



# CATECHETICAL LEADER



# Leading in faith

## IN THIS ISSUE:

Methodologies for Effective and Successful Adult Faith Formation

What Parables Can Teach the Synod Fathers and the Church Today

Electing New NCCL Officers



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# COMMON GROUND... SACRED GROUND

Bill Miller



## National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



Recently, I was fortunate to attend a luncheon featuring John Allen of the *Boston Globe*.

During his presentation, Allen made a special effort to advance the cause for rapprochement in the church. A prominent theme in his presentation addressed the ways in which Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI laid the groundwork for some of the major reforms that are now being championed by Pope Francis. The restructuring of the Vatican Bank, as well as the more proactive and transparent effort to address the clergy sexual abuse crisis, are two primary examples.

Allen's approach was designed to demonstrate how dangerous it is to put labels on people or movements that promote stereotypes and lead to further division within an organization. For example, while he admitted that Benedict and Francis have very different styles of leadership and sometimes emphasize different aspects of the mission of the church, they are both, at their core, very orthodox when it comes to the teachings of the church. Unfortunately, contemporary secular (and at times religious) media tend to focus on their differences and ignore the similarities.

Toward the end of his talk, Allen tackled what has become for some the great conundrum confronting the Catholic Church today: How do we bring together, for both listening and dialogue, those who represent various divergent points of view within the church in such a way that we do not lose the importance or beauty of church teaching, and do not disrespect those who espouse various points of view?

### FINDING COMMONALITY AMONG DIVERSITY

This is a thorny issue. Allen suggested that mutual respect and even friendship are what is needed in our Catholic Church today. Not coincidentally, he mentioned that Benedict and Francis are good friends. What he was proposing sounded to me a lot like the Catholic Common Ground Initiative put forth in the 1990s by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago. The initiative was designed to combine fidelity to church teaching with deep pastoral sensitivity in order to encourage a constant and patient

dialogue, intended to promote understanding and respect among the various and varied members of the church.

During the nearly 30 years that I have been associated with NCCL, I have witnessed an organization that has continued to grow in its ability to welcome people — to constantly, patiently discuss that which we all love: the Gospel of Jesus Christ as lived out through the practice of Catholicism. We love the Lord and we love our church, with its wonders and its warts, its heavenliness and its humanity.

In his book, *Making All Things New*, Henri J.M. Nouwen writes about the concept of community as it could be applied to the church: "The mystery of community is precisely that it embraces all people, whatever their individual differences may be, and allows them to live together as brothers and sisters of Christ and sons and daughters of the heavenly Father" (83). That is to say, there is a legitimate diversity of ideas and opinions that must be entertained with dignity and respect, while being faithful to the teaching of the church.

Frequently, on Thursdays between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., you will find five men, ages 33 to 65, with various family backgrounds, various income levels, and various opinions gathered in a local eatery near my home. We represent a wide range of the political spectrum and have very different ways of living our faith. Over a period of several years, we have built a friendship based on our respect for one another and the Christ-centered goodness that we encounter in each other...no matter what our differences may be. We have managed to find a common ground built on our love for God and the church. We are learning to truly love one another. As we break bread together each Thursday, we are nourished in body and in spirit. We all belong to the same parish, a community of faith. Each of us is far from perfect, but happy to be growing closer to God and to each other...together.

As members of NCCL, may all of us enjoy such a spirit of commitment to God, to the church, and to one another as we evangelize and catechize together. ■

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# GOD INVITES US TO THE DESERT

Margaret Matijasevic



The journey to the desert. Sometimes intentional. Often unforeseen. Always a surprising invitation to the unexpected.

There is something striking about the desert. Living amongst cityscapes and noise makes the movement into vast barrenness a wondrous experience. There is the ability to see beyond the ordinary rhythms of life, and into the magnificence of the Creator. In the aridness of desert living, eventually one is confronted with the piercing ringing of nothingness. But, isn't it amazing how once we open ourselves to it, nothingness is really more than it seems? Such is the season of Lent. We are invited to listen in such emptiness and recognize the loving hand of God reaching out to us; we must take hold, and trust.

Scripture describes the experience of Jesus as one of "being driven out to the desert," which is often replicated in the ordinary living of our lives. It is a forceful push to a place we would otherwise resist going, usually unpredicted. Two stories come to mind when considering such a push. One includes a woman faced with multiple strokes, while another is about a mother's journey, as she struggles with her anxious child.

## STRENGTH FROM POWERLESSNESS

A woman in her 40s was found in a parking lot by two "angels." Suddenly, paralyzed and alone, this woman became helpless, completely dependent on two strangers for safety. Her shift into powerlessness was an unfamiliar role for this amazing, vibrant leader. Fear demonstrated itself over and over on her road to recovery from multiple strokes. She wanted to be back to work, to drive, to hold her arm up like she had. She resisted having to live in this newfound desert of her life. Yet through prayer and support, she began to enjoy the wonderment of discovering God's role in her life. In the present reality, she was able to spend time with her daughters rather than be at work; she could celebrate achievements like fastening buttons and smiling. She appreciated moments that might've been overlooked. She realized her role in the relationship with the Father. She was a beautiful daughter resting in God's presence, surrendering in ways she had never allowed herself to do. She grew in the desert into an expression of hope and strength for all whom she encountered. And after six months of recovery, she has begun anew the life she has been given.

## FEAR BECOMES HOPE

The actual moment that this second story began is not as clear. It didn't start with a sudden change, but was gradual, progressively more intensive, and honestly frightening for this mother. The signs were already there: Her son refused to enter classrooms with ease; He threw aggressive temper tantrums when having to say goodbye before school; He bolted from a birthday party at the park. This mom was faced with a reality she knew nothing about. Her son was overwhelmed with anxiety, and was unable to cope like other kids his age.

She attended psychological sessions to help assist him in learning coping skills. She searched for the right people to journey alongside him with care. But despite her best efforts, the struggle persisted. His mother had to come to realize that this journey was one she had to take with him, and it would require her to adjust her whole lifestyle, so as to accompany him honestly. From initial fear and resentment, this mother grew into awareness of intentional presence. Angry prayers of doubt became hope in her potential. God invited her to not "fix" the situation but to live deeply and authentically into it. She realized her biggest fear of not knowing became her biggest grace. What she didn't know about her son, she learned with him, and that brought them to a place of genuine relationship. Without being fixated on what we think we should know, we discover what is. And God generously greets us there.

## AN INVITATION

Our God is that way. Our God invites us to the desert, sometimes without us knowing, or perhaps against our will. And it is there, in that seemingly long journey to emptiness, that we realize how beautifully our God has made us, and how often we need the invitation to rediscover that truth. The season of Lent is our willingness to open ourselves up to that discovery. In our choices of sacrifice, penance, and emptiness, we are reminded of who we are made to be, no longer clinging to resentment, expectations of perfection, or inclinations to fix the grace that is already given. Rather, we are invited to come into the reality of who we are before our God, and to offer ourselves fully, asking for the courage to receive the abundant grace in the intentional, unforeseen, and surprising form in which it is given.

# Methodologies for Effective and Successful Adult Faith Formation

Daniel S. Mulhall



Although the title may suggest differently, I do not believe that there are any methodologies that are just for adults or that are most effective for adults. But rather, each methodology is a tool to be used at the appropriate time and place in order to accomplish the intended outcome of that particular part of a learning or faith formation experience. Methodologies that work well with children will most often work well with adults, and vice-versa. Of course, this also requires us to treat adults as adults, and children as children.

There are some assumptions that one can make about adults that can't be made about children: that adults are eager and willing learners, that they have had life experience and so will understand cultural references better, and that adults are self-motivated, that they don't need outside coercion to cause them to act. While these assumptions may generally hold true for adults, they are not 100 percent certainties, and so must always be tested to make sure whether they are true or not for each individual with whom you will work.

In addition, this article focuses on Adult Faith Formation (AFF) as a whole and isn't limited to religious instruction or education, as such. Adult Faith Formation will always engage in some type of learning or educational experience but will also involve active efforts to lead people to grow in faith, while learning or educational experiences need not lead to faith formation. The goal of AFF is to help people encounter the living Jesus Christ and the church, and to fall in love with both. The goal of instruction or education is to help people learn to grapple with and understand information and concepts. Said another way, educational and instructional activities will always be a part of AFF but do not, in and of themselves, bring about AFF.

## CATECHISTS AS MATCHMAKERS

Before looking at methodologies, let's spend a few moments thinking about this goal of AFF, and for that matter, all of catechesis. The *General Directory for Catechesis* says that the goal of all catechesis is to help people develop an intimate relationship with Christ. Everything we do in catechesis should be aimed at helping people develop this intimate relationship.

Every method we use should ultimately be aimed at fostering this type of relationship.

In workshops, I frequently suggest to catechists and catechetical leaders that they should start thinking of themselves primarily as "matchmakers," rather than educators. Matchmakers, of course, are people who introduce people to each other and encourage them to fall in love with each other. This seems an appropriate role if we are in the business of introducing people to Christ (precatechumenate, perhaps) and helping them fall in love with him (catechumenate). Going on the principle that how you name what you do will determine what you do, thinking of yourself as a matchmaker will generally lead you to act as one; where thinking of yourself as a teacher will generally lead to an instructional approach.

There is a scene in the movie *Like Water for Chocolate* where a doctor explains the creation of matches. The doctor points out that it only takes a spark to set a match on fire. He then explains that inside of each of us is all we need to "come alive," and all we are waiting for is for someone to strike the match. That also seems like an appropriate role for a catechist/matchmaker, one who sets people's hearts aflame.

This idea of setting hearts on fire fits perfectly with what we know about today's learner. From the Gallup research on engaged parishes we know that people today need to be engaged before they will commit to either believing or belonging. We can't assume that those who come to us have been formed in the faith or have had their hearts "engaged." We must, then, keep this in mind with any and all AFF opportunities — especially for those situations when we are dealing with parents in sacramental preparation situations — that we need to find ways to first grab people's attention before trying to teach them or get them to make a commitment to the church.

This is not a new concept. Following the Second Vatican Council, theologian Karl Rahner, made this prediction: "The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic' or one who has 'experienced' something, or he will cease to be anything at all."





## INTENDED OUTCOMES

One of my favorite lines from the Talmud is this: “Any road is the right road when you don’t know where you are going.” In order to offer effective AFF, the starting point is not method but intention: what are we trying to accomplish in each session. Everything that we do during the sessions will be determined by that intended outcome. Intended outcome thus determines the methods we use. Intended outcome is another way of saying that we need goals and objectives for each learning session and each program. Here’s the order to follow when planning effective AFF:

- \* Know the desired outcome for the event.
- \* Plan the experience so that the desired outcomes are accomplished.
- \* Determine appropriate methodologies to accomplish desired outcomes.

Remember also that education and organized faith formation activities are, by nature, transformational. Whether we are teaching math or history, or religion, the goal isn’t to simply provide people with information. The teacher or catechist always wants people to understand the topic, to see it through their eyes, so that they will come to understand the ideas and concepts in a new way. In faith formation, we not only want people to believe what the church teaches, we also want them to live as disciples of Jesus. So when we start to think about intended outcomes we need to include the question of how people will be “transformed” by the activity or event; what is it trying to accomplish?

In addition to knowing the intended outcome for a formation session, the catechetical leader also needs to scope out what will take place throughout the session. Remember that people’s attention spans have now shrunk to a little more than 2 minutes, but that applies only to when they are being talked at or having something done to them. The length of attention span is unlimited when people are actively engaged in the faith formation process. So plan out a session where people

are actively involved for more time than they are listening passively.

Planning the faith formation session involves several steps.

- \* What are the intended outcomes of the course/session?
- \* What are the content/skills/learning/formation experiences desired from this session?
- \* What methodologies will be used to achieve learning outcomes?

A carefully planned formation session doesn’t mean that every minute or word is scripted. There has to be room for spontaneity, for people to share their stories or talk about their faith experiences. But a well-prepared catechist will know what she wants to accomplish, will have objectives that she hopes to accomplish in that session, and will know what methods she should use to accomplish these objectives and achieve the intended outcomes.

