



A PASTOR'S GUIDE TO EVANGELIZATION



GOING TO THE WELL TO BUILD COMMUNITY

Deacon Timothy E. Tilghman



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INTRODUCTION

Most folk take the free drink when it's offered.

Why not go to the well and get the best?

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. Exodus 3:5).

Holy Father Francis,
Evangelii Gaudium (EG) #169



A pastor in Washington, D.C., once asked me about hiring an organizer to help him with evangelization, wanting to apply the organizing discipline of engaging leaders and mutual accountability to the task of the New Evangelization. When he made the request, I did not know that it would lead to a group of pastors meeting two hours every month over a five year period to talk about how they could work together to accomplish the mission of the Church. Clergy invited lay people into the communal gatherings. Diocesan staff described these mission-oriented communal gatherings as a new paradigm. Clergy decided to name their effort “MISSION IN MOTION.” In this little book, I want to reflect on how a focused conver-

sation about mission can be sustained.

For me, the conversation began around kitchen tables and in church basements in Washington, D.C., in the 1950s. I met the best people in the neighborhood in these places. Looking back, it was a joy to meet, listen, and learn. This was the Black Catholic Church in the neighborhood. This is what Mike Gecan; author of the *IAF Organizer Training Manual*, meant when he said, “All relating is meeting (not meetings).” Pope Francis recently captured the essence of relating and meeting with his phrase “the art of accompaniment,” the one thing that every Christian is called to do for us to be Church, the Body of Christ, living and transforming the world.



The conversation is a journey back through the old neighborhood. I remember walking to church, to school, or to a neighbor's house to deliver a few eggs, a stick of butter, something so that could be used to prepare a meal for the day. I remember walking past a classroom at Henry Smothers Elementary School and hearing a teacher say, “Mrs. Tilghman's house is always spick and span,” and I wondered what the topic of discussion was in the classroom that day.

Besides the help with the day's meal, there were lots of good deals in the neighborhood. We could buy “two-for-a-penny” candy by collecting and redeeming soda bottles, or we could pick wild blackberries and take them to a friend's house to have them turned into

hot and fresh blackberry muffins. The most valuable “two-for-one” bargain was discipline and instruction in neighborhood values. I could walk an hour in any direction from my house in the neighborhood and people knew who I was and would share conversations with me about my parents and twelve older siblings. If any of these folk discovered that I turned the wrong way when I was supposed to “turn right” according to neighborhood values, I got spanked on the spot! Without fail, someone was waiting at the door when I arrived home to deliver the other half of the “two for one.” There was always a second spanking that preceded the lesson on family discipline and neighborhood values.

Miracles happened every day in the neighborhood. School teachers, postal workers, and folk who did domestic work and other manual labor lived in the neighborhood. Government was of, by, and for people. Housing assistance was often a “rent party.” Food assistance was walking a few eggs, some butter, or plates of food to a family at the end of the block who were more in need than we were. Clothing assistance was “hand-me-downs.” My parents sacrificed to send a few of us to the local Catholic school, and they fully engaged in life at local public schools to make sure that all their kids got educated. My mother knew every teacher who stepped into the classroom with each one of her thirteen children. And the greatest miracle of all in the neighborhood was that folk who had no car, no internet, no cell phone, and no house phone found a creative way to convey the circumstances of a breach

of the neighborhood value system to our “aunts” and “uncles” who, though not related by blood, loved us as if they had brought us into the world personally.



This was my life in the neighborhood and my life in the local church; there was no discernable difference back in the day. I knew that our church was a church of the Civil Rights movement. How did I know? When Archbishop O’Boyle said that the Catholic Church of Washington would be fully integrated in the late 1940s, my mother took to heart the Church’s teaching on justice and the dignity of human life, sending my oldest brother, Robert, to St. Paul’s Academy in 1948, well before *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Robert wore his “hand-me-downs” to school each day, always neat when he arrived in the classroom after cleaning spit from his clothes from Whites who did not approve of his presence in the previously “all-White” school. Graduating from St. Paul’s at the top of his class, he went to Catholic University of America, which was also not fully ready to receive Negro students in 1952, despite the Archbishop’s mandate in the 1940s. Looking back, Robert’s experience was my first taste of “relating as meeting” or what Pope Francis calls “the art of accompaniment,” which I will try to explain throughout this book.

