

The promise of hope is deeply imbedded in the way of the New Evangelization. As John Paul II says in *Pastores Gregis* (Shepherds of the Lord's Flock), "Evangelization includes the preaching of hope and the promises made by God, the new covenant, in Jesus Christ." 6 In the same document, we also hear that the essential mission of the bishop is to inspire hope in God's people, so that they can experience the salvation brought to them by Jesus Christ. Hope is that missing element in today's world that the New Evangelization seeks to restore.

The radical encounter with Christ deepens our relationship with Him and changes who we are and invites us to preach the Gospel by the witness of our lives. As Saint Francis of Assisi, whose feast day is celebrated tomorrow, October 4, told his disciples as he sent them on missionary journeys, preach the Gospel and if necessary even use words. Francis inspired his followers to be active witnesses to the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives. Words, actions and values follow one from another. The missionary spirit provides the incentive to help others share the same encounter and find means to evangelize all people in the varied circumstances of their lives. Everyone we meet – individuals, neighbors, those in small groups, whole sections of society – all can be led to encounter the Risen Christ. This is the New Evangelization.

Jesus Christ is the Primary Evangelizer

Jesus Christ, therefore, is the primary evangelizer. We are called to collaborate with Him each according to our own vocation and state of life. We collaborate as members of the Church, which depends on all who are its members, not only the ordained and those in consecrated life, but most importantly, the vast majority who are the lay faithful.

Through evangelization, the Church is built into a community of faith. More precisely, it is built into a community that confesses the faith in full adherence to the Word of God in order to celebrate the sacraments and to live in charity, which is the principle of Christian moral existence. If we cannot become a community of believers, we will not accomplish the New Evangelization. Such collaboration is at the heart of the Church's life. Collaboration never ends. Thus, the work of the New Evangelization continues for one's entire life and is ongoing in the life of the Church. It is a constant factor in the life of the Church from its beginning to the end of time.

Support for one another is critical if the New Evangelization is to be accomplished. Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization In the Modern World), said, "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church...Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize." 7 The experience of Vatican II prompted Pope Paul VI to issue *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to encourage new efforts in evangelization. As a predecessor of John Paul II, he issued the first call for the New Evangelization.

In summary, the New Evangelization offers us the possibility of becoming new evangelizers in the modern world. In an address on the New Evangelization, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington and a mentor to me, affirms that the new evangelizers must be ready to do three things:

1) To come to know Christ as He truly is, in study and prayer over His Word, 2) "To tell it like it is" by preaching a seamless garment of belief and life in Christ, and 3) "To speak from the heart" with zeal and conviction. 8 How important these characteristics of the new evangelizers are to our witness to Christ.

Who are the agents of the New Evangelization?

Who are the agents of the New Evangelization in our Diocese? The answer to this question is simple, everyone. Precisely because on our Baptism each one of us has received a mandate that we must fulfill to participate in the mission of the Church. It is a mandate to share our faith with others. All are asked to respond to this call in a particular way according to our state of life and vocation. In the past, the evangelizers were mostly the ordained priests, deacons and bishops, as well as religious in consecrated life. It is now the laity who have the principal responsibility for the New Evangelization. They are the vast majority of the Church and must exercise their responsibility as the new evangelizers.

The apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful), is a tremendous document that came forth from the Synod on the Laity held in 1987. It affirms the mandate of the laity to become evangelizers. As we have seen, the laity are called to share their gifts and talents as Christians in the world where they live and work, primarily outside of their

Church structures and relationships, but not excluding their parish communities and clusters. It is in the world where this evangelization will take place.

The laity are also called to promote healing and reconciliation in the Church and particularly in the Diocese. They are present to those who most need re-evangelization. It is they who encounter those to be evangelized and have the unique opportunity and privilege to be agents of the New Evangelization. They can assist with their talents and expertise in the planning process that will unfold over the years ahead. At the same time, they can directly evangelize those who have fallen away from the faith. They can catechize those who are in our religious education and RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) programs. If the New Evangelization is to take root in our Diocese, we need to see a great increase in the number of those who will participate in programs of adult faith formation. It is they who must bring the Gospel in season and out of season to the world and to all who will listen in the family of the Church and, indeed, in the world.