## Choosing a method

Now we are ready to consider which methodologies will work best in various situations.

Catechetical methodologies are discussed in Chapter 7 of the *National Directory for Catechesis*, which offers guidance on methodologies to use with adults. “Whatever method is chosen for adult catechesis includes a serious study of Christian doctrine integrated with formation in Christian living . . . enables the Christian to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel” (48A). When planning for AFF we need to:

- \* Identify and address the needs of the adult learners.
- \* Design a catechetical plan to meet objectives that reflect appropriate faith development.
- \* Choose “effective methods” and use a variety of forms.
- \* Be aware of the experiences and knowledge of adults.

As much as possible, adults themselves should be involved in the catechetical process “so they can teach and learn from each other.”

No one methodology is recommended by the church. We are encouraged to use diverse methods as needed, depending on the situation of the people to be catechized and the content of faith to be transmitted. Do not read “content of the faith” here strictly from an intellectual knowledge perspective. Sometimes this knowledge will come from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sometimes it will come from an experience of prayer or worship, sometimes it will come from a shared faith experience, sometimes it will come from considering and learning how to make a good moral decision. When people ask, “teach us to pray,” they don’t want a course on prayer. Rather, they want to be taught how to pray. A very effective way to teach people to pray is to pray with them. Here’s a method David Lara of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles RE office shared, regarding teaching people to pray:

1. You pray, have them watch and listen.
2. You pray, have them join in with you and help.
3. They pray, you join in and help.
4. They pray, you watch and listen.

The only limitations that are put on the use of any method is that they must do the following:

- \* Be faithful to God’s Revelation.
- \* Respect the disciple’s personal liberty.
- \* Promote the active participation of the catechized.

The *NDC* names a number of specific methods that can be used in catechesis. Remember that these are suggestions, not recommendations or requirements. In addition, remember that your options are not limited to this list. If you find another method that works for you and helps you accomplish your intended outcomes, use it. Here are the methods mentioned in the *NDC*:

- \* Instruction — inductive and deductive
- \* Human experience
- \* Learning to be a disciple
- \* Parish life
- \* Christian witness of parishioners, family, catechists
- \* Learning by heart (memorization)
- \* Active participation
- \* Mass media

As you can see, only one of these methods is concerned with direct instruction. All of the rest of them provide guided or unguided learning opportunities. The key to making each of these methods effective is a catechist who is prepared to help the learner draw meaning from the varied experiences.

There are several specific methods that are often used during direct instruction. These are as follows:

- \* Lecture

- \* Socratic method
- \* Video-assisted
- \* Group work and discussion
- \* Flipped classroom
- \* Hands-on
- \* Problem solving

Each of these is an effective way of engaging people in the learning or faith formation process. Lectures are ways to present complex topics in understandable ways. Remember that people remember only a small amount of what they hear in a lecture versus what they learn when they are engaged “hands-on” in the learning process.

The Socratic approach uses questions to help people reason to a better understanding. Video can be used to replace a live presenter, but it can also open up all kinds of avenues for reflection and discussion, as is done in *Echoes 3.0*. For example, using a scene from a non-religious movie can lead to great religious insights and discussions. Small group discussion and work allows people to take responsibility for their own learning and growth in faith. In the flipped classroom the lesson is taught away from the class setting and class time is used to discuss and practice what has been studied. Problem solving is especially effective when considering moral issues or making decisions.

As you can see, there are many methodologies that can be used in faith formation sessions. Again, the question isn’t what method should I use (or will work best for adults), but what am I trying to accomplish. So, if I want people to have a clear understanding of how the Bible was written, I might use a lecture, a video, and a hands-on search of the Bible. If I want people to grow in empathy and compassion, I would provide opportunities for people to work in soup kitchens or building a Habit for Humanity house — having had a discussion prior to the activity to help people prepare for the event, and then following it up with a small group discussion on what was experienced and what it meant. If I want parents to pray with their children, I would teach them how to pray and then have them practice teaching someone how to pray. Know what you want to accomplish and then use the most appropriate methods you have at hand to accomplish your goals.

There is only one way to know whether your efforts are effective and that is to evaluate everything you do. Ask people what they’ve learned or experienced during an event. Ask them to tell you in their own words what they’ve learned. Look at what they can do. If you have been teaching them to pray, do they feel comfortable praying on their own and are they praying on their own? That’s how you will know whether you have accomplished your intended outcomes with the methods you have chosen to use. **I**

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# What Parables Can Teach the Synod Fathers and the Church Today

Matt Halbach



Many are anticipating the upcoming Ordinary Synod on the Family, which will be held October 4<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> in Rome. It will be the responsibility of this Synod to draft a pastoral plan with regards to family and married life and the many and varied issues therein.

As part of this plan, the Synod fathers will recommend to the pope a pastoral/catechetical approach to gay marriage and Communion for the divorced and remarried.

Hopefully, the Synod fathers will have learned from the controversy that took place during the 2014 Synod, recognizing that there is much more going on below the surface of the debate over the rightness or wrongness of gay marriage or Communion to the divorced and remarried. What lies beneath is the difficult and fundamental task of interpreting the gospel message for today's world, and in light of Pope Francis' ongoing campaign for a church that demonstrates radical love, mercy, and tenderness toward all. Specifically, how the Synod responds to the issues of gay marriage and Communion to the divorced and remarried will either legitimize the church of mercy that Francis is building or bulldoze it to the ground.

The stakes couldn't be higher given that many believers and non-believers alike view Francis as an authentic example of gospel living, of good *human be-ing and doing*, and the fact that the church is channeling so many resources and so much energy toward bringing home "fallen away" Catholics (re: new evangelization). The Synod fathers face the formidable challenge of actualizing the language and logic of the kingdom of God in this "powder keg" climate. Only the light of Christ will keep the whole thing from exploding.

Nowhere is the language and logic of the kingdom of God so apparent, so naked, so "in your face" than in the parables. Parables take us out of our comfort zone and transport us to the fringes of reality — the threshold between our world and the kingdom of God — where the difference between our thoughts and our ways and those of God (Is 55:8) is mournfully clear. In the liminal space which parables create, the shepherd leaves the 99 to go find the one lost sheep; justice and mercy kiss and friend and foe are indistinguishable; loss becomes gain and death becomes life; and our mouths are left agape.

The road ahead for this year's Synod will be determined by interpretations of the word of God, which includes a constellation of parables whose only "North Star" is the call to love more, give more, embrace more, be more. The parables have much to teach the Synod fathers and the church today. As Jesus said, "whoever has ears, let them hear" (Mk 4:9).

## THE PARABOLIC JESUS

Jesus spent much of his public ministry speaking about the kingdom of God in the language of parables. The Gospel of Matthew notes that "Jesus . . . did not say anything to them [about the kingdom] without using a parable" (Mt 13:34). A parable is a mode of speech that is deceptively simple and in many cases very subversive (cf. "the mustard seed").

Some parables are apocalyptic in character. Here, the judgment of God is the focus (e.g., Mt 21:33-44; Mt 25:31-36; Lk 16:19-31). I consider this to be a special category of parable, used to point beyond our current situation to the end times and, more importantly, to the final judgment of God. The whole of scripture attests to the truth that judgment is God's domain alone, not ours. Therefore, we should use caution when seeking to appropriate the logic of these parables for the work of building up the kingdom. Generally speaking, however, parables explain the unfamiliar by using a familiar referent. For instance, Jesus often compares the kingdom of God to domestic and ordinary things and events (e.g., a net (Mt 13:47), a woman baking bread (Lk 13:20-21), a man knocking on a neighbor's door (Lk 11:5-8), or a roadside mugging (Lk 10:29-37)).

Parables were also used as a way of voicing one's displeasure towards unjust political and social structures. To this end, one could say that parables contain a *prophetic* quality. Specifically, parables illustrated and condemned the apathetic, and sometimes irreligious, behavior of the aristocracy toward classes, cultures, and individuals perceived to be "lower" (Lk 10:29-37) in stature; and, thus, being of less regard.

Parables are also examples of social education. Parables depict the values, attitudes, and actions of the kingdom of God as the ideals to be lived. Thus, they not only challenge current social and religious mores (cf. Mt 20:1-16; Lk 15:11-32; Mt 18:12), they also call people and societies into a new way of thinking and living. *Ultimately, parables aim at individual and social transformation*; and change is never easy and hardly ever welcomed, especially by those who stand to lose the most from a change in the status quo. Because change can be so unwell-

comed, one could make the argument that Jesus' frequent use of parable already destined him for the cross long before the events of Holy Week.

### THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Everyone knows the parable of the mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32). Many have interpreted its message to mean, "a little faith will go a long way." But did you know that the mustard seed Jesus referred to, when planted, actually grows into a weed — one so prolific and hardy that farmers could do little to eradicate it? Stranger yet, Jesus' parable draws upon the image of the tall and lush Lebanon Cedar in Ezekiel 17:22-24, but then replaces that image with the image of mustard weed, which he describes as a great place for birds to build their nests (Mk 4:32). A little background, here, would help to make sense of this transposition.

Ezekiel uses the image of the cedar to describe the future Israel and its Temple as a place of refuge for all peoples, which are symbolized by the "birds of every kind" in need of a place to nest. People hearing this prophesy would have liked Ezekiel's image. But then, in an instant, Ezekiel shocks the hearer, saying that God will "...bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish..." Jesus' parable takes advantage of Ezekiel's paradoxical images, and offers the mustard seed as proof of prophesy-fulfillment. The parable of the mustard seed drives home the point that the kingdom of God has little concern for conventionalism. Moreover, the parable foretells that, in Jesus, something new is about to happen which, having the relentlessness of the mustard weed, will eventually grow and spread and will not be stopped.

In Jesus' parable of the mustard seed, the kingdom which God plants, symbolized by the seed, is provocative and new; it is menacing to some and to others it is a welcomed sight. When read in the context of Mk 4:26-29, which speaks to "the seed that grows by itself," those who hear the parable of the mustard seed are left with the impression that there is nothing they can do to obfuscate the kingdom's growth: Either get on board or get out of the way! Again, for some, this is good news; for others it is an ominous prophesy which points towards unexpected and unwanted future change.

### THE ORDINARY SYNOD: DISCIPLES STILL SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND JESUS' PARABLES

Mark's gospel makes the point that Jesus' parables were difficult to understand, even by those in his own inner circle (Mk 4:13). We can presume that this difficulty is due to the fact that Jesus presents the new attitudes and actions of the kingdom so matter-of-factly. Something akin to saying: "Duh! Of course you shepherds should leave the 99 and go after the one. What other option is there?" I can only imagine the look on the faces of those who heard the parable of the Lost Sheep (Mt 18:12-14). And I can imagine them saying, much like Jesus' own family and friends did, "this man is out of his mind!" The logic of the kingdom, which Jesus presents as commonplace in the parables, seems so illogical and foreign to us. One can safely presume that during the upcoming Synod, the church fathers will struggle to understand and apply the logic of the kingdom, especially as it concerns the development of a pastoral and catechetical approach to the issues of gay marriage and Communion to the divorced and remarried.

### DOCTRINE AND PARABLE

Because so much has been said about parable, it should be noted that a synod tends to be concerned with the development and application of church doctrine, and doctrine is not the same thing as parable. Doctrine is the church's interpretation of divine revelation, supported by philosophy, theology, and the charism of the Spirit. It is always *constructive* in the sense that it builds upon the word of God. Doctrine, in a sense, tries to fill in the "gaps" which parables leave behind. For example, "The Good Samaritan" is a complex parable which challenged Jewish social and religious stigmas concerning the true nature of Israel's "neighbors," the Samaritans. Yet, the parable does not explicitly teach anything about the nature of love and mercy or how to apply these within a Christian context. It is the work of doctrine to fill in these holes, which it does by connecting the parable's wisdom to the divine command to "love one's neighbor," and based on selected theological and philosophical notions of "love" found in Scripture and tradition, suggests ways in which one ought to love as a disciple of Christ.

