

cl CATECHETICAL LEADER



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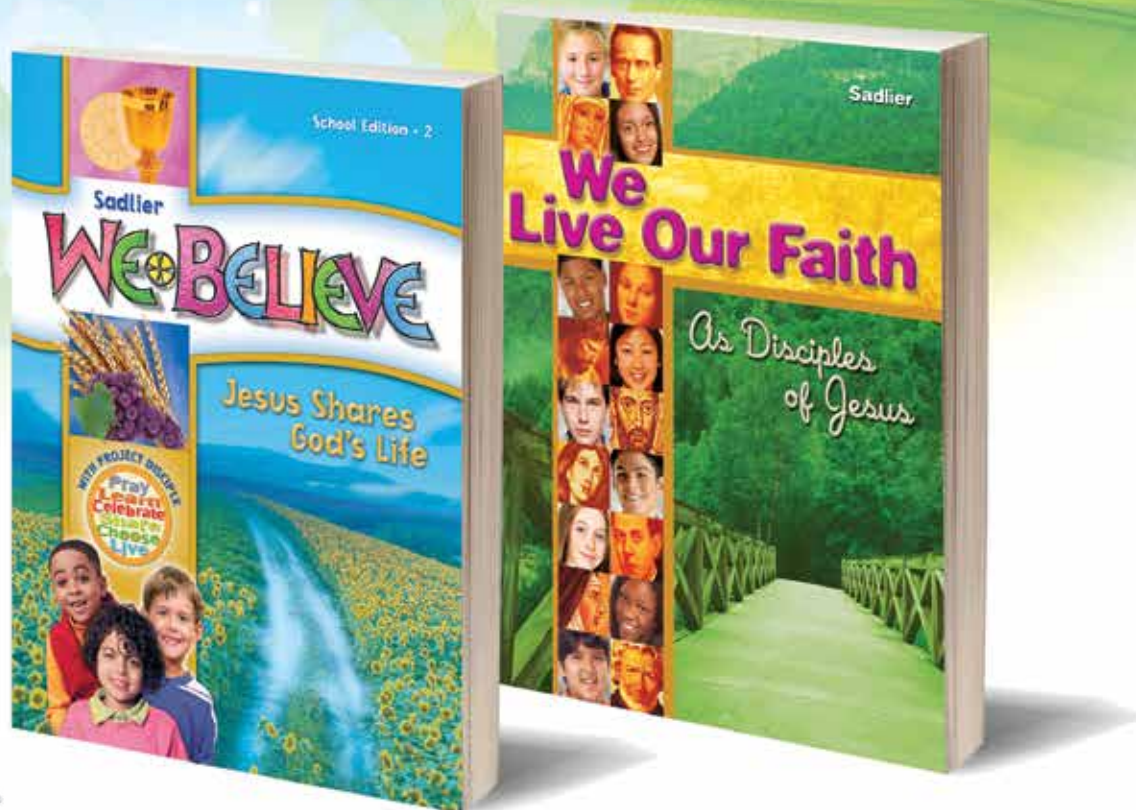
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TRANSITION IN LEADERSHIP

Anne Roat



National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



Dear NCCL Members,

Even though this column is on the page entitled *From the President*, the reality is that I have finished my term as President of NCCL. I wrote this column back in March, and by now our election of new officers has taken place and the board of directors has gathered in Washington, DC for their summer meeting. I know I will be happy and excited with the outstanding leaders you have elected to guide NCCL over the next three years. Both slates have women and men of wisdom, vision, and compassion who are capable of taking our members to new levels of excellence.

The past three years have gone incredibly fast! It seems like only yesterday that I was installed in Detroit. The three other individuals on my slate were outstanding people who became close colleagues and friends. Russell Peterson from the Diocese of Belleville served as vice president. His humor and wit became

a welcome addition to our board deliberations. Serving as secretary was Joanie McKeown of Superior, Wisconsin. I could always count on Joanie to keep track of everything that was happening and documenting it in detail. Kathy Kleinlein of the Diocese of Venice was our treasurer. She kept an eagle eye on spending and found many ways to save money. Without these three people, I could never have performed my job as president. Russell, Joanie, and Kathy – from the bottom of my heart – thank you!

Of course when offering thanks, I also must mention those who served as guides and mentors during my time in office. Lee Nagel, our Executive Director, was always a reliable source of information and insightful advice. Bishop Leonard Blair was a fount of kindness and knowl-

edge every time I met with him in his role as our episcopal advisor. And finally, Michael Steier served as the USCCB liaison and always impressed me with his understanding of the catechetical mission of the church.

I have been privileged to serve you — the members of our conference. You are what make NCCL a unique organization. You are the catechetical leaders who bring passion and dedication to our ministry. You are the supporters and promoters of evangelization and catechesis who attract others to join our organization. Never forget that NCCL exists for you, to help further our ministry.

I am looking forward to the next three years as your new leadership team begins their role in leading our organization. The future of our conference seems bright as our new officers begin their task of governing NCCL.

There is a strategic plan in place that will enable your board of directors to continue to promote professionalism among all catechetical leaders. Their vision for our organization will make our ministry stronger and more responsive to the needs of the church.

*I have been privileged to serve you —
the members of our conference.
You are what make NCCL
a unique organization.*

Thank you for letting me serve you in the only organization that allows catechetical leaders to gain and maintain professional competence. I pray that we continue to attract talented and committed individuals to the ministry of evangelization and catechesis. I know that NCCL will continue to be the professional organization in promoting excellence in catechetical leaders.

God bless,

Anne

President, NCCL

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A PARTNERSHIP WITH CATHOLIC FAMILIES

Leland Nagel



Greetings,

It has been over a year since we joined in partnership with NFCYM and NACFLM in the promotion and delivery of *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth*. Needless to say, it has been an exhilarating partnership that has responded to the needs of many catechetical leaders. Again and again, I hear catechetical leaders looking for ways to assist parents in living out their baptismal call and responsibility to educate their children in the faith. Most recently, in the Synod of Bishops' paper focusing on the Year of Faith: "The primary place for the transmission of faith was identified as the family."

We just finished a review of the *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* process which included both online evaluations and follow-up phone calls with several focus groups. The results were both encouraging and challenging. We were affirmed that our materials and presentations are right on target; research matched experience. People wrote that the presentations connected with parents, there were lots of *light bulb* moments, and it gave parishes a tool to address these issues. The two-hour commitment remains a challenge, especially when catechetical leaders incorporate this as part of a sacramental program, but if we intend to engage parents, there needs to be time to process the information rather than just ingest it; digestion takes time.

The consumer mentality crept into the needs requests fairly quickly as suggestions indicated that some parishes wanted this process to "fix" the parents — the farthest thing from the goals of the process. Others suggested we have a DVD that could be sent home so parents do not have to attend the two-hour program. While we acknowledge the need for some type of promo video, we are more inclined to create a video that could be placed on YouTube that would appeal to parents as well as parish staffs and pastors.

There is no doubt that parents want practical ideas, but we are concerned that participants understand the principles behind the practices. While we do have a Best Practices section on the website, and little by little people are sharing the good news of

what is working, what is most important is that people, parents in particular, believe the Catholic Church is here to support them with their children and their family. And as one diocesan *Parent to Parish Response Form* suggests, "That means that whatever you are dealing with matters to the church community."

We have, however, committed ourselves to developing a portrait of what a Parent-Empowered, Family-Centered Faith Community would look like. The evaluations affirmed that people are convinced that we need to change; both the research and examples prove that. What people are asking is what it would look like if we do change. Our goal is to provide a blueprint, not a finished product. If we have learned anything it is that one size does not fit all.

Another discovery that resulted in a task group dealt with helping a parish determine its readiness to host *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* in its parish. While we profess the importance of collaboration and even state that this process "will be most effective when a coalition of leaders work together with a common vision toward shared goals," we have not provided the best resources to assist a parish in examining its hopes for *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth*. This task group will tackle the *Parish Readiness Assessment*.

As you look to the upcoming year and wonder how to engage parents, take a look at *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* on our website. I think you will agree that this is a national initiative with energy. It keeps getting better and by the time you sign up, it will be new and improved. Our task groups will create *Parish Readiness Assessment* materials to assist you at the front end, as well as a portrait of a Parent-Empowered, Family-Centered Faith Community to give your vision some direction.

The SCFSCY Team will continue to evaluate and improve its services. This is a partnership that takes seriously the church's promise "to help parents foster their children's faith and assist them specifically in their role as catechists of their children" (NDC, 54C, 235). If one of your hopes is to engage and partner with parents in the lifelong process of faith formation but you are unsure where to begin, *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* is the place to start. ■

There is no doubt that parents want practical ideas, but we are concerned that participants understand the principles behind the practices.

The Ministry of Catechetical Leaders in Pluricultural Parishes

Hosffman Ospino



Passing on the faith from one generation to the next is one of the most beautiful dynamics in the life of the church. Parents, as the first catechists, are to plant and nurture in their children the seeds of what eventually is to blossom as a committed faith. Parochial communities are expected to provide the

necessary support to families and every person interested in growing as a discipleship of Jesus Christ. Societies, at a minimum, should not be obstacles for this to happen. It seems like a simple process, a rather ideal one.

But the dynamic of passing on the faith does not occur in a vacuum. It is always impacted by the reality that shapes the lives of the faithful who set out every day to share what they “have seen and heard” (1 Jn 1:3). Every generation of Christians must contend with its own “signs of the times.” Whether in the midst of critical situations such as persecution, political opposition, and war, or multifaceted realities such as secularism, globalization, and pluralism, to name only a few, sharing the Christian faith cannot ignore the circumstances that shape the lives of the baptized in the everyday. How much Christians know about these realities and how they respond to them will significantly determine the way they pass on the faith to future generations.

COMMON ATTITUDES, NEW CONTEXT

To pinpoint “the issue” that ought to be considered the top concern for catechetical leaders today in the United States is not an easy task. Though there are some highly touted contenders such as secularism, religious liberty, and indifferentism — all very valid in their own terms — I want to argue in this reflection that pluriculturalism, an alternative term to talk about cultural diversity, is rapidly rising to the top of the list among those issues that concern directors of religious education and other catechetical leaders in parishes nationwide.

The number of catechetical leaders in the U.S. responding to questions of cultural diversity is larger and larger every day. Many ask how to better serve faith communities where several languages are spoken; how to integrate the cultural values that shape the life and the faith of millions of immigrants into the faith journey of their children and grandchildren; how to better prepare themselves—and how to change as neces-

sary—to be truly effective in culturally diverse parishes; how to preserve the achievements of catechetical leaders and entire communities that for decades have shaped the U.S. Catholic experience. This is a reality that we cannot afford to ignore, even when our communities seem not to be affected by major cultural changes. The church in the U.S. as a whole is a culturally diverse body. Together, we have the responsibility of envisioning fresher and creative ways to pass on the faith in light of our diversity here and now.

