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CATECHETICAL  
LEADER



# Mercy, Prayer, Openness

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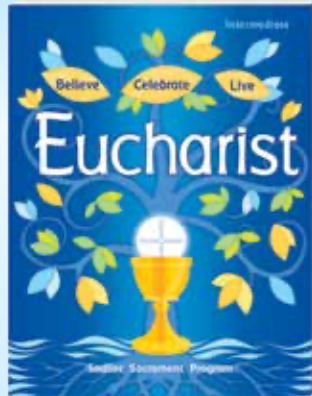
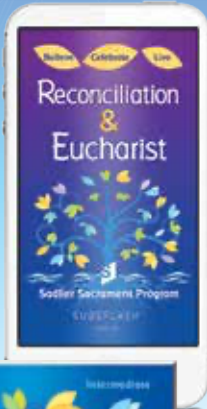
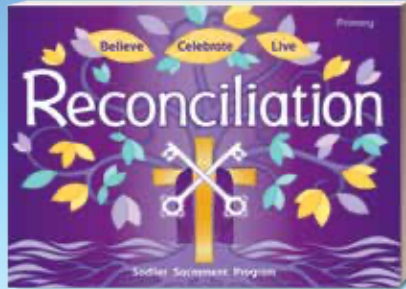
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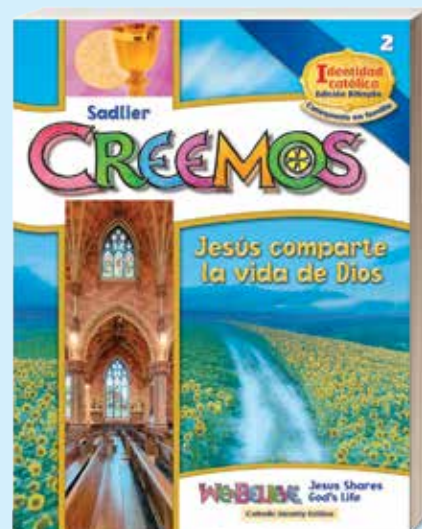
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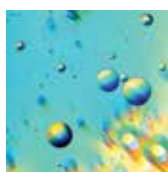
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# THE FALLACY OF PREREQUISITES

Ken Ogorek



## National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



Most of us have had the experience of taking a class for which a previous class was required. Prerequisites make sense, so long as their basic premise isn't misapplied.

### AN 11TH OR 12TH COMMANDMENT?

The idea of prerequisites is often applied in reverse, meaning, "If I've learned something already, there's no benefit in revisiting this content. It's a waste of time. Impractical." So when an adult parishioner sees a catechetical series on the Ten Commandments being offered, he or she might mistakenly think, "I know the Ten Commandments already. Why would I need adult catechesis on this topic?"

I often point out to adults that when we turn 40 the church doesn't say, "By the way, there's an 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> commandment we've been waiting to share with you." The basics of our faith don't change. And our basic identity doesn't change. So who or what changes? Our capacity to understand, appreciate, and apply each basic teaching develops over time. No matter how many MAs or PhDs we have after our name, we always benefit from reflecting on the foundational truths that God has revealed to us.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Each and every time that the truths of our faith are proclaimed, the Holy Spirit rushes in. He touches hearts. He changes lives. He saves souls.

So even though we can always learn more about one topic or another under the Catholic umbrella (even earning a PhD), we also always benefit from revisiting the basics of our faith, whether in a parish catechetical series or a keynote at our NCCL annual gathering.

### A KEYNOTE ON THE BASICS

NCCL is a diverse organization. Catechetical leaders range from full-time professionals with graduate degrees to part-time volunteers with high school diplomas and day jobs.

After a presentation on basic doctrinal or moral teaching, I've heard educators say either, "That was a waste of time because I knew that already," or, "That wasn't practical. I

want something I can use, right away, in my teaching." Both of these reactions, taken to extremes, don't hold water.

We've already established that knowing basic doctrinal content does not mean that we shouldn't revisit it, but actually puts us in a prime position for the saving truths of our faith to saturate us ever more deeply. And practicality? It's very practical to grow in our ability to understand, appreciate, and articulate the truths of our faith. Catechists, including catechetical leaders, appropriate the faith then articulate it in developmentally suitable ways to whomever God places before us, whether they be people in parish catechetical sessions or additional catechetical leaders. When we revisit the basics as learners, the Holy Spirit enhances our ability as proclaimers — provided that we collaborate with him by openness, docility, and prayerful humility.

### "I DIDN'T COME HERE TO BE DOCILE"

NCCL provides professional development for all of its members. When we make sacrifices to attend our annual gathering, we rightfully expect rigorous sessions on relevant topics. We come to our conference to be active learners.

Let's keep in mind that learning occurs via a variety of sessions. Do you want a nuts-and-bolts session on specific programs to help your catechetical efforts? We have that. Would you like an in-depth theological session on a specific dimension of our faith? We have that.

In the mix of opportunities at NCCL gatherings are sessions on basic doctrinal topics. Experiencing these presentations together unites us as eager listeners who are docile to the Holy Spirit, deepening our ability to engage in the prophetic ministry of catechesis.

Whether energetic veterans or enthusiastic young adults coming in to our own as catechetical leaders, we clarify our vision in the light of faith and bask in the glowing warmth of gospel joy — listening, learning, and growing together. When it comes to the lifelong journey of evangelization and catechesis, whether a typical adult parishioner or an exceptional leader in catechesis, God might prefer an occasional prerequisite but he never fails to bless our openness to revisiting the basics of our Catholic faith. ■

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# EARNEST PRAYER

Margaret Matijasevic



As catechists, we often explain prayer to others. However, I found myself experiencing a whole new layer when my nine-year-old expressed his prayer for me, and couldn't understand why God wasn't responding. For some reason, with all the prayer "knowledge"

I had, my son challenged me to go deeper because God's response wasn't quick or clear enough for him. Rattled a bit, I attempted to journey with him.

"Vincenzo, you have initiated prayer with God. You have put words on things that are important to you. And you have trusted them in the hands of God. That is the beautiful first step of prayer: To trust God enough to put words on what is in your heart and offer them to God. But, sometimes the answer isn't how we expect."

Trying my best to put language on my own experience of knowing God — of trusting in the relationship — I said, "The second step is listening. God is going to try to give you a response in a way you understand. God will try to respond in other people, in nature, in the silence when your thoughts are swirling. God will try to show you an answer and will attempt to tug at your heart." Not certain if he was following, I continued, "But there is a third step that still needs to come. It's the part where we have listened well to God in the conversation we have had, and we choose to participate in the answer that we have been given. We become the answer to the prayer in our living, in our response, in our choices."

I tried to tease out of him what he already heard in the morning time from his family. What was God saying? I reminded him to listen well to nature, to others, to the silence.

As the morning moved, I found myself prompting Vincenzo to look at the trees. "Look. These trees have to lose everything they know. They lose their identity in making leaves, and sit naked. They become something different. They have to choose to give up something they know well in order to become something new. That's kind of like the step three of prayer we talked about. We can listen to what nature shows us, and it inspires us to move into a response."

Sure, I'm a catechist by profession, but catechizing as a mother is difficult. We entered Mass that same day, and the priest's homily was so timely. "Joy can be found in relationship with God. It's about talking honestly, and listening carefully. It's about living in new ways." He cuddled me as he listened. I could feel his body shifting; something seemed to be stirring inside, as he realized the three steps I was trying to discuss were somehow bigger than his mom. He gave me a little smirk. Thank goodness God was working.

After Mass, Vincenzo offered a gift to two younger kids who had been struggling during children's liturgy. He struggled to get the courage to reach out, but was beaming once he finally did. And I realized, his own willingness to give of himself was growing. His own step three in the prayer process was growing. He had become a living, breathing testimony of his dialogue with God the previous night, and he literally was transformed from the morning conversation. He had grown from struggle to joy.

*His own step three in the prayer process was growing. He had become a living, breathing testimony of his dialogue with God the previous night, and he literally was transformed from the morning conversation.*

I was taken to NCCL as I prayed alongside my son. In many ways, we are like Vincenzo. We are experiencing change. Through the hiring of a new Executive Director last year, I heard the membership request a growing vision. I have been amazed by your regained sense of ownership in NCCL. Through utilizing the Ends Policies, you have been empowered in your committees to take on a

greater role, as well as stepping into leadership positions.

You have not feared looking at the foundational aspects of NCCL, and have contributed actively in the three steps of prayer when you consider NCCL. You put language on your concerns, your needs, and hopes. You bravely listened through your leadership. You observed and discerned your own response to what you heard, and have chosen to become actively engaged in the future of NCCL.

We live out our mission of the gospel in how we live in our various communities and families, but also in how we function together within NCCL. We pray. We express our hopes and concerns. We listen with discerning and open hearts. And we choose to participate in the answer to our prayer by becoming more. What a blessing it is to be among you. ■

# Master Catechist: Pope Francis's Pedagogy of Mercy

Hosffman Ospino



Like a whirlwind of joy, hope, and grace, a 79-year-old Catholic, born and raised in Argentina, took to the streets of some of the most influential cities in the United States last year. In just 124 hours, he did more than what many of us could conceive of doing in years — perhaps a lifetime. He visited

numerous places, spoke with the most influential people in the country, led several religious services, held private audiences, engaged the immense crowds that gathered to see him, went to corners of our society that often remain hidden or ignored because they make us uncomfortable, prayed with people of different religious traditions, shared public and private meals, listened attentively to people in a language not his own, and most likely made time to say his daily prayers; the list is exhausting! Not bad for a man just a few months shy of his 80th birthday. One only hopes that he also slept a few hours. After all, he is human like all of us.

He is the child of immigrants and an immigrant himself living presently in a country where he did not grow up. At a moment when many people think about retiring somewhere near their loved ones and then harvesting the fruits of a lifetime's work, he was summoned to leave his own land, culture, home, relatives, and friends — for good — to start anew in a different part of the world. He hails from “the ends of the earth” (literally), from a continent that for centuries was not seriously considered as a plausible source of leaders like him. Could a Pope come from Latin America? The question sounds trivial now since there is more awareness that nearly half of Catholics in the world live on the American continent. And yet, in 2013 he became the first Pope ever from Latin America: *Francisco*.

A papal visit is an opportunity for Catholics in any country to meet more closely with the person called by God to steer the church through a particular moment in history. It is also an invitation to assess what our communities do, how strong they are, how we live our faith convictions in the everyday, and how much impact our commitment to Christian discipleship is having in the building of a better world. Not long ago, a reporter asked me what it was that I expected as a Catholic from the Pope. She prefaced her question saying that many Catholics she had interviewed wanted him to advance major reforms, others wanted him to “take care” — with a strong hand — of those with whom they disagree, and still others

wanted him to be more involved in the local affairs of their dioceses and countries; all interesting options. My answer, however, was rather simple: inspiration.

## INSPIRING DISCIPLESHIP

Yes, I want to be inspired by the Pope. The most powerful impact that the Bishop of Rome can have upon my life as a Catholic is showing with his actions and words that it is worthwhile to be a Christian disciple in this day and age. This is what I like from him as well as from my local bishop, all bishops, and every pastoral leader I meet. I don't ask for perfection. Neither do I ask that my particular vision of church be imposed upon others. I know that the Pope needs to make decisions and ensure that the church as an institution does what is necessary to advance its evangelizing mission with credibility. And he needs to be accountable to the expectation that this is done well. Yet most of those decisions are beyond my immediate realm of influence, and perhaps understanding. But as a fellow Christian on the journey of life, I look up to him as someone who can lead the way in witnessing the gospel. Pope Francis is right on target as he echoes the words of his predecessor Paul VI, “People prefer to listen to witnesses” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 150; cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 41).

One detail that caught my interest during Pope Francis's visit to the United States was that thousands of people who came to listen to him and get glimpse of his persona were not Catholic, an echo of similar reactions throughout his pontificate. In fact, many were not Christians, and many not even believers. Many of these people were openly outspoken in their praise of the Pope for what he inspires in them.

