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CATECHETICAL  
LEADER



# Discipleship, Evangelization, Mercy

## IN THIS ISSUE:

How to Make Saints  
and Evangelize People

Moving in the Direction of Mercy

Joined to Christ:  
Confirming Adolescents

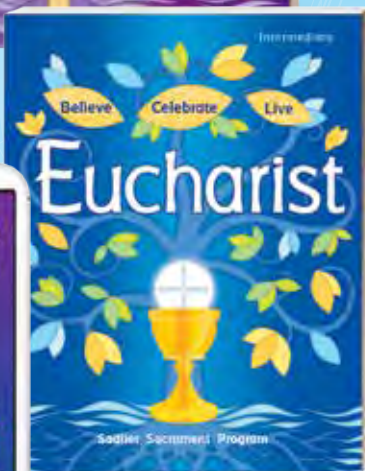
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# BE HAPPY WITH GOD FOREVER IN HEAVEN

Ken Ogorek



## National Conference for Catechetical Leadership



You're a catechetical leader. Sometimes you need to hear how beautiful the work that you do is — how pleasing it is to God when you serve his people faithfully in catechetical ministry.

### GOD MADE YOU

God had a plan for your life as you grew safe and strong in your mother's womb. God knew that his people needed catechetical leadership where you live and work.

In due time, God called you. He asked you to say yes to a question that might have puzzled you at first. "Me, work in catechesis? Me, be a person who others look to for leadership and guidance?"

You said *yes*. You embarked on an adventure. Maybe you've been a catechetical leader for many years. Maybe you're in the early stages of your leadership journey. (In my case it's a bit of both. I've been at this for quite a while, yet I'm just scratching the surface of some areas where good leadership can help our ministry flourish by God's grace.)

God made you for the work that you do. Certainly he made you for additional reasons. But your ministry of catechetical leadership is part of God's plan for you and has been for as long as there's been a you; please allow that thought to bless you with comfort and confidence.

### GOD LOVES YOU

If you've been at this ministry for more than a few days, chances are you've had at least one day that didn't go as well as you'd hoped. The e-mails didn't all get answered. Attendance at the catechist training was half of what you'd hoped for it to be.

The eminently quotable St. Teresa of Calcutta offers us words to this effect: "God doesn't ask you to be successful; only faithful." Sure, God wants you to use your gifts effectively. And if your best efforts fail time and time again with no evidence of success, then God might be inviting you to seek ministry elsewhere.

It's likely, though, that God wants you to keep blooming where you're planted. He loves you on those days when

your efforts bear good fruit by his grace. He loves you when your to-do list not only does not shrink, but looks longer at day's end than it did in the morning. God's love for you isn't based on your being the best spiritual leader ever; besides, that job is taken by Jesus. God loves you for taking the gifts he's given you and offering them in servant-leadership of his holy people, who need people to share faith and benefit from your small but important role in a wonderful symphony of disciple-making, teaching, and worship.

### GOD WANTS YOU TO BE HAPPY WITH HIM FOREVER IN HEAVEN

One day, the last catechetical lesson will be taught. The last inventory of textbooks will be taken. The last professional development day for leaders will be planned. The beautiful day that never ends will start in heaven, and God expects you to be there. Be good to yourself. Tend to your spiritual needs. Take care of your body, mind, and heart.

Sometimes ministry professionals set bad examples by working too many hours too often. We get out of balance. We lose our joy.

God wants you to have joy in this life and immeasurably generous joy in eternity. As you help teach his holy people what it takes to live peacefully on earth — as you help make clear that eternity awaits and God's mercy makes heaven attainable and form a community of catechists and leaders by the Holy Spirit's unifying graces — be good to yourself as a leader so you can continue serving as many days as our heavenly father gives you.

### A LOOK BACK ON THE JUBILEE OF MERCY

Not too long ago we completed a year-long focus on God's great gift of mercy. As catechetical leaders, we helped others embrace a central tenet of our faith while we ourselves allowed it to soak deeper toward our core.

Praise God for his merciful message: "I made you. I love you. I want you to be happy with me forever in heaven. I long to show you my mercy." May we, as catechetical leaders, take our father's words to heart, making Jesus our companion in life and ministry, sharing the Holy Spirit with those we lead and teach. Thanks be to God! ■

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# CHALLENGES AHEAD

Margaret Matijasevic



Entering into a new year, while launching the intricacies of the NCCL strategic plan, makes this year's annual conference theme fitting: Transformative Leadership. The National Conference for Catechetical Leadership has devoted itself to Evangelization and Discipleship, Membership Development, Professional Development, and Product Development. At the center of all these initiatives lies an invitation to transform ourselves as catechetical leaders — in how we serve others, how we connect with our national organization, how we commit to ongoing education, and how we choose to create meaningful resources for each other. But the most significant element to consider is the demographics of the catechetical population, which is transforming.

According to the CARA study on Lay Ecclesial Ministers ([cara.georgetown.edu/lemsummit.pdf](http://cara.georgetown.edu/lemsummit.pdf)), the professional catechetical leaders are predominantly female and non-Hispanic/white (84–88 percent). Of that population, the majority is on the verge of retirement. This challenges NCCL to plan to attract and nurture new upcoming leaders in the field of catechesis and evangelization. As your executive director, I find this an interesting balance to hold. How do we assure our strategic plan meets the needs of the current membership with an understanding that the population will significantly shift in a very short time frame? And it challenges me to consider the paschal mystery and the focus of our 2017 annual conference theme of Transformative Leadership.

Many of us can attest to living through the paschal mystery in our lives. We have encountered sudden shifts in life, such as the loss of a loved one, a change in career, starting a new relationship, becoming a parent, and in other ways. All these shifts have caused a bit of an identity crisis — a sense of loss and likely significant pain. It is never easy to move into something unexpected, new, or challenging. Inevitably there is a piece of ourselves that needs to die. Even the most joyous of memories force us into the paschal mystery, because even in joy there is a loss of something we once knew intimately. There is a loss of something we cherished, which we need to let go of in order to let new life in.

The National Conference of Catechetical Leadership is facing a tremendous shift in its population. Whether we can see it

now or not, it's there. It's on the horizon. So, how do we gracefully walk into the change?

As a member of NCCL, I challenge us to consider these tasks:

1. Prepare yourself to make decisions, in voting, in survey-taking, in advocating for membership that recognizes a changing landscape.
2. Become actively engaged in co-mentoring. Meet someone you have not met before, and engage in a co-mentoring process, one that allows you to learn from newer leadership their experiences and insights, or one that allows you to be nurtured by the wisdom of a catechetical leader who has served for many years. Build relationships, and create a meaningful future of catechesis through such mutuality.
3. Encourage stewardship of NCCL by volunteering in the organization, donating to a fund you believe in, or taking the #FutureofCatechesis pledge to invite other professional catechetical leaders into the organization.
4. Practice engaging in dialogue, an experience that allows difference in opinions to be shared together as sacred experiences, with the intention to simply seek understanding of the other. For the catechetical future of NCCL, healthy dialogue is essential.
5. Be intentional about saving room in your budget to attend the national gathering of NCCL. Your own advocacy for your professional development and your connection to this national organization should be a priority. Your voice and presence are important to the national perspective of catechesis.
6. Be open to transformative experience in your vocation through intentional prayer, gentle contemplation, and responsive action.

As I see it, a strategic plan requires each member of the organization to transform themselves in a significant way. Strategy always requires change, thoughtful connection of resources and trends, and involvement of those whom it affects now and tomorrow. I encourage you to pray on the theme of Transformative Leadership so as to be attentive to the Spirit's movements in the changing landscape of the profession of catechesis. ■

# Catechetics for a Field Hospital Church

Ed Gordon



The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.

These words of Pope Francis, describing his image of and vision for the church, have captured the imagination of many. Since I first heard these words, I have been asking myself this question, “If the church is like a field hospital, what would catechetics for a field hospital church look like?” I’d like to begin by exploring the concept of a field hospital.

## HISTORY OF THE FIELD HOSPITAL

The field hospital evolved out of necessity and the horrors of modern warfare. Though some formalized tending of the wounded had been around for hundreds of years, it was Napoleon’s chief surgeon, Dominique Jean Larrey, who institutionalized the new approaches. Among the many innovations he introduced were the horse-drawn ambulance and triage. Triage is the practice of assessing who is most in need of treatment and moving them to the front of the line of those to be cared for. This was in sharp contrast to the previous practice of taking care of persons in order of their rank.

During the American Civil War, many practices that had developed earlier in the century were adapted by both sides. The generals were still using massed columns and ranks of soldiers bravely walking forward and soldiers firing between the ranks. Together with more accurate artillery, the war recorded 600,000 deaths and many more wounded. The Battle of Antietam saw 32,000 die on one day. Doctors moved their surgeries closer to the front lines in order to treat the wounded as soon as possible.

Destructive instruments of war rapidly developed. It seems that humankind is genius at devising more and more destructive ways to kill and maim. World War I displayed this nefarious ingenuity operating at full speed. When the United States entered the war, it didn’t even have a medical corp. It

had to learn from the French and the English how to treat the many wounded produced by artillery, gas, and bullets, especially from the machine gun. As the war went on, a system of care emerged. Stretcher bearers carried the wounded from the field. They sometimes walked more than a mile to an aid station. These brave men risked their lives over and over again to move the wounded from the field.

Once the wounded arrived at the dressing station, the task was most basic: stop the bleeding, cleanse the wounds, splint broken bones, and prevent shock by keeping the patient warm and as comfortable as possible. Triage was performed and the wounded were then moved back to the field hospitals, where there was more equipment, operating theaters, nurses, and sometimes even x-ray machines. Of course, there were also surgeons and trained technicians to care for the wounded.

Much of the time, the lines were blurred by necessity. Doctors operated on the wounded in the trenches, dressing stations became field hospitals, nurses and stretcher bearers performed tasks often reserved to doctors. First-person accounts describe doctors working for 20 hours straight and improvising new techniques to save their patients. Eventually, the wounded were moved from the field hospitals to more permanent and fully equipped places of care.

Though the system seems neat, tidy, and logical, the reality was totally different. Thirty-seven million men were either killed, wounded, or missing in the years of war. One of the most important learnings from WWI was the importance of quick and early treatment of the wounded. By the beginning of WWII, the US Army had introduced the medic, assigned to each unit, who was to become the first responder for his brothers and sisters. Equipped with basic medical supplies, these men saved the lives of countless soldiers, and many medics lost their lives in the line of duty.