On the other hand, parables tend to be *deconstructive*; that is, as God's word, they break in on our lives and disrupt our

## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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most basic beliefs about ourselves and others, especially God. Parables force the hearer to take a hard look at him or herself. They often pack a punch that is comparable to Dr. Phil's line, "Now how does that make you feel?" or that wonderful line from *Good Will Hunting*, "How do you like those apples?" Thus, while doctrine is primarily an appeal to the intellect, parable is more of an appeal to the person's heart. And the heart, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

. . . is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant. (2563)



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Because parables speak to the heart, they are an excellent vehicle for holding in tension things, realities, that our minds tend to separate, like matter and spirit, sin and grace, death and resurrection, justice and mercy, love and hate (i.e., “love the sinner, hate the sin”), neighbor and enemy, secular and sacred.

Yet, while doctrine is a language distinct from parable, the two are not disconnected. In fact, the language of doctrine flows from God’s word. As the Second Vatican Council put it, the study of Scripture is the soul of theology (*Dei Verbum*, 24). The spirit of parable is evident in church doctrine wherever there is a radical call to love outside the limits of one’s own imagination, prejudices, and preferences — whenever we are prompted to try to do the impossible for the sake of someone else. Parables challenge us to love beyond our current strength, capacity, and desire. This is why it is typically the case with parables that the character who does what the audience would deem as reasonable or expected is usually doing the wrong thing and is often punished for it. The character who is proven right in the end is the one who does the unexpected, the unnecessary — the one who goes beyond the boundaries of convention for the sake of the other.

### THE CHALLENGE

The challenge of the parable is all around us today, and it has found an icon in Pope Francis, for whom the call to greater love, mercy, and generosity has been the hallmark of his pontificate. To respond to this challenge, we need only look at the person next to us and ask ourselves the questions Francis asks himself: Who am I to judge? And how far would I go to love my neighbor? Pope Francis eloquently describes the right response to the parable’s challenge in the *Joy of the Gospel*, where he states that we need to be willing to “remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other” (JG no. 169, cf. no. 92). That “sacred ground” is the person next to us; and this person might be gay or might be divorced and remarried and desiring Eucharist. The question is: How will

we respond to them? Will we welcome them or turn them away? Will we give to them or withhold? Will we do the “right” thing, or are we prepared to do the unexpected, to go the extra mile?

You might think these questions are overly simplistic for such complex issues. But that is the wisdom and the challenge of the parable, which confronts us with the logic of the kingdom — a logic which demands that your “yes” mean “yes,” not “yes, but” or “yes, if only” or “yes, for now.” What does an unqualified “yes” look like? I will give you three examples. First, *Mary’s yes to God*. Though she had every right to qualify her response, she offers herself as the handmaid of the Lord and freely embraces the terrifying and fantastic possibilities announced by the angel. Second, *the profound silence of the crucified Christ* bespeaks a “yes” that is totally unconditional. There neither has been, nor will there ever be, a greater love than this. Third, and finally, *the little child* whom Jesus repeatedly offers to his disciples as a model citizen of the kingdom of God (Mk 10:14-16; Mt 19:14; Lk 18:17). Besides their innate dependence, little children have the capacity for grand imagination; their belief in what they imagine motivates them to behave and act in ways that help to make their dreams more of a reality, no matter how far flung they are. And this brings me back to parables. Parables are the dreams of God. They represent how God wished the world to be: that good was preserved from evil, that all people respected and loved each other as friends, and that great sacrifice and generosity were commonplace values.

May the logic of the kingdom be on the mind, heart, and lips of the Synod fathers as they gather this fall; catechists as they share God’s dreams with others; and on every person who views themselves as “Catholic.” ■

*Matt Halbach, PhD, is the Director of the St. Joseph Educational Center in West Des Moines, Iowa. For more information, visit [sjeciowa.org](http://sjeciowa.org).*



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# Electing New NCCL Officers

It has been almost three years since the last time that NCCL gathered to elect the next slate of officers to work with the rest of the Board in guiding the organization.

At our next NCCL Annual Conference and Exposition, most of the members present will be voting for the new slate of officers. Their terms will begin at the end of the Annual Conference in 2015 and continue until the end of the Annual Conference in 2018. *See the end of this article for information on absentee and proxy ballots.*

As a member-driven organization, your participation in this election is necessary to ensure that the values and beliefs you hold regarding the mission of NCCL be vested in the slate of officers you feel can bring these principles and ideals of the catechetical leadership ministry to fruition. To not participate and exercise your right to vote is to weaken the responsibility that has been accorded every Professional and General member of NCCL.

## VOTING CRITERIA

- ✦ Each (Arch)Diocesan/Eparchial Institutional Member Office may cast one institutional vote. Typically, the diocesan director of catechesis casts this vote, though s/he may assign the vote to someone else.
- ✦ Each Professional or General Member may cast one individual vote.
- ✦ Associate Members do not have voting rights.

## ELECTION PROCESS

✦ On May 18, the opening day of the Conference, there will be an NCCL Business Meeting beginning at 11:15 am. Presentations by the two slates of officers will take place from approximately 11:45 am–12:45 pm and include time for questions. All conference attendees are encouraged to attend in order to learn more about the slates.

✦ Any questions pertaining to membership category or voting status will be addressed by the Membership Committee as determined by the NCCL Bylaws. If you believe there is an error in your membership type, please contact Joanie McKeown, NCCL Treasurer, (612) 859-2475 or [jmcknccl@email.com](mailto:jmcknccl@email.com) as soon as possible so that errors can be resolved prior to the conference.

✦ In order for a slate to be elected, the slate must win a simple majority of *both* the individual votes cast and the institutional votes cast, including absentee ballots of both types. Individual and Institutional ballots may be picked up by voting members

at registration. Members will receive three color-coded ballots, marked *First Ballot*, *Second Ballot*, and *Third Ballot*.

✦ *First Ballot* voting will take place following the slate presentations on Monday, May 18, from 1:45 pm until 6:00 pm and again on Tuesday morning, May 19, from 8:00 am to 9:15 am.

✦ If neither slate carries a majority of *both* the individual vote and the institutional vote, then a *Second Ballot* is required. This announcement will be made at the end of the Tuesday morning keynote session. Actual voting will be preceded by a 30 minute Q & A with the two slates from 5:30 pm to 6:00 pm on Tuesday, May 19. *Second* Ballots will be accepted on Tuesday from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm and again Wednesday morning, May 20 from 7:30 am to 9:15 am. Absentee ballots will not be counted in the second round of balloting.

✦ If a *Third Ballot* is required because neither slate carries a majority of *both* the individual vote and the institutional vote, an announcement will be made at the end of the Wednesday morning keynote session, May 20. *Third* Ballots will be accepted immediately following the Awards luncheon until 5:30 pm and again Thursday morning, May 21, from 7:30 am to 9:30 am. Absentee ballots will not be counted in the third round of balloting. If neither slate carries a majority of *both* the individual vote and the institutional vote in the *Third Ballot*, the percentage of individual votes and percentage of institutional votes that a slate receives will be added together. The slate with the higher total percentage is elected. The installation of officers will be conducted within the closing prayer and commissioning service at 12:15 pm on Thursday, May 21.

## ABSENTEE VOTING

According to Appendix I of the NCCL Governance Policies:

Concerning Institutional and Individual votes, absentee ballots must be requested from the National Office no less than 21 business days before the opening of the Annual Conference. Absentee ballots will be provided, if requested, to any members eligible to vote. The Executive Director of NCCL must be in receipt of all absentee ballots at least ten business days before the opening of the Annual Conference.

Therefore, the last day to request an absentee ballot is **Thursday, April 16, 2015**. Ballots must be received by the close of business on **Friday, May 1, 2015**, to be counted.

## PROXY VOTING

According to Appendix I of the NCCL Governance Policies, the proxy vote is only accorded to persons casting the *Institutional* vote.

Concerning *Institutional* votes: Each member Arch/Diocese is entitled to cast a single institutional vote for NCCL Officers. This vote is ordinarily cast by the director of the Arch/Diocesan Catechetical Office. For whatever reason, if the Arch/Diocesan Director is unable to cast the Arch/Diocesan Institutional vote, s/he may designate another voting member of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership to cast the Institutional vote by proxy. The designated proxy must be a member of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership who is eligible to vote in her/his own right.

The Arch/Diocesan Director in question shall send signed written notification to the NCCL Executive Director if s/he will not be able to cast the Institutional Vote for Officers and shall designate a proxy for the purposes of the Institutional vote. The Executive Director shall confirm in writing receipt of the proxy designation and the eligibility of the proxy designate and make the necessary arrangements for authorization of the designated proxy to cast the Institutional proxy vote at the Annual Conference.

The Executive Director of NCCL must be in receipt of all proxy designations at least ten business days before the opening of the Annual Conference. Therefore, all proxy designations deemed eligible to cast the Institutional vote must be

received no later than the close of business on **Friday, May 1, 2015**.

Individual votes must be cast in person or by absentee ballot. They do not enjoy the benefit of proxy.

Ineligible for service as a proxy are board members, members of slates running for office, and members of the Leadership Discernment Committee.

If you have any questions regarding membership or voting, please contact Joanie McKeown, NCCL Treasurer, (612) 859-2475 or [jmckncl@email.com](mailto:jmckncl@email.com).

## MEMBERSHIP TYPES

Professional and General members of NCCL may vote. These include: all diocesan catechetical leaders paying diocesan/institutional dues, all parish catechetical leaders, professors in the catechetical/theological fields, authors of catechetical materials, and members of the publishing/corporate communities who bear catechetical responsibilities.

Associate members may not vote. Associate members include: support staff (in parishes, dioceses, universities, and the publishing/corporate communities) who do not have catechetical responsibilities.

# NCCL Officer Slates

## SLATE: KEN OGOREK AND COLLEAGUES

Over half of our diocesan directors are at least 60 years old, with more than 10 percent having celebrated their 70<sup>th</sup> birthday (see *Joyfully Communicating the Living Mystery* at [icl.nd.edu](http://icl.nd.edu)). Presuming similar numbers among diocesan staff and, to a lesser but significant degree, parish catechetical leaders, several of our coworkers in the vineyard will be retiring from full-time ministry within the next few years.

Team Affirmative is ready to address this reality by working to accomplish three priorities if elected:

First, as catechetical leaders reach the end of their careers they need to hear from NCCL that they are valued and prayerfully supported in the transition to life's next chapter. Team Affirmative will pursue ways for NCCL to recognize and affirm our retiring members.

We know quite a bit about our younger catechetical leaders thanks in part to the study *A Crucial Key* (booklet available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)). As current NCCL members retire, it will be important that we make clear to the 20- and 30-somethings in our chanceries and parish catechetical offices: We appreciate you, we are open to learn from you, and as a professional

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## SLATE: LORRAINE S. DELUCA AND COLLEAGUES

“There are different gifts, but the same Spirit...” (1 Cor 12:4). The strength of who we are as NCCL is our diversity: diocesan directors, diocesan staff, parish catechetical leaders, academics, publishers. As members of NCCL, we minister using different languages within diverse cultures, in urban and rural areas, in large and small dioceses, parishes, universities, and publishing companies. Even though in our ministry we have the same goal of sharing the joy of the gospel, at times our needs differ. Within that challenge lies great opportunity.

We believe that our strength, as a slate, lies in the reality that we come from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and parts of our country — from the north, south, east, and middle of our country. With that diversity we come together to be members of the Board of Directors, and together with the other members of the NCCL Board, hope to serve you and the ministry of catechesis in our church with certain commonalities. As a member-driven organization, we bring to the table our collaboration, committed service, and the passion to use the gifts and talents we have to serve with you, the members of NCCL.

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organization we have something to offer you. In some cases this will mean doing a better job of communicating who we are, what we do, and how we do it. In other cases — and this is challenging — NCCL might need to adjust how we do things and even change some of the things that we do. If elected, Team Affirmative will use *A Crucial Key* and additional resources to help replenish our retirement-impacted membership ranks with newer catechetical leaders, who have a choice whether to join our organization — or not.

