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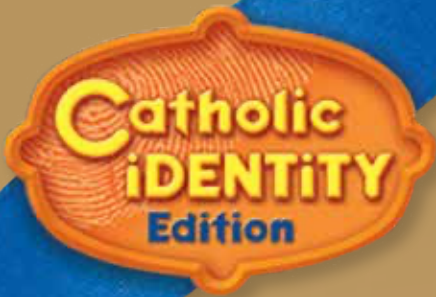
IMAGINATIVE EVANGELIZATION

IN THIS ISSUE:

Unleashing Your Imagination:
Living Joyfully is Not a Fantasy

Fourteen Ideas for Adult Faith
Formation: Send the Faithful
Out on Mission to the World

Who, Me, An Evangelist?



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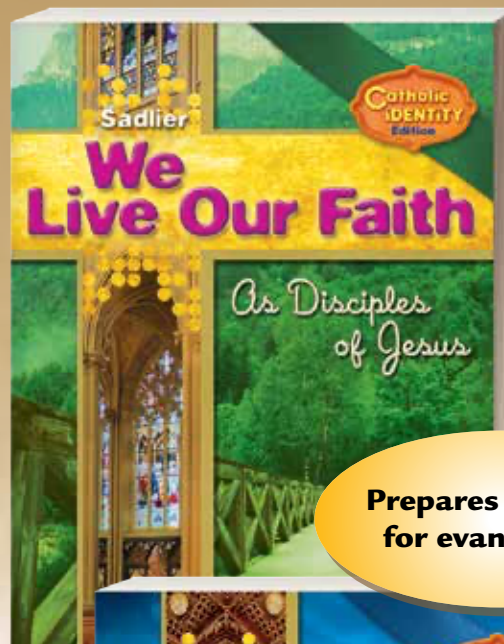
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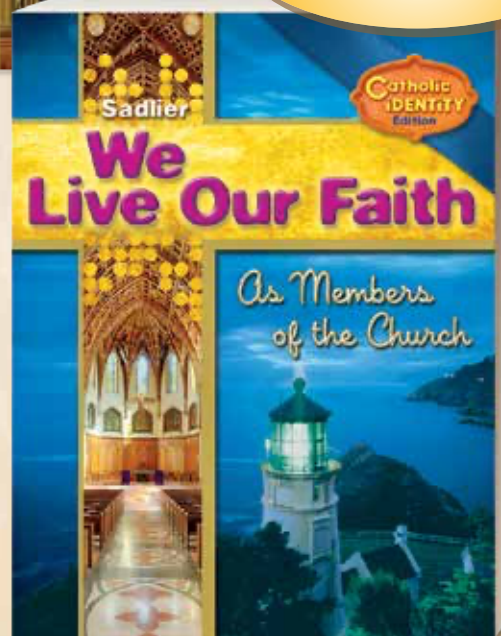
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CATECHETICAL LEADER Table of Contents

July 2015

In Every Issue

- 4 **From the President** Bill Miller
Looking Backward...Looking Forward...
But Planted Firmly in the Present
- 5 **From the Executive Director** Margaret Matijasevic
Wash in the Pool, See Anew!
- 23 **Book Review** Reviewed by Dan Thomas
Learning to Walk in the Dark
- 25 **Transforming, Evangelizing Catechesis**
Let's Be Brutally Honest Frank DeSiano, CSP
- 26 **PCL Perspectives** Walter Schulte
At Work in the Vineyard: Prayer and Quiet in the Life of a PCL
- 27 **New Evangelization on a New Continent**
Virtual Retreats Claire M. McManus
- 28 **From the Intercultural Committee** Mary Jo Waggoner
This Universal Church of Ours
- 29 **Diocesan Director's Forum** Sara Blauvelt
God's Mercy Endures Forever
- 30 **Adult Faith Formation** Leisa Anslinger
Bringing Christ to Others, Person-to-Person
- 31 **Notable Resources** Dan Pierson

Features

- 6 **Unleashing Your Imagination:**
Living Joyfully is Not a Fantasy Joe Paprocki
- 10 **Fourteen Ideas for Adult Faith Formation: Send the**
Faithful Out on Mission to the World Janet Schaeffler, OP
- 13 **Who, Me, An Evangelist?** Katrina Rae Daughenbaugh
- 17 **Growing Up Catholic: Coaching Parents to Form Their**
Own Children in Faith Paul Canavese & Ann Naffziger
- 20 **Preparing Those with Special Needs**
to Receive the Sacraments Michele Chronister



Unleashing Your Imagination: Living Joyfully is Not a Fantasy page 6



*Who, Me, An Evangelist?
page 13*



*Preparing Those with Special Needs to
Receive the Sacraments
page 20*

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WASH IN THE POOL, SEE ANEW!

Margaret Matijasevic



At the 2015 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, the theme *See-Ver* invited over 40,000 participants to explore the possibility of being healed of all obstructions of vision, living into the experience of the blind man from John's Gospel. The gospel's command from Jesus is simple: "Wash in the pool."

I realized early in the prayer experience that there was more that I was being asked to surrender than just myself. As your new executive director, I was being asked to offer this new job — the entire position of executive director — to prayer. This brought new depths to the prayer experience, as it kept deepening and broadening, echoing the mantra: *See! Ver!*

God's generosity overflowed as the dialogue of prayer expanded through each encounter with the various members of NCCL. The prayer that resounded in each "hello" was a prayer of opening my eyes as your Executive Director, so that I could see clearly the possibility of the future of NCCL in your faces and stories, in your joy and passion for catechesis, and in the various gifts you are excited to share. I kept persisting at the prayer for weeks following, as God's invitation felt vigorous in its efforts. It continued to present itself in dialogues with NPCD and NCEA, inviting me to see with compassionate, collaborative, and creative eyes.

My prayer for NCCL then began to take a more sophisticated form, as particular intentions took shape from all the encounters God was providing.

- * I prayed we could be cleansed of any obstruction in our growing national vision.
- * I prayed for the painful histories or frustrating realities of disconnectedness between ourselves as catechetical leaders in this organization.
- * I prayed for the hesitation to explore new methods inhibiting us from growth.
- * I prayed for any tendency for settling with what has been done in years past.

This prayer dialogue has led me to a deep discernment of what it would require for NCCL to let go of any fear of the unexplored and untapped potential of who we are, and risk responding to Jesus's invitation to "wash in the pool," and see anew!

NCCL has been given this grace-filled moment in time. Not only has our organization committed to a new office space,

prime for collaborative efforts, but we have explored discussions with other national organizations that have invited us to vision beyond where we currently are. It is certain that the whole NCCL membership needs to discern its individual and collaborative role in the national vision of catechesis, and how that will contribute to new possibilities. Each of us is called to own our contribution and to wear our NCCL identity with pride, professionalism, and joy!

We are called to be the visionaries of the present and future of our organization, to be advocates of a catechetical vision that inspires and offers hope to all whom we serve in our various communities. We are required to dignify the labor of catechetical leaders through offering professional networking and standards. We are invited to recognize the giftedness of each other, and so affirm such. We are challenged to recognize our stifling tendencies as an organization, which cling to the status quo of what we do and how we do it.

NCCL can no longer be an organization that merely maintains, but instead visions with strategic and intentional eyes that focus on hope and possibility! It is the time to take new risks; to build stronger trust in each other to lead; to prioritize the nurturing of our infrastructure of catechetical leaders; and to imagine ourselves as affecting each catechetical process with our collaborative, hopeful and professional presence.

We need to create goals in such a way that each of us can contribute to NCCL's success: Marketing, using modern methods of presence, while also committing to mentoring catechetical leaders in our dioceses and parishes on behalf of our NCCL membership; honoring each other's abilities by allowing individuals to serve effectively through affirmation and delegation, and not attempting to simply maintain year to year what has been done; and sharing freely our successes with each other by considering a new way to share information between our membership.

To *See! Ver!* such for NCCL means that each one of us needs to wash in the pool, cleansing ourselves of simply maintaining the status quo, and opening ourselves up to visioning the brilliance of possibility. It's time you bring your zealous passion to serve! So... "Go. Wash in the pool," and become overwhelmed with the possibility of hope! *See! Ver!* the person before you in the mirror that is being called to make a unique difference, and please hear the sentiment of the Good News and.... "believe!" ■

Unleashing Your Imagination: Living Joyfully is Not a Fantasy

Joe Paprocki



What gives you heartburn?

I'm not talking about the bad kind of heartburn. I know all about that kind of heartburn, having grown up the son of a pharmacist and working for years in our family drugstore, dispensing remedies for just this kind of malady. No, the kind of heartburn I'm talking about is the kind you want, the kind that the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus experienced when they said, "were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us on the road?" (Lk 24:32) They had heartburn. And they were in no hurry to take an antacid. They had the kind of heartburn that you want to keep. So, what is it that sets your heart ablaze? If you can get in touch with that, you'll be on your way to living joyfully.

Think about it this way. When you get down to it, each of us is walking around with a vision of a hoped-for reality — an alternate reality — for ourselves, for those we love, for our community, for our world. We have a vision for a world that exists somewhere beyond what our eyes can presently see — it exists in our imagination. Unfortunately, imagination often gets a bad rap, thought of as being out of touch with reality, when, in reality, imagination is the capacity to see beyond reality to an alternate reality. In a sense, imagination is the key to navigating, deciphering, and transcending the reality that meets the eye so that we can recognize unseen reality.

Imagination is not foolishness. The great intellectual genius, Albert Einstein, asserted that "imagination is more important than knowledge." It is said that when Einstein was asked by a young mother what she should read to her son so that he could grow up to be a brilliant thinker like him, he replied, "Fairy tales." When she pressed him for what she might read to him next, Einstein replied, "More fairy tales!" In fact, Einstein once said: "When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than any talent for abstract, positive think-

ing." In his essay, "On Fairy-Tales," J.R.R. Tolkien wrote that fantasy (freeing oneself from the boundaries of seen reality) is "not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and [. . .] the most potent."

LOVE REQUIRES IMAGINATION

The gospel we proclaim, while no fairy story, is indeed potent because imagination is at its heart. It takes great imagination to recognize the blessings of being poor, of peacemaking, of being meek, of mourning, of hungering for justice, and of being per-

secuted for righteousness sake. It takes great imagination to turn the other cheek, to love your enemies, and to pray for those who persecute you. It takes great imagination to wash the feet of others. And it takes great imagination to lose your life in order to gain it. And yet,

Jesus tells us that this is the reality of the kingdom of God — a reality that is in our midst, albeit unseen. And yet, by his very existence — his Incarnation — Jesus transformed this unseen reality into a seen reality.

Jesus not only epitomized the kingdom of God, he literally embodied it. In many ways, we can paraphrase the well-known gospel verse of John 3:16 that says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but will have eternal life" to say, "For God *had such a great imagination*, that he sent his only Son..." Love, indeed, requires great imagination. And living joyfully is achieved by entering into a loving relationship with a personal God, not with some nebulous vapor or impersonal force.

