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entirely practical guide."

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# to Heal, Proclaim, and Teach

The Essential Guide  
to Ministry in Today's  
Catholic Church

**SAMPLE**

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A BETTER RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR



## Preface

# SPIRITUAL NOT RELIGIOUS

On January 10, 2012, twenty-two-year-old Jefferson Bethke clicked *publish* on a YouTube video that was about to go viral. He made a bet with his roommates about how many views it would get—a hundred views, maybe a thousand—but none of them came close to predicting what was about to happen. The video, titled “Why I Hate Religion but Love Jesus,” is a poetic rap expressing Bethke’s love for Jesus but disdain for religious legalism. In two days it had more than two million views. Two weeks later YouTube showed it had more than sixteen million views, and by early 2015, it approached thirty million.

This video resonated with so many millions of people because Bethke was able to articulate in a five-minute video what a growing number of people try to express by calling themselves “spiritual but not religious.” This self-characterization is incredibly common today within every generational, ethnic, and cultural grouping in the United States.

There is no questioning the real decline in numbers facing the Catholic Church in some parts of the United States today. In many areas of the country, numbers of self-identified Catholics are decreasing at rapid rates. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, the number of people self-identifying as Catholics decreased from 23.9 percent in 2007 to 20.8 percent in 2014.<sup>1</sup> That equates to a loss of about 3.4 million Catholics in just seven years. In many places the pews are increasingly empty. Baptisms,

marriages, First Communion, Confirmations—you name it—they are on the downturn. People are not satisfied with their churches, so they go elsewhere or they do not go at all. During the same period between 2007 and 2014, the number of Evangelical Protestants grew by about 2.4 million and the number of religiously unaffiliated (spiritual but not religious) grew by a staggering 19.2 million people.<sup>2</sup>

Many of these unaffiliated spiritual seekers put a higher priority on youth sports events, watching professional sports, recreational activities with friends or family, personal downtime, or simply sleeping in on Sunday mornings than they put on going to Mass. They have not stopped believing in God—in fact, many will be back in church on Christmas and Easter—they just do not find much inspiration or joy in organized religion on a weekly—let alone daily—basis. In many areas of our country, church after church is being forced to close or consolidate now that once-full pews are growing empty.

One possible response is to blame an uncontrollable consumer culture and simply admit defeat. Many have pointed to the various “-isms” for the shift away from religion (secularism, relativism, individualism, etc.) and express an incapability to overcome such powerful movements. But another possible response is to look at ourselves as Christian leaders and the work we have been doing to see if there is something we can do differently to meet the spiritual—indeed, religious—needs of Americans today. Take a look at one of the most powerful verses from the middle of Jefferson Bethke’s rap:

But now that I know Jesus, I boast in my weakness.  
If grace is water, then the church should be an ocean,  
Cuz it’s not a museum for good people  
it’s a hospital for the broken.

Compare that verse with the words of Pope Francis in his 2013 interview with Father Antonio Spadaro in *America* magazine titled “A Big Heart Open to God”:

I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. . . . And you have to start from the ground up.

The Church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the Church must be ministers of mercy above all.<sup>3</sup>

I believe Bethke and Pope Francis are both pointing to an essential change that we need to make as leaders in the Church. We have to heal wounds, and we have to go deeper with our proclamation of salvation in Christ. It may be that the reason we continue to see so many Catholics leave the Church is that many people do not find in the Church a source of healing for their pain. They do not hear people in our churches preaching a message that inspires or connects with their deepest hopes, dreams, and needs. It may even be that our focus on conveying doctrine, without first laying a foundation for understanding it, renders the Church easy to leave for many and keeps others from ever entering its doors.

The Church can either be a community of people that welcomes the sinner and helps heal the wounds of sin and isolation, or it will be a place where sinners are condemned and turned away, forced by our lack of mercy back into their spirituality of

individualism. It can be a community that proclaims the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, or it can be an institution focused on scolding (sometimes condemning) outsiders for denying its doctrines. For many of us on the inside, especially those of us in leadership, the Church *we* know and love welcomes the lost and proclaims salvation, but the great challenge we face day in and day out is helping others see and experience what we do so that they develop a hunger to come and see more.