Technology and experience allowed the evolution of the field hospital into the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, made famous by the television series *M\*A\*S\*H*. The most seriously injured soldiers were brought by helicopter to these units a short time after they were wounded. This quick response was responsible for saving the lives of more and more wounded. The use of medivac systems begun in Korea has continued and improved from Vietnam through Iraq and Afghanistan. The time between a soldier being wounded and being cared for

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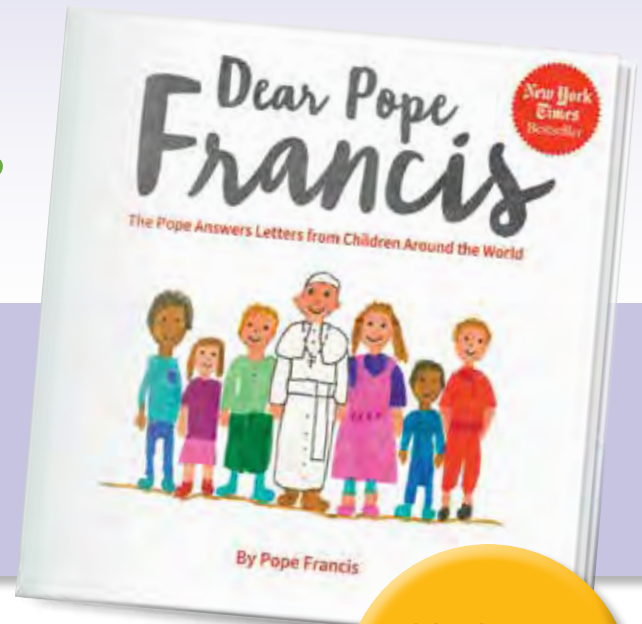
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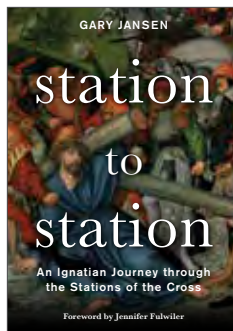
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at a well-equipped medical facility has continued to shrink, and more and more lives have been saved. The first hours are critical!

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

This short history of field hospitals teaches us the following:

- \* The quicker aid is administered, the better chance of survival.
- \* The aid has to be administered close to the battle field.
- \* It is important to triage — to determine the extent and seriousness of the wounds in order to prioritize the treatment.
- \* Surgeons develop new techniques as they deal with trauma that they would rarely or never see at home.
- \* While a surgeon may have a specialty, she or he has to serve as a generalist and serve the wounded as they arrive.
- \* It takes a team working together to save lives.

So, let's take a look at what catechesis might look like for a field hospital church.

### **The quicker aid is administered, the better the chance of survival**

Catechesis needs to begin with a focus on baptismal preparation of the parents and family. Many years ago, a pastor told me that if we could get baptism right, most of the later catechesis would be much easier. My experience has been that we give little time, effort, and thought to baptismal preparation. In far too many cases it consists of a one-evening session that has little relevance or meaning to the parents.

Knowing what we know about the religious affiliations of the Millennials and the GenXers, we ought to take the opportunity to invite the parents into a deeper identification with the Catholic community and to embed them more deeply into the church community.

In the final report of the 2015 Synod, *The Vocation and Mission of the Family*, the bishops wrote,

The Church must instill in families a sense of belonging to the Church, a sense of “we” in which no member is forgotten. All are encouraged to develop their skills and realize their plan of life in serving the Kingdom of God. May every family, incorporated in the Church, rediscover the joy of communion with other families so as to serve the common good of society by promoting policy-making, an economy and a culture in the service of the family, through the use of social networks and the media, which calls for the ability to create small communities of families as living witnesses of Gospel values. (90)

Too often the goal of baptismal preparation seems to be to explain the symbols we use in the baptismal rite. Instead, our goal should be for the parents to get to know the members of

the community and for the members of the community to get to know the parents and begin a process to embed them in the community.

Each parish should have strategies in place to follow up with the parents in their roles as first catechists of their children. In a larger parish this might include having periodic opportunities for parents to get together to talk about how they can begin to shape the religious imagination of their children. Because both parents may be working, these gatherings need to be scheduled with sensitivity and child care support. Another possibility is to keep in contact with the family by sending periodic e-mails with suggestions for how they may encourage the development of the preschool-age children. Also, parents could be sent ideas for celebrating the baptismal anniversary of their child(ren).

Emphasis in these ideas should revolve around practices. Cultivating religious practices in the home is essential for cultivating the religious imagination. Another possibility is developing a list of recommended children's books and videos that parents can share with their children. We need to keep them connected to the parish community. “Let them know that they are sought after, loved and forgiven” (Prayer for the Year of Mercy).

### **The aid has to be administered close to the battlefield**

For over 40 years, I have been involved in parish religious education programs. At this point I am convinced that an elementary program that does not integrally involve the family and the home is close to worthless. Too many parishes expend most of their energy and effort keeping a stand-alone classroom program going without very impressive results. While there is still a place for the classroom programs, we need to pay more than lip service to the family dimension.

At the close of the second synod on the family we read, “The Synod unanimously restated that the primary school of formation is the family and that the Christian community is engaged in the support and integration of this irreplaceable formative role. Places and times for families to meet need to be determined to encourage the training of parents and the sharing of experiences among families. Parents, as the first teachers and witnesses of faith for their children, need to be actively involved in their preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation” (67).

Intergenerational learning for the parish family needs to be an integral aspect of every religious education program. John Roberto and his associates' work in this area (lifelongfaith.com) should be studied by every parish PCL and diocesan office. In the November 2015 issue of *Catechetical Leader*, Jo Ann Paradise has an article, “Take Aim: Family Involvement in Faith Formation.” She begins by reminding the readers that the 2015 NCCL Conference had a keynote, seven breakout sessions, and 11 “quick fires” on family involvement in faith formation. So, there is a growing awareness on the part of the



catechetical community of the importance of involving the family and especially the parents in faith formation. However, practice is lagging behind the theory. In the field hospital, innovation should come more quickly.

Parents don't need to be catechists in the same way as those who lead catechetical formation sessions. They need to be committed Christians who teach their children through their actions and their lives that Jesus makes a difference. The article in the same issue of *Catechetical Leader* by Patricia McCormack, entitled "Create a Family Culture of Spirituality," has practical examples of how to help families become, once again, centers of spirituality.

There is no one program or process for every parish, and creating a culture where family is central to faith formation takes several years, but the effort to rethink parish faith formation is not only worth the effort, it is essential. The first step is to listen to the families in the parish. Paradise writes, "Do we do any discernment with parents that would help both them and us to name, without judgment, how conscious and intentional they are in living their baptism?" Special attention needs to be given to the number of parents who are in ecumenical or interfaith marriages. The non-Catholic parents need to be invited into the faith formation of their children.

At the other end of the life continuum, catechesis with the elderly is a fertile area for development. As our communities age, we might want to think about what kinds of faith formation are best suited to the senior members of our church. In a death-denying age, how do we help our older members face their own deaths and deal with the deaths of spouses, relatives, and friends? What does the church community have to offer its older members in the last age of their lives? What do the Scriptures have to say to us about our future, our hope? What is our hope? There are many ways for us to shape faith formation that can serve this population. The latest book from Lifelong Faith Associates, *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*, dedicates an entire chapter to exploring possibilities for faith formation with our elder members.

### **It is important to triage**

When the wounded are brought to the aid station or field hospital, someone is assigned the task of assessing the seriousness of the wounds and determining who gets what treatment. The attendant listens for a heartbeat. This is a good place for catechists to begin. Listen for the heartbeat. The Gospels most often describe Jesus as a reader of hearts, not a mind reader or test giver. Pope Francis speaks time and time again about appealing to the heart.

He wrote, "Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary.

The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing" (65).

As challenging as it may seem, one catechetical program or process does not fit all families. Parish catechetical leaders must be able to provide a number of different opportunities for the variety of families who are in their community. The Internet provides access to numerous resources that can be used to shape a variety of learning programs. Now, more than ever, we need well-trained pastoral PCLs who can help families become centers of spirituality.

The *General Catechetical Directory* of the early 1970s wrote about the hierarchy of truths and the need to understand the heart of faith. A good catechist knows what is most important for growth in faith and keeps the focus on those elements. A long time ago, I read that the ornate pulpits of medieval churches had "Show them Jesus" carved into the area near the steps where the preacher would ascend. Every catechist should remember this admonition as he or she begins a catechetical session.

Pope Francis reminds us of this in "Evangelii Gaudium,"

In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. The kerygma is trinitarian. The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father's infinite mercy. On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment. (126)

### **Surgeons develop new techniques as they deal with trauma that they would rarely or never see at home**

The classroom model for catechesis seems to be less and less effective for achieving the outcomes we hope to achieve. Singular focus on the catechesis of children seems to be a misplaced emphasis. A catechesis that does not focus on enabling a personal relationship with Jesus seems to miss the mark. A catechesis that is overly rational seems inadequate to the task at hand. A catechesis that expends most of its resources on an isolated catechetical program for elementary children ignores the greatest part of the parish.

As Pope Francis said, “It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.” So why do we keep using the same models for catechesis?

Parish catechetical leaders know that families and individuals who participate in their programs come with a great variety of religious experiences. It is almost as if each family needs a custom-designed program to help them on the journey in faith. The GCD says that the catechumenate should be the inspiration for all catechesis. The catechumenate is not a program but a process of bringing persons into a deeper relationship with Jesus and the Catholic community. Its goal is a change of heart, a deepening of the initial turning to Christ and the church.

The catechetical community needs the freedom to experiment and innovate in its approaches to and with families and parishes, not be straight-jacketed by a too rigid adherence to a “curriculum.” This is not to say that a curriculum may not contain the wisdom of the community on how, in general, catechesis should proceed. Sometimes it is just a listing of theological statements that have little organic relationships. There was a time when catechetical leaders were encouraged to innovate.

A battlefield surgeon needs to know the basic and best practice approach to any given surgical procedure. However, she or he may discover some new techniques emerging from meeting the challenges created in the battlefield environment.

### **While a surgeon may have a specialty, she or he has to serve as a generalist and serve the wounded as they arrive**

A good field hospital surgeon may have a surgical specialty, but she or he quickly learns to treat whomever is carried into the hospital with whatever wounds they have. In a field hospital, you can’t send for someone else. Parish catechetical leaders need to focus on faith formation, but with a pastoral and missional awareness and sensitivity. There are any number of ways into a relationship with Jesus.

In February 2015, at his daily liturgy at Casa Santa Marta, Pope Francis put it this way, “...the Church heals, it cures.

Sometimes, I speak of the Church as if it were a field hospital. It’s true: there are many, many wounded! So many people need their wounds healed! This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounds of the heart, to open doors, to free people, to say that God is good, God forgives all, God is the Father, God is affectionate, God always waits for us.” How should catechetics respond?

### **It takes a team working together to save lives**

Anyone who has ever seen a TV show or movie with a shock trauma unit in action realizes that it is a team effort that saves lives. Each member of the team plays an important part in the operation. Surgeons are not lone rangers. Catechetics is not an isolated ministry. Faith formation depends on inspirational liturgical and prayer experiences, experiences of service in the name of Jesus as well as formal catechetical sessions. When these elements are not in sync, the outcomes are much less certain than when they are interacting with each other and the learners.

