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# How to Develop an Outreach Program in the Parish

## A Brief Overview

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## GLOSSARY

**Outreach Ministry:** the parish's door-to-door evangelization program.

**Home Visitor:** a parishioner who visits inactive Catholics.

**Caring Friend:** a Home Visitor who continues to reach out after the initial visit.

**Inactive Catholic:** anyone registered in the parish, who--at most--attends Mass irregularly and/or does little more than drop their children off for Religious Education.

**The Evangelized:** the inactive Catholics who have been visited.

**Evangelization Teams:** Small Christian Communities that are focused on evangelization, which every Home Visitor is asked to join.

## Preparing the Home Visitors

Before parishioners can effectively invite inactive Catholics to church, they themselves must first be evangelized to grow beyond whatever level of spirituality they have already achieved. They need to be invited to:

1. Increase their understanding of the Catholic faith
2. Grow in their love for the people whom they will be visiting
3. Be inspired to serve in door-to-door ministry, and later be re-inspired, so that the number of those involved in this outreach will climb instead of drop.

## Preparing the Parish

The parish should be a community that appeals to inactive Catholics. This can be accomplished by:

1. Giving inactive Catholics a packet of information that includes a list of parish services, organizations, activities, etc., with descriptions that reveal how the parish addresses the needs that inactive Catholics perceive themselves to have, eg., how the parish helps people who are hurting or searching for acceptance.
2. Preparing parish organizations to follow-up the home visits. They will be taught how to utilize their particular gifts and ministries to invite the Evangelized to avail themselves of whatever their organizations offer.
3. Planning social-spiritual activities that make newcomers feel valued and welcomed, such as monthly receptions with free refreshments after Masses.
4. Educating regular parishioners about their role in evangelization, teaching them to genuinely care about their pew-neighbors and the people they meet in coffee-donut fellowship time and other social events.
5. Training liturgy greeters to welcome people with warmth.
6. Utilizing or establishing a Welcoming Committee that is given the task of finding new ways to make a parish feel like a family.

## Three-step Plan to Activate the Home Visitation Ministry

There are three stages of effective evangelization. Before the Home Visitors and the parish as a whole can lead inactive Catholics through these stages, the parish itself must go through them.

### 1. Pre-evangelization (needs assessment)

Members of the Parish Evangelization Ministry should meet with parish organizations, asking: "What needs for evangelization are you aware of and how do you think the parish can meet those needs?" A group discussion will follow with the evangelization team explaining what evangelization really is and what the goals are for the parish. These meetings will inspire more people to become interested in visiting inactive Catholics and they will start preparing the organizations to get involved in the follow-ups.

### 2. Direct Evangelization

The parish will sponsor and promote various faith formation events such as Parish Missions that have evangelization as their theme. During these, participants will be invited to become involved in evangelization outreach, including the home visitation ministry.

### 3. On-going Catechesis

Parishioners who sign up for Outreach Ministry will be formed into Evangelization Teams and will be given the following education.

- A training course will be provided using the workbook *Go and Make Disciples* by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and other resources, such as those provided by Paulist Evangelization Ministries at [www.pncea.org](http://www.pncea.org). This training includes listening skills, how to communicate love and caring, faith sharing, practice sessions, an overview of situations the Home Visitors might encounter, and an outline of how the parish's organizations will follow-up the visits.
- Evangelization Team Meetings, held weekly, that serve as support groups (Small Christian Communities) in which members share insights gained from outreach experiences. The *Holy Living Bible Study on the Sermon on the Mount* can be provided by Good News Ministries. These meetings may include parishioners who are not involved in the Outreach Ministry, as long as they are interested in evangelization in some form.
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- One-evening seminars on the Catholic faith using a variety of Church documents for study materials. These will be advertised to the whole parish, to continually add new members to the Evangelization Teams.
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- Occasional retreats to renew the enthusiasm and commitment of the Home Visitors and to inspire other parishioners to get involved in evangelization.

## Three-step Plan to Activate the Inactive Catholics

The Home Visitors will be trained to inspire inactive Catholics to enter into the journey of the three stages of evangelization. The whole parish will be involved.

### 1. Pre-evangelization (inspiring inactive Catholics)

The first inactive Catholics to be contacted are those with children undergoing sacramental preparation in Religious Education classes. Later, the Home Visitors will contact the parents of other Religious Education students. Lastly, they will contact all others who have registered in the parish but only attend Mass irregularly at best. Also, parishioners may submit the names of people they know who are not attending church or who are curious about the Catholic faith and who live within the parish boundaries.

- The Home Visitors will place phone calls to inactive Catholics, asking permission to stop by with materials from the church and to answer questions they might have about the parish.
- The homes will be visited, at the rate of one or two families per week per Home Visitor. The Visitor will primarily let the families know that the parish cares and is committed to serving them. He/she will listen to and observe the people, looking for needs that exist to which the parish can minister. He/she will ask permission for the church to help with those needs.
- The Home Visitors will serve as liaisons between the parish and inactive Catholics they visited, contacting the organizations, priests or personnel best suited for handling the needs that were observed during the visits.
- The Home Visitors will become Caring Friends, calling the Evangelized to thank them for the time they shared and to inform them of the progress of the parish's follow-up. When possible, the Home Visitors will cultivate friendships with the Evangelized.

### 2. Direct Evangelization

Parish organizations and personnel will continue what the Home Visitors began by responding to the needs of the Evangelized and their families.

- A mailing list of the Evangelized will be compiled. The Welcoming Committee or other organization will send them birthday cards, sympathy cards, holiday cards, etc., on behalf of the priests and parishioners.
- Invitations to retreats, parish missions, special Masses, social events, etc. will be sent to the Evangelized for at least two years after the first home visit.
- Whenever the Home Visitors see a positive response to the visits, they will call the Evangelized as Caring Friends, to personally invite them to attend social and spiritual events at the parish, and they will be ready to share their own spiritual journeys if encouraged to do so.

### 3. On-going Catechesis

The parish will provide seminars, courses, retreats, parish missions, etc., to continually feed the spiritual appetites of those who have returned to the Church.