

TRAIN.

RUN.

WIN.



The Evangelical Catholic

Ministry Guides Series

**Train, Run, Win
Guide to Intentional Ministry**

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Train, Run, Win

Intentional Ministry

“Run so as to win.”

I Corinthians 9:24 (NAB)

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Train

When the occasional jogger resolves to run a half-marathon, she makes a conscious decision to change her training. No longer is she running simply for recreation or when she feels like it. Now she has a definite and difficult goal to reach.

The half-marathon is in six months. Our runner knows she has the potential to reach her goal. What she needs is a course of action and diligence.

She sits down with a calendar of the next year, writes “For Dad” on the top of the page, and starts breaking down her weekly goals. In order to run the thirteen miles of the half-marathon, she will have to work up slowly from her current jogger status. She plans out her routes, her diet, and her objectives for each week. It is a lot of work, but she knows the only way she will reach the finish line is by assiduous training.

Training plan for ministry

Runners are not the only ones in need of a training plan. We too need a goal and a vision for our ministry efforts. The author of Hebrews encourages us to “persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (12:1-2, *NAB*). With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can begin to see clearly the road to successful ministry. Our goal is to reach Christ, not just individually, but together as God’s people.

We have a challenging and beautiful goal: to bring the people we serve closer to Christ. Perhaps it seems too lofty a goal to aim for, but what a privilege!

St. Paul writes, “For we are the aroma of Christ to God

among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing... Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor 2:15-16b).

The truth is that none of us is sufficient, not even Paul. Yet Christ came to the aid of Paul's weakness; so will God aid us as we plan and live out our ministries (2 Cor 12:9).

Envisioning the plan

The jogger in our story made a definite decision to run a half-marathon, but before that, she needed motivations. "Do I want to do this? Why?"

She and her father had often taken walks together as a child. These are some of her most pleasant memories of childhood. As she grew older, she and her father would race each other on a path near their house. Now, living thirteen hundred miles away from her dad, she missed him and knows running this race would make her feel close to him despite their physical separation.

In the coming weeks and months, her father would become the purpose of her training and her major motivation when it became difficult, when her desire flagged.

Before doing or changing anything in your ministry, you too need to know its purpose. Take a step back and look at the big picture. *What is the reason for your ministry? Why does it exist?* Take time to gain this necessary vision. It will provide motivation when the initial excitement of a new project wanes.

When thinking about the reason for your ministry, keep in mind its function in the larger Church. What is the purpose of the Church? The magisterial teaching is clear: "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize..." (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 14). As members of the Church, we need to be in touch with our deepest identity as sharers of the Good News.

If the grace and vocation of our Church is evangelization, we

should do everything in our power to evangelize. Yet too often, our unstated goal (or stated goal) is not evangelization but *involvement*. We are satisfied if people show up, and we think reaching those who do not is beyond our means. It seems to be enough just to get people in the door, but this is *not* enough.

Though a newcomer is likely to feel welcomed at a well-organized ice cream social, he will not receive Christ's Good News unless we have a larger goal for him than involvement. If we do not, our ministries will remain or deteriorate into mere clubs for people who are already committed Catholics.

Do not settle for an inward-focused, involvement-seeking ministry! The Church knows her vocation is evangelization because it exists to joyously share the Good News of the salvation, mercy, and love of Jesus Christ to those who have not received it. Our ministries must focus outward to evangelize the many lost sheep: baptized Catholics who have not found life in the Church; the unchurched who walk in darkness; the outright antagonistic who have yet to perceive that they were made by God for life in Christ. Our purpose can be nothing less than making disciples of Jesus!

Jesus taught us to take our love for him outward to our brothers and sisters who are dying for lack of his saving grace. "We love, because he first loved us." (1 Jn 4:19). In order to truly love others, we must show them not only our own love, but the love of Jesus Christ. To fulfill our mission our ministries must reach out to the downtrodden and broken-hearted, to the people on the outskirts, to those who are empty inside, and to those who are laden with many burdens.

Refuse to be satisfied by serving only those who show up to your ministry's door. Go out and bring good news to the poor (Lk 4:18) *and* the poor in spirit (Mt 5:3). This is evangelization.

We rejoice when one of our brothers or sisters finds new life in