

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 10 training modules over an 18-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 timchesterton@edmonton.anglican.ca .