Robert’s experience was shared, in detail, with all who attended Our Lady of Perpetual Help School or who were, in some way, connected to the neighbor-

hood church, which was primarily staffed by Josephite Priests and Brothers. When the word about a breach in the neighborhood value system came to our house, it was Robert who received the word and dispensed the necessary discipline to his twelve younger siblings, to other youth at our parish, and eventually to all the students he encountered in Baltimore City Public Schools, where he worked for decades.

The lessons taught and modeled by my brother, along with countless aunts and uncles in the neighborhood, brought me to service in the Coast Guard, to community organizing, and to diaconal ministry. In the 1950s I did what I did because my parents told me to and to avoid a disapproving look from Robert when I got home. Today, I do what I do because I realize that “relating is meeting,” which is also the “art of accompaniment” of which our Holy Father Francis speaks.



But this book is not about me; it is about the Church, about being called to ministry and being sent (like an apostle) into the neighborhood. After twenty-three years in the Coast Guard and a brief stint as a management consultant, I went to see my father and tell him that I was going to work as a community organizer with Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), the local community organizing affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, the premier network of congregational organizing in the world. Having listened to all of my

musings about life after the military and about maybe going into politics, his immediate response was, “Tim, you just don’t know *what* you want to do!” After I convinced Dad that I was serious, which was no small feat, he and I shared the best talk of our life together.

Talk about affirmation! I was surprised by my father’s enthusiasm and every word from his mouth that followed. “Did you know that I was an organizer?” was his first question. After graduating #1 in St. Cyprian School’s Class of 1929, he took the only job he could get, bellboy/elevator operator in the Harrington Hotel. When his peers decided to organize to build a union, my father was elected shop steward, accepting his first job as a union organizer. There were no unions in Washington, D.C., hotels when he became the shop steward, but most city hotels were unionized by the time he was elected a union officer in the late 1950s. Unions continued to thrive until his retirement in 1979. Now, he felt, the last of his thirteen offspring was, in a way, going into the family business.

Then, five years into my organizing work, I told Dad that I had been accepted as a candidate for the permanent diaconate at a youthful fifty-two years old! When I was accepted as a candidate, he bought me a gift that he had personally shopped for and found, a missionary cross. The gift said everything my father had taught me about important work. Through the conversation over many years, Dad taught me a most important lesson; there is great value in doing the Father’s work.

My father found great joy in each one of my or-

ganizing struggles and victories, delighting in his youngest son's work both as an organizer and deacon of the church. He saw much of organizing my success: \$70,000,000 invested in the poorest neighborhoods in the city, the construction of housing, the rebuilding of neighborhood schools and community centers, and the development of lay leaders who did the work in Catholic parishes and beyond. We talked about work in my parish often, as my father would go to his neighborhood sources to find out what I was doing in the parish beyond my WIN community organizing. He died in February 2009, one year before my ordination and departure from WIN, without knowing how my present conversations with pastors would expand and deepen.

I left WIN in January 2010 to start a two-year journey with the Josephite Priests and Brothers, experiencing the Church in the neighborhood in new ways that formed me on a larger scale by identifying and walking with leaders in the Josephites' forty parishes and twelve schools in Alabama, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.. While working for the Josephites, I also shared my burning question with pastors I met through community organizing and work in ecclesial movements in the Catholic Church. The question was and still is: If we could get \$70,000,000 of investment in the poorest neighborhoods in D.C. by inviting leaders to act on their faith in their public lives in the neighborhood, what could happen if we used the same principles to build the Church in the neighborhood? The revelation in the experience is that people convinced of your

willingness to meet them where they are will not only share but will act on their faith with you.



Going to the Well to Build Community is a reflection on the deep conversation that leads to relationships that bring people into the Church. At some time in our life, we have all been the Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the well in the fourth chapter of John's gospel. We were on the outside, looking to be invited into the conversation, feeling bad about our sins and shortcomings, and thirsty for the prescription to transform our lives. The Samaritan woman took a drink of the living water at the well, meeting the living Christ and changing her life in the process. Jesus met her where she was, and he quenched the thirst that she thought was unquenchable. The woman walked away from the well with a renewed spirit and the determination to share her encounter with Christ, the living water that had transformed her life. Those who heard her witness came to meet Christ and also witnessed to how a drink of the living water could transform their own lives.

So, if we want to receive what the Samaritan woman received, we have to go to the same well and drink the same water. We can't get the drink, which is free, unless we are willing to enter into and stay in the conversation.