As I assist my graduate students of theology and ministry to reflect about these matters in the context of the classroom and do likewise with groups of catechetical leaders around the country, every now and then I hear comments like these: “Well, the church in this country has always been culturally diverse, so what’s new?” “Why should we bother developing materials and programs of religious education in various languages if most children and youth communicate in English?” “When my great-grandparents (or grandparents) came from Europe, they learned English, assimilated into the American culture, and became one church.” These three thoughts capture a lot of the energy around conversations on cultural diversity in the church today. They deserve a few comments.

“Well, the church in this country has always been culturally diverse, so what’s new?” True, the church in this country has always been culturally diverse. Ours is an immigrant church and it has never ceased to be—even when many books on U.S. Catholicism often refer to the “immigrant church” as a reality in the far distant past. What is new is how cultural diversity is being handled. We know that in the 19th and early 20th century the church in most parts of the country developed the model of national parishes to organize the growing number of immigrant Catholics coming from various parts of the world, primarily from Europe. National parishes served as enclaves where Catholics worshipped and passed on the faith in different languages and according to particular cultural traditions. Catholicism in national parishes often mirrored the country of origin of those who constituted them. It was a rather self-contained experience.

In the second part of the 20th century, the national parish began a rather natural decline since migration from Europe was significantly reduced and bishops throughout the country



stopped erecting them. Nonetheless, this decline coincided with a new migration wave primarily from Latin America and Asia (although also from Africa and other parts of the world) that has lasted for decades and has not seen its end. Since millions of these immigrants are Catholic, this wave has deeply impacted life in Catholic parishes throughout the country. These immigrants and their families have mostly settled in the nearest parishes where they live. In the absence of national parishes, it is the regular parish that has assumed the role of serving the needs of the people who today are transforming our communities in various ways.

According to the *National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry* (2011-2013) for which I am the principal investigator, there are approximately 4,700 parish communities and missions in the country offering services in Spanish (more than a fourth of all parishes). Latinos constitute approximately 43 percent of the whole Catholic population in the nation, and 55 percent of all Catholics under the age of 18 are Latino. Asian-Americans constitute more than four percent of the U.S. Catholic population — and growing. African-Americans remain a steady four to five percent of all U.S. Catholics.

These numbers pretty much give us a sober picture of what is new today. In a recent report from the *Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership* in partnership with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), it was estimated that 1) about 38 percent of all parishes in the country are multicultural, namely communities “regularly celebrating Mass in a language other than English (or Latin); 2) the percentage of parishioners who are non-Hispanic white is less than 40 percent; and/or 3) the diversity index is 33 percent or higher” (*The Changing Face of U.S. Catholic Parishes*, available online). Many of these communities serve two, three and in some cases four or more language groups! These are not national parishes but regular faith communities where pastoral and catechetical leaders need to minister in different languages, incorporate the cultural values of their parishioners in the best possible manner, and build unity in the midst of diversity.

“*Why should we bother about developing materials and programs of religious education in various languages if most children and youth communicate in English?*” For ministers and catechetical leaders, going the extra mile should never be bothersome. If fact, this is what ministry is all about! What is at stake here is

the dynamic of passing on the faith in the context of culturally diverse communities. It is a true that the vast majority of Catholic children and youth present in our parishes can communicate in English. Many prefer this as the language of instruction at school and catechetical programs. Yet, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of them live in homes where their parents speak a language other than English and it is in these languages in which they pray and learn the basics of their faith. It is in these languages that their parents and other relatives teach them the values that will guide them through life. In these languages they have important conversations about why it is important to go to church, learn the meaning of the symbols that ground their faith and their culture, and worship together as a family. This is a dynamic that belongs primarily to parents and relatives as first catechists and no one should expect that because this happens in languages other than English, it should therefore be outsourced to parishes or schools. The pastoral goal is not to get everyone to speak English regardless of the consequences.



It is about creating communities of faith where all members of the family can comfortably share their experience of God in a common language. For millions of Catholics in the U.S., this common language is not English and thus the church has an obligation to provide spaces and resources in those other languages to facilitate the dynamics of passing on the faith. As long as millions of Catholics in this country worship and share the faith in various languages, pastoral and catechetical leaders should facilitate those processes in such languages. When families are ready to do this in English, then the

transition will occur naturally. I regularly hear that immigrant parents do not get involved in the catechetical formation of their children at the parish or the school. In response I ask, “In what language do you engage them? In what language do you expect them to participate?”

“When my great-grandparents (or my grandparents) came from Europe, they immediately learned English, assimilated into the American culture, and became one church.” Many European Catholic immigrants did learn English quickly and others already spoke it upon arrival, yet many did neither of these. This is exactly the same experience with the new generation of immigrants in our country. Large numbers of European Catholic immigrants spoke English at a very basic level until the end of their lives. Nothing different compared to today’s immigrants! Catholics must be careful not to fall into the trap of romanticizing the past in order to pass negative judgment on the present. There is enough of that in contemporary political and ideological debates

The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People clearly reminds us,

the unity of the Church is not given by a common origin and language but by the Spirit of Pentecost which, bringing together men and women of different languages and nations in one people, confers on them all faith in the same Lord and the calling to the same hope (*Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, 103).

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in our society. Second, the idea of assimilation should not be taken up lightly. Assimilation usually implies the loss of certain elements of identity and the presumption that there is a dominant paradigm into which a person or a group is subsumed. Assimilation is never an easy process. Every migration wave brings Catholics who have the potential to renew society and the life of the church in this country. Each wave is in itself an opportunity to reshape the American Catholic experience. Because of this potential, most immigrants today speak of integration instead of assimilation. I think that this is a better approach.

We already have a good sense of what European Catholics and their descendants contributed in the last couple of centuries as they integrated themselves into the larger culture. In this century, we are invited to remain attentive to what Latino, Asian, and other Catholics are contributing as they integrate. It is already exciting to see the transformation of our communities. We must let the Spirit work. Third, unity cannot be reduced to uniformity. The experience of being Catholic in this country has never been uniform. One just needs to point to, for example, the unique journey of Black Catholics, the variety of experiences among U.S. Latino Catholics, and the different experiences of Euro-American Catholics in the Northeast and the Southwest to confirm this. In a pluricultural community of faith like the church in the U.S., Catholicism is uniquely expressed as unity in the midst of diversity.

THREE MAJOR CHALLENGES

There are many challenges that cultural diversity brings to our Catholic parishes calling for authentic pastoral care. From what can be a possibly long list, I wish to highlight three challenges that directly relate to the formation of catechetical leaders: training programs, linguistic demands, and cultural sensibilities.

The first challenge has to do with how training programs prepare catechetical leaders to deal with cultural diversity in their parishes and other ministerial contexts. In my work with ministerial and catechetical leaders, one common denominator I see is goodwill. Most people want to do the “right thing” when working with Catholics from different cultures and languages. Most want to share their faith effectively and in

life-giving ways. But it is also easy to see that goodwill is just not enough. It is imperative that catechetical leaders, including clergy, vowed religious, and anyone else who directly oversees faith formation programs, receive specific training to work in culturally diverse contexts. Formation centers (e.g., dioceses, universities, seminaries, pastoral institutes) preparing catechetical leaders must integrate into their formation programs courses/units that teach the role of culture in catechesis, the history of the various cultural groups that are reshaping the U.S. Catholic experience today, the basic language skills to communicate with such groups, the multiple ways in which theological reflection is done in our diverse communities, and the ability to mediate conflicts. Without such intentional formation, the work of catechetical leaders, and other pastoral leaders, risks falling short of meeting the needs of our contemporary communities of faith.

The second challenge connects with the ability to communicate in a second or third language. A growing number of catechetical leaders fluently speak more than one language. More and more are engaged in language programs or experiences that will provide them with the basic skills to communicate with other groups. Yet, many cannot afford such programs or do not have the energy or time to learn another language or simply are not interested. Communicating in

a language beyond one’s mother’s tongue is not easy — believe me, English is my second language! It is more than saying a few words or reading a text. To speak a new language is to enter into a new world of meanings through which the intimacies of an entire culture are expressed. In the context of the pluricultural parish in the U.S., it is an enormous responsibility to serve entire communities in different languages. When catechetical leaders can engage in the process of learning another language, they must certainly proceed. But when they cannot for any obvious reasons, their responsibility is to train and fully empower women and men from those linguistic communities to assume the role of catechetical leaders in these parishes. There is still a lot that could be done in this regard.

The third challenge is the development of what I have been describing as cultural sensibilities. It is more than mere organizational or linguistic skills. It is about valuing culture as a

What is at stake here is the dynamic of passing on the faith in the context of culturally diverse communities. It is a true that the vast majority of Catholic children and youth present in our parishes can communicate in English. Many prefer this as the language of instruction at school and catechetical programs. Yet, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of them live in homes where their parents speak a language other than English and it is in these languages in which they pray and learn the basics of their faith.

window into the human and the divine; about understanding the cultural *other* as another *I* who is fully like me but not me. Cultural sensibility begins with authentic conversion from our biases. It demands enough humility to recognize that the culture in which we are inserted is one among many cultural possibilities and that the culture of the other can always open us into new understandings about God, humanity, and the world. Cultural sensibility does not develop overnight or magically emerge after reading a certain amount of books or taking this many courses. Cultural sensibility is a lifetime process, one that begins with recognizing one's own cultural rootedness, expands through exposure to cultural others, and deepens as we allow ourselves to be surprised by the God of cultures.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES

In November 2011, the USCCB's Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church formally presented five guidelines on intercultural competence for ecclesial ministers. These guidelines connect in various ways with some of the thoughts and recommendations developed in this reflection. A more detailed reflection on the guidelines and their implications for the ministry of catechetical leaders should be the task of another essay. Nonetheless, I introduce the guidelines as a resource for catechetical leaders working in pluricultural parishes to foster creative dialogue in light of the insights proposed in this article:

1. Frame issues of diversity theologically in terms of the church's identity and mission to evangelize.
2. Seek an understanding of culture and how it works.
3. Develop intercultural communication skills in pastoral settings.

4. Expand one's knowledge of the obstacles that impede effective intercultural relations.
5. Foster ecclesial integration/inclusion in church settings, with a spirituality of reconciliation and mission.

CONCLUSION

Rather than bringing the conversation to a close, I actually want to break it open. There are many issues addressed in this brief reflection that are (intentionally) unresolved.