Unfortunately, realities such as indifference, distractions, cynicism, and relativism cause our spirit to experience what Evagrius of Pontus, a fourth-century monk, referred to as the "noon-day devil" — a lack of energy with regards to things of ultimate significance, similar to the physical lethargy we often experience after lunch. It is the loss of imagination. The thought of putting energy toward things of ultimate significance feels like Sisyphus pushing that boulder up the mountain only to see it roll back down. Like Bill Murray's

*We have a vision for a world
that exists somewhere beyond
what our eyes can presently see —
it exists in our imagination.*



character in *Groundhog Day*, we resist doing the real work it takes to build a true relationship, only to find that nothing new ever happens to us. We find ourselves settling for less when, meanwhile, our soul yearns for more. So what's the solution? A revived and renewed imagination. Active imagination — our capacity for perceiving more than meets the eye — enables the spirit to engage in a type of spiritual photosynthesis, transforming that which cannot be seen into real energy for the soul.

Ultimately, Jesus' wildly imaginative proclamation of the kingdom of God is much more than the proposal of a preferred way of seeing reality but is rather an invitation to an indispensable way of seeing. In essence, imagination is a prerequisite for hope. To be imaginative is to develop a way of approaching reality that, while not contrary to reason, goes beyond reason and brings us into contact with mystery.

FEEDING THE IMAGINATION

Author John Shea describes the prominent role of imagination in spirituality when he says, "Thinking is the furniture and imagination is the room. We can rearrange the furniture all we want but sometimes what we need is a larger room." Indeed. The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims is the larger room that we need. Jesus, in fact, compares the kingdom of God to a mansion, saying that, "my Father's house has many rooms" (Jn 14:2). It so happens that imagination is the key to entering this mansion and that the language spoken there is a language of mystery. As such, we need to learn a new language — a language of imagination, a language of the soul, a language of mystery — in order to live joyfully as God wants us to do.

Spirituality is a realm where words are not the primary form of expression and where truth is encountered through forms of imagination. The spirit is more at home with a language that relies less on an alphabet and more on expressions that feed the imagination: sign and symbol, ritual, movement and gesture, silence, song, and story-telling. And yet, for some reason, when it comes to catechesis, we are never at a loss for words. The main problem in catechesis today is not with the message we are delivering, nor is there a problem with us: our hearts are in the right place. The problem is with our method

of delivery which, for all intents and purposes, lacks imagination because it lacks a language of mystery. The language of mystery predisposes us to the possibility of an alternate reality, which is the essence of the kingdom of God. If things were simply as they appeared, we would have no need for a spiritual life. However, life's ultimate meaning is veiled and mysterious. We would do well to nurture our spirit by incorporating these various elements of the language of mystery into our soul's daily diet and into our catechesis:

- * Sign and symbol – Think about how Moses was drawn to encounter God: not through a wordy invitation but through the sign of a burning bush. Upon seeing this sign, Moses said, "I must go over and see this." Signs and symbols speak directly to the heart through the imagination.
- * Ritual – Rituals connect us with meaningful events in our past and ground us in the present, leading us confidently into the future. Rituals awaken a deeper level of consciousness within us – that place where the spirit dwells.
- * Movement & gesture – One word: yoga. I'm not at all into yoga, but I get it. Our spirit is not a separate reality from our body. Spirit and body are conjoined; what happens to one affects the other. For example, sickness makes us sad. At the same time, sadness can make us sick. Spiritual wellness depends on harmony between body and spirit, meaning that we don't have to be perfectly still in order to reach a spiritual state. In fact, quite the opposite — controlled, reverent, prayerful movements bring about a corresponding prayerfulness of spirit.
- * Silence – I'll keep quiet on this one and let Thomas Keating speak: "Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and to rest in God."
- * Song – Few things can transport us to another state of mind better than music and song. There are nearly 100 references in the Psalms that command the use of music to praise God and that identify God as

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the audience for such songs of praise, (i.e. “O sing to the Lord a new song,” 96:1). Lucky for us, God loves music. It is no surprise, then, that when Israel was mired in exile in Babylon, one of the ways they expressed their despair was through their refusal to sing:

By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.
For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
How shall we sing the LORD’s song
in a foreign land? (Ps 137:1-4)

- * Story-telling – Approximately one-third of the recorded sayings of Jesus are contained in parables. The man could tell a story. Stories create worlds, new realities. Jesus’s stories tap into our imaginations, compelling us to consider the possibility of an alternate reality. In *Stories of Faith*, John Shea tells us, “story is the most interesting and compelling of language forms” (87) and that “storytelling raises us out of the randomness of the moment and inserts us into a larger framework.” That larger framework is the spirit world.

Paradoxically, working in ministry can do a number on our imaginations. We mistakenly assume that working in God’s vineyard will somehow automatically nourish us and that our imaginative energies will be replenished by the very act of serving in ministry. Instead, we find ourselves unable to imagine the possibilities of the kingdom of God. (We may be unable to even imagine getting out of bed on some mornings!)

So, how do we “jumpstart” our imaginations? By exercising that part of the brain where imagination is located: the right brain. Of course, the human brain has two hemispheres and while both sides of the brain can think, they each do so in vastly different ways. The left side tends to be more logical and analytical while the right side tends to be more creative and imaginative. Here are some strategies for unleashing the imaginative juices in our right brain so that we might once again live more joyfully:

- * Turn off the TV
- * Read, especially fiction and biographies
- * Focus on humor
- * Draw or paint a picture
- * Peruse works of art
- * Work with your hands

- * Listen to music and sing when possible
- * Get a hobby
- * Get regular exercise, eat right, and get enough sleep
- * Break your patterns and be illogical on occasion
- * Keep an idea notebook or write in a journal
- * Attend theater
- * Rearrange your workspace/living space
- * Meditate
- * Do deep breathing
- * Learn a new language
- * Associate with creative people
- * Cook or bake something creative
- * Do some decorating/remodeling
- * Travel or do armchair traveling
- * Interact with children
- * Play board games that require strategy

All of these things can awaken our imagination which in turn sparks the fire that fuels a healthy spirituality. And since spiritual wellness is all about being aligned with the Spirit, it helps to know what the Spirit is fired up about. So, just what is God fired up about? Selfless love. Mercy. Compassion. Justice.

God’s great imagination envisions a world in which the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given drink, the sick are tended to, the homeless are sheltered, the imprisoned are visited, the naked are clothed, and the estranged are welcomed. A healthy spirituality fueled by imagination compels us to be present to people in need, offering them the possibility of seeing the presence of God which is being obstructed by the pain in their lives. Dorothy Day insisted that “everything a baptized person should do every day should be directly or indirectly related to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.” She knew that God’s fire could be found there. If you are looking for God — which is the goal of spirituality — these are the places to look. As the traditional Christian hymn *Ubi Caritas* reminds us: “where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found.”

The God we seek is on fire, has a mission, and invites you and me to be a part of it.

Imagine that. ■

Joe Paprocki, DMin, is the National Consultant for Faith Formation at Loyola Press. His latest book, co-authored with Julianne Stanz, is The Catechist’s Backpack: Spiritual Essentials for the Journey (Loyola Press).

Fourteen Ideas for Adult Faith Formation: Send the Faithful Out on Mission to the World

Janet Schaeffler, OP



There's a church in our area that has a one-way driveway for entry and exit to its property. The posted signs reads: "Enter to Worship" and "Exit to Serve."

That is our baptismal call. One of the results of our increased concentration on adult faith formation is, hopefully, the deepening of people's awareness, desire, abilities, and skills to be missioned for their role in the world.

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us reminds us of this so well in the third of its major goals for adult faith formation:

To call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world. The Church and its adult faithful have a *mission in and to the world*: to share the message of Christ to renew and to transform the social and temporal order. This dual calling to evangelization and justice is integral to the identity of the lay faithful; all are called to it in baptism...Accordingly, faith formation seeks to help each adult believer become more willing and able to be a *Christian disciple in the world*. As salt of the earth and light for the world (cf. Mt 5:13-16), adult disciples give witness to God's love and caring will so that, in the power of the Spirit, they renew the face of the earth. (72-73)

ANALYZING BEST PRACTICES

When I was director of adult faith formation for the Archdiocese of Detroit, we did research on the best practices in adult faith formation in our parishes. One of the questions asked on the survey was: "Describe the effects of this initiative" (the initiative they identified as their best practice). "How were the participants - or the parish - changed by this event or process?"

In analyzing the responses, the committee found that this was not the easiest question for the respondents (adult faith formation coordinators, directors of religious education, pastors, pastoral ministers) to answer.

Perhaps we asked it the wrong way. Perhaps it was too broad; not clear; not measurable. One person asked: "How does one evaluate this?"

The majority of respondents answered with replies such as:

- * more involvement in the parish/new leadership has emerged
- * enhanced their personal prayer life
- * adults are excited about lifelong formation
- * more aware of Scripture at Mass
- * acknowledge the value of the "group" as a place to share faith with others and to be enriched by the sharing of others
- * a new sense of openness
- * men were surprised they were able to share so much
- * hunger for more
- * sense of belonging is heightened among participants/within the parish
- * helped them connect their faith with everyday situations and decision making
- * broadened understanding of their faith

These are all very hopeful and inspiring results. Many of the responses, of course, would be dependent upon the type of program that was offered. What was the purpose/goal of the program? Was that achieved?

One of the things that struck the committee was that of the 105 responses to this question, there were three which said:

- * a greater consciousness with regards to social justice issues; talking about what they can do
- * people were drawn closer together in unity of mission; increased outreach to those in need within and beyond parish boundaries; a more global vision
- * many are looking for concrete ways to encounter the poor

No one else indicated responses such as:

- * getting involved in/making a difference in the community (even though they mentioned getting involved in the parish — which is a very important thing!)

- * empowered people to become involved with others to seek solutions to poverty, racism, violence, environmental pollution in the community, etc.

It is very possible that many of these things did happen, but the survey responders were unaware of it.

These results might not be a natural outcome of each adult faith formation opportunity. Should they be?

- * “The laity, by their vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs, and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (*Lumen Gentium*, 31).
- * The third of the major goals for adult faith formation is to “call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world” (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, 72).
- * Adult faith formation calls us to live what we celebrate. We need to call each other to community and mission, to being the Body of Christ. When we celebrate Eucharist each week, it is not just the bread and wine that are changed. We are changed into the Body of Christ, commissioned to leave our Eucharistic assembly and be Christ’s Body throughout the week.

Adult faith formation calls us to live what we celebrate. We need to call each other to community and mission, to being the Body of Christ.

CREATING DISCIPLES IN MISSION

What might we do to ensure that adult faith formation leads today’s adults to living as disciples in mission to the world?