Our third and final priority concerns the role of executive director. To be NCCL's executive director is a daunting task. Because the NCCL board — in particular our officers — supervises the executive director, it would be a disservice to this professional not to help keep the director focused on the priorities above, especially the second one. Although we all have a role to play in recruiting members, the executive director's role in growing an organization is irreplaceable when it's kept on the front burner among many possible activities. If you vote for Team Affirmative, we will help our executive director serve the NCCL membership by making new-member-acquiring activity — including members of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds — a priority in goal-setting and supervision, especially affirmation. (Again, this might mean some challenging decisions between several possible activities. But in order to be a member-driven organization, and in light of the demographic crossroads that has arrived — It's here! We need to ensure a steady stream of new members over the next several years.)

If this crossroads description resonates with you, then Team Affirmative asks for your vote in return for a pledge to focus on these three areas in the three years ahead. We'll need your help in fleshing out details on how we address these priorities; although we have our own ideas to start with, we know that fruitful collaboration among NCCL members is the best way to determine specific courses of action by God's grace.

As a slate of officer candidates we have three traits that you'll notice in the bios below:

Each of us has developed an extensive network of relationships throughout our nation, and in some cases beyond! In the words of our vice-presidential candidate Libia Pérez-Howard, "Being part of NCCL . . . has helped me to form ministerial connections and some personal relationships all over the country."

We have significant longevity in the field of catechetical leadership, yet a fresh perspective on the joys and challenges that can accompany leadership roles in a professional organization.

Team Affirmative is upbeat, energetic, positive, hopeful or — in a word — affirmative!

Libia, Ellie, Jayne, and I would be honored to serve you as NCCL officers for the next three years. May God bless

*continued on page 16*

- + We believe in collaboration. In our catechetical roles in our dioceses and parishes, we encourage collaboration and view it as essential in working with others in ministry. We have also experienced collaboration with each other as we have served together on the Board, Representative Council, and many of the committees of NCCL. Therefore, we envision our roles as potential members of the Board of Directors to include collaboration and integration with the total membership, the Executive Director, and the Representative Council.
- + We believe in committed service to the conference and members of NCCL. Whenever called upon, we have responded to the invitation to serve. In some instances it has been as officers, board members, committee chairs and co-chairs, and also as members of committees trying to move the work and mission of the organization forward. Thus we offer ourselves as candidates to be of service.
- + We passionately believe in using our gifts and talents for the organization and in calling them forth from others for the benefit of all the members of NCCL as well as advancing the ministry of evangelizing catechesis in our time. Our organization is only as strong as the commitment of the members to the work of NCCL, and as a member-driven organization we want to encourage more ownership among our members.

## OUR VISION FOR NCCL OF THE FUTURE

As we look to the future, there are two areas where we believe NCCL needs to take the lead: the areas of evangelizing catechesis and technology in catechesis. In both of these areas NCCL has to be on the cutting edge so that it can model for its members how to do catechesis through the lens of evangelization and how to better use technology in their ministerial settings. This would call for the NCCL committees to take on the task of visioning how best to incorporate both of these aspects into their committee work.

## GOALS FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Together as a slate we have 131 years of ministry in catechesis and 94 years of membership in NCCL and with that experience we have set the following goals for NCCL:

- + We would like to see NCCL acknowledged as the voice for catechetical ministry in the country. To achieve this, many things would have to take place. A greater number of those who are members in name would have to recognize that they are actually members of NCCL and need to take an active role in the organization. It has amazed us to discover that many members of diocesan staffs do not see themselves as members of NCCL; others do not know what the diocesan staff forum is; and some do not know that we have an annual national conference. We need to work on sharing

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you today and always as you consistently answer his call — through our holy, Catholic Church — to lead by serving in the beautiful, prophetic ministry of catechesis!

## KEN OGOREK FOR PRESIDENT



I serve on Archbishop Tobin's staff as Director of Catechesis in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Because catechesis helps our relationship with Jesus by making clearer and clearer who Jesus is and how much he loves us, our catechetical ministry has been very important to me for many years.

Before becoming director in Indianapolis about eight years ago, I served as an assistant director for the Diocese of Pittsburgh for ten years. I've been involved with catechesis long enough to know many baby boomers, which is why priority one above is so important to me. On the Generation X and Millennial side of the equation, I network informally with over 70 diocesan catechetical leaders representing about 50 dioceses throughout the United States. While we're not cookie-cutter images of each other, most of these relatively young adults share a common vision of catechesis. And most aren't currently active in NCCL; it's these leaders and others — especially in parishes — that NCCL needs to engage in the next few years. My combination of longevity in NCCL and connectedness to many rising catechetical leaders makes me well-suited to build bridges, by God's grace, between our organization and those whom we'd like to see be active members (priority two above).

Finally, in addition to work in catechetical leadership, as a young adult I spent time learning fundraising and public relations as well as sales. As an author, speaker, and consultant, I still find that marketing ability to be very helpful. Priority three above will be enhanced in its pursuit by a leader with a track record of moving prospective donors, members, customers, etc. into the category of being active participants; I offer that track record in service of our organization.

The most important words to describe me are husband and dad. My bride of over 20 years and I have three children under the age of 20. My wife tells me I'm not subtle, so to make clear what Team Affirmative with me as president will focus on with your vote, we'll:

Help keep NCCL focused on honoring outgoing members and securing new memberships, with our executive director communicating to up-and-coming leaders that NCCL is a great resource;

Communicate enthusiastically both within and outside of NCCL the beauty and profound importance of our catechetical ministry — usually with smiles on our faces; and

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who we are with these individuals and inviting them to greater participation.

- + We need to increase the name recognition of NCCL among PCLs. In the past year, NCCL has initiated projects to do this, but more needs to be done by building upon this. Until PCLs know the existence, purpose, and value of NCCL, we cannot expect them to consider membership. On the regional and province level, publicity and education need to be done. NCCL is a gift and a treasure to those working in the catechetical ministry.

Over the years NCCL has served the church in the United States by being both reactive and proactive in the arena of catechetical ministry. It has nurtured and sustained growth on the national, regional, and parish levels. NCCL brings together the best minds and hearts of those involved in catechetical ministry to vision, construct, guide, plan, and debate the present and future direction of catechetical ministry. We feel blessed to have been allowed to be a part of this dynamic. At the same time, it has also allowed us to network with our peers, which we have found invaluable both professionally and personally. In short, we believe that the church, catechetical ministry, and all of us are much better because of the existence of NCCL. We ask you to consider what we would bring NCCL as officers of the Board of Directors, as together with you we will work to make NCCL *the* voice of evangelizing catechesis.

## LORRAINE S. DELUCA, EDD, FOR PRESIDENT



I was born and raised in Norwalk, Connecticut, and was a life-long resident there until moving to Beaumont, Texas, in 1997 to become the Diocesan Director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis. Previously, I ministered as a PCL for 16 years in various parishes in the Diocese of

Bridgeport, Connecticut, in catechesis for adults, children, and the RCIA. I received a Master of Arts in Adult Religious Education from Fordham University, Bronx, New York (1981), and a Doctor of Education in Religion and Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York (1994). In 2004, I received a BA in Spanish from Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where I have also taught philosophy and ethics.

I have served NCCL as:

- + Member of the Annual Conference Planning Committee, 2004-2005
- + National Chairperson of the Annual Conference Planning Committee, 2006
- + Treasurer of the Board of Directors of NCCL, 2006-2009

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Pray for you and with you in a spirit of perseverance that God has even greater works in mind for NCCL; that we can take a good thing and make it better by reading the signs of the times and focusing on the three priorities articulated by Team Affirmative.

I ask for your vote in our upcoming NCCL election. May God bless you abundantly, today and always!

## LIBIA PÁEZ-HOWARD FOR VICE PRESIDENT



Greetings and peace to you all! ¡Un saludo afectuoso y la paz de nuestro Señor Jesús para todos ustedes!

I write these words with a great sense of responsibility and joy. Thirty-three years ago, God called me into a “member-driven community” to serve as a catechetical minister. Today, God is calling me to serve through NCCL, a member-driven organization.

Ministry is like a dance; in dancing with others, I can exercise my talents better, learn new steps from them and they from me. I come from a community where everyone is welcome to the parties: the old, young, children, and babies. In ministry we need to invite everyone, invite them always and be willing to provide the environment where all will develop their God-given talents.

I am excited, deeply humbled, and honored to be part of Team Affirmative. My slate-mates bring great expertise and wisdom; I am very happy to add my talents and experience so we, if elected, can serve NCCL members to the best of our leadership capacities.

I am married, have three young adult children, and come from a large family in Venezuela. I have learned to work in partnership, stand up for what I believe, and ensure the well-being of others without neglecting self-care. I trust God, knowing that everything I was given is for the benefit of the community. I appreciate the wisdom of my elders and the vitality and capacity for innovation of the youth. We are all needed to bring the church to where God wants it to be.

In the United States (for 28 years), I have worked with and served people from different parts of the country and world. A MDiv from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago has better equipped me to serve the community. Being a native Spanish speaker and fluent in English has allowed me to serve a wider range of people. I have been a catechist, a youth minister, and parish coordinator of religious education both in Venezuela and in the U.S.

Currently, through the Office for Catechesis and Youth Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago, I serve as the Vicariate

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- + Co-chair for the Adult Faith Formation Committee, 2009-2012
- + Member of the Adult Faith Formation Committee, 2012-present
- + Member of the Evangelization Committee, 2014-present
- + Member of the Representative Council, for Galveston-Houston and San Antonio provinces, 2014-present

Besides my service to the organization, the three gifts I bring to NCCL are my organizational skills, relationship skills, and my imagination. I am a highly organized person and this is reflected in my thinking and ability to accomplish my goals, while at the same I have a high degree of imagination which allows me to think outside of the box — to imagine and see other possibilities and new ways of accomplishing goals. I am also able to understand the perspectives of others and engage their ideas and suggestions. I am ready to state my opinions while also being open to changing my thinking after listening to others. Throughout my ministry, I have led through building relationships with those to whom I minister and with whom I minister. Other gifts I possess are creativity, collaboration, the ability to move ideas forward into fruition, and a willingness to take well-founded risks to move in new directions.

Ministering in a smaller, rural, multicultural diocese challenges me to be innovative and sometimes more unstructured in programming for the full-time, part-time, and volunteer catechetical leaders of our diocese. Likewise, we must constantly think of the differences that culture and language will have upon the presentation of our programs. This has also taught me that my ministry requires an openness and willingness to learn from those to whom I minister, and that my role is to minister to all the people of the diocese. Twenty-five percent of the parishes in the Diocese of Beaumont are African-American which requires being conscious of the Black Catholic experience. With the growing number of Hispanics, I recognized the need to learn Spanish so that I could minister to and catechize all, not only the English-speaking of the Diocese. While pursuing my Spanish degree, I learned the language as well as the history and customs of people from Spanish-speaking nations.

## MICHAEL R. WAGNER FOR VICE PRESIDENT



I was born and raised in the Buffalo, New York, area. After college, I returned to Buffalo where I taught religious studies in Buffalo area high schools before becoming a PCL in a rural parish. In 1977, I joined the staff of the Department of Christian Formation in the Diocese of Ogdensburg, New

*continued on page 18*

III Catechetical Coordinator as well as the Coordinator of Leadership Formation in Spanish. My passion is helping others of any cultural and ethnic background and age, to develop their ministerial skills so they can serve better those they are called to serve.

I have been a member of NCCL since 2004, a board member of the Federation of Catechesis with Hispanics since its founding in 2008 (president from 2010-2013), and member of the NCCL Representative Council (2008-2013). I have come to know and understand the purpose of NCCL as the national organization for catechetical leaders, serving catechesis in the present, always with the need for “reading the signs of the times” making sure that there is a vision for the future.