- What kind of catechetical leaders are necessary to adequately meet the needs of our pluricultural parishes?
- How should we form them? Who should form them?
- What should we expect from cultural diversity?
- What exactly do we mean by cultural competency?
- How will the proposed guidelines on intercultural competence for ecclesial ministers shape the formation of catechetical leaders?

These questions require a longer and more sustained conversation in our parishes and dioceses. They need the research, analysis, and insight from religious education scholars and theologians exploring the relationship between faith and culture. They need the commitment of everyone in the church in this country, beginning with our own bishops all the way to parents and children, to foster creative conversations. As indicated earlier, what is at stake here is the dynamic of passing on the faith that is at the heart of catechesis. Let the conversation continue. |

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CATECHETICAL UPDATE

A publication of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership



ANCHORING CONFIRMATION'S PLACE TO THE EUCHARIST: A CATECHETICAL SUCCESS STORY

Linda Khirallah Porter



The seven-year-old Lutheran will celebrate confirmation and Eucharist for the first time at a Sunday liturgy. He will be brought into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The seven-year-old baptized Catholic has to wait until he is 14, and complete two years of study and service in order to celebrate confirmation. What is the church teaching regarding the theology of the sacraments of initiation? Do we have two theologies of initiation? It would seem our practices are dictating our theologies rather than the other way around.

DOES PRACTICE DICTATE THEOLOGY?

The experience of bringing a diocese into the process of Christian initiation has led the Diocese of Tyler into dialogue and reflection as to the pastoral realities of initiating children who were baptized Catholics under the age of reason. Should our

pastoral practices reflect the relationship of the sacraments of initiation and the importance of the sacrament of penance in the call to holiness for every Christian disciple? A movement from baptism-Eucharist-confirmation to baptism-confirmation-Eucharist brings a great opportunity to evangelize all households of faith.

In the spring of 2005, a deepening experience of Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as part of the Christian initiation process in the life of the church, led to consideration of changing pastoral practice toward celebrating confirmation prior to reception of the Eucharist. This pastoral change was already being implemented throughout the Diocese of Tyler when in early 2007, Pope Benedict XVI said,

In this regard, attention needs to be paid to the order of the sacraments of initiation. Different traditions exist within the Church. Yet these variations are

not properly of the dogmatic order, but are pastoral in character. Concretely, it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the center, as the goal of the whole process of initiation. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 18).

The pastoral practice was changed with significant effort, but with little resistance. What follows are some observations on reconnecting confirmation to the Eucharist.

Throughout most of the past 2,000 years, Christians were baptized and confirmed prior to receiving Eucharist for the first time. The reality of baptism and confirmation leading to the Eucharist was part of the restoration of the catechumenate by Vatican II, and the subsequent establishment of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

Evangelization is the event of an encounter with Jesus Christ; catechesis should respond to this event, this encounter. These events take place at funerals, weddings, quinceañeras, baptisms, anniversaries, birthdays, any time life is ritualized within the tradition of the church. The challenge is whether our catechetical programs in our parishes are ready to handle these events, to nurture the faith at every stage of development from no faith to an owned faith. Every individual must move through the stages of faith from imitation, doubt, questioning, and finally an ownership which leads to discipleship.

WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY. . .

Historically, the church has couched the primary catechetical effort within parish programs, which has proven to be only partially successful. The household is the primary locus from which lifelong catechesis takes root. In 2005 the Diocese of Tyler “anchored confirmation to the Eucharist.” The language deliberately omitted “restored order” so it would facilitate a connection to the sacraments of initiation and lifelong Christian living rather than a list of things to complete to “graduate” from CCD.

Additionally, a tremendous shift in who is responsible for catechesis moved from the parish and the catechist to the household where it properly belongs. There was not a particular age designated either, as some dioceses implement for celebrating confirmation to get candidates caught up. The procedure was designed to invite households who have individuals who have not completed the sacraments of initiation to take a more active role in catechesis, to assist these individuals, and to grow personally in faith formation.

Catechetical formation programs had to shift also in that regular religious education sessions could no longer be the vehicle for sacramental formation sessions. Individuals could participate in regular formation sessions with age appropriate groupings, whole community catechesis with their families, or home schooling. However, the sacramental formation sessions were to be distinct from this format, stressing the initiation into the sacramental life of the church and the integration into

the community. Hence, the basis for the catechumenate in the Christian initiation process was carried over to all sacramental formation sessions with baptized Catholics completing the initiation sacraments.

Certain challenges arose in shifting this responsibility for catechesis. Some adults in these households did not feel adequate to hand on their faith if they grew up in a model where lifelong catechesis was not encouraged. Adults who are not engaged in personal, ongoing faith formation had difficulty understanding the reasons for changing in both formation and celebration of the sacraments of initiation. These individuals base their opinions on their own personal experience when they “graduated” from religious education. The USCCB cannot agree on when confirmation should be celebrated, so they allow the local ordinary to set this policy.

In dialogue between the bishop and the priests in our diocese, it became apparent that there were a variety of theologies of confirmation and different understandings of its historical and pastoral significance. In part, these differences were reflective of the priests being born in 11 different countries. Throughout the discussion on the pastoral practice of when confirmation should be celebrated, the bishop avoided either a discussion of age for the sacrament, or a discussion of the historical order. In his *Pastoral Reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation*, Bishop Corrada emphasized that it is the theological relationship of confirmation to the Eucharist that he proposed should guide the pastoral decision (http://www.dioceseoftyler.org/documents/Confirmation_document_2.pdf).

Among the many thought-provoking ideas he presented was the observation that confirmation is not the sacrament for affirming the faith of baptism, nor is it the sacrament properly connected with service. He observed that it is the Eucharist, in which we re-profess our faith each Sunday and it is from the Eucharist that we are sent out in mission into the world. The draft of this reflection was presented to the clergy of the diocese for consultation, and ultimately, a strong recommendation from the priests to change the pastoral practice of confirmation of those baptized as Catholic infants. The shift to celebrating confirmation prior to first Communion would be presented to the faithful. The pastoral decision was made that there would be no insistence on an age or grade for celebration of confirmation and first holy Communion, but families would be encouraged to begin forming their children that had reached the age of reason with a view of their celebrating confirmation within the coming three years.

LANGUAGE MUST CHANGE

In order for catechesis to shift, our language regarding sacrament must change.

- a. *Formation – not preparation*
- b. *Households of faith – not families*
- c. *Catechists – not teachers*

d. Celebrate sacraments – not get sacraments

e. Catechetical sessions – not classes

SIX YEARS LATER. . .

There are many adults who embraced this primary role for catechesis which they committed to at their child's baptism. The parishes provided formation sessions. The diocese provided handbooks for catechists, priests, candidates, and households. Bishop Alvaro Corrada's *Pastoral Reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation* emphasized that children at the age of reason should begin to be catechized on the sacrament of reconciliation and celebrate this sacrament regularly for 10 months prior to celebrating confirmation and Eucharist for the first time. The household became the primary educator in the faith in this process. The household initiated the process. The household agreed to bring their children to Mass, to engage in personal faith formation, to pray with their children, and to take responsibility to discern when their child was ready to celebrate the sacraments.

The Diocese of Tyler is now in its sixth year with confirmation anchored to the Eucharist in our catechetical formation. We have one theology of initiation for both Catholics and non-Catholics. Households are committed to catechesis for every individual in their homes. Youth ministry targets service and social activities rather than confirmation programs. Christian initiation processes flourished with the launch of promoting the catechumenate as the basis for all catechesis in the diocese. A renewal of the sacrament of reconciliation was seen within intergenerational households and extended families. Quinceañeras were revised based on the frequent misuse of the sacrament of confirmation as a hoop to jump through in order to celebrate this cultural stage for the young Hispanic girl.

Probably the most frequent argument by bishops for holding to confirmation being celebrated by youth during the teen years is retention; they are afraid the young people will not stay or participate in faith formation once they are confirmed. The results we have seen in the Diocese of Tyler do not support this problem. Some of our candidates do not return, however; the percentage of those who do continue formation is remarkably high. The key factor is dependent on whether the household is part of the process. If this does not exist, the children will not return whether they are confirmed at seven or 17.

Bishop Corrada has said the following:

As I go around the diocese to celebrate confirmations since the change, I notice the children are better catechized, the adults are more knowledgeable. There is a sense that the entire household has been touched by this experience.

I believe this is the greatest impact on catechesis that anchoring confirmation to Eucharist has accomplished. As catechetical leaders in the church, we face many challenges:

parents not being involved, adults not knowing their faith, 'graduation from CCD,' watered down catechesis from untrained catechists, disintegration of the family unit. All of these areas and more have been affected and improved by this movement to anchor confirmation to the Eucharist. There were many positive side effects that we did not realize when we began this process. Initially, it was necessary to provide a good theology of the sacrament of confirmation, which was readily accepted. However, the pastoral application to implement this change faced some challenges, and each challenge was met with patience, tenacity and support from the bishop, compassion, and education.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH

1566 — Catechism of the Council of the Trent

"The Proper Age for Confirmation — Here it is to be observed, after baptism, the Sacrament of confirmation may indeed be administered to all; but that until children shall have attained the use of reason, its administration is inexpedient. If it does not seem well to defer (Confirmation) to the age of twelve, it is most proper to postpone this Sacrament at least to that of seven years" (208).

1963-65 — Second Vatican Council Documents:

"The rite of confirmation is to be revised also so that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of the Christian initiation may more clearly appear. For this reason the renewal of baptismal promises should fittingly precede the reception of this sacrament" (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 71, 1963).

"The Eucharist appears as the source and the summit of all preaching of the Gospel: catechumens are gradually led up to participation in the Eucharist, while the faithful who have already been consecrated in baptism and confirmation are fully incorporated in the body of Christ by the reception of the Eucharist" (Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5, 1965).

1983 — Revised Code of Canon Law

"To receive confirmation licitly outside the danger of death requires that a person who has the use of reason be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal promises" (889).

"The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time. Parents and pastors of souls, especially pastors of parishes, are to take care that the faithful are properly instructed to receive the sacrament and come to it at the appropriate time" (890).

"The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful around the age of discretion, unless the episcopal conference determines some other age, or unless there is present danger of death or some other grave cause which in the judgment of the minister persuades otherwise" (891).



1994 — Catechism of the Catholic Church

“Although confirmation is sometimes called the ‘sacrament of Christian maturity’ we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a free, unmerited election and does not need ratification to become effective” (1308).

“For centuries, Latin custom has indicated ‘the age of discretion’ as the reference point for receiving Confirmation” (1307).

FEEDBACK FROM PARISH TEAMS/INDIVIDUALS SINCE CONFIRMATION WAS ANCHORED TO EUCHARIST DURING THE LAST 6 YEARS.

