

Lay Evangelists in the Diocese of Edmonton

Why Lay Evangelists?

In our baptismal covenant we are asked, ‘Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?’ and we respond by promising, ‘I will, with God’s help’. Evangelism is what we do in order to keep that promise. Every Christian is called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. So why do we recognize a special ministry of evangelism?

Lay Evangelists are people who have a special gift and joy in communicating the gospel of Jesus to others, by word and action. They enjoy having conversations about faith with non-Christian friends. They love watching the Holy Spirit drawing people to faith in Christ, and they like helping new Christians get established as followers of Jesus. They don’t pretend to have all the answers, but they live their lives transparently and honestly, so that others can see God at work in them.

The beginning of an evangelist’s story is this simple desire to help other people come to faith in Jesus. At the start, you may not have much idea how to do this—in fact, the thought of doing it may well fill your heart with dread! You may look at bubbly extroverts who talk effortlessly about their faith and think to yourself “I could never be like that!” You may not like the stereotypes associated with the word ‘evangelist’ in popular North American culture. And yet, deep down inside, you know that faith in Christ is bringing you life, and you long to find a way of sharing that life with others, a way that fits with your temperament, with the unique person God designed you to be. The good news is, you can find that way! In fact, our formation program is designed to help you find it.

What sort of things do Lay Evangelists do?

Lay Evangelists look for opportunities to help the church connect with the non-Christian world around. They are always on the lookout for new ways their congregations can serve their neighbours in Jesus’ name. They are comfortable on the edges of church life, building bridges for the gospel into the community at large. They are learning to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, so that they can relax and enjoy the work of evangelism without feeling that all the responsibility for leading people to faith is on their shoulders.

Evangelists are part of the ministry team of their parish, and their specific roles may include any of the following:

- Relational evangelism (learning to share the gospel in the context of genuine loving relationships, and mentoring others to do the same).
- Helping people take those first (perhaps faltering) steps of faith in Jesus.
- Helping new disciples grow in basic Christian practices.
- Helping inquirers find answers to common questions about Christianity.
- Taking a leadership role in helping their parishes think missionally, and welcome and integrate new members.
- Leading inquirers’ courses such as ‘Alpha’, ‘Christian Basics’, ‘Pilgrim’, ‘Emmaus’ etc.
- Finding creative ways to engage the people in their neighbourhoods.
- Taking a leadership role in Christian service projects in their communities in order to build bridges between the church and the world around.

How can I be licensed as a Lay Evangelist?

There's no 'one size fits all' personality profile for an evangelist, and in fact there are as many different ways of evangelizing as there are different human temperaments! But we can say in general that we're looking for people who have a sense of joy in what Christ is doing in their lives and a desire to share this with others. We're looking for people who love people, enjoy conversation, and share Jesus' compassion for those who are 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9.36). We're looking for people who enjoy thinking outside the box, trying new things, taking risks, and stepping out in faith.

If you feel that this might be you, and that God may be calling you to be licensed as an Evangelist, the first thing to do is to talk to your rector about it. There will be a simple discernment process involving conversations with your rector, your parish, and the Diocesan Warden of Evangelists so that we can talk about your sense of call, pray about it, and get a clearer sense of whether God is leading you into the ministry of evangelism. Before you can be accepted into our formation program, your call will need to be confirmed by your rector and vestry. The Warden of Evangelists will also want to have a conversation with your vestry to be sure everyone understands what we mean by 'evangelism' and 'evangelists'.

On being accepted as an Evangelist-in-training, you will participate in ten training modules over an eighteen-month period. These modules will take place on Saturdays, and most of them will be held at a central location in Edmonton. Some of them may be held online on Zoom. Note that a good Zoom connection, and a basic familiarity with the use of the Zoom platform is essential for participation.

The modules will cover such things as:

- The story of God's love
- Surprise the World (a rule of life for missional Christians)
- Sharing your faith with others in the context of genuine caring relationships.
- Helping a person become a follower of Jesus.
- How to help new disciples grow
- Addressing big questions and common objections to the Christian faith.
- Evangelistic preaching and testimony
- Running effective inquirers' courses

There will also be some 'homework' to complete between the modules,.

