

Extraordinary Seminar Cells in S. Eustorgio
Saturday 29 May, 5-6 pm
Don Gian Matteo Botto

How to prepare the members of a Cell to evangelize their Oikos

The double underlined parts are indications for the translators of
St. Eustorgio

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Introduction

Good morning to all of you!

This teaching, addressed to Cell leaders, was prepared by the Italian Team of Parish Cells of Evangelization, with contributions from various parts of the peninsula.

I invite you to get pen and paper to be able to write down the Word of God we will read, the main points that we will deal with and your ideas.

Reading the passage from the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 16:

SLIDE John 15, 16

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.

As we know well, the Cell exists to evangelize: "You may be appointed so that you may bear fruit"; the main feature of evangelizing with cells is the evangelization of one's own oikos.

As a leader, how can you train the members of your Cell to "bear fruit", effectively evangelizing your life environment?

First of all, at the basis of our service as Cell leader, is the Lord's call: "I chose you." I serve as a leader because I have understood that, through the Church, the Lord asks me to take care of the members of the Cell and of those who will come.

This service, therefore, is a gift that the Lord is giving me. I invite you, in the

moment of silence that we will now follow, to thank the Lord for this call:

(25-second pause of silence)

If the Lord has called me, then also He gives me his grace to succeed in this service: "I appointed you". The Lord gives me all the help necessary to carry out my task with love and competence, through prayer, other leaders, formation.

The Lord called me and enabled me to this service, but can I have great confidence in performing my service?

Let us take some moments of silence to tell the Lord all our confidence in his help in our task.

(25-second pause of silence)

The leader, in order to train well cell members to evangelize their life environment, needs three elements:

The hat, the cloak, the saddlebag

1. THE LEADER'S HAT

The hat covers the head, to cultivate correct and basic ideas.

The hat, when it's hot, protects us from the sun, and keeps ideas fresh!

The hat protects the head when it is cold and humid, because it warms us, keeps the brain working even when it is icy outside.

We listen to the suggestions that come to us from the referents of the various areas of Italy so that we can preserve and feed the basic ideas of a leader who forms the evangelization of the oikos. (1m)

Video 1: THE LEADER'S HAT

introduced by SLIDE:

To train the Oikos to be able to evangelize

[put photos of the hat]

THE LEADER'S HAT:
CONVERSION TO BROTHER

Equipe Italia

(A): Federica Rosi Romersa (Tuscany):
conversion to brother

The preparation of the members of a Cell to evangelize their oikos is, first and foremost, part of a broad ecclesiastic horizon, that is necessary to expand the heart. It shines in the closing speech of the first period of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, delivered by Pope St. John XXIII, when he prophetically proclaimed:

Literal translation

"It will truly be the new Pentecost, which will make the Church flourish in Her inner wealth and in her maternally extending to all fields of human activity; it will be a new leap forward Christ's Kingdom in the world, an ever higher and more suave reaffirmation of the happy news of the Redemption, the luminous proclamation of God's sovereignty, of human brotherhood in charity."

Actual quotation (My translation since there isn't an official English version!):

Then no doubt the new Pentecost will shine, which will abundantly enrich the Church with spiritual energies and extend her maternal spirit ... in all areas of human activity. Then the Kingdom of Christ on earth will be expanded by new growth. Then in the world the happy proclamation of the human Redemption will be higher and more soave ... from which the supreme right of Almighty God, the bonds of fraternal charity among men and women will be confirmed.

From here it can be assumed that we are called both to proclaim the happy news of the Redemption and to love us as brothers and sisters. Looking at this picture, which represents the Upper Room, the Last Supper, we understand how Jesus formed the first "missionary disciples": he called them to have them with HIM, so to teach them with His own sublime example, first to mutual love, and then to send them to evangelize the whole world.

After His Resurrection, He himself supported them with the strength of His Spirit of Love, which He would have spread on them not only on Easter evening and Pentecost day, but also incessantly through His living Presence in the Most Holy Eucharist.

