

Go, Share, Serve

Pope Francis offers three simple ideas for evangelization: “Go, do not be afraid, and serve.”



CNS

GO

If you know the truth about life, love, marriage, and family, share it! To be silent “would be like withholding oxygen from a flame that was burning strongly,” as Pope Francis put it in Rio de Janeiro. “Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared and passed on, so that everyone may know, love and confess Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and history” (World Youth Day, 2013).

SHARE

We must share! And we needn’t be afraid. Pope Francis said, “Some people might think: ‘I have no particular preparation, how can I go and proclaim the Gospel?’” But you don’t need a theology degree to say something true and welcoming about the Church. Likewise, God doesn’t always call the equipped; he equips the called. And God is calling *you*. Give of yourself. Speak from experience. Walk with someone. Lead them to the wellspring of eternity. That’s not done by coercion but by patient, loving, and compelling conversation, friendship, and true encounter.

SERVE

Last, during that homily about our missionary work in the world, Pope Francis called us to serve. Serve the Lord even in your conversations about elections, even in conversations it would be much easier not to have. You might not convince those who think differently that the Church is right, but you may earn their respect and a second look. That’s what Pope Francis has been doing — his very life is a model.

SHARING the FAITH

“I went to lunch with my distant cousins and was sharing about my Catholic faith.

I said, ‘I just

love being Catholic; isn’t it great?’ I thought my Catholic cousins would join in the praise. Instead, one said, ‘We think the Catholic Church is against abortion because they’re against anything that would reduce the size of their membership.’ Whoa! That’s news to me. ‘How about,’ I suggested, ‘the Catholic Church looks to science, which tells us that life begins at conception, and, therefore, abortion is the killing of an innocent human being.’ My cousin said he had never thought about it that way.”

Raise Your Catholic Voice

“Now is a time for Catholic action and for Catholic voices,” Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez has said.

“We need lay leaders to step up to their responsibilities for the Church’s mission, not only to defend our faith and our rights as Catholics, but to be leaders for moral and civic renewal — leaders in helping to shape the values and moral foundations of America’s future.”



SHUTTERSTOCK

Use *your* Catholic voice. Lead with love — the love of Christ — in humble joy and gratitude. Enter into conversations knowing the love of God the Father and the mercy of his Son, and guided by the Holy Spirit. You may just see hearts be changed. You may just see miracles happen. And so we pray. And get to work!

Additional Resources:

Books:

How to Defend the Faith without Raising Your Voice, Austen Ivereigh. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012) (Revised Edition coming soon.)

Websites:

Catholic Voices, catholicvoices.org.uk

Catholic Voices USA, catholicvoicesusa.org

For more information on Catholic Voices, contact info@catholicvoices.org.uk and for more information about Catholic Voices in the United States, contact Kathryn@cvusa.org.

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TEN Principles

OF
CIVIL
Communication

Defending the Faith
without Raising
Your Voice — and
Losing Friends

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*“Who am I to judge?”
“I am a sinner.”*

When the Pope Francis said these things to journalists early in his pontificate, he gave all Catholics a gift. Both are tools for our conversations about controversial issues. Some of the most contentious issues in politics, media, the Church, and even our families can also be some of the most intimate and painful involving wounds and misunderstandings, confusion, injustice, and evil.

Out of politeness, or fear, or insecurity, we may think the best thing to do is simply avoid such issues, but Catholics are not called to sidestep or sit out the big debates of the day. There are ways to have a difficult conversation without ducking a question or watering down a doctrine when tough issues are raised. In fact, there are principles for civil communication that go beyond debate and become an opportunity for a true encounter, what Pope Francis would describe as looking at another person with the “eyes of faith” and the heart of Christ.

In 2010, a small group of Catholics in England founded an organization called Catholic Voices. They developed 10 principles of civil communication that enable Catholics to have that difficult conversation in a spirit of openness and love.

Whether around the family table, the office water cooler, the neighborhood barbecue, or even on Facebook and Twitter, we can remove obstacles to evangelization, to the sacraments, to Christ. We can defend our Catholic faith without raising our voices.

10 Ways to Defend the Faith

1. LOOK FOR THE POSITIVE INTENTION BEHIND A CRITICISM. When you encounter people who are critical of the faith, rather than focusing on their arguments, consider the value to which those arguments appeal. Look for the (sometimes buried) Christian ethic or idea behind the value.