On successful completion of the training, and on the recommendation of their rector and of the Warden of Evangelists, the Bishop may license candidates as Evangelists in the Diocese of Edmonton. The license will be for a specified period of time, and renewal is at the Bishop's discretion.

After training and licensing...

...comes the adventure of sharing the gospel, working in step with the Holy Spirit, and seeing people come to a new joy through faith in Jesus Christ!

In order to help this happen, the Warden of Evangelists will help you negotiate a working agreement with your parish, which will specify such things as which specific tasks you will be

working on, how many volunteer hours you will be expected to give to this work, how the parish will support you, and how continuing education will take place. You will be expected to give regular reports on your work, and the parish, the diocese and the warden of evangelists will be there to support you and cheer for you! The diocese will also organize regular opportunities for continuing education so that you can grow your skills and learn new ways of becoming more effective in the ministry to which God has called you.

When Can This Happen?

We hope to begin our next formation process early in 2024 and complete it in the first part of 2025.

For more information:

Contact the Diocesan Warden of Lay Evangelists, the Rev. Tim Chesterton, at tim.chesterton@gmail.com.

Formation of Lay Evangelists

Entry into the Program

A. Publicity

- The Lay Evangelist Program will be advertised on the Diocesan website (<https://edmonton.anglican.ca/get-equipped/lay-evangelists>), and on the Lay Evangelists' Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/edmontonevangelists/>).
- The warden of lay evangelists should do regular presentations and updates about the program at clergy days. Rectors should be encouraged to identify possible candidates.
- Current lay evangelists can also be invited to identify possible candidates

B. Application and Acceptance

- Before a candidate can be accepted from a parish, the warden of lay evangelists (or their delegate) will attend a vestry meeting, do a short presentation about the role of evangelists and the formation program, and have a Q and A time.
- Candidates will fill out the application form. The Rector and the Vestry will also fill out forms indicating their willingness to confirm the applicant's call and support them in the nomination process.
- After receiving the above documents, the warden of lay evangelists will have a meeting with the candidate and their rector, after which they will make a decision about whether or not to accept the candidate into the program. Note: a candidate will not be accepted if their rector cannot support their application.

C. Ongoing Support

- Evangelists in training will identify two people in their parish who will be their prayer partners through the training process. They will be encouraged to meet monthly with their prayer partners to share their progress and identify specific needs for prayer support.
- Evangelists in training will take responsibility for keeping their rectors informed about the content of their learning, so that the rectors are 'in the loop.'
- The warden of lay evangelists (or their delegate) will have a private meeting with each lay evangelist in training twice a year during the formation process, to discuss progress and concerns.

D. Local Training Option

Note: This is in consideration but has not yet been approved. It would be possible for the warden of lay evangelists to prepare videos of the content of the presentations from each training session and make them available on the Diocesan website. They could also provide session notes so that local rectors or lay leaders, who have been approved by the Bishop for this purpose, can train their own candidates using the Diocesan program. The warden of lay evangelists would then have reasonable availability for whatever support the local rectors and evangelists in training find necessary.

As mentioned above, this option is in consideration, but most feedback so far is that rectors would prefer for their candidates to be trained centrally by the warden of lay evangelists.

The Formation Process

NB: This process is for a centralised training program. If local training is taking place, some of the specifics will need to be adapted.

Module 1: 'The Story of God's Love'

Module Outline:

- The story of God's love in six chapters
- The Prodigal Son: Coming home to God's unconditional love
- Conversion in the Bible:
 - Darkness to light
 - Passing it on to children
 - Response grid

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this session, you will be better able to:

- Describe how the whole Bible hangs together as a story of God's love.
- Understand the process of conversion and the different ways it can work in the life of a Christian.
- Understand your own faith story and how it 'maps onto' the different varieties of faith story found in the Bible.

Homework:

- Pick a partner in the group. Your role will be to bring your partner up to speed (using the video and also your own notes) if you miss a session.
- Write down a short summary (5 minutes) of your 'conversion story'. Be ready to share it at the next session.

Module 2: 'Surprise the World'

Report:

- Share your conversion story with the group.

Module Outline:

- This module is heavily based around the book *Surprise the World* by Michael J. Frost. It outlines a rule of life for missional Christians using the acronym BELLS (Bless someone, Eat with someone, Listen to God, Learn Christ, Sent).