Media coverage of the papal visit, in a country where Catholics are barely one-quarter of the entire population, was astounding. It was a true Catholic moment. He seemed to be speaking a universal language — not necessarily in terms of linguistics — but the language of love, mercy, welcoming, service, and joy. In fact, what Francis seemed to be using was a grammar that many perceived as new, yet ironically as old as the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is a grammar that has the





ability to connect with the hearts of the entire human family. Francis showed us with words and actions the human depths of Christianity while reminding us all that Christianity has a lot to say about what it means to be human.

### FRANCIS THE CATECHIST

During his trip to the United States, Pope Francis demonstrated that besides being a great theological thinker and a wise pastoral leader, he is also an extraordinary religious educator. In fact, he is a master catechist who embraces a very particular pedagogy.

During the closing Mass for the Eighth World Meeting of Families he reminded the crowds that the Christian experience is always born as a gift of faith that demands trust. “Faith opens a ‘window’ to the presence and working of the Spirit.” For a society that often over-relies on human effort to deal with reality and explain everything around ourselves, this was a clear invitation to humbly leave room for mystery and to trust in God. Anyone listening to Francis during his trip witnessed clearly kerygmatic moments in which the Pope announced with joy the core truths of our Catholic faith. He

shared with the Catholic bishops gathered in Washington that the heart of his pontifical ministry is to “testify to the immensity of God’s love” in Jesus Christ, affirming that Jesus “is the Savior” and with the entire Church he hopes in the promise of eternal life asking, “Come, Lord!”

On the evening of the prayer vigil for the festival of families, he told a story about a young person who once asked him, “What did God do before he created the world?” The question echoes many of the ones that catechists hear every week in our parishes. His answer, like the best of the New Testament writers, was a catechesis on God who is love: before God created the world, he said, “God was in love, because God is love!”

Various television networks throughout the country provided their audiences with nonstop coverage of the liturgical celebrations and moments of prayer presided by Pope Francis during the visit. Countless images of these celebrations were shared via Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, among other similar venues, demonstrating the catechetical potential of the social media in our days. The symbolic power of the liturgy was made manifest in the beauty of the vestments and objects as



well as that of the spaces where the liturgies took place, the carefully orchestrated movements of the rituals, and the depth of the prayers in various languages. A young person in my parish told me, “Now I know what it feels like to be at Mass with the Pope. I will pay more attention to our Mass on Sunday.”

The Mass of canonization of Fray Junípero Serra was a true educational moment for U.S. Catholics and others. Not only did we witness the official declaration of sainthood of the first U.S. Hispanic Catholic, a Franciscan missionary from Spain who was instrumental in the Church’s evangelization in the southwest during the 18th century, but also we were reminded of the importance of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Christianity is a communal experience, both in history and beyond. We are not alone.

As a spiritual leader who speaks with authority on matters of faith and morals, Pope Francis challenged our entire nation to live up to the best of our foundational convictions. Thus, examining our strengths and limitations as a society is very important. In his address to the joint session of the U.S. Congress he evoked the well-known Golden Rule, also in Matthew 7:12, as a principle of mercy: “Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves.” In that same address the Pope made a strong case that respecting and defending life at every stage of its development is a social responsibility. He reaffirmed the Catholic plea against the death penalty.

## WITNESSING IN PUBLIC

Perhaps one of the most powerful moments during Pope Francis’s trip was his visit and prayer with leaders of various religious traditions at Ground Zero in New York, “a place of remembrance,” as he called it. In words difficult to forget, the master catechist said: “This place of death became a place of life too, a place of saved lives, a hymn to the triumph of life over the prophets of destruction and death, to goodness over evil, to reconciliation and unity over hatred and division.” There is no doubt that this was a true catechesis on hope that echoes the best of our Christian spiritual tradition. It was a catechesis born out of prayer. With words, symbols, and gestures the Pope and those gathered with him taught us how to pray.

On various occasions, the Pope shared candidly why he prays. Praying with priests and religious in New York he referred to God as “almighty and merciful,” pointing to a couple of driving images that inspire his relationship with God. We all have an image of God that brings us closer into the mystery. Every

image teaches something about how God becomes present in our lives. Pope Francis reminded the group that God listens to those who sincerely pray, and with them he prayed trustingly for vocations. Two days later in Philadelphia he echoed the same words he said after his election, standing at the balcony leading to St. Peter’s Square: “Let us always pray for one another.” At a Mass with a group of bishops, clergy, and religious he told them, “I pray for each of you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me.” Yes, when we pray with others and for one another, we learn more about the depths of God’s mystery of mercy. We learn how to pray.

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Christian witness is not something that occurs only in church and in the privacy of one’s home.

The gospel refuses to be domesticated or reduced to timid expressions when all is “safe.” Inspired by Jesus’s own public ministry, Catholics know that we have much to say to the world in light of our faith. Our witness is important to build community. This was a clear

message during the papal visit. At Capitol Hill in Washington, Pope Francis reminded the nation that U.S. Catholics have been and will continue to be an integral part of this society. Highlighting the witness of two extraordinary Catholics, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, the Pope soundly declared that the struggle for justice, peace, and life in our society is a Catholic struggle. The construction of a just society committed to the pursuit of the common good must begin by addressing the needs of those who are most vulnerable. Poverty prevents many from achieving their dreams and living with dignity.

In his address to the U.S. Congress Pope Francis said, “I would encourage you to keep in mind all those people around us who are trapped in a cycle of poverty. They too need to be given hope. The fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts, especially in its causes.” In his visit to detainees at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia, the Pope introduced a compassionate Jesus who wants to seek us out, “to heal our wounds, to soothe our feet which hurt from travelling alone, to wash each of us clean of the dust from our journey.”

Meeting in Philadelphia with victims of sexual abuse, Pope Francis reminded us that the commitment to justice is not limited to doing something for those who are in need, but also to recognize sin, our own sin — personal, institutional, and social — and its consequences. To the victims he said: “Words cannot fully express my sorrow for the abuse you suffered. In some cases the trust was betrayed by members of your own family, in other cases by priests who carry a sacred responsibility for the care of soul. In all circumstances, the betrayal was a terrible violation of human dignity.” It is by turning our



attention to those who suffer or have been harmed, and giving them a new hope, the hope of the gospel, that we build a stronger society. And we begin doing this by actually encountering these sisters and brothers where they are.

Yes, going out to the encounter of the other, just like Jesus did when he met lepers outside the city walls or visited the houses of those considered sinners, is what the new evangelization is about.

With tireless resolution, Pope Francis has been calling for a church that “goes forth,” a church that does not remain static benefitting from the *status quo* or too comfortable at the established centers waiting for people to come. It is a church that goes out to the peripheries where many sisters and brothers live. His vision is that of a church that is “a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 24). Pope Francis’s call to mission also found echoes during his visit. Perhaps his words during the Mass of canonization of Fray Junípero Serra sum up this calling in a masterful way:

Mission is never the fruit of a perfectly planned program or a well-organized manual. Mission is always the fruit of a life which knows what it is to be found and healed, encountered and forgiven. Mission is born of a constant experience of God’s merciful anointing.

Without a doubt, this is an invitation for all the baptized to embrace our identity as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ — now!

## A PEDAGOGY OF MERCY

The shrewd catechetical leader reading these thoughts may have already realized that these characteristics associated with Pope Francis as a master catechist coincide with the six tasks of catechesis spelled out by the 1997 General Directory of Catechesis. “Catechesis is to foster 1) knowledge of the faith, 2) liturgical education, 3) moral formation, 4) prayer life, 5) education for community life, and 6) missionary initiation” (85-86).

It is not farfetched to speak of the Pope as a catechist. In fact, being so is at the core of his teaching ministry as a bishop, as we are reminded by the Second Vatican Council’s Decree *Christus Dominus*, Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the church: “In exercising their duty of teaching, which is conspicuous among the principal duties of bishops, they should announce the Gospel of Christ to men [*sic*], calling

them to a faith in the power of the Spirit or confirming them in a living faith” (12).

It is almost inevitable to expect that the teaching office of the Pope — and of any other bishop — be exercised largely through doctrinal statements, official documents, and formal preaching. This certainly happens on a regular basis. But there is also a way of exercising that same teaching office, which we may call “a pedagogy of mercy.” *Christus Dominus* gives us a glimpse of what this pedagogy entails: “The bishops should present Christian doctrine in a manner adapted to the needs of the times, that is to say, in a manner that will respond to the difficulties and questions by which people are especially burdened and troubled” (13).

U.S. Catholics witnessed Pope Francis embody and proclaim the central tenets of Catholic Christianity with words and actions that connected to the people of our society in a very unique way — Catholics and non-Catholics, believers and non-believers. He did not hide

away from the most pressing questions of our day: life and death, religious freedom, democratic participation, family life, terrorism, poverty, sexual abuse, secularism, etc. He proposed an encounter with the Good News of Jesus Christ as a starting point to fathom the implications of these questions. But he also catechized us all using a pedagogy of mercy. He visited the imprisoned, consoled the broken, listened to the wounded, encouraged the burdened, embraced the immigrant, and brought attention to the most vulnerable among us. In all these actions we were invited to see the face of Christ as well as the foundation of the core truths that sustain the entire Catholic doctrinal system. Not necessarily a novelty. Jesus called us to do this in Matthew 25.

## CALLED TO INSPIRE

Popes are not the only ones who can or should inspire. All the baptized, having entered into the depths of the Paschal Mystery of the Lord, are called to give witness of who we are: missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. We are called to inspire. Whether giving witness of what we believe and our relationship with the God of Life at home, or school, or catechetical program, or parish, or at the workplace, or any other place, there is one thing that is certain: we all can be incredible catechetical leaders and evangelizers if we decide to embrace a pedagogy of mercy. |

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# I'm Over Facebook! What Parish Leaders Must Know About Social Media Today

Clarissa V. Aljentera



Remaining relevant in ministry means you are constantly changing. You are forced or encouraged to change your ministry or tailor your program as we come to know religious education and catechesis is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

It takes prodding and plotting to make a ministerial experience more interesting and challenging for those involved. The challenge comes from the concept that we know our faith must be one of question and not just a passive approach.

As our lives are constantly being enhanced by technology, so are the ways in which we communicate and share our faith with the folks and families in the pews of our parish. We hear the need to become more digital, and underneath that call, we hear that people have a desire to work via social media.

It is becoming more apparent that some people are hoping we move away from Facebook but still engage in meaningful ways via social media. Facebook leaders recently announced that they are close to having more than 1.5 billion people on the site. It's grown exponentially since its beginning 11 years ago. We know Facebook is not going anywhere, nor do we as catechetical leaders want to move people away from using Facebook to keep up with their families, their friends, and their lives of faith.

As catechetical leaders, we know that we may take a broader approach in how we communicate and share the faith with those around us not using Facebook. For awhile it was thought that teenagers and young adults may be moving away from Facebook and onto other sites such as Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Snapchat. But while some of that is true for our young church, researchers say that there is still active interest in Facebook with recent numbers stating that for us.

## THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is now anything that allows us to communicate with each other on another platform that is not e-mail, texting, or websites. It can be through words and photos such as Facebook. It can be photos on a platform such as Snapchat or Instagram. It can be videos on Vine or Periscope, which functions via Twitter.

And while this can be a conversation about the "how-to" on social media, that in itself would hinder a larger discussion on

how we use what is out there to inform people and share faith. In recent years, our definition of social media has expanded as technology has evolved.

We have come to know that social media mimics our real-time world in many ways. Social media gives us a real-time conversation as it unfolds before our eyes. It is almost like everyone with a smartphone can become a play-by-play analyst posting images of their daughter's soccer game complete with a mini-photo album of team shots and maybe some candid photos. As receivers of the social media, we can also participate by posting comments and replying with tweets as if we were really there. The way in which the conversation is hosted changes because it can become multi-platform (maybe using Facebook and Twitter) and we now can pick up where we left off. We post something at 8 pm and people reply late into the evening; first thing in the morning, we can have a more robust conversation.

