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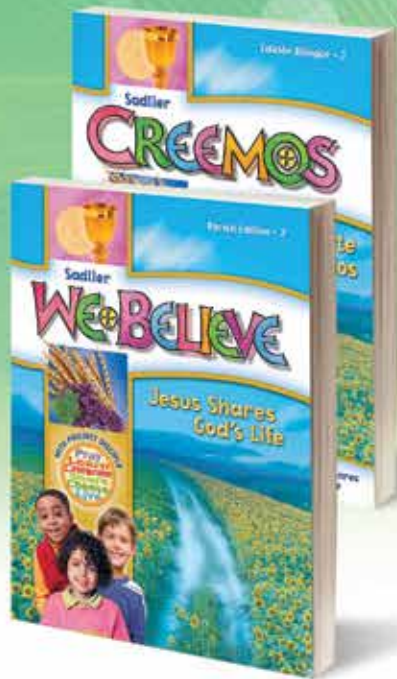
IN THIS ISSUE:

Breaking Open the Six Tasks of Catechesis

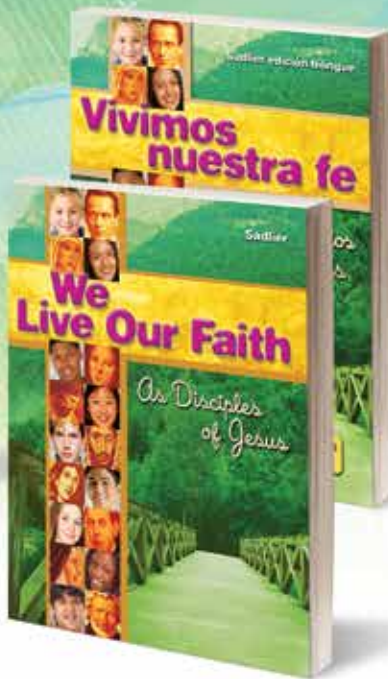
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CATECHETICAL LEADER Table of Contents

July 2013

In Every Issue

- 4 **From the President** Bill Miller
Looking Back...Looking Ahead
- 5 **From the Executive Director** Leland Nagel
Wanted: Doorkeepers
- 25 **Engaging Parents** Leisa Anslinger
Developing and sustaining adult faith formation
- 26 **Transforming Evangelizing Catechesis**
Immersed in Christ Becky Eldredge
- 28 **New Evangelization** Claire M. McManus
on a New Continent
Clean Out the Old Alienation,
Bring on the New Evangelization
- 30 **Diocesan Director's Forum** Diane Kledzik
Dreams to Reality
- 31 **Notable Resources** Dan Pierson

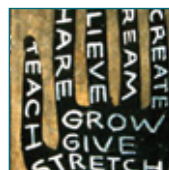
Features

- 6 **Breaking Open the Six Tasks** Kathy Wolf McCormick
of Catechesis in the Classroom and in Life
- 11 **The Evangelizing Parish Today** Frank DeSiano, CSP
- 15 **The Effective Catechetical Leader** Maria G. Covarrubias
- 19 **Ministry to Families** Tom Rinkoski
Interagency Task Force Report
- 21 **Leading to Christ** Dan Ebener and Luke Ebener
- 23 **Baptismal Preparation Ministry** Tom Quinlan
and Beyond: The Richest Ministerial
Soil for Evangelizing Young Families



Breaking Open the Six Tasks of Catechesis in the Classroom and in Life

page 6



The Evangelizing Parish Today

page 11



The Effective Catechetical Leader

page 15



Leading to Christ

page 21

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LOOKING BACK... LOOKING AHEAD

Bill Miller



National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



For many catechetical leaders, summertime presents an opportunity to look back and evaluate the goals, objectives, and strategies; reflect upon the lessons learned, and formulate plans.

As I reflect on my first year as president of NCCL, I am pleased to admit that I am a richer person for the experience. I take this opportunity to share some of my “lessons learned.”

Lesson One – I am glad that the term of office for officers and “at large” members of the board is three years, not one or two. We are blessed to have an intelligent and dedicated NCCL Board, filled with members who are passionate about catechesis. However, it takes a while to get to know one another, including the gifts and talents that each member brings to the table. Moreover, it has taken me a year just to begin to understand the many aspects of the organization and how they are connected. With one year fulfilled, I believe I am now able to proactively guide the organization forward.

Lesson Two – Ours is a wonderfully collaborative and inclusive organization. NCCL includes many different types of catechetical representation. Rarely does one find an organization that brings together such diverse constituencies as diocesan directors, diocesan staff members, parish catechetical leaders, publishers, academics, etc. NCCL also encourages partnerships with other highly respected organizations such as NCEA (National Catholic Educational Association), NFCYM (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry), NALM (National Association for Lay Ministry) and NACMP (National Association of Catechetical Media Professionals) among others. Additionally, we have established a category for “Federations” in order to give witness to the importance of building bridges with additional organizations that are recognized by our Bishops as partners in the catechetical endeavor. Members of the organization known as FCH (Forum for Catechesis with Hispanics) are putting the finishing touches on their application for “Federation status” within NCCL. This attitude of “catechetical inclusivity” will continue to serve us well.

Of course, with privilege comes responsibility. I love that we are a member-driven organization; every member has a responsibility to the entire membership of NCCL. Please keep that in mind whenever help is needed for some aspect of the work in which NCCL is engaged. Always be willing to ask yourself: “How might I best use my gifts and talents to support the ministries of NCCL?” We are strong only to the extent that each individual member is committed to support the mission of NCCL with her/his time and talents.

Lesson Three – Our strategic plan positions us well as advocates for lifelong faith formation in the Catholic tradition. The diligent work done by our Representative Council Members, under the leadership of our Board Members over the past years has culminated in this wonderful plan for advancing catechetical formation in the 21st century. (To view copies of NCCL’s Mission Statement and Strategic Plan, please visit: www.NCCL.org). Together, members of the Board and the Representative Council will strive to engage our entire membership in implementing the plan.

Lesson Four – “Marketing” is not a dirty word. Statistics indicate that, while the majority of diocesan catechetical directors and their staff belong to NCCL, less than 20 percent of parish catechetical leaders belong to any catechetical organization. The viability of our organization and, more importantly, the success of the catechetical effort depend upon building (vigorously) a network of information, formation, and support for all who are involved in catechetical leadership; this will be a major focus during the remainder of my term. Together, let us bring the message of the mission of NCCL to the 80 percent of parish catechetical leaders who may not know or understand the benefits of joining us.

NCCL stands as a constant reminder that the mission of catechesis is far bigger than the work of any one individual, parish, or diocese. We are a voice for the importance of catechesis within the mission of our one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We are NCCL! ■

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WANTED: DOORKEEPERS

Leland Nagel



It didn't happen every Saturday and definitely not in the winter, but several times every summer two young guys dressed in suits and ties would come knocking on our door. Even as kids, we knew the rules:

- * Be hospitable.
- * Don't let them in the house.
- * Tell them you are not interested. You are a Catholic.
- * Close the door while wishing them a good day, even if (especially if) they were preaching.

When I was older and on my own, I changed the rules. I would let them in the house if they agreed to listen to me for as long as I listened to them. I went back to the old rules once I figured out that neither of us was willing to listen. This was my introduction to evangelization, or so I thought. The goal was to convert someone, to make them decide to be a Catholic.

These young men who went door-to-door were the only people I knew who really shared their faith. After a while, I wasn't sure it was *their* faith any more than the rote answers I could give to the catechism questions I had memorized in order to be confirmed, expressed *my* faith.

Little by little after Vatican II, opportunities presented themselves with an invitation to share my beliefs, my faith, and my relationship with Jesus. I saw connections between my parents' love and God's love. I recognized the truths of the parables could be seen in the episodes of daily living.

During two years of college and three years following, I became a volunteer catechist and served on a retreat team for high school students. I taught religion in a Catholic school and served as a DRE. I was given opportunities to share my faith while most Catholics still read their prayers. I was being challenged to engage students while many adults, if they were interested in the faith, attended lecture classes by Father.

For the majority of Catholics, not much has changed. Unless you participate in a weekly Bible study, serve on an RCIA team, or are active in one of the lay movements, you are rarely asked to share your faith. It is possible to *attend* Sunday liturgy every week, *serve* on a parish committee or board that meets regularly, *partake* of coffee and rolls after Mass and never be asked to share your faith or reflect on your personal spiritual life.

If adult Catholics aren't given opportunities for faith sharing, how can we expect them as parents to be the primary educators of their children? How can we encourage them to open the door of faith in their hearts, pass through the gate of discipleship, and seek the Christ who calls them to be evangelizers in the world?

This year's theme for Catechetical Sunday is "Open the Door of Faith" and I am challenging each of you to be the best Catechetical Doorkeeper (Doorman) the church has ever seen. There are two initial rules for doorkeepers that explain the *be hospitable* rule:

- * Create a welcoming environment.
- * Listen to troubles and joys, remembering to ask about matters of importance.

One of the prime duties of a Catechetical Doorkeeper is to open the entrance doors to the heart, and keep that entrance free of trash and other obstacles that might cause someone to retreat. These are the doors that lead to an encounter with the Risen Christ.

Acknowledge the adjustments people made in their schedules just to be present; express a deep gratitude from your heart for their decision to place faith at the top of their list for the next hour. Assure them of God's presence and invite them to open their hearts and minds to God's abiding love. Begin with a modified version of *lectio divina* or *Seeing the Word*, featuring illuminations from *The Saint John's Bible*. Engage them in a faith sharing activity and listen to the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties."

Among the other duties of a Doorkeeper is helping to solve all sorts of problems. The greatest problem solver is Jesus Christ. Help them pass through the gate of reluctance where they will be welcomed into the arms of the One who loved them before they were in their mother's womb. After all, it is the God of Love, not you the Catechetical Doorkeeper, who is the Eternal Doorkeeper on duty 24/7.

Wanted: Doorkeepers – Gate Guardians need not apply.

"I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked" (Psalm 84:10, NIV). ■

Breaking Open the Six Tasks of Catechesis in the Classroom and in Life

Kathy Wolf McCormick



The ministry of catechesis starts with us. We are called by God to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” (Mt 28:19). This call is something to be embraced with joy and wonderment. We have the honor of echoing our faith in the way we live and how we serve to build up the kingdom of

God here on earth. We do this in different ways, but if we look at every moment in life as a catechetical moment, we can begin to look at the ministry of catechesis as an everyday commitment to our Lord. We are catechizing others when we live out our lives through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

When we think of catechesis, many times, we immediately think of Sunday morning in a classroom with a catechist and 12 to 20 children. This is a valid and essential structure for catechesis but I would like to expand that classroom to include daily life. So, as I break open the six tasks of catechesis that are outlined in the *General Directory of Catechesis* (85-87) and in the *National Directory of Catechesis* (20), I hope to not only give insight to formal catechesis in the classroom, but also share with you the moments of informal catechesis in my own life. In doing so, I hope to create a platform of imagination of how we can make each moment in life a catechetical moment.

TASK 1: PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH

It is the catechist’s ministry to introduce the student to the life, mission, and message of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ we come to know God and God’s loving plan of salvation for all people. As we learn about and respond to Christ’s presence in our lives, we grow in our understanding of God’s self-revelation through sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition. We teach students the meaning of the Creed so with the grace

of the Holy Spirit, they may understand and live the church’s beliefs that can be traced from the time of the Apostles.