1. Whatever we do, whatever the program/process (in whatever format/media we’re employing), include the “so what?” question. What does this (what I’ve just learned) have to do with my everyday life? And not just my life, but how does this impact the common good?
2. Invite/encourage people to tell stories. As we listen to the experiences of others, we become aware of the various needs of the world.
3. Pay attention to the signs of the times. Are your parish faith environments and your program/processes filled with the signs of the times? Do you listen to what people are talking about? What are their questions, needs, concerns? Do the general intercessions during weekend (and weekday) liturgies reflect today’s needs (or were they written by someone else four months ago)? Are the adult faith formation programs that are offered a result of what the learners have asked for, a reflection of what is happening in their life circumstances?
4. Become a place where people gather to talk about their questions, their feelings, exploring how faith relates to the challenges of the day. When something happens in the life of the parish, the community, the church, the

nation, the international community, do people first look to the parish as a hospitable place and the place to gather to explore with others their wonderings, their questions, and range of emotions?

When 9/11, the sex abuse scandal in the church, Katrina, the war in Iraq, the Sandy Hook tragedy, widespread unemployment, ongoing terrorism, the racial tensions in the country happen, does the parish respond by inviting people to gather for coffee and brownies, wine and cheese, soup and bread (whatever is comforting food), and a chance to talk about their feelings, their fears, their questions?

Perhaps a class on theology or teaching is not what is needed — especially in the beginning. People need, first, to talk about their feelings, their concerns, their worries. Then, the question can be asked: what is there in Scripture and our tradition that will help us get through these events, these incompre-

hensible challenges to our lives today? Of course, it does not stop there: What does this mean for the way I’m called to live my life as a disciple? What can I do? What can we do together?

5. To invite people together when a significant event occurs (as described above) is always a possibility. What if there was also a hospitable gathering every week or twice a month for people to come together for prayer and reflective discussion of whatever is on their minds, whatever is in the news? Depending upon the topic of discussion, the facilitator (or any participant) could always be encouraged to mention needs in the community or world and ways people might be able to respond.

Some people might come all the time; others might come whenever they feel a need. When an extreme need surfaces in the community, a welcoming place would already be there.

6. Use all opportunities (infused into all adult formation sessions: speaker series, parent meetings, church bulletins, blogs, websites, your e-newsletters, 30-second public service announcements on television, etc.) to raise questions about realities and events in your community, our country, or world that aren’t proceeding according to gospel values.
7. In homilies, continually connect the call to serve, the call to be a person-for-others, to baptism and the Sunday Scripture readings.
8. Revisit and stress the dignity, the call, and responsibility of the laity in the Vatican II documents, *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (*Christifideles Laici*), Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic exhortation that followed the 1987 Synod on the Laity, and the

US bishops' documents, *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (1980) and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (1995).

It is they (the laity) who engage directly in the task of relating Christian values and practices to complex questions such as those of business ethics, political choice, economic security, quality of life, cultural development, and family planning. New situations, especially in the realm of social justice, call for creative responses. We know that the Spirit moves among all the People of God, prompting them according to their particular gifts and offices to discern anew the signs of the times and to interpret them boldly in light of the Gospel. Lay women and men are in a unique position to offer this service. (*Called and Gifted*, 21-22)

9. Use “convoy learning” — field trips. Go to where the people are, where the needs are. We learn best by experience. Put the adult learners in vans and go to visit, be with, and experience various needs and situations that are different from what people’s daily lives usually hold.
10. Invite people to do the do-able. When we talk about being missioned to the world and think about some of the current issues or begin to study some of the justice issues of today, it can be daunting. Some people’s responses could easily be: what can one person do?

Some people have all they can do to care for their elderly parent(s) and advocate for their rights. Is this lived reality not responding to human need, the human need where our life experience currently reveals God’s presence?

Some people who are homebound might feel they can’t be involved in touching the world beyond their home. My mom was very involved in a telephone ministry of calling people weekly, people she did not know (at the beginning), but whose names were given to her to check in on once a week.

Letter-writing about important issues of concern is another valuable way to be involved in making a difference in the issues of today which can be undertaken by most people—with a little encouragement and suggestions.

11. Outreach fair. Many of our parishes often have ministry fairs, highlighting all the parish ministries in which parishioners are invited to become involved, because of their baptism. These are important and need to continue. At the same time, do we have service and outreach fairs, since we are likewise called to be missioned to the world, to make a difference in someone else’s life, in the life of our world? Various agencies, which provide numerous avenues for awareness as well as involvement, can be invited to exhibit.

12. Parishes also do a wonderful job of highlighting, commissioning, and thanking the various parishioners involved in the ministerial life of the parish. Can we acknowledge that parishioners have taken seriously their call to be of service in the world? The sensitivity in doing that is to realize that people respond in service in many and diverse ways.
13. Adult faith formation is about much more than imparting knowledge. It’s about transformation. One of the ways to do that is to enable the person to develop skills: skills for ministry, for service, for outreach. These skills can be incorporated in practical sessions/opportunities within your programs. Don’t presume that everyone has the skills.
14. Don’t let your “programs or processes” (no matter what format they are...speaker series, online group, infused into existing structures, bulletin, websites, etc.) ever end. Continually share with past participants (and all parishioners) ideas of ways to be involved with others, of ways to be of service. Link people with others, with groups who have like interests with theirs. ■

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“It is they (the laity) who engage directly in the task of relating Christian values and practices to complex questions such as those of business ethics, political choice, economic security, quality of life, cultural development, and family planning. New situations, especially in the realm of social justice, call for creative responses. We know that the Spirit moves among all the People of God, prompting them according to their particular gifts and offices to discern anew the signs of the times and to interpret them boldly in light of the gospel. Lay women and men are in a unique position to offer this service.” (*Called and Gifted*, 21-22)

Who, Me, An Evangelist?

Katrina Rae Daughenbaugh



What comes to mind when we hear the word *evangelist*? The apostles? The four writers of the gospels? A TV minister? What exactly is an evangelist? The dictionary defines it as: 1) a person who seeks to convert others to the Christian faith, 2) a layperson engaged in Christian missionary work, 3) a zealous advocate of something. My definition is a person who is called and chooses to serve God to further build God's kingdom here on earth.

BEING CALLED

It doesn't matter whether God is calling you, you just think he is calling you, you have a church position, or you simply want to do something for God or church. Serving God is the issue. He takes what you give, blesses it, forms it to his desire, and uses it to his Will.

I left a successful country music career to sing gospel music only because I thought I had a better chance of becoming a singing star. While working with a gospel record label, they realized I was Catholic and — for many business reasons — asked me to “re-affiliate” my church. At first I thought I would, but by end of day, I knew I couldn't deny my Catholic faith nor pretend to be Protestant for the sake of a record deal. I was devastated at how things had turned out; I thought my singing career was over and I spent months whining to God. One day he allowed me to see a glimpse of myself in his eyes: selfish, spoiled, self-willed. I was horrified at myself. Yet, despite my behavior, God chose that moment to call me to sing in the Catholic Church, and I accepted.

I began my ministry soon after. I simply sang songs of worship and shared my witness. I had no idea what the response would be. Gradually, I received feedback that the ministry was helping many people on their faith journey. So, regardless of my initial intent or reasons, God was able to bless and use my efforts to help build his kingdom. He does the same for all his evangelists.

RESPONSE

It's easy for some people to have confidence but for many of us, confidence can be shattered by small things. We see our lacks, negatives, shortcomings, sinfulness, and believe we are unable or unworthy to serve in a meaningful way. But, God is great beyond our understanding. He knows us intimately and still calls us. He doesn't force us into service; we can say, “no”

or “yes, Lord, send me!” There is nothing we require that he can't or won't give. Once we accept God's call, we often realize we have more of the needed skills than we initially thought. And, amazingly, God sends assistance of just the right thing at just the right moment to help us along.

You don't have to be an expert in religion or faith formation. Prepare and study the best you can for the job to which God calls you, then let him take care of the rest. Respond with your heart and put your faith in God that he will groom, guide, and inspire you. With God, nothing is impossible.

APPROACH

Imagine going to the store and being treated poorly by the clerk. Negative vibes far outweigh any great sales you may get. You might wonder why the clerk stays working there while being so unpleasant. And you might wonder why the store employs such a negative worker. Consequently, you might decide to shop elsewhere in the future.

When we serve God, we don't want to be like that store employee. We need to follow through our *yes!* response in a gracious and positive way so those we are evangelizing can see the great and positive power of God. We want people to feel appreciated and welcomed when we are sharing our faith with them. We don't want to undo what good God has already done in them by acting aggressive, defensive, removed, superior, or unpleasant in any way. If we strive to serve as Jesus served us, we will be powerful in our outreach.

EMPOWERMENT

The following are three important tools absolutely needed by an evangelist:

1. A close relationship with God

There was a time when I felt too busy to pray. I really loved God but I had young children, a husband, a house, and a long to-do list. I started my day at the crack of dawn and dropped into bed after midnight exhausted from the day. Prayer time didn't fit in. I began to miss my time with God and realized that I needed it. I tried to schedule prayer into my daily routine but it always got pushed aside by other demands. Then, I realized God never required undivided attention. Suddenly I did have times each day when I could pray and talk to Him. It started with a simple, “Good morning, Heavenly Father,” as I climbed out of bed. Then I prayed while I made beds, brushed my teeth, cooked meals, did the laundry, etc. You name it,

there was time! God was no longer distant from me. He was once again an intimate partner and the graces I received from my time with him were wonderful.

I still do those frequent prayers with God. Over the years I've learned to listen as well as speak. It's amazing the direction, inspiration, and support I receive!

God is near and present for everyone if we choose to have a relationship with him. He is always offering himself to us. It's up to us to link to him. It will strengthen and guide us as we serve him. On our own we are like little pebbles in a stream. Society washes over us and drags us in its direction. But a close relationship with God makes us strong and firm... like a large boulder. The secular world can push and tug at us but nothing can pull us away from our Lord. We know him and are eager followers.

2. Accept healing

We enter this world with hearts of love, peace, and goodness. As we journey through life, many hardships and painful events occur. Maybe we had painful childhoods, maybe someone we loved let us down or deserted us, maybe we were abused in some way. The causes of pain are endless. We try to take these hurts in stride. We store them in our hearts hoping the anger, disappointment, pain, sadness, or sorrow will fade away. Eventually, our hearts become so filled with pain there's no room left for the one thing that can heal us — the love of Jesus.

For years I ministered and spoke of the wonderful love of God. I knew about it, I believed in it, but couldn't actually feel it. Privately I wondered, "Shouldn't I be able to feel such a wonderful love?" I felt like a cripple trying to teach people to run. How could they learn from me how great was God's love when I couldn't feel it myself?

One night I was working very late preparing for a concert and practicing a song called *Silent Weeper*. I had sung it many

times but its message had not impacted me. However, that night the song went deep within me and I suddenly realized I was a silent weeper. My heart was so filled with pain from the junk of life there was absolutely no room for God's love. I realized I wanted to be rid of the pain; I needed healing. I began to pray and ask God to take away all the pain so that I could feel his love instead. But it seemed my prayer was just bouncing off the wall. Then, I sensed God was telling me he would not take the pain from me. I had to give it to Him. That seemed easy enough to do. So I began to pray again but when I got to where I would give my pain to God, I stopped. I was afraid to let go of the pain. It was a part of me. I knew how to get through life with it. I wasn't sure I wanted to give it up.