## ELLIE NELSON FOR SECRETARY



Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. I come to you seeking election on Ken Ogorek’s Board of Director’s slate to serve NCCL as Secretary. I have been an active member of NCCL since 2006 and I am presently serving on Rep Council representing the Chicago Province.

I am a Parish Catechetical Leader, ministering as a Director of Religious Education and Adult Formation in a medium-sized parish in Algonquin, Illinois, dedicated to St. Margaret Mary. I have worked in the Diocese of Rockford for 23 years as a Family Life Director, Director of Evangelization, and presently, DRE/AFF.

I bring many different experiences of Evangelization, Catechesis, and Family Life Ministry. I co-authored the Light of the World Evangelization Process (LOTWEM.org), which is a parish-based Kerygma Retreat rich in renewing the sacraments of initiation. I have been all over the United States as a Retreat Master proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ one parish at a time.

Our stories and experiences of God’s love and mercy are so important to share. People are hungry to hear how Jesus has *personally* touched our lives and from that experience we are moved to change, become more like him.

As a young adult, I needed more answers to some of the deeper questions that I had on my heart: primarily, how can I have a *personal relationship* with a person who died 2,000+ years ago? My restless heart journeyed me to the words of our Blessed Mother when she appeared at Medjugorje. Mary’s words pierced my heart in an appeal to listen to her Son and turn to him! I fell in love with Jesus and became His disciple. I continued my journey and pursued a Masters in Pastoral Theology at St. Mary’s of the Woods College. This brought me to authoring a book: *Becoming a Living Sacrifice*; words

*continued on page 19*

York, where I served for 37 years as a staff member, Diocesan Director, and Associate Director. I attended The Catholic University of America, received a BA in American History (1971), then a Masters in Theology (1973). Upon returning to Buffalo, I earned a MA in Religious Studies from Canisius College (1975).

I have served in NCCL as:

- + Member of the Steering Committee of the Diocesan Staff Forum, 2005-2014
- + Member of the Representative Council, for the Diocesan Staff Forum, 2008-2014
- + Chairperson of the Diocesan Staff Forum, 2008-2014
- + Member of the Leadership Discernment Committee, 2008-2014
- + Member of the Marketing Sub-committee, 2010-present
- + Co-chair of the Membership Committee 2014-present
- + Member of the current Annual Conference Planning Committee
- + Co-author of *Knowing Jesus and His Message*, published by NCCL

I also served on NACARE (National Advisory Committee for Adult Religious Education) 1991-1998; Co-secretary 1995-1998. During this time the committee conceived and drafted *Our Hearts were Burning Within Us* for the USCCB.

Three of my gifts that I would like to highlight are found in my top three “signature themes” (Gallop’s *Strengthsfinder*): Connectedness, Maximizer, and Self-Assurance.

I am a bridge-builder (Connectedness). I look to see elements that can bring people of differing ideas and cultures together rather than divide or separate. This strength was helpful in my commitment to increase interaction between the Diocesan Directors and Diocesan Staff Forums.

I also am a Maximizer. I enjoy introducing an idea, or having a project proposed; listening to the discussion; then reflecting and trying to make the original notion better. This is why I am a strong collaborator.

Self-Assurance is the third of my signature themes. I know my strengths, as well as my weaknesses, and have confidence in my abilities and my judgments. If I decide to take on a project or a challenge, I have confidence that I will and can get it done. I believe in NCCL, its goals, and vision. NCCL is a gift and treasure. Somehow for many it continues to be hidden under a bushel basket. I would like to help let its light shine!

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that help us see how the Living Sacrifice of the Mass can move our hearts to conversion.

As a DRE and former fourth grade catechist, I am moved with Pope Francis' words, "On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over, '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'" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 164).

This calling to run for Secretary is another step in my journey of faith, to serve my fellow colleagues in an organization that dedicates themselves to quality catechetical leadership bringing the teaching ministry of Jesus to every Catholic child, youth, and adult. Thank you for your consideration. God bless you.

## JAYNE MONDOY FOR TREASURER



Aloha from the Diocese of Honolulu. Actually, I'm writing this biography aboard a Hawaiian Airlines flight, returning to Honolulu following a conference on the U.S. mainland. In my nine years as diocesan director of religious education for a six-island diocese (Kauai, Oahu, Maui, Molokai, Lanai, Hawaii), I'm on airplanes quite often. Why not, then, use air travel as a metaphor for sharing my catechetical leadership experience with you? Welcome aboard!

Consider the passengers from around the world gathered at a boarding gate and you'll begin to grasp life in the Diocese of Honolulu. Our multi-cultural population is among the most diverse in the nation and is reflected in our parish communities. As a catechetical leader, I am immersed in this exciting dynamic that requires continually refining the art of listening, seeking common ground, and finding joy in diversity as together we witness to Jesus.

During taxi and take-off, pilots are in continual communication with the tower, their crew, and pilots in their vicinity. Similarly, multiple end-point communication is an integral part of my ministry. While acknowledging that there is no substitute for person-to-person communication, the Office of Religious Education is committed to actively communicate and instruct via video teleconferencing, distance learning, video production, and social media. In 2013, I was awarded the Diocesan Information Systems Conference award for my use of private Facebook groups for training catechists and in 2014 won a Telly Award for our locally produced video on the Eucharist. Together with electronic finance reporting, database, and events management we are better equipped to provide equal access to high quality catechesis and evangelization across the islands and more effectively (and affordably) collaborate with colleagues from across the nation and around the world.

*continued on page 20*

## MARY FRAN CASSIDY FOR SECRETARY



I live in Delaware, Ohio, with my husband Tom and our three cats. Our son, daughter-in-law, and two grandsons live in San Francisco, California, and another daughter in Dublin, Ohio. One daughter is deceased. I have been Director of Religious Education at St. Brigid of Kildare Parish in Dublin, Ohio, since 1989. Between 1969 and 1989, I taught (primarily) English and music in parochial and public schools in Ohio, and religion in the Catholic schools, grades one through 12, and later language arts in two Ohio technical colleges. I earned my BA in English and Music from Silver Lake College, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and MA in Theology from Ohio Dominican University, Columbus, Ohio.

When I became the parish catechetical leader in 1989, only diocesan directors were allowed to become members of NCCL. However, as an educator, I have always realized the importance of belonging to state and national organizations, and became a member of ODREO (Ohio Directors of Religious Education Organization), NCEA/NPCD, and as soon as allowed, NCCL.

Because of my background in education and my firm belief that "you can't teach what you don't know," I have required all of our catechists to become certified in religious education through the Diocese of Columbus, and as a matter of justice, pay them for their contact hours with the students, based on their years of experience and level of certification.

I bring many years of experience in liturgy, both as a liturgist and a liturgical musician.

I believe that the greatest thing I bring to NCCL is my passion for excellence in religious education.

I have served NCCL as:

- + Member of the Annual Conference Committee, 2007
- + Member of the Membership Committee, 2008-present
- + Member of the Representative Council as PCL for Cincinnati Province, 2008-2014
- + Member of the Annual Conference Committee, 2013

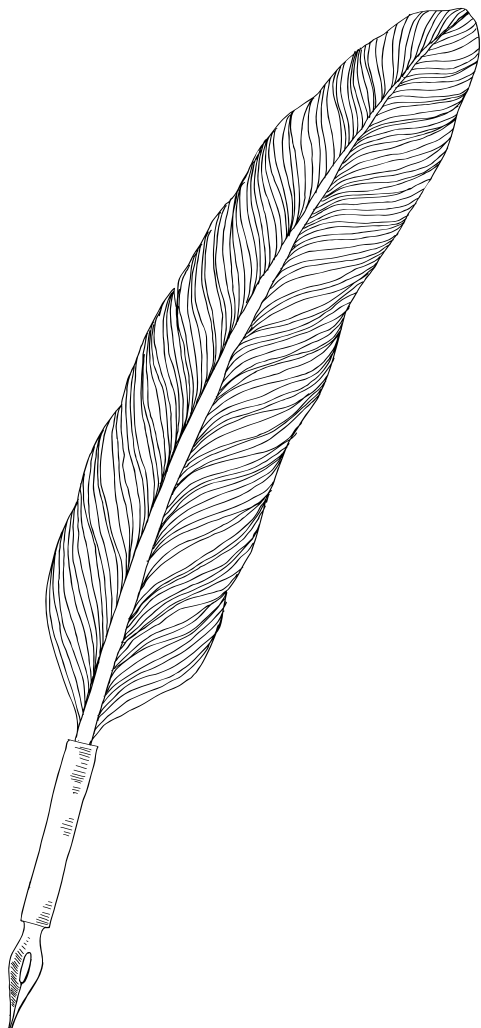
I believe that my greatest strength is my love of God and passion for catechesis for all ages. In addition, other strengths I bring to this slate are my love of language and years of practice writing and speaking. In 2007, The Center for Learning published my *Faith and Belief*, a supplemental textbook for junior high religious education.

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My view at 40,000 feet comes from serving on the Bishop's Administrative Advisory Council (BAAC). Our diocesan offices are organized into four teams, each assigned a team leader. Since 2008, I've served as the Faith Formation team leader, collaborating with my amazing colleagues in the offices of Adult Faith Formation, the Hawaii Catholic Schools, the Hawaii Catholic Herald, Religious Education Safe Environment, Youth and Young Adult Ministry, and Worship. BAAC members provide consultation to the bishop on a wide range of issues and form a communication bridge to and from our team members. It requires continually balancing local issues with the global vision of our bishop.

Friends, I hope this whimsical essay has given you a sense of the leadership skills that I bring to NCCL: a multi-cultural perspective, effective use of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, effective collaboration, and consultation at local and global levels. It would be my honor to apply these skills in service to NCCL.



## MICHELE K. HARRIS FOR TREASURER



The beautiful Eastern Shore of Maryland has been my home for 37 years. I attended Salisbury University and received a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education with a concentration in math, *magna cum laude*. While in college, I began my catechetical journey in our parish religious education program.

The love I had for my faith developed and grew exponentially as my two passions were combined: education and faith!

My desire at graduation was to teach in the parish school which came to fruition in 1984 when I was hired to teach middle school math and religion. While teaching, I began the Loyola Institute for Ministry Extension program, and in 1991 earned a Master's Degree in Religious Education. With the required degree, I was then able to apply for the position of Director of Religious Education at our parish and was hired for that position in 1993. In 2000, I was hired to be the Director of Adult Faith Formation as the parish was able to expand the faith formation department. The responsibilities of coordinating liturgy were added to my ministry in 2009, changing my title to Pastoral Minister. I have just begun serving my 31<sup>st</sup> year of professional catechetical ministry in our parish.

I have served NCCL as:

- + Member of the Annual Conference Planning Committee, 2014
- + Co-Author and editor of *Welcome! Open the Door, Pass through the Gate, Seek the Christ*, 2013
- + Author of *Open the Door of Faith: Being Agents of the New Evangelization*, 2012
- + Member of the NCCL Speakers Bureau, 2008-present
- + Member of the Conference Dream Team, 2007-2008
- + Member of the Bylaws Committee, 2006-2010
- + At-large member of the Board of Directors, 2006-2009
- + Parish Catechetical Leaders Forum Chair, 2003-2006
- + Co-Chair of Recruitment and Retention Committee, 2001-2003
- + NCCL 2000 Refinement Committee, 2000-2001
- + Member of the Representative Council, for Baltimore-Washington province, 1999-2002

I am privileged and honored to be able to share my faith through the ministry of evangelization and catechesis. To the responsibility of treasurer, I have the gift of detail, organization, and a mathematical background. I will bring to NCCL my gift of respect for the diversity that gathers around our tables, my ability to listen and dream as we all strive to seek the horizon of sharing the person and message of Jesus Christ.

# The Synod on the Family – and Religious Educators

Kieran Sawyer, SSND



The year is already half over — the year between the Synod on the Family held in October 2014 and the one scheduled for October 2015. The Synod fathers have asked us, the Catholic faithful, to walk with them toward the next Synod. They tell us that they need our help in finding concrete solutions to the many difficulties that surround and suffocate today's families. They are especially seeking input from the married male and female Catholics who live the daily challenge of creating healthy, loving families.