We continually proclaim that parents are the first catechists of our life. Looking back at my own life, this is surely true. My parents instilled in me a foundational knowledge of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are faithful and faith-filled people in their own right and continue to live out their faith in all they say and do. Growing up, my parents set the example of lifelong learners of our Catholic faith. They participated as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, brought the Eucharist to the sick, were engaged as parish council members, led prayer groups, sang in choirs,

attended retreats, and participated in Bible studies. I would be remiss if I did not mention that they strongly encouraged me to attend religious education classes every Sunday all the way through my high school graduation, and when I say strongly encouraged I mean that I had no choice in the matter. All kidding aside, most importantly, they talked to me about their relationship with the Lord and their love of the Catholic Church.

My parents had 18 years to lay that foundation of faith, but as catechists, we only get an hour or so once a week. We have to be creative and to the point when working with our students. One example of promoting knowledge of the faith that I have used in the classroom for fifth – eighth graders is to act out the Scripture story of Creation. In order to teach about sin and how it separates us from God, I turned the classroom into the Garden of Eden and the students acted out the story.

I am no artist, but before class I made cut outs of birds, fish, cattle, sun, moon, and stars and assigned students to represent this part of creation. To symbolize the water, a student continuously poured water back and forth into two paper cups; and a student monitored the light switch to simulate light and

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Photo by Linda Lane

darkness. The Tree of Life was represented by a student who held a small branch from outside in one hand, and an apple in the other. The serpent was a student using a sock puppet. Finally, I assigned two students to represent Adam and Eve.

I read the story and the students came to life as their parts appeared. We had a great time moving all around the classroom. The students who represented the sun, moon, and stars asked if they could get on chairs since they needed to be in the sky. I allowed the students to be creative in the way they celebrated the Scripture. When it came time for Adam and Eve to be banished from the Garden, I asked the students who were playing those parts to step outside the classroom. In an instant, the fun we were having stopped. The students in the room wanted their friends back and the two students outside the room felt left out and lonely. We spent the rest of the class time speaking about how sin separates us from God and what God's plan is for forgiveness.

TASK 2: LITURGICAL EDUCATION

The catechist's ministry is to foster liturgical knowledge by teaching about the liturgy and the church's sacramental life. We enable the students to participate more fully in the sacraments by helping them experience the prayers, gestures, signs,

and symbols that celebrate God's love and Christ's presence among us.

Right before the gospel was proclaimed I always crossed my forehead, lips, and heart because that is what I was taught to do at that moment in Mass. On this particular day, I leaned over to my mother and asked why we do this. She looked astonished and said, "Don't you know the prayer?" I shook my head no and she proceeded to teach me the prayer.

From that moment on I have had a deeper reverence for the word of God. I tend to pay closer attention to the gospel and I never forget to pray to have the word of God in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart. There is meaning behind all the signs, rituals, gestures, and sacramental celebrations. When we unfold why we do the things we do, it gives our students a chance to deepen their faith and the relevance of our church.

Since we do not sit next to all our students during Mass to answer those catechetical moments, many times we need to create them in our classroom. For example, during Lent it is always a good practice to bring the students to the church to pray the Stations of the Cross.

In some cases, your class time is the same time liturgy is being celebrated. So, create the Stations of the Cross in the classroom. Break the students into groups and assign each group one station to create. You could have them draw it, use magazine cut outs, act it out, or use other forms of art. Once each station is complete, put the artwork up around the classroom and then pray the stations. You could utilize a few minutes of each class time leading up to Lent to “build” the stations and then when Lent begins, you can lead your class in the prayer.

Another example of an activity that promotes the task of liturgical education is ministry mentoring. For younger students, have parishioners who participate in any liturgical ministry such as lector, usher, or welcoming minister, come to class and speak to the students about what they do during the liturgy and why it is an important part of celebrating the Mass. For older students, assign them a mentor. Let the student “shadow” an usher or sit with the lector or Communion minister. They could be a greeter before liturgy or maybe sing in the formal choir on Sunday. Learning about these specific ministries not only connects the student to the liturgy but also connects the student to another parishioner at the parish.

TASK 3: MORAL FORMATION

Catechesis on morality includes teaching the content of Christ’s moral teachings and helping students recognize how they can live out these teachings in their daily lives. The goal of moral catechesis is to enable students to transform their lives according to the example and message of Christ and the church.

We face moral dilemmas every day. Our moral compass is Jesus Christ and our conversion to Him means walking in his footsteps. Jesus’ example should be brought in every time we face a moral decision. As an adult, I can think back on how I

was taught to handle any moral decision. I can see now that my parents really focused on teaching me the virtue of prudence though I do not remember that virtue being mentioned. My mother’s advice was to always pray about your decisions, quickly followed by my father’s mantra to “list out the pros and cons of each decision.” This was then followed up with the question, “Will you be able to live with yourself tomorrow morning with the decision you have made today?” These practices of teaching me to approach each decision with prudence and follow up with an examination of conscience continue to help me through the daily living of a moral life.

In the classroom, teaching the four moral or cardinal virtues of Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice can help to build decision-making skills in our students. One way to increase knowledge of these virtues is to split the students into groups and assign a cardinal virtue to each group. Have the students look up scripture passages that apply to their assigned virtue. For example, Prudence: Ephesians 5:15 and Proverbs 18:15; Fortitude: Isaiah 35:4 and Galatians 6:9; Temperance: Romans 14:21 and 2 Peter 1:5-6; Justice: Proverbs 21:3, Isaiah 1:17, and Micah 6:8; then, break open the meanings and what we can glean from those Scripture passages.

To help students with decision-making skills, create a list of questions for the students to use when going through the labors of making a decision.

Prudence: Have I educated myself enough about this situation?

Fortitude: Have I called on the power of the Holy Spirit to give me the courage to do what is right?

Temperance: Do I have control of my emotions or am I at least thinking clearly about this situation?



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Justice: Does my decision affect me or anyone else unjustly?

These kinds of questions can help remind our students to think before they act.

TASK 4: TEACHING TO PRAY

Knowing and celebrating our faith go hand in hand. Catechists teach students to pray as Jesus did in the Our Father prayer. Understanding the Our Father teaches us how to pray and live as followers of Christ. Catechists also help students cultivate the use of a variety of prayer forms, including adoration, praise, thanksgiving, blessing, intercession, petition, contrition, and mediation so that they may pray with Christ and the church.

Prayer has many forms and everyone has their favorite way to pray. I have used many different forms of prayer throughout my life. The first time I was introduced to meditation was in my eighth grade confirmation class. My family belonged to a new Catholic mission at the time and we did not have the classroom space for religious education classes so we met in the homes of our confirmation catechists.

Though we do not have this practice today, I have to say that the husband and wife team that opened their home to my classmates and me were a wonderful example of faith. It was in their family room that I first learned mediation prayer. As an adolescent, the idea of being quiet and listening to God was not something I ever thought to do. But, as an adolescent with all that being that age entails, it was exactly what I needed in order to grow in my relationship with God and the church.

It is hard to create an atmosphere of quiet in a classroom. There are not any couches or easy chairs in which to sit, but we can teach students to pray using a little creativity. Many of us have heard of ACTS — Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Here are a few ways to teach students to pray with these elements. Break the class into four groups. Give each group one of the four parts of ACTS. Have each group work on lists. For adoration, have the students list out all the names by which our Lord is referred. For contrition, have the students list all those things for which they are sorry; this is kept in general terms, but it is here that the students can learn about the attitudes of sin as well as the actions of sin. For thanksgiving, all things for which we are thankful and for supplication, ask each group to go around and ask for personal

prayer intentions. As each group presents their lists, make it a catechetical moment. Compare what they have created with the different parts of the of the Our Father prayer. This way the students are reminded of how we should always pray in the way Jesus taught us. Finally, tie all that has been written down into a final prayer for the class.

TASK 5: EDUCATION FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

Catechists are called to create an atmosphere in their classrooms that makes it possible for students to understand the implications of Jesus' command: "Love one another" (Jn 13:34). Jesus calls us into a community that is characterized by simplicity, humility, concern for the poor, communal prayer, forgiveness, and love. Through their classroom experiences, students grow in their appreciation of the communal living and their responsibility to build up the Christian community.

The summer before my eighth grade year, my family moved to the South. Up until this time in my life, I lived in very Catholic communities. It was a bit of a culture shock to see so

many churches of other faith denominations. It was truly an education for me during high school and college to meet so many people who had different belief systems. In many cases, my Catholic faith and practices were brought into question by my peers. Some treated me with respect and curiosity while others treated me with judgment and condemnation. The call of Jesus to live in humility and forgiveness was tested much during this time but this experience brought about some very positive things in my life. It forced me to continually educate myself in my Catholic faith in order to answer the questions asked of me and through that education, I became more centered in my Catholic faith. I had support during those years from my family and my Catholic faith community. The catechesis I received laid the foundation in my life for me to be able to work through those challenging moments.

Creating an atmosphere in the classroom of the community life that Jesus calls us to is no small task. One way to help students understand Jesus's command to love one another is to create a classroom list of acceptable behaviors — "Standards to Live By" or "Classroom Beatitudes." It could include statements like the following:

1. Respect the person who is speaking.
2. Show concern for the well being of your classmates.

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3. Forgive when needed.
4. Pray for each other.
5. Treat each other with charity.

As these rules are being formulated, ask the students to think of concrete examples of how these would be applied. By listing attitudes of behavior at the beginning of the school year, the emphasis is placed on the way in which Jesus calls us to live. The catechist can point to these attitudes as ways to interact with those who will touch our lives throughout the years, whether they are in our families, schools, jobs, or greater communities.

TASK 6: MISSIONARY INITIATION

Faith is meant to be lived. Catechists teach students that we are all called to bear witness to our faith through our daily works and actions. We promote a spirit of evangelization and help our students find ways to prepare the way for the coming of God's kingdom of peace, love, and justice.

As I stated earlier, my parents were adamant that I attend religious education classes through my senior year in high school. By the time my senior year rolled around, the class was made up of two students. I told my parents I did not want to go to the class where I just stared at the other senior in the room. I was involved in the youth ministry program at my parish, and I felt that was enough. My parents did not agree with my reasoning and the outcome of the conflict was for me to serve in the religious education program as a catechist aide in the seventh grade confirmation preparation class. I learned more during that year of service about what it means to serve the kingdom of God than ever before. I remember some students who did not say a word, others who said too much. Many students did not want to be there and some actually did. Little did I know that this year of service was the beginning of the call to work with youth in the Catholic Church.

In my youth ministry days, I worked with students from sixth grade through high school. It is often in this age group that the sacrament of confirmation is celebrated. During preparation for confirmation, we emphasize a missionary spirit of serving the community and the world. We tend to do this with requiring service hours. What I found successful was to move from a requirement of hours to project-based opportunities. Three projects were to be completed within the year, with

each project focusing on different communities in the life of the student. One project was to serve the student's family at home, the second project was to serve the student's parish family, and the third project was to serve the greater community.

Throughout the year, different parish and community-wide service opportunities were generated by the students, and once completed they gave a short summary of what they learned in the experience. Many times, the students put in more hours than what was expected because they chose projects that were interesting and relevant to their lives. These projects helped students understand the broader community and to realize the many ways in which to serve.