Here is what catechetics for a field hospital church might look like:

- \* Starts with the situation and reality of the learner
- \* Considers the family environment
- \* Develops in a family context
- \* Begins at the beginning with a formational baptismal process
- \* Focuses on the essentials, especially nurturing a personal relationship with Jesus
- \* Has lots of room for experimentation and creativity in developing new models
- \* Is a collaborative, pastoral process involving all ministers and ministries of the parish

I invite you to examine your own programs in light of these characteristics and also consider other ways of conceiving how this image challenges us to think about catechetics. |

*Ed Gordon was secretary for Catholic education and director of religious education for 30 years in the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware. He is a consultant to RCLB for the Echoes of Faith Project and has been a member of NCCL for more than 35 years.*

## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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# How to Make Saints and Evangelize People

Stephen Bullivant



Let me begin by telling the best kind of story: a true one. Seventeen centuries ago, in 312, there lived in southern Egypt a young pagan called Pachomius. At that time, Egypt was a province of the Roman Empire, and since empires need armies, it was the custom to conscript noncitizens to serve as auxiliary soldiers. Pachomius's draft number duly came up and, along with other youths from his district, he was put in chains, loaded onto a cramped ship, and transported up the Nile for training and deployment. Since these were not Roman citizens, and no one much cared if one or two died in transit, no great concern was taken to keep them adequately shaded, fed, or watered.

At Thebes, however, the ship stopped to load up on supplies, and Pachomius and his companions were permitted to stretch their legs on the quayside. Seeing their plight, a group of strangers came over and began to give them food and drink, showing care for them as if they were long-lost relatives or friends. Astounded by this, Pachomius asked the strangers who they were and why they were so “eager and willing to perform such humble acts of mercy” to people they had only just met. Quoting from the ancient *Life of Pachomius*:

He was told they were Christians, who were in the habit of doing acts of kindness to everyone, but especially towards travellers. He learned also what it meant to be called a Christian. For he was told that they were godly people, followers of a genuine religion, who believed in the name of Jesus Christ the only begotten son of God, who were well disposed to all people, and hoped that God would reward them for all their good works in the life to come.

Our source goes on to tell us, “Pachomius's heart was stirred on hearing this, and illumined by the light of God; he felt a great attraction towards the Christian faith.” Accordingly, once his military service had ended, Pachomius — *St. Pachomius the Great* as we know him today — sought catechesis and baptism and ultimately ended up as one of the founders of Christian monasticism.

I first heard this story in a sermon before I was Catholic — before I was even baptized. Evidently, my *own* heart was stirred on hearing this, since I don't just remember it but make

a point of recounting it to others on a regular basis. I do so not just because it's a good story about the past, but because it's an excellent story *for* the present. Basically, I think Pachomius can help us to realize three things that are absolutely essential for understanding — for *doing* — the new evangelization.

## WHAT'S SO NEW ABOUT THE NEW EVANGELIZATION?

Jesus began his own public ministry with the manifesto: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). In the very last words of Matthew's Gospel, he instructs his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (28:19). From the very beginning, then, evangelization has been the Christian community's very *raison d'être*. It is the church's abiding purpose to continue Christ's own mission to humanity, by announcing the kingdom of God, calling sinners to repentance, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching the Christian faith, safe in the knowledge that he remains “with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

But if the church “exists in order to evangelize” (“*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 4), then what can possibly be new about the so-called new evangelization? To find out, let us return to fourth-century Thebes.

When Pachomius staggered off his ship, our 20-something Egyptian had never met a Christian, encountered the church, or even heard the name of Jesus Christ. The Theban Christians made a very good first impression.

Seventeen centuries later, such love-at-first-sight encounters are scarcely possible in the mission fields of the new evangelization, that is, among those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed (St. John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” 30). In our increasingly *post-Christian* cultures, the opportunities for a first impression are long gone.

The problem is not that people have never heard of Christianity, but rather that they have heard quite enough. Today's American unbelievers will likely have been baptized (and perhaps confirmed), may have attended Christian schools or colleges, or will have regarded themselves as being a Christian at some point in their lives (likely for the first couple of decades or more). Above all else, it is this situation — the sociocultural background against which our evangelizing takes place — that *primarily* gives the new evangelization its newness.

Evidently, this presents challenges that are different from those faced in a traditional mission territory: hence the *second-ary* need for a renewal of “ardour, methods and expression” (Synod on the New Evangelization). Despite this, the basic requirements for evangelization remain, like its true object, “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). And it is here that Pachomius has two more lessons to teach us.

### Practicing what we preach

Pachomius’s first contact with Christianity was not with an argument, or idea, or piece of apologetics. Rather it was a direct, face-to-face encounter with Christian *caritas* or love. In effect, he met with the fourth-century Theban equivalent of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul: ordinary believers doing what little they could for “the least of these who are members of my family” (Mt 25:40).

Throughout the first centuries of the church, we find evidence of people being converted by the example of Christians *living out* the implications of their faith. Already in Acts we find a clear connection between (a) the earliest Christians’ practice of giving “to all, as any had need,” (b) their receiving “the goodwill of all the people,” and (c) the fact that “day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (2:44–47). Of particular note is the explicit link between Christian living, the influence this had on the wider socio-cultural context (“all the people”), and ultimate evangelistic success.

According to Tertullian, by the early third century, Christians had become widely known for “care for the derelict and our active love.” “See,” the pagans say, “How they love one another (cf. Jn 13:35). How willing they are to die for one another” (Apology, 39). And though one might reasonably suspect Christian writers of bias here, we have supporting testimonies from non-Christians too.

Most revealing is the fourth-century Emperor Julian, who renounced his Christian upbringing in order to restore the old Roman gods. In a 362 letter to the pagan high-priest of Galatia, he complains of the Christians’ successes with evangelization:

Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead, and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase [Christianity]? It is a scandal that ...

the godless Galileans should care not only for their own poor, but for ours too.

Significantly, the witness of Christian living did not only attract those encountering Christianity for the first time, like Pachomius. It also attracted people who, despite having heard a lot of bad things about Christians, had their minds changed. This was true of the second-century apologist St. Justin Martyr. In his case, it was not Christian charity directly but rather the brave conduct of the martyrs in the Roman arenas: “I myself used ... to hear evil spoken of Christians. But, as I saw that they showed no fear in the face of death and of all other things which inspire terror, I reflected that they could not be vicious and pleasure-loving” (Second Apology, 11).

The basic point being made here is nothing remotely new in the history of missiology. The church has long recognized the necessity of living out what we claim to profess and the potency this can have for evangelization. St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing at the very beginning of the second century, advised, “It is good to teach, if he who speaks also acts.” According to St. Leo the Great in the fifth century, “examples are stronger

than words, and there is more teaching in practice than in precept” (Sermon 85). The same idea is behind the oft-quoted words of Pope Paul VI: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (“*Evangeliu Nuntiandi*,” 41).

Therefore, consider again the idea of there being a “socio-cultural background” against which the good news is heard (or not). Without putting too fine a point on it, it would be fair to say that our Christian communities are not held in universally high moral regard at the present time. This is true enough among Christians themselves, let alone actual unbelievers.

Thankfully, even against such a dark and unpromising backdrop, it is possible for individuals, or acts, to stand out. Heroic figures are, obviously, important here: the witness of a Mother Teresa or Dorothy Day prevents Christianity from being entirely written off. It would be wrong, though, to suppose that this kind of concrete witness is rightly or exclusively the preserve of the saints — especially not if we understand by that phrase a discrete class of “super-Christians” set apart from the rest of us. *All* Christians are called to perform the works of mercy. And while these ought not be undertaken *for* the purposes of evangelization, we need not be blind to their potency in preparing the way.

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## PREACHING WHAT WE PRACTICE

That said, it is necessary to recognize that, crucial though the Theban Christians' *witness* was, it was not that witness itself that set Pachomius on the path to baptism. His brief encounter with Christian love-in-action prompted him to both ask the question, "Who are you and why are you doing this?", and listen attentively to the answer he received. But, according to our source, it was the answer itself that actually stirred Pachomius's heart and "illuminated by the light of God" made him feel "a great attraction towards the Christian faith." This short answer (quoted in full above) is a minor masterpiece of evangelization: simple and concise, hope-filled yet humble, unwilling to water down difficult ideas (e.g., "only begotten son of God"), but without resorting to jargon-filled obscurity.

The point I am trying to make here is, once again, a very simple one. In the words of St. Paul, "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Rom 10:14). While Paul is referring here to his fellow Jews, the sentiment applies to all non-Christians, not excepting our contemporary "nones."

There is no use in putting off the inevitable: if we are serious about evangelizing non-Christians, then we need to be prepared to actually speak to them about our faith directly. This is something that many Christians feel shy or uncomfortable doing, even when among other Christians. There can be many reasons for this. Many people don't feel confident enough about what it is they believe, and why it is they believe it. Or maybe, when speaking to non-Christians, they don't want to come across as proselytizing or being "preachy." It might be that they fear that others will think them judgmental, or bigoted, or irrational, for adhering either to Christianity itself, or to some particular doctrine. Or possibly their faith feels too "personal" to be the subject of conversation. Increasingly, people think they will be mocked or sneered at for saying what they really believe. All of these reasons are natural and understandable. Unfortunately, Christians are encouraged to "always be ready to give an accounting of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15–16). That is far easier said than done. Even so, it is something that is within reach of all of us in mostly ordinary and everyday ways — as indeed it was on the quayside at Thebes all that time ago.

## HOW TO MAKE SAINTS AND EVANGELIZE PEOPLE

The story of St. Pachomius tells us three important things. First, it helps us to grasp what it is about the new evangelization that makes it genuinely *new* in terms of most of the past 2,000 years of Christian history. And once we have realized this, it shows us how, in continuity with the traditional way of successful Christian evangelizing, we need to go about it.

These are the second and third lessons: that we must be *both* witnesses *and* teachers, preferably at the same time.

There is a fourth lesson as well — and this is perhaps the most urgent. Without it, none of the other three will make any difference whatsoever. Ask yourself this: Who is the true hero in our little story from ancient Thebes? One might be tempted to think that it is the future St. Pachomius the Great himself. But it isn't.

The *real* heroes of the piece — the ones who exemplify our second and third lessons — are the nameless and non-descript believers who met him at the quayside. They had no premonition of the long-term repercussions of their actions in either the life of Pachomius or the history of the church.

All they did was give a scared young man their time, attention, and a little something to eat and drink. And when he asked them *why*, they had courtesy, courage, and conviction enough to tell him. Possibly they did this kind of thing every day; maybe this was the only time. But importantly, they did nothing beyond what a large number of equally "ordinary" Christians do on a regular (or somewhat-less-than-regular) basis.