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this session you will have a better understanding of how a missional Rule of Life can help equip an evangelist for their work of witness, and you will begin to work on developing such a Rule for yourself.

Homework:

- Begin to implement BELLS in your daily life. Be ready to report back on your progress next month.
- For your reading: Michael J. Frost: *Surprise the World* (The Navigators, 2015).

Module 3: ‘How to Relax and Enjoy Evangelism: Part 1’Report:

- How is BELLS going?

Module Outline:

- Introduction to Relational Evangelism.
 - Start by being honest about our hesitations, sense of inadequacy, fear etc.
 - Identify and Rejoice in the Ways the Gospel is Good News for You
 - Start by Being a Witness
 - Remember that a Conversion is Usually a Process
 - Begin with Those Closest to You
 - Pray Continually

Learning Outcomes:

This module is the first of a two-part series. By the time the Module 4 is completed, you will have an increased sense of confidence and expectancy about sharing your faith in the context of trusting relationships, and you will begin to be more intentional about looking for opportunities for conversations about faith with people who are not yet followers of Jesus.

Homework:

- Continue with BELLS.
- What’s your favourite way of describing the Gospel? Prepare a short, one page explanation of it and be ready to share it with the group next month.
- Create an ‘Operation Andrew’ list

Module 4: ‘How to Relax and Enjoy Evangelism: Part 2’Report:

- How is BELLS going?
- Share about the process of creating an Operation Andrew List (but don’t share confidential information)
- Share your Gospel presentations.

Module Outline:

- Introduction to Relational Evangelism.
 - Quick recap of last time
 - Be Yourself

- Learn to ask Leading Questions
- Listen for Openings and Possible Contact Points for the Gospel
- Enjoy your Evangelising Conversations
- Don't Be Afraid of Awkward Questions
- Don't Be Afraid to Help People Step Through the Door
- Do Good Follow-Up

Learning Outcomes:

This module is the second of a two-part series. By the time it is completed, you will have an increased sense of confidence and expectancy about sharing your faith in the context of trusting relationships, and you will begin to be more intentional about looking for opportunities for conversations about faith with people who are not yet followers of Jesus.

Homework:

- Continue with BELLS.
- Work with your 'Operation Andrew' list – begin praying and looking for opportunities for witness. Report back next month.
- For your reading: William J. McKay: *Me, An Evangelist?* (Stephen Ministries, 1992). Read it and be ready to share *one reflection* next month.

Module 5: Helping New Disciples Grow

Report:

- BELLS, Operation Andrew
- How was the book *Me, an Evangelist?*

Module Outline:

Four things Jesus is leading us into:

- Into a new relationship with God (habits: prayer and Bible reading)
- Into the people of God (habits: corporate worship and small group fellowship)
- Into a new way of living, which will affect many areas of our lives)
- Into mission and evangelism

How are we currently helping new disciples grow?

- Preaching
- Confirmation classes
- Midweek study groups
- Spiritual direction
- Self-directed reading

What can we do?

- Start a discipleship group
- Initiate one-on-one or one-on-two mentoring conversations

Learning Outcomes:

By the time this module is completed you will be able to identify the key habits and disciplines that help Christians grow, and you will be better equipped to help people take their first steps into this new way of life.

Homework:

- Continue to implement BELLS, Operation Andrew
- For your reading: Francis Collins: *The Language of God*. This will be our discussion book for next month. Read it carefully, take notes. For *each* chapter, identify:
 - New learning for you.
 - What was the most important point?
 - What did you agree with most strongly? Was there anything you disagreed with, and why?
 - What unanswered question do you still have?

Module 6: The Big QuestionsReport:

- BELLS, Operation Andrew

Module Outline:

In the modern world, many people struggle with difficult questions about faith issues. These might include things like ‘Is there a God?’ ‘Are science and faith contradictory?’ ‘Why is there evil in the world?’ It is impossible for us to address all these issues in one session. However, Collins’ book *The Language of God* is a good defence of (a) theism against atheism, and (b) science against fundamentalism. Our learning for this module will be based on this book and the things that stood out for us as we read it.