## WHAT ABOUT RELIGION LOOKS SO BAD?

Let's face it: religion is a tough sell—even to the curious. To outsiders, religion often seems dominated by rules—rules that are pretty tough to follow. *They* ask *us* to totally transform our lives and turn away from what is comfortable and makes us feel good. The time commitment once each week (sometimes more) may seem like nothing to us, but for many people Sunday morning is prime time for all sorts of other activities. Religion can feel confrontational or can seem an unnecessary hassle. Probably most people who don't go to church are hardworking good people who just want to get a break by sleeping in, playing golf, watching football, getting caught up on things around the house, or just enjoying downtime with loved ones.

The vast majority of people who grew up going to church and do not go anymore are not ardent atheists. They are not anti-Church or anti-God. Remember, they see themselves as spiritual people who believe in God. They may not get anything out of going to church on Sundays, but they do like to pray, especially in times of crisis or when they feel profoundly grateful. Most of these people want to do what is right, and they want to enjoy life. Religion, however, puts restrictions on them without providing much payoff. To them, it adds unnecessary rules and

meaningless actions to their already too-busy lives. Religion seems to take the fun out of life.

As Christian leaders whose lives have been transformed by Christ, we know differently. We are spiritual *and* religious because we know the joy of intimate relationship with Christ and the benefits of following God's laws and getting involved in a community of fellow believers. We are at church not out of an obligation but because we *want* to be there. We want to give thanks to God for his gifts, and we know we cannot live the life we want to live without his help. Many of us have tried to find fulfillment outside of the Church but ultimately cannot find a better source of hope. Our attempts to find happiness elsewhere have failed. We have found hope and an incredible source of peace and joy in God and within the communion of the Church.

Do you see the difference? We believe what we believe and do what we do because we *want* to. Religion is a part of who we are, something we choose over and over again to remain with. Our religious practice brings with it certain obligations, but they are obligations we choose to accept as members of the Church. Those who consider themselves open only to spirituality see religion as an obligation put upon them by others. This is why many of them still go to church occasionally when Mom and Dad visit, on Christmas and Easter, or for other special occasions such as weddings, Baptisms, and funerals. Often these people attend more because of sentiment than conviction.

The challenge before us, then, is to show others why Christian beliefs, teachings, practices, and laws are worth understanding and embracing. It is to show our brothers and sisters that just being spiritual is not enough; there is further commitment necessary when choosing a Christian life. But even before inviting others to discipleship, we need to help restore for them trust in organized religion, which continues to be degraded by a

tendency to preach and teach without first attending to compassionate mercy and love. Many religious leaders—certainly within Catholicism, but also within other Christian communities—have too long neglected that to which Pope Francis now calls us. We must return our way of ministry to our biblical roots and the example of Jesus himself by becoming “ministers of mercy above all.”<sup>4</sup> This is the key to genuine, life-changing evangelization.

## **IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SO HARD**

As I write this book, I have in mind many conversations I have had with parents who are in tears over their grown children's separation from the Church. They have tried everything. Every conversation these parents have had about God is brushed off and unwelcome. If their children come to church with them, it is out of coercion or a murky sense of guilt, not free choice. If they believe there is a God, they are not all that interested in worshipping him, especially not in church. On the brink of hopelessness, these parents turn to God in prayer, feeling helpless and guilty for failing to raise their kids to become practicing Catholics. They cannot even with confidence claim their children are Christians.

I also have in mind the professional and volunteer ministers who are struggling to reach people at all different ages and progressions along their faith journeys. In many places the pews are emptier and emptier each year. New ministries, such as youth nights and adult faith-formation series, often do not attract enough participants to sustain them. Children's programs may be steady in attendance, but the parents of these children do not bring their kids to Mass on Sundays. Often, once those kids receive the sacraments, they don't come back to Mass or any other parish activity. In other places churches are filled to overflowing, but ministry leaders can't help but feel that what

they do primarily is barter in the sacraments. They set up hoops, parishioners jump through, and sacraments are received. But then what? Too many ministers are left wondering how many people come to truly know Christ because of what they do.

