



Orthodox Evangelism (abridged)

A brief resource guide for Orthodox Christians

Produced by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Department of Missions and Evangelism

Preparing and Giving Your Personal Spiritual Journey

from Fr. Peter Gillquist

One of the easiest and most effective ways to share God with others is telling them about your own experience of God — what I call giving your personal spiritual journey (often this is referred to as giving your testimony). This could involve explaining how you came to believe in Jesus Christ, why you became Orthodox, or simply how God has impacted your life.

Giving one's testimony is a traditional and very ancient Orthodox Christian method of evangelism. St. Paul writes about his conversion several times in Acts, the man born blind testifies before the Sanhedrin to what Jesus did for him, and the emissaries of St. Vladimir report their experience of the Kingdom of God when they worshipped in Constantinople.

Here are a few ideas to help you prepare and give your personal spiritual journey:

If you converted to Christianity/ Orthodoxy, explain:

- 1) your spiritual life before converting
- 2) how you converted
- 3) your spiritual life after converting

If you grew up Christian/Orthodox, describe one or more of these:

- 1) your childhood, youth, and adulthood
- 2) what Christ means to you
- 3) a life changing event (spiritual awakening, lifting up of one's soul)
- 4) what you know about God, and how you know it

Key elements for everyone:

- 1) Keep it brief (3 minutes is ideal)
- 2) Make it personal
- 3) Tell a story or dialogue
- 4) Include elements to which the listener can relate
- 5) Give 3 reasons why you believed in Christ, or converted to Orthodoxy, or renewed your commitment to Christ
- 6) Point out the one most significant event/influence on the journey
- 7) Struggles along the way

See the article by Fr. Jon Braun on the back of this sheet for more about sharing how God has worked in your life.

A Starter Recommended Reading List

Here are some good literature ideas for introducing others to the Orthodox Christian Faith, better understanding your own Faith, and learning more about Orthodox evangelism.

- 1) *The Orthodox Study Bible*
- 2) *Becoming Orthodox*
by Fr. Peter Gillquist
- 3) *Introducing the Orthodox Church*
by Fr. Anthony Coniaris
- 4) *The Orthodox Church*
by Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware
- 5) *Thirsting For God in a Land of Shallow Wells*
by Matthew Gallatin
- 6) *A Sorrowful Joy*
by Albert Raboteau
- 7) *Orthodox Alaska*
by Fr. Michael Oleksa
- 8) *Facing East*
by Frederica Mathewes-Green
- 9) *Topical Booklets Series* from Conciliar Press (over a dozen booklets on topics such as Church history, the Bible and Tradition, worship, the Theotokos, and more)

And here are a couple more titles particularly well-suited for those who already are Orthodox.

- 1) *The Orthodox Faith*
by Fr. Thomas Hopko
- 2) *Divine Energy*
by Fr. Jon Braun
- 3) *The Apostolic Fathers*
edited by Fr. Jack Sparks

(The above can be purchased through Conciliar Press (look under "HELP!"). They also might be available from your parish bookstore, and some might be found at your college library.)

HELP!

For help with missions, evangelism and questions about the Orthodox Christian Faith:

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“Joe Evangelist”

by Fr. Jon Braun,
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Following is a summary of the opening address of the 2000 Orthodox Conference on Missions and Evangelism, in which Fr. Jon Braun stressed how important and easy it is for each of us to be an evangelist, or witness, for Christ. Witnessing is easy because it all comes down to simply sharing good news — what God has done in our own lives — with others. (Reprinted from the Department of Missions and Evangelism Newsletter — Advent 2000.)

To be an evangelist all you need is to be able to talk — or to write. It's simply a matter of sharing your Christian Faith.

It's really not difficult to share good news. Most of us can hardly wait to tell people about the good things that happen in our lives. That's all we are asked to do in being a Christian witness. When we are baptized the Holy Spirit comes upon

us and, as Christ said, “You shall be witnesses to Me...” (Acts 1:8). If everything were going right, we would have to tell some people to tone it down!