2. SHED LIGHT, NOT HEAT. As Christians, we are called to shed light on difficult topics and represent the Church. If you come to the discussion to shed light rather than heat, your emphasis will be completely different. Stay calm. As Pope Francis’ encyclical *Lumen Fidei* explains, this composed approach may just disarm and open a door to the light of faith, which illuminates everything.



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3. PEOPLE WON’T REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAID AS MUCH AS HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL. Aim for civility, empathy, clarity, and kindness in faith conversations. Try to use simple words to explain complex ideas and keep overly theological language to a minimum.



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4. SHOW, DON’T TELL. Stories are compelling. Work with what you know. Think of yourself not as a spokesman of a remote corporation, but as a delighted disciple with stories and experiences to share!

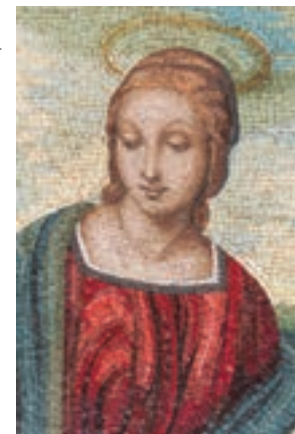
5. THINK IN TRIANGLES. We tend to have disjointed, meandering discussions about faith, which could confuse people engaging in the discussion. Try not to get distracted, and stay on point. Have three points and know how they relate to one another. You

SHARING the FAITH

Most of my extended family members aren’t practicing Catholics. But last year at my sister’s wedding, several family members approached me wanting to talk about Pope Francis, having heard so much about him in the news. With the Catholic Voices training, I had the joyful confidence to share with them how Pope Francis’ moving gestures remind me of all the wonderful charitable works of service the Church provides for millions of people around the world. In the end, I think they left feeling warmer toward the Catholic Church than they had in a long time. And that’s a great place to start!

may not get through them all, but if you do, go back to them. Like Pope Francis begging us to never tire of asking God for his forgiveness, don’t be afraid to repeat your most compelling message. If it’s worth hearing, it bears repeating.

6. BE POSITIVE. So many people see the Church as a list of prohibitions. Yet, the Church calls us to the fullness of life. Our model is Mary, the first and perfect disciple, who said yes to God. The Church is not a grim-faced moral cop. Share your experience of your parish and the joy of the life of the Gospel in the spirit of Mother Teresa — a Christian who was attentive to the most forgotten. Point to her and countless contemporary saintly lives you know.



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7. BE COMPASSIONATE. They will know we are Christians by our love, even in heated debate. Learning to be compassionate when involved in exchanges on our most contentious issues will help break our culture out of the cycle of mutual rebuke. It may be that sometimes we simply need to be good listeners, ready to absorb the anger and hurt that some people have with the Church. Listening and compassion can be a priceless witness.

8. CHECK YOUR FACTS, BUT AVOID ROBOTICS. Good preparation, of course, involves having helpful Catholic facts and figures that reframe a discussion. But a fact is meaningless without content and perspective. Don’t get sucked into statistical

ping-pong or talking point whack-a-mol. Remember you don’t have to — and can’t — say everything. Stay on point, and leave other issues for later. Always remember the bigger picture.

9. IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU. Let the ego take a backseat. It’s not you that the critic doesn’t understand or respect, it’s what you represent. Your fear, self-consciousness, and defensiveness are products of your protesting ego. It’s about Christ. It’s his Church you’re representing. *Pray!*



DESIGNPICS

10. WITNESSING, NOT WINNING. Reframe. Challenge a prejudice or preconception. Invite conversion. One of the journalists assigned to cover Pope Benedict XVI’s papal trip to England was relaxing in a London pub on the second day of the visit. Next to him were two young women disinterestedly watching the television screens overhead. Two articulate, passionate, young people from Catholic Voices were being interviewed about what the pope’s visit meant to them, which they relayed concisely and joyfully. After they were done, one young woman in the pub looked to the other and said: “Well, I suppose they’re not all crazy, then.” “Home run,” the journalist later remarked to Catholic Voices.

Sometimes that’s all you might accomplish: a little change of attitude toward the Church. You’ve been an instrument, then, and God’s grace has room to grow as a heart has been opened.