Making saints and evangelizing people, something so easy, that you can — sometimes, at least — do it without even being aware of it. ■

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# Moving in the Direction of Mercy

Kathleen Bryant, RSC



During the 2016 political campaign, I suspect each of us had a fiery passion about a conviction we wanted others to embrace. Those of us who are catechists, evangelists, and preachers hold a sense of God or one specific aspect of the gospel that we try to pass on throughout our lifetimes. I have a passion about God that I feel empowered to keep emphasizing in my teaching and preaching. Using Romans 8:38 as my launchpad, I remind people that nothing — *absolutely nothing* — can separate us from the love of Christ.

As a product of Catholic education since first grade, I remember learning about God from the renowned Baltimore Catechism, with direct questions and very clear, memorized answers. You might remember the powerful and strong attributes about the God questions that were emphasized. We learned that God is everywhere, omnipresent; God is all-powerful, omnipotent; God is all knowing, omniscient; God is all seeing as if waiting for you to sin. Imagine how a child hears this description of who God is.

To prepare for the recently completed Year of Mercy, I read *Mercy*, by Cardinal Walter Kasper, with curiosity about how he influenced Pope Francis in his own theological thinking and to educate myself about the topic. It brought me back to those Baltimore Catechism days, as Kasper stresses that mercy is at the heart of who God is, right at the center and not just one of God's attributes.

This lengthy quote from Kasper is worth pondering:

Mercy expresses God's essence (89). It cannot be treated, as happens in the dogmatic handbooks, as one attribute of God alongside others. It certainly cannot be treated as an attribute that is subordinated to the attributes that derive from the metaphysical essence of God and then is mentioned almost only in the margins. Instead, mercy is the externally visible and effectively active aspect of the essence of God, who is love (I John 4:8, 16). Mercy expresses God's essence, which graciously attends to and devotes itself to the world and to humanity in ever new ways in history. In short, mercy expresses God's own goodness and love. Therefore, we must describe mercy as the fundamental attribute of God. We

should treat mercy, not as an appendix to the exposition of God's attributes, but rather as the organizing center of God's attributes, with the others grouped around it. (88)

Those other attributes of God's are the ones I mentioned earlier from the Catechism but also includes Kasper's list of holiness, justice, fidelity, truth, magnanimity, forbearance, gentleness, and patience.

Do you remember learning about mercy as being the very essence of God, at the core of who God is? Can you reimagine God with mercy at the center, inviting you to a deeper trust in this mercy?

## MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF MERCY?

Our image of God profoundly impacts the way we educate others in the faith. We become like the God in whom we believe. And if we believe that mercy is at the heart of who God is, then our students will be grounded in that sense of God. However, if we believe God is a vengeful, judgmental God always seeing us when we sin but not focused on delighting in us as God's very creation, then our students will absorb that fearful sense too.

Our own conversion precedes any evangelization and education. Religious formation is more about transformation than it is about information. Every catechist needs to reflect on his or her own sense of this God of Mercy and perhaps pray for healing the God image that can cripple our own mercy and acceptance of others. What is not transformed in us is passed on to the students. Conversion requires fresh imagination. Boston College professor Father Michael J. Himes, reflecting on the work of philosopher Paul Ricœur, wrote, "Too often and too easily we tend to emphasize the need for conversion of the will when what is really required is an expansion of the imagination" (*Doing the Truth in Love*, 136). Now is the time to reimagine God as part of our spiritual development and formation.

A God of boundless mercy always invites us to life. If you want to know how you are developing spiritually, observe which paths are leading you to more life. If you want to know what God's will is, notice what is most life-giving for you at this time. Our Catholic tradition provides us with a discernment process and tools that help us align our lives with God's will.



If you are moving toward the God of Mercy, you are sensing newness of life within yourself. If you are not moving and stuck, you will sense a boredom and emptiness. As civil rights leader Howard Thurman said, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive” (*Meditations of the Heart*).

You know you’re moving in the direction of mercy when

- \* You have experienced God’s mercy personally and forgiven yourself for things you regret.
- \* You are able to let go of a grudge, an old story you keep repeating looking for sympathy, or you let go of an old resentment, e.g., “Mom loved you more.”
- \* You are moved when you see a person lost, on the margins, or excluded. You are unsettled by injustice and you are restless until you respond, until you do something about it.
- \* You find yourself able to listen to another person’s need to be heard without interrupting them, sharing how the same thing happened to you, or fixing their situation through advice.

Who is off your social radar? Is there a population that you have never engaged with? Is there a human being of another

faith, race, sexual orientation, economic status that is not included in your social grid? We meet people at the gym, the salon, the market. As we walk around the neighborhood we meet people. Let your neighbor be your teacher and you might experience an inner shift, a fresh perception.

When we are living a life of grace, God is the source of our deepest desires, and so we can trust them. I suggest that we Catholics might need to update our faith software for our understanding of God’s will and mercy. I invite you to be open to that update and maybe even to the need for a whole new operating system upgrade.

What *is* God’s will? Have you ever tried to explain it to a third grader? When and where do we use the phrase “God’s will”? When there is a natural disaster or a child dies, too often we respond with, “It’s God’s will.” Imagine how that sounds to a child whose grandparent has died. The idea of God’s will has had a fearful connotation. You yourself may be afraid of God’s will. If we surrender to God’s will, will God take away something precious from us?

### GOD’S WILL — WHAT IS IT? WHAT IT ISN’T!

God’s will is our well-being. The word “salvation” comes from the Latin *salvos*, which means “health.” God wills that I





become whole, healthy, and the most alive human being possible. God delights in creation, in my personal growth.

We may have thought about God's will as something pre-planned, like a blueprint for our life. However, God's will is rich with new possibilities; it is dynamic, not static. God's will is about abundance, ongoing creation, creating ever new. It is also about dying, and the mystery of that cycle of death and life. In this evolutionary spirituality, new life is emerging *all* the time.

As a former California beach girl, I invite you to an image of God's mercy that the Pacific Ocean offers. In Micah 7:19, we hear that God casts our sins into the depths of the sea. The Jacques Cousteau films on the ocean explore its amazing depth, and yet, even at the deepest, darkest parts of the ocean, there is life. We know that God's mercy is boundless and surpasses any limits of a particular ocean. Having grown up enjoying the beach, I find images of the ocean and being immersed in it help me to connect with God.

In the song "Ocean of Mercy," Catholic composer and musician John Poirier reminds us of the Micah reading, that God's mercy is endless oceans of mercy with purifying salt water, comforting rhythms and sounds, crashing waves and peaceful sunsets, swells, ripples, and white caps.

As with ocean currents, we are vulnerable to being moved by all kinds of influences. Ignatian spirituality schools us in noticing these movements, paying careful attention to our feelings, recognizing the source of affect as well as the direction we are moving.

My image of this Ignatian discernment is the joy of boogie boarding. When I caught a wave just right, it would propel me all the way to the shore with little effort. Consolation is anything that moves us to deeper faith, hope, and charity, movements that lead us to God. When we are living a graced life, Ignatius of Loyola urges us to go with the flow of consolation, to let it move us. Whereas I imagine desolation being like an undertow dragging us down. In that case, Ignatius urges us to go directly against that urge with the opposite virtue or energy and warns us never to make major decisions in a time of desolation. He strongly recommends we remember the moments of consolation when we experienced the God of mercy. Moving in the direction of mercy requires a discerning heart that can recognize the movements and choose life.

### INVITING AND RENEWING IMAGES OF GOD'S WILL AS MERCIFUL

An image to help understand a sense of God's will as merciful and life-giving comes from St. Catherine of Siena, who

describes God's will as an abyss of love that surrounds us in nothing but mercy. An abyss is limitless as is God's unconditional love and mercy. Wouldn't this image be more inviting as we imagine God's will enveloping us in this abyss?

Another image comes from the Book of Genesis, in which we hear God inviting humanity to be cocreators. God invited the first humans to name the animals, till the soil, be fruitful and multiply, to create a family, to build community — in other words, to be a partner with God in cocreating. God's will is that we each share in creating with God's grace families, communities, ministries, music, art, and endless new realities.

There are many ways to cocreate with God. Gardening is one of those concrete ways of witnessing God's creative activity through your own efforts. Pope John XXIII said, "We are not here on earth to guard a museum. We are here to cultivate a flourishing garden of life." That entails getting our hands dirty. Some of our attempts to do God's will as cocreators can be messy and dirty.

As you pray, imagine a God who invites you into a creative partnership. Can you hear God inspiring you to create using your gifts and talents and impelled by your deep desires?

What new venture might be in your creative works?

In a keynote address, Father Brian McDermot, SJ, used the example of God as a master jazz musician. As we cocreate the music of our lives, our choices contribute to bringing about God's reign. In jazz there is room for improvisation, accompaniment, modulating into different keys. There's a freedom of expression because God always honors our free will, gifts, and talents. God invites us into the creative project.

What is the great work of your life that God invites you to? One clue might be the story told about you as a child. A wonderful book called *The Great Work of Your Life* by Stephen Cope illustrates how the childhood stories of creative and famous people reflected the seeds of that creativity that were present as young as three years of age. Reframe your understanding of God's will as this creative, almost playful engagement with God in bringing about something new. Creation continues through us.

With our call to be cocreators comes great responsibility. As Archbishop Blaise Cupich wrote, "God, in effect, placed history in our hands by commissioning us to continue the creation he began." When we cocreate with God, we do so as people made in the image of God, as echoes of God

If we are honest, we know that we don't always follow the movement of the Spirit's inspiration; we make choices that are not coming from our best selves that lead us astray. When we get off course, take a wrong turn in life, sin, make mistakes, the God of mercy says, "Recalculating!" Parents have dreams for their children, so how much more does God have dreams for your life, for all you can become? Just like the GPS, if we sin, God just continues on recalculating, patiently, redirecting us along a new route.

## WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE DOING GOD'S WILL? HOW CAN YOU KNOW FOR SURE?

When we are truly doing God's will our desires are aligned with God's. Things go smoothly even if life is difficult or challenging. When you go to the store and grab a shopping cart, you go through the ritual of sanitizing the handle of the cart. You put in the shopping bags and start off only to discover that there is one wheel that keeps getting stuck. You try pushing and think it might just make it with extra effort. But it impedes your movement and most likely you give up to get another. Doing God's will is like walking through the aisles of life with wheels aligned so we can move. There is no resistance to God's grace, God's invitation.

Another image is a tuning fork that vibrates with another sound. To be in tune with God, truly doing God's will is when your life resonates with God's being and desires. God's will is in harmony with your deepest desires when you are walking with God. Spiritual pollution and dissonance are caused by another spirit. We don't want to move in that direction. Dissonance is caused by resentment, jealousy, and sloth. When our desires are aligned with God's we are in tune with God and resonate with grace.

I invite you to spend some time reflecting on these questions:

I invite you to spend some time reflecting on these questions:

- ★ Who am I when I feel that my life is aligned with God's will?
- ★ What concrete signs alert me to being in tune with God's will? Who am I in those times?