There are, of course, sparks of success in many corners of the Church, but nearly everywhere there are too many Catholics who *aren't* in church this can bring great distress to ministers striving to do more. These leaders try new things but never quite know what is working, except for prayer, which faith tells them always works.

As a result, some members of the Church have unfortunately become passionately frustrated and even angry with the current situation. In reaction to the many uncatechized kids and adults, members of this group hold tight to the fervent beliefs and doctrines of the Church and try to share their love of these teachings every chance they get. It is usually with good intention but often with negative results. The spiritual-but-not-religious crowd often reacts by taking offense and turns further from the Church, sometimes growing passionate as well—passionately frustrated with the people in the Church!

What, then, shall we do to bring people back or attract them for the first time? How might we who are engaged inspire them to know and love God *and* Church? You will find in this book a process for evangelizing ministry that works. It is a process that Jesus himself used to make disciples. It is the process that his apostles used to grow the Church and that the great saints throughout history have followed ever since. It is the same process that many successful individuals, parishes, and Catholic ministries are using today to foster growing numbers of disciples and conversion experiences in the people they serve.

With this process, you will not have to feel hopeless anymore. Instead of turning to God in prayer as a last resort, you

will trust in his work, trust in the process, and thank him in prayer for his great intervention. Or, instead of putting all the trust in your own actions to inspire faith in others, you will look to the process and turn to God in faith that he will work through you and others in each stage along a person's journey.

Evangelization is not a mysterious set of activities that only people with charismatic gifts are able to do. It is about so much more than great preaching or good teaching. It is something we all can do in every day of our lives if we begin with mercy offered as healing to those who hurt. The most common form of evangelization, in fact, doesn't feel like something extraordinary at all. As you will find, we are all *called to* and *able to* make disciples, and we don't have to be great preachers, teachers, or miracle-workers to do it.



## Introduction

# WHAT IS EVANGELIZATION?

Every Sunday millions of Christians throughout the world say “I believe” as they recite the words of the Nicene Creed. *Believe* is a word that has taken on all kinds of meanings today. We might say, “I believe in ghosts,” meaning, “I believe that ghosts exist.” We can say to someone, “I believe you,” as in, “I believe that what you are saying is true.” We often say, “I can’t believe that!” when something shocking has happened that is difficult to comprehend. In almost every case other than in the context of the creed, we say “believe” in reference to the acceptance of an idea or perception. The “I believe” we say in the creed, however, is very different.

In the original Latin, “I believe” is the single word *credo*. It can mean “believe in,” but it can also mean “trust in.” The Latin word originates as the compound of two words: *ker* or *cor*, which means “heart”; and *do* or *dheh*, which means “to put, place, or set.” When Christians recite the creed, what we are really proclaiming is that we place our hearts in God. It is commitment to a someone (not just a something) with whom we can have a relationship. It is so much more than a simple acceptance of ideas, perceptions, or truths. When we recite the creed, we pledge our very hearts to God. This should have an enormous impact on the way we live every day and a profound influence on how we think of ministry, particularly in the way we evangelize.

## WHAT IS EVANGELIZATION?

What exactly is the purpose of evangelization? What are we trying to accomplish? Why should we want to do it? What exactly is it? Simply put, evangelization is the way in which we show others why and how to trust in God. It is the process by which we help others learn to pledge their hearts continuously to Christ. From the outside, this might feel selfish and imposing. Today more than ever people take offense even to the idea of openly sharing religious beliefs with those who do not already accept them. They have become hypersensitive to proselytization and religious fundamentalism because they have seen and experienced the negative effects of these.

At the same time, the word *evangelization* has been naturally adopted by the secular world. An increasing number of “brand evangelists” can be found in companies and start-ups today. These individuals practice a form of marketing that is focused on word of mouth. They create messages that spread among people who love a product or a company. The goal is to craft a message and a reputation among people who already love a product and get it to spread to others.