And they certainly need input from *us*, the faithful who are involved in the ministry of catechesis. We should be deeply involved in this inter-synodal reflection and consultation because, as Catholic educators, we will have a unique role to play in the process of renewing family life. Such renewal will depend largely on our ability to prepare young adults who are able to forge life-long, faithful commitments to God, to one another, and to the families they will create and maintain.

In preparation for our indispensable role as family life educators, there are several tasks we should be seriously undertaking this year. We need to:

- a. Study (or re-study) the official church documents of the last 50 years to see what the church has actually been teaching about family life, marriage, and human sexuality.
- b. Clarify the goal of sexuality education. The terminology itself is confusing: sex education, chastity formation, moral development, character education, safe environment training. How are these distinct from one another? How are they inter-related? What is the goal of each?

- c. Review and evaluate the various models that are being used across the country to prepare young Catholics for adult life choices.
- d. Adopt a comprehensive educational plan designed to provide young Catholics with the knowledge, motivation, and relational skills that they will need in their future vocations, especially the vocation of creating a loving family.

## OFFICIAL ECCLESIAL DOCUMENTS<sup>1</sup>

Fifty years ago the bishops of the Second Vatican Council provided a blueprint outlining the goals of the church's educational efforts. In *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), the Council Fathers indicated that every child has the right to an education "in which truth and love are developed together." Special mention was given to the need to give children "a positive and prudent sexual education" (1).

The fundamental principles found in this document were developed over the years by subsequent Vatican commissions and episcopal conferences. Chief among these documents is *Familiaris Consortio*, the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, issued by Pope John Paul II after the first Synod on the Family held in 1980. This document could be subtitled a treatise on authentic love; it refers to sex education

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*In preparation for our indispensable role as family life educators, there are several tasks we should be seriously undertaking this year.*

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as "education in love."<sup>2</sup>

Other Vatican documents that flesh out the basic elements of sexuality education include *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983) and *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995). Both refer to sex education as "education for love," and both state the need for parents and teachers to work together in providing this education.

In more recent years, the bishops of the United States have issued three documents which have impacted, in varying degrees, how sex education is presented to Catholic children.

The first of these is the 2002 document *Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth*, which mandates that children of all ages are to be given annual “safe environment” training. While often taking the form of lessons on how to avoid sexual abuse, the Charter envisions a full and wholesome development of the young person.

The second USCCB document, the 2005 *National Directory for Catechesis*, lists 21 points that are to be included in sexuality education, all of which are to be provided “in the broadest context of education for love” (178).

The most recent document, issued by the USCCB in 2008 under the awkward title *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living*, is intended to guide catechetical leaders, parents, teachers, and publishers in the “crucial and delicate task” of sexuality education. This document pulls together the principal concepts from all of the documents mentioned above, and clearly delineates the complementary tasks of all of those responsible for the sexuality education of children.

### CLARIFY THE GOAL

The goal of sexuality education differs somewhat depending on which term is used to designate the process. (The various terms are used interchangeably in the ecclesial documents mentioned above.)

The term *sex education* includes instruction on all aspects of human sexuality, including sexual anatomy, reproduction, and sexual intercourse, along with reproductive health, rights, and responsibilities. When used in secular parlance, the term seldom includes any sense of spirituality or morality.

Church documents usually prefer the phrase *education in human sexuality* which is intended to help individuals to gain a balanced understanding of the various aspects of human sexuality — biological, emotional, physical, and spiritual — as well as to understand how they can live their sexuality most fully as a gift from God.

The latest USCCB document, *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living*, uses the phrase *chastity formation*, and defines chastity as the virtue “that helps us direct our sexuality and sexual desires toward authentic love and away from using persons as objects of sexual pleasure” (23).

Other educational terms to consider here are *moral development*, *character education*, and *virtue formation*, each of which contributes to our understanding of the complex processes by which children learn to make the good choices that form them into responsible, loving adults. And we must add to this list the safe environment training required by the USCCB Charter.

The most comprehensive term used in church circles is *family life education*, which designates a total program including all of the concepts outlined above. The goal of family life education is to prepare children and young people to develop in such a way that they can live “healthy, wholesome, and holy lives,”<sup>3</sup> each according to the vocation received from God. Central to

this task is helping them, as they approach the teen years, to understand their developing sexuality, and to make the kinds of choices and decisions that will lead to truly loving relationships in their lives.

### VARIOUS MODELS<sup>4</sup>

I think it is safe to say that few dioceses and parishes are fully implementing the many recommendations, directives, and mandates concerning sexuality education that have been received from the official church over the years. Though most parishes feel compelled to “do something” about sexuality and chastity education, what is offered often falls far short of the ideal. A cursory look at the types of programs offered includes the following models:

- \* Motivational speaker — a once-a-year “chastity talk” for teens. Parents may be invited or required to attend.
- \* Sporadic program — a few age-appropriate sessions on sexuality at various grade levels, including the mandatory “safe environment” sessions.
- \* Focused program — a multi-session program focused on sexuality, offered for middle school and/or high school students with or without parental presence.
- \* Mentoring groups — discussion groups in which older teens or young adults serve as mentors for those a few years younger, guiding them through the life issues concerning adolescence and dating.
- \* Retreat — an overnight retreat (or series of retreats) on relationships, sexuality, and chastity for adolescents, using the teens’ own parents or a group of young adults as group leaders.
- \* Homeschooling — the material for the sexuality agenda is given to the parents who are expected to teach their own children at home.
- \* Sequential program — a series of coordinated age-appropriate sessions dealing gradually with all of the broader topics covered in a family life and chastity program: relationships, character formation, decision making, chastity, the biological and social aspects of sex, and the safe environment agenda. The individual lesson plans are created by professional religious educators, approved by church authorities, published in print or online, and presented by trained catechists. Ideally such a program offers sessions for all children from pre-school through high school graduation and is designed to include the parents in the planning and presentation of the material.

### COMPREHENSIVE PLAN NEEDED

When the bishops of the world gather again in October 2015, it is quite certain that among their Synod conclusions will be the need for sexuality education for all children. If so, they will



look to us, the professional religious educators, to provide such a program. Let's begin now to plan for that day. Let's study the blueprints provided by church documents, survey the field to find out and evaluate what is being done and by whom, and work together to design a comprehensive program with a clear goal: to help our children and young people to develop the knowledge, motivation, character strengths, and relational skills they will need to create the loving Catholic families of the future. |

*Sr. Kieran Sawyer, SSND, is nationally known for her creative work in youth ministry and adolescent catechesis. She is the Director Emeritus of the TYME OUT Youth Center (now Inspirio) in Stone Bank, Wisconsin. Her current ministry is giving workshops for catechists and youth ministers and training facilitators for the family-based chastity and sexual abuse prevention program, Learning about L.I.F.E.*

*Sr. Kieran would like to begin a national conversation on sexuality education with religious education leaders. If you are interested in being part of this conversation, please email her at sawyerk@tymeout.org.*

**ENDNOTES**

1. The University of Dayton offers a three-week online course entitled Catholic Teaching on Chastity, Family

Life, and Human Sexuality Education, created by Dan Mulhall for the VLCFF Program. The course guides the reading, study, and discussion of the ecclesial documents mentioned here and related materials. For information on this very helpful course, go to [vlc.udayton.edu](http://vlc.udayton.edu).

2. I think it is notable that *Familiaris Consortio* closely reflects, in very readable language, many of the heavy philosophical and theological concepts that are found in Pope John Paul II's book *Theology of the Body*, which he was presenting section by section during approximately the same time frame as the 1980 Synod on the Family.
3. This quote is taken directly from one of the essays studied in the VLCFF course referenced above. Sister Kieran attributes many other ideas in this paper to the readings, reflections, and discussions required in that course, which she completed this past fall.
4. Sr. Kieran has prepared an annotated listing of some of the books, videos, online publications, and other materials that are available for the various models. The list can be found on her website at [www.sisterkieransawyer.org](http://www.sisterkieransawyer.org). Click on Publications > Chastity Materials.

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# Solutionism

Claire M. McManus



“Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” Sounds like such a great offer; wouldn’t it be nice if we could develop an app for that? Don’t think that Silicon Valley isn’t beyond such thinking. The Third Millennium promises to take us to almost limitless technological heights

that we are only beginning to ascend. While we continue to propose the gospel of Jesus Christ, with all of its attendant signs and symbols, Silicon Valley subtly suggests, “We can do that, too.” Take, for example, Google Glass. This latest experimental gadget attaches a tiny wearable smart phone type of computer to eyeglasses, allowing the user to activate the camera or search engine hands free, using only voice command. Though early in its development, the claims of its wonders boast amazing uses from improving memory, tracking the visual stimuli for children with autism, and even restoring sight to the blind! Facebook, the social media trend-setter, enthused about the “Seesaw” app that helps users instantly poll their friends to ask their advice. The marketing director for Facebook happily crowed that with this app users can “crowd source absolutely every decision in [their] life.” If you’re looking for a resurrection experience, the website LivesOn promises to send out your tweets even after you die!

Evgeny Morozov, author of the book *To Save Everything, Click Here*, views these advancements as a foreshadowing of a troubling future. He wrote in a March 2, 2013, *New York Times* article, “The Perils of Perfection,” that these efforts to solve the problems of humanity threaten to wipe away essential parts of our human nature. He gives as an example the Microsoft scientist that predicted that the latest in recording technologies may provide us with “enhanced self-insight, the ability to relive one’s own life story in Proustian detail, [and] the freedom to memorize less and think creatively more.” This Microsoft scientist suggested that these recording devices could be always on, making us “aware of our own faults, of our inconsistencies, of the many lies we tell ourselves.” The scientist mused, “imagine being confronted with the actual amount of time you spend with your daughter rather than the rosy account of it...or how truly abrasive you were in conversation.” What would St. Ignatius say about this daily Examen?

## MAKING PROBLEMS DISAPPEAR

One can see how tempting it may be to turn to technology to remove the more difficult tasks of life. While e-memory may help a person to make a starkly detailed examination of

conscience, imagine if one uses technology to avoid such self-reflection. Morozov reported that one futurist found a way to enhance the use of e-memory. “Last year Ayesha Khanna described smart contact lenses that could make homeless people disappear from view, ‘enhancing our basic sense’ and, undoubtedly, making our lives so much more enjoyable. In a way, this does solve the problem of homelessness — unless, of course, you happen to be a homeless person. In that case, Silicon Valley would hand you a pair of overpriced glasses that would make the streets feel like home.”

Even though we have been encouraged to Christianize computer applications for the purpose of enhancing evangelization, we should be careful not to slide down that Silicon rabbit hole into a virtual Wonderland. Morozov coined the term *solutionism* to describe the mistaken belief that technology can be panacea for all of our human foibles.

He believes that there is a real threat to our souls if we fail to recognize that the technology industry promotes “an intellectual pathology that recognizes problems as problems based on just one criterion: whether they are ‘solvable’ with a nice and clean technological solution at our disposal. Digital engineers, however expert in their fields, lack the skills to address issues with ethical, philosophical and human implications that derive from our natural states of being.”

We may not be susceptible to Silicon Valley’s subliminal message that technology makes our problems disappear, but we are not immune to the temptation to turn our backs on our neighbor in need.