In his Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (The Mission of the Redeemer), Pope John Paul II says, "Within the Church, there are various types of services, functions, ministries and ways of promoting the Christian life. I call to mind, as a new development occurring in many Churches in recent times, the rapid growth of 'ecclesial movements' filled with missionary dynamism. When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of local Churches and are welcomed by bishops and priests within the diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God both for new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so-called. I therefore recommend that they be spread, and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life and to evangelization, within a pluralistic view of the ways in which Christians can associate and express themselves." 9

In the evangelization of the past, different ecclesial movements most frequently evolved into new institutions of consecrated life of women and men. The New Evangelization of our own time is the special province of the laity as expressed in many new ecclesial movements. Our Diocese is blessed to have many new and older lay movements which can carry out the work of the New Evangelization. They include, but not exclusively, the Neocatechumenal Way, the Charismatic Renewal, the Hispanic and Haitian Charismatic Renewal, the Disciples in Mission Program, the RENEW Program, Communion and

Liberation, Worldwide Marriage Encounter, the Cursillo and Jornada Movements, the Apostolate for Family Consecration, the Focolare Movement, the Christian Family Movement, Lamp Ministries, the Pro-Sanctity Movement and the Legion of Mary. These movements deserve our respect and cooperation. Although some are not easy to incorporate into our existing parish structures, they all bring zeal and energy that are necessary for the New Evangelization. We need to become more aware of their strengths and integrate their specific charisms into the efforts of the New Evangelization.

Efforts to encourage vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life cannot slacken.

Although the New Evangelization will primarily be carried out by the laity, the need for ordained clergy and consecrated women and men is more critical than ever. An entire pastoral letter needs to be dedicated to the work of vocation recruitment and retention. It is, however, sufficient to say that without the full-time leadership of the ordained and the men and women in consecrated life, the work of the New Evangelization will not be complete.

There is a unique role in evangelization for those in consecrated life. They are the symbols of their complete availability, dedication and service on behalf of the Kingdom of God. They have left all things to follow Christ and it is they who can witness most effectively to the need for complete and total dedication in the work of the New Evangelization.

To the permanent deacons so numerous in our Diocese and, thank God, to which vocations are not lacking, we call upon them to redouble their efforts to be of service to the sacred ministries at the altar, to the Word of God and most of all as ministers of charity in the world in which they live and work.

To our brother priests, we encourage them never to slacken their efforts to be men of faith and hope, in their ministry of and in the celebration of teaching and preaching the Gospel, the Eucharist and the other sacraments. Through their witness of holiness they remain the most effective visible evangelizers in the Church and in the world today.

The first mission of the Church is to preach the Word. That Word must be preached, however, with the holiness and generosity of self-gift that is the very Person of Jesus Christ. This is the transforming power of the sacrament of Orders and the reason why only those with Orders, and not solely Baptism, must

preach the Word in our Eucharistic Liturgies. Preaching the Word must move its hearers to make the same self-gift and therefore experience in themselves the power and presence of the living Word of God. Further, the Word is also communicated by the word and example of the laity to help bring others to this same experience.

A tremendous debt of gratitude is owed to those who have labored in the vineyard and borne the day's heat, as the Gospel parable tells us (Mt 20, 1-16). Women and men in consecrated life, deacons, priests, bishops, and the laity as individuals and as members of ecclesial movements, have all given generously in the past and remain active participants in the New Evangelization. Their efforts are all the more important now. They should never feel excluded or unneeded as newer agents of evangelization may take the lead in the future.

For the bishops, especially for myself as chief pastor, the auxiliary bishops and our retired bishop, we must follow the example of the Good Shepherd as the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (Shepherds of the Lord's Flock) tells us, "...setting an example for the flock entrusted to us the Pastor of Pastors, so that we can become even more committed servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world."¹⁰

The bishops, as chief evangelizers in the Diocese, are given the responsibility of teaching others what evangelization is all about. It is my hope that this pastoral letter will fulfill some of that responsibility in explaining clearly how and in what ways we can become more effective in our efforts of evangelization.

The Context of the New Evangelization in Brooklyn and Queens

The work of the New Evangelization within the Diocese of Brooklyn must take into account the unique nature of our Diocese. Evangelization is only effective when it takes into account the very people it wishes to address – their language needs, symbols and culture. The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens make up a Diocese with individual characteristics and challenges that will affect the way we live the New Evangelization. We are who we are. Because we are unique, our problems in facing the challenges of evangelization also are unique.

Our Unique Challenges

Our unique challenges are many. First, we are the Diocese of Immigrants. Almost half of our population are recent immigrants, people who have their own struggles as newcomers in adjusting to a new society and sometimes even to a new and different Church from what they are accustomed. These individuals come with special needs and problems. They are many times victims of social injustices such as poverty, problems of unemployment, and lack of immigration status. These individuals in our Diocese face unique circumstances that must be taken into account in any outreach of the New Evangelization.