Christian evangelization, on the other hand, is about so much more than spreading an idea or defending a reputation. Christianity spreads not because of convincing arguments, but because of heartfelt encounters with Christ that transform lives. Christianity calls for more than the acceptance of ideas alone; it exists as the result of and in response to an encounter with a living God. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1).

If, when we think about evangelization, we think only of the beliefs and stories of Christianity and not about the benefit to the

other person, then our perception is much too narrow. We evangelize to enter into the deepest needs of our neighbors in order to help them find solutions to their deepest desires. Evangelization is about the heart, wounded by sin and separation and yearning for something more. This kind of evangelization—one that puts the needs of others first—is the only one that really works. It is the ministerial approach used by Jesus himself. It is this kind of evangelization that will not cause us to feel guilty or unsure of ourselves. We never have to feel bad about evangelization in this sense, because it keeps the needs of others at the forefront of our concern.

Evangelization is not primarily about teaching doctrines and communicating ideas. Learning and assenting to the doctrines of the Church and committing to a life of discipleship do not *lead* a person to conversion. Rather, these *result* from conversion. In order for a Christian to proclaim “I believe,” he or she must first experience a transformation in mind and heart. With that transformation comes the recognition that we are loved by God and will do everything we can to love God back. The doctrines and teachings help us to love God, but they only make sense when built upon that firm foundation of love.

Understanding and accepting Church doctrines is a process that takes time and internal motivation. It cannot be done with a simple intellectual assent. We accept the doctrines because of an intimate relationship that we have formed with Christ and the Church. This is what we mean by the word *faith*. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes faith as a response to God’s revelation by which “man completely submits his intellect and his will to God,” and, further, “with his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer” (142–43). In order to have faith, we must have a change of both mind *and* heart, a reorienting of our lives toward God, which leads to ongoing conversion. This

means we have to share more than ideas when we evangelize. When we invite another into relationship with Christ, we have to *love*.

## HOW TO EVANGELIZE

Evangelization, if it is to be effective, is always the challenging work of entering into the depths of another human being's experience and walking with him or her into the light of a better tomorrow. It is more than teaching about doctrines. It is more than spreading ideas. Ministry is always about serving another human being in that person's greatest need and deepest longing.

I always thought the new evangelization—the appeal to Catholics to evangelize even those who have already been baptized but have now fallen away—was about getting better at knowing and sharing my “faith” (i.e., Catholic doctrine and theology) with others. As it turns out, the new evangelization—and, in fact, *all* evangelization and all ministry—calls for a much greater sacrifice than acquiring knowledge and building up the skills of articulating what we believe. It calls us, as disciples, to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, to be vulnerable rather than knowledgeable, to be interested *in* others rather than simply interesting *to* others.

As dedicated Catholics and ministers, most of us have had striking, unexpected transformations in faith or lifelong religious experiences that have made an incredible impact on our lives. At some point we felt the call to share the love of God we encountered in those experiences—to serve the Church in children's or youth ministry, adult faith formation, or liturgical ministries; as volunteers in soup kitchens; or in numerous other ways. We feel compelled to share the joy we know in Christ, but the question is, how do we actually do it effectively without scaring people off or, worse, pushing them away?

There is no reason to think that our situation is any different from every other era in the history of the Church. In each century, the Church has had to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges in making new disciples. Many great saints became beacons of hope during those times and showed us how to spread the Gospel amid adversity. In fact, while the methods they used to spread the Gospel may have differed, the process they used to bring people into the Church can be traced back to Jesus himself.

We all know in a general way what Jesus did. We can cite specific stories of his miracles, meals, preaching, and teaching. But twice in the Gospel of Matthew we find a concise summary of the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ: **“Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness” (Mt 9:35; see also Mt 4:23).**

Here Matthew lays out for us a clear summary of what Jesus did: he healed, he proclaimed, and he taught. Each action is a distinct and effective form of ministry with people who are at various points in their faith journeys. Jesus responds to the need before him and ministers accordingly, depending on where each individual or group is along the path to conversion and eventual discipleship. Healing, proclaiming, and teaching are all just as essential today as they were at the time of Jesus’ ministry.