In a parish setting where we might be a director of religious education or a youth minister, that means while we are posting and publicizing what might be going on in the parish, others are leaving messages or questions for us. It allows us to be more present in a sense that we can report on things as they are happening and it allows those not physically present to become part of something even though they are far away.

Social media for many of those who are "church-hopping" or even millennials who are away from home for the first time may be the one way to grab a person. If our technological presence is not interesting or even outdated, what might that say about our programs and parish. Someone might think just because social media presence is outdated and limited it might not be a place that goes with the times, i.e. not adapting technology.

Much like our Sunday morning presence may have grabbed new families 20 years ago, our social media presence must grab the families of today. We used to be able to rely on religious education programs, Sunday donuts, and maybe even CYO as a way to invite people into our parish. But now as we compete with Sunday activities and sports teams, that luxury of spending Sunday morning at the parish is much tighter than before.

My experience with social media in previous years was much like the Journey to Emmaus; surprised and with the disciples is how we must walk today. We must be that surprise on a

journey of life where people are feeling disappointed and challenged by their faith. Let's be a Eucharistic people who know and acknowledge an encounter when we see it. It is not our job to wait for people to darken our doorways or sign up for our programs, but our job to come out and meet them halfway.

Statistics from Pew Research released in the past year show that despite what we might hear about Facebook, it is still a very popular site, bringing in 58 percent of adult users who spend time online. Twitter's share of that population of online adults is 19 percent, with 21 percent of those same people on Instagram and 22 percent on Pinterest. Pew defines adults as anyone over the age of 18 so those numbers reflect young adults who are in high school and college.

Previous statistics taught us that one of the highest groups to adapt to technology are those who are older than 50-years-old. There is a certain adaptability in technology once we come to know the same language. And we can understand how to recreate some of the items on Facebook without using that same platform. Much like everyone has a different favorite flavor of ice cream, our social media users also have different and varied tastes when it comes to using various platforms.

## SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS INTEGRATED

There are three dominant social media platforms and each can contribute differently to the ever-changing conversation. Throughout the following article, take a look at how we might use Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest differently than we might be using them now. This examination may also allow us to see where our personal gifts and talents might best be expressed via social media.

### Twitter

Twitter lends itself to the news hungry and those who are actively seeking information. Its best functionality allows users to constantly share news or even share another's news. It helps users correlate news easily and gives them a broader platform for information gathering. The language of Twitter is spoken in tweets which are messages given in no more than 140 characters, meaning succinctness is championed.

Users also use # which are known as hashtags. Anyone born before 1985 remembers these symbols as the number sign, which we knew to find on the bottom right hand of our telephone's number pad. The hashtag helps to categorize news and events so all who are interested in a topic can find information. For example, if you are looking to follow the SuperBowl the hashtag would be #superbowl. Hashtags allow us also to express what would be the text equivalent of emoticons. As users we can express our joy of the event like this — These Pats are #fantastic players. This #superbowl is my favorite one ever.

Twitter's best functionality for us in a parish setting is to use it as a newsy site. It is a wonderful place to send reminders and news in a timely fashion. It allows us to also give a thought for the day. For example, if we wanted to send out a message

about Good Shepherd Sunday, we can tweet a message such as, "Learning more about your vocation is everyone's responsibility. #GoodShepherdSunday is coming up. Do you know your #role?"

### Instagram

Instagram is a site commonly used by teenagers and young adults. It goes off the adage, "A photo is worth 1,000 words." Photos are some of the most effective ways to share our good news in the parish. We are constantly taking photos at meetings, Mass, and festivals so why not put them somewhere for people to constantly see. The vocabulary of Instagram is we have the photos we take which are known as an 'Instagram' or 'Insta.' The hip usage of Insta is something like this: "Let's throw up photos from today's Mass on Insta."

Users who like the photos they see on their Instagram profile can do what Facebook users call sharing. If we liked something on Facebook that we wanted to tell our friends, we would hit the "share" button and send it along. The equivalent in Instagram is to "regram" an image to our followers. It is an easy way to show support or applaud someone's creativity.

For those of us in parish ministry or a catechetical setting, Instagram's best use helps us to capture group events in real-time. No longer will users have to wait until an image is uploaded on a website or even printed in the parish bulletin. It can automatically go up as part of a parish ministry site.

This is also an effective way to share other people's work. Let's say you really like a photo from a follower that could be applied in a ministerial setting — a beautiful photo of flowers in springtime. We may regram the photo on your ministry page to say something about Easter and new life.

### Pinterest

Out of all the social media platforms, Pinterest is the one that fosters and shares the most creativity. It is built on the premise of the old bulletin boards used at community centers or in the back of parishes that had items for sale and shared upcoming events. There are areas on a "virtual bulletin board" that allow users to share favorite recipes or home organizing tips. Pinterest users communicate via "pins" which are the objects pinned to the boards. And the boards are organized into categories. Some in parish settings have boards dedicated to classroom ideas, or religious education-related activities, or crafts. Some even have boards and pins dedicated to individual sacraments.

Users on Pinterest might find it most helpful to use this to share inspirational messages or quotes. This might be a fun way to categorize items for families preparing for first Eucharist. Maybe there are pins related to images relating to the Pascal Mystery or activities to talk about the Eucharist around the dinner table with other family members.

This might also be a way to capture the interest of catechists and catechist aids. We might have age-appropriate boards for classroom activities. We might share arts and crafts on the



board. We might also share information appropriate to the grade level since we know 8-year-olds have a different way of learning and communicating than 12-year-olds.

My colleagues in the Office for Catechesis and Youth Ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago who handle media resources have toyed with the idea of creating a resource board for youth ministers on Pinterest. In one way, it creates an easier way to categorize items but when you reference something from another site, you don't have to worry so much about copyright issues; pinning on Pinterest allows you to share the link which still belongs to its original owner.

In any social media or Internet technology-related conversation, it is important to stress the significance of making sure you aren't taking something or posting something that does not have proper permissions. If done properly, social media helps people post and share things appropriately when links, pins, or tweets are shared.

### UNPACKING THE SCRIPTURE SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Several years ago when I completed my master's thesis on integrating Facebook in a ministry setting among millennials, it became apparent that the gospel message that aligns itself most is Emmaus. We know it's a favorite among ministers and even more among those of us working with young people. There's something terrific and honest about having Jesus show up alongside two people who were disappointed with their life circumstance.

It's a beautiful and life-giving thing he does to walk with them, share their histories through Scripture, and then sit down to table and share the Eucharist. We know our role as ministers and catechetical leaders that we hope to lead people to a moment of discovery through Eucharist. We hope they learn to mission and can do likewise beyond the doors of the parish.

Emmaus illustrates that beautifully in social media. We come as a community of believers to a gathering place such as Twitter or Pinterest. Because we are who we are as humans, we carry disappointment, even regret. Then we encounter Christ through something we see on Pinterest that brings us to discovery. Our eyes are opened when we read a tweet from Pope Francis about how to live the Fourth Commandment with our families.

We can share our personal history and our parish history via social media. We can be that community of believers who journeys with the stranger. We can very well be the one who welcomes the stranger who is journeying toward something spiritual. We learn to break open Scripture in our catechesis classes with children, teenagers, and adults.

Next time you are struggling with how to use social media in your setting, re-read Luke Chapter 24. Walk with the disciples and reflect on how you and your ministry team may use Emmaus to journey with people in your religious education classes or your ministries at the parish. Maybe use *Lectio Divina* to see where Jesus is calling you to meet someone along the way. Ask what is it about your faith, your program, or your parish that may fill someone's heart so it burns brightly for Jesus.

### CULTIVATING GIFTS AND TALENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

As administrators, we are somewhat gifted when it comes to noticing potential volunteers or individuals who can help shepherd our programs with us. That same thinking needs to apply to our social media roles. We need to be better at finding people and aligning their gifts with our technology and social media crew.

We know in Corinthians that our gifts that are unique to us help the greater community, or in the rest of the body as we have come to know it. Let's think about that as our catalyst when we involve others on social media. Let's think about which gifts shine brightly when using different social media and build our teams in that fashion.

Instagram: Pictures capture emotions much more effectively than words. Find or invite someone in your ministry to help capture the beauty in your program or parish. We know that beautiful pictures evoke deep emotions. Invite a photographer or photographers to begin to capture beautiful events or moments that are special. If you are considering this avenue of Instagram, make sure you double-check proper permissions of photographs, especially with minors. Often times there may be someone at your diocesan office who can help assist with this if you are unsure of how to create proper permission forms.

## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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Pinterest: This is most for our crafters out there in social media world. This might be a good place for a team of catechists for children or even catechists for adults to create and gather items of faith to share. Ask those among us who are the catechist aids who have the gift of the arts and crafts.

Twitter: The tweeting team might consist of adults who naturally gravitate toward sharing news easily. Think about those among us who bring the good news easily and naturally. Maybe slowly encourage them to think about helping the Twitter ministry as an extension of their personality.

These are just ideas and thoughts on how to engage your community differently using their natural gifts, talents, and desires. But with any volunteers with whom we work, we ask them based on their talents.

We spend much time debating whether or not to continue in old ways or adapt new ones. Social media can be a hybrid experiment in your parish sharing new ways of communication for our essential pieces and programs. The evangelization we see Pope Francis spread via social media is one that we must not be afraid to adopt in every avenue of catechetical ministry.

Some of the successful keys to social media are simply revisiting our own mission and call as disciples who are sent to share

the Good News. Like the disciples who were walking with Jesus en route to Emmaus, we want to invite others to have this passion and desire for the Eucharist.

That can only be done in communion with others on a path that is sometimes more familiar to them than it is to us. As leaders, we are not called to ministry because it is a comfortable path, but one where growth can occur no matter what we do. Believe it or not, this growth can and will happen in social media if you begin to let it take shape in your ministry. |

*This article was adapted from a presentation Clarissa shared at LA Congress titled "I'm Over Facebook! Exploring other social media sites to help parish leaders remain relevant."*

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# Challenging Conversations: Strategies for Working through Ministerial Conflicts

Ann M. Garrido



As a child, one of my favorite books of the Bible was the Acts of the Apostles. I loved hearing the story about those who, upon hearing the preaching of the apostles, handed their possessions over to the budding Christian community and lived “happily ever after.” Hearing my father hint at the dinner

table about his struggles in the business world, I considered how ideal it would be to work in the church with people motivated only by good and holy intentions in an environment void of conflict.

My first high school job as an evening parish receptionist was quite an eye-opening experience as I watched four priests of varying generations and ecclesiologies wrangle with one another and a strong-willed housekeeper to exercise pastoral leadership in a bustling, boisterous Catholic community. It turns out that sometimes keys get lost, the adult faith room gets double-booked, DREs yell, principals cuss, and no one remembers to empty the dishwasher. Not everyday, but enough to leave an impression: the church is not a place where people live “happily ever after.”

One of the great gifts of graduate studies in theology was the opportunity to discover the letters of Paul. Written decades before the book of Acts was put onto parchment, Paul’s epistles reveal a church riddled with discord even from its earliest days. Only a few years after the tomb was found empty, Jesus’ disciples were already debating how to handle money and what kinds of public behaviors were appropriate for Christians. They had differing views on the role of women; how to handle interreligious marriage; and wages for their ministers. Many of the challenges that we know today, they knew as well. It turns out that there was *never* a time in which the church was without conflict, and yet, 2,000 years later, the church goes on.

The story I tell of my own journey is not unique. It mirrors the journey of almost every person who works in ministry — a pattern of attraction and disillusionment, hope and coming to terms with reality. What distinguishes those who are able to live meaningfully within the church as it is from those frustrated in their attempts to live “happily ever after” is the ability to function constructively within a church in conflict.

Which, time has proven, is not necessarily a bad place to be.

Studies have shown that communities reporting no conflict are less likely to be vibrant, practicing communities than they are to be comatose. People only argue about things that they care about, and if there are no tensions in a community, chances are it is a sign that no one much cares. So rather than be dismayed at the multiple conflicts that inevitably are a part of your ministry, think of them as a sign of commitment to your community’s life. The question is not how to make them go away, but how to engage them in such a way that they serve the ongoing health and vitality of the community rather than fracture it.

