



Discussion Guide

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Rivers, CSP., Robert, *From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005. ISBN: 08091-4318-6

Discussion Guide for Readers

Directions:

- Complete the assigned reading as determined by the group.
- Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts and insights and that no one person dominates the conversation.
- Each chapter begins with an “insight” to guide the reading process, keep this in mind as you progress through the text.

Introduction, pp. xi-xii

- Rivers speaks of many Catholics having a “stereotype” of what it means to evangelize. As you start this book, what is your view of evangelization?
- By baptism we are all called to be evangelizers, what do you think the “job description” is that accompanies this title?

Chapter 1, pp. 3-27- Beyond Vatican II

Insight: Evangelization has the power to bring new unity to the church in the period of upheaval following Vatican II.¹

- Rivers makes the connection between the events of popular culture and church culture; how has culture and Church influenced each other during your lifetime?
- Vatican II affirmed that all people are called to holiness by virtue of their baptism, how do we help each other grow in holiness amid ordinary Christian life?
- The title of this book is “From Maintenance to Mission.” Identify elements of a parish that is solely “maintaining” versus one that is “missionary.”
- Vatican II sought to remind all of the baptized that we are called to be missionaries. What do you think River’s means when he says, “the mission is where we are?”

Chapter 2, pp. 28-42 – Evangelization – The Church’s Essential Mission

¹ Rivers, CSP., Robert, *From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005. Each chapter of the book begins with a stated “insight”.

Insight: The Church has yet to embrace evangelization as its essential mission, even though it was the very purpose of Vatican II.

- What does it mean to say “the Church exists to evangelize?”
- Rivers quotes Pope John Paul II’s plea for “new ardor, methods and expressions” to carry out the work of the Church. How can we foster greater enthusiasm and methods as followers of Christ?
- On page 39, Rivers makes reference to the “consumer attitude” of the contemporary society. What impact has the “consumer attitude” had on you?
- What impact does such an attitude have on our work as evangelizers?
- Why do you think that people resist change?

Chapter 3, pp. 43-60

Insight: Individual Catholics must recover disciple-making as a part of discipleship for the church to own evangelization as its essential mission.

- How do you define “disciple” and “discipleship?”
- What is a Catholic “disciple-maker?”
- How are you a maker of disciples?
- Rivers reminds us that Catholics view God differently than many of the fundamentalist evangelist. How is Catholic evangelization different?
- What is the role of community in the work of evangelization?
- How does a personal relationship with Christ find its full expression within a community of faithful believers?
- How does “initial conversion” differ from “ongoing conversion?” How has the Word of Christ transformed your life in an ongoing way?
- How is discipleship a form of spirituality?

Chapter 4, pp. 61-75 – Evangelization is our Deepest Identity

Insight: Evangelization is the Church’s deepest identity because our God is a missionary God.

- Rivers states that Catholics are sometimes uncomfortable sharing their faith with others, why do you think he says this?
- What is your comfort level for faith sharing?
- What does Rivers mean when he says, “our God is a missionary God?”
- God is love. What does this tell us about God’s mission and our mission in Christ Jesus?
- What are your favorite Old and New Testament images and stories that illustrate God’s love? Why?

- “Outreaching love is the source of all evangelizing activity.” How does the love of Christ urge you on to share the good news and be a missionary of his Word?

Chapter 5, pp. 79-93. – A Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization *Insight: Go and Make Disciples provides a practical tool that enables the Church to move evangelization from vision to reality.*

- On page 81, Rivers reminds us that the U.S. Bishop’s reject “trickery and manipulation” in the process of evangelization. Why is this point so important?
- On page 82, the three goals of Catholic evangelization for the United States are presented, why are the three goals simultaneously to be pursued?
- How is evangelization an “integrating umbrella” for all of the work of the parish?
- Rivers talks about the importance of having a plan, why is parish planning for evangelization important?
- River defines “inactive Catholics” as people born and raised as Catholics but who no longer participate in the institutional Church. Why do you think Catholics become inactive?

Chapter 6, pp. 94-105 – Goal One – To live our Catholic Faith fully.

Insight: Go and Make Disciples provides a practical tool that enables the Church to move evangelization from vision to reality.