Many Catholic ministers and volunteers are very comfortable with being good teachers of doctrine. Most of the well-attended ministries in Catholic parishes focus on catechesis and preparation for the sacraments. For the most part, the goal of these meetings or classes is to pass on the teachings of the Church. We know, however, that many participants in these programs are poorly catechized and even unevangelized. As Saint John Paul II observed in his apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*,

“A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ” (19). This is why all of us who are responsible for catechesis should recognize that it is only one aspect of the larger responsibility of evangelization.

Thankfully, Jesus gave us a model for ministry that makes evangelization possible. Take note of where Matthew says Jesus taught. He taught in the synagogues. He taught people who were already committed to being spiritual *and* religious. The crowds, however, whom he met in the cities and villages, heard a different message. They were interested in knowing God and probably even considered themselves to be spiritual. Why else would they come to hear what a great spiritual sage like Jesus had to say? To them, he proclaimed Good News about the kingdom of God, which he preached with words and proclaimed by the way he lived. Like Jesus, we must offer those who are not yet fully committed disciples a different message than those who are already disciples. To them we must offer an initial proclamation that expresses God’s infinite love for us—a love that requires a response of faith.

To be able to hear and understand that message, however, individuals need to experience love in their own lives. This is where healing ministry comes in. I will explain later how healing is an essential part of evangelization, not because of the occasional physical miracles that may occur, but because of the inner healing of emotional brokenness. When wounded hearts are healed in the context of a personal encounter with Christ, through the ministry of his disciples, the other parts of the evangelization process can effectively take place.

## TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH

I have nothing against teaching religion. In fact, it has been my entire life's vocation. After graduating college, I immediately entered the classroom as a religion teacher and continue to serve as a catechist today. I have seen firsthand that focusing too heavily on professionalism and perfectionism as a teacher is one of the easiest ways to turn people away from Christ. Let me share an example of this common mistake.

When I was a new Catholic-school teacher I found my role as educator to be the easiest place to hide. As a recent college graduate, I was young and self-conscious about my age. I developed a real complex about it that started with the very first time I met my new students and their parents. At our first open house, at least five parents and a handful of kids smiled dismissively when they met me and said, "You look too young to be a teacher."

From that moment on, I hid behind the veil of professionalism, and the effects were truly unfortunate. This was never more clear than during a moment in my second year of teaching when one of my eighth-grade students came to talk to me about his girlfriend, Rachel, a classmate. She was noticeably distraught in recent days and not her usual happy, bubbly self. It turned out that her parents were getting a divorce. Knowing that my parents had been through a divorce, her boyfriend turned to me for guidance.

He caught up with me between classes and said, "Could you talk to her, Mr. Dees? You said your parents are divorced, and I thought you might be able to say something to her." He was brief because he didn't want her to know that he told anyone.

Over the next few days I looked for a chance to talk to Rachel, but I'm sad to say I never did. I didn't know what to say, and I was afraid. Part of it may have been my own painful memories of my parents' divorce; I'm not quite sure. But I justified

the lack of action in the name of professionalism. I told myself it was not my place to say anything—that I should be the teacher, not the friend. I told myself that it was my job to teach about religion and history and not get involved in the personal lives of my students. How very sad for a Catholic-school teacher, especially a *religion* teacher!

This is a scenario playing itself out in many different ministries in our Church today. It is easier to teach a speed-lesson about the Sacrament of Baptism to new parents than it is to sit with them one-on-one to talk about their biggest hopes and greatest fears as new parents. It is easier to grudgingly issue certificates of completion to engaged couples who have met the minimum diocesan requirements for marriage without ever getting to know why they are getting married in the first place or what they dream of becoming together. Attend enough classes, complete a program, attend the annual retreat, and you qualify for your First Reconciliation, First Communion, and the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Church leaders today are sometimes more focused on completing a curriculum than actually getting to know the needs of the people they are serving. For instance, some of our homilies might catechize adults about the sanctity of marriage and at the same time ignore the profound pain that separation and divorce have caused many people in the pews. Our RCIA ministries may try to cram in every paragraph of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in a multiweek lecture series that ends up dissipating the desperate hunger for the kingdom of God that catechumens and candidates brought with them. Our marriage-preparation programs can become a series of classes that display bite-sized introductions to big-time issues such as the significance of families of origin, finances, communication, unrealistic expectations, hopes, and fears, the value of Catholic teaching on contraception, the