There are also many ethnic and cultural communities in the Diocese of Brooklyn that bring with them the challenge of the plurality of languages, religious traditions and ways of life that affect our parishes, schools and other institutions. There are many opportunities amidst these challenges for evangelization. Unless these challenges are properly identified and addressed, however, the efforts of the New Evangelization certainly will be limited.

Another unique characteristic of our Diocese is the totally urban environment in which we live. The challenge of a fast-paced life, the dangers of anonymity, our constantly changing neighborhoods, displacement and other social problems make evangelizing in this Diocese a unique challenge. This is one challenge, however, which I know the people, priests, deacons and religious of the Diocese of Brooklyn are well equipped to meet.

Finally, another challenge we face here in our Diocese, as well as in our nation, is the popular culture in which we live. Our secularized culture is characterized not only by the embrace of values contrary to the Christian faith, but also by an outright antipathy towards those who profess a religious faith. The New Evangelization must strive to witness to Christian values and open the Gospel message to diverse cultures. Evangelization, as John Paul II tells us, again and again, leads to a civilization of love.¹¹ Thus, the task before us is immense and critical.

The New Evangelization is directed not only to individuals, but also to all cultures. It seeks to transform all cultures and societies according to the Gospel. It has always been the missionary activity of the Church to encounter cultures and to immerse itself in them by the process of "inculturation". This "inculturation" means the ultimate transformation of cultural values for the insertion and integration of Christianity into various cultures. We must not fear "inculturation" but rather embrace it as a necessary

component of the New Evangelization.

Our Strengths

We cannot, however, forget our strengths. We come well prepared to meet the challenges of the New Evangelization because our greatest strength is our people, our human resources. We are blessed with many dedicated, talented and hard-working women and men of faith who are in our parishes, clusters, and diocesan offices and work with extraordinary zeal in bringing about God's Kingdom. We are also invigorated by the faith of our newcomers who remind us of our traditions and teach us new ways to practice and express our faith. Our tradition of welcoming immigrants is well established here in Brooklyn and Queens, especially as witnessed through our social services, hospitals and schools. This reassures us of the great potential we have to meet these special challenges.

Some Obstacles to the Work of the New Evangelization

Our modern society also presents some obstacles to the work of the New Evangelization. First, there are those social obstacles that impede people from responding to Christ's call. Some people are so poor and marginalized that the difficulties of daily existence keep them from hearing the Word of God, and even from seeking the assistance of the Church. The Good News of Christ is obscured by the daily problems that they face. They can become easily distracted by secularized culture and materialism, as well as consumerism which gives the appearance that they are uninterested in the practice of the faith. In fact, they are at the same time hungering for a new understanding of life and faith.

Other Trends

There are many other trends that act as obstacles to the New Evangelization. Avery Cardinal Dulles, in an essay, "Evangelizing Theology,"¹² mentions many of these obstacles. One such obstacle is the separation between faith and belief. In the instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (Jesus the Lord), we are cautioned against making this separation. "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God... free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed."¹³ It is the total gift of self to Christ as the Revelation of the Father. It is an act of obedience. Belief is "the sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which

man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute."¹⁴ Belief can be the experience of self-emptying from the world. It may involve no transcendence of the self. Faith rather is the experience of self-gift to the Person of the Revealing God. It is a supernatural occurrence.

This separation between faith and belief can lead to a certain denial of anything that is beyond the physical ability to prove. There are those who engage in religious pragmatism, making religion a utilitarian object. The cultural relativism of our time does not allow many to develop real values that would stand the test of the call for personal freedom. Many mistake religious pluralism as an excuse to avoid evangelization. The overwhelming trend to misunderstand personal freedom also mitigates against a stable and effective evangelization. Finally, there are many whose anti-authoritarian attitudes create a true obstacle for them to accept evangelization, which in itself responds to the authority of Christ and is exercised by the Church.

There is no room, however, for a defeatist attitude. We are assured that grace will allow us to overcome all of these obstacles, though they may be many and formidable. Our new zeal allows us to begin again and go where perhaps our human fears would not let us go.

Six Attitudes for the New Evangelization

If we wish to begin the work of the New Evangelization in our Diocese, there are certain attitudes that must define our lives and work as evangelizers.

First, an attitude of partnership or, in theological terms, solidarity must define all that we do as a Church. Partnership characterizes much of the world in which we live. It is a world in which businesses and corporations often act in partnership in order to accomplish certain tasks or achieve goals. Although partnerships in secularized society can be merely utilitarian tools, many are not. In fact, people who are not baptized can live a spiritual life in a secular society by the grace received from Christ through the Church in a mysterious way we do not understand. They often do it better than we do.

As Catholics, we believe that the Church is a sacrament offered to society to humanize it. We affirm that there are many human and divine events taking place outside the Church. The faithful are