This is not a theoretical conversation. It has to lead to action, and it has. Through a series of meetings over the past several years with clergy in historically African-American parishes in Washington focused on the need to build the Church, I have discovered that community organizing is similar, if not identical, to the “old time religion” that is at the heart of the ecclesial movements in our Church. (“I,” the first person singular pronoun, is not the best to use when talking about this discovery, because all of the fruit produced came from the public witness of the communal gathering of clergy.) Clergy then invited others to join the conversation. Organizers would say that “relating is meeting.” Ecclesial movements would use the label “small group meeting with mutual accountability.”

Clergy in these historically African-American parishes described their situations as unique. Africans, Latinos, and young urban professionals are among those served. Gentrification, suburban sprawl, and demographic shifts are changing the face of the surrounding neighborhoods. People in the pews are more concerned with finding community than they are in staying within parish boundaries. Often, the people in the pews are not the ones who live in the surrounding neighborhood. This new situation is the state of the Church in and beyond the traditional African-American parish community. The two lessons learned in the conversation are these: the Church is always in transition, and Saint Augustine of Hippo was right—souls in the neighborhood are restless and will be restless until they encounter the truth, which

is the risen and living Christ, who is embodied in the Church. The restless want to experience Pope Francis' "art of accompaniment," which is the invitation to join the conversation.

When faced with transition, folk are hungry for the truth embodied in the Church, the personal and communal encounter with the Christ who lives. Participating clergy link the action of sharing this living Christ to the New Evangelization. Our Pope Francis talks about the action throughout his treatise on evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*. Here are just three of the fruits of the conversation thus far:

- ***Communal Gathering of Lay Leaders.***

Modeling a mantra from the Cursillo Movement, "Talk with God about people before talking to people about God," clergy invested almost one year in conversation to determine the best way to invite lay people into the conversation. In February 2013, nearly 100 lay people from eleven different parishes responded to the invitation to join the conversation about a unified effort to accomplish the Church's mission. The laity departed with a renewed commitment to witness to one another and animated about improving the vital signs of life in and beyond their parishes. Energized by the encounters, participating leaders continue to work on the mission of sharing the encounter more than one year after being invited into the

conversation.

- ***East of the River Revival after the Invitation to Join the Conversation.*** After twenty-three “business as usual” annual revivals, clergy invited the Revival Committee leaders into conversation about a unified effort to focus the 24th Annual Revival on a greater commitment to mission-oriented actions. The results—improved attendance and full confessionals each of the Revival’s four nights, and vastly improved clergy presence and participation. More lay leaders and more mission-oriented action initiated by the Revival Committee’s lay leaders were incorporated into planning for the 25th Anniversary East of the River Revival. More parishes are participating in the event that originally included parishes from a single deanery.
- ***Celebrating Marriage in the Neighborhood.*** Responding to the call to action of the 2013 East of the River Revival, a team of married couples from multiple parishes outlined and implemented a strategy to strengthen marriages and mentor the newly wed and engaged with regularly scheduled “Marriage Reunions.” On a blistering cold February 15, 2014, as the metro area was digging out from a blizzard, eighty people (married, engaged, and singles) from five parishes witnessed to each

other about the joy of overcoming struggles to live the sacramental life as husband and wife and committed to continue the “Marriage Reunion” conversations. Subsequently, presenter-couples from Worldwide Marriage Encounter and the Engaged Encounter communities were excited to join and continue the conversation in their circles.

- ***The Consequence of Doing What God Is Blessing.*** Hearing the conversation about the “Marriage Reunion,” the youngest couple at the table saw the need to invite their young adult single peers to join the conversation. This couple convened a cadre of young adult singles to engage and invite the young adult community into the Church. Engaging in the conversation is contagious. Youth and their ministers, ministers of charity, and men who look to invite other men—especially young ones—into the Church began to use the conversation. Archdiocesan ministers with responsibility for youth, young adults, marriage and family, and ministry to the African-American community joined the conversation with the idea to unify and collaborate instead of just offering the “headquarters’ solution.”



Working with the “Marriage Reunion” team and clergy, one of our pastors introduced the idea of *“doing what God is blessing rather than asking God to bless your work.”* Taking this idea to heart, clergy and laity have come together to focus on the mission of sharing the encounter through practicing the “art of accompaniment.” Why? I could say that it is community organizing; but that answer would be inadequate and incomplete. Like the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), people get animated about their faith when invited into a real conversation. People are moved by the clergy communal gathering. Each time clergy have invited leaders into a conversation, those invited have responded with great enthusiasm and creativity in practicing the “art of accompaniment.”