## OPENNESS AND INNER FREEDOM

There are two major requirements to do God's will. The first is openness and the realization that God's invitation can come from any person, anywhere, anytime. The second prerequisite is an inner freedom that allows your imagination free reign. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Baby Suggs tells her fellow slaves

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that “the only grace they could have is the grace they could imagine.” So imagine: What would your life look like if God’s grace were to abound in you without any resistance? Imagine what next week would be like for you.

Pope Francis warns catechists about being rigid and not open to new ideas.

To be faithful, to be creative, we need to be able to change. To change! And why must I change? So that I can adapt to the situations in which I must proclaim the Gospel. To stay close to God, we need to know how to set out; we must not be afraid to set out. If a catechist gives in to fear, then he or she is a coward. If a catechist has an easy time of it, he or she will end up being a statue in a museum. We have a lot of these! Please, no more statues in the museum! If a catechist is rigid, he or she will dry up and wither. I ask you: Do any of you want to be a coward, a statue in a museum, dried up and withered? Is that what you want to be? (*The Church of Mercy*, 18)

Inner freedom helps us realize that God’s will is not always what we planned or expected. Do we ever miss God because it’s not what we were expecting? Who would have imagined it was “the carpenter’s son”? That anything good could have come out of Nazareth? God’s will can become clear sometimes only in retrospect — a bad relationship that woke you up or a job you took just to get a paycheck and later realized it gave you skills and experience you needed later on.

## LIVING IN DARKNESS

As you read this article you might not be swimming in the glorious blue, peaceful, sunlit ocean. You might be immersed in darkness and feeling like something is pulling you under, struggling to survive spiritually, emotionally, financially, and physically.

You may have invested in a marriage for years that has just come unraveled. You may have been struck out of the blue with a diagnosis that is going to change your life. You may have raised and loved children who never seem to be launched. You may be struggling with personal issues that lead to anxiety, stress, or depression. Where is God’s mercy here?

We acknowledge the times when the ocean is dark and stormy, knowing God’s mercy is also expressed in darkness. After a struggle or long suffering, we often realize God *was* merciful even though all we encountered was darkness. Was it a death that came sooner than we expected? An illness that knocked us off course? A financial disaster that forced us to regroup?

Mercy in a time of darkness is an invitation to hope beyond everything you see and experience. Mercy in a time of darkness is when your faith is stretched and the word of God kicks in. No matter what you are going through, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.

There will be times of experiencing mercy in the darkness that we cannot avoid since it is part of the Christian life, the paschal mystery of dying and rising with Christ. Jesus will ask us, “Can you drink the cup that I must drink?” When you are faced with struggle and darkness, can you take the cup in your hands, receive it, and say “Amen?” We remember that this is a cup of mercy, abundant mercy flowing from the side of Christ. So in the act of accepting and drinking from the cup we come incredibly close to truly realizing what the mercy of Christ is all about.

We would much rather be floating on our backs in the ocean, kissed by the sun, and gently bobbing up and down, supported and held by God’s mercy. But there will be seasons when we fight the undertow and struggle against the movement to doubt, despair, and give up. It is God who comes to save us, as Pope Francis reminds us that mercy is “the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us ... the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his” (“*Misericordiae Vultus*,” 1, 2). Like Peter drowning in the sea, we can look into the eyes of Jesus, and that will save us.

We are never saved alone. So in the dark, we remember Kasper’s words,

Mercy courts every human being to the very end; it activates the entire communion of saints on behalf of every individual, while taking human freedom with radical seriousness. Mercy is the good, comforting, uplifting, hope-granting message, on which we can rely in every situation and which we can trust and build upon, both in life and in death. Under the mantle of mercy, there is a place for everyone of good will. It is our refuge, our hope, and our consolation. (111)

During last year’s Jubilee Year of Mercy, you may have completed the church’s requirements for reception of sacraments and walking through one of the designated Holy Doors. I challenge you to let mercy evolve in you this year and be surprised by opportunities that will surface. Don’t reduce it to one act of forgiveness, or trivialize it, but go beyond what the church asks to live the gospel as Francis encourages us. When we are giving alms, Francis urges us to find out the person’s name, touch them, have a conversation with them.

Thich Nhat Hanh says, “The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence” (*Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 20). Open your heart to someone living on the fringes of society. Is there something in the corporal or spiritual works of mercy that is not yet your own personal experience? Visit or write a prisoner; ask who is forgotten at a nursing home and needs a human visit. In the end, it will be you who are visited by the God of mercy. ■

*Sister Kathleen Bryant is a Religious Sister of Charity. She ministers in the field of spirituality as a facilitator, retreat director, spiritual director, and workshop presenter.*

# Joined to Christ: Confirming Adolescents

Tom East



Confirmation for adolescents is the strengthening of young disciples who are joined more closely with the church as they witness to the love of Christ in their hearts. Personal experience and research projects demonstrate the growth in faith understanding, deepening of participation in parish life, and deepening of Catholic identity that many youth experience from their process of preparing for and receiving the sacrament of confirmation.

Sometimes the process for confirmation of adolescents does not achieve what we hope for. In these cases, participating in a preparation process and receiving the sacrament marks the end of the adolescent's active participation in the faith community instead of marking the beginning of strengthened discipleship.

We can't doubt the power of the grace within the sacrament. We also cannot control the degree to which youth will be good stewards of the strengthening they receive through the gift of the sacrament. But, there are choices we make and pastoral concerns for which we are responsible. *As a parish community, we are responsible for the living faith in our community before, during, and after the reception of confirmation.* We are also responsible for the support we provide to the home, the domestic church. We can control our investment and pastoral choices involving all ministries with youth. We can also make good choices about the process we will use to prepare adolescents to receive confirmation.

This article explores the understanding of confirmation founded in church documents and tradition and proposes a way to build a foundation for an effective process of preparing adolescents to receive the sacrament.

## THROUGH CONFIRMATION, WE ARE STRENGTHENED AS DISCIPLES

In baptism, we are joined to Christ, joined to his life, his love, his death, and his resurrection. We are encircled in love and drawn into his message of salvation for the world. Through Eucharist, we are nourished by Christ's presence to share his love with others. Confirmation, as a sacrament of initiation, is a strengthening of our baptismal graces, and is linked to our reception of Eucharist. Anselm Grün, OSB, provides this description of the strengthening received: "Confirmation is

connected with the Latin verb *firmare*, which means 'to make form or fast, strengthen, fortify, support, encourage, animate, strengthen in resolution, secure, affirm, help stand firm'" (*The Seven Sacraments*, 90).

Confirmation is

- ✱ a sacrament of initiation (it is linked directly to baptism and Eucharist); and
- ✱ a strengthening of
  - the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
  - our capacity and desire to witness to our faith; and
  - our relationship with the church, universal, local, and parish.

Through this strengthening, we are more firmly bound to Christ and are consecrated as witnesses to his love.

The sacrament of confirmation strengthens the baptized and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses of Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith. It imprints a character, enriches by the gift of the Holy Spirit the baptized continuing on the path of Christian initiation, and binds them more perfectly to the Church. (*Code of Canon Law*, 879)

Confirmation is a strengthening of baptism that leads to a greater communion in Eucharist and witness to the world. Other Christian denominations have different visions for confirmation; some of these ideas have also taken root in the preparation practices of Catholic parishes. For example, in our tradition, confirmation is not youth's ratification of baptism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1308). The grace of baptism is an indelible mark; youth need to accept these graces and live out their promises, but the sacrament of confirmation is not a decision point for youth to decide if they intend to be Catholic for life, because baptism does not need "ratification." Through prayer and preparation, youth open themselves to receive the gift that God has planned.

Confirmation is also not a rite of passage into adult faith or the sacrament of Christian maturity. In many dioceses, confirmation is received at the age of seven or the age of discretion. Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation, so if someone has also received baptism and is receiving Eucharist, then after



receiving confirmation, that person is fully initiated. This can occur at a variety of ages.

The key is to focus upon God’s action in providing the gift of the sacrament of confirmation. As an unwarranted gift of God, this sacrament should celebrate what God is doing and what God seeks to do in the life of the confirmation candidate. Rev. Paul Turner says, “Faith is a gift, the Holy Spirit is a gift, and sacraments celebrate the unmerited grace of God. Confirmation celebrates what God does, not what teens have shouldered” (*Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions Newsletter*).

### RECEIVING THE GIFT OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

These understandings are important because sometimes the pastoral practices of a parish can be shaped by misguided interpretations. For example, some parishes overly emphasize the sense of youth’s choice in confirmation. In these cases, the preparation process is consistently informing youth of their choice to receive and the commitment that they are making. Similarly, some parishes imitate the processes of Christian initiation in developing their confirmation preparation. All catechesis is informed by initiatory catechesis, but it is absurd for youth who are baptized and receiving Eucharist to be treated as though they are now “choosing” membership in the church and beginning their initiation. One parish, in imitation of the Rite of Christian Initiation, had the youth who were beginning their preparation process go outside and knock on the door to ask to be received inside. Imagine the confusion for a youth who one week was receiving communion with the community and the following week is forced to request entry to his own faith home.

Another pastoral concern is parishes that overly emphasize the *readiness* of youth to receive by creating rigorous processes with numerous requirements and various points of determining whether youth should be excluded from receiving. Canonical guidelines are clear. Confirmation is not reserved for an

exclusive group within the church. All baptized persons are “obliged” to receive the sacrament (see *Code of Canon Law*, 890). The requirements focus on prayerful preparation to receive the sacrament.

To receive confirmation, a baptized person should be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal graces. At the time of receiving the sacrament, one should be in a state of grace, have recently received the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, have a sponsor, and have engaged in intense prayer to prepare to receive the sacrament.

- \* Suitably instructed
  - Able to participate in the rite of confirmation
  - Able to renew baptismal promises
  - Catechized as appropriate to age
- \* Properly disposed
  - Attitude of openness
  - Relationship with God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
  - Relationship with church — universal, local, parish
- \* Other
  - Participated in the sacrament of reconciliation
  - Has a sponsor
  - Engaged in period of intense prayer in preparation to receive

### PREPARING YOUTH TO RECEIVE CONFIRMATION

Understanding these requirements helps us to create a preparation process that focuses on those elements described in the documents. One of the big considerations is choosing how much to require from a confirmation candidate. We hope that the process of preparing will lead to greater participation in the parish and in youth ministry. When the preparation process is too big and has too many requirements, youth often feel a sense of “graduation” from participation, which is the opposite of what we hope for.

Leaders often ask the question, “How can we encourage our young people to participate in youth ministry after they are confirmed?” The parish and her ministries are the context for receiving confirmation. The question is not how to encourage youth participation after confirmation. Effective parishes find ways for youth to experience their preparation for confirmation as part of parish life and youth ministry. Communities that invest in creating vibrant ministry with youth experience increased participation of youth before, during, and after their participation in preparation processes. We can be intentional and connect youth to the living faith in the parish, in youth ministry, and in their families as a vital part of their preparation. These connections will help us achieve our hopes.