Our goal as catechists is to reinforce the ongoing informal catechesis that is passed on through our families with the formal catechesis in the classroom. It is a ministry that is stacked with joys and challenges, but if we continue to offer opportunities for our students to meet Jesus Christ in the word of God, the rituals and traditions, and in the sacramental life of our church, we are answering the call to go and make disciples. The six tasks of catechesis are essential in the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ and are the roadmap to follow our Christian call. ■

Kathy Wolf McCormick is the Division Manager for RCL Benziger and holds a Master's degree in Pastoral Ministry from Loyola University, New Orleans.

Catechists teach students that we are all called to bear witness to our faith through our daily works and actions.

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The Evangelizing Parish Today

Frank DeSiano, CSP



While I have written about this topic before, with Fr. Kenneth Boyack, in *Creating the Evangelizing Parish* (Paulist, 1994), the topic certainly deserves another look. In the past 20 years, the whole world seems to have been turned upside down in terms of Catholic life — and in terms of the environment in

which we are called to be Christ's people. The recent "Synod on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" underscored the issue in its very title. Is it possible, given the wider culture we have today, even to pass on the faith?

Anyone in parish and catechetical work understands that we seem to have entered into a brave, new world when it comes to attitude toward faith. We once could count on the faith being transmitted through the help of families, cultures, and various religious education programs. Today, families are in various states of health and disarray. Cultures no longer indentify exclusively with a particular religious identity. Children feel a need to reinvent themselves as part of growing up, often throwing off their family and religious identity in order to "find themselves."

We can elaborate some of the unease of modern people, and modern culture, by pointing out two dramatic needs widely felt in contemporary life: meaning and community.

MEANING

Broader culture sells a very strange scenario to modern people — who swallow this scenario with hardly any awareness. I call this the "molecular" theory of existence. Somehow, in the vastly distant past, a "singularity" occurred in which an infinitely small entity, containing all the potential matter of the universe, suddenly exploded. This was 13 or maybe 14 billion years ago. And from that explosion, the components of molecules and atoms formed, making various kinds of gas which coalesced into stars. Wouldn't you know it? Planets formed around these stars, making them into suns — billions of them all over the universe, with billions of potential planets circling around them. And (who could believe it?) certain planets circling certain kinds of stars just happened to develop in certain ways that simple living cells developed. These simple living cells multiplied and mutated, combined and cooperated, to

make living creatures, from amoeba to plankton, from fishes to frogs, from reptiles to mammals, from monkeys to humans.

So what does this make us? Hmmm. . . . An unplanned accident. An unexplained phenomenon (except in terms of mindless chemical processes). An anomaly of existence? We'll spend billions trying to find other life "out there," so we can explain our absurdity to each other, exchanging information about our mechanical and technological progress, so we can make life better for future generations who will undoubtedly want to explore their absurdity in turn.

I believe Americans walk around today with these images which are really half-digested myths, extrapolations of scientific observations into philosophical and spiritual realms that they cannot explain. This creates one of the key issues that parishes need to address for people today: a coherent sense of meaning and purpose. This also creates enormous possibilities for a parish's various ministries of the word — from preaching, to initial proclamation and invitation, to the Catechumenate, to the formation of children and adults, to Scripture study and sharing.

So, a first step for parishes is to review *how they do the ministry of the word* in its various forms in a parish. Because it is from this ministry that people will begin to form an alternative to the "molecule theory," and come to a vision of an absolutely loving and generous God, from whom the marvel of existence emerges — a marvel that half a moment's contemplation will reveal. And this font of absolute love, flowing from Father through Son and Spirit, surrounds us with beauty; even more, when humans distort existence itself through selfishness and sin, this font of love comes to us as healing, forgiveness, and salvation.

A parish which does the ministry of the word effectively will also be serving the ministry of conversion precisely because it is the word that calls us to respond, love calling to love, in confidence, trust, and faith. Although most Catholics have a sense that this love, confidence, trust, and faith is part of their experience, most of them have not come to think of these human dimensions as an ordinary part of their lives. Catholics have come to think of themselves more in institutional terms (e.g., members of a parish that has buildings and financial obligations, doing what God requires of us in order to escape hell)

than in relational terms (e.g., disciples of Jesus in community, celebrating and sharing his life with the world).

So a check-list is quite easy to develop in this area:

- * How are the Scriptures proclaimed at Eucharist?
- * Does the preaching both engage the congregation and further the ministries of the word?
- * Is the parish cultivating frequent opportunities to experience conversion (through prayer groups, retreats, sacramental experiences)? Does it talk and act conversion?
- * Is religious education for children geared to the evangelization of families, so they become circles of the word lived in daily life?
- * Is all religious formation in our parish calling our parishioners to ongoing discipleship?
- * Are our parishioners studying and sharing the Scriptures?
- * How vibrant is our RCIA, and an enveloping sense of the Catechumenate (conversion and sacrament) in our parish?
- * Are our parishioners inviting others to share in their experiences of the word of God, of Jesus, and conversion?
- * Is our parish reaching out to groups which tend to be tangential to the practice of faith today — youth, young adults, young parents?
- * Is our parish actively inviting people to experience Jesus in our Catholic community?

These are initial, essential ways to begin addressing the modern question surrounding human meaning.

COMMUNITY

There is yet another question that modern people have; this one revolving around issues of community. As communication and travel intensify, our connections with each other become quick, coincidental, electronic, casual, and non-committal. Parents worry about this all the time when they look at the cellphone, iPod, hook-up universe in which they are trying to raise their children. Modern life has made it possible for people to enter an extended adolescence, from 16 through 35, prolonging the felt need for any substantial commitment to another, and any substantial dealing with the possibility of children. This prolonged state amplifies the opportunities for young people to connect and disconnect with each other and their families, making relationships frail and tangential.

Of course, I recognize that the picture I have painted is a bit overstated, but only a bit. I know that people develop strong attachments, which often grow into strong commitments. My remarks are only to point to the difficult environment in which people have to form these attachments and commitments. For all the success people find in developing stable relationships, our courts document countless failures in marriage and collapses of family life, with children torn between contending parties. (By the way, the Synod of 2012 talked

extensively of family as providing the essential environment through which people learn the basic human vocabulary of faith — trust, acceptance, generosity, love — which makes the passing on of faith even possible.)

Beyond the family, other structures of community are also frayed, beginning with our ability to discourse civilly about our common political problems, the growing gaps between those with more resources and those with less, the tortured postures around immigration (and immigrants!), the lack of commitment of corporations to workers, and the sheer mobility of people in society today, felt most of all by young adults and young families. If, in fact, people marry ten to 15 years later than they used to, then that is more than a decade of people having the opportunity to postpone those decisions that bring about the greatest cohesion in life — spouse, family, career, ownership of a house, and children.

What is the role of parish in the midst of all this connection and disconnection between people? Obviously, parish should itself be a model of community, and parish should be exemplary in the way it portrays dynamics of community. If community is one of the great searches of modern people (even if they cannot clearly articulate that), the parishes who are not speaking and living community will appear to have little to say to people. Even more, the inability to portray bonds of community between members will inadvertently diminish the capacity of people to experience bonds with Jesus Christ.

Certainly the experience of congregations in America is instructive, those congregations which show Americans coming together to form a church group. (This is a very different ecclesiology than we Catholics have, because our root of community comes from the bishop's role as shepherd and evangelizer of his whole diocese, which happens mostly through our Catholic parishes.) American Protestant congregationalism shows people coming together with community as a huge force of cohesion among the members. Megachurches, which emphasize community and participation, are really a modern form and outgrowth of Protestant churches which formerly dotted smaller communities before suburban life became our default American life. These huge churches evince strong welcome, acceptance, belonging, service, participation in ministry, and outreach to others. Although some studies hint at a slowdown in the growth of these megachurches, there is hardly an area in the country which does not boast of several of these churches, each with thousands of people (many of them formerly Catholic) who feel a strong bond with fellow members, their congregation, and Jesus. These congregations are responding to this primary, American, modern need of community.

How are Catholic parishes responding to this need of community? This would be an excellent second prism for looking at a parish and its capacity to be evangelizing in today's culture. When I talk publicly and vaguely reference how Catholics often are toward each other (when they even notice each other!), people chuckle in painful recognition. I often talk



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about three ladies whom I met at our huge parish in New York over 30 years ago: “Father, we love coming to your church because it’s so big we don’t have to sit next to each other.” This behavior finds echo in all those churches where the back third of the congregation disappears after Holy Communion. What are people saying? With the Body of Christ fresh inside them, by their swift exit, are they not saying, “We love you, but we just cannot wait to get away from you?”

Many parishes, to be sure, have begun some kind of welcome ministry which at least facilitates people through the threshold of the church building. Many, too, have instituted what is comically called the eighth sacrament of the church — coffee and donuts after Mass. But almost all our parishes have difficulty cultivating a sense of warm inclusion and bonding throughout the whole parish experience. We call ourselves the Body of Christ, but we behave like members who are so cold that we often look dead. Part of this might be cultural; not all groups should be expected to express themselves the way, say, African Americans or Latinos do. But when one visits these ethnic groups, one knows that there is no experience of church without also an experience of community.

What might be things that parishes could look at? Here’s a beginners list:

- * In what ways are we welcoming all people who come to our church? Especially visitors? Especially people who are new to our neighborhood?
- * How do we cultivate a sense of community in our parish?
- * How do we identify, deal with, and overcome divisions in our community?
- * How do we welcome the strange, the foreigner, the homeless?
- * How effective are we at inviting people to parish events? To school events? To the Mass?
- * How often do we try to reach out to our registered members (40 percent of whom are probably never or rarely in church)?
- * How do we help parishioners socialize before and after Mass? Before and after important meetings? At large parish celebrations and events?
- * How does our parish hospitality extend to nursing homes, shelters, food kitchens, and other places of service?
- * How does our parish involve itself in neighborhood events? With other neighborhood and civic groups? With broader community efforts of outreach and service?
- * How ecumenical is our parish? Does it ever gather with other Christians? Do we ever join with people of

other major world faiths for prayer, communication, or service?

In doing this reflection (what a great agenda this would make for a pastoral council over a four or five month period), it is important that parishes keep in mind the difference between communities and clubs. Clubs presume the membership of others, and implicitly exclude non-members either by rule or by behavior. My extremely rare visits to country clubs have all reinforced for me that fact that I am not a member! Communities, on the other hand, explicitly desire to include the other, to bring in new people, to grow by the warm embrace of the other, the stranger.

It is painfully obvious that Jesus' primary ministry was reaching just those people who were excluded from the various religious groupings (clubs) of his day — painful because that is the norm against which our parishes have to be evaluated. How do our parishes look like Jesus? Like his kingdom? Like his gatherings? For many people, the perception is that our parishes pretty much exist for themselves and their own activities (Mass and educating children), making us look like we are focused on ourselves as institutions, and on institutions as property and buildings. This is exactly the wrong kind of signal to be sending out to a society looking for community.

My book, *Mission America: Challenges and Opportunities for Catholics Today*, expands upon these themes and presents an elaborated agenda for Catholic parishes today. Written for parish staffs and leaders, it can help change us from stuttering about evangelization to actually designing parishes that evangelize. Our parish renewal program, "Living the Eucharist/Vive La Eucaristía," reinforces dynamics of sharing and discipleship for three seasons of Lent. Parishes have resources to reflect and act.

Evangelizing Parishes

We have many images of liturgy and religious education in our heads; some of them very good, some of them not so good. But at least we have them. Unfortunately, we have hardly any images of what evangelizing parishes look like. Perhaps in a city there might be one or two Catholic parishes that seem to "be alive" and be places where people flock. But most of our parishes have no imagination when it comes to thinking about growing, reaching out through invitation, and bringing people to an encounter with Jesus Christ.