For me, the most visible sign of the miracles that come from *“doing what God is blessing”* is the clergy commitment to the conversation, meeting nearly every month for five years while maintaining focus on experiencing and sharing the encounter with the risen and living Christ. This is our faith; this is the Church! People who experience the miracle of Church are excited; diocesan staff responds differently; clergy and lay are more engaged in the communal life. After three years at the table in the communal gathering, the clergy defined their purpose and guide to future actions:

MISSION IN MOTION is a grassroots effort of several predominately African-American parishes in the Archdiocese of Washington and their pastors working in collaboration across deanery lines to strengthen the Catholic identity of our

parishioners and to empower and equip them to embrace and carry out the work of the New Evangelization in our local communities.

Through my ten years of community organizing and several years of communal gatherings with clergy, the same question constantly resurfaces: How can we continue to meet and improve on the accomplishment of the Church's mission? The answer is to practice the "art of accompaniment" as described by Pope Francis. This practice is the focus of ecclesial movements in our Church, actions which are both "Catholic" and "catholic." The answer is simple and embodied in these inspired words: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

I have said, "*The joy is in the action*," which is the practice of the "art of accompaniment." What follows is the answer to the clergy questions about how to continue the Acts 2:42 conversation and improve on mission accomplishment. Each time the clergy convene in a communal gathering, clergy and lay leaders walk out of the meeting energized and with renewed focus on the mission. What follows is one deacon's prescription about how to continue the conversation. I invite you to read on if you want to experience the joy.

Timothy E. Tilghman
Washington, D.C.
The Year of Mercy

PART #1

THE CONVERSATION CREATES THE SPACE

Someone good at accompaniment does not give in to frustrations or fears. He or she invites others to let themselves be healed, to take up their mat, and embrace the cross, leave all behind and go forth ever anew to proclaim the Gospel.

Holy Father Francis, EG #172



Accompaniment begins with a conversation, because folk simply won't walk with people they do not know. When I told my father that I planned to work as a community organizer, he told me "Timothy, when you tell people you want to know what *they* want to do, they will be suspicious, and when you stop to listen to their answers they will be doubly surprised because rarely do people get asked what they want to do by people who will help them do it." My father, the old union organizer, was a prophet. To a person, most folk responded just as my father said they would. When you stop and listen, everyone owns what comes next.

As I listened to pastors in communal gatherings and individual meetings, questions surfaced with the main questions being "*who?*" and "*how?*" The biggest discovery I have made from my organizing is that people want to act, but they want to act on what

they believe. As my father said, however, "...rarely do people get asked what they want to do." If you get to know folk and listen to them, they will tell you what they want to do. And if you are willing to walk with them, they will do what they say. This is what I am calling "going to the well"—the people of God getting what they need to do God's work. This is what Jesus did with the Samaritan woman. If you want results like Jesus got from his conversation with her, do as Jesus did in their encounter.

Initiating a conversation with her about a drink of water, Jesus helped the woman answer not only the "who?" but also the "how?" The Samaritan woman knew "what" to do with the "who" and the "how," and she did it with great enthusiasm and spectacular results.

There are six facilitated conversations outlined in this booklet: *Introduction to the Encounter*, *The First Encounter*, *The Leader*, *The Team*, *The Ideal Parish-ioner*, and *The Culture*. Walk through the conversations with groups of leaders. The "who?" and "how?" will emerge, and people will take action on the "what" consistent with the faith we preach and model.

Conversation is best when followed by focused questions to stimulate sharing and introspection as individuals and as community. If you are honest in your conversations, especially the exploration of the questions, you will find answers that lead to specific, concrete actions. The organizing axiom still applies: "The joy is in the action." Read on only if you want to experience the joy! Starting the conversations moves us from talking to walking.

The essentials for Christians in these six conversations:

- Be open to Christ in the people you meet.
- Learn to share the essence of the encounters with your team as you prepare leaders.
- Determine priority actions from the six conversations.
- Conduct a parish census, internal then external, based on the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well; modify actions based on census results.



CONVERSATION #1

REVELATION: THE INVITATION TO ENCOUNTER

This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself.

