

SESSION I

INTRODUCTION TO EMBRACING EVANGELISM

Introduction

Welcome to *Embracing Evangelism*, a video series on Episcopal Evangelism from The Episcopal Church and Virginia Theological Seminary. Throughout this adventure, we will explore evangelism as a spiritual practice rooted in joy, gratitude, and holy curiosity; a practice through which we seek and speak of Jesus' loving presence and invite other people to celebrate God's life and love for them.

In this first session, we introduce the practice of evangelism and explore the importance of growing your own loving relationship with God. Before we begin the video, let's open with a word of prayer. *Offer your own prayer here, or use one of the following:*

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

Gracious God, as we begin our time together, help us to open our hearts and minds to what you would have us learn today, as a group and as individuals. Help us to set aside our prejudices and to release our imaginations, opening ourselves up to what is possible through your Spirit. Thank you for the time to spend in study and for the opportunity to dive deeper into our call to proclaim your love. Amen.

Begin the Video

Watch video from start to 21:56. Note these highlights for yourself:

Scripture gives us ample guidance for practicing evangelism: In John 4, we read Jesus' intense conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, a conversation that leaves both of them changed. In Acts 11, Philip chases down the Ethiopian eunuch and helps the eunuch to understand where God was already speaking in his life. In Luke 19, we meet Zacchaeus, a tax collector who climbs into a tree to spy on Jesus and, by the end, hosts Jesus in his home and welcomes others to follow Jesus.

We draw on these and other scriptures in Episcopal Evangelism – the spiritual practice through which we seek, name, and celebrate Jesus' loving presence in the stories of all people and then invite everyone to MORE.

Here is a breakdown of each part of this practical definition of *Episcopal Evangelism*:

1. *Seek* – Episcopal Evangelism is inherently curious, wondering where Jesus' loving presence is showing up in others' lives and in our own.
2. *Name* – Once we find that loving presence, we name it. "Hey, when I see you do this..., it looks like God to me." "I feel the Spirit at work when...." In other words, proclamation is essential.
3. *Celebrate* – When you discover good news, you can't keep it to yourself. You celebrate it. Let the gratitude and wonder flow, and share it with others.

4. *Jesus' loving presence* – Christian life starts with Jesus and his love. Through him, God meets us, heals us, surprises us. Through him, we have intimate knowledge of the fullness of God. Through him, God invites us into the eternal dance of the Trinity.
5. *Everyone's stories* – Stories are the heart of evangelism. There is the story of the God we meet in scripture. There are our own stories of life with God: our struggle, loneliness, authentic presence, resurrection. And there are other people's stories. Maybe they wouldn't name God, but you see God in them and can help them to find their own words and relationship.
6. *Invite everyone to MORE* – Evangelism includes an invitation: to more conversation over coffee; to a book, poem, or film that resonates with whatever you've both discovered together about God; to visit a community that is growing in faith and practice. "Come to church with me" is an option, so don't be afraid to say it! But that's just one of many ways to invite someone to MORE.

For a lot of us, this is a different kind of evangelism, but it might just be what our neighbors and even we are most hungry for.

- *If your group is doing the Exploratory Exercise: Watch until 21:56, which is the end of the explanation of the Exploratory Exercise. Pause the video and lead your group in the exercise and the post-exercise discussion.*
- *If your group is not doing the Exploratory Exercise: Continue watching the video to witness the masterclass group as they try out the exercise.*

Exploratory Exercise: Recognizing God in Your Midst

As was mentioned in the video, Episcopal Evangelism flows directly from our gratitude, joy, and wonder for all God's goodness.

During a time of quiet meditation, ask participants:

- Take a minute to reflect on a moment in your life when you experienced wonder, joy, or deep gratitude.
- What was happening? How was God part of this for you?

After a minute or two, you may offer this explanation:

Now, we will share with each other using One-to-One StorySharing. This is a brief relational experience of sharing our stories during which each person has the chance to serve as an attentive listener and authentic storyteller.

1. Turn and find one partner. Make pairs, so everyone gets the chance to listen and to share. (*Facilitator: If you see several trios, invite one person to hold up a hand and look around to find someone else who is in a trio and needs a partner to make a pair.*)
2. Sit or stand so that you and your partner are looking at each other face to face.
3. One person will be Partner A and one will be Partner B.
4. Partner A will go first and will have one minute to share. When one minute has passed, you will hear a signal. This is the time to switch, so Partner B will share.
5. When it is your turn to speak, offer your authentic story, using details and emotions.
6. When it is your turn to listen, create the space to welcome the story of the other as a real blessing.
7. When you both have taken a turn, thank each other for the gift of sharing.

Brief Discussion

Pose the following questions to the group:

- How did it feel to share your story?
- How did it feel to receive your partner's story?

Let's resume the video and see how the *Embracing Evangelism* participants did.

Resume the Video

Watch from 25:27 to 36:06. At that point, pause the video for discussion.

Discussion & Reflection Questions

Use the following reflection questions to guide your discussion. Depending on time, you might choose one or two on which to focus. Encourage participants to reflect on the remaining questions later themselves.

- How do you feel about your relationship with God?
- Are you able to see and feel the love of God in your life?
- What part of the definition of *Episcopal Evangelism* resonates for you?
- Does any part of the definition bring you hope?
- Who has been Good News to you? How was that person Good News to you?

Finish the Video

Review the Try It Out section of the Participant Guide (see guide for more detailed instructions). Encourage participants to do the following before the next session:

- Ponder the questions from the Discussion and Reflection section on your own through journaling or in conversation with a partner from the class.

Close with Prayer

In your own words, thank God for being present in each person's life and in the stories shared, and pray for God to continue to open hearts and minds to see Jesus' loving presence in our lives and in every person's life. Ask for God's guidance as you continue to explore and embrace evangelism.