Here are five tips for turning a difficult situation into a learning conversation:

## SIDESTEP THE “TRIANGLE”

One of the greatest temptations when we are upset about something is to tell everyone but the person with whom we are upset. The pattern of getting others involved in our conflicts is often referred to as triangulation — what was between two parties has now spread to include a third. Triangulation has many faces; it includes behaviors like venting to a co-worker about another co-worker, as well as asking the pastor to confront a parent for you rather than doing it yourself.

Research indicates that triangulation flourishes in contexts where people are eager to avoid conflict, and in situations where people feel as if they have little power to influence the outcome of a situation.<sup>1</sup> As such, faith-based contexts are often particularly susceptible to triangulation; they are populated by “nice” (conflict-avoidant) persons functioning within a centuries-old hierarchical structure. No matter how well-meaning we are, however, triangulation can have a toxic effect on a community. As one of my co-workers said to me once, “You want your anger to be like a coursing stream and not a finely diffused mist.”

Difficult though it may be, try talking to the person with whom you have a problem before letting others know about it. Let the person know directly what you find challenging; give the person a chance to explain themselves to you privately. Keeping the conversation limited to those involved can help maintain a sense of dignity and lessen defensiveness. If the





initial effort is unsuccessful and you feel the conflict requires bringing in a supervisor, do so, but continue to be present personally in these conversations so that you can speak your impressions and perspective yourself and not expect another to do for you the difficult work of bringing up sensitive topics.

### LISTEN TO LEARN, “WHY DO WE SEE IT DIFFERENTLY?”

The authors of the book *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*<sup>2</sup> note that in times of tension our brains seem wired to ask, “Who’s right in this scenario? Who’s wrong?” And the answer to these questions is always the same: “Me. You.” When we enter into a conversation from this angle, we end up spending our time trying to persuade one another as to all of the reasons *why* we are right and *why* the other is wrong. We share the strengths of our conclusions and point out the weaknesses in theirs. But rarely does this lead to a fruitful resolution. When was the last time you changed your mind on something because of another’s persistent advocacy of their point?

Rather than enter a conversation with the aim to figure out who’s right and who’s wrong, we can start with another ques-

tion: “Why do we see this differently?” It turns out that each of us arrives at conclusions not out of midair, but based on different data and different ways of interpreting that data — based on our own life experiences, personalities, families of origin, preferences, and biases, etc. Even though you might say, “Well, X’s position just doesn’t make any sense,” you can bet that X is not walking around saying, “Well, I hold what I hold because I don’t make any sense.” Somehow it makes sense to X from where X sits. The first step to transforming a difficult situation into a learning conversation is to ask questions to understand why X believes what X does.

### UNTANGLE INTENT FROM IMPACT

One of the most common characteristics of a tense situation is that the parties involved begin to conflate intent and impact. Each of us knows the good intentions that undergird our behavior as ministers: We want people to feel included and empowered. We make decisions with the common good of the community in mind. We bend over backwards to accommodate their special needs. And it is hurtful when others can’t see that. When they complain. When they don’t show up. When they give irrelevant feedback. Were they even *at* the same event that we planned? We think that our good intent

should have a good impact on others. On the flip side, we can all think of times when we've been hurt, offended, left out, stung. And when we think of what motivated the persons who impacted us this way, the first thoughts that come to mind are, "They meant it. They were careless, irresponsible, inattentive to detail." We suspect that when we are impacted negatively, it is because the other had poor intentions.

In reality, it is possible that even the best of our intentions can still have negative impacts on others' lives, and that even the things that impact us worst could be the fruit of good intentions on the part of others. When talking to others with whom you are upset or who are upset with you, be careful to untangle intent from impact: "I know what my intentions were, but it sounds like you were really hurt by what happened. Tell me more about that" or "I know I was really frustrated by how things turned out, but I'm guessing your intent was not to frustrate me. What *were* your intentions?"

### GIVE ROOM FOR THE FEELINGS

We've all been in tense situations where someone has suggested, "Okay, we should just leave feelings aside here and try to figure this out based on reason." The advice would be fine and good — if it were possible. The fact is that we are embodied beings, not disembodied minds. We couldn't turn off feelings if we wanted to, and if we didn't have feelings, we wouldn't find the situation challenging in the first place. Rather than trying to eliminate feelings from the conversation, it is a question of managing feelings effectively so that they can serve as a source of wisdom and enlightenment about what is really going on for each party.

Although it sounds counter-intuitive, the best way to manage feelings is to get them out onto the table. Name the array of feelings you have about the situation: "When I think about how last week's session went, I feel both grateful for the effort and also really frustrated by the outcome and maybe a bit angry that I wasn't consulted in the planning process." Naming emotions is not the same thing as getting emotional. One can name anger without yelling.

For the other, invite what they are feeling. If they begin to vent or turn red or throw accusations in your direction, you can help them find words to express what they aren't saying: "It seems like you were really frustrated by what happened" or "I'm picking up a sadness in what you are saying. I could be wrong, but could you say more about what you are feeling?" The feelings involved often illumine what is at stake for both parties.

### PURSUE INTERESTS RATHER THAN POSITIONS

Too often when we disagree over the best path forward in a situation, we trade our proposed solutions: "We should move religious education to Sunday mornings." "No, we should keep it on Wednesday night." The temptation is to make it a contest of wills (either you get what you want or I get what I want) or to try to figure out a compromise: "Maybe we should

do it Tuesdays at lunch time." Like the two mothers in the story of King Solomon, cutting the baby in half really is not good for anyone, least of all the baby.

Before debating positions or looking for compromises, spend some time discussing interests: Why do you want it on Sunday? What does the Wednesday time slot offer? What is at stake for each of us here? Once we know each other's interests, it is possible that we might be able to create other options that would meet many of both of our interests, even if not each of our positions. We might find that we don't need our position to be realized in order for our interests to still be honored.<sup>3</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The apostle Paul says that as a church, we have been entrusted by God with both the "message" and the "ministry" of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19). We don't just get to theorize about prayer; we are expected to pray. We don't just get to talk about acts of mercy, we must do them. And we don't get to just preach about God having reconciled the world through Christ, the world expects to see some examples of how it is done. Conflict may be perennial. It may be built into the structure of the church from its very beginning. But that doesn't mean conflict can't be redeemed. Indeed, done well, conflict can lead to great spiritual growth for the participants and witness to the world.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' final dinner with his disciples is marked by a long closing discourse in which he relays all that he most wants them to remember before he departs. At the center of his teaching that night is a parable in which he describes himself as the True Vine and his disciples as the branches. Repeatedly, he uses one verb to express what he wants them to be able to do in the time ahead, difficult though it may be: he wants them to "remain."

Fostering practices for healthy communication in our communities is one of the most important things we can do together as ministers. For, when we nurture the vision, capacities, and skills for conflict done well, we are proffering a pathway for "remaining" in the church and in the vine. We are nourishing the means for living not a life "happily ever after" but "life in abundance"—the kind of life Jesus *does* promise us, even in the midst of our bustling, boisterous communities. |

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### ENDNOTES

1. Ted Dunn, "Triangulation and the Misuse of Power," *Human Development*, v. 27 no. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 18-26.
2. Stone, Patton, and Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. (NY: Penguin, 2010).
3. For more information on interest-based problem solving, see: Roger Fisher and William Ury, with Bruce Patton. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Penguin, 1991).

# Water and Oil, Robe and Candle: The Symbols and Significance of Baptism

Michael Marchal



The 20<sup>th</sup> century liturgical movement was not some artificial, artistic cult or some historian's restorationist fantasy. Though the desire for both beauty and authenticity played a role, the movement's diverse components seem to have had one insight in common. This deep truth was articulated

by the mediaeval theologians: *Sacraments "work" by being symbols*. And authentic symbols are ample, and concrete, and richly sensory.

My baptism in June of 1944 is a good example of what the movement was trying to change. The only people present except for me were my godparents and the priest. Since it was June, the baptismal water — which was blessed only at Easter and Pentecost — was still relatively fresh. But that did not make much difference since only a few drops were trickled over my forehead.

The chrismation was the priest tracing only a dab of chrism on my forehead with the tip of his thumb since each parish was given only a tiny amount of oil. The white garment was a handkerchief that was laid on me and then removed. The lighted candle was presented to my godparents and then blown out and put back in the storage cabinet.

A canon lawyer would have been satisfied with that ceremony since it was both valid and licit — and those issues are foundational. Yet, the foundation is not the building. The more important question is: what did the participants *experience*?

Three of us could not understand many of the words of the rite since they were Latin. More importantly, the symbols of the sacrament were mere remnants, mere shadows of what had once been strong and evocative objects and gestures.

Though I never asked my godparents the theological questions, I would not be surprised if they walked out of the baptistery thinking that the meaning of the rite was the washing of original sin off my soul. After all, I did get a little wet. Though some days my failures make me question whether that liberation really happened, there was no convincing symbol that anything else happened: rebirth, or resurrection, or adoption, or the giving of the Spirit — all those other equally important components of the sacrament's spiritual significance.

Then Vatican II happened and the rites were reformed and renewed. And so during the last public baptisms at Sunday Mass in my parish, three babies were naked when they were immersed in the font, and the crowns of their heads gleamed with the fragrant chrism. They were dressed in white after the water-bath and presented with their candles amid the applause of the whole assembly.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLS

It was a service filled with authentic symbols and not remnant gestures. But what did those symbols *signify*? I would like to reflect upon their richness so that, when we do mystagogy with older neophytes or infant baptism preparation with parents and godparents — or religious education in any form — we can lead people into the fullest possible understanding of what is happening through this complex set of symbols.

The first symbol is often unnoticed, the assembly. Yet the Rite of Baptism for Children states: "The faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family but it is the common treasure of the whole Church" (64.4).

Not just the immediate family but the entire parish community is responsible for supporting both the families of children being baptized, and adult initiates. (That is why we have mystagogy.)

Adults are initiated only at Easter. And so if infant baptism occurs only in a Sunday afternoon ghetto and is never celebrated during Sunday Mass, that larger community will never have the chance to experience with some regularity both the reliving of their own baptism and the challenge to provide "love and help" (*RBC #I, 4*) to the neophytes. Nor will the families experience that commitment by the community.

The second symbol is the water. Quantity is important. The various blessings recall the oceanic waters of creation, the overwhelming waters of the flood, the walls of water at the Exodus; such images spoken over a salad bowl containing maybe a half a gallon or so of water can grate on the imagination.

Connected to the quantity of water is how much contact those being baptized will have with it. Small bowls allow only pouring (often dribbling); bigger containers allow for immersion of at least some part of the neophyte's body. The ancient texts do speak of the font under the image of a *spring* or a *bath* in



which all sin is washed away. Yet they also describe it as a *tomb* from which the neophytes rise (Romans 6) and as a *womb* from which they are reborn (John 3).

The more we can make the font itself and the water-bath approach the richness of those images, the more will all the participants have the chance to experience more of the rich spiritual reality which is unfolding. As The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults says, we must “ensure the clear understanding that the washing is not a mere purification rite but the sacrament of being joined to Christ” (213).

And so our earliest Christian ancestors felt the need to follow the water-bath with a symbolic unpacking of that strong but simple gesture. These explanatory rites that they developed “give expression to the effects of the sacrament just received” (RCIA, 214).

Since adults will be confirmed almost immediately, they are not chrismated after the water-bath. (And that is a long discussion for another time.) The first of these rites for children, though, is chrismation with a “christic” and not a “pneumatic” formula.

The roots of this rite might lie in the growing awareness in the earliest years of the church of what it meant to be Christians (Cf. Acts 11.), disciples of the Christ (Greek), the Messiah (Hebrew), God’s Anointed One (English). Perhaps under the influence of the first covenant where fragrant oil was used to anoint priests and kings, in Christ’s new community not just the leaders but everyone was anointed. Even infants are still invited to live their new reality, to live as members of (Christ’s) Body, for he is “priest, prophet, and king” forever.

Imagine how different our lives would be if we took that reality seriously. It is so easy to think that spiritual growth comes primarily through shame and guilt. Though I know that we are all sinners, the good news is grace, not sin; growth, not failure.

