

## How Do I Evangelize?

### Starting Evangelism Group in Your Church

By Victor Beshir

When the Lord sent His disciples to evangelize, the gospel says: "And He called the twelve to [Himself], and began to **send them out two by two**" (MARK 6:7). Here the Lord set up a great rule of evangelistic work. **It is better to have at least one other person working with you in evangelism than to work by yourself.**

Although, I recognize the difficulty of finding people with keen interest in evangelism at the present time, **we need to start establishing an evangelism group in every church**, even if we start with only two people. Here are some practical steps explaining how to do that:

#### **1- Raise evangelism awareness in your church:**

In an Islamic society where Islamic Sharia (Law) is applied, as in Egypt, Christian evangelism is a punishable crime that could lead to the death penalty. Even if the government does not punish the evangelist, the mops severely attack the evangelist and the converters. This severe punishment stopped evangelism activities in Egypt for over fourteen centuries. As a result, **now evangelism is foreign to Copts.** Before the Islamic invasion of Egypt in 642 A.D., Copts were the first to evangelize in Ireland many centuries before St. Patrick did. They evangelized in Switzerland and other parts of Europe, as well as Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Ethiopia, and Sudan in Africa. They also evangelized in Asian countries such as India and Yemen.

Copts did not only travel to other countries to evangelize, but they also attracted thousands of students from all over the world to their first international theological school, The Theological School of Alexandria. Many of those students were not Christians upon enrolling. However, not only did they end up converting to Christianity but also became pillars of the church.

Christian Monastic life that started in Egypt in the fourth century made Egypt a pilgrimage to all those who sought spirituality (similar to what we see today when the spirituality thirst people travel to India, Africa, and other places seeking spiritual fulfillment). Many knew Christianity when they saw the Desert Fathers of Egypt. This type of evangelism is sometimes called 'Passive

Evangelism.’ However, it is better to call it “Non-Verbal Evangelism.” In fact, we need to revive this kind of evangelism by revealing the great spirituality of our church and inviting those who are seeking spirituality to visit our monasteries in Egypt and abroad.

Therefore, we see here a great church that was involved in evangelism for a long time and did not stop until the sword was too heavy to carry all the time. However, the love of God still kindles the hearts of the Copts. They only need someone to open their eyes to the facts of evangelism.

**Our first job in evangelism is to raise the awareness of our congregations of the need to evangelism.** To do that, you need to talk to your priest, Sunday school teacher(s), or youth leaders in your church and offer **to arrange lectures or discussions about evangelism.** Another way to do it is to invite evangelism servants from other churches to lecture on evangelism. In fact, the *Coptic Orthodox Evangelism Fellowship of North America* offers this service.

In addition to lectures and discussions, there are other means of raising the awareness of evangelism, such as distributing small articles or brochures that address the topic. Currently, we don’t have such brochures or booklets that talk to our congregation about the importance of evangelism. I hope that **somebody from this class starts using the available articles in writing brochures.** I will be happy to work with anyone who would be willing to start writing brochures.

Another powerful tool is inviting someone who involved in a mission to give presentation, including pictures or videos and answering questions. Questions and answers session are important since they directly address evangelism obstacles by giving a living example.

## **2- Find People Interested in Evangelism:**

While visiting youth meetings, Sunday school classes, discussion, pray that God leads you to those people who are willing to work in the field of evangelism.

## **3- Invite those people to meet:**

Get this group together to pray, study the bible together, and discuss what you could do for evangelism.

## What Could the Evangelism Group Do?

### 1- Prepare the church to receive guests:

- There are many things that you could do here. First, **make sure the church is clean.** Make sure there are no soda cans or other trash in the yards of the church and that the rest rooms are clean and have enough paper towels and soap.
- **The thermometer is set at a reasonable temperature.** I will never forget one time when a guest came to our church only to find herself shaking and sneezing because someone who felt hot set the temperature very low. She never came back.
- **The microphone of the church is set at a reasonable volume.** Some deacons love to set microphones at high volumes and they sing very close to the microphone, which makes it uncomfortable to listen to.
- The pews of the church are clean.
- **There are enough English Prayer Books and there is a screen that shows the page number of the prayer book,** it works, and there is at least one person who can operate it.
- It is a great idea to encourage the church to purchase the software that shows on screens all the prayers and the readings.

### 2- During Prayers:

- There should be at least one **person who stands at the door to welcome any guest**
- **Prepare small cards for the guests to fill out** their names, e-mail addresses, and their telephone numbers. **Meet the guests with a smile and welcoming words.** Introduce yourself and welcome them in the name of the church. Ask them politely to fill out the card so the church can also welcome them.
- **Give each guest a prayer book,** tell them about the screen, and ask them if they need someone to help them follow the prayers. If their answer is yes, ask someone to stand next to them to help.

- **Prepare them for our divine liturgy:** tell them briefly that the worship here is Biblical and goes back to the first centuries. Therefore, it is different from what they may be accustomed to. Nevertheless, it is very rich in spirituality. Tell them we stand up most of the time, but they should feel free to sit. Give them "*A Few Things to Know Before You Attend the Divine Liturgy*" brochure by Victor Beshir.
- **Lead each person to where he/she will sit down.** Please, avoid seating them at the very rear of the church whereas usually this area has more noisy children. Also, avoid seating them up front where they could feel uncomfortable since everybody can see their inadequate following of prayers and rituals. Please, don't let them sit next to a loud speaker!
- **Prepare a list of the guests' names and give it to the priest** to welcome them publicly from the pulpit.
- Make sure that **there is a translation for the sermon.**
- Let the priest know that there are guests, so he can pray more in English

### 3- After Prayers:

- **Welcome guests again and express your desire to see them again the following week.** This will help them feel accepted and welcomed.
- If they have time, **lead them to the coffee room** and make sure that you help them around.
- **Introduce them to others** and ask people to spend time with them and let them feel welcomed and accepted. Also, ask those people to let the guests know that they enjoyed their company and they also would like to see them the following week.
- **Introduce them to the priest** to welcome them personally and spend a few moments with each. Guests consider the priest as the manager of the church; therefore his welcome is so important to them.
- During the week, **call the guests** and thank them for coming and invite them to come again.
- **Give their names to the English Bible Study group.**
- Add their names to the list of people the evangelism group should pray for.

#### 4- During the Week:

- **Meet with other members to pray** for guests and for evangelism, share a bible reading, and discuss evangelism activities.
- **Promote evangelism activities.** The list is enormous. To give you a few examples: you could run a church advertisement in the yellow pages, in the local newspaper, and in all bulletin boards in the community that accept ads from churches.

#### 5- Other Activities:

- **Establish a Bible study for the guests.** Bible study is a very effective American way to attract people to the church. While studying the Bible, refer to the authentic Bible commentary available through the fathers of the church. **Expose them to the depth of the Orthodox Bible interpretation.** I recommend **starting with the 'gospel according to John.** Simply, because it lets them meet Jesus face to face. The divinity of Jesus is very direct in this gospel. In addition, it will give you countless opportunities to talk about our faith as a Christian and as an Orthodox Church. For example, the first chapter talks about the divinity of Christ, the second chapter talks about Holy Matrimony, the third chapter speaks of baptism, and the sixth chapter deals with the Holy Communion. Please use the commentary done by Ihab Mikhail as a model for Bible study for new comers. Here is the link to this commentary:

<http://evangelismcopticorthodox.org/bible/biblestudy.html>

- **Prepare for other evangelism events,** such as church open-house or church outreach programs to visit hospitals, prisons, or elderly homes.

Finally, It is so important to get the evangelism group together to pray together.