This is not a good prognosis for us Catholics. Since 1975 we have been talking about evangelization. In some decades, this talk has generated some initial behaviors — bishops had directors of evangelization, and parishes even formed evangeli-

zation teams. But those years came and went, with hardly any of the evangelizing apparatus intact. Bishops merged evangelization with catechesis or simply closed (or defunded) offices; parishes gave up on evangelization teams as soon as the interested pastor or parishioner had to move on. Once again the church is talking about evangelization, but it is considerably diminished (except for Africa) from where we were in 1975: fewer parishes, older Catholics, more marginal Catholics, less energy, much less money. In other words, in terms of evangelization, we have lost 40 years of progress.

Parishes can begin to reverse this decline if they accept the missionary mandate that is inherent in their very existence — to fulfill the apostolic mandate that Jesus gave his Apostles which we Catholics understand as communicated in a direct link with our bishops. Pointing to the obvious theological underpinnings of evangelization, however, will not mean as much as will our orienting Catholic parishes to the two salient needs that people have today: the quest for meaning

and the search for community. Jesus has powerful answers for modern people, answers which our Catholic parishes can make available in strong and viable ways. Meaning and community are what Catholicism is all about.

We are now at a crossroad. We have benefited enormously by

the immigration of Latinos who have swelled our Catholic numbers, allowing us to hide the millions who have slipped out (and continue to slip out) our front doors. If we are almost 70 million strong in the United States, the shame is that we should be 95 million strong. These are millions of people whose lives are poorer because they do not have the word of God and the sacraments of Jesus Christ, the community of the faithful, and the social vision of the church, as resources in their lives. We cannot easily absolve ourselves from our responsibility for the lack these millions of people suffer because of our "automatic pilot" vision of parish.

Rather than rue this huge flaw, parishes can begin to reverse the trend of the past 40 years by retrieving the pastoral vision that modern popes have powerfully laid before us. We have so much to say. We have so much to offer for peoples' richer lives. We have so much to give. On the other side, people have needs that stand like open chasms waiting to be filled. It's a good combination — what we have, what people seek. We should start believing that this is a match made in heaven, what our parishes can be, mated with the deepest longings of Americans today. ■

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Anyone in parish and catechetical work understands that we seem to have entered into a brave, new world when it comes to attitude toward faith.

The Effective Catechetical Leader

Maria G. Covarrubias



There have been times in my catechetical ministry that I have felt very effective, but there have also been other times that I have not at all. I have found out that my effectiveness depends on many factors, some within my control and others outside of it.

A main factor is how much I know about this ministry, the timely planning and preparation, the circumstances, my own or other's expectations, and the outcome. It also has to do with the relationship I have with those involved, and my own understanding of my strengths and weakness. Here are several areas that are the core of an effective catechetical leader today: the professional leader, understanding the impact of challenges, the need to be a sign and an agent of hope; the importance of embracing, articulating, and sustaining the mission of the church; the need for a focused vision and a plan of action; the knowledge and use of digital technology and social media, and the fact that the catechetical ministry is about people and relationships.

WHO IS AN EFFECTIVE CATECHETICAL LEADER?

The ministry of the catechetical leader is a multi-faceted ministry requiring professional education and a wide variety of skills. Because the work of catechesis is inextricably bound to the work of evangelization, the role of the catechetical leader is extremely important in the ministry of the church, which is to evangelize.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* states, "the single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a professional trained parish catechetical leader" (#54, B5). A catechetical leader is not merely an administrator or a manager, the catechetical leader is a catechist first, who has responded generously to the call and vocation to lead. He or she has taken this call seriously enough to obtain the necessary education and learned a set of competencies and skills that will lead to an effective ministry. This preparation for service should include advanced studies in theology, scripture, liturgy, catechesis and catechetical methodology, educational psychology and theory, administration, management skills, technology and practical catechetical experience with adults, youth and children (#54, B5).

In addition, catechetical leaders are always to be current on their knowledge and skills, by continuing their personal spiritual and

professional development, participating in diocesan programs of in-service training and formation, catechetical institutes, conventions, retreats, and accredited programs (#54, B5).

In a recent study by Tom and Rita Walters called *Catechetical Leader, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Facts, Figures, and Questions*, the section about academic credentials shows that 43 percent of the catechetical leaders in 2011 had a master's or doctoral degree, while 27 percent had less than a bachelor's degree.¹ As a result of these findings, the authors reflect that it is difficult to make a case for the profession of catechetical leader when more than one-fourth of those who serve in the ministry have less than a bachelor's degree; they continue on saying that it is safe to say the "position" of catechetical leader is a reality in most parishes, but the "profession," on the other hand, is far from a reality.

The findings of this study bring forward an urgent challenge for all of us involved in catechetical ministries. If the professional trained catechetical leader is the most important factor in the effectiveness of a catechetical program not only for the betterment of the parish, but to increase the respect and confidence of those they work for and with, it is extremely important that diocesan and parish catechetical leaders promote and support the urgent need of professional catechetical leaders, and advocate for all kinds of resources needed to facilitate their professional development. We have the responsibility to continually seek, identify, and mentor potential diocesan and parish catechetical leaders to help them develop the professional competencies and skills necessary for effective leadership and a comprehensive knowledge of the faith.

CHALLENGES FACED BY CATECHETICAL LEADERS

The catechetical leader in the 21st century faces many challenges that can be seen as opportunities for growth and development. The *NDC* names three main areas of great concern: 1. challenges to catechesis from social and cultural conditions; 2. challenges to catechesis regarding doctrine; and 3. challenges in the ministry of catechesis. Each of these areas

¹ Tom and Rita Walters, "Catechetical Leaders, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Catechetical Leader* 24, no. 2 (March 2013): 17.

include a list of complex issues, to name a few such as the pervasive secularism of our culture and the struggle to live the Catholic faith in the home; family structures that challenge the traditional catechetical programming; the need for new and creative methodologies and programs in order to reach the new generations as well as continue to serve the older generations; the significant number of Catholic children and youth who are not enrolled in any systematic catechetical program; the challenge in engaging adults in lifelong formation; the gap between the faith and the everyday life that leads to an inadequate connection between the religious beliefs and the moral choices; the variety of needs related to diverse cultures; questions and concerns about the presentation of the complete and authentic content of the faith; the frantic pace of life caused by economic and social expectations leading to serious time constraints for many people's participation in catechetical programs and in the life of the church; and the information revolution including the Internet, media in all its forms, and all types of social communications.

THE EFFECTIVE CATECHETICAL LEADER IS A SIGN AND AN AGENT OF HOPE

These challenges can be overwhelming but they are also doors for new possibilities and change. A catechetical leader must be a sign and an agent of hope. Hope is the belief that things could be better and that we can make them better.² It's hard to be effective and successful without being hopeful. A catechetical leader must understand that hope is a powerful active attitude. "Hope taps into a human desire to be part of something bigger."³ Hope provokes passion for the work we do and the energy to work harder and get more engaged. Hope is the door to creativity and new possibilities. An effective catechetical leader must be an agent of hope with a strong understanding of the big picture and the reality in which his or her catechetical ministry happens. A hopeful catechetical leader who is excited about his or her work inspires others to collaborate in the catechetical efforts. He or she portrays passion filled with hope that creates enthusiasm about sharing in the ministry of catechesis with the conviction that we help others have a better life in establishing the kingdom of God among us. When we believe that the future will be better than the present because of our efforts and contributions, we become builders and agents of hope.

EMBRACING, ARTICULATING, AND SUSTAINING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

As I pointed out earlier, the catechetical leader's mission flows from the church's comprehensive mission to evangelize and catechize. Catechesis is one of the essential sources of energy for the life and mission of the church. Because the church exists to evangelize and catechize, the role of the catechetical leader in implementing and sustaining this mission is of great

importance taking into consideration that personally, the catechetical leader is called to Christian leadership derived from Scriptures, the catechetical documents of the church, and contemporary societal demands.⁴ A professional catechetical minister is called to a professional standard of behavior and to uncompromising desire to live the values of the gospel in discipleship with Jesus.⁵ Therefore, the professional catechetical minister exemplifies both a vocational and a professional attitude toward the ministry which embraces personal, communal, and societal dimensions.⁶ Understanding that the catechetical leader is a designate from the bishop or the pastor to assist them with their primary responsibility of catechesis, the catechetical leader is to vigilantly ensure that the proclamation of the gospel is authentic and that those involved in catechizing hand on the complete and accurate deposit of faith. The catechetical leader assures accessibility to the gospel message by appropriate adaptation to people's human needs, development, cultural, ethnic, and racial heritage.⁷

HAVING A FOCUSED VISION AND A PLAN OF ACTION

A professional catechetical leader with a focused vision rooted in hope is able to see the bigger picture to respond with dedication and commitment to the catechetical needs and challenges of today. By understanding the mission of the church and knowing the reality in which the ministry happens, the catechetical leader is able to develop goals and a plan of action which includes strategies for short and long term goals and objectives including ongoing evaluation at different times in the process. The evaluations allow for learning, new developments, and opportunities for change.

Every year, my office staff and I develop a ministry plan for the following year. This ministry plan includes all the formation and events on which we will be focusing our efforts. Back in October of 2012, I was notified that my office was going to be evaluated. I was surprised to hear the news! Why? Is there something wrong? One more thing to do! These initial questions and reaction led to a very meaningful process that displayed many opportunities for affirmation, learning, growth, development, and collaboration. Through the preparation for the evaluation, we were able to creatively and strategically develop the parts of the evaluation: the process, the team, the time line, the tools, the participants, and the content. Laying down every effort, program, and event that had happened in the last five years gave us the opportunity to see the fruitfulness of our efforts and the value of the collaboration with others. The actual physical evaluation happened on January 8-10, 2013 for which we had selected a team of five professional and experienced catechetical leaders

2 Jennifer Robinson, "Making Hope a Business Strategy," *Gallup Business Journal* (12 February 2013). <http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/160361/making-hope-business-strategy.aspx> (Accessed March 29, 2013).

3 Ibid.

4 New York State Catholic Conference. *Comprehensive Plan for the Formation of Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium*. New York: New York State Catholic Conference, 2012, 14.

5 Ibid, 14.

6 Ibid, 14.

7 Ibid, 15.



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that included three from outside the diocese and two of our own. This team was to interview and listen to a good number of people from all the regions of the diocese who minister in the different areas of catechesis like sacramental preparation in infant baptism, first Communion, youth and adult confirmation, marriage, RCIA, and also who had experienced the courses offered for each of these areas, including the catechist and the master catechist certification programs. This review also included the evaluation of ongoing consultation, services, collaboration, and promptness to respond to needs and demands at the diocesan and parish levels. The final report offered a list of commendations that was very affirming. The recommendations brought light into the areas that were not visible from our perspective and needed additional attention. The following meetings with our bishop, the advisory board, and the staff about the findings of the evaluation began to unveil specific direction for our future plan of action. We saw the need to revise our priorities and modify the short and long term goals and objectives in order to provide specific and intentional response to the challenges that surface in meeting the needs of those under our care for the next three to five years. Overall, this experience was very meaningful and valuable for the entire office staff. We learned that this process was a powerful tool to help us experience team work, developed a strategic plan, measured the effectiveness of our services, and drew new directions for our ministry to respond to the contemporary needs of our people. We look to the future with new vitality and hope dreaming of a better future for the ministry of catechesis in this local church.