problem with cohabitation, and what *sacrament* really means. We teach teenagers in Catholic schools about Church history and Catholic morality despite the fact that many of them do not even believe in God, or mistrust or simply do not see the point of religion.

I write all this not as a complaint but as a confession. I spent too many years focused on teaching people about the doctrines that I love rather than loving the people that I taught. I am the guy who started a website called *The Religion Teacher* because of my passion for our Catholic beliefs. Teaching has long been an integral part of my identity. Over the years I have gotten good at it. I was bad at first—really bad—but I got better, and now I feel confident that I can teach a lesson I know my students will remember. In the process, though, I became so focused on the craft that I lost sight of the needs of the children in front of me.

Teaching about Church doctrines can be inspiring and influential. It really can. Our beliefs certainly can make a lasting impact on people who hear about them in the proper context. The problem is that teaching alone is not enough. Teaching is safe, comfortable, impersonal, and objective. It is not risky. It does not necessarily require us to share any part of ourselves. As teachers, all we need to do is pass on what we have learned in the clearest way possible. If they can remember and repeat back to us what we have taught, then we can reasonably say that we are successful. The truth is, however, there is so much more to evangelization than this.

We in Catholic leadership, in ministries complex and simple, are left with a choice. We can continue acting only as teachers resenting those who don't "get it," all the while wishing there were more people at Mass on Sundays. Or, we can do things differently. We can give first priority to healing the wounds of those in need, connect the Good News of salvation with the

actual hopes and dreams of the people we serve, and only then try to teach them.

## **FIRST, HEAL THE WOUNDS**

The process of evangelization begins with the ability to see the pain in our brothers' and sisters' hearts and find ways in which we can help them find healing. It requires a disposition of mercy that looks beyond our own desires for protection and fears of losing what we have.

Think for a minute about the way Jesus attracted and led people to conversion. Jesus was a teacher, yes, but did he always lead with a lesson?

Take, for instance, the calling of the first disciples. How did Jesus win over the doubting fishermen? When he met them, the men were struggling to catch fish. Again and again their nets came out of the water empty. It seemed as though they would go home completely empty-handed from a long day at work. But, upon Jesus' instructions, they put out into the deep water one last time and, to their amazement, found their nets bursting at the seams with fish.

Jesus saw their pain and met their needs. He did not lead with a lesson. He started with their pain. The soon-to-be disciples saw that Jesus was the source of this miracle, and upon his command they followed him. They committed to a relationship with him before they ever heard a lesson from him.

Or take the woman at the well. Jesus met the woman, identified her most painful source of guilt and shame, confronted it head-on, and helped her find mercy instead of harsh judgment. Out of that healing encounter came her conversion. She went away recognizing Jesus as the Son of God and proclaiming his work in her life to the other people of Samaria.

A similar story is repeated again and again throughout the gospels. A person is healed by Christ but, more importantly, finally feels loved and accepted instead of feeling rejected by others. As a result of a healing encounter, he or she follows Jesus and spreads the Gospel.

The lesson here is clear: healing is the first step in evangelization.

How on earth can we imitate the healing power of Jesus? Should we learn how to become miracle-workers? Sorry, but you will not find a manual for magical healing in this book, nor will you discover the ways in which you can become an evangelical miracle-worker, slaying people with the Holy Spirit onstage before large crowds. No, the healing power you will learn in this book is much, much more difficult and much more effective.

In order truly to help heal the pain of our brothers and sisters, we have to enter into it. We have to feel a compassionate desire to help by walking with them in their pain and helping them navigate a way toward healing mercy and toward salvation. This takes time, emotional investment, and a lot of vulnerability on our part.