### LIVING AS PRIEST, PROPHET, AND KING

How often do we live in that grace? For in all those moments of self-sacrificing love that happen throughout our day, we are living as priests. Whenever we speak up for the vulnerable and disregarded, whenever tough love makes us say what needs to be said, whenever we call others to life and joy, we are living as prophets. And when our values and our actions embody not just the Ten Commandments but also the Beatitudes, we are living as kings and queens, as those already alive in the reign of God.

Just as with the water, a generous use of oil is crucial for making this symbol truly speak. All that the rite says is that “the ministers anoint each child on the crown of the head (not the forehead!) with the sacred chrism” (BFC, 125). No quantity is specified, nor any way of application.

The second explanatory rite is the clothing in the white garment as the visible sign for the newly-baptized and for the community of the dignity of being a member of Christ. Although the formula about the garment is slightly somber with its reference to carrying it “unstained” to heaven, the fathers of the church emphasize the positive.

They describe the white-clad neophytes as radiant, as living icons of the risen Christ. The robe is also described as a wedding-garment and a priestly robe that they will wear as they soon share in the Eucharistic banquet for the first time.

I am old enough to have experienced the meaning of clothes that were my “Sunday best.” Much of my family worked five or even six days a week at jobs that were physically demanding and often made them quite dirty. Yet one day a week they were more than their work; they were somebody, and they had dignity. Just like the white

pall at a Christian funeral, the white garment is a great equalizer, eliminating all signs of social or economic standing and proclaiming instead a person’s spiritual status.

Another aspect of the white robe that we miss is that it is also a mark of freedom. Because of some recent movies, many people now have a much better understanding of the brutal realities of the slave-holding American South. Most of us have no sense, though, of how radical a challenge the robe presented to the hierarchical basis of ancient Mediterranean society. In a world bound in a rigid caste system where political and social status was publicly displayed by the clothes that one did and did not wear, the neophytes entered into the community all dressed the same — even *slaves!*

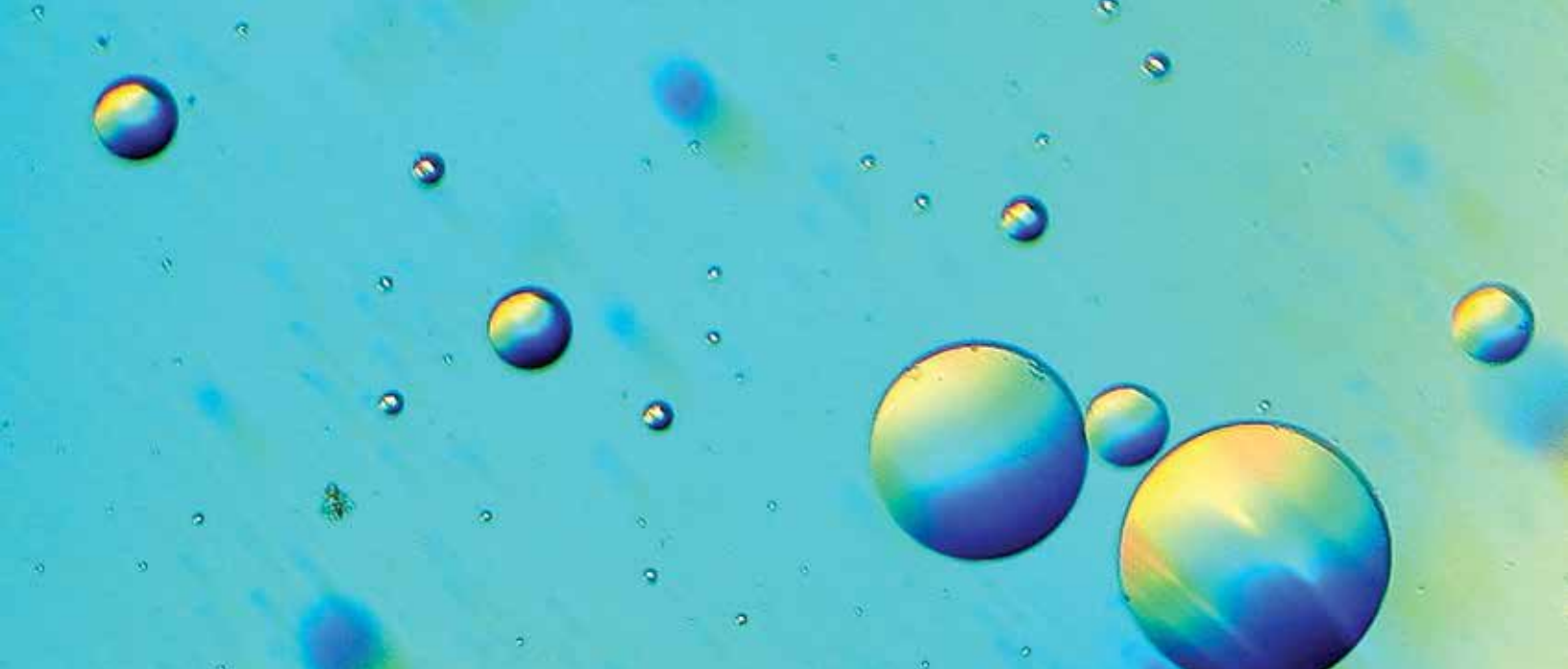
In a country marked by growing income inequality and protests over the values of the lives of all its citizens, reflecting upon the garment as the outward sign of the inward dignity of all the baptized might enable us to bring an authentic Christian awareness and a healing voice to our discussions.

The third explanatory rite is the presentation of the lighted candle to the older neophytes and to the parents and godparents of newly-baptized infants. This formula of presentation again refers to the day of judgment since the initiates are charged with carrying the flame “alive in their hearts,” but the

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emphasis is again positive. Like the five wise bridesmaids, they are ready for the wedding feast.

The fathers do not speak much about the candle (or lamp) even though in early Christian art such lamps are often associated with the saints, especially the martyrs. Our ritual, though, which requires that baptismal candles be lit from the Easter candle, strongly reinforces that what we share in baptism is resurrection glory. The neophytes are living members of the living Christ, joined to the communion of saints that John saw in Revelation.

A fourth possible explanatory rite for infants is the Ephphetha, the touching, or opening, of the ears and mouth. It is absent from the ritual for adults because they experienced it as part of the preliminary RCIA rites. Retaining the gesture for infants divided the post-Vatican II reform commission, and its use is optional in this country. Since the infant does not understand the words or gesture, and the parents and godparents have been challenged several times in the rite to “keep the...faith alive in their (child’s) heart,” there seems to be little gain in adding this additional rite to the service.

#### FINDING RICHNESS IN ADDITIONAL RITUALS

In addition to these four explanatory rites, there have been others that either never became part of Western Christian initiation rituals, or at some point disappeared. Yet they too might help us see even more of the richness of initiation.

The first was the foot washing, a gesture whose inclusion might startle or puzzle us. Yet its position in the old rituals soon after the chrismation reveals its significance. If the neophytes are to live as members of the messianic king, they must imitate Christ the Servant. The formula for the gesture charged them to do exactly that — especially “to strangers, to pilgrims, and to the poor” — and to immigrants?

A second rite was the giving of an additional cup of milk and honey to the neophytes during communion. Still practiced among the Ethiopian Christians, this gesture is richly sym-

bolic, recalling the theme of rebirth since the *neo-phytes* are *new-born* children of God. Yet the gesture also looks backward to initiation as an exodus to a promised land of freedom and dignity and forward to the rich sweetness of the heavenly banquet.

The final rite still practiced in the Syrian tradition such as the Maronites, and especially among the Copts, is the crowning of the neophytes. Occurring after the chrismation and clothing, it seems to be an image expressing the *royal* dignity that the initiates have gained in the Anointed One — and perhaps also to their *priestly* dignity by referring as well to the miters worn by Israel’s priests. The Coptic formula of blessing the crowns also picks up *prophetic* allusions, found above all in Isaiah, by asking that the crowns be a sign of “blessing and glory...virtue and righteousness,...wisdom and understanding.”

Just like the white garments, the crowns seem to symbolize the radical moral and social transformation that Jesus proclaimed to be the sign of God’s reign. I think of the gospel musical *Crowns* about the challenges faced by African-American women during the six days of the week when they are often little more than “the help” — challenges met with the deep faith that is proclaimed by their “church hats” on Sunday. In the midst of the congregation, they are queens, respected and looked up to for their wisdom and fidelity.

Whatever the additional rites used, they always develop one central theme for us to share: initiation at any age is not just about purification; it is about *Christ-ening*. |

*Michael Marchal* has degrees from Xavier University and Fordham University, and is retired after teaching high school for 44 years. He has been involved during that time with worship at Bellarmine Chapel of Xavier University and has served a term on the archdiocesan worship commission. He has published numerous articles on education and on liturgy and four books: *Parish Funerals*, *Adapting the Liturgy*, the award-winning *The Spirit at Work*, and *Towards the Table*. His hobby is cooking, and he is currently exploring desserts.

# The Problem and the Antidote to People Leaving the Church

Mary Birmingham



The problem? Recent polling suggests that people are leaving the Catholic Church at an alarming rate. The solution? As difficult as it is to comprehend, we have the power in our own communities to turn those numbers around. It does not require another program, process, or workshop. It simply requires single-mindedness, commitment, and consistency to uphold a singular, primary driving force in all our Catholic Christian endeavors — *conversion, conversion, conversion.*

We must ask ourselves, if people — children, youth, and adults — leave our hallowed halls with a basic *knowledge* of the faith (a good and worthy thing), but do not necessarily know its architect, do they have an intimate knowledge of the “*One Who Knows Us Best and Loves Us Most?*” Too many of our young people are leaving our classrooms and ministries without having had a meaningful encounter with the Risen Lord. If that is not our primary goal, then what else is?

Any public institution can educate — our mandate is to educate and pass on the truths of our faith — but above all, our primary responsibility is to bring those we teach into a living, intimate union with Jesus Christ. Our job is to help those we serve find within themselves the Christ who lives within, the Spirit of Christ who groans within us and who desires an intimate friendship with us — a personal, living relationship.

The problem begs the question: How much time is given in our ministries and our classrooms to lead people into an encounter with the Lord? Although we are bound to schedules and outlines, time must be given to reflect upon the way in which our living Lord has been present and active in our lives, this week, this hour, and this very moment.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us that we are all called to preach the Gospel of Joy; it is our responsibility. If we are called to preach joy, we must be given the language to do that preaching. Without consistent awareness of God’s action in our own lives, how can we possibly go out and share God’s love with others? Francis tells us that we are all called to be missionaries. He gives us the blueprint for this important responsibility.

Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen

unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. (127)

In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterwards is it possible to bring up God’s word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship. This message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn, in the awareness that the message is so rich and so deep that it always exceeds our grasp. At times the message can be presented directly, at times by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way that the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation. If it seems prudent and if the circumstances are right, this fraternal and missionary encounter could end with a brief prayer related to the concerns, which the person may have expressed. In this way, they will have an experience of being listened to and understood; they will know that their particular situation has been placed before God, and that God’s word really speaks to their lives. (128)

## CALLED TO BE VULNERABLE

Francis presents us with the solution. We simply must lead those we serve to encounter a living faith, to consider the events of our lives in the light of faith. We as Catholic educators, catechists, and ministers must ask ourselves: Are we providing the space, security, time, and environment necessary to share the joys, sorrows, hopes, and dreams of our lives? Are we weaving personal dialogue, faith sharing, and testimony to God’s action into our programs, lesson plans, or doctrinal sessions?

Sometimes it is easier to simply pass on Catholic information than it is to become vulnerable to the children in our schools, our religious education programs, our youth programs, and our adult spirituality programs. Sometimes even wonderful,



committed Catholics find it difficult to become vulnerable in sharing life with those to whom they minister.

Sometimes we hear from catechists that there is not enough time to share personal faith. There is too much to cover in the allotted time. What is more important: knowledge of the faith or a living faith in Christ? Without the latter, the former will have no meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve.