UTILIZING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

It is a fact that because of digital technology, we communicate faster and more efficiently than ever before. Smartphones have put at our fingertips the features that in the past we could only find on a personal assistant or a computer. The younger generation has grown less fond of e-mail, primarily using texting or social networking instead.⁸ The effective catechetical leader understands the importance of digital technology today and its impact on the formation of the individual. The catechetical leader must use a wide variety of digital material and online resources to support catechetical formation of families, adults, teens, and children. In addition, he or she also needs to create a support system by identifying, recruiting, and cooperating with those who can assist in the content creation (photos, videos, and social media), distribution, and administration of materials and information for evangelization and catechesis.⁹

CATECHETICAL MINISTRY IS ABOUT PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The effective catechetical leader understands the importance of forming and strengthening ministerial relationships at many different levels. A good relationship and clear communication with the bishop or pastor or or person in charge are essential for the

8 Jonathan and Thomas W. McKee. *The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer*. United States of America, 2012, 131.

9 New York State Catholic Conference. *Comprehensive Plan for the Formation of Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium*. New York: New York State Catholic Conference, 2012, 14.

good functioning of the catechetical programming. Regular communication to review expectations and to inform of any changes that would affect the parish's planning contributes to developing and maintaining effective relationships with our superior and other leaders in the parish to ensure the effectiveness of our role. This collaboration involves providing information, resources, and asking for advice in the planning of the catechetical program.

CATECHIZING FAMILIES

For decades, the catechetical leader partnered with parents and guardians to transmit the faith to children and youth. Today, it is a fact that the dynamics of families have changed. They have different structures and lots of stressors, including adult members who have not developed their understanding of the faith and their relationship with God. Most parents and guardians who bring their children and youth to the parish catechetical program do not live a conscious faith at home. An effective catechetical leader understands that the instructional model of catechesis has moved to an anthropological model which focuses on the experience of the people, providing an atmosphere and catechetical opportunities that encourage the religious growth of the entire family, not just the children and youth. It is important for us to consider two important realities in regard to catechesis: 1. It is within the family that children should have their primary experience of God. 2. The church's ministry for faith formation can no longer be a ministry geared only to children; it must be a ministry to families that includes components of adult catechesis. More and more adult catechetical formation is vital for the effectiveness of the transmission of the faith at home. Catechetical leaders must get to know their families, encountering them where they are, providing an atmosphere of welcoming, understanding, and partnership.

PARISH STAFF AND MINISTERIAL LEADERS

The effective catechetical leader collaborates, cooperates, and works with other parish staff and leaders to make sure the catechetical mission is understood and supported by all the other ministries in the parish. He/she serves as consultant on any issues related to catechesis, participating in the committee on education, and the parish pastoral and finance councils. These relationships support and promote the unity of the parish ministries assuring also other leaders' collaboration and support to the catechetical leader and the catechetical program.

RECRUITING, FORMING, AND SUSTAINING A NEW BREED OF VOLUNTEERS

The greatest asset of a catechetical program is the many men and women who share in the ministry of catechesis. Technology, social media, and the many shifts we have experienced in family structure, the fast pace of life, the many commitments, the sense of individualism, etc. have caused a massive transformation that has impacted the way we understand voluntarism. The effective catechetical leader understands and values the importance of having a diverse group of volunteers. He or she knows the dynamics of how to recruit, form, and sustain

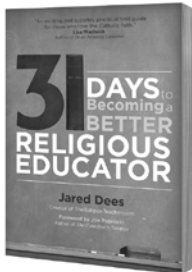
volunteers as times change. Jonathan and Thomas McKee, in their book *The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer*, state, "as we approached the end of the 20th century and entered the new millennium, developments and trends evolved that changed the way we need to operate; whether we like these changes or not, they've produce a new breed of volunteer." The effective catechetical leader pays attention to the signs of the times, welcomes change, and is open to learn new effective strategies to identify, recruit, form and sustain the new breed of volunteers.

In conclusion, the catechetical leader is a professional, well-trained leader who understands the importance of his or her role in the mission of the church to evangelize and catechize. This person understands the present challenges and looks to the future with hope, embracing, articulating, and sustaining the mission of the church. He or she has a focused vision and a plan of action to serve those under his or her care. The effective catechetical leader uses technology and social media as effective ways to catechize. He or she understands that the catechetical ministry is about relationships. This catechetical leader draws life and purpose from this specific ministry in which "the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (NDC # 19B). This final statement speaks out loud about the importance of an effective catechetical leader to help fulfill the mission of the church. |

Maria G. Covarrubias is the director of the Office of Catechetical Ministry for the Diocese of San Bernardino.

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Ministry to Families Interagency Task Force Report

Tom Rinkoski



It is hardly a discovery that the points of connection between the domestic church and the institutional church are difficult to develop. Since the Decade of the Family, that relationship has suffered a “climate change.” The sizes, shapes, textures, and pace of family life have undergone exponential changes.

Families have a difficult enough time finding the breath to tell their own story, let alone name their needs and dream dreams. Similarly affected by the change in climate, parish and diocesan staffs have been doing all they can to maintain healthy and successful ministries while undergoing their own transitions.

Catholic ministerial associations such as NACFLM (National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministries¹), NFCYM (National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry²), and NCCL have spearheaded efforts to deepen and enrich communication with the domestic church. The constituencies those three organizations represent have a lot at stake in building effective and meaningful relationships with families. NACFLM pioneered *Ministry To Families* workshops in the 1980s. Those workshops assisted diocesan and parish staffs to listen more clearly to families’ “joys and hopes, griefs and sorrows.” The project has proven itself over the years having been presented in parishes and dioceses all over the country. More recently, NFCYM developed the *Strong Catholic Families* initiative to engage parents in reflecting, assessing, and actively sharing with parish leaders their support and formation needs in the Catholic faith. NCCL has been a partner in the support of the *Strong Catholic Families* material.

Building on previous successful joint ventures, NACFLM invited these three players to reposition the *Ministry to Families* workshop in the light of the changing times and new available data. To this end, representatives of NACFLM, NFCYM, and NCCL collaborated toward this shared objective. The goal was to develop a replicable training day for parish leaders focused on examining positions, imparting skills, and setting new goals on how ministers can more effectively partner with families (the “domestic church”). Specifically, the hope was to produce a 9am to 4pm day-long workshop that builds on

some of what is contained in the current weekend *Ministry to Families 101/102* training sessions (produced by NACFLM).

The assembled task force was chaired by Linda Moses of NACFLM. Linda is the Director of Faith Formation and Family Life Ministry at Holy Family Church in Irving, Texas. The group also included: NFCYM member, Frank Mercandante of Cultivation Ministries in St. Charles, Illinois; Anne Keogh, NACFLM representative and Director of Adult and Family Ministry of Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Dallas, Texas; Michael Theisen, Director of Membership Services at NFCYM; and Tom Rinkoski, from Florida, who serves this task force as the representative from our own association, NCCL. As well as being dedicated lay ecclesial ministers, these folk are also brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers — and now (some of us) grandparents!

The first meeting over the phone was packed with introductions, questions, and concerns. Dedicated ministers and old friends gathered virtually to identify the goals as well as the wishes, hopes, and dreams for such a workshop. Opportunities like this bring a new *electronic* light to St. Paul’s analogy of the church as a body with each of us bringing our gifts and talents toward its common good. With two excellent sources (*Ministry to Families* from NACFLM, and *Strong Catholic Families; Strong Catholic Youth* from NFCYM), the task force was searching for a process that could gather ecclesial leaders from differing disciplines to discuss the health of the connection between the domestic and the institutional church. To accomplish this goal, we aimed to produce a set of PowerPoints and speaker notes portable enough to be used by different agencies and associations, diocesan staffs, regional leaders, etc.

In the subsequent teleconferences, the team identified five key elements to be brought to the workshop. These included:

1. An examination of our Mental Models.³
2. Reviewing key data on parents and children in the light of new research, especially as put forward in the NYSR⁴.

3 As developed by Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*; Doubleday Publishers; 1990. “Mental Models are deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking an acting.”

4 Especially - *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* by Christian Smith et alia.

1 www.nacflm.org

2 www.nfcym.org



As well as including research material from other sources like the Search Institute.

3. Examining the Family Life Cycle for significant moments of connection.
4. Specific suggestions on how to examine and improve our listening skills.
5. Empowering participants to walk away with a specific plan for action in their primary settings.

In forming the program, the team also wanted to make sure it included an adequate review of key church teachings on Marriage and Family Life, including citations from Vatican II⁵, Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*, as well as USCCB documents such as *Follow the Way of Love* (1994) and *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* (1988, 1998), among others.

Before the final team meeting (05/18/2012), we e-mailed our proposed PowerPoint slides and speaker notes for our sections. As you might imagine, there was more material than time would permit, so a portion of the meeting was searching for ways to not only synchronize the five elements named above, but to infuse the workshop with time for active participation ending with a sharing of take-home plans. At the final teleconference, I sat at my worktable with this wealth of material laid out before me, as each of my team members clarified their objectives while others pointed out places of convergence and prioritized approaches. Conference calling and computers are wonderful tools to effect synergy! Team members Michael and Linda were tasked with the final assembly of the package so it would be ready to showcase at the annual NACFLM Conference on July 25–28 in Texas. The theme of this conference is *Strengthening Marriages and Families in Today's Culture*.

The final version of the program premiered under the name "Cultivating a Home Grown Faith" at the July 2012 NACFLM Conference, and received positive reviews. Some additional "tweaking" happened as a result of that presentation and review. The program consists of the PowerPoint presentation, a series of handouts, and group discussion and dialogue.

⁵ *Declaration on Christian Education and The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in The Modern World.*

Now the team is convinced we have a product ready to be used in parishes and dioceses across the country, as well as a team of qualified presenters. Our immediate goal is to promote this program, using a one-hour teaser at our national conferences. This six-hour long workshop is now available to groups of parishes and diocese; it will present a blue print for church ministers and volunteers to adjust to particular needs in building a viable relationship between families and church. In the spirit of the Year of Faith, it is aimed at building a sustainable faith. We believe these leaders will leave with practical tools to empower families to recognize and celebrate their sacredness throughout the family life cycle.

Any member of the team will bring it to your site. Cost for this workshop at your site is \$1,000.00 plus expenses for one presenter. Of that fee, each of the three sponsoring associations receives a \$100.00 stipend. A \$300.00 deposit is required to secure a contract for presentation. If you are interested in this in your parish or diocese, contact Michael Theisen at 202.674.4209 or via e-mail at miket@nfcym.org.

The team worked together as members of a living tradition, honoring the wisdom of the past, extracting from that storehouse to fashion a new church oriented with gospel eyes and heart toward the kingdom. Our goal was not just to patch up difficulties between families and church, or to add new data to an old program, but to envision possibilities for our common future that embraces a real, although sometimes messy, intimacy with living together in the here and now.

It is a mark of healthy development that different organizations can get together like this to resource each other. Each of these organizations has done a lot of growing over the past years, identifying their goals and constituencies, and now, with some maturity, we are able to work together in shared purpose. It is made easier by technology, but it is made possible by an attitude of openness, recognition of each other's gifts and talents, and dedication to the common good of effective ministry. I was proud to be a member of this task force and look forward to being a presenter of the material! ■

Tom Rinkoski is the Director of Religious Education and Marriage Ministries at St. Augustine Church in Gainesville, Florida. Contact him at tomrinkoski@yahoo.com.