1. “A renewal in the celebration of sacrament of penance throughout the entire parish.”
2. “Parents of first Communicants were offered the option to have their child confirmed at the same liturgy — this is how we began. After six years it has become parish ‘policy’ and it is rare for a parent to have objections to this or request a later age.”
3. “Adolescent catechesis and youth programs developed as lifelong faith formation rather than ending with confirmation.”
4. “Families tend to be involved in preparation of sacraments when children are younger.”
5. “Full Eucharistic communion, not confirmation, is experienced as the culmination of initiation.”
6. “Since our Christian initiation process was in place, it was easier to move confirmation and not for the parish to see something out of the ordinary.”
7. “Having families sit together at the celebration liturgy is more meaningful for us compared to having a group celebration. It seems like a natural step in our living the sacramental life of the church. Multiple children within a family were celebrating the sacraments at the same time.”
8. “Initially I felt I did not know enough to prepare my child for his sacraments. The more I helped him, the more I learned and the more I realized how helpful this faith knowledge is in living my life daily with every choice.”
9. “As a pastor, the concept of Whole Community Catechesis was something I always wanted to implement. This concept was implemented to provide the parish resources for the new sacramental formation policies. To my surprise, it has been well attended and we are catechizing more people in the parish than before.”
10. “Working in sacramental formation for the Cathedral, the largest parish in the diocese, traditional CCD and sacramental formation was not working. Whole Community Catechesis became the primary format for catechesis for all ages in the parish. Special needs individuals surfaced as catechesis shifted to the households. Moving confirmation was an easy transition since we had established WCC as the norm for catechesis.”
11. “Before we anchored confirmation to Eucharist, it was very difficult to explain the one baptism that unites us and yet celebrate the completion of baptism and the other two sacraments of initiation (confirmation/ holy Eucharist) at different ages and at separate liturgies. Catechesis for all groups who are preparing to celebrate baptism and/or confirmation, Eucharist is now much more congruent



and coherent; and the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy Eucharist are more visible and readily understood as sacraments of initiation.”

12. “What I have noticed is that by joining them together, I don’t see the focus on the specialness of each sacrament. It may be a teaching error on our part, I am not sure. But the Eucharist seems to lack the reverence, the importance, as the youth file up to receive Our Lord. Confirmation with the Eucharist has become a crash course. Cram the information in, get that sponsor, come up with the name of that saint and forget it the week after the ceremony.” *This parish program was not utilizing household catechesis, but continued in the ‘school model.’

ONE PROGRAM – TWO LANGUAGES

The Diocese of Tyler is 60 percent Hispanic. Every program and process in the diocese is developed in both English and Spanish. “Amen, I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 18:3).

When the catechetical leaders for the Diocese of Tyler began informing and forming people about anchoring confirmation to Eucharist, we saw among Hispanics not a resistance but a concern pastorally of how this would work.

In most states in the Mexican Republic and in Latin America, Catholics celebrate the sacrament of confirmation as infants; therefore, bringing the celebration of this sacrament to an earlier stage in life was not foreign to them. They accepted the decision with no resistance but some concern. The concern was that, once children celebrated the sacraments they would not come back to the parishes for religious instruction.

Catechetical materials for parents was a crucial factor. Allowing parents to actively participate in their children’s formation and allowing them to be involved in the many activities this formation entails became “the greatest success among Hispanics.”

After six years of hard work and dedication in helping priests, parents, and catechists understand the theology of the sacraments, especially confirmation, we are now witnessing great growth in appreciation of the sacraments. Hispanic parents are becoming more aware of their role as primary educators in the faith of their children. They are participating in Sunday liturgy with their families, praying more with their children. Candidates for confirmation are continuing in ongoing formation in greater numbers than before.

Celebrating the sacrament of confirmation prior to Eucharist has been an opportunity of growth and faith development for Hispanic families in our Diocese. Hispanic parents now understand that in order to help their children grow in their faith, they must become like them, and in this way, together, join our Father in heaven.

Anchoring confirmation to Eucharist in the Diocese of Tyler continues to be a catechetical success story which impacts every area of catechesis, Christian initiation, and the building up of the kingdom of God in East Texas. ■

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Discipleship Training: Helping Children Be Like Jesus

Victor Valenzuela



Discipleship is one of those buzz words in our faith that we never seem to stop exploring. It is a rich and dynamic word that has a variety of meanings depending on where we are in our journey of life and in our ministry.

Since discipleship is such a vibrant word, it is sometimes difficult to find the right way to explain it. I have been reflecting and praying a lot about this, mainly, because the National Directory for Catechesis (2006) laid out a clear path to discipleship with the six tasks of catechesis. Also, the Bishops of Latin America (CELAM), in their concluding document of Aparecida (2007), advocated for a clear path to discipleship for all baptized Catholics.

LIGHT AND DISCIPLESHIP

When a word is so dense with meaning, I usually refer to symbols or metaphors to try to wrap my mind around it. I am a visual learner, and these types of images usually help me capture the essence. The image or metaphor that keeps appearing to me when talking about discipleship is “Light.”

For me, light and discipleship go hand in hand. My starting point is that like light, discipleship is about leading people out of the darkness. But it’s more than that; the warm glow of light is always so inviting. When you walk into a hotel lobby or someone’s living room with a roaring fire in the fireplace, your first inclination is likely to be to move near that fire. We want to feel the warmth and the glow from it. Think back to your high school retreats, whether you were a leader or participant; some of the most intimate moments of faith sharing were around a bonfire or during a candlelit service.

Think for a moment that you are ascending a very dark cave. Maybe you are on a tour of an old mine shaft or exploring caves in one of our national parks. While you’re down there, far away from the entrance, the lights go out. There you are in complete darkness. This is when you begin to appreciate what light does for us every day. In this darkness, you feel an understandable anxiety that is normal for most of us when it is pitch dark. It is so dark that you cannot even see your hand in front of your face, and fear begins to overtake you. Then, suddenly, someone lights a small match. Even though it is a small flicker, it is enough to calm our fear and anxiety. When

that tiny match light becomes a small candle light and then a larger light, we can really feel that we are much happier in the light than in the dark.

GIVING BIRTH TO LIGHT

That is how I best define discipleship; I am most complete in the light rather than in the dark. This light metaphor goes even further for me. In Spanish, when an expectant mother gives birth, we say “dar a luz” which means “she gave light” We are saying that the act of giving birth is the act of giving light.

Scripture is full of light metaphors. Light was one of God’s first creations in Genesis 1. The Israelites were led out of Egypt by a pillar of light in Exodus 13. Later in Isaiah we read, “the people in darkness shall see a great light” (Is 9:21). And of course the gospels are filled with many light metaphors as well. In Matthew we hear Jesus say, “You are the light of the world.” The Gospel of John uses light extensively. In John’s prologue in Chapter 1, he is writing about the Incarnation and he says, “and this life (Christ) was the light of the human race: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John later writes that Jesus is the light of the world. If we follow Jesus who is the true light we will then be children of the light. This, to me, is a clear connection with discipleship. Jesus is the light that we follow, and thus we are a light for others in their quest to find and follow Jesus.

HEALING BLINDNESS

Perhaps the story of the healing of the blind man in John chapter 9 is for me the clearest example of light overcoming darkness. If you recall the story, the blind man asks for healing from his blindness, which he has had since birth. Everybody assumes that he or his family must have committed a grave sin for him to be blind. It seems that for the disciples at that time blindness or darkness of the eyes is tied to sin. Jesus heals the blind man by making mud out of spit and placing it on the blind man’s eyes. When the mud is washed off, he can see. I have always thought of this story as a physical healing for blindness. But now looking at it with fresh eyes, I see that this is a story of Jesus asking us to heal our spiritual blindness. Our hearts can be clouded and living in darkness; Christ is asking us to wash that sin from our hearts and let in the light.



The story about the Road to Emmaus gives me a real deep sense of discipleship. Two disciples walking on the road are having a conversation about the events that just happened. They seem to be crestfallen. A man joins them as they walk and asks what they are talking about. They tell him and are amazed that this person did not know what had happened. When they stopped near the village, they invited the third man to stay. While they were at the table, he asked to bless the bread they were about to share. It was then that “their eyes were opened” and they recognized him as Jesus. Then, one of the most famous phrases of the Bible is said, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road.” The goal for all of our catechetical efforts should be to ignite this fire within those who come to our sessions. We want them to feel that their hearts are burning every time Christ touches their hearts.

CATHEDRAL OF LIGHT

The Diocese of Oakland in California recently built a new cathedral. The name chosen was “The Cathedral of Christ the Light.” The reason for choosing this name is that the diocese was founded in 1965, also the closing year of Vatican II. One of the last documents to come out of Rome that year was entitled *Lumen Gentium* or “light for all nations,” which the document calls the church to be. The cathedral is made mostly of glass, befitting the name since the main symbol of the inside is light. There is one other large image when you enter the cathedral. The builders somehow took rectangular aluminum panels and perforated them with a computer (similar to pixels on a printer). When they assembled all the panels and let the light shine through, a stunning image of Christ appears. It is truly an amazing sight.

In my metaphor of discipleship as light, there are several lights that illuminate the path. These lights are similar to path lighting on a walkway or luminarias that are used in New Mexico. For me, these lights are the six tasks of catechesis which the

US Bishops outline in the NDC by saying that they are the different dimensions of the faith. We see these dimensions as we watch Jesus form his disciples. They are interrelated, distinct yet complementary. While they are outlined in long form on page 60-62 of the NDC, I really like what Sadlier did when they encapsulated the six tasks into the following one-word summaries:

- | | |
|--------------|-----------|
| 1. Pray | 4. Share |
| 2. Learn | 5. Choose |
| 3. Celebrate | 6. Live |

The NDC describes the six tasks this way “Faith must be known, celebrated, lived and expressed in prayer” (60). The more we integrate these six tasks into our catechesis, the closer we bring ourselves and those we catechize to Jesus. Just like the luminarias that are used in New Mexico and elsewhere to light the path to the Christ child, we can use the six tasks of catechesis to illuminate our path to Him.

Thus, discipleship training for me is to help children and all who come to our catechetical sessions learn to live in the light. The only way that we can pass on that light is if we are light to others. Being a witness of Christ the light is the best way for me to show others the way to Jesus.

St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians probably captures it best when in Chapter 5 he states, “for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of Light—for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.” ■

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Home and Parish: Partners in Faith

Joseph D. White



Pope John Paul II famously said, “As the family goes, so goes society, and so goes the world in which we live.” We could just as easily say, “As the family goes, so goes the parish, and so goes the church in which we live” — for our parishes are made up of families, and every child with a vocation to the priesthood and religious life is born within a family. For this reason, Pope Benedict has said, “The family...is the cradle of life and of every vocation” (Angelus talk, Feb. 4, 2007).