What do we hope for? We hope that preparation for confirmation leads to new attitudes of the heart, new understandings, and new capacities.

**Heart:** *What do you hope youth will care about? What attitudes do you hope young people will develop?* (feelings and attitudes)

- \* Friendship with Christ —  
Openness to the Holy Spirit
- \* Belonging to church (universal and parish)

**Head:** *What do you hope young people will learn and know?* (understandings and knowledge)

- \* Creed
- \* Baptismal promises
- \* Rite of confirmation

**Hands:** *What do you hope young people will be able to do?* (behaviors and actions)

- \* Live out baptismal promises
- \* Witness to their faith
- \* Participate in the rite of confirmation

## STRENGTHENING DISCIPLES FOR LIVES OF WITNESS

These hopes echo the direction and the energy of the new evangelization since they promote young people’s ability to witness to their faith and to live their faith with renewed zeal. The new evangelization reminds us that we should be open to new ways to inspire and guide people of all ages into deeper relationship with Christ.

In “Ecclesia in America, Pope John Paul II says, “[Evangelization is to be] new in its ardor, methods and expression . . . . In accepting this mission, everyone should keep in mind that the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ” (6, 66).

To prepare youth for confirmation in light of the new evangelization, we can focus on three phases of preparation: encounter with Christ, formation in faith, and response as disciples.

## Phase one

In this first phase, we focus on evangelization and proclamation of the Good News in new ways to youth by promoting an encounter with the living Christ. Where are the places that young people encounter God’s presence? Prayer, nature, Scriptures, sacraments, community, family. To promote this encounter, we provide experiences and promote relationships that provide a firsthand experience of faith. During this phase, we should be very attentive to helping youth recall and experience the Good News directly related to the cares and concerns of their life today. We should provide opportunities for faith witness and faith sharing, for affective prayer experiences, for an experience of service to others.

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (“Catechesi Tradendae,” 5).

## Phase two

The second phase provides formation for discipleship and can focus on strengthening faith understanding in youth and their sense of Catholic identity. This should include attention to understanding our creed and an ability to renew baptismal promises. Within this phase, candidates can experience formation in our core beliefs and explore Catholic identity by learning about saints, Catholic practices, and spirituality. Candidates can also deepen their understanding and formation by experiencing mission and service. This phase of the process could also include connections to the specific ministries, community life, worship, and catechesis of the parish community.

The believer who professes his or her faith is taken up, as it were, into the truth being professed. He or she cannot truthfully recite the words of the creed without being changed, without becoming part of that history of love which embraces us and expands our being, making it part of a great fellowship, the ultimate subject which recites the creed, namely, the Church. All the truths in which we believe point to the mystery of the new life of faith as a journey of communion with the living God. (Pope Francis, “Lumen Fidei,” 45)

## Phase three

The final phase of the process is the response of the disciple. This includes the immediate preparation to participate in the Rite of Confirmation. It will also include participation in the sacrament of reconciliation and time for prayer and reflection prior to receiving the sacrament. A disciple is compelled to share the love they have received with others, so this phase also includes the ways that youth will become engaged in

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*The sacrament of confirmation  
is not a decision point  
for youth to decide  
if they intend to be Catholic for life,  
because baptism  
does not need “ratification.”*

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faith witness, ministry, service, and mission as part of their response to receiving the sacrament. A disciple needs continued nourishment through sacrament, community, continued catechesis, and prayer, which the newly confirmed will experience through participation in the life of the parish, youth ministry, and faith sharing with their family.

Good news! God the Father desires us to be intimate with him. In Jesus, God the Son has emptied himself and united himself with us. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, God the Holy Spirit has fallen upon us in the sacrament of baptism and propelled us mystically into union with the Body of Christ Jesus. The same Holy Spirit that descended upon us, the bond of love between Father and the Son, the very life of God moves mightily within our lungs and permeates the totality of our existence. (*Proclaiming the Good News: Resources for Evangelizing the Youth Church*, 4)

To help youth to respond as disciples we help them become connected to an ongoing service or ministry role so that they are actively sharing faith and sharing God's love with others. We also need to connect them more deeply to the sources that will nourish and sustain them as disciples: the sacraments, especially Eucharist; God's living word in Scripture; personal prayer; active participation in the faith community; and witnesses of faith who will support their continued discipleship.

It's all about helping youth, parents, and the faith community see the reception of confirmation as a beginning. My friend Eileen McCann, CSJ, former coordinator for youth and young adults for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, prepared a community of youth to receive confirmation this past year. At one point, she asked the young people if any of them were getting their driver's license. She invited

them to describe the process of getting a permit, taking drivers education classes, getting behind the wheel, preparing for the tests. She asked them, "What would you think of someone who goes through all of the trouble of getting their license but never drives?" "That would be stupid." "What a waste of time." "Why would anyone do that?" Then she told them, "That's exactly what you would be doing if you let your reception of confirmation be the end of your participation in our parish!"

## CONCLUSION

Preparing youth to receive God's gift of strengthening in the sacrament of confirmation is part of the ongoing evangelization and conversion of adolescents. We can give this preparation process a good home by situating it within the youth ministry, catechesis, and faith life of the church — connecting youth more deeply to the universal church, the local church as diocese, the parish, and the domestic church of their family. We situate confirmation preparation as part of youth ministry and we utilize the people, ministries, worship, service, and community life of the parish as part of preparation. We support families in this important moment so that they continue to share faith, pray together, and do service together.

Knowing that we are privileged to help youth prepare for confirmation, we connect, we engage, we witness, and we provide space for prayer, faith growth, service, and reflection. Then, we stand back and get out of the way of the Holy Spirit, who has plans for these young people that are beyond our imagination! |

*Tom East is the director of the Center for Ministry Development and project coordinator for the Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies Program.*

# Sample process for confirmation preparation

## Encounter with Christ

- \* Welcome to confirmation preparation
- \* Retreat — encounter with Christ
- \* Styles of prayer
- \* Reading and relying on God's living Word
- \* Finding God in nature and creation
- \* Introduction to service

## Formation for discipleship

- \* Creed
- \* Catholic identity — saints
- \* Catholic identity — spirituality
- \* Understanding Eucharist
- \* Church — global and parish
- \* Retreat — justice, service, and mission

## Response as a disciple

- \* Retreat — life in the spirit
- \* Renewal of baptismal promises
- \* Joining the mission of the church
- \* Gifts discernment — personal mission
- \* Sacrament of reconciliation
- \* Preparing to receive the sacrament of confirmation
- \* Confirmation liturgy
- \* Connection to an ongoing service and ministry role
- \* Ongoing support for discipleship

# Matthew's Gospel and the Process of Transforming Leaders

Steve Mueller



“Transformational leadership” describes the ministry of Jesus with his disciples. His main effort was engaging his disciples in a process of transformation (conversion). They went from followers and disciples to leaders and “missionary disciples” through their assimilation of Jesus’s gospel vision and their

acceptance of their gospel vocation to continue his mission and ministry after his death.

Thus, we see that transformation is at the core of our Christian discipleship. It is a process characterized by three stages: a “*from-through-to*” pattern. We move *from* one situation *through* an intermediate stage *to* a final situation in which we are changed or transformed. As we move from *information* to *confirmation* or assimilation, we experience *transformation* into Christian disciples.

Our important focus, then, is not so much on the two ends of the process, but the all-important middle:

How is the process of Christian conversion or transformation facilitated? What means do we use to effect the transition from our initial Christian call to a transformed state? More importantly, how do we facilitate the transformation of leaders, in particular catechetical leaders, for their ministry?

The answer is the gospel, and in particular the four canonical Gospels in our New Testament, which were the original catechetical tools for conversion. So we must explore how the gospels were created and shaped to effect the transformation of those who engage with them and how they can transform followers into leaders, like Jesus did with his disciples.

The transformative power of the Gospels is most easily understood through a closer examination of Matthew’s Gospel. Here, we can grasp not only what Matthew accomplished,

but also what he thought the Gospel was for: transformational leadership.

Matthew’s Gospel is shaped like a course in Christian discipleship, a kind of “Discipleship 101.” Through a series of carefully crafted stages or lessons, Matthew takes the reader through the basics of becoming a disciple by connecting the words of Jesus (gathered primarily into five major discourses — chapters 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25) with his actions and culminating with the final lesson found in Jesus’s suffering, death, and resurrection.



Matthew’s final commissioning scene (28:16–20) reveals how he thinks of Christian discipleship and how he believes his Gospel is the key transformative tool. Matthew has used his Gospel to shape his audience as disciples, and now he reveals through the words of Jesus that as they have been “disciplined”; now they are to go out and “discipline all nations.” They are able to do that by using his Gospel to lead people through the same

basic course in discipleship and their transformation.

Matthew’s Gospel is really meant to be a course in discipleship that transforms all who engage with it. His Gospel tool of transformation is also our basic tool for developing transformation leaders who have assimilated the vision of Jesus as incorporated in his “good news” and changed their lives as he invited them to do. ■

*Steve Mueller, PhD, is the author of five books, including The Catechist’s Guide Reading Series and So What’s the Good News? The Catechist’s Guide to Reading the Gospels (Faith Alive Books). He helped develop and taught for many years in the renowned Denver Catholic Biblical School. He is the current editor for Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics for All Saints Press.*



# Catechetical Collaboration

Justin Huyck



As parish catechetical leaders, we all know the importance of collaboration. And yet, we sometimes treat collaboration — especially collaborative activity beyond the parish — as an “extension” of our “main” parish work. With limited schedules and drained energy, we are often tempted to view many collaborative opportunities as peripheral or burdensome. This is unfortunate, because practicing collaboration is intrinsic to parish catechetical ministry. Collaboration allows us to expand our vision about the resources available for forming the various dimensions of discipleship, as encapsulated in the six tasks of catechesis (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 20).

## TASK OF PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH

As catechetical leaders, we are not merely *dispensers* of theological knowledge. Rather, we collaborate with our parishioners to discover the stories and beliefs that have shaped their Catholic imaginations and the areas of our tradition that will further nurture their journeys. This is true during our catechetical gatherings, but also in planning and programming for catechesis. Key collaborative partners for visioning might include our parish council, adult faith formation committee, parental advisory committees, and informal conversations with our catechists, parents, and adult faith group facilitators.

## TASK OF LITURGICAL AND SACRAMENTAL FORMATION

Sacramental formation provides an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues on the parish staff. The “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” says that the liturgy is the “source and summit” of the church’s activity (10). Yet, sometimes we treat it as only the summit — the culmination of our catechetical endeavors. We unlock the liturgy’s potential as font of our faith when we collaborate with our liturgical leadership for worship as well as catechesis. For example, sacraments of initiation are celebrated with prescribed ritual texts and gestures, along with particular parish choices as to music and movement. We would do well to enthusiastically explore the sacramental theology found in these choices and expressions.