But I needed healing and I wanted to feel the love of Jesus. I resolved to let go and I started my prayer over, but I choked. This time because I realized I'd have to forgive all those who were part of the pain, including myself and I wasn't sure I wanted to do that. After a few moments, I determined to forgive and began my prayer anew. But again I choked. This time because I was terrified I would give my pain to God, forgive the transgressors, and then not get healed. If that happened I'd be devastated — it would be the final unbearable pain.

Everything in me was now crying out for healing. I loved God and I had to trust Him. I began the prayer one last time and gave God all my trust as I mentally visualized laying at His feet all my anger, disappointment, hurt, pain, and sorrow. As I finished my prayer, I had a good cry and went to bed.

The next morning was typically busy as the children got off to school and my husband left for work. I began my usual routine, and as I worked, I realized I felt good — really good! So good it seemed I was almost floating. It was a feeling that I hadn't felt since I was a child. Then I realized why I felt so good: the prayer for healing. Had God healed my heart? I tried to remember sorrows I could have recited with ease the previous day. Nothing. I couldn't remember anything painful.



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Photo by MarLeah Cole

God had healed me, and my heart was now filled with the love of Jesus. I was no longer a silent weeper.

That healing has held even through some very hard and sad events. Several times I've wondered, "Is this pain so great that it will overtake my heart and lock out Jesus's love?" "Will I become a silent weeper again." The answer? Jesus was in my heart. His love softens the pains that happen in life. Jesus's healing is permanent — just like his love.

You might be a silent weeper. God doesn't want us in emotional pain. He created us as a reflection of his great love. God wants us to accept his healing so he can dwell in our hearts giving us the love we need to live on earth. We just have to trust he will heal us. Jesus carried the heavy wooden cross to Calvary to set you free from sin.

Will he not carry your pains to free you from your silent weeping? I hope you choose to give your pain to Jesus. Once healed, you can truly become a fruitful witness to God's great love.

3. Rely on the power of the Holy Spirit

We've studied, prepared, built a closer relationship with God, and we've received healing for life's pains. What more could an evangelist need? Quite simply, we need the Holy Spirit behind all we do in the name of the Lord. Trying to serve under our own power is useless. The Holy Spirit is our power.

In 1991, our pastor formed a committee to examine whether our parish should begin small faith communities. For one year we attended seminars and read books to learn about various models of these faith-sharing groups.

The second year we became a sample community to see what we gained from the experience. When that year was over we decided to do small faith communities. But, living in Nashville where there were only about 6 percent Catholics surrounded by fundamental Christians, we wanted books that encompassed our situation. We also wanted a weekly outreach for each member and a bi-annual outreach for each group. None of the books available filled our need. One night Father asked me to write the book. I was stunned and overwhelmed with fear and inadequacy, but I said yes.

I had no idea how to write a Bible study guide and had very little time. The first book needed to be written and printed in less than seven weeks. I was positive I could not do it; I was a singer, not a writer. However, Father seemed so sure about it. I had no place to go but to my Heavenly Father. So I prayed and turned the project over to him.

Inspiration flooded into me. I bought numerous commentaries on the Book of Mark and studied them. Every night I

dreamed how to formulate the weekly sessions. By morning, I had settled one more factor in writing the book.

Finally, I had to actually sit down and begin writing. I prayed and reminded God I had no ability to write so please send his Holy Spirit to inspire and lead me. And, guess what? The book just flowed out of me. Discussion questions, outreaches — everything — just kept flowing. I worked about 12 hours a day, afraid to quit for fear of losing the inspiration. But each morning I deferred to the Holy Spirit again, and he dictated as I typed. The book turned out exactly as our pastor wanted. And for the next 12 years, every six months, I sat down with the Holy Spirit to write new books for the small faith communities. After completing each book, I was amazed at the content as if I had never seen it before.

Do I believe in the power of the Holy Spirit? Absolutely. We cannot bear fruit on our own. It's only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can evangelize where and how we are called. He is our courage, inspiration, power, and strength.

ONE LAST SHARING

One day a person called our ministry office interested in having me minister in his parish. As the conversation between my husband and him progressed he asked, "What are Katrina's credentials?" Well, I don't have any theological degrees; my college major was chemistry. I don't even have formal music training. My talents are all God-given and God-trained. But the man wanted qualifications. My husband looked over at me and repeated the question. Without pause I answered, "I am called to serve God and evangelize in this world just as the apostles were called to serve and evangelize." Well, that answer didn't satisfy the caller and he didn't invite me to his parish. But I knew I had stated the simple truth. That's exactly what I am — called to serve and evangelize.

I am a broken vessel serving the Lord. I am an evangelist — a Catholic, lay evangelist. I suspect you might be one also. Now is a good time to recognize who and what you are. Repeat after me: I am an evangelist! ■

Katrina Rae Daughenbaugh is an award-winning singer and songwriter. She has served as a youth minister and as parish council Director of Parish Life/Evangelism at Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Community in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Also for 13 years, Katrina served as the director and coordinator for the parish's small faith communities.

*Several times I've wondered,
"Is this pain so great that
it will overtake my heart
and lock out Jesus's love?"*

Growing Up Catholic: Coaching Parents to Form Their Own Children in Faith

Paul Canavese and Ann Naffziger



Our two daughters are at delightful ages — almost nine and six. They both attend our neighborhood public school, along with the children of many marginal or lapsed Catholics.

To our amazement, our girls seem to have become little evangelists (every once in a while to our embarrassment). Some examples:

- * Our older daughter wrote in a homework assignment that if she could meet anyone who ever lived, she'd want to meet Jesus.
- * They often ask us to read bedtime stories from our story Bible.
- * They invite their friends to come to Mass with them.
- * They often cite parallels to Scripture: "That's just like the story in the Bible where..."
- * When a classmate's friends rejected her, one of our girls noticed and took the initiative to start playing with her on the playground.
- * One day we found them in our backyard, "baptizing" our chickens by tossing leaves on them, reciting the proper Trinitarian formula, declaring them "new members of the church," and singing a "Glory to God" at the top of their lungs.

Their Catholic faith is clearly very important to them (our girls, not our chickens). So how did this happen?

We can tell you that it's not because they are in some kind of exceptional religious education program at our parish. We can also tell you that we're not doing anything exceptional as parents.

THE SIMPLE WAY

We discovered that our advanced theological degrees were not all that helpful (and perhaps sometimes even a hindrance) to raising our children in faith. Pope Francis's quotation comes to mind: "At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people." Of course, this is even more so with children.

We do very simple things in our household to pass on our faith that any Catholic parent, with a little encouragement and support, could also do. We read Bible stories to them and sometimes discuss them a little afterwards. We give them bedtime blessings. We share supper together every night and talk about what happened that day. We pray together and encourage them to pray. We bring them to Mass and their religious education classes regularly. Our children know our faith is important to us, and it has become important to them.

ARE WE PASSING ON OUR FAITH?

Almost every committed adult Catholic is active because his or her parents had faith (only 10 percent join the church as adults). Their faith did not come from a textbook, no matter how excellent it may have been. It came from the witness, "faith talk," and practices that went on in the home. Whether we like it or not — for better or for worse — parents are the primary influence on passing faith on to their children.

Over the past 50+ years, the passing of the Catholic faith from generation to generation has slowed or stopped. This coincides with a shift from a strong "Catholic culture" in the home to one where formation is almost entirely outsourced to the parish. Parents have come to believe that it is the parish and catechists' job to pass the faith on to children.

As statistics show, this model has simply not been working. If the parents are not in the process, the child will not have faith. The parents' presence is vital if we expect the formation to last a lifetime.

ROLE OF PARENTS

But don't take our word for it. As you may know, church teaching reinforces the primary role of parents in catechesis. It's helpful to remind ourselves from time to time how strong the language is in the official documents:

- * "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children" (CCC, 2223).
- * "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute" (Vatican II, *Declaration on Christian Education*, 3).

- * “The right and duty of parents to educate their children is essential...irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others” (John Paul II, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, 36).

PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

There are two groups of parents in our parishes. The “deeply engaged” make up less than 20 percent of parents. They are active in parish life, celebrate Mass almost every week, and probably have some intentionality around bringing faith into their homes. But even this group is often reluctant to form their own children.

The other group — close to 85 percent — is on the edge of the parish. They show up when their kids need it, are tentative about their faith, and do not consider religion very central to their lives. This is the group we need to love and help most.

Parents in both of these groups don’t understand their role, don’t know their faith well, feel ill-equipped to pass it on, and lack confidence. We must, therefore, form a real partnership between parish and household. We need the parents to become the catechists, while the catechists become coaches for the parents. By forming their own children, the parents themselves are formed more deeply in their own faith.

We use the term “coaching” for a number of reasons. It is a familiar term to parents that is not threatening to them. It’s also a relationship word that communicates that they have the primary responsibility here, but they’re not alone in this.

Think about it this way: the formation that occurs on the parish grounds is just the tip of an iceberg. Most formation is “underwater” — mostly hidden to us church professionals. It happens (or should happen) in the household and in everyday life. Only parents can do that kind of formation.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In our experience, parents will rise or stoop to meet our expectations of them. If we agree to form their kids for them, they will let us do so. They will simply drop off their kids at class and go shopping.

Changing the expectations will require some backbone on our parts. If we say, “We’d really like it if you’d participate, but of course, *you really don’t have to*,” you know that the parents will only hear the last five words. Or: “We don’t want to make you mad or anything, but this is really your job. Of course *we’ll do it for you if you don’t want to*.” Timidity will result in lackluster results.

However, when parishes clarify what the parents’ role really is, empower them to fulfill it, and coach them along the way, they rise to the occasion. Deep down, parents *want* to do this, and they *love* doing it once they understand how. Helping this happen requires a real shift in our expectations and how we structure our faith formation programs.

A NEW KIND OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION EVENT

We won’t empower parents to become the primary catechists of their children by just sending a textbook home. Parents need help getting started, re-imagining their role, understanding how to take initiative, and deepening their own faith. They need to be coached.

That’s why we believe so strongly that we need a new kind of parish religious education event in our parishes where:

- * parents attend with their children
- * parents are the teachers
- * catechists coach parents to form their own kids, and
- * parents grow in their own faith

Families sit together and parents are given clear instructions that guide them in learning and teaching their children *while they are there*. Catechists orchestrate the process, gently coach the parents, and answer questions.

CREATING EXCELLENT COACHING RESOURCES

For this kind of event, we need to be quite intentional about the resources we use. Having a strong resource on the table empowers the parent by giving them a framework from which they can confidently teach their child. Here are some guidelines that we use in developing our resources:

Use short handouts. Parents are intimidated by textbooks. The shorter and more approachable the handout you hand them, the more quickly they will relax and dig in. They’re also a lot less expensive.

Number the steps. Clear, short, easy-to-follow steps make it easy for parents, who are reading the resource for the first time. If they become confused, they won’t be able to focus on actually teaching their children.

