

Statement on Decade of Evangelism

April 1990

We are alarmed by the call to a "Decade of Evangelism." We recognize that evangelization is a biblical imperative. We also recognize that there are contradictory understandings of what the word "evangelism" implies. But the term "evangelism," as currently used and heard, leads to confusion, misunderstanding, and anxiety.

We see evangelization in terms of unselfish spiritual awakening in which we proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ to a world greatly in need of reconciliation.

This call to evangelization is a frightening challenge for a church preoccupied with its own internal affairs. It will be less frightening if we can divest ourselves of false notions of what it means to be the church, and renounce the temptation to use the "Decade of Evangelism" simply to increase our numbers and income.

If we are to answer the call to evangelization, we need to become a people of humility and love, confident in our own standing in God's grace. This can happen if we become the church which the liturgy proclaims us to be: the people of the baptismal covenant, formed by word and sacrament.

We begin to evangelize when we listen in love to the stories of individual people and to the stories of the world. Only then can we discover how to proclaim the good news in ways that can be heard. We continue to evangelize as we proclaim Christ's death and rising in our worship together.

Our first calling is not to proselytize. Our first calling is to proclaim the reign of God in the world, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, and respecting the dignity of every human being, ready to give an account of the hope that is in us.

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