

Bad news is everywhere. We hear something on the news and it sticks in our head. We, human beings, naturally pays more attention to negative news than the good news. It triggers fear that can permeate our thoughts and paralyze our life. Because of that, I usually stay away from the news media at the beginning of my day.

Today in this morning, however, I got on the CNN website and read through the U.S. headlines for the sake of today's message. The news about "Baby Doe" was the top headline with this picture. Isn't she adorable? This is a computer generated picture. "Baby Doe" is not her real name. This name is given to this little girl after her body was found in trash bag near Boston Harbor. As of this morning, it is unknown why and how it happened...who this little girl truly is.

Terrorism, corruption, greed, climate change, economic crisis, unemployment, racial and cultural conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, broken families, and criminal violence are just a few of the bad news that confront us each day. We need to hear Good News. I don't know about you, I need to hear good news. I also love to tell the good news to others because the joy of good news in me does not let me be quiet about it.

- When I received the college/graduate school admission acceptance letter with a full scholarship, I told everyone about it. Actually, my mom took care of letting the news be known by others.
- When you observe Pastor Luke and Stephanie these days, you have no question that what good news they have—their first child, Cable. The joy of having him as their son is known by everyone. They are not shy about sharing this joy of good news.

Telling good news or sharing good news, particularly about our faith, is evangelism.

The word "evangelism" first entered the English language in the seventeenth century, at a time when "-isms" were being created left and right. The word comes from the Greek εὐαγγέλιον ("euaggelion"), which simply means "good news." In the verb form of this word, it means to "announce" or "bring good news." Evangelism is the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This news is God's world transforming news which is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The good news in the first century is the same good news in the twenty-first century.

The conversion in the first century occurred naturally through the work of the Holy Spirit at the hearing of the good news (Acts 2:22-24; 37-41). However, during the middle ages evangelism took on the same meaning as proselytism when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire through the crusades. Winning people for Christ is a must for evangelism. Converting people to Christianity is understood as the intended outcome of evangelism since then. A popular image of evangelism is of a bible-waving evangelist in the mold of local street preacher or televangelist.

Over the years the pendulum has swung between what is called the “social gospel” i.e. good works, meeting the needs of others, and “gospel proclamation” i.e. preaching and teaching about Jesus. Both have their place within the overall work of evangelism but neither are the sum total.

C. Peter Wagner, one of my professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, coined the phrase 3P evangelism which is a holistic understanding of evangelism, I think. It embraces the caricatures and the polarities and much more besides. The concept is of a 3 storey house which is incomplete without all three floors and that has to be built up in the correct order from the bottom up.

***1P – Presence Evangelism.*** This is the first floor of evangelism, where all evangelism must start. It is the social action aspect of evangelism – meeting the needs of the people, especially the poor, demonstrating the love of God in action. It is prevalent today and widely accepted across different churches and denominations. The effectiveness of this evangelism is measured by *How many are helped.*

***2P – Proclamation Evangelism.*** This is the second floor of evangelism where the gospel is shared in word through a variety of mechanisms. It may be a sermon in worship, a Bible study, a retreat including individual Christians talking naturally with others about their Christian faith – whether with a colleague at work or with a friend over a cup of coffee, or simply being able to respond meaningfully to questions others ask about God or faith. The effectiveness of this evangelism is measured by *How many hear and understand the good news.*

***3P – Persuasion Evangelism.*** This is the last floor of evangelism, where a person is helped to come to a personal faith in Christ, to become a new disciple. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, it might happen at any time and anywhere such as in response to a sermon, during baptism preparation or through a personal conversation with a friend. The effectiveness of this evangelism is measured by *How many new disciples are made.*

Evangelism includes all three of these “P”s and in this order—Presence, Proclamation and Persuasion. I believe, however, that the essential foundation to all evangelism is prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit which empowers, equips and motivates us.

From this conceptual idea of evangelism, I would like to move us to the praxis of evangelism.

How is it practiced in a global city and in a global world, in both world Christian (ecumenical) and world religious (wider ecumenical) contexts?

What are relevant and appropriate outcomes of practices of evangelism, and how can these be measured or assessed?