There is a pervasive assumption that every parishioner is already converted to Christ. One could conceivably study the Bible and still not have had a personal encounter with God. Perhaps such people have a dormant faith in Christ, and have not had the opportunity to share their faith in Christ and thus, grow in an environment that nurtures that growth.

We as catechetical leaders must ask ourselves, “When we teach, are we willing to become vulnerable? Are we willing to share the joys, sorrows, struggles, weaknesses, and challenges of our own lives? Are we willing to share the transformation that our faith in Christ has brought about? Are we willing to teach in a way that invites a faith perspective into all dimensions of what we teach?”

The challenges in parish life are no different than they are for our Catholic classrooms. We cannot assume that just because

someone is involved in parish activities that they have developed a personal, living relationship with Christ.

Francis insists that we break the mold of how we have always done things in the past. Conversion and evangelization must be the first and primary priority in all that we do.

Yes, we are hemorrhaging people out of the church. I suspect that we do not, however, have an attendance problem; we have a conversion problem.

What, then, can we do as a parish and as educators to help stem the exodus — to put a finger in the dike, if only in small ways — in our personal lives, in our family lives, in our work lives, and in our parish life?

We simply must become better witnesses to our faith. The best thing we have to share as Catholics is our faith in the risen Christ who is with us, who lives in our hearts, who walks with us in the challenges of life. We are called to open our hearts, our minds, and our lives to the God who is with us — every minute, every day, and every week throughout the years. We cannot change the face of the church by ourselves. We can, however, make a difference in our own lives, in the lives of the family, with our friends, in the parish, in our workplace, and in our local civic world.



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Most importantly, the parish should make a commitment to become a *conversion-centered parish*; its very reason for being is to nurture a living faith in Jesus Christ in the parishioners it serves. Such a focus will influence every prayer, every decision, and every action the parish takes.

### SHARING PERSONAL FAITH

Where do we begin? First, we cannot share what we don't have or what is weak in us. The first priority is to foster ongoing conversion in us, to consider ways in which we are called to grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus and to become better disciples of the Lord.

We are called to explore ways in which we can help people who perhaps have an impersonal view of God to move to an awareness of God who is alive and active and desires our friendship. Very often when we say, "share our faith," we automatically think of sharing Catholic faith — what Catholics *believe*, such as real presence in the Eucharist. While that is a worthy endeavor, it is not the place to start. Before people can embrace Catholic doctrine they must have an encounter with Christ for it to have any meaningful, long-lasting effect. The former Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) said, "A dogmatic faith unsupported by personal experience remains empty; mere personal experience unrelated to the faith of the church remains blind." Both are needed.

### SHARING FAITH IN OUR FAMILIES

Second, our families are our greatest classroom for learning how to share our faith with others. What better way to learn how to evangelize to people who are unconverted than to practice intentional faith sharing within our own families? Witnessing our faith is the most powerful tool of evangelization there is.

### SHARING FAITH IN THE PARISH

Third, parishes can and should keep a conversion-centered focus at the forefront of parish life. Ongoing conversion to Jesus Christ who lives within us, and who desires to be in close personal relationship with us, should be at the heart of everything we do. Conversion of hearts should become a primary focus. What does that mean? It means that we will be more intentional than we already are about fostering conversion to Jesus and about forming more committed disciples.

Before we begin the important work of evangelization, we must do the work of personal discernment. We must honestly assess

whether our image of God is that of a personal friend or an impersonal force. If God is an impersonal force for me, then I must pray for the faith to grow deeper in my relationship with him. "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief."

We must empower our students, teachers, catechists, and parish ministers to confront a living faith. If a Scripture is proclaimed in the class or session, take ten minutes to unpack it with one other person or a small group through eyes of faith. What does this Scripture have to say about *my* relationship with Jesus? How does it speak to what is going on in *my* life right now? In what way does this Scripture challenge *me* to be a better disciple this week in my family, my work, and my play?

Begin each class or session with the basic conversion-centered question: In looking back at your day or week, in what way has Christ been present in your life? What events in your day or week have God's fingerprints written all over them? In what way has Jesus been active in your life today?

We can encourage families to share faith around the family table. "How was God present in your life today? For what are you grateful? What needs to change in light of the way God has been leading and directing each of us today?"

We must encourage every parishioner to pray for the strength and the courage to share their faith with family,

friends, and coworkers. Pope Francis tells us we are to take on the smell of sheep. We are to enter the world of the broken and see in our encounter with them the hand of God reaching out to them no matter what sin, no matter what pain, no matter what state of life — to reach out and invite them into God's loving embrace.

Every event — every occasion for gathering — is an opportunity to share God's love and invite people into the household of God. Our job as ministers of God's Word is to be diligent in this very important work of evangelization. Only then will we have any hope of stopping the blood flow out of our communities. |

*Mary Birmingham, a popular writer and speaker, is the director of music, liturgy and Christian Initiation and Whole Community Catechesis at Ascension Catholic Community in Melbourne, FL. She has a master's degree in Theology and Liturgy from St. John's University in Collegeville, MN.*

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# The Role of the Blessed Mother in the 1986 Philippine Revolution

Cris V. Villapando



*Author's note: February 22-25, 2016, marked the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue Philippine Revolution that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos.*

If you look at most revolutions in the world, you'll see a heroic figure, a man or a woman who inspired the people to rise and fight for their cause. We have George Washington in the United States, Dr. Jose Rizal in the Philippines, Emiliano Zapata in Mexico, and a slew of other heroes punctuating urban squares and national parks with their monuments and statues. Human heroes, flesh and blood incarnates. But what's mind-boggling in the Philippine Revolution of 1986 that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos, the person the Filipino nation elevated to heroic status was not a regular, flesh and blood contemporary person; it was the Blessed Mother.

The Filipino nation could have chosen Cory Aquino who was intensely campaigning against Marcos's corruption in the island of Cebu, or Jaime Cardinal Sin who risked his life using Radio Veritas (the only nongovernmental channel) to direct the mass demonstration, or General Fidel Ramos and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, Sr., who instigated military rebellion. So, how come the people erected the statue of the Blessed Mother as the heroine of the 1986 EDSA Revolution? What was happening on the ground? What did the Blessed Mother actually do?

## MAMA MARY, MOTHER OF ALL

In order to understand this unique national phenomenon, you have to go back to the scene that unfolded from February 22 through February 25, 1986. First you'll catch the sight of this vast ocean of people. You'll notice they are holding signs clamoring for freedom and justice but what's strangely unusual is that they are also holding *something not found in other countries' demonstrations*: they're carrying statues, images, and pictures of the Blessed Mother.

The soldiers who were given the command to fire at the demonstrators uttered to themselves: "Hey, those people are the children of Mama Mary. I, too, am a son of Mama Mary. Hey, those people are carrying rosaries, praying the rosaries. I, too, have a rosary in my pocket."

A cognitive dissonance happened! A mental conflict shook their heads. A spiritual alarm jarred their souls. It just did not make sense for the soldiers to fire at their fellow Marian brothers and sisters.

CATECHETICAL LEADER

## A MARIAN REVOLUTION

Meanwhile, a secondary miracle was happening. There are at least 96 languages in the Philippines and more than 140 ethno-linguistic groups in the south. The soldier from Pangasinan Province who spoke the Ilocano and Panggalatok languages, upon seeing the image of the Blessed Mother exclaimed: "That's Mama Mary, Our Lady of Manaoag!" The Tagalog soldier from Rizal Province declared: "That's Mama Mary, Our Lady of Antipolo!" The Bicolano soldier also recognized the woman as "Ina" (mother), the term Bicolanos use to address Our Lady of Peñafrancia, and so on.

Thus, when the Marcos central command gave the order to fire at the demonstrators, the artillery unit, according to Jesuit Fr. Nilo Tanalega, made an excuse saying: "Sorry, sir, we cannot get the machine to read the correct coordinates for the target," or "Sir, something is wrong with our canons, it's malfunctioning, etc." Inside the heart of the soldier: "I'm not killing my brother, son of Mama Mary for I, too, I am a son of Mama Mary."

In an attempt to use cultural diversity to his advantage, Marcos deviously assigned soldiers from different language groups other than Tagalog, the language of Manila. The object was to prevent ethnic bonding or social bonding by one province native with a co-province native. But the demonstrators recognized this tactic and sought beautiful Ibanag women to offer sandwiches and water to Ibanag soldiers; beautiful Visayan women to bring flowers and towel wipes to Visayan soldiers, lovely Bicolana Belles to offer snacks and drinks to Bicolano soldiers, etc.

At the end of four unpredictably risky days, the Blessed Mother brought about the first bloodless revolution that became known in the world as "People Power" — a legacy Filipinos bequeathed to the world. It was also the first of its kind, a Marian Revolution, and there at EDSA is the proof, the statue of the Blessed Mother standing tall at the intersection of Ortigas Avenue and Epifanio de los Santos. ■

*Cris Villapando is the Director of Faith Formation Programs for the Diocese of Charlotte.*



# Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction

by Philip E. Tetlock & Dan Gardner

Reviewed by Dan Thomas



Superforecasting can be our guide to how we work with diocesan and parish councils and staffs, NCCL committees and Rep Council, as well as our own everyday planning processes for the work that we do.

What is superforecasting? It is a process that helps “superforecasters” predict what will happen in politics and economics in the near future. What Philip Tetlock suggests in this book is that superforecasters are ordinary people and that the techniques they use can be taught to anyone.

Tetlock begins with the story of the development of modern medicine, which in its early history was full of many untested techniques and assumptions, which were common practices that everyone used and “knew” to be true. Slowly but surely in the twentieth century, “randomized trial experiments, care-

ful measurement, and statistical power” were used to discover which treatments really worked. As he puts it, “What medicine lacked [up to that point] was doubt” (29).

This history leads Tetlock to “think about thinking,” which clarifies how we go about making judgments and decisions. Normally, we use what he calls System 1 thinking, that is the automatic process of deciding based on our intuitions about those events that happen to us. “System 2 is charged with interrogating that answer” (34). It is System 2 thinking that this book is all about.

“Its steps are as follows: Unpack the question into components. Distinguish as sharply as you can between the known and unknown and leave no assumptions unscrutinized. Adopt the outside view and put the problem into a comparative perspective



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that downplays its uniqueness and treats it as a special case of a wider class of phenomena. Then adopt the inside view that plays up the uniqueness of the problem.... Synthesize all these different views into a single vision.... Finally, express your judgment as precisely as you can..." (153).

The value of this process is that "From thinking about the markets to understanding politics to navigating daily life, anyone can get better at weighing the odds of what will happen next."

Tetlock has these descriptors of superforecasters: they are cautious, humble, nondeterministic, actively open-minded, intelligent and knowledgeable, reflective, comfortable with numbers, pragmatic, analytical, dragon-eyed: value diverse views and synthesize them into their own, probabilistic, thoughtful updaters, good intuitive psychologists, and have a growth mindset (191-2). It seems to me that this is a good list of contemporary Christian virtues.

Another important finding of his research is the significance of working in teams: "on average, teams were 23% more accurate than individuals" (201). He also talks about what he calls "adversarial collaboration," a "commitment as a scientist to finding common ground with those who hold different views" (234).

*Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* is on the cutting edge of organizational forecasting. It uses the best of what is known about the thinking process and applies it in a way that can be used in real life, everyday situations. The virtues it recommends are the virtues required for effective planning and living in today's world. Ours is a chaotic time, which challenges us to be attentive to the actual reality we are meeting in life and our work. This book is a guide to doing that processing well.

The value of this book for any reader is first of all what it can do for our own thinking in looking at the persons and classes that we meet in our teaching. It is important not to make quick judgments about our students and our classrooms. Following the above suggestions will help us analyze what and how we teach. The book also suggests we work in teams in order to make us more aware of our blind spots. We are called to humility in the way we do our teaching, learning, and planning. |

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



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# Planning for the Vineyard

Teri Burns



Spring is a time when parish catechetical leaders begin planning for next year. Whether you're a team of five or on your own, it's important to plan to ensure a successful faith formation process.