The method of parish cells evangelization therefore has the advantage of obeying these two commands of Jesus, through a strategy that allows a faster and more effective evangelization by enhancing the oikos, that is, the people who live in their daily life environment: relatives, neighbors, colleagues, friends "*As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'*" (Mt 10:7), that is, "evangelize the people you meet along the path of your daily life".

So, the first step of the evangelizer, of the missionary disciple (an expression so dear to Pope Francis) is: "Convert to your brother, love him in the name of Jesus, do to him all that Jesus himself would do. May he see and be surprised at how you feel involved with him."

Looking at the Crucifix, according to a wonderful interpretation of St. Thomas and Blessed Antonio Rosmini, we see what this love must be like explained in St. Paul in the Letter to the *Ephesians* (3:17-19): "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth ... so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

The *length of Charity*, the vertical axis, which represents faithful *Love*: "Always love".

The height, that piece of wood above Jesus' head, represents the purpose of Charity: "To become one with God".

And, finally, *the depth*, that is, that piece of wood that is under the ground, that manifests the *Love* that is given to the point of *self-sacrifice*: "Love up to give your own life".

Behold, dear friends, Jesus the Eucharist continues unceasingly to support all of us in mutual love, in this "conversion to brother" with His own Prayer to the Father (Jn 17:26):

"Father, I have made known Your Name and I will make it known, so that the Love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them. " Amen. hallelujah!

(B): Don Ambrogio Giuffrida (Syracuse, Sicily):
Converting to your brother is a true love

If we want proof that our lives have been authentically touched by God, it is necessary to check whether we have the ability to bend over the wounds of others. Recently, in the homily of the feast of Divine Mercy, Pope Francis has encouraged us to ask ourselves: "Am I, who have so often received the peace of God, who have so often received his forgiveness and mercy, merciful to others? Do I, who have so often fed on the Body of Jesus, do something to feed those who are poor? Let us not remain

indifferent. We can't live faith only halfway, receiving but not giving, welcoming the gift but not giving ourselves. We have obtained mercy, we become merciful. Love cannot end within ourselves, faith would dry up in sterile intimism. "Without the works of merciful people dying (cf. Gc 2:17)".

It is not uncommon for ecclesiastic communities to find people who have so much compassion for poor children in underdeveloped countries, or who provide charitable services that can gratify as they do so. In itself excellent things. But the peculiar thing, is the lack of realization of the needs of the people around us. It overlooks their wounds and sores of all kinds, both in the body and in the soul, also because it would be complicated to manage them. We are too pressed by our things, perhaps even from our so-called "religious duties" and we do not notice the real needs of those who live next to us.

To convert us means precisely this: to look at each other as a brother to love in the concreteness of real, simple, daily relationships. It looks just like Columbus' egg, but it is necessary, to get into action, to ask for the grace to have the regard of the Good Samaritan and to become witnesses, not experts, in mercy. Only then will faith be alive. Only in this way will we be heralds of the Gospel of God, which is the Gospel of mercy.

1C: Don Narciso Danieli (Venice): The Holy Spirit

In our journey of evangelization, the relationship with the Holy Spirit is particularly important.

The Holy Spirit is Spirit of Truth and Spirit of Love, and Jesus wants to give it to us plentifully. It is important that we invoke the Holy Spirit every day. The Holy Spirit changes our eyes because he is the Spirit of Truth and changes our hearts, because he is the Spirit of Love.

It changes our eyes because Spirit of Truth as it makes us see people, brothers, not with our humanity that sometimes feels them as a nuisance, as an adversary who annoys us, one who intrudes ... and so on, but he makes us see them through the eyes of God and makes us see them as brothers given to us by Him.

And the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Love who makes us welcome and love people in the name of Christ, giving us the opportunity to open our heart, changing it from a heart of stone - which is sometimes annoyed, seeking its own interest, judging, somehow full of selfishness - to a heart that loves, a heart that is patient, a heart that bears the fruits of the Spirit: love, peace, joy, goodness, meekness, benevolence, patience and self-control.