Leading to Christ

Dan Ebener and Luke Ebener



REBECCA'S STORY

Rebecca is a student at the Don Bosco Senior Secondary School (DBSSS) in Gumbo, South Sudan. She shows up every day at 8:30 a.m. with an enthusiastic

attitude and an eager desire to learn. You would never know that she's been up since 4 a.m. and spent the past three hours traveling to school.

That's because Rebecca is grateful for the opportunity to gain a Catholic education with the DBSSS, which is operated by the Salesian Fathers. She thinks of it as her ticket out of poverty, and it will give her the ability to help provide for her needy family as well.

When her alarm clock rings well before sunrise, Rebecca is the first of the 22 people living in the three-room house to get up in the morning. She takes a quick bath, sweeps the house, prepares tea for her cousin, and packs her bag for school.

No breakfast. No coffee to jumpstart her day. And no worries about what to wear as she slips into the same Salesian school uniform each day. Rebecca must leave the house by 5:30 a.m. to catch the first of three busses that will take her close to her destination. But she must still walk the final mile to the school.

After a long day of classes, she has to walk the 15 km (9.3 miles) back to her house, as it is too late to catch a bus. Every day, she spends six hours commuting to receive six hours of secondary school education. For Rebecca, the youngest of five siblings, it is all worth it.

The long journey to DBSSS is a choice that Rebecca makes every day. Hers is the type of intrinsic motivation that we all wish for our religious education students. There is no adult who is forcing her decision. She simply says, "I read about

Don Bosco and I knew God would help me if I went to Don Bosco."

A CONTRASTING STORY

Contrast Rebecca's story with one which I (Dan) heard while visiting a Baptist church in Florida. The guest preacher was a missionary who was "leading teenagers to Christ" in Brazil. They were holding an altar call where young Brazilians were expected to "commit their lives to Christ" while the congregation prayed for them.

The preacher described one teenage girl who was resisting his invitation to approach the altar. He quoted himself as telling her, "If you don't commit your life to Christ, your soul will be tormented in hell for all eternity." The girl continued to refuse.

However, about 15 minutes later, as the preacher told the story, he saw that same girl approach the altar "to be saved by Christ". And the congregation in Florida replied, "Praise the Lord!"

*He quoted himself as telling her,
"If you don't commit
your life to Christ, your soul
will be tormented in hell
for all eternity."*

LEADERSHIP AS A VOLUNTARY PROCESS

These two contrasting stories present two different approaches to evangelization. In the first story, we find a Sudanese girl who is fundamentally motivated out of love for her family and hope for the future. In the second story, we discover a Brazilian girl motivated by fear and intimidation. The two stories present contrasting styles of leadership.

Scholars define leadership as a voluntary, interactive process of influencing others toward a change. The change might be a change of heart, mind, or behavior. It might be a change of policy, structure, or strategy. Leaders change all these things.

There is an emerging consensus among scholars that leadership is *not coercion*. That is not to suggest that coercion is not necessary under any circumstances, but it means that when we are coercing, it is not leadership.

LEADING LIKE GOD

With this definition in mind, what does it mean to say we are “leading people to Christ?” We would like to suggest that there are three major ways to lead someone to Christ in ways that will get the natural type of results that we saw in Rebecca. These are three ways that model the way that God influences, and they are backed up by scholarly research in leadership studies.

Aquinas taught that God influences human beings through (1) love, (2) truth, and (3) beauty. We all believe that God has almighty power; that is part of our creed. But when it comes to instilling faith, God grants us free will. For some reason, God does not use coercive power to lead us to Him. God leads us with unconditional love, everlasting truth, and the beauty of creation.

Yet, when we are granted the opportunity to use coercive power, as parents, teachers, and church leaders, how often do we resort to using it? We would like to suggest that coercive tactics, such as using fear, guilt, and punishment, are not useful ways of leading people to Christ. Instead, we should try to use the loving, truthful, and beautiful ways that God modeled and provided for us.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS

Let’s look at the scholarly research and apply Rebecca’s story to the three ways that leaders can intrinsically motivate their followers through individual consideration (love), intellectual stimulation (truth), and inspirational motivation (beauty). (See the work of Bernard Bass.)

The first of these intrinsic motivators, **individual consideration**, suggests that people are motivated by their relationships with people. “I don’t have a father,” Rebecca says. “So I come to school to educate myself and provide for my family later on. I want to have a good future.” Like many people in poor countries, Rebecca is motivated by love for her family.

Rebecca is also motivated by the relationships with friends she has made at Don Bosco. Despite the six hours per day she spends getting to school and back, she finds time to develop friendships as well.

Relationships are an intrinsic motivator for all of us. While few teenagers in the USA may be as worried as Rebecca about the day-to-day subsistence of their families, they pay close attention to their relationships, especially with their friends at that age. Consideration for the relationships in the group should be a major concern for anyone trying to “lead teenagers to Christ.”

The second intrinsic motivator is **intellectual stimulation**. People are motivated by how stimulating the learning environment is. Adults need to learn how to make learning fun. As

teachers, we are leaders, and leaders have to bring bursts of energy into the room or it can be a long day for everyone in the classroom.

Rebecca could go to a much closer school where she would get a public education but she would not receive religious education at all with that option. Don Bosco blends practical education and English classes with catechesis, all in one stimulating environment.

One of the highlights of the day for Rebecca is lunch break. Like most of the 27 other students at DBSSS, she cannot afford to eat lunch. It is a time to enjoy time with her friends, play basketball, foosball, or a card game.

The third intrinsic motivator is **inspirational motivation**. To inspire is to lift up the spirit. Leaders inspire with the passion for a mission and clarity of a vision of the future. Young people today are hungry for

a sense of purpose (mission), i.e. why religious education is important, and a direction (vision), i.e. how it will impact their future.

When I (Luke) ask my students why they come to our Catholic school, they suggest they want to help their fellow people of South Sudan. They want to make the world a better place for their loved ones.

Rebecca states, “I love school and studying CRE (Christian Religious Education) and English. CRE teaches the Word of God and when you follow the Word of God, God will help you. Knowing English allows you to communicate with everyone and is good knowledge to have wherever you go.” She hopes to continue with her studies and finish all four years of secondary school.

LEADING TO CHRIST

We all want our students to succeed in life and to grow in the love of Christ. We want them to *want to* live active faith lives. When we face resistance, hesitation, or indifference from them, it is tempting to use coercive tactics, especially if those tactics are readily available to us.

When we use coercion, the results are less than stellar. When we coerce, command, and control, we generally get sub-ordinary results. If we want the extraordinary motivation that we see in Rebecca, we need to use the loving, truthful, and beautiful ways that God uses to influence us. |

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Luke Ebener is a missionary teaching for the Salesian Fathers in the South Sudan.

Baptismal Preparation Ministry and Beyond: The Richest Ministerial Soil for Evangelizing Young Families

Tom Quinlan



There is no greater opportunity to reach young Catholics than at the time of baptism of their children. Both research and pastoral common sense affirm this. And yet, baptismal ministry is somehow taken for granted, more or less an afterthought in many parishes.

There was a time, perhaps, when the church could simply assume that parents would raise their children in the faith. In that environment, baptism was simply a sacrament to be conferred. That time has passed. In fact, it has well passed. And now it is time that we as Catholic leaders take seriously the great, incomparable *opportunity* that baptism affords parishes to engage in serious, intentional evangelizing ministry.

It is a simple analogy but one that I use in exhorting parish leaders to rethink the place of baptismal ministry in the matrix of parish ministries; *the cement is wet at baptism.*

While we try (or should try) to move heaven and earth to reshape family religious practice at the time of later sacraments, we often, as a church, miss the opportunity to create meaningful experiences in baptismal preparation and follow-up family ministry, experiences that are highly relational and designed to foster conversion and commitment in young parents.

RECOGNIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

In this era of new evangelization, the most logical place to proclaim Christ and propose Catholic life is with the vast numbers of Catholics, many of whom are marginal or inactive, who still present their child for baptism. In each of these families, a parish is given a chance to evangelize or re-evangelize. The future religious identity of a young family is often at stake. Parishes must come to recognize this opportunity for what it is, and radically re-imagine how it can take full advantage of the opportunity that the sacramental moment provides.

Some parishes are already trying to be intentionally evangelizing in their baptismal preparation ministry. And, granted, in today's culture, even the most dynamic and attractive ministry

won't bring every young Catholic family back to active faith practice. But if there is any parish in our nation resistant to the challenge of raising the bar for this ministry...if there is any parish satisfied with the outcomes of their baptismal preparation ministry...I would want to ask the Dr. Phil line: "*How's that working for you?*"

Last fall, almost 150 parish leaders came together for a formation day that explored this vitally important theme. We spent the morning looking at baptismal preparation and how it can become a truly evangelizing ministry. The afternoon was dedicated to considering how parishes can strengthen the connection established in baptism throughout the first years of a child's life...*before* the school years. It was a day filled with energy, ideas, and hope. The commitment I asked of each one present was to bring the conversation back to the parish and take action, both immediate and long-term, to make this ministry what it ultimately needs to be: *evangelizing.*

I invite all dioceses and parishes to explore how to strengthen baptismal preparation, the baptism itself, and post-baptism ministry to young families. There is room for improvement and new ways to conduct this ministry. It is not rocket science, but simply a recognition of both the opportunity and the needs of young adults today. Sadly, the cement of religious practice (or lack thereof) has hardened for many families by first Eucharist or confirmation. Let's rejoice that it is still wet and malleable for many of our Catholic young adults at the time of their child's baptism. And let's go to work building ministry that will awaken faith and draw them into a life-giving relationship with Christ and the parish.

The following are six recommendations that I offer from my years overseeing the development of baptismal ministry as a parish director of religious education:

SIX KEYS TO EFFECTIVE BAPTISMAL MINISTRY

1. **Understand baptismal ministry (before, during, and after baptism) as an opportunity to evangelize and foster conversion.** Design the ministry upon this primary principle.



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- 2. Focus on team building and team formation.** There are many gifts present in the people of your parish and numerous roles on baptismal ministry teams. (For example, having a single mother on the team will help the ministry be sensitive to the needs of new single moms. Gifts of hospitality and being able to relate to young adults are invaluable on any such team.)
- 3. Build different tracks.** There should be one track for first-time parents and at least one different track for others. For example, one track might focus more on core elements of our faith and the baptismal rite, one more on things like Catholic parenting and what the parish has to offer. However, any track should be heavily Eucharistic in its focus. (By the way, a parish should consider providing more than one session to parents presenting a child for baptism. Two or three is not unreasonable given the importance of baptism. Just make sure they are good!)
- 4. Don't call them classes or meetings.** Create more of a *day of formation/retreat* experience and frame it as such. Mix in strong relational interactions with some time for reflective quiet. And don't skimp on the hospitality and humor.
- 5. Give families an absolutely tremendous experience of baptism itself.** Let the sacrament and the community evangelize!
- 6. Develop follow-up ministry for families between baptism and the school years.** There are countless ways to accomplish this, such as having regular and outreaching communication, assigning a mentoring family, and growing a ministry for mothers. These are the key years that will help to determine what kind of relationship the family will have with your parish and with the church for years to come! |

Tom Quinlan is the catechetical director for the Diocese of Joliet. He can be reached at tquinlan@dioceseofjoliet.org.

WHAT IS YOUR BEST PRACTICE?