Learning Outcomes:

By the time this module is completed you will have a greater sense of confidence in your ability to respond when people raise difficult questions about faith.

Homework:

- Continue to implement BELLS, Operation Andrew
- Talk to a non-Christian friend and ask them about their biggest questions, objections, and hang-ups about Christianity. Research some answers for them!

Module 7: Courses for InquirersReport:

- BELLS, Operation Andrew
- How did your talk with your non-Christian friend go? What questions and issues did they raise?

Module Outline:

In recent years many ‘inquirers’ courses’ have been created to help people who want to explore

Christian faith but are not yet persuaded of its truth. In this module we will:

- Identify what makes a good inquirers' course
- Identify and explore some of the better-known options (Alpha, Transforming Questions, Pilgrim).
- Go through a detailed outline of one particular course, Christian Basics, based on the first four chapters of Tim Chesterton, *Starting at the Beginning*.
- Begin to plan a Christian Basics weekend that we will present as a group at a church in the Diocese.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module you will have a better understanding of what makes for a good inquirers' course and will be more familiar with the options available if and when your church wants to use such a course.

Homework:

- Continue to implement BELLS, Operation Andrew
- Further reading: Tim Chesterton: *Starting at the Beginning* (Amazon, 2023)

Module 8: Evangelistic Preaching and Testimony, Part 1

Report:

- BELLS, Operation Andrew
- How was the book *Starting at the Beginning*?
- Continue planning for our diocesan Christian Basics course.

Module Outline:

In this module we will explore two types of public presentation of the Christian faith:

- The evangelistic sermon, in which a preacher gives a presentation of the basic gospel message and invites people to respond to it in some way.
- The faith story/testimony, in which the speaker shares their own personal journey of coming to faith in Christ and growing in that faith.
- We will learn how to prepare and present both these options. Note: these are big subjects and each one could be the subject of a whole course in itself! It will only be possible for us to scratch the surface in this module.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module you will be able to begin preparing either an evangelistic sermon or a faith story/testimony.

Homework:

- Continue to implement BELLS, Operation Andrew
- Choose one of the following options to do as a presentation next month:
 - Prepare a faith story/testimony
 - Prepare a ten-minute talk on the question, 'Why would I recommend Jesus?'

Be ready to do your presentation before the group next month.

Module 9: Evangelistic Preaching and Testimony, Part 2

Report:

- BELLS, Operation Andrew

Module Content:

- In this module you will preach your sermon or share your faith story for the group, and the group will offer feedback.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module you will be ready to refine your faith story/sermon and present it in your own church (with your rector's permission) or another appropriate situation.

Homework:

- Refine your story/sermon and present it in your own church (perhaps as a sermon, or to a small group gathered for the purpose of hearing and giving feedback), with your rector's permission.
- Continue to implement BELLS, Operation Andrew

Module 10: Where Do We Go From Here?

Report:

- BELLS, Operation Andrew
- How did your presentation in your own church go?

Module Content:

- In this module we will look back and review the whole course, and our participation in it. We will identify the modules we feel confident about and those that need more work, and each participant will try to identify the sort of evangelistic work they are most excited about.
- In the second half of the module, the candidates will work with their rectors to come up with a plan for the first year of their ministry as evangelists.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of this module each candidate and their rector will be well on the way to preparing a working agreement for the first year of their ministry as a lay evangelist.

Homework:

- Complete working agreements with rectors (with the help of the Warden of Evangelists). Implement them.

Commissioning and Follow-Up

A. Commissioning

- After Module 9, the warden of lay evangelists will meet with the rectors and their evangelist(s) in training and confirm that the parish is still happy to support the commissioning of their candidate(s)
- Commissioning of each evangelist is at the pleasure of the bishop and will normally happen at a diocesan service.
- Before the commissioning, the rector and the candidate will negotiate a working agreement with the support of the warden of lay evangelists.

B. Ongoing Support

- Each year, the rector and the evangelist(s) are encouraged to revise their working agreement.
- Each year, the warden of lay evangelists will poll the evangelists about specific topics on which they would like further training and discussion.
- The warden of lay evangelists will organise an annual retreat for prayer, building community, and further education on the topics identified by the community.