- Goal One of *Go and Make Disciples* emphasizes that evangelization begins with the person in the pew. What does this mean for you (a person in the pew)?
- Conversion to Christ is a deepening process. Rivers reminds us that “faith in Jesus Christ calls Catholics beyond personal holiness to outward openness and action.” How has your growth in the ways of Christ changed the way you do things in your daily life?
- Can you recall a moment when you felt God working in your life? What did it feel like? How did you know it was God? What difference did it make?
- Conversion – change of heart – is a priority in the life long journey of discipleship? How have you seen this in your life or the life of someone you know?
- How does your parish feed the spiritual hungers of the human heart for God?

Chapter 7, pp. 106-129 – Goal II – Calls Catholics to invite others to hear the Good News.

Insight: Goal II challenges Catholics to invite into the fullness of the Catholic faith all those who do not share it.

- What point is Rivers making when he says on page 108 that there is not a “one-size-fits-all way” of doing evangelization? How does he support this statement?

- Pluralism, the premise that a diversity of ideas or (in this case) religious paths are equally valid. This premise of religious liberty is a right protected by the Constitution of the United States. How does Rivers discuss the inherent tension between dialogue with people of other faiths and proclamation of the Gospel in a pluralistic culture?
- Who are inactive Catholics? Rivers claims that the definition of an “inactive Catholic” is broad, what does he mean?
- How is the practice of “hospitality” taught in our society? What are the obstacles? What are the possibilities for our parish? For you?

Chapter 8, pp. 130-147 – Goal III - Calls Catholics to transform the world through Christ.

Insight: Goal III challenges Catholics to actualize their faith in society.

- Rivers says that “Catholics cannot ignore the culture when welcoming newcomers”
- “Faith itself is culture” says Rivers quoting the then, Cardinal Ratzinger; what are the characteristics of the Catholic faith culture?
- How might we go about creating a “civilization of love?”
- What are Social Awareness and Justice? What is its role in our evangelizing efforts?

Chapter 9, pp. 151-168 – The Parish – An Ideal Venue for Evangelization

Insight: The parish is where the vision and plan for evangelization becomes real.

- What does it mean to say that the “marrow of Catholicism is concentrated at its most localized and accessible level – the parish?”
- What do we learn from the history of the development of parishes in the United States? What does it tell us about our present and future?
- What does it mean to say that the parish is “a spiritual powerhouse?” What kind of spiritual nourishment do you find in your parish? Do you leave spiritually hungry?
- How are lay ministers in your parish empowered to evangelize?
- How do you evangelize?

Chapter 10, pp. 169-194 – The Challenge of Collaboration

Insight: The more a pastor involves parishioners in decision-making, the greater the release of gifts for mission.

- What is lay ministry?

- What does it mean to say that there is one priesthood of Jesus Christ and that lay and ordained ministers share in it complementary?
- How have you experienced collaboration between lay ministers and the ordained?
- How does your parish help the lay faithful discern their baptismal call and giftedness?
- How can you contribute to forthright and honest communication in your parish?
- How will collaborative leadership release the evangelizing potential of the parish?

Chapter 11, pp. 195-223 – Organizing the Parish for Evangelization

Insight: Pastors organize parishes for evangelization by communicating a vision, managing for results, and providing administrative support.

- How can a parish collaboratively seek God's will for the Church and look progress and abandon illusions of perfection?
- Why is "faith" so important to the leader seeking to bring about change amid parish life?
- What does it mean to invest oneself in the endeavor of pastoral ministry? What are important boundaries that we must establish to maintain oneself individually and communally?
- What does "emotional differentiation" mean?
- What are some characteristics of St. Paul Spirituality of Leadership?

Chapter 12, pp. 224-242 – Formation of the Parish for Evangelization

Insight: Viewing the goals of Go and Make Disciples through the priestly-prophetic-royal lens offers a rich spirituality for the formation of disciple-makers.

- What does it mean to say that the Church—us—are royal, priestly and prophetic?
- How do we go about forming the parish for evangelization amid a society that is strongly relativistic—there is no absolute truth—and pluralistic—where anyone that claims to know something about truth is viewed with suspicion?
- Faith stories of the ordinary Catholic is a powerful witness to the truth of faith. What is your faith story? How can your parish be a "safe place" for people to share their experience of God?
- How did the truths of faith take root in your heart? What insights can that offer to helping others discover God's grace and love?

Final Thoughts:

Now that you have read and discussed this book, what are five steps you can take to move your parish from maintenance to mission?