The family has a prominent role within our Catholic faith. God himself is revealed as a “family” — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God creates us, male and female, in his image and likeness (Gn 1:26-7; CCC 2205). We are created to be in communion with one another, just as God is a communion of persons. Jesus reveals God as a father who loves and cares for his children. The church is revealed to us as a family into which we are adopted by God and become brothers and sisters to one another (Gal 4:4-5). Jesus’ relationship with the church is presented in Scripture as a marriage, with Jesus as the groom and the church his bride.

Marriage and family are intimately related to the common good in society. The benefits of marriage noted by social scientists include higher levels of health and happiness and lower levels of alcohol and drug abuse, better economic conditions, and lower crime rates in areas where marriage rates are higher. In a 2003 fact sheet on marriage promotion in low-income families, the National Council on Family Relations stated the following:

A large body of social science research indicates that healthy, married-parent families are an optimal environment for promoting the well-being of children. Children raised by both biological parents are less likely than children raised in single- or step-parent families to be poor, to drop out of school, to

have difficulty finding a job, to become teen parents or to experience emotional or behavioral problems. Children living with single mothers are five times as likely to be poor as those in two-parent families.

Clearly, families make a difference. It is time for us, as parish and diocesan leaders, to take bold steps to support families in our parishes and communities. These steps should be based on an awareness of changing family demographics and should include every aspect of parish life. Our parishes will thrive or die out based on the way in which we support and connect with families.

The family also has a privileged place in catechesis. The Catechism states that “parents receive the responsibility of evangelizing their children” and calls them the “first heralds” of the faith (2225). The family is called the “domestic church” — the church of the home (2224).

Today, pastoral leaders are posed with several challenges to engage the family. These challenges include hectic schedules and divided attention. One study from the University of Michigan showed a shocking decrease in the amount of time

devoted solely to family conversation, a 33 percent decrease in families eating dinner together, and a 28 percent drop in family vacations. In the same period, the time children spent in structured sports doubled, and passive spectator leisure time increased five-fold. More recently, a study by the Annenberg Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California showed that 28 percent of Americans say they are spending less time with their families than in the previous year and this rise appears to be related to more time on digital media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Internet websites.

Another challenge to engaging the family is the increasing secularization of modern society, which can lead to a compartmentalization of faith; it is seen as an extracurricular activity rather than a central aspect of one’s life that impacts all oth-

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ers. A third challenge is the fact that many adults are poorly formed in their faith, due to incomplete or inadequate catechesis or a “confirmation as graduation” mentality that precluded continuing faith formation as an adult. Consequently, these adults may lack the confidence and/or knowledge to guide their families in the faith. Finally, there exists a cultural fear of commitment, likely due to the busy-ness of modern life — a struggle with taking on additional responsibilities.

SUPPORTING AND REACHING FAMILIES: SOME FIRST STEPS

Making the parish a place that reflects the importance of families starts with family-sensitive parish leadership. Is the parish staff a collaborative team? Do we help one another? Are our roles flexible enough to allow for working together? A silo-mentality can undermine a family sensitive environment, both philosophically and practically speaking. For example, collaboration between the parish catechetical leader and other ministry leaders can help to make other aspects of parish life, such as liturgy and service, more inclusive of all ages and family configurations, but failure to collaborate in this way can sometimes limit participation by families in parish events and ministries.

The changing family brings a new moment in catechesis that requires from us as catechetical leaders a fresh and creative approach. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, this approach should follow the example of God who, rather than waiting for us to find him, reaches out to us, meeting us where we are. We must look for the evangelizing moments we have with families, and capitalize on these moments to the greatest extent possible.

Where are the evangelizing moments? They are the times when families are naturally more open to the church and what she can give.

In the usual family life cycle, these moments may include *developmental milestones* of family life, such as a wedding, the birth of a new child, a child’s entry into school, the death of a family member, and other important times. Evangelizing moments might also be spiritual or religious milestones in the life of a family, such as baptism, first Eucharist, or confirmation. Special circumstances that could be evangelizing moments might also arise in the life of a family. These include a severe illness or unexpected death of a family member, a separation or divorce, a time of financial need, or another family crisis. When catechetical leaders and other pastoral ministers welcome families warmly and reach out to families in need,

they can make the most of these evangelizing moments to let the family know that they are part of a larger Christian community that seeks their presence.

FAMILY FRIENDLY GRADE-LEVEL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Some have spoken of traditional grade-level catechetical programs as an impediment to family involvement, but with some modifications, we can make even the most traditionally-structured programs much more family friendly:

- Involve parents as volunteers, and give them plenty of options with respect to roles. Sometimes parents may be left to feel as if they can only help with the parish catechetical program if they feel called and equipped to be catechists, but parents could also volunteer as classroom assistants, helpers with special events, or “guest speakers” to discuss other areas of ministry in which they are involved. For example, parents who serve as extraordinary ministers of Communion could help instruct the children preparing for First Eucharist on the proper way to receive.
- Communicate creatively. Send home newsletters and flyers, and make use of social media to update parents on what children are learning and how they might reinforce this as a family. Send parents questions to ask their child to assess what they learned in catechetical sessions. Where possible, order lessons so that multiple children from the same family are working on the same themes at the same times of the year.
- Provide intergenerational experiences. Many parishes have found a transition to a program of intergenerational catechesis alone to be impractical or imprudent, but a traditional grade-level program can be greatly enhanced by adding intergenerational events and experiences. Consider adding seasonal celebrations for All Saints Day, the feast day of your parish’s patron saint, and perhaps for Advent and Lent. For children preparing for the sacraments, host day retreats that are designed for the whole family, with perhaps some time for parents and children separately and some opportunities together.

FAMILY-SENSITIVE ADULT FORMATION

We can increase participation in adult formation as well when we take some steps to be more family-sensitive:

- Offer a variety of adult formation classes and experiences that allow adults to choose based on their interest and phase of life. Many Protestant churches offer adult classes for various groups, such as singles, young professionals, older adults, etc.
- Make adult formation practical. Offer topics that intersect with the daily life of the adult learner, such as being a faithful Catholic in the workplace, raising Catholic kids and teens, and other real-life concerns.

- Make adult formation available and practical for families. Consider offering adult classes at the same time as children’s classes, when adults are already coming to the parish. Offer childcare for younger children.

WORSHIP MINISTRIES THAT ARE RESPONSIVE TO FAMILIES

In collaboration with liturgy and music ministers as well as clergy, catechetical leaders can do a number of things to make the parish’s liturgical ministries more responsive to families:

- Instead of a “Cry Room,” consider a “Mass Readiness Room” that provides parents for resources to help young children learn about and participate in the Mass.
- Provide a Children’s Liturgy of the Word, or at minimum, a worship aid for children that will help them explore the readings on their own level.
- Help priests and deacons offer homilies that connect the Scriptures to everyday life. Help write reflection questions for families and mention lectionary connections for families with children and teens.
- Note which liturgical ministries invite whole-family participation, and invite the leaders of other ministries to adapt if possible (for example, children can serve as ushers with a parent).
- Provide resources for family prayer, both general and seasonal.

REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES WITH PARTICULAR NEEDS

While all families in our parish need our attention, some families might need extra consideration. These include single-parent families, remarried and blended families, families of persons with disabilities, and families in crisis.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

In the 1960s, 90 percent of all children in the United States lived with both parents until adulthood. Today, only about 60 percent of U.S. children live with their own biological (or adoptive) married parents. One in three children in the United States is born to a never-married mother. The following recommendations are offered for working effectively with single parent families:

- Understand that schedules and time constraints are different for single-parent families, and make every effort to accommodate them.
- Include single-parent families in the life and activity of the parish in visible ways, such as bringing up the gifts or completing service projects together.
- Minister to the unique needs of divorced and single parents through support groups and special programming.

FAMILIES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Our Catholicity is reflected in our efforts to include persons with special needs and appreciate the gifts they bring to our parishes. In the National Directory for Catechesis, the U.S. Bishops state, “Catechesis for persons with disabilities is most effective when it is carried out within the general pastoral care of the community...The whole community of faith needs to be aware of the presence of persons with special needs within it and be involved in their catechesis.” Effective ministry with families that includes persons with disabilities requires that we be familiar with relevant church documents and guidelines (e.g., Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities, Opening Doors, Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities). We should also make efforts to educate our catechists regarding best practices for catechesis of children with disabilities. Partnering with parents and other family members to ask what is needed, rather than assuming we already know, is essential, as are public statements of willingness to make “reasonable accommodations” for persons with special needs. Some parish leaders erroneously assume there are no special needs in their parish because families of persons with disabilities have not presented themselves. This may, however, be a reflection of the perception of these families that their needs will not be accommodated.

FAMILIES IN CRISIS

As previously mentioned, crisis situations handled pastorally can become evangelizing moments. This is because these

moments offer us the opportunity to meet Christ in the suffering “other” and also to be the body of Christ to those in need. When we become aware of such situations, it is important that we take the time to be present to family members first and foremost by listening. Active listening, in which we allow families to tell their stories and offer empathetic reflection and encouragement, lets families know that their parish cares about them and that their faith can be an anchor to hold them steady through this difficult time. We might sometimes also find that it is important to be flexible with families in crisis situations regarding everything from religious education fees to attendance at “mandatory” sacramental preparation events. Our flexibility at these times will demonstrate our understanding and care.

The family plays a critical role in the life of the parish and in the transmission of the faith. It is important that we be deliberate in our efforts to engage families. In facing the many challenges to doing so, we might remember the words of St. Therese of Lisieux, who said, “Many people say, ‘I don’t have the courage to make this sacrifice.’ Let them do what I did: exert a great effort. God never refuses that first grace which gives one the courage to act; afterwards the heart is strengthened.” **I**

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Focus on a Catechetical Pioneer: Reverend Pierre Babin, OMI

Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS

Fr. Pierre Babin, OMI, passed away on May 9, 2012. A recipient of the NCCL Life Time Achievement Award, he was an international pioneer and leader in catechesis in the 20th century.

Babin was a pioneer of group media (photo-language), an expert in psychology-pedagogy, explorer of social networking, author, and researcher. He taught at the universities in Lyon, Paris (France), Strasbourg (Switzerland), as well as St. Paul's University (Canada), St. Thomas University (Florida) and the University of Dayton (Ohio). Internationally, he was renowned for his innovative vision for defining a new approach to catechesis in a media age. He founded an international research and training center in religious communications—CREC AVEX, Ecully (Lyon), France.