The NCCL Evangelization Committee is gathering best practice information from parishes across the nation. If you believe your parish or one in your diocese has a strong ministry relating to baptism and early years of formation, please send your name, contact information, role, and parish name to ccornue@syrdio.org. Please give a very brief description of the ministry. |

Developing and sustaining adult faith formation

Leisa Anslinger



I am the parent of two young adults. Some of their friends are married. A few have children of their own now. Suddenly, some of my friends are grandparents. I watch the change in their perspective with amazement, appreciation, and wonder. I see their expression change when they speak of their grandchild;

I hear the lilt in their voice, and have to admit, I occasionally weary of their stories.

I wonder, was that what it was like for my friends when I talked about my children when they were young? Do I still bore people with stories of my children? The circumstances have changed. The stories are, if anything, longer, as my children's lives have become more complex. As a parent, I still lead with my heart, and hope that my head will follow. Reason gives way to love, and love must be tempered with reason.

PARENTS ARE PEOPLE TOO

I imagine many of you understand and have your own stories to tell. I remind us of this because sometimes it seems we forget when we talk about parents that we are talking about people. Their lives are complicated and messy. They want what is best for their children and their lives, but they do not always know what is best, and struggle to act on what is best even when they do know.

You may have seen an invitation in the NCCL newsletter to participate in and share with others a survey about spiritual needs. (Go to CatholicLifeandFaith.net/spiritual-needs-survey for a full description and survey link.) The survey has been developed to help us learn about the spiritual lives and development of the people who are in our parishes. Some of the questions are multiple choice, some demographic, and a few are open-ended responses about our lives in relationship with God. I recently began reading the responses to a question that asks, "What would help you grow closer to God and others? What do you wish your parish would offer?"

I will offer a more complete synthesis and summary at another time. I think an initial impression will enhance our discussion here in this column about engaging parents, because the responses to this question on the survey seem to indicate that at times we offer what we know people need without taking their life circumstances into account.

ADAPTING TO REALITY

I do not intend for this to sound as harshly as it may be received. This is something to which we must always be atten-

tive. Developing and sustaining responsible and responsive adult faith formation requires listening, adapting, and risking something new in order to meet the needs of people now. So initial impressions on that open-ended question are that we are doing many wonderful things in our parishes.

We offer helpful processes for which some of our parishioners are very grateful. Yet some would like occasional offerings that meet the demands of their lives and responsibilities. A retreat, for example, that does not require an overnight stay; short-term processes to spur reflection and encouragement for growth; offerings for parents at a time when their children are in religious education, or activities for children so that parents can participate and know their children are receiving something as well. These are simple and actionable ideas, shared by people who want to grow closer to Christ and to their parish family.

NEXT ACTIONS

I propose two items for your consideration at this time:

1. Take the Spiritual Needs Survey yourself, and share the link with others. If you are a parish leader, let me know to add your parish name to the list from which respondents may choose. If you are diocesan leader, contact me so we can discuss ways your diocese can participate. I will send you details and will provide you a report that summarizes your parishioners' responses. The survey will be open until June 2014. Consider the survey a national focus group from which we all may learn. New, renewed, or enlivened practices may emerge from what we learn.
2. As you begin to develop your calendar of offerings for adults next year, think about the parents you serve. Remember that they totally, beyond words, love their children. Show them that you appreciate that love. Listen to their needs, hopes, and fears. Your listening may take place in a formal session or in the hallway while they are waiting for their children. Invite the eager and interested ones to help you do something wonderful with and for their peers.

The research on engagement tells us that people need to sense that their leaders care about them as persons. When we listen to parents and enter into their perspective, we show our care, and life-giving, engaging ministry results. We can do no more nor less for them, their children, our communities, and the world. ■

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.

Immersed in Christ

Becky Eldredge



In a previous issue of *Catechetical Leader*, Kristina DeNeve wrote about how we are called to evangelize with the support of our larger Christian community. Whether we are seeking to evangelize within our Catholic communities or with our larger communities, we still must pause on occasion to reflect on our own prayer life and our relationship with Jesus. Conversion and evangelization, after all, begins with ourselves.

IMMERSED IN FAITH

In her book, *Companions of Christ*, Margaret Silf shares a powerful image of an oil lamp that illustrates our prayer lives.¹ The oil wick has two ends; one end is fully immersed in the pool of oil at the bottom of the lamp, and one end is out of the oil and fully immersed in the world. Whether or not the wick will ignite is determined completely by the amount of oil absorbed by the rest of the wick that is immersed.

Our prayer lives and our relationships with Jesus are like these oil lamps. We need to have one end of our wick always immersed and rooted in Christ. As we spend time with Jesus, absorbing all that he offers us, we become filled with Christ's love. As our understanding of who we are in God grows, it begins to seep up and saturate the rest of our lives. It is then that our wick has enough fuel to be ignited and enough fuel to share the light of Christ with others in the world.

Silf's image invites us, as catechetical leaders, to pause and examine our own prayer lives:

1. Do we have one end of our wick immersed in the oil of Christ, or is our wick currently out of the oil?
2. What prayer method helps us keep our wick rooted in the right place?

3. Is the light we are sharing with others fueled by the oil of Christ, or is it light fueled by something else?

BRING THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT INTO THE WORLD

When our lives are rooted in Christ and we are committed to a life of prayer, what we bring into the world are the fruits of this prayer. The fruits of our prayer, which so often echo the fruits of the Spirit, are powerful evangelization tools. Evangelization, at times, involves intentional action and outreach. From my experience, evangelization most often occurs when we live with one end of our wick fully immersed in the oil, rooted in prayer, and rooted in our relationship with Jesus. Then, we can bring the fruits of the Spirit into the world and into the daily interactions at home, at work, at school, and at social events.

Our witness of living and sharing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, goodness, and faithfulness draws people to Christ. Evangelization should be a gentle pointing towards the person in whom we root our lives. Isn't this what John the Baptist did as he prepared the way for the Messiah's coming? He rooted his life in God and pointed towards Jesus. Isn't this what Jesus did? He rooted his life in

his Father and pointed us toward God. What about us? Who or what do our daily lives point toward?

I cannot think of a better example than a young adult man, now a dear friend, whom I met four years ago at our parish. My friend lost his job, and a few months later his wife lost hers. Both remained unemployed for almost a year, and the two of them struggled to support their family, including their two children. While this rocked my friend to the core, I watched a man who turned to prayer and turned fully toward Christ; his wick was fully immersed in the oil of Christ. As he prayed, ideas emerged, his faith deepened, he began to understand the depth of love that God has for him.

I can tell you, he is a changed man. His way of being with Jesus and rooting his life in Jesus affected his "doing." It changed his relationship with his wife, his son, and his daughter. They speak of the change they witnessed, as he

Our witness of living and sharing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, goodness, and faithfulness draws people to Christ. Evangelization should be a gentle pointing towards the person in whom we root our lives.

¹ Silf, M. *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.

grew into a gentler, kinder, man who is easier to be around. The light he brought into his family, the light he shone to his friends, and the light he radiated to our entire church community was the light of Christ. My friend evangelized his family and gently pointed them toward who was causing the change in his life. The transformation that took place drew his family back to church. Now, each member of his family is embarking on their own, unique faith journey with Christ. My friend began living the fruits of his prayer — especially patience, joy, kindness, and peace. The fruit of his prayer drew all of us who witnessed his transformation towards the same source where his light was coming from, namely Christ.

This is the type of evangelization our world needs the most! Our world needs people who have one end of the wick fully immersed in the oil of Christ so that what we bring into our daily lives radiates the light of Christ. ■

Becky Eldredge is the Product Development and Training Coordinator for Charis Ministries. Her passion is to help others create space to connect faith and everyday life through spiritual direction, writing, and retreat ministry.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN ECUMENICAL GATHERINGS

Kristina DeNeve

1. Show up. Any ecumenical event will have Catholics of all stripes and flavors in attendance. If we are not formally and officially present, we risk continued loss of our less active brothers and sisters
2. Develop procedures for responding and reaching out to Catholic youth identified from these events. Parish youth ministers and other teens are well-suited for following up, but they will need special training and specific directives.
3. Use these events to form and evangelize active Catholics in your parish. Many Catholic adults at these events are already active in some way with a parish. They simply don't know how Catholics commit themselves to Christ every day.

Excerpted from "Billy Graham Crusades and Catholic Evangelization," Catechetical Leader, May 2013, 24. ■

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Clean Out the Old Alienation, Bring on the New Evangelization

Claire M. McManus



Most dioceses are working hard to address the exodus from the church that has occurred for the greater part of the last decades. As one priest put it, “We can’t begin the new evangelization until we address the old alienation.”

The new evangelization has been given a shot of adrenaline since the election of Pope Francis, whose style of evangelization is to *be* the gospel. While Pope Francis projects his message of simplicity, mercy, and love, we must prepare to welcome back the people he brings home.

Reaching out to Catholics that no longer occupy our pews requires a multi-faceted strategy that employs media, cyberspace, and warm hearts. There are several organizations that have made it their mission to seek out and welcome back lapsed Catholics.

CATHOLICS COME HOME

Catholics Come Home (catholicscomehome.org) may be familiar to those of you in the 35 dioceses with whom they have partnered. Founder and president, Tom Peterson, has brought his years of experience as a corporate advertising executive to reach out to fallen away Catholics through the media.

The “evangomercials” are aired in television markets that reach directly into the homes of those people who have left our churches. This requires a large financial investment on the part of partner dioceses, most of which is used to buy the most lucrative television air times that have the best chance of hitting the target group. These “evangomercials” are professionally produced and employ multiple strategies to address lapsed Catholics in the audience.

Some commercials remind the viewers of the rich history of pastoral care and education that has been such an important part of our Catholic heritage throughout the world. Other

commercials touch on more personal experiences that may produce a visceral response that leads the viewers to introspection about their lives. The hope is that the commercials will elicit a return to the local parish, or a search of the Catholics Come Home website.

The Catholics Come Home website is busy and filled with information, but the real value of the ministry lies predominantly with the commercials that draw in the visitors. It offers answers to frequently asked questions about church teaching, explains the necessity of the sacraments, and invites a renewed involvement in the Mass.

The presumed path through the Catholics Come Home process is into a parish that is geographically close, and indeed they report some initial rise in Mass attendance after the commercials air. It is the responsibility of the partnering diocese to make sure that parishes are prepared to be welcoming.

ONCE CATHOLIC

The Franciscan Friars of the St. John the Baptist Province in Cincinnati, Ohio, have developed another strategy for reaching out to lapsed Catholics. Their “Once Catholic” website (oncecatholic.org) is a ministry that flows from the Franciscan charism of reconciliation. The website has a very welcoming approach that seeks to get to the heart of the issues that may have driven people away in the first place.

Exploring this website brings a person home through the “front door.” On this page, there is a list of stories that may speak to the individual searching the site. Among these stories are “Marriage Issues,” “Drifted Away,” “Not Fed,” “Quarrel with Staff,”

“Felt Excluded,” “Abortion/Post-Abortion,” “Church Teaching,” and “Other Stories.” A click on one’s story leads to the “Story Room” where the topic is expressed more fully. From there, one enters the “Living Room” where a welcome sign is displayed and the church’s response to the issue is discussed.

*The new evangelization
has been given a shot of adrenaline
since the election of Pope Francis,
whose style of evangelization
is to be the gospel.
While Pope Francis projects
his message of simplicity, mercy,
and love, we must prepare
to welcome back the people
he brings home.*

The next step is an invitation to have more conversation about this issue with others who have the same experience. This is done by way of the “Conversation Corner” which is the heart of the Once Catholic ministry. It is here that the person is given a companion for the journey home.