Behold: may the Holy Spirit help us change our hearts and our eyes so that, as Pope Francis (EG 270) says, "we truly accept to enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness." To be witnesses and guides toward Jesus.

FINE VIDEO

Conclusion Don Gian Matteo

I'll give now you a minute's silence, to write an idea that you want to keep with you from this first part.

(1m silence)

Here's the Leader's hat: conversion to his brother. The member of the Cell will learn from our way of acting towards him, from the loving attention we will have towards him, to evangelize in the same way its own oikos, with a service full of love, acceptance and non-judgmental attitude.

2. THE LEADER'S CLOAK

Introduction with Gian Matteo

Second instrument: the cloak.

Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, was ordered by the Lord to prepare his successor. The first book of kings, chapter 19, the verses: 15-16

SLIDE 1 Re 19, 15-16

The Lord said to Elijah "Go, take the road back to the desert near Damascus,". When you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king of Aram. Then you shall anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, as king of Israel, and Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah, as prophet to succeed you.

Elijah obeys, because the mission of salvation of God's people cannot end with him, he must continue. The Word of God must continue to "run". Elijah obeys the Lord:

Now let's read verses 19-20:

SLIDE 1 Re 19, 19-20

Elijah set out, and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he was following the twelfth. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him. Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and I will follow you." "Go back!" Elijah answered. "Have I done anything to you?"

The cloak mentioned here is the "cloak of the prophet" with which Elijah worked miracles, such as stopping the course of the Jordan River to wade it dry. Elijah chooses Elisha "passing to him the baton", putting on him the cloak of prophet. Elisha thus becomes a prophet in the place of Elijah and he too will do wonders like his master, striking the Jordan River with that cloak to wade it dry.

Dear leaders, together with the "hat", which reminds us of the "conversion to the brother", we need a "cloak", which is always with us as a second skin: our coleader who should train one of your cell members to evangelize the oikos not alone, but also by forming your own member to become a leader: prepare him to form the members of the Cell to evangelize their oikos.

Let us listen to a testimony from a married couple, the way they have formed their co-leaders.

VIDEO: THE LEADER'S CLOAK

Introduced by SLIDE

The training for the evangelization of the Oikos

[put cloak photos]

THE LEADER'S CLOAK:

PREPARE THE COLEADER

Valentina and Giorgio - (Ragusa, Sicily)

Hello to all of you; we are Giorgio and Valentina and for 20 years we have been leaders of an evangelization Cell of the Community "Eccomi, manda me" of Ragusa founded by Don Salvatore Tumino, (today we remember the 19th year since his ascent to heaven).

We want to share our development process. Our Cell has multiplied several times in recent years and today it is a Cell of young couples.

In recent years we have had the grace to train members to become leaders of new cells.

Every time we had to think about a new leader, we must confess that we've struggled to see among the members a future leader, but then, praying the Lord, He gave us the grace to understand that the new leader may not be equal to us, that the new leader may not be perfect - neither are we -, the new leader may not be even a great preacher, orator, influencer.

The new leader will need to have three key qualities:

1- Having had a personal experience of The Love of God, an experience of conversion of one's life.

2- Be a person of prayer, who feels the need to pray every day and to feed on the Eucharist and the Word of God.

3- Have a strong desire to evangelize. Since we are part of the Cells of Evangelization, the new leader must necessarily have this desire, this zeal for the Gospel.

This has been our experience, and on this bases, we have been forming more members, by creating personal relationships, that is, moments of intimacy made of prayer but also convivial moments such as a dinner at our home. In these occasions we can transmit our experience as leaders and share with them the path of the Cell thus allowing us to collaborate in serving our brothers and sisters. In this way we give space to future leaders to grow and bring out the talents that God has given them. In

this way we hold them accountable, asking them to take personal care of some members of the Cell, through a call, praying for them and asking them to lead a part of the Cell: giving praise, asking for intercession...

All this will allow the Cell to multiply more serenely and more easily.

Our job as a leader is to take care of the members and to train new leaders and serve our brothers and sisters.