Whether he was developing strategies for teaching adolescents about religion, producing radio shows, or engaging photo language, he believed catechists needed to use more than books to address issues of faith, religion(s), and culture. As the digital era and Internet became a dominant culture, Babin explored their meaning and impact. Ever intuitive, curious, and prophetic in mind and heart, he pioneered new media terrains with enthusiasm. For over 60 years, Babin understood the power of media and technology in society and inspected their applications for promoting faith formation and inter-religious dialogue.

Pierre Babin was born in 1925 in Paray-le-Monial, France. During the Second World War, German soldiers were stationed in the village of 8,000 people. Babin indicated that their presence ignited caution, fear, and trepidation among the people. In this context Babin belonged to a group of young French resisters who, as he would say, “engaged in dangerous activity and games against the German Army by sabotaging their huts and helping prisoners to escape or pass over the borders to freedom.” At the age of 17, he escaped from the occupied zone, headed toward a small town in southern France called la Blachère, and entered the novitiate of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

During his scholastic studies, Babin became very sick and was sent to Corsica to rest. The pastoral landscape and people offered a healing presence for Babin. It was there (1943-1944) that he picked up a book about St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In a flash St. Bernard's words captured Babin's imagination: “You

will learn more in the woods and fields than in a book. Fields and woods will teach you many secrets that no person can ever reveal to you.” This single insight ignited new fire within him. He was ready to discover a new way of animating the minds and hearts of young people to discover God.

Babin did not perceive himself as a specialist in theology, but only as a developer of a technique. Nevertheless, he was encouraged when some theologians told him that he had a deep sense of theology that went beyond any systematic approach. With this comfort, he set in motion dialogues with different theologians, even seeking them out to confirm or criticize his new way of thinking about communicating the Good News in a new media age.

Reflecting on the works of Karl Rahner, SJ, Babin said: “He was not one of my teachers, but his theology enhanced my thinking because it is deeply pastoral and rooted in experience.” Babin's studies at the University of Lyon introduced him to outstanding theologians and entrepreneurial thinkers, such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who ignited Babin's investigations into the “all holy” in creation, preparing the ground for Babin's famous “The Symbolic Way.” Lyon was the center for creative theological investigation in the 1950s and 1960s, and Babin delighted in immersing himself in flowing conversations.

In 1949, he was ordained and finished his theological studies. He was named chaplain at a Catholic high school in Lyon. While ministering to youth, he developed a new gospel sense of community and a deepening awareness of the power of gospel symbols. He said, “I began to discover the symbolic way of faith, to realize that young people needed to experience the Kingdom of God.” During this time in Lyon, he began a two-year study in psychology.

As early as 1957, Babin was a pioneer in the catechetical movement. One of his lectures at the time, “Catechesis for Adolescence,” emphasized that evangelizing means transmitting a direct and personal message to the whole person, to the heart and not just to the intelligence. The catechist's language, as well as whole being, should be part of the message. This emphasis on heart, emotions and feelings (experience) was somewhat suspect by church leaders in France, but Babin continued lecturing and publishing books in the same vein: *Crisis of Faith* (1963) and *Faith and the Adolescent* (1964).

In Strasbourg, Babin encountered Leon Barbey, a Swiss pedagogue, who deepened Babin's curiosity for linking human development with spirituality. Several of Babin's first publications were highly influenced by Barbey: *Book on Friendship* (1967) and *Methods* (1968). *Options* (1965) was perceived by Babin to be his systematic expression arising from the experiences of his first catechetical experiences with youth. These books were eventually translated into a number of languages and used as primary texts in catechetical formation programs around the world.

Taizé offered Babin a richer experience as he was contemplating a new methodology for spirituality and catechesis. Years before the Taizé Community entered the international scene, Babin connected with Brother Roger Schultz, founder of Taizé. Inspired by the Taizé ecumenical way of life and prayer, Babin integrated the Taizé experience within his personal spirituality and the CREC AVEX program he founded in Lyon. This was reflected in the arrangement of his liturgical space (small prayer chapel) and in the evening community prayer to which he invited guests from the neighborhood, visiting CREC AVEX lecturers, students and friends. The ambience – icons, light, tone, smells, posture, and music, chanting of psalms with a small community – reflected a merging of Taizé within Babin's spirituality.

In his book *The New Era in Religious Communication* (1991), Babin explains how the encounter with Marshall McLuhan changed his philosophy and orientation toward teaching. Babin said, "Originally, I had regarded media as external instruments. Little by little, my conventional understanding of the media and audiovisual methods changed. The more I contemplated this new revelation, the more aware I became that people were audio-visually oriented, so that we could no longer speak to them as we had seen in the past." McLuhan had inspired him to re-examine the function of communication, including the communication of faith. McLuhan helped Babin to understand that technology, or more specifically the audiovisual medium of communication, is the key to understanding our contemporary culture and the evolution of a new human consciousness.

In 1999, addressing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Babin said,

I believe that we must radically rethink our pastoral methods, in the same way as the revolution which occurred as a result of the discovery of print technology and culminated in the Council of Trent. We have been invited not to a superficial restructuring of methods, but rather to what has been termed a change in the priorities and paradigms of pastoral work. We must do with the electronic media what

Luther and Canisius did in their time with the printing press when they invented the catechism, seminaries, etc.

Later in Babin's evolutionary thought, the Internet became the determinant media that would reshape the world into a "global village." The concept of the "global village" enabling us to mobilize the hopes and imaginations of the people to recreate the world with the slogan, Unity in Diversity, was deeply rooted within Babin.



A prophet not only in his own time but in ours, Babin appreciated the inevitable rapidly evolving media (digital) era and its impression on young people. In *The Gospel in Cyberspace: Nurturing Faith in the Internet Age* (Babin and Zukowski 2002), Babin attempted a new leap to understand the emerging influence of the Internet and faith formation. He was intuitively reading

the signs of the times and prophetically preparing catechists for a radical 21st century catechetical paradigm shift. His message was clear and simple: What many young people are looking for in faith is not so much knowledge as healing and spiritual fulfillment. The special characteristic of the symbol, the image and sound is that it produces effects that are not so much normative and cerebral as emotional and even physical; therefore, they tend to spread from one body to another and from one person's feelings to those of another.

How did Babin perceive his particular contribution to the field of catechesis? In an interview, he said:

Once a mentor of mine said, 'Okay, Pierre, so you have projects in life, but you must follow the inner voice within yourself.' So, I tried to listen to this inner voice always and not to be too preoccupied with many projects or my future. It is important always to be ready to follow a mystery. By listening to God day by day, in accordance with the grace of each period of history and each culture, one can catch something of God's voice and reflect something of His presence. I want to trust my experience of mystery, to be open to its revelation and to reflect it back into the lives of the people I encounter each day."

Babin continued to be faithful to this vision throughout his life. He left us with the challenge first issued by the founder of the Oblates that guided him throughout his years of service: "We must dare everything!" Priest, pioneer, colleague and friend — thank you! ■

Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski, MHSH, DMin, was a colleague and personal friend of Fr. Pierre Babin. Quotes referenced in this article are from interviews with Babin over the years.

A Catholic Voice at the Evangelization Table: Debunking the “I Don’t Know Scripture” Myth

Kristina M. DeNeve



In the March 2012 issue of *Catechetical Leader*, John Boucher explored whether we should consider scrapping the term evangelization in favor of simpler, more user-friendly terms. The question he raised touches on a deeper issue Catholics often have regarding evangelization, namely, Catholics do not typically identify themselves as evangelizers.¹

When I connect with parishioners around the Diocese of Green Bay, I often hear that one of the major reasons they don’t feel comfortable “doing evangelization” is because they don’t know Scripture. Their image, matching that of broader society, is that evangelizers must be able to quote chapters and verses of the Bible, plucking out references in response to anything the other person might say. Since most Catholics cannot do this, they cannot and do not evangelize.

This article examines this issue, challenging common misperceptions about the use of Scripture for evangelization. As lectionary-based worshippers, do Catholics know Scripture better than they realize? How can Catholics deal with their general inability to quote chapter and verse of the Bible? How might we empower Catholics to feel more comfortable and confident about being evangelizers, using their current grasp of Scripture?

DEBUNKING THE MYTH

Obviously, catechetical leaders should be frontline advocates for ongoing study and prayer with the Bible. There is no substitute for actively opening one’s Bible and spending time with the living word. Encouraging parishioners to study the Bible, to pray with the Bible, to read Catholic books about the Bible, and to come to parish Bible studies will always be among the most powerful tools a catechetical leader will have.

That said, it is time for us to foster more confidence in our Catholic brothers and sisters concerning their current grasp of the gospel message. As catechetical leaders, we can directly challenge the assumption that Catholics don’t know Scripture. The truth is that as lectionary-based worshippers, we know much more than we realize; we know it in an incarnational, lectionary-based way. And, ironically, fostering a confidence over what we do know can simultaneously deepen our desire to return again and again to the word.

To help our faithful appreciate that they do know Scripture, I often ask a group to take a minute, close their eyes, and reflect on the following question(s): “Right now, at this point in your life, what is your favorite Jesus story? What is one thing Jesus did or said that stands out to you today?” After a brief moment, we go around the room and each individual shares enough details so that the rest of us know which Jesus story is their favorite. And, when someone invariably states that their favorite is the same story as another group member, I then ask if they or the whole group can name a different story in its place. Whether the group has 15 or 50 people, every person in the room can articulate a different Jesus story quickly and easily such that every other person in the room knows exactly which story is being identified.

A great variation of this activity moves Catholics beyond self-awareness into formation for using Scripture in their daily lives, which is where evangelization primarily takes place. Specifically, group members are asked to reflect and then share in pairs or small groups *why* their story/saying is their favorite. With encouragement, evangelization-phobic Catholics can successfully write their own “elevator speech” connecting Scripture with their personal lives. And this, after all, is what sharing the Good News is all about – being willing and able to tell others how Jesus has touched us, how we have experienced him, why he is so important to us.

ON DEBATING AND PROOF-TEXTING

Of course, it doesn’t take long during these aforementioned exercises for someone to point out that while our Catholic group might easily identify over 50 Jesus stories, few Catholics seem to know which gospel any given story comes from, let alone chapter and verse. This raises a second misconception, namely, that quoting chapter and verse is somehow the ideal or the most appropriate way to utilize Scripture for evangelization.

Yes, there was a time not long ago when quoting chapter and verse, skipping from one book of the Bible to the next, impressed the listener. However, that time has passed. Today, when a speaker does this, the listener suspects the speaker is not trying to openly dialogue, converse, or relate to them as an unique individual created and loved by God. The listener suspects the Bible-quoting speaker will not share anything personal about their ongoing relationship with God. The listener, usually correctly, suspects that the Christian evangelizer

in this instance is simply determined to “win” a debate based on an argument of their own making.

