

Faith Based Conversation 3rd Monthly Meeting

A few challenges from Pope Francis

Evangelii Gaudium 78

Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity. At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervour. These are three evils which fuel one another.

Evangelii Gaudium 169

In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people's lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.

Don't overlook the small stuff

It takes time to build relationships. It might take 20 times seeing someone on your regular walk with the dog or going to get a newspaper before you

are both comfortable enough to stop and start to converse beyond 'Good morning'. But it is worth taking the time to smile and say 'Good morning', even if it takes 40 times. Not so long ago there was a funeral for a man who used to rake the leaves in the front of his yard every morning. He'd say hello to whoever passed by. That funeral was packed with people who had been touched by his personal concern over the years. Stopping to say 'hello' builds community, and community is the best antidote to violence.

Make encountering others a habit

At the bus stop, waiting at the chemist, in the queue at the bank, take the opportunity to encounter the person waiting near you. Talk to them. You may not get as far as talking about God with them, but for a few brief minutes they were a somebody and not a nobody. Then pray for them afterwards. Every person is someone uniquely created by God and well worth getting to know.

Invitations are powerful

Even if your friend or relative turns an invitation down, it still opens up a door to talk about the event (retreat, vigil, Mass, parish mission, study group) that they didn't go to. Frequently they will ask you how it went, so have your answer ready. It will also open up the door to talk more seriously about matters of faith.

Of course, they can always accept your invitation too!

People are longing for peace

The majority of us have forgotten what it is like to live without peace of soul, because living in union with God produces constant peace. Many of the people we come across don't have inner peace. But they will experience God's peace especially if they come to Mass, or sit quietly near Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. They will also experience peace if they come to a prayer vigil, to a prayer group, or to your home. To experience inner peace people are willing to do far more than we give them credit for.