I recommend a five-prong planning process:

(1) Pray to the Holy Spirit; (2) Consider the mission; (3) Read the signs of the times; (4) Consult with others; (5) Develop the plan. Following this process helps me to stay focused and organized as I consider the possibilities for faith formation programs for the coming year.

## FAITH FORMATION PLANNING

Because we are about God's ministry, it is important to first pray to the Holy Spirit for inspiration and wisdom. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us determine the best programs and processes for engaging our people in growing in knowledge of our Catholic faith and encouraging them to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives.

We need to consider the mission. Our mission comes directly from Jesus: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Jesus exhorts us to spread the Good News so that others may come to know him and follow his way. As we reflect on this mission, we ponder what difference living as disciples of Jesus Christ will have in the lives of our parishioners.

It is important that we read the signs of the times. Mass attendance is down. Attendance in weekly religious education programs is dwindling. The pull of secular culture is gaining momentum. We need to wrestle with the issues of Christian discipleship versus secular culture in order to better engage our people in growing in relationship with Jesus Christ.

To be the most effective in reading the signs of the times and understanding what our people need to grow in their Christian discipleship, we need to consult with others. We cannot rely on our own perspectives. We need to consult with other parish staff members and collaborate among the various ministries. We can also develop an advisory council made up of well-informed parishioners. Surveying catechists, parents, and participants is a good process to evaluate the past year and determine what worked well and what might need further development. This also helps us learn what our people need and desire rather than relying on what we think they need.

Consultation also involves being aware of what's happening in the universal church. We need to be aware of important international endeavors, such as the Synod on the Family and the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The USCCB provides many resources for catechesis, including Catechetical Sunday every September. We also need to be mindful of events in our dioceses.

After praying to the Holy Spirit, considering the mission, reading the signs of the times, and consulting with others, we can begin to develop the plan. First, brainstorm all the possibilities, using the six tasks of catechesis as a guide: knowl-

edge of the faith; liturgical education; moral formation; learning to pray; education for community life; and missionary discipleship and service. As we consider the possibilities, we should keep in mind the different groups to which we minister: children, youth, adults, families, etc.

Planning involves preparing the calendar and developing the budget. Because time, space, and resources are limited, it is important to prioritize the dreams based on the needs of our people, potential impact of processes, and what we can actually manage.

## COMMUNICATION AND RECRUITMENT

After developing the plan, it's time to communicate the plan and begin recruiting others. Communication of the plan and recruitment go hand in hand. It's never too early to begin. As we share with the community the programs and processes that will be provided, we can invite others to get involved. Making disciples involves encouraging – and challenging – people to practice their discipleship. As people express their discipleship through action, they will grow in love for and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let us be open to the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance as we plan for the future of our faith formation programs and processes. Let us stay focused on the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us keep our eyes and ears open to reading the signs of the times so that we know what our people need and desire. Let us collaborate with others to maximize our potential. May God bless all our endeavors. ■

*Teri Burns is Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation at St. Robert of Newminster Parish in Ada, Michigan. She holds a Masters in Pastoral Theology from St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Terre Haute, Indiana. Contact Teri at [tburns@stroburchurch.org](mailto:tburns@stroburchurch.org).*



# When the Living Room Becomes a Classroom

Claire M. McManus



The church went full steam ahead when she planted her flag firmly onto the new continent of the cyber world. There are countless Catholic resources peppering the airwaves with knowledge and witness from apps and theology blogs to Catholic eBooks, films, and podcasts.

The target audience that the church is most interested in engaging is the millennial generation of Catholic parents between the ages of 25 and 45. Holy Cross Family Ministries, whose mission is to serve the spiritual well-being of families, wanted to find out why this effort to flood the airwaves with Catholic content is missing its mark. They asked the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to conduct a survey. Since their ministries include Family Rosaries and Family Theater Productions, they were particularly interested in the prayer practices of these young parents and how media plays a part in the development of their faith. (For complete survey results see: [hcfm.org](http://hcfm.org).)

## FAITH FORMATION AMONG MILLENNIAL PARENTS

Who are these parents and how do they practice their faith? CARA was able to compare this age group with all Catholics whom they have surveyed in other studies. The survey found that 20 percent of millennial Catholics celebrate Mass weekly, especially if they have teens in the house. Young Catholic parents with infants tend to not go as frequently. This same group is less likely to enroll their children in religious education. Only 66 percent of parents said that it is very important to them that their children receive first Communion, and even fewer indicated confirmation to be important. If the parents celebrate Mass regularly, the numbers increase to more than 80 percent who say that it is important for their children to receive the sacraments. Unfortunately, the survey supports what many have seen with their own eyes: parents walk away once the sacrament requirement is fulfilled. Sixty-eight percent of Catholic parents do not have their children enrolled in religious education, and even if they celebrate Mass regularly, they are only slightly more likely to send their children to religious education.

The survey gave a clear impression that millennial Catholic parents are also not likely to pray with their children. This seems to indicate that faith formation is mostly during Mass. With so few of these parents using media with Catholic con-

tent, it is hard to determine what they are using to hand on the faith. The CARA report suggests:

With Catholic parents today being much less likely than their own parents and grandparents to have their children enrolled in formal religious education or preparing for childhood sacraments, the Catholic Church must hope that the faith is being passed on well at home. When the living room becomes a classroom, many parents must rely on television, books, audio, and the Internet as resources to teach the faith to their children.

*Only 66 percent of parents said that it is very important to them that their children receive first Communion....*

## MEDIA USE AMONG PARENTS

The information gathered about the media use for this group reveals that they use Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube, but are

not as involved with Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr. These may provide vehicles for disseminating information about the Catholic faith, however, parents access these sites for entertainment, not Catholic content. Parents are more likely to use their parish bulletin, whether in print or online. Very few go to their parish website for information, and less read their diocesan newspaper. Half of the parents surveyed do not seek information about the Catholic faith from any of these media sources.

Catholic parents who celebrate Mass regularly are more likely to be aware of Catholic media, but when asked specifically about the Catholic content available, they did not have a very positive opinion. Common responses were, "I haven't found anything interesting," or "It's boring." Some expressed concern about the bias in Catholic media: "Catholic media today tends to be more conservative than my beliefs, and have a more rigid world view than I hold."

On a positive note, the survey also revealed an untapped interest in religious content among Catholic parents. Forty-one percent of parents are "somewhat" or "very" interested in Internet content about prayer, as well as content about church history, the saints, and resources.

If Catholic media producers work at improving the content, we can partner with them in helping to promote its use. If living rooms have indeed become the classroom, then we have to make sure that families show up for class. ■

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

# Happy Birthday, Baltimore Catechism

Biff Rocha



The Baltimore Catechism is the Bilbo Baggins of religious education, overcoming tremendous odds and succeeding wildly. Tasked with the impossible mission of uniting and educating an ever-growing and diverse Catholic population settling in a predominately hostile land, this national catechism was a candidate for failure before it was even written.

Here are some of the problems it was created to address:

- \* An ongoing influx of Catholic immigrants of differing ethnicities and customs.
- \* Uneducated immigrants possessed a poor understanding of the basic teaching of their Catholic faith.
- \* The prioritized need by bishops and priests of finding housing, food, and employment for thousands of immigrants.
- \* U.S. public schools were run by Protestants who targeted Catholic children for conversion.
- \* Each newly appointed bishop traditionally propagated a new catechism for his diocese.
- \* Conflicting teachings or emphasis among current catechisms, bishops, and pastors.
- \* Competition between bishops was fought indirectly through catechisms, articles, and people.
- \* Territorial expansion meant people frequently moved. With each new diocese, the faithful found new religious education programs with different catechisms and expectations.
- \* There was a lack of priests and qualified catechists, especially in rural areas where Catholics were widely scattered.
- \* Anti-Catholic literature was distributed in the disguise of a Catholic catechism.

A Catechism of Christian Doctrine Prepared and Enjoined by the Order of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, as it is officially titled, was propagated following the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, which met November 9 - December 7, 1884.

A committee of bishops was assigned to consider the feasibility of adopting a catechism to become the official national catechism for the United States. On November 29, the committee decided an entirely new catechism should be created for U.S. Catholics. The committee assigned the task of writing a first draft to Italian priest Fr. Januarius De Concilio, who had a reputation for scholarly work and a missionary heart. Now typically writing a catechism is thought to take years of effort, culling the best of previous catechisms and adjusting the expression of the faith to the local situation. However, De Concilio was given ten days. Galley proofs of the new

catechism were distributed during the last full assembly of prelates. Only a handful of criticisms and corrections were ultimately rendered by the bishops, so very little in the book was changed. The Baltimore Catechism was first published on April 6, 1885.

## CREED, SACRAMENTS, COMMANDMENTS, AND PRAYER

The catechism was well received. It was designed to fit inside a boy's dress shirt front pocket. The cover and paper were to be hearty stock, for durability and repeated use. The content of the Baltimore Catechism was thoroughly orthodox, presenting established doctrine, shying away from the speculation of theologians. It followed the Tridentine four pillar approach of: creed, sacraments, commandments, and prayer. It employed the question and answer method which encouraged memorization. It was clear and concise. If one looks at earlier catechisms many were confusing, ramble, use flowery language, and were bulky.

Diocese after diocese adopted the book and began using the new text in their schools. Many other positive traits were discovered. For example, the presentation of the Catholic faith is framed in the love of a gracious Creator God. The Baltimore Catechism opens with one of the most famous questions: "Q. Why did God make you? God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next." Similarly the catechism concludes with, "Q. What is Heaven? A. Heaven is the state of everlasting life in which we see God face to face, are made like unto Him in glory, and enjoy eternal happiness."

Used around the country from 1885 through the 1960s, the Baltimore Catechism is still present within the United States today. Interestingly enough, the conditions that catechists face today bear a striking similarity with the bullet list above. For example, even more than immigration, our pluralistic society demands we attend to differing ethnicities, cultures, and customs.

Ultimately, a catechism needs ongoing engagement within a community of faith, a place where doctrines are incarnated and lived out. It's exciting to reflect on how the Holy Spirit might move through us as we strive to form communities of intentional disciples excited to evangelize and catechize others.

When Bilbo turned 131 he left Middle Earth but his presence left a lasting impression. Similarly, let us remember the great effects of the Baltimore Catechism on its 131<sup>st</sup> birthday. |

*Biff Rocha was awarded a doctorate in Theology from the University of Dayton in 2015 after writing his dissertation on the topic of the Baltimore Catechism.*

# We Are Made for Love and Glory:

## The Dignity of the Human Person

Jim Gontis



In Psalm 8, we read, “What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor.” Christians, due to the Incarnation of God the Son and through our baptism into Christ Jesus, have been divinized. This is the scandal of the Incarnation. Church father St. Athanasius says as much. “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God” (CCC, 460).

### IMAGO DEI

Human beings are made in the image of God. But do we break open for people specifically what this means? Principally it means three things. Human beings and angels possess:

1. Intellect — Unlike plants or even animals, we are made with intellect. This means we have the power to reason and self-reflect. It is why our beloved pets will never compose a work of art, rebuild an engine, or compose an essay, but humans do with frequency.
2. Will — By this faculty, we are capable of directing ourselves toward our true good — or, of freely choosing against it. Intellect and will are why if a shark attacks Sam, a surfer in the Pacific Ocean, we feel sympathy for Sam, but we don't generally experience anger toward the shark. Why not? Because the shark was merely acting on instinct. However, if we see human beings being senselessly slaughtered by terrorists, we feel indignation. We are justifiably angry. Granted, that anger must be tempered so that we do not act irrationally or as vigilantes, but the anger itself, rightly ordered, is justified. Why? Because the terrorists misused their free will in an intentionally heinous way.
3. Perhaps most important, we were made by God and for eternal communion with God and our neighbor.

*Human beings are made in the image of God. But do we break open for people specifically what this means?*

### VOCATION TO BLESSEDNESS AND GLORY

Scripture and the Church teach us that we are made for God, for the beatific vision. God wants nothing less for us than to be plunged into himself. Far from losing our individual identity, it is in love of God and neighbor that we find ourselves.