Let's be very clear about one thing: you are to witness to Christ, not to the structure of the Orthodox Church. Christ is center, the focus. If we witness to the Orthodox Church, you will disappoint many of the people who come. The Church is not perfect; Christ is. The Church is important, but it is nothing without Christ.

There are at least two important things you need to know and do to be an evangelist for Christ. Number one, you need to tell what God has done in your life and what He means to you. Most of us don't have personal experiences of demonstrative miracles, but those things aren't necessary, and there are greater things. In the sacraments (or the mysteries, as we prefer to call them) we experience the greatest miracles possible! Don't hesitate to talk about the sacraments and what they mean to you.

One night, when I was a young Protestant minister, I was teaching a group how important it is to receive Christ and have a personal relationship with Him. Afterward, a young woman, who identified

herself as a Roman Catholic, approached me. I asked her if she was a Christian and if she had ever received Jesus Christ into her life. Without flinching she replied, “I receive Christ into my life every Sunday when I go to communion.” I suddenly was at a loss for words because she was so bold in her confidence! Here I was, a very aggressive young evangelical minister stumped because this young woman unhesitatingly knew what she experienced in the sacraments.

Should someone ask, “When were you saved?” you respond, “When I was baptized!” After all, that is what both Christ and St. Peter the Apostle said (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). If one asks if you have received the Holy Spirit, say yes with boldness and confidence in your chrismation when you received “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” There is great power in telling of God's work in the sacraments.

Summing it up, what does “Joe Evangelist” mean? It's not that you become preachers, as it were, to all your friends. It is far simpler. It's that you tell how Christ has touched you and how you experience Him and know Him in your Church. It's easy to share good news.

Evangelism Doesn't Have to Be Scary

by Howard Lange
Department of Missions and Evangelism

An excerpt from a review of Fr. Martin Ritsi's (director of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center) "Friends and Family Evangelism" method. (Reprinted from the Department of Missions and Evangelism Newsletter — Pascha 2001.)

God desires that all men should be saved, He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to effect this, and He calls His people to spread the gospel through evangelism (Isaiah 45:22, John 3:16-17, Matthew 28:18, 1 Timothy 2:1-4). However, outreach seems a low priority for most parishes and individual Orthodox Christians.

Why are Orthodox believers not more involved in evangelism? I think the greatest reason is *fear* — we're not sure what to do and say, and we worry how the

other person will react. Even most seminary graduates get a little squeamish at the prospect of sharing their faith.

Most of us only have a narrow stereotype of what evangelism is: street preaching, door-to-door solicitations, and mass rallies. These have their place, but these are not natural for most of us nor the most effective means of outreach.

Fr. Martin's “Friends and Family Evangelism” method is essentially how the Orthodox Churches in Albania and Africa have grown so rapidly, and it is proven effective in North America as well. This method also is very biblical. Many of the conversions recorded in the Book of Acts happened in the same way.

Here's a thumbnail step-by-step sketch of the “Friends and Family Evangelism” method.

Step 1: Identify who is in your personal “extended family”, i.e. your close friends, relatives, and associates who are not presently committed to Christ and the Orthodox Church.

Step 2: Pray regularly for each extended family member.

Step 3: Use discernment and focus your efforts. Concentrate on the friends with whom you have influence, you enjoy spending time with, and who are most receptive to what God has to offer them.

Step 4: Strengthen your relationships. Enjoy each others' company through shared activities and conversations. Have fun together!

Step 5: Enhance your witness. Learn your faith and be able to verbalize it. Also know where to lead a person for further opportunities to experience Christ.

Step 6: Incorporate into the Church. This is the goal — the “extended family” member must become part of our family in Christ. This step is not automatic, but is more like the care and nurture provided to a newborn child.

A survey of over 15,000 people by the Institute for American Church Growth reports that a whopping 75-90% came to their church and to Christ because of the influence of a friend or relative! Follow the “Friends and Family” method, and you will have taken the first step to becoming an evangelist for Christ!