We want to conclude our sharing by reading a prayer of Don Salvatore that we find in his book "Amare è...":

Serve and you will be in joy.

Serve and your life will not be wasted.

Serve and you will get rid of your selfishness.

Serve and you won't think why you live.

Serve and the Lord will free you from so many worries.

Serve and welcome the brother as Jesus himself.

Serve constantly, and don't get tired.

Serve with all your heart and everything in you will be a blessing.

FINE VIDEO

Now, let's take a minute to write an idea that, after listening to Valentina and Giorgio, we think we can apply in our Cell (1m).

(one minute of snum)

3. LEADER'S SATTELBAG

Introduction don Gian Matteo

This task of training cell members in the evangelization of their oikos is so important, because sometimes they "delegate" evangelization to the leader.

But a Cell is truly "evangelization" only if everyone evangelizes!

Moreover, some cell members may have been demotivated by failure in its evangelization, and think: "I have failed, I am afraid of failure... then I no longer evangelize".

In addition to the hat and cloak , therefore, we need a...

SADDLEBAG

In the saddlebag you can put many things, to be pulled out when necessary.

As Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, 13: 52:

SLIDE

“Every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”

In the saddlebag you can put in many concrete proposals to train the members of the Cell to evangelize the life environment.

Certainly, the Shepherd of the community together with the Executive Cell, can organize several initiatives to support leaders in their important task:

1) A basic course for Cell members (which can be titled: "evangelize the life environment"). We'll explain the evangelization of the oikos (the process of evangelization), the functioning of the Cell (moments and ends), the discipleship, the vision of a "parish of evangelizing disciples", the figure of the leader. This course must be repeated every year, addressing it to the new members of the Cell and to the parish community as a whole.

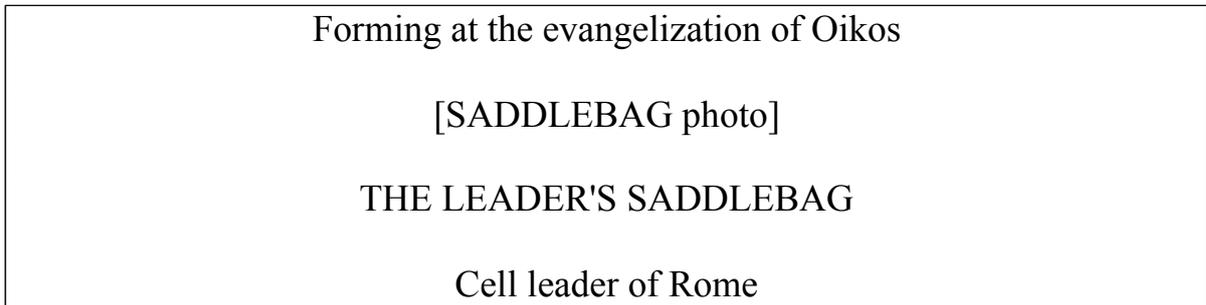
2) Prepare some 1-minute videos to welcome the new Cell members and explain the basis of this method of evangelization.

3) Make cycles of teachings on the process of evangelization and Cell moments.

Let's now look at some of the initiatives that the leader can take.

VIDEO: THE LEADER'S SADDLEBAG

introduced by slide:



Here's my leader's saddlebag; what am I going to put in it? The Holy Spirit!

Well, why? The leaders, in addition to having a heart of welcome and listening for his members, must also have a heart of exhortation.

They must encourage them, they must motivate them to pray daily for their oikos. It is important that every day they take a moment to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the hearts of the people in their life environment may open themselves to the Lord.

Don Pigi said: "The most significant element of evangelization is the Holy Spirit, without, is making a hole in the water". And again, Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.75 states: "Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit".

"The heart must have a single desire: that everyone knows Christ"; and thus, we are called to be collaborators¹ of God because our relations of oikos, and their relations of oikos are of Jesus.

So how do you motivate them for intercession? First of all, 1Tess 5:17 encourages us to "pray without ceasing". So, the intercession must be done with faith and perseverance, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit and his strength will make our commitment effective.