To answer these questions, I would like to share a story written by Paul Villard<sup>1</sup>. Here is the story:

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When I was quite young, we had one of the first telephones in our neighborhood. I remember well the polished, old case fastened to the wall. The shiny receiver hung on the side of the box. I was too little to reach the telephone, but used to listen with fascination when my mother would talk to it.

Then I discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device, lived, an amazing person—her name was “Information Please” and there was nothing she did not know. “Information Please” could supply anybody’s number and the correct time.

My first personal experience with this genie-in-the-bottle came one day while my mother was visiting a neighbor. Amusing myself at the tool bench in the basement, I whacked my finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible, but there didn’t seem to be any reason in crying because there was no one home to give me sympathy.

I walked around the house sucking my throbbing finger, finally arriving at the stairway. The telephone! Quickly, I ran for the foot stool in the parlor and dragged it to the landing. Climbing up, I unhooked the receiver in the parlor and held it to my ear. “Information Please,” I said into the mouthpiece just above my head.

A click or two and a small clear voice spoke into my ear “Information.” “I hurt my finger...” I wailed into the phone. The tears came readily enough now that I had an audience. “Isn’t your mother home?” came the question. “Nobody’s home but

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published June, 1966 Readers Digest; reprinted with permission in the December 1999 issue of the Singing Wires newsletter, TCI club.

me,” I cried. “Are you bleeding?” the voice asked. “No,” I replied. “I hit my finger with the hammer and it hurts.” “Can you open your icebox?” she asked. I said I could. “Then chip off a little piece of ice and hold it to your finger,” said the voice.

After that, I called “Information Please” for everything. I asked her for help with my geography and she told me where Philadelphia was. She helped me with my math. She told me my pet chipmunk that I had caught in the park just the day before, would eat fruit and nuts. Then, there was the time Peaty, our pet canary died. I called “Information Please” and told her the sad story. She listened, then said the usual things grownups say to soothe a child. But I was un-consoled. I asked her, “Why is it that birds should sing so beautifully and bring joy to all families, only to end up as a heap of feathers on the bottom of a cage?” She must have sensed my deep concern, for she said quietly, “Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in.” Somehow I felt better. Another day I was on the telephone. “Information Please.” “Information,” said the now familiar voice. “How do you spell fix?” I asked.

All this took place in a small town in the Pacific Northwest. When I was nine years old, we moved across the country to Boston. I missed my friend very much. ‘Information Please’ belonged in that old wooden box back home and I somehow never thought of trying the tall, shiny new phone that sat on the table in the hall. As I grew into my teens, the memories of those childhood conversations never really left me. Often, in moments of doubt and perplexity, I would recall the serene sense of security I had then. I appreciated now how patient, understanding, and kind she was to have spent her time on a little boy.

A few years later, on my way west to college, my plane put down in Seattle I had about half-an-hour or so between planes. I spent 15 minutes or so on the phone with my sister, who lived there now. Then, without thinking what I was doing, I dialed my hometown operator and said, “Information, please.” Miraculously, I heard the small, clear voice I knew so well. “Information.”

I hadn’t planned this, but I heard myself saying, “Could you please tell me how to spell fix?” There was a long pause. Then came the soft spoken answer, “I guess your finger must have healed by now.” I laughed, “So it’s really still you,” I said. “I wonder if you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time.” “I wonder,” she said, “if you know how much your calls meant to me. I never had any children and I used to look forward to your calls.” I told her how often I had thought of her over the years and I asked if I could call her again when I came back to visit my sister. “Please do,” she said. “Just ask for Sally.”

Three months later I was back in Seattle. A different voice answered, “Information.” I asked for Sally. “Are you a friend?” she said. “Yes, a very old friend,” I answered. “I’m sorry to have to tell you this,” she said. “Sally had been working part time the last few years because she was sick. She died five weeks ago.” Before I could hang up she said, “Wait a minute. Is your name Paul?” “Yes.” “Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you.” The note said, “Tell him I still say there are other worlds to sing in. He’ll know what I mean.” I thanked her and hung up. I knew what Sally meant.

Never underestimate the influence you may have on others simply by sharing who you are. That’s evangelism in life!