Give the parent the answers. Never, ever embarrass a parent in front of his or her child. Remember that the parents may not have had any faith formation themselves since they were children (how would you feel about teaching a child a geometry lesson right now?). We are teaching the parents alongside their children.

Make it interesting and fun. Help these families have some fun and special time together. The last thing we want to do is make our faith boring.

Help them share. One of the best things we can do here is to help parents learn to really *share their faith* with their children. Encourage parents to share stories about when they needed to ask forgiveness, times they asked God for help, or what their first Communion was like.

Send it home. The sessions at the parish should be a start for something that continues at home. Get the parents curious and send home materials for them to go deeper. Give families household goals to work on and tools to support them.



Photo by fai

Our *Growing Up Catholic* sacramental preparation program uses this model. Each session includes three sets of handouts. The first is for children, with key points, learning exercises, a page of Scripture, etc. The second is for parents, with numbered steps next to reduced images of the child pages. Each step has an arrow pointing to the relevant part of the child page. The third handout, for catechists, is very similar to the parents' page, except the steps explain how to coach the parents along as needed. The last page of each handout is always a household goal to take home.

HOUSEHOLDS OF FAITH

If passing on faith to the next generation is a priority, we must recognize the importance of building households of faith (the “domestic church”) and what that takes. While passing on doctrinal knowledge is important, fostering loving, faith-filled homes is the key for faith formation lasting a lifetime. This requires some particular goals:

Getting to know Jesus. If we hope children (and parents) will have personal encounters with Jesus, we need to help them know who Jesus is. Help them to find *age appropriate* Bibles (e.g. story Bibles) that engage their imagination and read them together so they can get to know what Jesus is like.

Talking to Jesus. Help family members pray together and learn how to pray on their own. Traditional prayers are a great start, but creative and free form prayer will engage kids (and parents) at different levels.

Family time. With endangered family mealtimes, long commutes, technology disconnects, over-scheduled kids, and

more, we can no longer take quality family time for granted. We need to help families learn how to have supper again and prioritize their in-person time.

Faith sharing. Parents may be intimidated by this term, but this is fundamentally about being present to each other, sharing what happened during the day, fostering loving responses, and considering how God is working.

Celebrate Mass together. Telling parents they should celebrate Mass is probably not going to be an effective approach, but those who follow the above goals will be much more likely to come on their own initiative.

Households of faith produce life-long Catholics. Lest we not make the connection, this is the *heart of evangelization*. We need to coach and equip parents to share their faith in simple ways. Shifting to great expectations for your parents and coaching them successfully does require some effort — planning, insight to overcome pitfalls, and excellent resources — but it will make the difference to the future of the church (and perhaps a few chickens). |

Paul Canavese and Ann Naffziger are co-directors of Growing-UpCatholic.com, which provides resources for coaching parents to form their own children in the Catholic faith, and operate ThePastoralCenter.com. They now find themselves attempting to translate the gospel message to their daughters, 8 and 5, who regularly ask complicated biblical questions. They all live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Preparing Those with Special Needs to Receive the Sacraments

Michele Chronister



I spent the summer of 2008 working with the ministry department of a beautiful residential community for individuals with disabilities, run by an order of sisters. Among my responsibilities that summer was preparing a young man, whom I'll call Francis, to receive the sacraments of the Eucharist and confirmation.

Francis faced rather significant challenges: he was a young man who was unable to verbalize much (although he was learning to use a picture board to express his needs), and had very significant mental and physical disabilities. There was something very special about him, though (other than his prodigious love for jokes). The friendship that I developed with him that summer filled my heart in a deep way.

His silence spoke volumes. His "silence," at least his lack of words, presented its own challenges. It was difficult to gauge what he was retaining from our sacramental preparation sessions.

We did something unique to compensate for our inability to communicate with each other as well as we'd like. We held our classes in the chapel located in Francis' residence, in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We had soft music playing in the background when we came into the chapel. And the shift in Francis when we entered the chapel was noticeable; he became calm, peaceful, thoughtful. We spent time together in prayer, time doing catechesis, and time talking about Jesus' great love for him.

Before Francis received the Eucharist for the first time, we had to do a few practice runs with unconsecrated particles of the host. In addition to the other challenges that Francis faced, he also had some oral-motor difficulties, and so practicing beforehand was a necessary step. Each time we practiced, Francis would look confused and fairly disgusted by the unfamiliar taste and texture. I hoped that he would be alright the day he received Jesus for the first time, but I trusted that all would be well.

The day of his first Communion arrived. Towards the end of a simple, beautiful Mass with Francis' closest family and friends, the time for receiving the Eucharist came. The priest gave

Francis a small particle of Jesus, and Francis looked momentarily startled as Jesus came into his mouth, but then...joy. Francis' countenance radiated *pure joy*. I had never seen him so happy before. The chapel was quiet, no one was talking to him — there was no external reason for Francis' smiles.

It was in that simple moment that Francis taught me about the Eucharist more eloquently than anyone ever had before.

I think of Francis often, because he didn't just teach me about the Eucharist, he reinforced for me the lesson that each member of the church, *even and especially those with special needs*, has a particular vocation and a special role to play in the body of Christ.

I could wax poetic for you about the practical considerations of preparing those with special needs to receive the sacraments, but if you don't understand this, then none of it will matter. To prepare those with special needs to receive the sacraments, you can't just view it from the perspective of you "helping them." You need to see that everyone, by the grace of their baptism, and when in a state of grace, has a right to receive the sacraments. It's more than that, though. Anyone who has read the *National Directory for Catechesis* is well aware of the church's encouragement to catechists, to meet the needs of those with disabilities. We need to take this one step further — those with special needs *need to be given the sacraments* because they need the grace of the sacraments to live out the vocations that God has in store for them.

WHAT IS VOCATION?

The word vocation can bring to mind a variety of images. In the secular sense, vocation is thought of as the career choice or life work of an individual. In the church, we hear vocation and typically think of what state of life we are called to — priesthood, married life, religious life, consecrated celibacy, etc. There is another way to talk about vocation, though. We are all called, as baptized people, to sainthood. Sainthood and holiness are not for the elite, but for us all. We are each called to union with God (ultimately in the beatific vision) and to play our role in the mystical body of Christ, both in this world and in the next. Our vocation is to know God's love and to live out his love in our lives. Our vocation is the way in which we



Photo by Jimmy Brown

encounter God's love and are able to fully love God in return, as well as love others.

HOW DOES VOCATION APPLY TO A PERSON WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

I think that some may hesitate to talk about vocation in relation to those with special needs because many with special needs — especially those with significant needs — may not be able to get married, be ordained, or join a religious order. But vocation is so much more than that. Each member of the church has a vocation because each is called to bring God's love to the world in a particular way.

Again and again, we see in the Scriptures and in the life of the church, that God chooses those who are weak in order to show

his strength. God works through those who are disregarded by the world, in order to “confound the wisdom of the world.” The most famous example of this is his own mother, who was a simple, uneducated girl.

St. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians about a “thorn in his side” that he is struggling with. He shares how he has begged God to remove this weakness from his life. But, in the end, he realizes that God can work through his weakness in a particular way. He says that God's answer to his prayer is, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul concludes, “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong!” (2 Cor 12:9).

This rich Scriptural tradition (which is also mirrored in the lives of the saints) is the context in which we talk about vocation

with those with special needs. We have to embrace the fact that God's idea of perfection is not the same as the world's idea of perfection. Not only can God use those with disabilities in spite of their disabilities, but he can actually work through their weakness to bring his love to the world in a particular way. We have something to give to those with disabilities, of course, but they have much to give to us as well. The church needs these individuals, and needs to be open to the ways in which God is working through them. It is important to talk with those with disabilities about the fact that they are called by God to do his work in the world, and to remind them that he has a special plan for their lives.

HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT VOCATION WITH THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

So, how do we talk about vocation with those with special needs? We launch from the starting point of God's immense love for us all. It is important to bear in mind that a vocation is, ultimately, God's gift to each of us. Our vocation is, firstly, to know of God's love for us.

Our vocation is also to share the love of God with others and to love God with all our hearts. So, secondly, we must bring God's love to fruition in our lives. When we talk about vocation with those with special needs, it is important to share with them that God deeply desires for them to know his love; that, from the gift of his love, they are called to love God in return, and to bring his love to others.

To know God's love, to love him in return, and manifest his love in our lives — that is at the heart of what vocation is.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SACRAMENTS AND VOCATION?

The sacraments are what enable us to live out our vocations. Baptism opens us to the life of grace. Confirmation fills us with the strength that comes from the Spirit. Anointing of the sick fortifies us in the face of suffering. Reconciliation heals our souls, and the Eucharist feeds us on our journey to heaven, drawing us into intimate union with God and each other. We need these sacraments, and all the graces that they bring, in order to live out our vocations. We need these strong manifestations of God's grace and love to sustain us in this life. This is why it is essential that the sacramental life be made readily available to those with special needs. They need to know God's love and receive his grace in order to grow in holiness. They need the sacraments because they, too, are called to be saints. Can God work through those with special needs even if they aren't given the sacraments? Certainly He can! But, we put them at a disadvantage if we deprive them of the opportunity to be loved in this most profound way.

If we are going to bring those with special needs to the sacraments, we have to do so with vocation as our goal. They are not just being given the sacraments, unable to give anything in return. Rather, God has a plan for each of their lives, even if that plan remains hidden to us in this lifetime.

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST

In addition to this mindset of vocation, preparing those with special needs (and anyone, really) to receive the sacraments must be done in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Now, logistically, it isn't always possible to teach a class in a chapel with a tabernacle. Nevertheless, it is important to find some way and some time to bring those with special needs to Jesus in the Eucharist on a regular basis. Why?

Catechesis isn't just about imparting points of doctrine to those being catechized. Catechesis is about conveying a love story — a love story between Christ and his church. We don't just want our students to know who Jesus is; we want them to know Jesus. The only way to get to know someone is to spend time with him.

Catechesis with those with special needs can be challenging. It is challenging for both the catechist and the catechized. Both become acutely aware of their own weaknesses in the process. But sacramental preparation isn't the work of the catechist alone; it is also the work of Christ. The most effective thing a catechist can do is to bring her students to Jesus in the Eucharist, in order for him to work on their hearts in a way that no other catechist can. Harkening back to the story of Francis at the beginning of this article, through the Eucharist, Jesus teaches his beloved people, in the depths of their hearts, things that no earthly catechist can. He speaks to us of his love.

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENTS

There are a lot of considerations that go into preparing those with special needs to receive the sacraments. There may be concerns about class size, how to make lessons more interactive, how to engage parents and caregivers in the process, etc. But ultimately, none of these considerations matter if they are not undertaken with these two things in mind: vocation and the importance of time with Jesus in the Eucharist.