Knowing the propensity of humans to perpetuate problems of their own making, Jesus warned against resorting to the quick fix. The solutionist-disciples looked past the monumental act of Jesus’ anointing, expecting to solve the world’s poverty by selling the precious oil. They drew their swords, as if this one violent reaction would stem the tide about to sweep Jesus toward his destiny on the cross. They locked the door of the Upper Room, only to have it penetrated by the Risen Christ. To each of these solution-driven responses, the answer was Jesus. Beware of easy solutions, Jesus warns, for those who live by the techno-gadgets are doomed to die by them. ■

*Claire M. McManus, STL, is the Director of Faith Formation for the diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts.*

# Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi

By Amy-Jill Levine

Reviewed by Dan Thomas



This book opened up several new ways for me to look at Jesus and the New Testament. It is full of insights about the Jewishness of Jesus, the real meaning of the parables, and the anti-Semitism that is often part of the parables' interpretations. Amy-Jill Levine is a Jewish woman, who grew up among

Portuguese Catholics in Massachusetts and is presently a professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion. She has held offices in the Society of Biblical Literature, the Catholic Biblical Association, and the Association for Jewish Studies. She describes herself as a "Yankee Jewish feminist who teaches in a predominantly Christian divinity school in the buckle of the Bible Belt."

In nine chapters and a conclusion, she opens up the parables of Jesus so that they question, challenge, comfort, and move the reader. With intellectual rigor and entertaining humor, Levine shows how often allegorizing parables leads to serious misunderstanding and dangerous anti-Semitism that causes us to miss the challenging messages and deep questions that they raise if understood in the context of the time in which they were told. Instead of a Judaism that is legalistic, sees God as an angry judge, and is focused on purity laws that divide rather than bring people together, we are presented here with a religion that is truly that forebear of Christianity.

Each chapter begins with her translation of the parable directly from the Greek. Thus, the reader gets some sense of the original wording, which she then uses to add new meaning. Levine explores the context of several of those words in the various uses throughout Scripture. Though sometimes tedious, more often this gives a depth of clarity to the parable. What she is trying to do is to remove our personal and group prejudices in order that the parables can confront us with their questions and challenges. Often we are called to avoid the easy meanings that earlier interpretations have given.

As an example of her work, in the discussion of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, she undercuts the traditional interpretation that stereotypes the Jews and the Pharisaic party. The tax collector is "an agent of Rome not of God," thus would not be looked on positively by Jesus' listeners. The Pharisee (a respected teacher) goes to the Temple (a good thing), fasts twice a week (way beyond what is required), and his prayer (he is *praying*) begins by thanking God who made him who

he is. Her understanding is that the parable honors both figures and raises the following questions:

At the end of the parable, we are left without full resolution, which is what a good parable should do. Is the Pharisee praising God or praising himself? Is the tax collector trusting in the divine or not? Will he keep his day job [tax collector] and continue to sin, or will he make restitution for his sins and find another line of work? With whom are readers to identify, the Pharisee who does so much more than is expected, and perhaps is a bit self-satisfied in the process, or the tax collector who, as far as we know, had done nothing for the benefit of the community, but who at least seems sincere in his request?

Levine does this rethinking with each of the parables she discusses in this book. With each reinterpretation, the reader is confronted with questions about how to be in community, how one's life is in conformity with the call of God's reign, and how the various economic and political realities of that (and today's) world are in touch with God's demands.

The conclusion is entitled, "The Power of Disturbing Stories." There, she states, "we take them seriously not as answers but as invitations." Levine comments on how much we have "domesticated" the parables. "This process [of domestication] should not surprise us. As much as we might respect the idea of divine freedom and mystery, we are ultimately more comfortable with answers rather than questions, with the tried and true rather than new thoughts. Debate can be messy; it can lead to disagreement, or worse. Better that everyone remain on the same page" (278).

Disturbing stories are difficult to deal with, hard to accept, and very much worth opening up to oneself. There are many questions, challenges, comforts, and emotions that come from these "short stories by Jesus." This book speaks to us as individuals and as a church to confront our stereotypes, our dodges, and our "ease" with "the enigmatic parables of a controversial rabbi." In many ways this book was a difficult read; it raised uncomfortable issues, yet its information and questions made it well worth the struggle. ■

*Daniel Thomas was a director of religious education for 30 years in four different parishes in the Dayton area of the Cincinnati Archdiocese. He retired in 2010. He has been married to Eileen for 35 years, and they have two adult sons. Contact him at danlthomas@sbcglobal.net.*



# Making Connections, Building Relationships: Evangelization and Catechesis

Catherine Cornue

“It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus. But how is this possible?...Persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. Even our own knowledge and self-awareness are relational; they are linked to others who have gone before us” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 38).



From the time of the first proclamation of the gospel through all the cultures, times and experiences, people have experienced Jesus through their relationships with others. Every age connected to the ones before, inviting seekers to “come and see.”

In more recent times, beginning with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and continuing with ongoing church documents such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), The General Directory for Catechesis (1997), *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), and *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), the Catholic Church has rediscovered its focus on evangelization. These, along with the National Directory for Catechesis (2005) and its emphasis on evangelization in chapter two, have led NCCL to realize that catechetics must include the interwoven threads of both evangelization and catechesis.

Many diocesan offices are listed as “Evangelization and Catechesis” or “Evangelization, Faith Formation, and Family Life.” Because they are connected to the catechetical mission of the church, diocesan directors, staff, and parish catechetical leaders know that they have a “home” in NCCL. However, at the present time, there is no national organization for those whose sole focus is the evangelization ministry.

## EVANGELIZATION AS PART OF OUR MISSION

Over the past two years, the Representative Council, Board of Directors, and Executive Director have been in conversation about intentionally integrating “evangelization” in the mission statement of the NCCL. This was accepted by all, setting the stage for an outreach to Evangelization Directors throughout the country and an invitation to become members of NCCL.

We, the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, formed as an organization of diocesan, parish, academic, publishing, and other personnel in catechesis and evangelization, strive to enrich and strengthen the ministries of evangelization

and lifelong catechesis throughout the Catholic dioceses of the United States, and seek to serve the church by:

- \* **Promoting** the church’s ministries of evangelization and catechesis in accord with the vision of Scripture, the wisdom of the church, the expertise of our members, and the needs of the people we serve in our continually changing world;
- \* **Collaborating** with the bishops of the United States, international, national, regional, and local organizations, other leaders who relate to catechetical ministers, and one another in the development of the ministries of evangelization, catechesis, religious education, and faith formation;
- \* **Nurturing** the continual spiritual, professional, and personal development of leaders in religious education, catechesis, and evangelization in the church;
- \* **Gathering** with one another at the national, regional, provincial, and diocesan levels to challenge our vision, foster our unity, strengthen our ministry, grow in faith, deepen our spiritual life, increase our understanding and broaden our perspective for catechesis and evangelization in the church.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN MORE

Encounter the Joy of the Gospel, the theme for the NCCL 2015 Conference, provides an excellent focus for all of us involved in catechesis and evangelization. The members of the conference committee saw it as an occasion to offer learning sessions on evangelization that would reflect the action words of our mission statement: promote, collaborate, nurture, and gather.

With that in mind, here is a brief look at some of what is being offered and who the presenters are. Although some of these presenters might not be familiar to everyone, they have been suggested by members who have experienced their presentations and enthusiastically recommended them.

- \* Evangelize Through Mobile Technology: Shane O’Flaherty
- \* Evangelization in the Digital Age: Sarah Jarzebowski and Deirdre Long
- \* Catholic Parents – Keepers of the Promise: Sr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM, EdD

- \* Evangelizing for Less-Than-Perfect Parishes: Holy Joy or Madness? John and Therese Boucher
- \* Adult Faith Formation: An Essential Key to the New Evangelization: Matthew Pinto
- \* At the Heart of the New Evangelization: Sharing Your Story of Faith: Julianne Stanz
- \* The New Old Evangelization: Mike and Lori Pacer
- \* For Christ's Sake! Follow Me! Anthony Marchia
- \* Lessons from the New Evangelization for Evangelization with Young Adults: Dennis Mahaney
- \* Facilitated Conversation for Diocesan Evangelization Leaders: Terrie Baldwin

The complete list of learning sessions, including descriptions of each one, and information about the presenters is available at the conference website: [nccl.us](http://nccl.us).

Opportunities abound for parish and diocesan catechetical leaders to make connections, to build relationships between evangelization and catechesis. As members of NCCL, let's take this opportunity to be an evangelizing community, reaching

out to our colleagues in ministry and extending personal invitations to join us at the conference, May 18-21, 2015. It's all about building relationships, making connections, encountering Christ and the joy of the gospel in one another! |

*Catherine Cornue holds a BA in Education, a Certificate in Religious Education, and an Advanced Continuing Education Certificate in Pastoral Studies from the Loyola Institute for Ministry Extension (LIMEX), New Orleans. For over 30 years, she has served as a parish DRE, a Regional Director, and for the past four years, Diocesan Director of Faith Formation, Diocese of Syracuse. She is also a co-chair of the Evangelization Committee and serves on the Representative Council of NCCL.*



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# At Work in the Vineyard: Forming Catechists as Evangelizers

Teresa Burns



As a parish catechetical leader, I used to focus primarily on methodology and classroom management. However, I've changed my perspective.

One of the catalysts for my changed perspective is Pope Francis' address to catechists in September 2013 during the International Congress on Catechesis. He called catechists to view their ministry not as work, but rather as a vocation.

Catechesis is a vocation: 'being a catechist,' this is the vocation, not working as a catechist... 'be' catechists because this is something that embraces our whole life. It means leading people to encounter Christ by our words and our lives, by giving witness... what attracts is our witness. Being a catechist means witnessing to the faith, being consistent in our personal life.<sup>1</sup>

Catechists are, by their very vocation, evangelizers. It is their lived example of faith in and love for Christ that attracts their learners to Christ. I have found that the best catechists are men and women who have a contagious passion for sharing Christ with others. When catechists have a genuine love for Christ, their lessons will be filled with energy and excitement. Their learners will pick up on the enthusiasm they exude and they themselves will be drawn to Christ.

Even if catechists have great skills with lesson planning and classroom management, if they don't have a personal knowledge of, love for, and commitment to Jesus Christ, they will not be effective catechists. My focus for catechist formation, therefore, is primarily on three areas: Scripture, prayer, and witness.

## SCRIPTURE

In order to catechize learners about Jesus, catechists need to know about Jesus' life and teachings. Therefore, they must regularly read and study the Scriptures. A reflection on Scripture should be included in every catechist formation process. *Lectio Divina*, divine reading, is a wonderful process for engaging catechists in reflecting on the stories of Jesus. Catechists can listen to the passage, reflect on it, then dialogue with others about its

meaning. By sharing in dialogue with others about the Scriptures, catechists may be inspired with perspectives they hadn't considered before. In this way, they grow in their understanding of the Scriptures and their knowledge of Jesus.

## PRAYER

Catechists must have a personal relationship with Jesus. As with every other personal relationship, this involves regular communication. In order to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus, catechists must spend regular time with him in prayer. Catechist formation sessions must include an opportunity for catechists to spend time talking with Jesus, both personally and communally. Catechists should also be continually encouraged to spend time in prayer on their own.

## WITNESS

The third focus I suggest for catechist formation — witness — is a little more challenging. Most Catholics are not comfortable sharing stories of their personal faith experiences. Catechists need to get comfortable with their personal stories of faith. They need to reflect on their experiences of Christ, how they've seen Christ in the world, and how they've been Christ to others. Then they need to practice sharing those stories with others. Catechist formation sessions can include opportunities for catechists to reflect on their experiences of Christ and share their stories with others.

Catechists also witness Christ by their actions and attitudes. How catechists act expresses their connection to Christ. If catechists have a close relationship with Christ, their actions will mirror Christ's love and mercy. They will handle difficult situations with grace. They will call on the Spirit of Christ to inspire them and guide them to know what to say and how to respond to their learners and all of the people they meet.

Through Scripture, catechists come to know Jesus. In prayer, they grow in relationship with Jesus. With witness, they share Jesus with others through stories and lived example. As they share their knowledge of, love for, and example of Christ Jesus, catechists provide opportunities for their learners to come to know, love, and live like Christ. ■

*Teresa Burns is Pastoral Associate of Faith Formation at St. Robert of Newminster Parish in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan. She holds Bachelor Degrees in Theology and Sociology from Aquinas College, Michigan, and a Master of Pastoral Theology from St. Mary-of-the-Woods College in Terre Haute, Indiana.*

<sup>1</sup> To participants in the International Conference on Catechesis, 27 September 2013. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130927\\_pellegrinaggio-catechisti.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130927_pellegrinaggio-catechisti.html)



# Hungering for Mass

Diane M. Quintal



Every Friday night when we were growing up, my brother and I would huddle in blankets in front of our small TV set clutching a bowl of well-buttered popcorn to watch scary movies. Looking back, they weren't really that scary; in fact they were often hilarious. It was on one of those Friday

nights that I was introduced to the 1960 movie, "The Little Shop of Horrors." Some of you may remember it.

