

EVANGELISM & SOCIAL ACTION CO-ORDINATOR

Why evangelise? Why worry about social action? There are some things written in the Bible that might bring a reason and our motivation into focus:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." -Matthew 28:18-20

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I." - Isaiah 58:6-9

Like everything else in this manual, this section is very dependent on other chapters. You won't be effective at planning your evangelistic strategies if you don't have your vision established. Your social action will be nullified if you don't have a discipline of real prayer amongst your committee and your wider CU.

Evangelism

CUs are meant to be all about mission and discipleship. Whatever one understands by "Mission", whether it is local outreach, work in a foreign country or social work, it necessarily involves evangelism. The first thing that must be considered by anyone taking responsibility for Evangelism in a CU is how essential it is to the core of what makes a CU authentic.

Evangelism, at least as defined in this little chapter, is the direct stuff that we do to tell people about the Good News. It probably isn't very helpful in the long run if you decide to call simply going out with friends from your class evangelism. If you went out with friends from your class and ended up explaining the idea of Grace to one of them, then we're in the evangelism zone. As the Evangelism Secretary in your CU (or the committee member who has to take care of it in the case of smaller CUs), you should keep your planning in focus so that you organise events that are more than just social meetings.

Social Action

Social action basically means taking responsibility for the problems in our society and trying to meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged. We should also consider that there is a distinction to be made between evangelism and social action. Social action is something that all Christians are called to. We have a mandate from the behaviour of Jesus and from biblical passages like the one above to take injustice in our society personally. It is right and proper for Christians to be part of the Drop The Debt campaign or to be committed environmentalists and it is not a slight on individuals called with a particular passion to those kinds of areas to say that those actions in and of themselves do not constitute evangelism.

The relationship between evangelism and social action is very close and that is why they are often bound together in the same role. Social action lends authenticity to our

evangelism efforts (which can be essential if we hope to evangelise successfully) and it can often prompt evangelism opportunities. But in the smaller CUs, where person-power is at a premium, social action will probably be down the list of priorities. Social action is still possible in that situation. Almost every campus will have active student groups like Amnesty International and St. Vincent de Paul which are geared up to offer the kind of social work that Christians are naturally inclined towards. It can be a very positive step to lasso together some interested members of the CU and to get involved. One real advantage of interested CU members participating with other societies is that by working in close contact with people who aren't Christian that you have a genuine interest in common with, evangelism opportunities are almost inevitable!

So, Social Action is something that CU's aspire to but evangelism is what we should be all about.

Equip People To Evangelise

Many of the Christians in your CU may have an intellectual acceptance of the importance of evangelism. Committee members from previous years have likely been reinforcing their church experience and telling them how worthy it is. Yet we can see that it is rare for Christians to be on fire for spreading the Good News. There are a number of legitimate reasons for their hesitance. Here are some of them:

- Fear of not knowing enough
- Fear of being rejected by peers, friends or family
- Fear of asserting yourself
- Doubts about the truth of the Gospel

Equipping your CU for evangelism is a two-fold task then. The first is to over-come these fears and then secondly, to train people where they feel they lack the know-how or the confidence to deal with the questions their friends throw at them. A vitally important thing to note here is that guilt is absolutely the worst motivator for evangelism. Always guard your heart and your words so that under no circumstance are you creating a burden through your efforts.

Equip people to evangelise out of the right motives:

- Evangelism can be an act of worship- you are bringing glory to God by increasing those who acknowledge Him.
- Evangelism is actually the most concrete expression of love you can have for your friends and family. It is literally the act of sharing God's love with them.

Each CU will have to approach these problems differently according to their size and their specific setting. For some large CUs it might be fully appropriate to bring in Staff Workers or other Christian leaders to lead special seminars on tackling the role that doubt and unbelief plays in the hesitance to evangelise or to give people practical tools to help them when they are discussing Christianity with their friends.

For smaller CUs, small Bible study groups might be a good place to think about equipping people for evangelism. But that is only if the small groups haven't already been included as part of your evangelism campaign (we'll talk more of that later!). Equipping the membership of your society to go and tell their friends and classmates about God is not a responsibility that falls on your shoulders alone. CU should not be a burden in your life and it certainly shouldn't be interfering unreasonably with your workload. When

thinking about whether your CU needs training and what form that should take, remember that there is a wide range of help available to you, starting with your IFES Staff and Relay workers and then moving out into the wider Christian world. The speakers you invite to give your main addresses on the night of CU might well be equally gifted and enthusiastic to do afternoon seminars on evangelism technique. Other students in the society who are gifted and called especially as evangelists can be drafted in to organise round-table discussion events. Your role is not to personally fix the problems of the CU and the whole of Christendom but to facilitate more effective evangelism.

