Selecting a Conversion Engine for your Parish

Why implement a Conversion Engine in your parish?

As the name implies, a Conversion Engine is often a *driving force* behind a parish's efforts to evangelize and make disciples. It is a tool for bringing people through a life-changing encounter with Jesus and, in response to that encounter, helping them to follow the Lord as intentional disciples. In the work of making disciples (as in carpentry), tools never produce anything on their own; rather, they must be wielded by a person (a carpenter) with the appropriate desire and skills in order to produce something beautiful.

Characteristics of an Effective Conversion Engine:

1. Highly Kerygmatic	Does the program present participants with a clear proclamation of the kerygma (the core message of the Gospel)? Pope Francis gives us the following example of the kerygma in *The Joy of the Gospel*: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you" (EG 164).
2. Conversion-Oriented	Does the program provide participants with an opportunity to discuss and grapple with the meaning of the kerygma for their own lives, culminating in a decision (or a renewed commitment) to follow Jesus as a disciple? Does the program take into account the process of conversion and respect the uniqueness of each individual's journey of faith?
3. Rooted in Scripture	Does the program help participants to pray with Scripture, enabling them to hear the words of the Bible as the voice of God speaking personally to each one of them?
4. Small Group Context	Does the program enable every participant to be known and loved in a small-group context, and does that lead to authentic community in the broader church? Does the program focus primarily on an encounter with the Lord (love of God) and deepening relationships with others (love of neighbor)?
5. Mentorship of Individuals	Does the program foster the accompaniment and mentorship of individuals? Are participants guided by more mature Christians to transition from passive recipient into active leadership through mentoring? Is care taken to address each participant's particular obstacles to discipleship?

Examples of Conversion Engines

The Alpha Course	ChristLife	CCO Faith Study Series	Christians Encounter Christ (CEC)	Small Groups
Format: • 11 sessions in small groups with a weekend retreat • Each session includes a meal, video, and small group discussion	**Format:** • 3 sets of 7 sessions (a total of 21 sessions) • Each session includes a meal, video, and small group discussion • The first 7 sessions include a weekend retreat	**Format:** • A series of 5 small group study booklets • Each booklet has material for 6-10 sessions • Need one leader and ideally 6-10 participants for each small group	**Format:** • A retreat experience over a 2 ½ day weekend • Includes talks, prayer, small group discussion, and songs	**Format:** • Leaders in the parish facilitate kerygmatic-centered groups • Can use various resources depending on the needs of the participants • Ideally 6-10 people
Benefits/Limitations: • Free videos with a high production value • May be more comfortable for non-Catholics • Large support network	**Benefits/Limitations:** • Costs $1,200 for the full kit (3 sets of DVDs, materials, and parish license) • Natural progression from encounter with Jesus, to growing discipleship, to spirit-filled evangelization	**Benefits/Limitations:** • Cost is $11.95 for a leader guide and $8.95 for each participant guide • Relatively easy to begin • A good resource to use in conjunction with retreats like CEC and Welcome	**Benefits/Limitations:** • No cost to the parish • Requires personal initiative of the participant to get into a small group for ongoing discipleship • Not necessarily grounded in the parish community	**Benefits/Limitations:** • No cost to the parish • Focus on building leaders • Connected to the parish and run by parishioners • No time limitations • Without a missional vision, can turn inward

General Instructions and Keys for Success

• In making disciples, our principles will never change, but we must continually reexamine and reimagine our methods to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

• There is no silver bullet — the method we employ to make disciples at any given time will depend on our unique circumstances.

• We should ask ourselves regularly: "What is the surest way to bear the most fruit among the people the Lord has called me to in this specific time and place?"

• No conversion engine can stand alone — it must be part of a larger, clear path of discipleship in the parish.

• Seek out an experienced mentor to help you implement a particular conversion engine.

• Unless you build a culture of invitation to move parish outsiders through your conversion engine, you will short-circuit your efforts.

• Identify and equip new leaders to replace your current leaders, and help each person to take their next step as a disciple of Jesus.