The main character is Seymour, a flower shop worker who has just received an unusually large exotic plant. It's not doing well, at least not until Seymour pricks his finger and accidentally drips blood onto the plant; the plant immediately perks up. From that point on, it's a never-ending, persistent, determined outpouring of four simple words. Yes, you heard me correctly — words. The *plant* continuously insists, "Feed me. I'm hungry." Over and over, the words spew forth until the hunger is satiated at greater and greater cost to the shopkeeper, but especially to his customers.

Now you might be asking, "What does this have to do with Mass attendance?" Hunger, of course. After his resurrection, Jesus was just as persistent with Peter, sending him to "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17). From the beginning, Jesus wants to bring his people to the table to be nourished by word and sacrament. Even in his last hours, he sits down at table with the apostles, "*Take this all of you and eat of it. This is my body... Do this in memory of me.*" Generations to come would receive Christ in the Eucharist because the apostles obeyed.

## FEED MY SHEEP

Fr. Robert Barron, in his Word on Fire DVD series, "*Eucharist*," gives the statistic that, on a given Sunday, 75 percent of Catholics stay away from Mass. When did the sheep lose our hunger for the "source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium 11*)? How do we regain it? When was the last time you heard of someone "starving" for Eucharist — hungering for the sacrament, which feeds us and provides grace? What are we to do? "Feed my sheep," Jesus says.

The perfect time to re-awaken a hunger for Eucharist is when parents are preparing their children for first Communion. Parent meetings can be so much more than picking out the right dress or finding out first Communion Mass schedules. Are we

feeding the parents with a history and theology of Eucharist? Can we help make their experience of the rituals, gestures, and vocabulary of our liturgy more meaningful? Even before this, right from baptism, can we encourage parents to be positive with their children about celebrating Mass? Can we overtly welcome the children and support the parents who are present with their children at Mass? "Feed my sheep," Jesus says.

Let's help our teens feel they belong at the table. Let's prepare them to be active participants in the Mass — in the pew, as Ministers of Hospitality, in the choir, at the Table of the Word, as Extraordinary Ministers. Let's give them meaningful catechetical and missionary experiences so they can grow in faith and deepen their relationship with God. Feed these sheep, too.

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*Let's help our teens feel they belong  
at the table. Let's prepare them  
to be active participants in the Mass.*

---

Do our senior adults feel like they still have a place in the community? Aside from including them in ministry positions, are we taking time to sit with them and listen to their stories at coffee hour and assuage their loneliness? What are we doing in our church buildings to ensure that they have easy

access to all facilities? These wisdom figures can help model at Mass a deep and rich prayer life and animate the prayer lives of our younger Catholics. They need to feel welcome. "Feed my sheep," Jesus says.

Lent is approaching. Ash Wednesday, Rites in the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, reconciliation, Stations of the Cross, fasting, Triduum are all rich in tradition. We prepare the Elect to be washed in the waters of baptism, sealed with the Holy Spirit and welcomed, finally, to the table. Let's make these liturgies the most well-celebrated, reverent, inclusive, and musically appropriate experiences possible. Invite the whole community. Not only will it ignite a hunger in our Elect, it might just help us re-awaken our own appetite for Mass.

Feed us, Lord. We're hungry. ■

*Diane M. Quintal is Director of the Office of Catechesis and Faith Formation for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh. A graduate of Wadhams Hall Seminary College in Northern New York, Diane has been in catechetical ministry for over 30 years having served in the Diocese of Raleigh, the Diocese of Ogdensburg, and military bases both stateside and overseas.*

# A Continuum of Parish Climate

Leisa Anslinger



*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (OHWB) proposes a vision of “a parish climate and an array of activities and resources designed to help adults more fully understand and live their faith” (17). Forming parishes and adults that are vitally alive in faith through such a climate is a dynamic and complex process.

Let us consider such a climate here as we continue to consider the importance of the parish in adult faith formation.

At a lunch I had recently with Fr. Bob Hater, he talked about visiting dioceses, talking about establishing an evangelizing climate in parishes. I remembered the above quote from OHWB then, and have thought much about parish climate since then.

What is the most desirable climate for a parish? I believe we could agree that any climate is better than the cold and uninviting sense that some parishes convey. Most of us recognize that attentiveness to people is the key to beginning to adjust the climate, opening the door and people’s hearts to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis and OHWB offer similar advice for such attentiveness: meet people where they are, connect with them through the circumstances of their daily lives, and help them to make connections between their lives and faith. “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice,” Pope Francis tells us (*Joy of the Gospel*, 24). We read in OHWB, “To be effective ministers of adult faith formation we will first, like Jesus, join people in their daily concerns and walk side by side with them on the pathway of life,” (8).

## WARMING THE CLIMATE

Because I visit parishes often, I have experienced the gamut of such attentiveness or lack thereof. Not surprisingly, I find that there is a continuum of welcome, relationship, and depth of faith within our parishes. What is surprising is that parish

leaders often misperceive the experience of parishioners and visitors at the parish. Sometimes, they are unduly critical, wanting and expecting the ideal in every situation. At other times, they look at and experience their pastoral life through the lens of the insider, not understanding the needs of the people who are not as engaged in the community and as disciples as they are.

Recognizing where we are on this continuum can help us move the thermostat a degree or two, enhancing the climate within our parish, which contributes to the ways in which people hear the gospel message.

Where does your parish lie on this continuum?

Take the continuum above to a few whom you know well and a few you have only seen but never met at your parish. Ask them where they believe your parish lies. You may be surprised, perhaps pleasantly.

Establishing a parish climate in which people are engaged in living discipleship is not all about welcome or hospitality, but this is a good beginning point. Consider these additional thoughts:

Both OHWB and Pope Francis in the *Joy of the Gospel* point to the importance of connecting with people’s real life circumstances. How do you do so? How does your parish do so? Connecting with people, building relationships, gives us the opportunity to help them connect their faith with their daily lives. In what way do you and your parish do this?

Establishing a parish climate that invites people to “more fully understand and live their faith” is a dynamic and complex process. In fact, we might say it is as much about who we are as what we do. Each of our parish communities has elements of our climate that can be adjusted by being attentive to people and their spiritual needs within the community of faith. ■

*Leisa Anslinger is the director of Catholic Life & Faith, an online resource for helping leaders engage real people in real faith, catholiclifeandfaith.net. Contact her at leisaanslinger@gmail.com.*

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Lukewarm  
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on Mass

+

Mild  
a few, helpful

+

Warmer,  
more  
welcoming

+

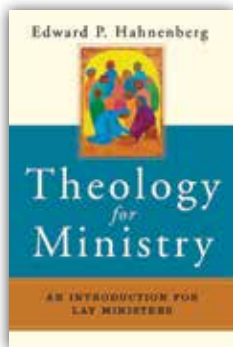
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Books, websites, and media for the enrichment of the parish catechetical leader

Compiled by Dan Pierson

**Theology for Ministry: An Introduction for Lay Ministers** by Ed Hahnenberg. Liturgical Press.

*Theology for Ministry* is for beginning ministry students, seasoned lay leaders, and anyone in between who wants to learn more about the faith that feeds their call to serve. Six easy-to-read chapters introduce the main areas of theology that every lay minister ought to know: the notion of vocation, the doctrine of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, church, and ministry. By sharing personal stories and simple examples, Hahnenberg brings the Bible to life and dusts off ancient church doctrines,



revealing the many ways our tradition can inspire the work of lay ministers today.

*Theology for Ministry* is ideal for independent reading, study

days, and reading circles for parish directors of religious education, lay ministers, and parish staffs.

Edward P. Hahnenberg is the Jack and Mary Jane Breen Chair in Catholic Systematic Theology at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, and author of *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*.

“Ed Hahnenberg offers a well-informed, most engaging, delightfully written, and inspiring theology for ministry, crafted precisely for lay ministers. I know of no better introduction to theology for lay ministers than this one.”

Thomas Groome, Professor of Theology and Religious Education, Boston College, author of *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*.



**Mitch Finley: Three Recommendations**

I asked Mitch Finley, the author of more than 30 books for Catholic readers, to

review all of the titles that he has written and select three that he recommends for catechist enrichment and formation. I have always enjoyed Finley’s writing; he presents the teachings, beliefs, and practices of the Catholic faith in an easy to understand way for the everyday Catholic.

*Key Moments in Church History*. Sheed & Ward.

The more you know about church history, the better you can understand the church today. Many books on the topic try to tell you everything, and it can be discouraging. This book hits the high points without trying to tell you every detail of the church’s 2,000-year story.

*What Faith is Not*. Sheed & Ward.

“Faith” is a word that can be easily misunderstood. This book helps you understand what faith really is by discussing several of the most common ways people live with misunderstandings of faith, such as: faith as a security blanket, faith as a spiritual aspirin, faith as a way to escape death.

*The Ten Commandments: Timeless Challenges for Today*. Liguori Publications.

Think you understand the Ten Commandments? This book will help you gain new insights into the Ten Commandments, because their meanings aren’t nearly as obvious as many people think they are.

Finley earned a BA in Religious Studies from Santa Clara University

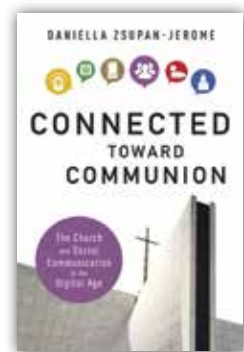
and an MA in Theology from Marquette University. Mitch and his wife, Kathy, have been married since 1974 and have three grown sons.

To learn more: [mitchandkathyfinley.com](http://mitchandkathyfinley.com).

**Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age**

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome. Liturgical Press.

In *Connected Toward Communion*, Daniella Zsupan-Jerome traces the Roman Catholic Church’s contemporary thought and practice of social communication, from *Inter Mirifica* of the Second Vatican Council to the church’s approach to



communicating faith through social networking today. Throughout, a key question forms a common thread: how might we form pastoral ministers today for serving the church in the digital age and beyond?

Diocesan and parish catechetical leaders can look to Zsupan-Jerome as an excellent guide to explore the effective use of digital technology in all dimensions of catechetical and parish ministry.

Zsupan-Jerome teaches theology, religious education, and pastoral studies at the Loyola Institute for Ministry New Orleans. |

*Dan Pierson* has served as a catechist, Catholic school teacher, parish and diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of *eCatechist.com*, *faithAlivebooks.com* and *Faith Alive Books Publishing*. Contact him at [pierson.dj@gmail.com](mailto:pierson.dj@gmail.com).



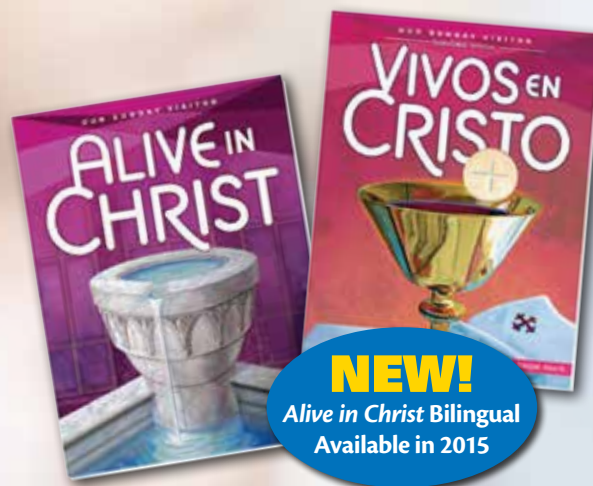
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