We are living in an exciting time in the church, and I have been encouraged by some of the amazing endeavors being undertaken on behalf of those with special needs. In the midst of all of this, let our hearts always be open and attuned to the ways that God continues to use those whom the world views as "weak" to confound the wise. ■

Michele Chronister received her BA and MA degrees in theology from the University of Notre Dame. During her undergraduate and graduate careers, she had the privilege of working with individuals with special needs in a variety of ministerial settings. She developed a catechetical curriculum for individuals with special needs as part of her parish work in Notre Dame's Institute for Church Life's ECHO program, and has also authored the book Handbook for Adaptive Catechesis and co-authored the book Faith Beginnings for Liguori publications. She lives in Missouri with her husband and two young daughters.

Learning to Walk in the Dark

by Barbara Brown Taylor

Reviewed by Dan Thomas

One of the images we often use for the development of the life of the Spirit is “enlightenment,” a way of presenting the



process of insight, deepening knowledge, and growth that happens to us on our life’s journey. This book explores another way of looking at the spiritual life that Barbara Brown Taylor calls “endarkment” or “lunar spirituality.” She expresses “endarkment” this way:

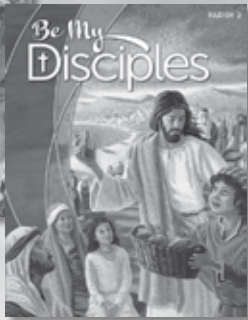
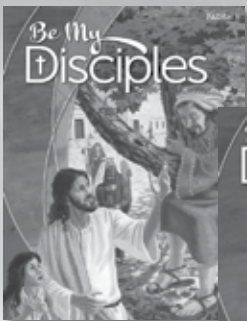
If I have any expertise, it is in the realm of spiritual darkness: fear of the unknown, familiarity with divine absence, mistrust of conventional wisdom, suspicion of religious comforters, keen awareness of the limits of all language about God and at the same time shame over my inability to speak of God without a thousand qualifiers, doubt about the health of my soul, and barely suppressed contempt for those who have no such qualms. (4-5)

“The dark” is a critical part of a full life. It has treasures that can give balance to our life of faith. Taylor begins with our childhood attitudes towards darkness and their influence on our later understanding of the role of darkness in our lives.

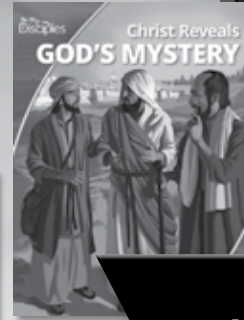
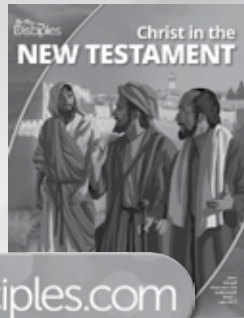
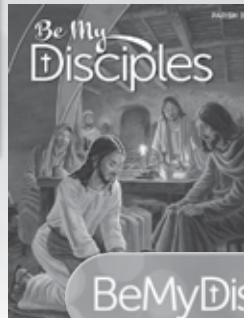
In chapter two, we learn “how many important things happen at night in the Bible...Jacob wrestles an angel...His son Joseph dreams such dreams at night that he catches a pharaoh’s attention...The exodus from Egypt happens at night...” (45). This thought raises some important questions: “...when we run from darkness, how much do we really know about what we are running from? If we turn away from darkness on principle, doing everything we can to avoid it because there is simply no telling what it contains, isn’t there a chance that what we are running from is God? (57)

Chapter 3, “Hampered By Brilliance,” makes an interesting point: “The brightest spots on earth have never been the places where the most people live, but rather the places where the most prosperous people live. Where there is money and power enough to light the night...”(62).

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Then there are the “dark emotions such as grief, fear, and despair” that are to be conquered and fought. Her suggestion is to face them and see where they lead us by listening to their call to deeper ways of living. “What such people stand to discover, Greenspan [author of *Healing Through the Dark Emotions*] says, is the close relationship between ‘individual heartbreak and the brokenheartedness of the world’” (85).

In chapters 5 and 6, she shares her experience of the “darkness” of being blind in an exhibit in Atlanta called “Dialogue in the Dark,” where people are led in darkness by blind guides and of her entering the darkness of a cave with two experienced cavers.

These images lead naturally to the spiritual darkness called the dark night of the soul, described as “a time when the soul was severely tested, often to the point of losing faith, by circumstances beyond all control” (133-34).

An interesting point she raises is that dark nights happen not only to individuals but sometimes to institutions: “...there are clearly times when whole communities of people lose sight of the sun in ways that unnerve them. This seems to be what is happening to a lot of church people right now...The old ways of being Christian are not working anymore, not even for those who are old themselves. Something in the ways has died, or is dying — truly cause for great sorrow, even among those who

know the time has come — and yet at the same time something is being born” (140-41).

In “Our Lady of the Underground,” Taylor speaks of Mary as a guide to lunar spirituality: “Although I am not Catholic, I am devoted to Mary. Part of it is that she is a she; the other part is that she is entirely human. Most of the time I think she understands me better than her son does, since she has a whole DNA spiral and a body that operates on a lunar cycle — or did. Even if she has left that part of her life behind now, as I have, she remembers what it was like to fill like the moon every month and then to empty. She knows what it is like to go through this routine diminishment without ever getting used to it...” (172-73).

Learning to Walk in the Dark is a valuable book in its unique ways of looking at life and spirituality that broadens the old ways of approaching them. It is about being open to what happens, listening carefully and prayerfully, giving up control, and allowing life — in all its richness, both light and dark — to guide us in its many ways. ■

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



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Let's Be Brutally Honest

Frank DeSiano, CSP



I don't expect to win many fans with this column, but I hope to raise questions — which Catholics have been raising across various ministries of the church — in a more explicit way.

There is, I feel, a widespread skepticism about the whole project of catechesis, doubts that have been brewing for decades. Now, with the routine admission that “Confirmation is just like graduation,” from virtually every faith formation minister I talk with (and from Pope Francis himself!), it becomes clear that, whatever we think we are doing in catechesis, we are not making disciples, committed Christians, convinced Catholics who understand their lives as being called and sent by Jesus Christ.

I think that the basic problem is precisely the “grade” and “education” metaphor we have applied to religious education, undoubtedly a result of the erection of a widespread Catholic school system in response to what Catholics saw as an alien, mostly Protestant, culture in 19th-century America. For close to 60 years (but, note, for *only* 60 years), we enjoyed a process whereby committed women (with some men in smaller proportion) gave up their lives to teach in Catholic schools, often in educational settings that would be incomprehensible today — classrooms of 50 children, minimal access to technology, with memorization as the basic form learning.

With that as the ideal, a “clone” system called CCD was developed for those who inexplicably could not attend the Catholic schools (which were virtually free, thanks to the uncompensated labor of young women and men religious). This clone system tried to provide in one hour the level of classroom teaching (that is, memorization) that Catholic schools provided. Often already pronounced in the 1950s and 1960s as woefully inadequate, nevertheless, with the growth of the suburbs and the advance in public school education, CCD became the main channel by which religion was taught.

Some questions arise from all of this:

1. Is teaching religion the same as forming disciples?
2. Were we actually passing on faith in the Catholic school model, or were we in a real sense actually acculturating children to a social and cultural system that had come to represent the state of Catholicism in America?
3. Did learning catechism answers actually instill faith or did it mostly make us similar to millions of other Catholics who also memorized catechism answers?

When the NCCL gathered in May, it sponsored many brilliant talks about catechesis, specifically about the need to transform what we are doing to form disciples. Yet, come September, most DREs will be running around, looking for some person to volunteer to “teach” third grade or sixth grade, with classes basically mimicking the school calendar. There we go again — confirmation equals graduation.

DISCIPLESHIP IS RELATIONAL

It's more than time for us to scrutinize the whole “grade” and “classroom” model of religious education. I say this knowing full well that many Catholic leaders are currently committing themselves even more to “content” and “testing” as fundamental thrusts for religious education. And, yes, we all know there are issues of “Catholic illiteracy.” However, Catholic illiteracy is another way of saying that we cannot replicate the memorization model developed in the 1920s. And, though we have explored “intergenerational” and other non-classroom models, they are ultimately abandoned because of the requirement that “content” has to be taught at appropriate grade levels.

That said, there are greater problems today than illiteracy or our classroom methodologies. My ministry leads me to suggest the United States has problems obtaining identity and commitment to the following of Jesus Christ as disciples.

Discipleship, of course, has “content” factors, but it mostly has relational factors. Rather than mostly emphasizing content, discipleship calls us to instill behavioral structures that reflect levels of deeper conversion to Christ. Most of this has to happen, of course, in the homes. (And it doesn't, let's be honest; even though that is our *fundamental* pastoral task today.) Discipleship needs to be reinforced in the gatherings at the parish. And the best reinforcement involves opening our hearts to God's Word, sharing on that Word so it leads to greater commitment and relationship, expressing that relationship through individual and communal prayer (liturgy), building up community, and leading us to serve others.

Let's be brutally honest: very little about discipleship happens by putting children in classrooms with a teacher. As yet, we don't trust the Spirit to bring us somewhere else. My prayer this Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit blow more freely through our parish religious education programs. I invite you to pray along with me. ■

Fr. Frank DeSiano, CSP is President of Paulist Evangelization Ministries.

At Work in the Vineyard: Prayer and Quiet in the Life of a PCL

Walter Schulte



One of the most exciting things I enjoy about being a PCL is preparing prayer opportunities for the catechists, students, and parents. We know that prayer is an important part of our ministry because it is an encounter with God for everyone involved. Sometimes with the frenzy of activity as a PCL, I find at the end of the day that I have not taken as much time to pray as I should have. Prayer does not have to be complicated or heavily planned; sometimes my most profound experiences of prayer have been when I have done something simple, quite ordinary, and unplanned.

PRAYER IN PRACTICE

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that there are five types of prayer: blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. One of the ways that a PCL can weave these various types of prayer in the trenches is to practice these throughout the day:

- * We can ask for a blessing on the parent, student, and catechist that we have just met.
- * When we become aware of issues and struggles in a family, as many PCLs already do, we can add these needs to our own prayer.
- * After a wonderful liturgy or an awesome session with our students, we can thank God for the amazing experience that we just had.
- * We can praise God for both the joys and struggles that come our way.

Now this is not the only way that we can pray. The church provides many types of prayer: Litanies, Liturgy of the Hours, *Lectio Divina*, and the Rosary among others. What is important is that just as we help to nourish those to whom we minister, we must also take the time to pray and nourish our own soul.

Because we often lead prayer, it is only natural that the more comfortable we are with prayer personally, the more those that we pray with in a group setting will benefit. It is very touching when people tell me after a prayer opportunity that they were really touched, and this flows from my own prayer life. Another helpful tip anyone can benefit from, especially those

in ministry, is to find a spiritual director to help you examine your prayer life. Often times, my director will be able to point out ways that I can grow in holiness.