Once Catholic uses a relational process to help a fallen away Catholic return to the church. Their stories are held sacred and their concerns are addressed with compassion. What is most interesting about the process is that people who seek to return to the church are not sent to the nearest parish, but are asked to explore various programs for returning Catholics in their area so as not to become a lost soul in an unwelcoming parish. They can find such programs on the site’s “Help Room,” stating, “Here you’ll find real people, hopefully close to home. Jesus Christ is a real person, who walked in faith with real people. Those who follow Jesus always find him in community. We want to help you find a place to continue your journey face-to-face.”

LANDINGS

The third component of the strategy to welcome back Catholics is preparing parishes for the homecoming. The Paulists were at the forefront of evangelization, and for more than 25 years have reached out to returning Catholics through their ministry of reconciliation. They have re-launched their “Landings” program for parishes to address the need of securing “a safe harbor,” or “landing place for returning Catholics.” Their website, landingsintl.org, provides resources for parishes, and also has a place for lapsed Catholics to begin their inquiry about the journey back home.

No one strategy alone can lessen or stop the flow of Catholics exiting the doors of the church until we rededicate ourselves to the gospel. The old alienation ends with us. |

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

Reaching out to Catholics that no longer occupy our pews requires a multi-faceted strategy that employs media, cyberspace, and warm hearts.



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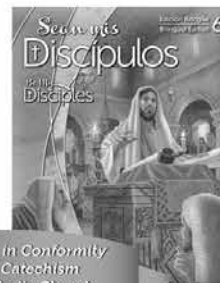
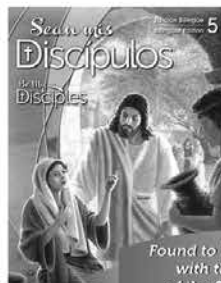
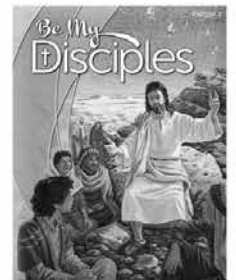
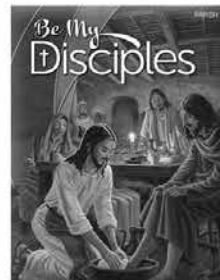
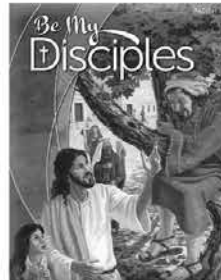
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Dreams to Reality

Diane Kledzik



Have you ever attended a conference and brainstormed how you would put some of what you learned into practice only to quickly dismiss your dreams as thoughts of inadequacy or lack of resources crept in? Here's how Jim Kemna (Jefferson City), Wendy Scherbart (San José), and I (St.

Petersburg) came together with the help of John Roberto, to plan a course of action to put our dreams into reality.

PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

The three of us attended the Diocesan Leaders tract at the 2012 NCCL Conference in San Diego presented by Leisa Anslinger and John Roberto. In the final session, the presenters fielded questions and assisted us in planning for engagement and in creating a faith formation system. Just as I was pondering how I might curate resources in the varied ministries I serve, Jim questioned out loud how he might create a website to better serve parents in the *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* (nfcym.org) initiative in his diocese. As the discussion ensued between Jim and John, my heart was burning within me and I shared that I would be very interested in the same type of curating. Wendy agreed.

As the session progressed and connections were made, the attendees gathered in groups or individually, to work on next steps. Naturally, Jim, Wendy, and I came together, reacquainted ourselves with each other and began suggesting the possibility of creating one shared, curated website. We brainstormed what we would offer, who our audience would be, and how we would choose resources to post. We drew diagrams, took notes, and tried to envision this site. "Do we have enough time, talent, and treasure to take on this kind of project?" we questioned.

CREATING A WEBSITE

John offered to assist us with the architecture of our proposed site and suggested that we look to weebly.com for free website hosting. I volunteered to set up the website and we brainstormed what we would name our site. We decided on *Strong Catholic Family Faith* after researching available suggestions. We exchanged business cards, took our expanded dreams home to our respective dioceses, and planned to further discern our audience, our topics, and our desire to continue with the project.

When I got the website set up and sent the link (www.CatholicFamilyFaith.org) to Wendy and Jim, we first met by conference call. We discussed how to edit the website, who would contribute, and what topics we would address. We continued to discern our intended audience and we knew we had to pin down criteria for appropriate selection of resources before going further. We connected with John again to move us to our next steps.

John invited us to "hangout" on Google+ and with each meeting, technology issues were overcome and the website was populated. We defined our target audience as parish leaders — those engaged in the *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* initiative and those not yet on board. We refined our postings to fit our purpose, "To provide parish leaders with high quality resources to build strong Catholic families." We created the criteria for resource selection which included, "The content and activities reflect and support Catholic values," and "The content and activities are inclusive of a variety of family structures."

A PILOT

Several parish leaders have been piloting our website over the past few months, suggesting particular links or resources from the site to parents to supplement their ongoing faith formation and ministry. We have received feedback concerning ease of use and strength of resources on the site. We have been inspired and affirmed as we hear, "The right website at the right time."

Our team continues to meet on Google+ monthly to assess resources and to address user feedback. We e-mail in-between meetings and look forward to gathering with one another annually at NCCL conferences. The parable of the loaves and fishes (Mk 6:34-44) reminds me that God's generosity is never outdone and thousands can be fed through curated websites when gifts are shared. ■

Diane Kledzik (dmk@dosp.org) serves as the Associate Director of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. She coordinates, trains, and consults parishes, ministries, and individuals in Evangelization, Small Christian Communities, Infant Baptism Ministry, and Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth. Her prior work consists of diocesan and parish youth ministry. Diane holds a Certificate in Advanced Studies in Ministry from the Center for Ministry Development and an MA in Pastoral Ministry from St. Thomas University in Miami, FL.

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

Thank you to Dr. Eileen Daly, Jeanne Schrempf, and Dr. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome for offering the recommended resources that follow.

“Artifact, Christian” (*art/y/fact. Xn*) is an app that is successfully being used with adolescents and adults by integrating art into learning events using two approaches to Christian art, interpretation, and spiritual reflection. Catechetical leaders can script a lesson or encourage learners to use the app themselves. The app does not contain art; instead, it is intended to support the user’s encounter with paintings, sculptures, and stained-glass. It is available for both Apple and Android devices for \$1.99.

Its approach to interpretation offers basic information about over 100 common themes in Christian art — a list of what to look for in works depicting those themes, focusing questions, timelines including significant turning points in Christian art, pointers on the elements that go into art appreciation, and a variety of other articles on art, history, and theology. The app’s approach to spiritual reflection offers a selection of six audio meditations intended to be played while the user is looking at a particular work. The point is for the art to seep into the heart. When we are busy, thinking, scheduling, and planning, we often forget to nourish our souls.

—Eileen M. Daily, JD, PhD, Program Director, Religious Education Programs at Loyola University Chicago, Institute of Pastoral Studies

* * *

The *National Directory for Catechesis* is a foundational work that includes the vision of the *General Directory*, *Vatican II Documents*, and publications from the Vatican and USCCB. It also includes a summary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* — a wealth of

formation in one publication. It contains some of the most profound writing on the relationship between evangelization and catechesis.

In our diocese, *NDC* is required reading for all new catechetical and youth ministry leaders in our program, “Becoming a Minister of Faith Formation.” We partner chapters with the topics being presented and request a written reflection on what they learned and how they would apply it to their own ministry.

The *NDC* can be a ministry primer, an introduction to ecclesial documents, a reference manual, an organizational chart, an evaluation tool, and a profound spiritual guide. It is one of those “favored books,” and is always new because the reader applies his/her own life and ministry to it. It is an incredible gift.

I would also like to highlight *The Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium*. It can be accessed through the website of the New York State National Catholic Conference (nyscatholic.org/).

—Jeanne D. Schrempf, Director of the Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life for the Diocese of Albany.

* * *

In *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Sherry Turkle presents a careful observation of how our sense of relationality is tested, shaped, and challenged by our technological world. Reporting on case studies with robotic technology, she shows how human beings are innately seeking to relate to what seems to be a sentient being. At the same time, communication technologies designed to connect us with one another, she posits, are actually driving us apart; more and more, we prefer texts and e-mails to face-to-face

conversations. As religious educators encounter and engage in this cultural fascination with technology, Turkle’s observations are insightful. Authentic relationship with Christ and church are at the heart of the ministry of the word. This book gives food for thought about how to remain true to this relationality in catechetical ministry.

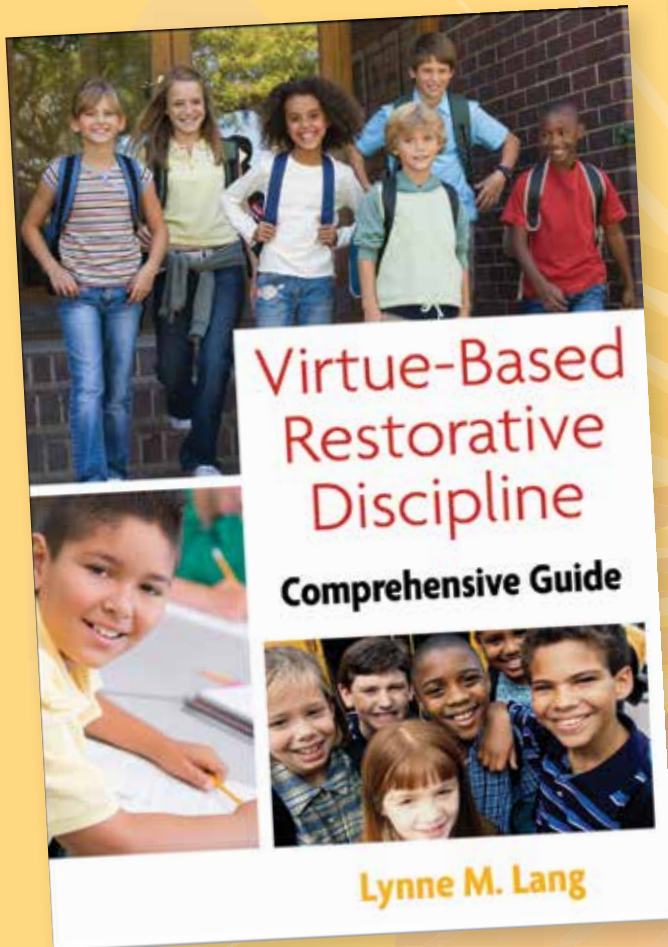
Nicholas Carr approaches the phenomenon of digital culture from the perspective of neuroscience and neuropsychology in *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. His observations are both accessible and convicting. He suggests that as we spend more and more time in front of a screen, this manner of communication is actually reconfiguring our brains to fit this medium. Truly, digital media are no longer a tool but something that has reshaped the way we gather, gain, trust, and contribute to information, and essentially, how we understand knowledge. For religious education, this shift in human thinking is highly relevant. How might catechesis convey the content of faith in a world of shortened attention spans, a networked experience of information, a sense of participation in the flow of information, and a continued fascination by the screen?

—Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, PhD, Assistant Professor of Liturgy, Catechesis and Evangelization and Faculty Coordinator of Distance Learning Systems at Loyola Institute for Ministry, Loyola University New Orleans. ■

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

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