## TASK OF MORAL FORMATION

Diocesan offices are often a major collaborative partner in forming parishioners to reflect on moral choices and living as people of mercy. Our parishioners have benefited from diocesan programs on forming consciences for faithful citizenship, service learning and Catholic Social Teaching, prison ministry, chastity education, and more. Usually, these programs emerged out of discussions between parish and diocesan

leaders about what was needed to animate discipleship at the parish level.

## TASK OF PRAYER FORMATION

Collaboration at the national level can have amazing results. Our most recent Catechetical Sunday theme, Prayer: The Faith Prayed, is being supported by articles and Leadership Institute webinars at the USCCB website. In addition, a digital toolkit at [nccl.org](http://nccl.org) includes various resources from NCCL’s corporate members and *The Praying Catechist* video series produced by NCCL. As NCCL members, how can we design our projects to creatively utilize our best national resources — each other — to support parish catechesis?

## TASK OF FORMATION FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

Interparish collaboration is a primary resource for catechetical ministry. For two years, I have been working with colleagues from neighboring parishes on a monthly young adult gathering at local bars and restaurants. These gatherings are opportunities to gather those in their 20s and 30s into a community of peers. This initiative is connecting and re-connecting these same young adults with their various parish communities.

## TASK OF MISSIONARY FORMATION

Evangelizing catechesis supports missionary discipleship when we invite people to participate in the church’s mission of serving, allowing God to transform the world. In my city, ecumenical and interfaith collaboration is an essential resource for parishioners to make a difference in the larger community. For example, our citywide Thanksgiving baskets project has connected us with parts of the city most in need, but also deepened relationships with those of other traditions who are partners in service. One component of this project involves families sorting food after faith formation classes, and we have been privileged to have families from the Jewish community join us for this task.

In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis called for a “missionary impulse” capable of transforming everything, including the church’s ways of doing things (27). As catechetical leaders in today’s church, how can collaboration help us enter into this missionary impulse in new and surprising ways? ■

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# The Four Keys to Everlasting Love

by Karee Santos and Manuel P. Santos, MD

Reviewed by Ellen Garmann



In *The Four Keys to Everlasting Love*, lawyer-turned-blogger Karee Santos and her psychiatrist husband, Manny, have crafted an easy-to-read account of marriage grounded in St. Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. The authors draw on their years of teaching pre-Cana, Manny's counseling

experience, and their own lived witness of marriage to help couples engage in conversations about some of the most challenging and crucial aspects of marriage.

The book is written with a candid and faith-filled voice of what it means to live a sacramental marriage rooted in the love of Christ. The work sets out to put flesh on what a marriage grounded in the free, total, faithful, and fruitful love of Christ looks like for today's Catholic families. Through case studies and their own experience of marriage, with a heavy dose of citations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the authors reveal the beauties and challenges of seeking to espouse Christ's love for the church through the vocation of married life.

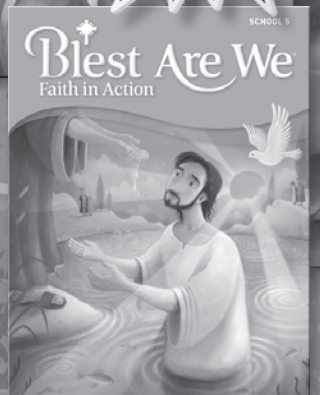
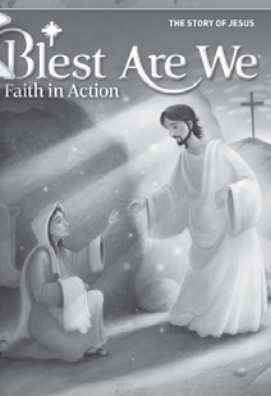
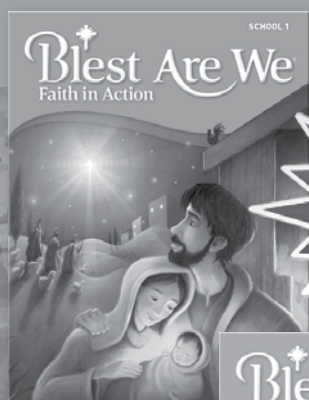
## FIDELITY AND FORGIVENESS

Part 1 addresses fidelity and forgiveness in marriage. Whether disagreeing about how to put away the laundry or seriously considering divorce, they recommend the sacrament of confession and letting go of self as their primary suggestions to restore balance. In chapter 2 especially, they frequently refer to "grace," although a distinction between actual grace and sanctifying grace is not given.

## FREEDOM

Part 2 speaks of freedom: the contexts of work, money, and spare time explore what it means to love freely in a family. They do justice to the full concept of stewardship, which isn't only about money. Lower-middle-class or blue-collar families may have a hard time seeing around the freedom of choice that comes with the Santos's professional status. In chapter 4 helpful list of considerations when determining work-life balance is provided, but the freedom to influence those priorities is very different for a person beginning a career or working in a low-wage field.

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## FRUITFUL LOVE

Part 3, about fruitful love, is somewhat predictably about sex and family planning. In chapter 7, they are faithful to the understandings of biologically and spiritually life-giving sex that the *Theology of the Body* professes. However, sentences such as “Cuddling in bed at night to share the highlights of your day and maybe praying a decade of the Rosary can be a fabulous segue into making love” (112) have to fall on the right ears to be heard as beautiful witness and not dismissed as laughingly unrelatable. Chapter 8 on natural family planning is honest, sharing the struggles of unintended pregnancies and extended abstinence, but at times turns condemning in its dismissal of Catholics who use artificial birth control: “Data from 2006–2010 shows that 75 percent of Catholics ... were using birth control at the time of the survey ... indicating that many Catholics aren’t aware of the problems with artificial techniques and the benefits of natural techniques” (127–128). They are equally pointed toward couples that use in vitro fertilization. However, a great service is given to the antiabortion conversation when they share many beautiful stories of families that have children with special needs and the vibrancy those children bring to the world.

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*The most valuable contribution of the book is its extensive resources for discussion.*

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## TOTAL AND ETERNAL LOVE

Part 4, on the merits of total and eternal love, is a lovely extended reflection on the beauty of prayer and trust in God’s providence in marriage. Families that assent to the previous nine chapters would likely wish for some more in-depth prayer recommendations from chapter 11, but it contains helpful suggestions nonetheless.

The most valuable contribution of the book is its extensive resources for discussion. Each chapter and case study have recommended questions for reflection. With even more resources available online, the book would be very useful for a parish discussion group or as recommended reading for a couple seeking counsel from a pastor. It would also be a good gift for a recently married couple or recently engaged faith-filled couple. *The Four*

*Keys to Everlasting Love* offers a wonderful guide to a strong Catholic marriage, and readers will feel as if Manny and Karee Santos have invited them into their own living room. |

*Ellen Garmann is the pastoral associate for music at St. Helen Parish in Dayton, Ohio. She worked for four years in adult formation and holds a master’s degree in theological studies from the University of Dayton.*

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# Pinterest-ing

Claire M. McManus



Anything we need to know can be immediately accessed online. This is so commonplace that Google, the company, has become *google* the verb. When we begin our search in such places as Google, Bing, or Yahoo, a result page pops up listing websites or images in priority order based on the most visited or the most paid-for sites. The decision to prioritize the list is based on an algorithm — that is, a site visited the most times is the most relevant. What if the search was a little more personal or had a human side to it? Evan Sharp, cofounder of Pinterest, wondered the same thing.

Pinterest was born out of a simple tool that Sharp created when he was a student. Speaking to *The Atlantic* in a 2014 interview he said,

I was in school for architecture and when you're in school for a creative discipline, so much of what you produce comes out of inspiration from other people. So I had thousands of images that I had saved in folders on my computer. But they were all named like databasestrings.jpg and I had no idea what any of them were. So Pinterest was a way for me to create a link: let's bookmark an image so that when I go look at it later, I go to where it came from. And collections are a natural way of organizing that sort of inspiration. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/07/what-is-pinterest-a-database-of-intentions/375365/>)

Since it was launched in 2012, Pinterest has had an unintended sociological impact. The site has become a “database of things in the world that matter to human beings.”

This bold claim comes from the realization that the Pinterest users decide what is relevant to the searcher, not some statistical analysis that drives other search engines.

## A PLACE FOR WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE

Pinterest works like a catalogue that offers multiple images of whatever topic is being searched. Most people know it as a virtual place where one can search for ideas for a project, event, recipe, or fashion. But Sharp believes that Pinterest is a place people go to search for what matters in their life: “And as you encounter great ideas and discover new things that you didn't even know were out there, you can pin them and make them part of your life through our system of boards. Best of all, as you're creating a board on Pinterest, other people can get inspiration from your ideas, so there's this cycle where

what you're creating for yourself also helps other people make their lives.”

The images on Pinterest are channels to the way people think and feel about anything and everything — even faith. A simple search on Pinterest of such topics as evangelization, Catholic faith, or prayer brings the searcher into contact with another person who may have pinned the image on the site. It doesn't bring the searcher to some institution's website unless some person collected that site on their Pinterest board.

Sharp said, “So we think of Pinterest some days as this crazy human indexing machine. Where millions of people are hand indexing billions of objects — 30 billion objects — in a way that's personally meaningful to them.”

When Pinterest started, nearly 52 million users were predominantly women from the middle of the country. In 2016, the number of users grew to 87 million people, but it has spread outward to the East and West coasts. Sharp speaks of Pinterest in quasi-religious or philosophical terms. Pinterest “is about connecting you with people who manifest one thing you want your life to be like. That's why Pinterest doesn't just show an image. It's an image with a person. That was a very deliberate decision. Everything on Pinterest was put there by a human being and — in aggregate — we can figure out who the human beings are, who the enthusiasts are in the thing that really interests you. And those are the people who can guide your journey in that interest or project you're planning.”

If this is true, this is a place where the gospel must be proclaimed.

## EVANGELIZING WITH PINTEREST

The impact Pinterest may have on evangelization has yet to be explored, but its potential is fascinating. There are 87 million people guiding each other's journey on a virtual platform. Pinterest even employs a guided search to help broaden the searcher's imagination. Once a person searches for a topic, their home page is populated by suggestions for similar ideas pinned on someone else's board.

We are always searching for new ways to share the gospel message with young adults; Pinterest may just be the place. We can reach out to searchers who may be the young mothers in our parish, the young adult who lives away from home, or the young person looking for greater meaning in life.

Pinterest is where we should pin our message of hope. ■

*Claire M. McManus, STL, is the director of faith formation for the Diocese of Fall River.*

# Nondenominational Churches and Evangelization:

We've Got Some Things to Learn

Tom Quinlan



Big shiny postcards from a nondenominational church had been arriving at my home for months. Parkview Christian Church, a major player in the south suburbs, was opening its third location last Christmas. When a new postcard arrived detailing a worship service entitled, “What’s the difference between Parkview and the Catholic Church?”, I knew I needed to go.

