

# Clear & Simple – How to Have Conversations That Lead to Conversion

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## Introduction

- It's not what we did wrong, but what Catholics haven't learned to do yet – having intentional spiritual conversations.
- Catholic evangelists are most effective when we build up leaders in the context of relationships: one-on-one conversations.
- Share the kerygma, the basic message of the Gospel. Go beyond words of encouragement.
- Mass is different for people after they pray, read Scripture and go to Confession.
- The Lord's plan – "make disciples of all nations". Personally encounter Jesus and become disciples of Christ.

## Chapter 1: Let's Be Clear

- Ambiguity surrounds the Catholic understanding of conversion.
- People get excited hearing stories of how people's lives have changed, but confused on how it happens.
- People not sure if they have had an encounter with Christ or not.
- Marriage – the icon of encounter; greatest manifestation of encounter in human terms is between husband and wife. It is the central human relationship that affects how they relate to everyone.
- Understand conversion by seeing marriage as the icon of encounter between God and his Church.
- God has helped people understand his desire for a relationship with them using the terms of marriage.
- Conversion involves:
  - 1) Our Will
    - Consent is an essential aspect of a committed relationship. Without it, relationship not based on love. It's a personal decision.
    - A sincere, free, mature "yes" cannot be forced by fear and coercion.
    - Most people don't deliberately reject the Gospel, rather no one has ever presented them with the offer of a relationship with Jesus.
    - Conversion and encounter are not determined by environment but by God's grace and our will.
    - Saying "yes" is a human act that opens our heart to Christ, who has already given himself to us.
    - Words are important – they express our intentions, not just our emotions.
    - Without a "yes" did conversion take place?
    - Look beyond creating positive experiences and commit to a clear intention – to call forth true consent, instead of mere theoretical approval or sentimentality.
  - 2) Our Intellect
    - No one can say "yes" in an authentic way to the Gospel if they haven't heard it proclaimed.
    - Common for evangelization efforts to be obscured by piling on doctrine and devotion.
    - People haven't encountered the kerygma ("the essential Gospel message").
    - Not given a clear and concrete invitation to respond.
  - 3) Our Heart
    - "We are only Christians if we encounter Christ" – saying "yes" to a relationship, not just a set of doctrines.
    - Our hearts have to be moved to desire it.
    - Models of Conversion: through baptism and family support, over time, clear and definitive moment
    - Personal spiritual testimony is a powerful aid to evangelization.
    - Testimony – what was life before/encounter with Jesus/how has life changed
- Barriers to Giving Our "Yes"
  - 1) People don't know what they are saying "yes" to.
  - 2) Their "yes" lacks love.
  - 3) Christ not at the center of their life.
  - 4) People struggle to experience the freedom of a life in Christ.

## Chapter 2: Conversation and Conversion

- Outreach goes beyond a warm welcome. Goal is to bring people to a personal and life-changing encounter with Jesus.
- Majority of Catholics do not believe God can be known personally.
- Train people to evangelize one person at a time.

- Fruitful evangelization is relational – we are made for relationships with God and each other.
- Consider that no one experienced a “trivial” encounter with Christ.
- There is no one who doesn’t yearn for love, meaning, purpose, joy and freedom. (“Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” St. Augustine)
- Accompaniment is walking with another person on their pilgrimage to God, not our own – their initial conversation and growth over time.
- Each person must make their own journey, we cannot do it for them.
- No one can make a disciple on their own, it requires the work of the Holy Spirit.
- We need to resist the temptation that the work of salvation relies entirely on our own efforts.
- A seed has all the potential it needs to grow, it just needs the right environment.
- Reject the idea of turning human relationships into “projects” – trust is needed.
- Cherish the relationships that God has entrusted to us.
- The most loving thing we can do for one another is introduce them to Christ.
- Witnessing has two purposes: build solid friendships/trust and build a curiosity for our faith.
- Prophetic listening – prayerful listening to the way a person talks about themselves.
- Like any good first responder, we must assess the situation first before we can help anyone.
- Having a heart for the “lost” is crucial mind-set for any missionary.
- Multiplication – build a disciple into one who is ready to make disciples themselves.
- The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization.
- Role of missionary during intentional spiritual conversation is more of listener than speaker.
- Look for ways that the Gospel fits into a person’s particular circumstances.
- As evangelists, need to respect that many people haven’t had a positive experience with the Church.

### Chapter 3: Sharing the Kerygma

- Instead of inviting lapsed Catholics to Mass or how to pray, insight was to present the kerygma in a systematic way (clear and simple) that does not impose faith but proposes its beauty and power. Four points are:
- 1) God’s Love – it is God’s desire to be in a personal, dynamic and intimate relationship with each of us- unique to each of us. When God says “I love you” directly to someone, a person can’t help but notice.
  - 2) Introduce Sin and Separation – our relationship with God is broken because of sin. It was not God’s intention for us to be separated from him. Adam and Eve given free will and chose not to trust in God. Concupiscence – humans have a natural tendency to sin. We cannot think of sin as a casual mistake, it has eternal consequences. Dynamics of human relationship is similar to relationship with God. St. Augustine – the search for God begins when we start to understand ourselves.
  - 3) Introduce Jesus – Jesus is the one who restores our relationship with God. Without Jesus, faith loses its relevance. The Resurrection seals our faith in Jesus, he came to save us.
  - 4) Invitation to Respond – invite people to respond and experience first-hand the joy of being a child of God. Invite them to live a God-centered life. Faith is not the result of human effort or human reasoning, but rather it is a gift from God.

### Chapter 4: Where Do We Go From Here

- Help solidify what God has done.
- God is committed to a relationship. Love gives you the permission to fail, to be yourself.
- Invite people to participate in the sacraments and to be part of a parish community.
- Some people will say “no”.
- Celebrate all conversions. Joy is contagious – share your joy of living the Catholic faith.

### Appendix – Resources

- The *Ultimate Relationship* Booklet and *Discovery Faith Study*
- 4 Points of the kerygma:
  - 1) God created us for a relationship with Him.
  - 2) That relationship is broken through original sin.
  - 3) Jesus died on the cross to restore our broken relationship.
  - 4) We are each personally invited to receive the gift of a restored relationship given to us by Jesus.