QUIET AND PRAYER

Many of the great spiritual writers of the church remind us that an important part of prayer is also allowing some quiet time when we are not talking. This is not always comfortable for people, and this is one of the reasons why I include this experience at least once a year for my CCD students. While

it is counter-cultural because we live in a world in which we are constantly bombarded by noise, it is very important because as human beings, we need the quiet time to process the information and reflect upon our experiences. Jesus's mother Mary is a prime example of this: "And Mary kept all

these things, pondering them in heart" (Lk 2:19). Mary does not have many words recorded in the gospels, and this would be an indication of this reflective aspect of her life.

In his Apostolic Exhortations on the Word of God, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote: "The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence" (*Verbum Domini*, 66).

Depending on where our offices are and what is going on at home, it can be hard to find the time for silence. However, it is very important to instill this in our own lives and in the lives of those to whom we minister. Some of the liturgical seasons help to give us the opportunity as PCLs to share and practice this, especially the seasons of Lent and Advent. As PCLs, we typically have a key to our church buildings, and that means that we can find the time to spend a few minutes in quiet before our Lord. This allows us to combine the best of both worlds: prayer and quiet in addition to spending time with our friend Jesus. ■

Walter Schulte is the PCL at St. Philip Parish in Crafton and the West End Catholic Community, in the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Contact him at: stphilipreled@gmail.com.

Virtual Retreats

Claire M. McManus



From the time that Jesus took off for his 40-day retreat into the desert, Christians followed him into this path to hear God's voice. Whether one takes a day, weekend, week, or month to do this, retreats give us the opportunity to tune out life so as to become more acutely aware of God's presence.

Retreats have not escaped this era of virtual reality. There are 3-minute retreats to jumpstart to your day, and 34-week online versions of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Since the participant will not be making an actual retreat into the wilderness, these sites explain "a retreat is a *retreat from* our ordinary patterns and a *retreat to* a 'place' where we can be more receptive to the graces God wants to offer us."

Virtual retreats are a nice way for the adult to set aside time out of their busy schedules, but should they be part of the spiritual formation of youth? Retreats are an important part of the spiritual formation of the young, as was confirmed by the National Study of Youth and Religion in 2004. "Young people who have participated in at least one retreat, rally, conference, mission trip, or extended service project report significant increases in the closeness they feel to God, the degree of importance faith has in their daily lives, and how often they read the Bible alone."

CONFIRMATION RETREATS

Retreats are important enough to be inscribed into just about every diocesan guideline for the sacrament of confirmation, but this requirement has driven many catechetical leaders to find anything that remotely resembles a retreat and dress it up so that they can check the "completed a retreat" box.

Every year when the confirmation season rolls around, diocesan offices get frantic calls from DREs in search of a place to send the kid who always somehow misses the parish confirmation retreat. One desperate catechetical leader pointed out that there are online retreats for teens and asked permission to offer this as an alternative to the parish retreat. Perhaps we need to look more carefully at how diocesan guidelines are presented so that they are not perceived as a punch list of activities to earn the right to receive the sacrament. We never want to mislead anyone down the path of the Pelagians, who believed that grace is earned by performing a series of tasks.

The Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are the foundational documents on which we build our sacramental guidelines. In order to receive the sacrament of confirmation, candidates must be baptized, not previously confirmed, and able to renew their Baptismal promises. They must be in the state of grace, which necessitates that they

celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation prior to receiving the sacrament. Candidates must have the intention of receiving the sacrament and be properly instructed. Candidates must be prepared to assume the role of disciples and witnesses to Christ. This necessitates that they are encouraged to nurture a more intense prayer life. None of these guidelines state that service and retreats are a requirement to receive the sacraments, although both of these are important elements in preparing the candidate for lifelong discipleship.

ESTABLISHING THE PURPOSE AND ELEMENTS OF A RETREAT

When it comes to the confirmation retreat, it is important to establish what purpose it will serve. If it is only a way to conclude the formation process for the sacrament of confirmation, then it will give a clear message to the candidates that this is the end of the road. If the retreat aims at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit, then there is a chance that a lifelong relationship with Christ will be nurtured.

Some dioceses offer an online "Last Resort Confirmation Retreat" for those candidates who missed their parish retreat and have no other opportunity to make it up. While this is being offered with all good intentions of being helpful, it sends the message that the retreat is so important to receiving the sacrament that any way in which the obligation can be met will suffice. Perhaps if we look at what the retreat is designed to do, we can replicate the effect.

Witness is an important element of a retreat. The best retreats allow a person to listen to stories of faith from peers or from respected adults and to then connect their own faith story with that of the other person and with the story of the people of God told in Scripture and Tradition. Rather than substitute this experience with a virtual retreat that isolates the candidate from the parish community, there are other paths that parishes have taken. A candidate who misses the parish retreat might be paired with a catechist who is designated for this special ministry, and if peer leaders are part of the team, even better. Some catechetical leaders have invited the candidate to join them at the Easter Triduum, which was followed up with a conversation about what they experienced. This requires a great deal of commitment on both the candidate and the parish catechetical leadership, but it is an effort worth taking.

Virtual retreats are a boon for the busy adult, but let's first nurture the spirituality of our youth so that one day they will seek out a quiet place to listen to God's voice on their own. ■

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

This Universal Church of Ours

Mary Jo Waggoner



Most people don't remember their baptism because they were infants when they became part of this church of ours. Me? I was baptized at the age of 12 and remember the moment and the effect it had on me, becoming part of this universal church. The words that Paul wrote to the Galatians still resound in my mind: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). I became part of that oneness.

Years later, when I received my Masters in Pastoral Theology, my mother rewarded me with a trip to Medjugorje, my first trip outside the USA. It was a great experience for me.

I have since had the privilege of traveling to many countries and living outside the United States in Mexico. Whether I celebrated Mass in Israel, Austria, Italy, or China — even if I didn't know the language — I knew I belonged in this celebration of the Eucharist. In Germany, I happened to be in Mass on Pentecost and although I speak not a word of German, I heard the readings and understood because I knew it was the feast of Pentecost. I remember feeling a sense of wonder that, here I was in a foreign country and at home they too were celebrating the sending of the Holy Spirit, the birthday of the church.

In Hong Kong I chose to celebrate the Mass in Chinese. I was awed by the sharing of the sign of peace when, instead of shaking hands, we bowed to each other. 合十礼 or namaste, "I bow to the divine in you." It was a moving experience. Here, the 'shaking of hands' at the sign of peace is barely touching, hardly a handshake, and almost no eye contact; I am disappointed.

We need to be intentional in all aspects of the celebration of the Mass to truly celebrate what we are doing. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states it best, to truly receive from the Mass we first must be evangelized and we must have a "conscious, active and fruitful participation" in this celebration. The experience of intentionally bowing to the other has never left me and has enriched my sign of peace handshake; I do so wish that peace be with you!

CELEBRATING AS A UNIVERSAL CHURCH

In Sonsonate, El Salvador, I timed my visit of bringing medical supplies to clinics in the diocese to coincide with Holy

Week, to celebrate with the people. It was a wonderful lesson in living the faith. The men in town, who wish to be part of the annual Lenten processions, have to have testimonials of leaders affirming that these candidates have lived upright lives all year in order to participate as bearers of the statues they are privileged to carry through the streets. Some of these statues on platforms take 20-40 men to carry and weigh 2000 pounds. Beginning with Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, and throughout Lent, they carry these platforms up and down streets all night long to commemorate Christ's Life and Death. Women carry much smaller platforms through the streets, and everyone dresses in purple. I became immersed in the solemnness of these processions making my celebration of Holy Week something very special. I didn't attend Easter Vigil in a large cathedral, but a small outlying village church where people came walking or on horseback. The faith of these poorest of the poor Salvadorans touched my heart, my beloved brothers and sisters.

At St. Blaise's church in Dubrovnik, Croatia (what was then Yugoslavia), I had my throat blessed during Mass, and not on February 3, but simply because it was St. Blaise's church. They have that blessing at every Mass, possibly for the many tourists, and it was an unexpected blessing.

In Jerusalem, we walked the footsteps of Jesus to Calvary with 2,000 Catholic pilgrims, the largest Catholic tour to Jerusalem up to that time. We would tour during the day and celebrate Mass together every evening. When I step into a Catholic Church, no matter in which country or language, I step into my home. How awesome to celebrate in other cultures and languages this universal truth which is the Holy Eucharistic celebration.

Even if you have never traveled, visit a parish near you and attend a celebration not in your language or culture. Experience the richness of various cultures and languages within your own diocese that remind us that we truly are a universal church and we are, indeed, one family in Christ. ■

Mary Jo Waggoner is the director of the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry in the Diocese of San Diego.

God's Mercy Endures Forever

Sara Blauvelt



The beauty of God's mercy and forgiveness was a lesson I learned most profoundly in the sacrament of penance when the priest welcomed me with the words: "Come, let us set things right." I had been away from the sacrament for some time and this simple and heartfelt welcome was a gift for my

soul! Now, years later, as I've spent hours teaching about this powerful sacrament of healing, I reflect anew on these words. God's mercy and forgiveness is intended to heal the frailty of our human nature and put us in right relationship with God and others.

When I was working in parish ministry, I enjoyed helping students and their parents approach the sacrament of penance, either for the first time, or for the first time in many years. Encouraging them as they waited in line, I often found myself talking about the stories of God's mercy and forgiveness that weave throughout Scripture and form the backbone of salvation history. When we begin to understand this generous plan of love, we can more readily trace this love in our relationship with Christ and our own need for mercy and forgiveness.

The Old Testament recounts over and over tales of God's mercy. This mercy is made incarnate in the paschal mystery of Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, love is the source of God's mercy, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ" (Eph 2:4-5). The merciful love reflected in the saving actions of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ radically changes the world. As Christians, it should likewise radically change the way we love — the way we forgive and extend mercy to others.

Before we practice forgiveness, we must better understand mercy. We must not fall into the pit of equating mercy with secular tolerance. Pope Francis stresses this point, "Forgiveness is not a sentiment — it is not 'feeling good' — on the contrary, mercy is the true force that can save man and the world

from the cancer that is sin, bad morality, or bad spirituality." As we receive God's mercy and forgiveness, we are called to live mercy and forgiveness in our everyday lives with those who agree with us and those who do not. This requires prayer and reflection; a daily *examen* can provide us with the opportunity to discern God's presence and his direction for our lives as well as highlight those ways in which we may or may not have responded to his call to love God and our neighbor.

Sadly, in a culture rife with relativism, the great power of mercy and forgiveness is diluted. We lose the opportunity to experience true mercy and forgiveness when we do not

acknowledge the presence of sin in our lives and experience contrition for those actions. To transform the world, we must live in Christian hope in God's mercy and forgiving love, which is always greater than our sins. We must live in the confidence that mercy and forgiveness begins and ends with God's love. The spiritual and corporal works of mercy provide us with concrete ways that we can exercise God's loving mercy toward our neighbor.

