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Where Does Mission Advancement Begin?

The process we call mission advancement begins with understanding and a careful articulation of this received mission of the Church in the context of a particular diocese, parish, religious community, school or other Catholic organization. The Church is the same always and everywhere, but the challenges and opportunities that individual Catholic organizations face vary according to different historic, economic, political and cultural circumstances. The first step in any mission-advancement effort is to provide members of the Catholic community with opportunities to reflect on, and better understand, the Church's mission as it is expressed in the particular mission of each individual diocese, parish, religious community, school and Catholic organization. This process of raising awareness about the Church's mission is itself a part of the work of evangelization because education about the Church must always also be a proclamation of the Good News of our salvation in Christ and an invitation to accept the Lord's call to be his disciples and help transform the world in the concrete circumstances of their daily lives.

Who is responsible?

This process of "mission education" and evangelization is first and foremost the bishop's responsibility, but it is a responsibility the bishop shares with many others, including his priests and deacons, with the leaders of religious communities, with the administrators of Catholic organizations in his diocese and with all baptized Christians. So, for example, when the superior of a women's religious order invites her Sisters to reflect on and articulate their community's mission, she is participating in the larger work of evangelization by calling attention to the distinctive charisms of her community and the ways in which the members of her order

contribute to the proclamation of the Gospel through their prayer, the witness of their lives and their apostolic work.

Mission is not something we can afford to take for granted.

Too often, the mission of a Catholic organization is "assumed." But how many Catholics really understand what a diocese is? Or how many know why religious men and women live the way they do? Or how Catholic organizations such as schools, hospitals and social service agencies contribute to "proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of God?"

Mission education is the necessary first step in any successful advancement program because understanding is the key to participation and engagement. That's why planning for the future begins with a statement of mission. It's also why it's important for official communications should consistently remind Catholics of the overall mission of the Church and the ways in which dioceses, parishes, schools and other Catholic organizations participate in carrying out this mission.

Experience shows that if you help people understand what your mission is and invite them to participate through their prayers, their personal involvement and their financial support, they will give generously from the heart. On the other hand, even generous people will hold back (at some level at least) when they do not understand or do not feel a part of organizations whose purposes and accomplishments are unclear to them.

Successful mission-advancement programs strive to inform, involve, inspire and invite people to participate actively in the mission and ministries of the Church.