

The New Evangelizers.

Inspired to preach creatively, guided by prayer.

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How should the church evangelize young people?

This is the question I had in mind as I entered the World Youth Day Vocation Center, located in Stadion Cracovii, the home turf for Kraków's soccer team.

As I wound my way through the many booths at the center, I realized the answers were right in front of me. A Christian with a heart for spreading the Gospel was manning each booth. Many of them were priests, brothers, nuns, and laypeople living consecrated life. These people were here to share about following Jesus; these were the new evangelizers!

A few messages seemed clear after I spent some time learning about their orders and associations. The first— *we ourselves* need to bring Christ to the world.

Bring Jesus to the World.

“When I was younger, and very far from the faith, I thought church was boring and only for old people. I didn’t realize how wrong I was.” A young pilgrim from Brazil was telling me how he came to know Jesus personally. It wasn’t until the young man found friends his age who enjoyed having fun and also following the Lord, that he began his journey back to the church.

“Where are the young people today? They’re out partying. We need to meet these people where they’re at,” he said. “We need to get more young people passionate about the church.” The Rio native now works for an organization that serves drug addicts, people in prison, and children on the street through music, dance, and drama. He believes that people who are spiritually far away from the church will come to know God through other people, starting with himself. He’s not the only one thinking creatively.

New Methods for a New Evangelization.

Many groups at the Vocations Center are using creative methods to reach people outside the church. One such group is “Tweeting with God,” which answers pressing questions about the Catholic faith in 140 letter characters or less—an answer accessible to the shortest of attention spans. It was started when a priest launched social media accounts and a mobile application to tackle topics from the Big Bang theory to sexual morality.

From concern for people who are questioning, the booths moved to concern for solidarity with those oppressed. One nun gave me a graphic novel about a late sister in her order. Sister Gabrielle Gonzalez De Linares helped rescue Jews in Paris during World War II. Her order, Our Lady of Sion, continues to work to build bridges between “Christians and Jews and people of all faiths” as well as “those in situations of conflict and oppression.”

The theme of solidarity continued with an organization called #LetsBeOne. This one offers pilgrims the chance to send a letter to Christians being persecuted. I wrote, “We are praying for you,” and designated it for Iraq. I realized that intercession is a form of evangelization too.

A Call and an Answer.

In addition to using prayer for intercession, various groups talked about

prayer for discernment. There at the Vocations Center, people are encouraging young adult pilgrims to pray about whether God is calling them to pursue marriage or the religious life—or perhaps not.

This same attentiveness to God for vocation discernment is essential for Christian life and mission. “We don’t send people out accidentally,” a Polish native and member of a missionary organization said. “People must pray and go abroad only if they feel called by God.”

But how do I know if I’m called, you might wonder. As I discovered, there’s a group for that too! An international group called *Christian Life Community Jesus Christ* helps people deepen their faith and pray about their calling with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. After I correctly answered three questions about St. Ignatius, they handed me a free CLC tote bag, perfect for my growing collection of pamphlets!

Let God Take the Lead.

The Vocations Center houses a huge variety of Christian associations, but all are based on the same founding principle—following Christ. At every booth I visited, I made sure to ask how the organization was started, and I received many different versions of the same answer; there was a human need, and the founder was inspired by God to serve that need.

Prayer and discernment were unquestionably the foundation of each organization. So the biggest message being sent here is to rely on God as you evangelize! His ways of reaching the world are as diverse as the gifts of his people, and he wants to use you.

This article is part of an online series chronicling World Youth Day 2016. William Bornhoft, a journalist from Minneapolis, Minnesota, is in Kraków writing for The Word Among Us.

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