Holy Father Francis, EG #76



People are still coming to church, looking for the Christ our Holy Father met, the one who comforts and sustains the lonely, lost, and disinherited. These are the restless souls that Saint Augustine spoke of nearly 1,700 years ago. Too often they come into our midst looking for Christ and find bad news and cold,

cautious people when they come to our parishes. We are witnesses, but what are we telling the folk in search of the comfort Christ offers?

In October 2012, Father Maurice Nutt preached from the Gospel of Mark at the closing Mass for the Annual East of the River Revival in Washington, D.C. There was a man, Fr. Nutt said, who approached Jesus out of frustration. When Jesus inquired about the man's frustration, he responds, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak.... I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so" (Mark 9:17-18). These disciples Mark describes are the folk people meet when they get to church. Father Nutt's message—we, the disciples of this day, could not get the demons out. The gospel is the truth that transcends time. Folk are coming to our parishes looking for someone who greets them as our Holy Father Francis does and they are frequently disappointed. Folk want community; we give bureaucracy.

Who is our Holy Father talking about? Folk that we meet in Mark's gospel: "Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him..." (Mark 2:3-4). Yes! The crowd was too big, and the door was blocked, but four men were not deterred, they found the path of hope and carried their paralyzed brother to Christ. The neighborhoods surrounding our parishes are full of paralyzed people. Many of these folk are excited about our Holy Father's witness.

Pope Francis will not meet them in person, but our parishioners can. What will our people do—present the good news or the bad news? The answer is in the Gospel. Are we getting it right at your parish?

The New Evangelization speaks of the people who got it right with these words: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Act 2:42). Our parishes are full of people whose actions are chronicled in Mark’s gospel—the disciples who are dodging the demons as well as those who are aware of, but undeterred by, the bad news. Instead, they continue to take people to Christ.

The whole world sees the Pope—washing the feet of women, riding the metro train to work, meeting people at the gate to the Vatican, admitting to being a sinner, and asking “Who am I to judge others?” Non-Catholic or lapsed Catholics are moved by his actions and looking at the parish in their neighborhood, wondering if neighborhood Catholics are dodging demons and being ruled by doubt or overcoming demons and saving through hope.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). As the doubters continued to doubt, Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic and took care of his physical ailments too. This is our faith. Is this what we present when we meet people in the neighborhood?

The Scripture

Read Mark 2:1-12; 9:14-29, Acts 2:14-42.



This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself.

Holy Father Francis, EG #76

God addresses man as a master his servant; God asks a question; man hearing God answers by faith and obedience. The fact and content of this communication are called revelation.

R. Latourelle, SJ, *Theology of Revelation*, p. 21



The Questions

1. When did you encounter Christ? What did you do after the encounter?
2. If you cannot name the demons, you cannot remove the demons. What demons are present in your parish community? In the surrounding neighborhood?

"I am leaving this message so that you might experience the joy!"

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A pastor in Washington, D.C., once asked me about hiring an organizer to help him with evangelization, wanting to apply the organizing discipline of engaging leaders and mutual accountability to the task of the New Evangelization. When he made the request, I did not know that it would lead to a group of pastors meeting two hours every month over a five year period to talk about how they could work together to accomplish the mission of the Church. In this little book, I want to reflect on how a focused conversation about mission can be sustained. — from the Introduction

Here are the fruits of those discussions with clergy in mostly traditional African-American parishes, set down in very practical steps by an ordained deacon in the Catholic Church. Timothy Tilghman uses Pope Francis' encyclical letter *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)* as a starting place and a touchstone for the work of "Going to the Well to Build Community." That "well" is the art of accompaniment based on biblical reflection, relational conversation, setting priorities, and taking targeted and effective action. This precious book, which will be received as a blessing by those wise enough to receive it, will help pastors, parish staffs, and lay leaders in individual churches across denominational and even interfaith lines to begin to revitalize both their congregations and their communities in ways that are both tried and true. Each short chapter is followed by suggestions for Bible readings and questions for individual reflection and especially group discussion.

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TIMOTHY E. TILGHMAN is a sailor, an organizer, and a deacon, one who lives to answer the question: How does my individual action build the community? This life is learning, teaching, and walking with others as they take action that gives meaning to their public lives; it includes caring for family, those related by blood and the larger family of those encountered in public life. His formal education at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and his graduate work in Public Administration at the George Washington University and in Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University's Ecumenical Institute were important milestones in his formation.



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