For Catholic Christians, argument and debate are not acceptable methods of evangelization.

“The missionary task implies a respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 856). In a secular society where both the news and reality TV are scripted to maximize conflict, debate is often the *modus operandi* in place of civil discourse. However, when we share the Good News, we are never to use violence or to coerce listeners. Rather, we are to be animated by love:

The first (sign of love) is respect for the religious and spiritual situation of those being evangelized. Respect for their tempo and pace; no one has the right to force them excessively. Respect for the conscience and convictions, which are not to be treated in a harsh manner. Another sign of this love is concern not to wound the other person, especially if he or she is weak in faith, with statements that may be clear for those who are already initiated but which for the faithful can be a source of bewilderment and scandal, like a wound in the soul. Yet another sign of love will be the effort to transmit to Christians not doubts and uncertainties born of an erudition poorly assimilated but certainties that are solid because they are anchored in the Word of God (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 79).

In addition to the fallacy that evangelization succeeds when Scripture can be used to win an argument, so too is the quick-fire quoting of Scripture susceptible to proof-texting. “Since Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind, no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith, if we are to derive their true meaning from the sacred texts” (*Dei Verbum*, 12). Picking specific passages that affirm one’s pre-determined point and ignoring other passages that do not enhance one’s argument is the antithesis of Catholic evangelization, which is, at its heart, a sharing of the entire gospel story.

TOWARD A LECTIONARY-BASED METHOD OF CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION

Catholics know Scripture in a lectionary-based manner, based on what it means to us and how one story connects us to the other stories and sayings of our faith. We are exposed to the breadth and depth of Scripture over a three-year cycle, hear-

ing, reading, and reflecting on the word throughout our lives until it flows through us, becomes part of our own story. In the spirit of the call for the new evangelization, perhaps now is also the time to identify and develop evangelization methods that take advantage of our lectionary-based, Biblical foundations.

What might a lectionary-based model of evangelization look like? Like our priests and deacons whose homilies weave together stories of Scripture with stories of our daily lives. Like our Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults offerings, which base their catechetical sessions on the Sunday liturgies throughout the liturgical year. Like our small Christian communities who gather regularly to pray, read, reflect, and share about the upcoming Sunday readings. Like our faithful who go to BibleGateway.com to look up the chapter and verse of the Scripture story they shared with friends earlier in the

day. And like our catechetical model, which takes “Sacred Scripture as its inspiration, its fundamental curriculum and its end because it strengthens faith, nourishes the soul, and nurtures the spiritual life” (National Directory for Catechesis, 70). In each of these cases, we find the faithful sharing the Good News by sharing and relating to Scripture stories rather than quoting chapter and verse.

Just as “catechesis must be permeated with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit, and attitudes through constant use of and reference to the word of God,” so too should the word of God pervade our evangelization efforts (NDC, 74).

Just as “catechesis must be permeated with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit and attitudes through constant use of and reference to the word of God,” so too should the word of God pervade our evangelization efforts (NDC, 74). As followers of Jesus Christ, we will always invite and encourage others (and ourselves!) to an ever greater knowledge of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and to an ever deeper intimacy with Jesus. However, knowledge of Scripture and intimacy with Jesus are not necessarily nor solely demonstrated through the recitation of Bible chapter and verse. Indeed, lectionary-based models of evangelization advocate for sharing Scripture in a manner consistent with what is modeled daily within our parish settings. ■

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NOTE

1. Supporting this common sense hunch, Matthew Kelly’s research on what makes for an engaged, dynamic Catholic found that while committed, active Catholics do regularly share the Good News, they rarely, if ever, use the term “evangelization” to describe their efforts. See details of this research in Kelly’s upcoming book, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, due to be released in August of 2012.

Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church

By Timothy Matovina | Reviewed by Daniel Thomas



This book is an incredibly thorough, nearly encyclopedic, presentation of one of the most significant transformations of American Catholicism: the presence and influence of the Hispanic people and culture.

The first chapter, "Remapping American Catholicism," is an examination of the history of the Americas that refocuses the lens of understanding on the Hispanic stories with which most white Americans are unfamiliar. We know the date 1607 as the founding of Jamestown, but few know that Santa Fe was settled in 1610. "Spanish-speaking Catholics have lived in what is now the United States for twice as long as the nation has existed" (7).

As a result of the Mexican War, "Mexican Catholics in the Southwest did not cross the border, but the border crossed them." These original settlers were harassed for their beliefs and devotions by American Protestants. "[T]he story of the first large

group of Hispanic Catholics in the United States is primarily a tale of faith, struggle, and endurance in places where their Spanish and Mexican forbearers had already created a homeland" (15).

This chapter also tells that story of the 20th century immigrations from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central America, and South America, capturing the diversity in the Hispanic community itself. There are many interesting stories and revelations from this perspective, which help the reader understand the present much more accurately.

Chapter 2 wrestles insightfully with the issue that is one of the great difficulties that any new group has as it enters a new culture: integration versus assimilation. It tells the story of the several Encuentros and their contribution to the American Catholic Church's relationship to Hispanic issues. These were attempts to hear from the grassroots before doing the pastoral planning necessary to Hispanic ministry.

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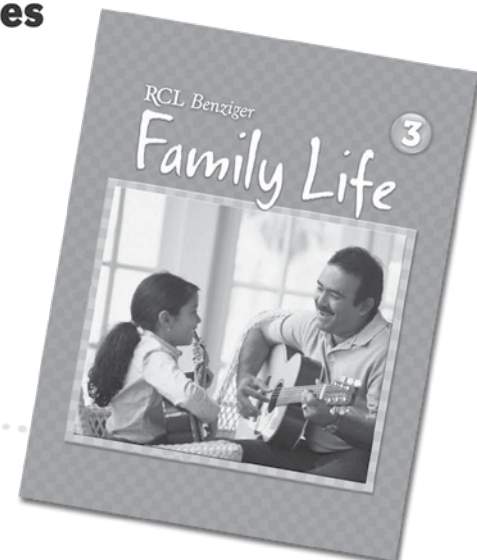
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Ministry to the Hispanic community has been a challenge due to the attitudes of those in parishes and dioceses who have difficulty welcoming the stranger among us. The two fold task of acceptance and understanding doesn't come easily. Finances have created even more hurdles leading to the loss of some of the structures that have helped in the past. "[W]hile on the whole national and regional support structures have weakened over time, ministries at the local level have continued to expand" (87).

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Cursillo are two crucial movements that fostered the faith in the Hispanic community and the entire American Church, with the Cursillo movement being one of the great gifts that helped bring TEC, Christ Renews His Parish, Kairos, and similar processes to the parishes and other Catholic communities.

One of the great needs of the church and the Hispanic community is Hispanic clergy. There is no lack of unordained leaders who have arisen in the organized movements, new immigrants, international priests, the integrationists (151-2), and the charismatic leaders who have sprung up to meet various needs. "The numerous lay Hispanics who desire to expand their faith formation and involvement in the church pose the most widespread challenge to Hispanic ministry leadership formation" (157).

The presentation of worship and devotions develops the role of Marian devotions and the dedication to the crucified Jesus that have impacted the American Catholic worship scene. The author gives examples of the struggle to incorporate these into parishes and points out both the difficulties and the contributions these make.

This was an eye-opening, horizon-expanding book for me, and I suspect it would be the same for many with limited background in the Hispanic experience in the Americas. It also seems to me it would be a valuable guide for clarifying and focusing on this experience even for a long-time minister in the Hispanic community.

"[T]he primary interpretative lens of this book is how the U.S. context, the U.S. Catholic Church and Latinos mutually transform one another" (viii). The author succeeds well in achieving this purpose. ■

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 danthomas@sbcglobal.net.

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Six Spiritual Tasks for Deeper Engagement

Leisa Anslinger



We have been exploring the process of engaging people, particularly parents, in faith and the life of the Christian community in this column. Last issue, we began considering the importance of meeting spiritual needs as a primary element of evangelization and catechesis, and we touched on the connection

between meeting people's human needs as a means for leading them to a deeper relationship with Christ and the church.

INVITE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

A wise catechetical leader and NCCL member commented on this just a few weeks ago: "The first thing that comes to mind for me about this is the importance that every catechetical minister be a person who is growing spiritually as well. How can we hope to be spiritual companions with another if our own spiritual life is often ignored or put on the shelf for another day?" This is a key insight!

Engaging parents and others in the Christian life and the community of faith is a process of fostering and sustaining a Christian environment within the parish. The more we engage people, the more we will experience a compelling Christian culture, one that is the answer to and far surpasses the surrounding secular culture. But how can we hope to create such a parish culture if we who are leaders are not committed to inviting the Holy Spirit to touch us?

Our faith led us to answer Christ's call to serve. We heard the gospel call to lay down our lives for others; we know that through the way we live our lives, we are to echo Christ's love and compassion with those with whom and to whom we minister. What happens when our ministry falls flat, our time of prayer seems empty, or the one to whom we pray seems distant? How do we instill in catechists, school faculty, the catechumenate team, and committee members the freedom to express the deepest of their spiritual longings, the depths of their questions and doubts, the fragile, uncertain, and vulnerable nature of the spiritual life? Doing so is certain to contribute to a culture in which faith is connected to the real moments of life, where spiritual needs can be met, and through which we may hope and expect that all are on a journey of ongoing conversion in Christ.

Where does this lead us in our work with parents and others?

PRAYER

We must be people of prayer, sacrament, and the word ourselves. How many times do we say to each other, "parents cannot give what they do not have!" This holds true for us as

well. We cannot cultivate an environment in which people raise their hopes, joys, and fears in life unless and until we live an ongoing spiritual journey and do the hard work ourselves of making connections between the stuff of our lives and the stuff of faith.

OPENNESS

Being open and honest with others will lead them to do the same with us. This does not mean that we cross the boundaries of professional ethics or become unnecessarily focused on our own needs before those of the community. When those needs emerge, and they will, we can seek spiritual direction, counseling, or the listening ear of a trusted companion. But there is a healthy and appropriate level of self-disclosure that says to people, "I am one of you and with you" that gives them the assurance they need in order to seek our help or support.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Make a practice of inviting catechists and parents to check in with you or each other occasionally, for something in particular or for nothing at all. The engagement research tells us that holding each other accountable in the spiritual life is part of the process of growing as a community of faith. When we occasionally check in with each other, we are expressing our care for one another, and that sort of care is contagious!