The healing we provide through our ministry isn't some kind of medicine that takes away the pain. In some cases, the pain never goes away. What we do is lead others to the source of our own personal healing and strength, the Lord Jesus Christ. Unlike Jesus, who healed physical pains as miracles and proof of his divinity, we don't often offer the alleviation of physical pain. But as Jesus also did, we take on and experience their pain together with them. Through compassion we offer a healing touch, a merciful presence to those who are hurting. In the face of suffering, we are the *Body* of Christ.

## **THEN, PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS**

Jesus is the Savior; he brings salvation through his unconditional love for us. Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth and suffered just as we suffer but to the point of a humiliating death on a cross. Then he rose again and ascended into heaven, paving the way for us to experience our own salvation today. Through Baptism, we enter into the kingdom of God and continue to dwell in Christ both in this life and the next.

Salvation is something we get to experience right now, reaping the benefits of the Christian life, and also after death, when we will be united with God and others in the perfection of heaven and entry into the kingdom of God.

This is the heart of the Gospel that always comes with us when we enter into the pain of our brothers and sisters. We cannot magically heal a person's deepest pain, but we can bring redemptive love to sit alongside that pain. We enter into the woundedness of others and show them the way we found healing in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. In other words, we help our brothers and sisters to find healing, and we show them who provides that healing by proclaiming the Good News of salvation.

We all want to find healing and freedom from something in our lives. For some it is a physical ailment, but much more commonly it is the pain of isolation, loneliness, rejection, betrayal, inadequacy, oppression, and other such emotional hurts. When the joy of the Gospel is proclaimed in the context of the pain someone is experiencing, and the hope of something different is offered, then a door is opened to a meaningful, healing encounter with Christ.

Instead of turning to Christ, however, many people look elsewhere seeking deliverance from their pain. Some people turn to addictive behaviors involving drugs, alcohol, food, sex, money, and power. For many others, though, it is the simple

satisfaction of short-term relief found in entertainment, social media, or smartphones.

The Gospel brings hope, but it is a hope that claims a stake on our lives. It demands of us self-giving love. When we proclaim the Good News, we cannot hide the fact that the kingdom of God requires great sacrifice from us. Its rewards are often not immediate as it calls us out of ourselves to work for the greater good of reconciling the world to God. Disciples of Jesus put others before themselves, as do the honored guests in the parable of the wedding feast (see Lk 14). People who pursue the kingdom, such as those in the parables of finding the pearl and the hidden treasure (see Mt 13), find the kingdom so valuable that they sacrifice everything else just so they can take part in it.

Once people accept the true promise of the kingdom, things start to fall into place. They begin to taste the peace that comes from giving rather than receiving. They see the failure of other habits and addictions to bring joy and fulfillment and begin to see that only their faith in God will give them rest. Curiosity is sparked and questions follow. Questions are answered in conversations, in books, in lectures, in classes, and in churches on Sundays. Only at this point in a person's journey of conversion is teaching truly effective. It is effective at this point because the person is now motivated to learn and ready to ask more questions. He embarks on a journey of discovery, and we, as teacher-evangelists, can finally introduce him to the doctrinal beauty of the Church.

## **THE CHURCH EXISTS IN ORDER TO EVANGELIZE**

Church leaders have talked and written and read about evangelization so much in recent years that we have placed it in a category of actions all to itself—as if evangelization were one mode

of acting and speaking that ministers undertake completely separate from the work of other ministries. It would be a very big mistake to think that only those with offices and titles that include the word *evangelization* are responsible for it. It can be easy to separate, in our minds, the good work of managing soup kitchens or planning weddings or educating children in Catholic schools from the work of evangelization. But all ministries must be characterized by an evangelizing spirit, and all efforts at evangelization must be rooted in the ministerial priorities of Jesus.

Evangelization is not something we do in order to proselytize or urge people along a series of steps on a faith continuum toward discipleship. No, evangelization is built into our very being as ministers and especially as disciples and servants of God. We are always evangelizing, even if the primary work we do has no explicit link to spiritual conversion, education, or open sharing of our beliefs about God.

Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World) that “the Church exists in order to evangelize” (14). All Catholics are called to evangelize no matter what we do for a living. With that said, all of us, whether a parishioner, pastor, youth minister, retreat leader, choir director, eucharistic minister, DRE, catechist, teacher, or missionary have one primary goal: to lead others into an intimate and transformative encounter and ongoing relationship with Christ. Evangelization is a part of who we are as Christians. It is integrated into everything we do. It is not some separate class of actions that only particular individuals in the Church are able and supposed to do. It is not reserved to those who make a living as ministers within the Church, but rather evangelization is the rightful ministry of all the baptized.

When I talk about parish ministry in this book, I am talking about evangelization. When I talk about evangelization, I’m

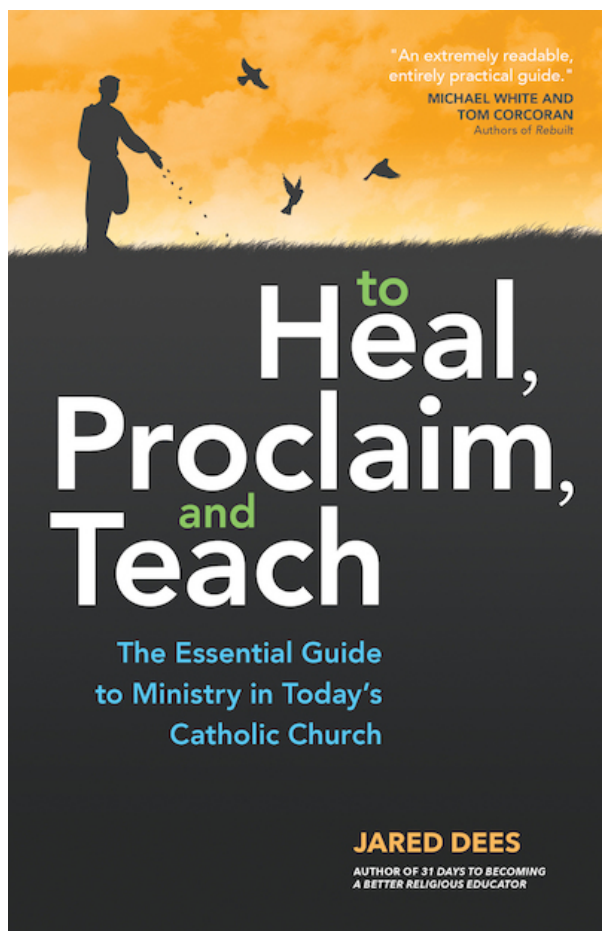
talking about ministry. There is no ministry that is not intended to be evangelizing (characterized by proclamation of the Good News in word and action). And there is no evangelization that is not rooted in the threefold ministry of Jesus to heal, proclaim, and teach.

## **ARE YOU READY?**

This book is divided into four parts. Part I examines the foundations of evangelization found in the Bible and in the Church's documents. Part II explores each aspect of Jesus' threefold ministry (healing, proclaiming, and teaching) and tries to clarify what each means for us today. We will look at saints who have exemplified these forms of evangelization in the past. Their stories will provide a clear vision for what imitating the ministry of Jesus entails and why it still works so well today.

In part III we bring the healing, proclaiming, and teaching framework to the front lines of ministry in the Church today, and I offer practical examples of how to become evangelizers in our everyday lives and ministries. We look at ways in which we can put ourselves in positions to be continually evangelized so that we can go heal, proclaim, and teach people one-to-one and in groups.

Finally, part IV applies the threefold ministry framework to various age groups with case studies of ministries and movements seeing the most success today. We will examine best practices in Catholic evangelization today and provide practical ways in which ministers of every generation—whether children, teens, or adults—can implement the heal, proclaim, and teach approach. In addition to this book, you can find a collection of resources, including video trainings and printable tools, at [healproclaimteach.com](http://healproclaimteach.com).



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