I’m no stranger to nondenominational Christian churches. In the 1990s, I served at a parish close to Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago’s northwest suburbs. Willow Creek was already a big deal back then. Perhaps no church in the country has been more influential on the evangelical, nondenominational movement in the United States than Willow Creek. It certainly influenced many of the Catholic parishes in geographic proximity. The presence of Willow Creek demanded that parishes get their act together or risk hemorrhaging parishioners.

My Parkview field trip last February has left me with some personal and ministerial insights. First, I was amazed at how resistant I was to going. I was nervous, even agitated. And yet, having had the experience, I would strongly recommend that all of us in Catholic leadership roles find an evangelical or nondenominational church to visit. It would be the best way to get a sense of what these churches are all about and what makes them attractive to people we should care about: (1) Catholics, (2) seekers, and (3) the unchurched. And, in attending a service you will certainly glean tactics and perhaps begin to imagine strategies that you can discuss back at the parish to effectively evangelize, form, and retain people.

Second, I now better understand the two simple actions that parishes can take almost immediately that can make a difference in transitioning the Catholic Church into the evangelizing powerhouse it must become.

## INVITATION

Let’s get our parishioners to go out and invite their neighbors, coworkers, friends, family, and others to experience their Catholic parish (or *a* Catholic parish) in some way, be it a liturgy or otherwise. (Mass may not always be the right initial portal into the Catholic parish experience.) Let’s also find creative means to invite, such as postcard campaigns (to all residents in local zip codes — or ongoing outreach to new neighbors). Social media also seems to offer hope as an effective means for broad outreach. And let’s not overlook old-fashioned means of invitation: community newspaper and radio, postings at libraries, grocery stores, hair salons, etc.

## RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Let’s do a great job of making people feel super-welcomed, safe, and appreciated on parish grounds and in our presence. Let’s make a point of looking one another in the eye and smiling and greeting and conveying an empathic spirit. Affect (or *vibe*) is so very important! *Every* parishioner should be formed (through homilies and beyond) to develop this mindset and demeanor, not just a committee or team.

Note that these two things don’t cost a parish anything in terms of budget. However, both require intentionality. Parish leadership needs to model this and give it attention for an extended period, or better, as a permanent part of the parish identity. Parishioners would need to be formed for mission — for recognizing that through their baptismal identity they are on for evangelizing along with the other aspects of discipleship, such as social justice work.

## CHANGING PARISH CULTURE

Changing a parish culture is more difficult than we tend to imagine. But it is doable. Every parish can move the needle on these two fronts. And the Catholic parish that is becoming invitational and radically hospitable has a chance to attract people in a way comparable to its nondenominational neighbor.

There is no reason why any parish can’t take these two pages from our evangelical Christian brethren’s playbook. Nothing in our theology prevents it. In fact, we should see our faith and tradition requiring it. Of course, our goal is not just to get people in our doors. The quality of the parish, in all respects, will determine whether they stay or not.

Here is a question I often pose in presentations: Do people *believe their way into belonging* or *belong their way into believing*? It’s offered here as a possible conversation starter as you explore evangelization in your parish or region or diocese.

I hope your parish (or diocese) is grappling with how to attract and retain people, with what it means to be in *renewal* mode. I encourage your parish (or diocesan) staff to make that field trip to a successful Christian church in the area. It will be illuminating. And it may well fuel your missionary zeal to bring people to Jesus Christ and the richness of Catholic faith. ■

*Tom Quinlan is the director of religious education in the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois.*

# Who Is Your Guiding Coalition?

Leisa Anslinger



One of the greatest challenges of faith formation leadership is shaping and executing engaging adult faith formation. As a parish leader, I was always looking for parishioners who were passionate about their faith and willing to be involved in discerning faith formation opportunities for others.

One such parishioner, Gina, vividly comes to mind. She initially came to me in my first year as a staff member, energetically expressing her concern about the way our youth were being prepared for confirmation. I will be honest; she was complaining, loudly. After listening to her for a few minutes, I asked if she would be willing to be part of the solution by joining our faith formation commission. As her second and final term on the commission ended, she teased that people should never complain unless they are willing to be put to work, and then shared how grateful she was for the opportunity to serve.

In the November 2016 issue, this column explored the first step of Dr. John Kotter's change leadership framework: the importance of having a clear and compelling vision and knowing why we do what we do. Kotter's second step is to have a guiding coalition: a team of people who share our vision for adult formation within our faith community and who are willing to share their time and talents in order to shape adult faith formation for the diocese or parish.

## WHO IS YOUR GUIDING COALITION?

It takes many of us, working together, to discern what is needed to engage adults in living faith, develop a plan, and implement it. In "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us," the U.S. bishops outline the responsibilities of the pastor, adult faith formation leader, adult faith formation team, and catechists of adults (124–153). "Providing effective, diverse adult faith formation opportunities is a demanding responsibility requiring the collaborative efforts of a well-trained, coordinated team of parishioners, 'a nucleus of mature Christians, initiated into the faith.' Clearly, no person acting alone can adequately meet the needs and fulfill the potential of parish adult faith formation ministry. The value of a team approach has been clearly shown in the success of the RCIA, youth ministry, and pro-life activities in parishes throughout the country" (142).

Many dioceses and parishes have an adult faith formation team. Some are very effective in the ways in which they solicit

input from parishioners and guide formation opportunities in an intentional manner. Yet, even among those with a long-standing practice of a core adult faith formation team, it is not uncommon for team meetings to take on a perfunctory tone, offerings to become stale, or participation in formation to wane. The beginning of the new year is the perfect time to consider the composition of your team, the ways in which members are discerned and formed, and the ways in which the team carries out its roles and responsibilities.

## TEAM COMPOSITION

In order for the parish or diocese to effectively offer faith formation for adults in varying stages of life and faith, it will be beneficial for "teams to include qualified representatives of all the major parish demographic and cultural groups" (OHWB, 143). Is your team representative of the people you hope to engage in adult faith formation? In providing parish leadership retreats and workshops for many years, it is not uncommon for leaders (staff and parishioner leaders)

to bemoan the lack of young adult participation in parish formation or ministry opportunities, for example. Yet, young adults are often absent from the discussions about them. Many teams are comprised of like-minded people. Had Gina not been invited to join the formation commission, her insights, passion, and ideas would have been missing as we redesigned confirmation preparation. Creating a truly representative team is essential to the development of engaging faith formation for everyone.

## FORMATION OF THOSE WHO SHAPE FORMATION

It is not enough for people to be asked to help in creating an adult faith formation plan. Those who shape formation must themselves be formed through prayer, study, and ongoing faith sharing. Have you established a regular pattern of meeting that includes time for prayer and formation among your team members?

## HAVE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Do your team members understand their roles and responsibilities? Having clear expectations is key to engaging your team in the ministry they have agreed to share. An engaged team is the first step in fashioning engaging faith formation. ■

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

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*It takes many of us, working together,  
to discern what is needed to engage  
adults in living faith.*

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

**Formation through Twitter**

As parish and diocesan catechetical leaders, we are committed to the ongoing learning and spiritual formation of ourselves, friends, colleagues, and members of our diocesan and parish communities.

In addition to the traditional methods of reading, listening to presentations and attending workshops, classes, and conferences, Twitter can be a tool for ongoing learning, catechesis, and evangelization.

We can use Twitter to share information about the Catholic faith, belief, and practice.

Desta Goehner, Director of Congregational Relations at California Lutheran University, has been a long-time user and consultant to churches in the many ways that social media can be integrated into ministry.

I asked Goehner to share her insights on the value of Twitter for church life, religious education, and evangelization. She replied, “Jesus says that where two or more are gathered, I am there. Lots of people are on Twitter. There were 313 million monthly users in 2016. Why would we, as the church, not go there? It’s the easiest place of evangelism these days and is super-accessible to us.”

Goehner continued,

Twitter is a great way for us to tell the story of God, Jesus, and the church. It’s a place that we can show how we wrestle with God, listen to how others are wrestling with God, and be in a global community. We can hold and use Twitter as a sacred space. Twitter connects people to each other that may have never otherwise been connected. Online community can be real community. It doesn’t replace in-person community, but it can be real community.

People used to come to church. That is changing. Why can’t we take church to them? Why can’t we take what is happening in our churches out to the people? We can use digital and social media to do that. We can take the pulpit to the people using Twitter. We can tweet sermons, prayers, images, and bring these sacred things to a digital place. Why not increase the audience of your message or worship? Sharing sacred content on Twitter expands your message and audience. Take the pulpit to the people. Use Twitter to do it!

Read what people are saying about the church and God: Check out hashtags like: #ChSocM, #Church, #God, #Jesus.

Here are tweeters that catechetical leaders may want to follow:

- |                          |                                      |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| U. S. Catholic Bishops   | RCL Benziger                         |
| Catholic Relief Services | Archbishop Cupich                    |
| Crux                     | Father Tom Reese, SJ                 |
| Father Jim Martin, SJ    | Pope Francis                         |
| Edutopia                 | U.S. Catholic Magazine               |
| Salt & Light             | Thinking Faith                       |
| Our Sunday Visitor       | Loyola Press                         |
| Archbishop Kurtz         | Notre Dame Institute for Church Life |
| On Being                 | Acts of Faith: Washington Post       |
| Sadlier Religion         | Paulist Fathers                      |
| Bishop Barron            | America Magazine                     |
| Catholic News Service    | Franciscan Media                     |
| News.Va.English          |                                      |
| NCCL                     |                                      |
| Busted Halo              |                                      |

From these and others I find information and resources that I retweet on my Twitter accounts: DanPierson at eCatechistToday and DanPierson@faithAlivebooks. Both of these accounts are linked to my blogs: eCatechist.com and faithAlivebooks.com

Explore ways Twitter can benefit both you and your ministry. Twitter is a great tool to further our mission of evangelization and catechesis.

**Becoming a Parish of Mercy: A New Vision for Total Parish Evangelization** by Matthew W. Halbach, PhD, Twenty-Third Publications

In this practical and enlightening book, you will uncover key actions and attitudes of accompaniment that can bring Pope Francis’s vision of a more merciful church to life in your parish. You’ll see how the new evangelization can help you thrive as an oasis of God’s mercy, cultivating relationships based on trust, respect, and love.

In my conversation with Dr. Halbach, he explained, “Evangelization in the parish begins, most organically, when people start to reflect on and converse about the power of God’s mercy in their lives, and reaches its climax when people begin to demonstrate this power to others around them. This is exactly what this book aims to facilitate.”

*Becoming a Parish of Mercy* is a simple resource for engaging pastoral staffs, parish leadership, and volunteers in conversation, evaluation, and planning. Halbach offers an abundance of ideas and practical steps for accompaniment. “The intent of this book is to be a thought inspirer and conversation starter” (78). ■

*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 coauthor with Susan Stark of Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Reflection (Tarcher/Penguin, 2015). Contact him at pierson.dj@gmail.com.*

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