"Come, let us set things right." This is a call to perseverance in an ever-deepening relationship. Pope Francis reminds us that when we seek God's mercy he

is always awaiting us, "Let us not forget this word: God never tires of forgiving us, but we sometimes tire of asking Him to forgive us." ■

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*When I was working
in parish ministry,
I enjoyed helping students
and their parents
approach the sacrament
of penance,
either for the first time,
or for the first time
in many years.*

Bringing Christ to Others, Person-to-Person

Leisa Anslinger



“Today, as the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal, there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbors or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching which takes place in the middle of a conversation, something along the lines of what a missionary does when visiting a home. Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey” (EG, 127). This paragraph is found under the “Person to Person” heading in the Joy of the Gospel. Pope Francis’s wisdom that evangelization is often a person-to-person endeavor is both reassuring and challenging to us as catechetical leaders.

How do we create an environment in which such person-to-person evangelization is likely to happen within our parishes and by our parishioners? I have had many opportunities in the past few years to talk with parish leaders about this, and the conversations are often surprising. We tend to think about adult faith formation and evangelization programmatically, and certainly there is a programmatic aspect to what we do.

There is, however, a more informal element which Pope Francis notes, and which the bishops recognize in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* as well: “To be effective ministers of adult faith formation we will first, like Jesus, join people in their daily concerns and walk side by side with them on the pathway of life. We will ask them questions and listen attentively as they speak of their joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties” (8).

RECOGNIZING CHRIST IN OUR MIDST

Our programs are important; they invite people to learn and grow in faith, to acquire greater understanding, and to appropriate our Catholic-Christian worldview in their daily lives. Often, however, we miss a step in the process. In order to be ready for many of the adult faith formation processes we offer, people first need an encounter with Jesus Christ, and that encounter often begins through an encounter or relationship with a member of Christ’s body, the church. This is where the surprise often comes in my conversations with leaders.

Because we think so programmatically, we often fail to recognize our own responsibility for reaching out, drawing in, meeting people in the daily circumstances of their lives, helping them to recognize Christ in their midst. We also miss opportunities to help those with whom we serve, catechists,

committee members, those who are already involved in ministry, to recognize and appreciate their role in bearing the Good News to those around them.

INFORMAL EVANGELIZATION

As a friend often reminds workshop participants, “This is not about an either/or. It is about an and, and more!” Adult formation processes and programs have their place. So does an intentional process of raising awareness of the need for the more informal ways of bringing Christ to others, person-to-person. Like our formal faith formation processes, informal evangelization and catechesis require planning and implementation. A typical plan often includes the following elements:

- ✱ Convene leaders: draw together those with whom you serve: staff members, catechists, committee or commission members, others who are involved in catechetical ministry;
- ✱ Inform them: provide background such as the quotes above, along with paragraph 24 of *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which Pope Francis speaks of the role and nature of the evangelizing community;
- ✱ Invite conversation: talk together about the impact of relationship in the openness to encounter, acquisition of faith, living faith in daily life. Through dialogue, help participants to recognize their responsibility in day-to-day evangelization and faith formation;
- ✱ Practice: role-play scenarios in which people practice talking about faith in daily life. This is often key for those who are reticent to invite friends or to discuss faith with others. Invite participants to be playful with one another as they practice, and also to share previous experiences — positive and negative — in which they have been a companion on another’s journey;
- ✱ Develop strategies: consider entry, or re-entry, points for newcomers. Provide contact information for the RCIA, annulment, sacramental preparation, parents groups, retreat processes, and religious education;
- ✱ Connect faith with daily life: offer occasional adult faith formation processes in which people have the opportunity to witness to, question, and deepen the ways in which their faith informs and shapes their daily lives. ■

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.

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson



Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages & Generations by John Roberto.

LifelongFaith Associates. 2015. *Reimagining Faith Formation* is a proposal for what 21st century faith formation can look like.

Much has been written about the challenges facing Christianity and faith formation. This book seeks to provide a way forward by asking:

- * How can we address the big adaptive challenges facing churches and faith formation?
- * How can we reimagine faith formation with a vision that honors the past and is open to the future?
- * How can we build a new faith-forming ecosystem that supports religious transmission and faith growth?
- * How can we design new models with the best understandings and practices of learning and faith formation?
- * How can we engage all ages and generations in growing in faith and discipleship for a lifetime?

Chapter one explores four big adaptive challenges facing churches and faith formation to identify the need for a new faith forming ecosystem and new models of faith formation.

Chapter two presents a reimagined faith formation ecosystem for the 21st century incorporating five essential, interconnected components: intergenerational faith formation in the congregation, age-group and generational faith formation in a variety of physical places and online spaces, family faith formation at home, missional faith formation to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated, and online and digital faith formation.

Chapter three presents a reimagined model of faith formation as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources — in physical places and online spaces that are lifelong and life-wide — everywhere, anytime learning within a network of mentors, teachers, family, and peers.

Chapter four presents a reimagined understanding of faith formation curriculum that is holistic, comprehensive and balanced, systemic, lifelong, contextual, digitally-enabled, connected, and multi-platform.

Chapter five reimagines the role of faith formation leader as curator.

Available from LifelongFaith Associates. 203-729-2953

lifelongfaith.com

Parish Catechetical Leader Formation Workbook

A Self-Directed Journey into Catechetical Leadership. Edited by Marcella Abatemarco. National Catholic Education Association (NCEA). 2015

Men and women who have served in parish catechetical ministry for many years have developed this workbook. It is divided into four sections guiding the parish catechetical leader in navigating the complexities, challenges and joys of catechetical ministry.

- 1) Person of Faith. Personal leadership style, ability as a spiritual leader and relationship with pastor and others in ministry.
- 2) Administrator. Tools that help the catechetical ministry run smoothly. Budgeting, scheduling, personal ideas, and templates.
- 3) Community Builder. Responsibilities of community building, and issues around recruiting, training, and supporting catechists.
- 4) Professional Catechist. Opportunity to assess personal background in knowing and practicing the faith. Challenge and encourage opportunities for professional development.

This is a self-paced workbook, encouraging the parish catechetical leader to examine strengths and weaknesses and to develop a sense of direction and plan for the future.

Available from the NCEA at 800.711.6232 or ncea.org.

Living the Eucharist – Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Living the Eucharist is a parish-based program designed to help revitalize parish life and spirituality through a more profound experience of Sunday Mass. It helps the entire parish — adults, teens, and families — grow in their Catholic faith and live more fully as disciples of Jesus.

Living the Eucharist runs during Lent for three years. Parishioners can take part in adult and teen faith-sharing groups, family activities, devotional, and catechetical Lenten readings, and a prayer campaign.

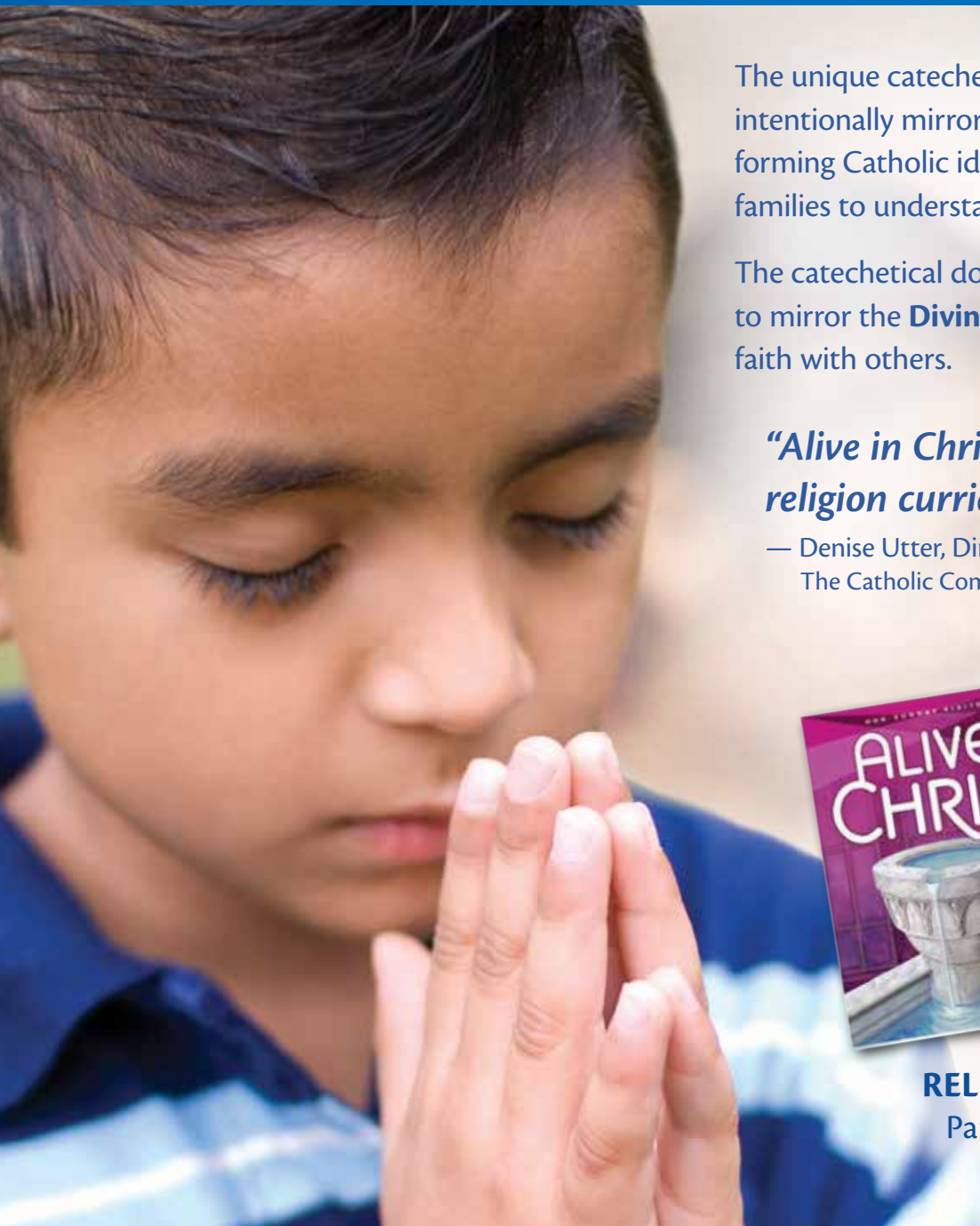
The multi-media program materials are comprehensive, proven, and easy to use. Ongoing support keeps your parish on the right track throughout the program.

The Cathedral of St. Andrew Parish in the Diocese of Grand of Rapids recently completed the three-year program. Fred Johnson, director of adult faith formation, said this program is “a shining light that has helped over 200 participants each year move from ‘reception of the Eucharist to living the Eucharist.’” St. Andrew Parish is a community that uses the materials that are available in both English and Spanish.

For additional information contact Paulist Evangelization Ministries. pemdc.org ■

Dan Pierson has served as a catechist, Catholic school teacher, parish and diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of eCatechist.com, faithAlivebooks.com and Faith Alive Books Publishing. He is co-author with Susan Stark of Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Action. Tarcher/Penguin. 2015. Email him at pierson.dj@gmail.com.

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