interested at first – it takes prayer and patient perseverance in calling them to take the next step in faith
 - These people probably aren't at Church on the weekend
- It can help to have a journal where you write these things down
 - Think about who the person is and write down their name
 - Seek to find out more about them by spending time with them in friendship
 - Pray for them each day
 - 2 Tim 1:3-4 – I thank God whom I serve, when I remember you constantly in my prayers. I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy!
- Ask God for an opportunity to share the Gospel with them
 - Invite them to conversion, to take the next step in responding to Jesus' call
 - Accompany them in a faith and prayer-filled relationship with Jesus and the Church

This is not a mechanized system. Rather, it involves letting the Holy Spirit lead, and watching and following his lead as he brings people into your life or calls you to reach out to certain people. It doesn't involve deciding who is going to respond to the Gospel or not – the results are up to God. Evangelization involves intentionally praying for certain people each day, getting to know them through friendship, and being ready to share the Gospel and call them to follow Jesus when opportunities arise.

Questions for reflection:

- Who are my friends with whom I have not shared the Gospel?
 - Pray for them, ask for opportunities, be ready to share when opportunities arise
- With whom am I meeting regularly (weekly/biweekly) to accompany them in their walk with Christ?
 - If no one, this can be the next step for me to take, intentionally meeting with a friend regularly to help and support them in following Jesus
- With whom am I spending time on a regular basis to equip them to do the same?
 - All baptized men and women can become catalysts for the evangelization of others; am I teaching others how to do what I'm doing and encouraging them to make disciples?

Lectio Divina

A method of prayer from the monastic tradition. It translates literally to “divine reading.”

Prepare by finding a quiet place. Decide what text you will use. Determine a set amount of time to devote to Lectio. Call to mind God’s presence and ask for help in praying.

1. **Lectio** (Reading) - Read the Scripture passage SLOWLY, two or more times. Pay attention to any words or phrases that stand out.
2. **Meditatio** (Meditation) - Think about the passage. How does this apply to me? How does it make me feel? How do I imagine this scene happening?
3. **Oratio** (Prayer) - Begin a conversation with God about what you have been thinking about. Tell him how his Word is affecting you.
4. **Contemplatio** (Contemplation) - If at some point, God seems very near to you, rest in his presence. Allow yourself to be quiet and “gaze” upon him. Take delight in any peace or sweetness that God gives during your time of prayer.

Taken from Fr. Brad Sjoquist presentation to Faith Formation Coordinators, Summer 2016