Well, let's put the Holy Ghost in my saddlebag, and pass it to Pina.

Here we go: what do I put in my saddlebag?

Let's see. It's the member's entry into our Cell. When a member enters our Cell, as a leader it is good to spend some time with him/her to explain what the "oikos list" is. That's why we give her/him the "postcard" explaining that it is the "list of the heart" and thus it is important that we explain that it must be made in prayer. It must be done with a great inspiration by the Holy Spirit to ask ourselves: "who wants the Lord to bring to Him?" And we leaders know that when teaching this and passing it on to the member, sometimes we take for granted that he/she knows what their oikos is and

¹ ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *The missionary face of parishes in a changing world*, 1 (Rome 2004)

therefore the real meaning of praying for one's life environment - for colleagues, work, friends -; but this is not true. Thus, it must be explained and shared and then it will be the Holy Spirit (as we leaders certainly know) who will make the Cell member know what to write in his own list of oikos and will know that the Cell is not a path of intercession for their own oikos but a path of evangelization to bring one's oikos to God.

So here I put the postcard that we give to our new member to be a postcard that really is made up of people who are brought to God.

And now I pass the leader's saddlebag to Paola.

Here we are, dear cell members. You remember that when we entered the Cell our leader handed us this postcard and told us to write on the back the names of the people dear to us: family, friends, work colleagues and pray for them every day. Well! What happened to this postcard with the list of our Oikos? Where did you put it? Maybe someone put it in the pages of the Bible, maybe in a drawer, maybe someone doesn't even remember where it was placed.

So, I now propose that you dust off this list of oikos: let us take it up again, let us update it, because perhaps over time some friends, some families will have been added for whom we want to pray, and above all to remember to carry it always with us. Let's put it in our purse or in the jacket pocket, so we can always have it at hand.

And let us also dust off our joy, our enthusiasm and our perseverance a little because it is important that we pray every day for evangelization and for the conversion of our oikos.

We learn to cure our oikos because it's the most important thing there is.

So, I'm going to put this postcard in the leader's saddlebag, but with the compiled list of the oikos.

And now I pass the leader's saddlebag to Francesca.

Thank you! I'm Francesca. What am I going to put in my leader's saddlebag?

First, I'll put SHARING. By sharing in the Cell our experience of evangelization (as I am evangelizing the people of my oikos) I, leader, set an example to my Cell member and I will certainly be a stimulus for what they will have to do. So, I recommend, when you share, remember to include in your sharing HOW you are evangelizing.

Another thing I'm going to include is ACCOMPANIMENT, an element of support for members in evangelization. When a member presents us a person of his oikos to evangelize, we will support him in the sense that we will remember this person and perhaps during the week we will ask him how evangelization is going, to stimulate him not to stop on a phase in the process of evangelization that suits him but to stimulate him to move ahead to another steps.

So maybe we'll ask him, "How's that person's evangelization going?" "Ah, are you already praying? Come on! Let's see what we could do to help her and serve her?" Or, "How can we break the ice and give a little explanation?"

Here are the things that can definitely help our cell members overcome fear.

FINE VIDEO

CONCLUSION (Don Gian Matteo)

Now let's take a minute to write down a proposal that can be useful for our situation (1m)

(pause of Silence - 1m)

I would like to invite you to share your thoughts with the other leaders of your parish and add other concrete ideas and tools. (15s)

So, how can cell members be formed when the Oikos is evangelizing?

With the HAT, the "conversion to the brother"

With the CLOACK, the "formation of the coleader"

With the SADDLEBAG, many concrete tools to be used according to the needs.

LET US PRAY

We thank you, Father, who have given us the gift of meeting your blessed Son, the Lord Jesus, our God and Saviour, and that have called us to serve you with the Parish Cells of evangelization. Send us your Holy Spirit so that we may serve in love our cell members and our Cells can evangelize and multiply, because "we bear a lot of fruit" thus becoming true disciples-evangelizers of yours.

Amen.