It is why St. Augustine so eloquently penned in *The Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

We must teach our young people, and our old people, “not to live beneath their dignity.” I remember hearing that phrase uttered by Dr. Brian Benestad in a talk he gave to my fellow Pennsylvania diocesan directors. It is, in essence, about choosing God, who first chose us, and accepting his grace and rejecting sin. This may sound easy, but our Lord is clear that it is not. “For wide is the road that leads to destruction... and narrow the path that leads to salvation...” But the path is marked out for us. What are some of these markers?

### THE NARROW PATH

- ✦ Formation in the Truth. We must choose and teach the ways that lead to freedom over license. This way comes via the commandments, the beatitudes, and a properly formed conscience in consonance with the Magisterium.
- ✦ Drinking from the draughts of the sacraments. These are seven torrential rivers of grace given to us by the Lord Jesus, especially Penance and the Eucharist.
- ✦ Living out the virtues.
- ✦ Practicing the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.
- ✦ Rejecting as evil what the world accepts as good (contraception, same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, missing Sunday Mass, receiving the Eucharist in mortal sin).
- ✦ Prayer, Penance, and devotions such as Eucharistic adoration and the Rosary. These arrows in our spiritual quivers are to be used. Let us use them.

Paragraph 1721 of the Catechism says, “God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise.” That is the dignity for which we are made. Let us live up to the dignity of the sons and daughters of God, and in so doing, help others to that narrow, but beautiful path! ■

*Jim Gontis is in his 15th year as Director of Religious Education for the Diocese of Harrisburg. He is currently serving as an animator in the DDRE Forum. Jim and his wife Eva Marie and their children live in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.*



# Heart, Hands, and Head: Mentoring Adults in Faith

Leisa Anslinger



“We need to move from the head to the heart. While teaching people about our faith is important, leading people to an encounter with Jesus and growing in relationship with him is crucial. We have not been trained to do this. It is something we need to learn to do together. Without this, we will not be able to send people forth as missionary disciples.” This stunning comment from a priest, Fr. Rick, received nods of assent from his peers, priests in his region, acknowledging their recognition of the complexities of preaching, teaching, and forming people in faith.

I heard Fr. Rick’s comments and the sentiment that accompanied them with particular interest, as I had heard similar things from other groups of priests in the previous two months. The impetus to move “from the head to the heart” comes from their reflection on *The Joy of the Gospel*, and their perception of the needs of their people in relationship to their desire to meet those needs as shepherds and spiritual leaders. In essence, they perceive the need to lead people to an encounter with God’s love (heart), to learn and grow in faith (head), and to live as missionary disciples in the world (hands).

The U.S. Bishops point to this pattern in their summary of *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* on the USCCB website:

Meeting the challenge [of adult faith formation] will be both demanding and rewarding. For guidance, we offer the following goals, principles, content, and approaches:

1. Invite and Enable Ongoing Conversion to Jesus in Holiness of Life.
2. Promote and Support Active Membership in the Christian Community.
3. Call and Prepare Adults to Act as Disciples in Mission in the World. ([USCCB.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis](http://USCCB.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis))

It is not only our priests who need to take these three dynamics to heart (no pun intended). All who have responsibility for forming adults in faith share this call alongside the clergy. With this in mind, I would like to suggest that we consider ways in which to mentor others in faith, as servant leaders who companion and accompany people on the way:

## HEART

While the catechetical documents have always pointed to the primary role of faith formation in leading people to a

relationship with Jesus Christ, the call to lead people to open their hearts to an encounter with the Lord is finding renewed focus as pastoral leaders reflect on *The Joy of the Gospel*: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (3). As the priests with Fr. Rick noted, however, most of us are good at *teaching* the faith, and yet are uncertain about how we might reach people’s *hearts* with the love, joy, and mercy of the Lord. A faith mentor witnesses to the moments of encounter he or she has known, while encouraging the other to be attentive and open to such encounter.

## HEAD

“As adult believers, we learn and live our faith as active members of the Church. Our response to God’s call to community ‘cannot remain abstract and unincarnated,’ but rather, ‘reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers’” (see #2 above). Not only do we understand that our faith is about “we and Jesus” rather than “me and Jesus,” as Catholic Christians, we recognize the role of the faith community in urging us forward as disciples on the ongoing journey of living and growing faith. As a member of the community of faith, a faith mentor draws the person to Christ through active participation in the Mass, sacraments, prayer, learning about and applying faith in daily life, and giving of self in ministry and service.

## HANDS

“The Church and its adult faithful have a mission in and to the world: to share the message of Christ to renew and to transform the social and temporal order. This dual calling to evangelization and justice is integral to the identity of the lay faithful; all are called to it in baptism” (see #3 above). Faith without works is dead; faith formation must lead people to put their faith into action in their daily lives. A faith mentor guides us to go beyond ourselves and that with which we are comfortable, to give of self as Christ gives, lavishly, generously, sacrificially.

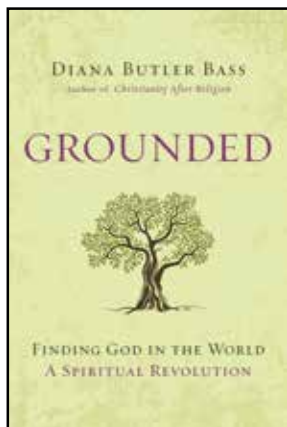
For whom are you a faith mentor? Who mentors you? How does such a relationship touch your heart, head, and hands with the love and commission to love of Jesus Christ? ■

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

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

*Grounded* and *The Nones Are Alright* are foundational reading and study for catechetical leaders as we explore and create new strategies for adult faith formation programming and ministry. The culture has changed. It's a "new world" requiring new models and resources.



**Grounded: Finding God in the World - A Spiritual Revolution** by Diana Butler Bass. Harper One.

The headlines are clear: religion is on the decline in America as many people leave behind traditional religious practices. Diana Butler Bass, leading commentator on religion, politics, and culture argues that what appears to be a decline actually signals a major

transformation in how people understand and experience God. The distant God of conventional religion has given way to a more intimate sense of the sacred that is with us in the world.

This shift, from a vertical understanding of God to a God found on the horizons of nature and human community, is at the heart of a spiritual revolution that surrounds us, and that is challenging not only religious institutions but political and social ones as well.

*Grounded* explores how people are finding new spiritual ground by discovering and embracing God everywhere in the world around us — in the soil, the water, the sky, in our homes and neighborhoods, and in the global commons. Faith is no longer a matter of mountaintop experience or institutional practice. Instead, people are connecting with God through the environment in which we live.

"Bass observes and reports a radical change in the way many people understand God and how they practice faith. In doing so, she invites readers to join this emerging spiritual revolution, find a revitalized expression of faith, and change the world" (Harper One).

**The Nones Are Alright: A New Generation of Seekers, Believers, and Those In Between** by Kaya Oakes. Orbis Books.

The ascent of the "nones," those with no religious affiliation, has puzzled religious leaders from every denomination. But the increasing number of people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s who have walked away from, or have never belonged to any religion, means that up to 40 percent of not one but two entire generations of Americans have chosen to live life without a traditional religious practice.

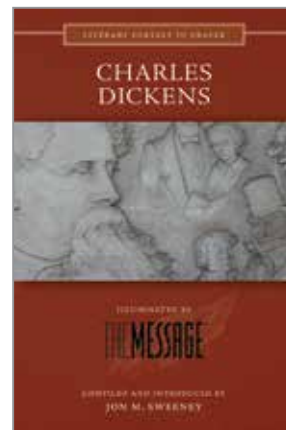


And yet, some members of Generation X and Generation Y have chosen to embrace religion, but they've done so in a do-it-yourself fashion, recreating religion for a new generation of skeptics, in a time when past ideas of career, home ownership, and the nuclear family model are all changing.

"Through profiles of dozens of individuals, this book investigates how and why the exodus from organized religion is occurring, and contrasts the stories of Nones, atheists and agnostics with the stories of those who took different tracks: those who defied the trend and found religion as adults, or experienced a conversion from the religion of their childhood to a completely new set of beliefs, and those who've remained in the religion of their childhood, but have reimagined and redefined what religion means" (Orbis Books).

**Literary Portals to Prayer.** ACTA Publications

The *Literary Portals to Prayer* series is the first truly new resource for personal prayer in years. Designed to be a prayer-starter in the *Lectio Divina* tradition, these books have a passage from the Bible side-by-side with a selection from an author whose work has stood the test of time. Each turn of the page ties together literature and Scripture with an insightful theme. Bible verses are from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Catholic/Ecumenical edition).

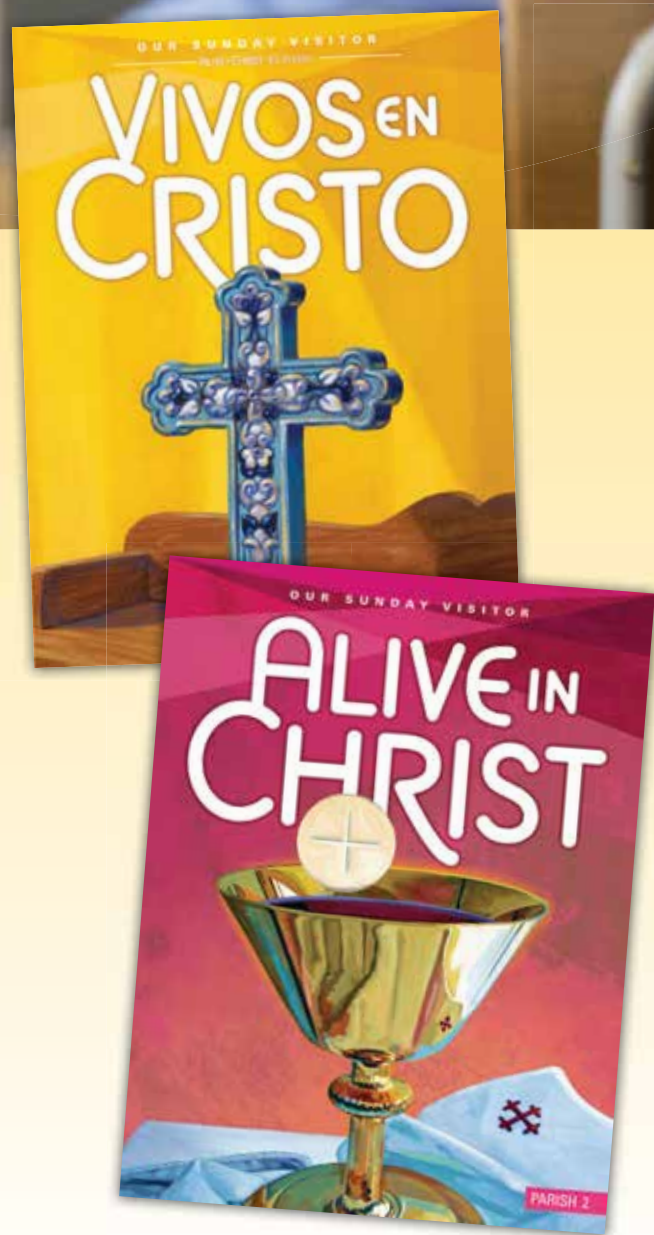


"Each book features an author from classical literature: William Shakespeare, Herman Melville, Elizabeth Gaskell, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Louisa May Alcott, and Hans Christian Andersen. Future editions will include: Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Eliot, and Robert Louis Stevenson" (ACTA Publications). ■

*Dan Pierson* has served as a diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of *eCatechist.com*, *faithAlivebooks.com* and *Faith Alive Books Publishing*. He is co-author with Susan Stark of *Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Reflection*. Tarcher/Penguin, 2015.

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I am a retired teacher and I will tell you that I went about choosing this program the same way I had selected a new science program for our district. When I lined up several series and compared them topic by topic, I was convinced *Alive in Christ* was the best series for our students. Every one of our catechists had praise for this series and thanked me for getting it for them.

—MARGE HALLORAN, Director of Faith Formation,  
St. Joseph's Church, Toms River, NJ

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To find out more about the *Alive in Christ*  
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