QUESTION

Invite those who are involved in ministry to seek out times to raise spiritual questions and insights among those they serve through their interactions with each other. Catechists can check in with parents, share appropriate prayers, stories, or articles, ask fellow catechists for support, or gather occasionally for prayer, faith sharing, or simply to be together. We sometimes forget the importance that such moments make for the strength of future interactions and relationships.

CONNECT

Be especially intentional in connecting with people during transition moments – sacramental preparation, family occasions such as the birth of a new child, the death of a parent or grandparent, school entry or graduation, a change in job, career, or focus. Connecting with people in their human needs will lead to their spiritual needs, engaging them for a lifetime 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.

Building a Better Catechist Formation Workshop

Jonathan F. Sullivan



In the fall of 2011, our diocesan Office for Catechesis, in cooperation with our Office for Worship and the Catechumenate, sponsored a series of regional workshops helping Catholic school teachers and parish catechists to understand the (then) upcoming implementation of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, examine the changes in the English translation, and prepare the faithful to embrace these changes through their catechetical programs.

We knew that this would be a challenging workshop, due to both the inherent pain and grieving many people experience when their mode of worship is altered, and a history of poor reception of such large, regional workshops. With those considerations in mind, we made a conscious effort to change our approach from past workshops.

1. **We dumped the single-speaker approach.** In the past, we hired individual presenters to lead our regional catechist workshops. This year, because we increased the number of workshops and spread them out over the course of six weeks, hiring a single presenter from outside the diocese didn't make logistical sense. Instead, the members of the sponsoring offices took responsibility for pieces of the workshop. As a result, participants heard from five different people over the course of the session.
2. **We kept things moving.** At three hours long, the workshop could have dragged on for participants. Instead, we broke down the agenda for the workshop and intentionally kept the individual sections short and to the point. No individual section was longer than 30 minutes and some were as short as five minutes long. Combined with the multiple speakers, participants were always being presented with something new to hold their interest.
3. **We utilized interactivity and multimedia.** To help participants come together as a group, we began the workshop with a 15-minute Liturgy of the Word. We also had a reflect/pair/share exercise early in the session and presenters asked feedback questions throughout the

workshop. In addition, besides using traditional PowerPoint slides, we played short clips from ICEL's *Become One Body, One Spirit in Christ* DVD in between major agenda items to either highlight ideas from the preceding presenter or to set up the next one. These short clips gave participants an opportunity to stand and stretch or just "reset" before the next part of the workshop.

4. **We eliminated technological variables.** As we went around our diocese, we brought our own laptops and projector. Even more importantly we invested in a portable PA system that allowed us to forgo using unreliable and outdated sound systems in the parishes. This ensured that, regardless of the setting or size of the room, participants were always able to hear the presenters clearly.
5. **We gave them resources to use.** In the past, the biggest criticism of our formation workshops was a lack of resources to "take back to the classroom." This was especially true of school teachers, but parish catechists also expressed a desire to have relevant materials that they could take back and use in their programs. Because we didn't hire a presenter, our budget allowed us to purchase booklets and other materials to give to catechists to take back with them. These were handed out in folders by grade level (K-6 or 7-12).

*In the past,
the biggest criticism
of our formation workshops
was a lack of resources
to "take back to the classroom."*

Implementing these changes meant working outside our established patterns, but in the end, it made for a more effective and engaging catechist formation experience. Our future workshops will build on and refine this model. ■

Jonathan F. Sullivan is the director of catechetical ministries for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. He blogs regularly on catechetical topics at JonathanFSullivan.com.

Finding Silence in the Digital Continent

Russell Peterson



Those of you of a certain age may remember a song entitled, “Too Much Information” by Duran Duran. It was written in the early 1990s after the rise of cable television and the 24-hour news cycle. At that time, information was arriving to people at a pace faster than any previous generation had experienced and for many people, it was simultaneously captivating and stressful. This was before the rise of the Internet and the plethora of information that became accessible. If we were not at the point of too much information in the early 1990s, we are certainly there now.

POPE BENEDICT CALLS US TO SILENCE

Information is omni-accessible. It is on our televisions, computers, and smartphones. It is both a freeing experience, and an overwhelming one. Words are flooding us — flowing constantly and never halting. It is a barrage of words and messages and ideas and information; words upon words upon words. Pope Benedict is aware and has a message of wisdom for the current World Communications Day:

When word and silence become mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, either because it gives rise to confusion or because, on the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of coldness; when they complement one another, however, communication acquires value and meaning (46th World Communications Day, *Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization*, Sunday, 20 May 2012).

Within the words of the digital continent, we need to find the silence; confusion is a common experience. There are too many words masking as ideas. Words require silence in order to be digested and integrated. The digital continent allows so many words to flow that it is in danger of being a culture of confusion. A culture that runs from silence is also running from meaning. It is in and through the silence that the words find resonance or dissonance in our individual human experience. The Internet is a place of words and information, and we require silence and absence within that cornucopia of language.

INTERNET SITES FOR SILENCE

Pope Benedict XVI does not condemn the digital continent as a place of words without communication. He appears to be aware that the Internet, like other tools, can be used for both good and bad. He calls us to the good side of the Internet. “Attention should be paid to the various types of websites, applications, and social networks which can help people today to find time for reflection and authentic questioning, as well as making space for silence and occasions for prayer, meditation, or sharing of the word of God” (ibid). Do any websites that make space for silence pop into your head? I immediately thought of sacredspaces.ie and the [ibreviary](http://ibreviary.com) app. There are many others. The Communications Committee of NCCL is using NCCLOnline Facebook page to provide items for reflection and authentic questioning. We must pay attention to those aspects of the digital continent that call us to silence, prayer, and reflection. When we locate websites or apps that are beneficial, we need to communicate them to others. One place to share them is at the NCCL annual conference.

AUTHENTIC WORDS

Embracing silence does not mean neglecting words. Words are very important for evangelization and catechesis. Words can capture great meaning, even in 140 characters. “In concise phrases, often no longer than a verse from the Bible, profound thoughts can be communicated, as long as those taking part in the conversation do not neglect to cultivate their own inner lives” (ibid). (It is humorous to note that Pope Benedict is substantially over the Twitter limit for his quote about concise phrases.)

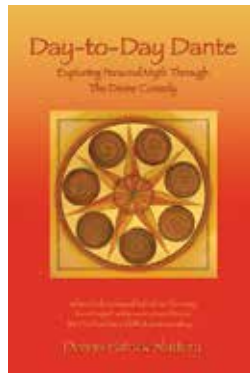
Those taking part in conversation need “to cultivate their own inner lives” in order to achieve authentic communication on the digital continent. Cultivating our inner lives requires silence, prayer, a healthy lifestyle, and an active intellectual life. The Internet can be an impediment to cultivating our inner lives; or it can assist us in doing so. The choice is ours. The determining factor is not the Internet. The determining factor may be the role of silence in our life. ■

Russell Peterson is the associate director of catechesis for the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, and the vice president of NCCL. Contact him at RPeterson@diobelle.org.

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

Day-to-Day Dante: Exploring Personal Myth through the Divine Comedy by Dennis Patrick Slattery



First, let me begin by saying that I am a life-long student of Virgil and Dante. Having studied and taught both of them over the last 40 years, I continually find them, in one way or another, my touchstones. Reading the original has always brought me great joy.

Professor Slattery has now given us Dante in bits and pieces, daily reflections that can turn into meditations, and, as he says in his introduction, can even make us go out and buy the *Divine Comedy*. This book will only reinforce the fact that each of us is on a journey. Dante makes us look inward and see all of our flaws. We struggle through the Inferno, the myriad of sins for which we will be judged. Then we climb into Purgatorio for cleansing from the dank, fiery underworld, and we proceed to Paradiso, our ultimate goal on this journey through life and death. There we encounter our Beatrice, our Blessedness.

The book is divided into thirds, 121 lines for each cantica, plus two selections more from Il Paradiso, which then fills the calendar year. Each day has a selection from a canto of anywhere from four to ten lines. Professor Slattery reflects on that selection of the day. He expands on the lines chosen and uses Mandelbaum for his commentary support and Dante's historical perspective. In his reflections, Slattery often gives the historical background of the text selected, i.e., who is speaking, what the conflict might be, who the characters are in the particular canto.

At the bottom of each day, there is a brief thought, a meditation, often in question form, asking how the selection applies to one's daily life. There is much for fruitful thoughts and meanderings.

This is such a good way to introduce the novice to Dante Alighieri and his

masterpiece. Each of us needs a mythological or sacred text to make some sense out of our existence. This will indeed whet the palate and definitely make one go out and purchase one of the greatest pieces of literature in the western canon, a touchstone for everyone's journey through life.

Dennis Patrick Slattery, PhD is currently a Core Faculty member in the Mythological Studies Program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, California. He has taught for 43 years at the elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate levels.

Reviewed by Gregory C. Carnevale. Gregory resides in Grand Rapids Michigan where he has taught English and Latin at the high school and college levels. When not reading the classics, he is golfing and traveling to Rome, Greece, Ireland, and throughout the United States.

Day-to-Day Dante is available through Amazon in print and Kindle editions. A reading sample is available online. Slattery's website — <http://dennispslattery.com/wordpress/>

New and Noteworthy

Let the Lord Build the House: 8 Steps to Successful Pastoral Planning by Daniel Mulhall. Twenty-Third Publications.

Everything about Parish Ministry I Wish I had Known by Kathy Hendricks. Twenty-Third Publications.

Deciding to Be Christian: A Daily Commitment by Mark O'Keefe, OSB. Liguori Publications.

Companion to the Calendar: A Guide to the Saints, Seasons and Holidays of the Year. Second Edition. Liturgy Training Publications.

Children's Liturgy of the Word (2012 – 2013): A Weekly Resource by Maureen A. Kelly. Liturgy Training Publications.

Mysteries of the Rosary by Michael O'Neill McGrath, OSFS. World Library Publications.

Flunking Sainthood: A Year of Breaking the Sabbath, Forgetting to Pray and Still Loving My Neighbor by Jana Riess. Paraclete Press.

Diocesan Spotlight

This month, I recognize the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization. Each week Tanya Monsour Stager sends a short email newsletter, *News and Notes, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization*, to the catechetical leaders in the archdiocese. What I like is that it is short (only four or five items of importance), attractively designed, and managed through the e-mail service, MailChip. Each item often leads to links with additional information and resources.

For additional information, contact Tanya at tstager@catholiccincinnati.org.

Dan Pierson served as director of religious education for the Diocese of Grand Rapids for 17 years and is the founder of faithAlivebooks.com and eCatechist.com. He is co-author with Susan Stark of What Do I Do Now? A Guide for the Reluctant Catechist (Pflaum Publishing). Please send suggestions and recommendations to pierson.dj@gmail.com.

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