Give Them The Passion To Evangelise

Maybe you are fortunate enough to have a CU filled with firm, whole-hearted followers of Jesus. They know (or have recently reacquainted themselves through your training events) the Gospel and are able to articulate things like their testimony and how their life has changed since taking their faith seriously. Your job, in this case, is definitely not to be Mr. or Miss E. Van Gelism for the whole of your CU.

A vital part of the Evangelism Secretary role is getting events on the CU calendar that will prompt lots of discussions between CU members and their friends where Jesus is the topic. In the next section, we'll look at practical tips for where you can organise evangelistic events but you must remember that the events only work if people are committed to them. Perhaps the most productive way to spend your time as Evangelism Secretary is getting your CU members psyched about evangelism. It is thrilling and exciting when you can tell someone about Jesus and if your society catches that enthusiasm you will have succeeded in your task.

Elsewhere in this manual you will find a section on vision and a section on planning your year. When you encourage people to participate in evangelism, you are trying to share a vision for what CU and their Christian life should look like. This should be vital reading for you. Alongside that it is important that your efforts are planned in terms of the whole year so that it isn't ad-hoc or rushed. Make hay while the sun of the summer shines so that it is less work during the long dark nights of assignment and exam drenched winter! When your committee meets to plan your next year of CU, make a parallel evangelistic plan in conjunction with your co-workers. By being conscious and intentional about things, you can only help your effectiveness.

Some Practical Evangelism Tips

Some CUs base their evangelism in their small Bible study groups. Others choose to hold evangelistic events at Easter and Christmas. Some others just forget about evangelism altogether and dedicate themselves to maturity. It is vital that when you sit down to plan your coming year, you take the specific needs of your setting into consideration. Think back to the resources and training you were given at **e:con** to do with assessing your campus and planning your year. If you have a large core group of committed Christians who are established in local church communities where they are being discipled and fed spiritually, then they could form the basis for seeker-friendly evangelistic bible study groups, much like Trinity in Dublin have.

Different contexts require different responses. In Maynooth, the group of committed Christians often doesn't extend outside the committee group and so they take advantage of a politically charged student environment and host public talks and debates on issues that will prompt debate and other events that can happen with very small numbers of people. That approach might fail utterly on an IT campus that tends to be deserted in the evenings

but might not be nearly enough for a CU with hundreds of up-to-speed Christians like you have on a couple of the Northern Irish campuses.

The only limit to your evangelistic efforts is the commitment of your CU and your imagination. This is a vital component of your year so dream big. Launch ambitious projects that haven't been done before (remember that ambitious doesn't necessarily mean expensive or large-scale) and dwell on the idea that God is actually the source of your efforts (if you let Him be!).

Wrapping Up The Task

Like everything else in CU leadership, don't inadvertently let yourself become the tyrant of your task. Too often CU leaders are hesitant to delegate or to share responsibility out of the totally benign and good-spirited wish to not be a burden. That path however, leads to over-work and to serious pressure as you individually take on a corporate responsibility. From the first day, approach your job as a "Chief Delegator" instead of a "Manager" or "Boss". You haven't got to personally guide 60% of your campus to conversion before the end of Semester 1.

Instead, you have to cater to people's needs in terms of preparing them for evangelism (the equipping part) and then set up chances for them to do it by organising events they can bring their friends to (whether that is a Carol service or a Single's event on Valentine's Day or a performance by Bruce Kuhn or a Grill The Church session or a talk by a Christian leader on some topical subject or a Culture By Candlelight evening in a local bar or venue or coffeeshop or whatever...) and then getting them enthusiastic about going. Don't do their work for them (or more accurately, take the fun and excitement of evangelism away from them) by misunderstanding the Evangelism Secretary portfolio to be the one, sole member of the CU engaged in evangelistic activity. Your job is to facilitate others in their evangelism!

Wear the job lightly. It is only ever going to be done in the God's power so be constantly vigilant to the temptation to hold your own efforts as the benchmark by which the job will succeed or not. When you come up against a task that stretches you and leaves you feeling incompetent or ineffectual remember that it is in our weaknesses that God's strength is seen most perfectly. Instead, put your faith and your worth in Christ, pray regularly and honestly about your role and try your best to share your enthusiasm for evangelism with your CU.

Resources

Social Action: <http://www.opendoors.org/>
<http://www.tearfund.org/>
<http://www.thirdworld.co.uk>
<http://www.debtireland.org>

Evangelism: <http://tinyurl.com/5s6jh>
See books in Mission Co-ordinator guide
