

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

keeping *The Question of God* alive through

Public Witnesses of Faith

A guidebook for individuals and parishes



Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Secretariat for Evangelization
Office for the New Evangelization

Introduction

As the first step of evangelization we must seek to keep [the quest for God] alive; we must be concerned that human beings do not set aside the question of God, but rather see it as an essential question for their lives. We must make sure that they are open to this question and to the yearning concealed within it.

-Pope Benedict 12/21/09

The new evangelization is a call to bring the “ever-new” of Jesus Christ to a dramatically new time in human history. In many parts of the West, our formerly Christian culture is giving way to an aggressively secular atmosphere where even the idea of the existence of God is prohibited entry into public life. Catholics are called upon, now more than ever, to be the constant witness in the public square to the reasonableness and justice of creating societies built upon belief in God and deference to his laws.

The following guide contains different ways that individuals and parishes can give witness to their faith in an explicit way, especially in the public arena, so in need of the consoling message of God’s love. Many of the suggestions found in this guide are already practiced by our parishes. Some suggestions might be a new idea to try. Please feel free to contact the parishes listed in the guide who have participated in these public witnesses of faith and who are willing to answer practical questions on how to get it started in your parish.



Questions or comments, please contact:

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Office for the New Evangelization
Secretariat for Evangelization

Prayer



Outdoor Mass

When Mass is celebrated outdoors under special circumstances, it gives witness to the faith of the Church in the Holy Eucharist and reminds all people that it is “right and just” to worship the living God. Many parishes already give this public witness when they celebrate Mass in cemeteries on Veterans’ Day, All Souls’ Days and Memorial Day. It is also common to begin certain celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy outdoors, for example, the Palm Sunday procession and the blessing of the fire at the Easter Vigil.

Corpus Christi Procession

When parishes process the Blessed Sacrament through their neighborhood, they give powerful witness to their faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. They also bring into their neighborhood the consoling love of Jesus that he offers to all. A Corpus Christi procession can be held any time of the year and with different prayer intentions in mind.

St. Bede the Venerable in Holland holds a Eucharistic procession each year at the Vigil Mass for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

Contact: Patrick McNally • pmcnally@st-bede.org

To pray for peace for a neighborhood struggling with crime

Franciscan Friars of the Renewal event: www.peaceinthestreets.org



Marian Procession

The tradition of processing through the streets with an image or statue of the Blessed Virgin expresses our deep faith in the maternal love of Mary, which she has for all mankind. Through our prayer and song, we draw down grace for the homes we pass and bring the sweet presence of Our Lady to all who are near. It is a beautiful work of evangelization!

St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish in Philadelphia holds a Marian procession and May crowning on Mother’s Day. Contact: Sr. Stephanie Henry, SBS • stigdre@gmail.com

Our Lady of Charity, Brookhaven holds a Marian procession and outdoor May crowning in front of the Church, where the crowd and coronation ceremony are visible to passing neighbors and cars.

Contact: Gina Mesko • gagm2002@comcast.net

Prayer



Outdoor Way of the Cross

Lent is an especially good time to pray the Stations of the Cross outdoors. They can be prayed along streets or in a public park (with the permission of relevant authorities). Neighborhood landmarks could be chosen as "stations" at which to stop and reflect on the Lord's Passion.

Every Good Friday, parishioners from **St. Ignatius & Our Mother of Sorrows, in Philadelphia** participate in a Walking Stations of the Cross between parishes. Contact: Sr. Stephanie Henry, SBS • stigre@gmail.com

Praying the Rosary

Keep your Rosary visible in your hand while you pray it ...

- ◆ During your walk around the neighborhood
- ◆ On an airplane flight
- ◆ While waiting in line
- ◆ Taking the train to/from work



Sacramentals

Catholicism is, by its nature, a very *visible* religion. The Year of Faith is a great time to rediscover the many sacramental signs of our Tradition that can be worn with pride to school, work, the store or anywhere! A Miraculous Medal, Crucifix, Rosary, Lenten ashes or other sacred signs can be worn as a witness to our love for Christ and his Church. While wearing a sacramental it is good to have ready an explanation for its meaning for those who ask what it is.

Grace Before Meals

The Year of Faith is a great time to renew among parish families the practice of prayer before meals, including those times when eating in restaurants and other public places. This is a beautiful way to give witness to the Catholic faith before others. If every family in a parish were to commit to this, the impact in the public arena would be great!



The Public Square

Stand Up For the Truth



Catholic Faith is not only about what we believe, but also about how we live. This is why Catholics have always been active in the public arena, allowing the light of Christ to teach us the true meaning of freedom, justice and rights. Many parishes and schools give public witness to their faith through rallies, marches and prayer vigils. The Year of Faith is a great time to renew these efforts and to work for the dignity of the human person in all areas of the life of our nation.

Different ways to give witness to the truth in the public square:

Life Chain

Rally for Religious Freedom

Rally for School Vouchers

Prayer Vigils for Peace

Rally for Immigration Rights

Prayer in front of abortion clinics



Local Parades

A great way to "keep alive the question of God" (Pope Benedict XVI) in the public square is for parishes to enter their local town parades with a float depicting a Catholic theme or with a group of parishioners marching with signs or T-shirts expressing their love for their faith.



Local Events

Parishes can rent a booth at a local town fair and provide there information pamphlets about the Catholic faith, activities in the parish and the parish bulletin. This is a good way to renew the sense of the Church's positive influence in the neighborhood and community.

March for Life—Washington, D.C.

Every January, Catholics from across the nation travel to Washington, D.C. for a day of prayer and public witness to the sanctity of human life. The month of March finds people of all faiths giving witness to the truth about marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman. Now more than ever does the world need our witness to the sanctity of life and marriage!



Seasons & Feasts

Nativity Scenes



With the secular culture trying to remove all religious content from Christmas, it is important for Catholics to hold fast to the true meaning of Christmas as the celebration of the Birth of Christ. Parishes and homes are encouraged especially this year to place a nativity scene outdoors where people may see them and be reminded of the great gift God gave us in giving us his Son.

St. Bede the Venerable Parish in Holland does a living Nativity Scene each year.
Contact: Patrick McNally • pmcnally@st-bede.org

Faith Bumper Stickers

A bumper sticker with a simple and consoling message about Christ's love, prayer for peace or the dignity of human life may be just the word of truth that another driver may need to hear. Let's make sure our driving habits reflect the faith we are proclaiming!



Other Feasts and Solemnities

The feast of Pentecost finds many parishioners wearing red. This is a great opportunity to equip parishioners with a simple catechesis on the Holy Spirit to enable them to answer the question of those who may ask the reason for their red ensemble throughout the day. **Nativity of Our Lord in Warminster** does this every year.

Contact: Cathy Krzywicki • ck@nativityofourlord.org



Parish Festivals for patronal feasts are also an opportune moment to evangelize the culture. Along with booths for food and games, parishes can offer booths that offer catechetical materials, a Q & A session about the Catholic Faith with a priest or lay minister, the parish bulletin and a priest or deacon to bless religious articles.

Parish Carnivals often draw people who have no faith affiliation or Catholics who may not have been to Mass in many years. It is another moment in which priests and lay ministers should be readily available at booths or walking around for those who might need just a small prompting to reconnect to the Church.