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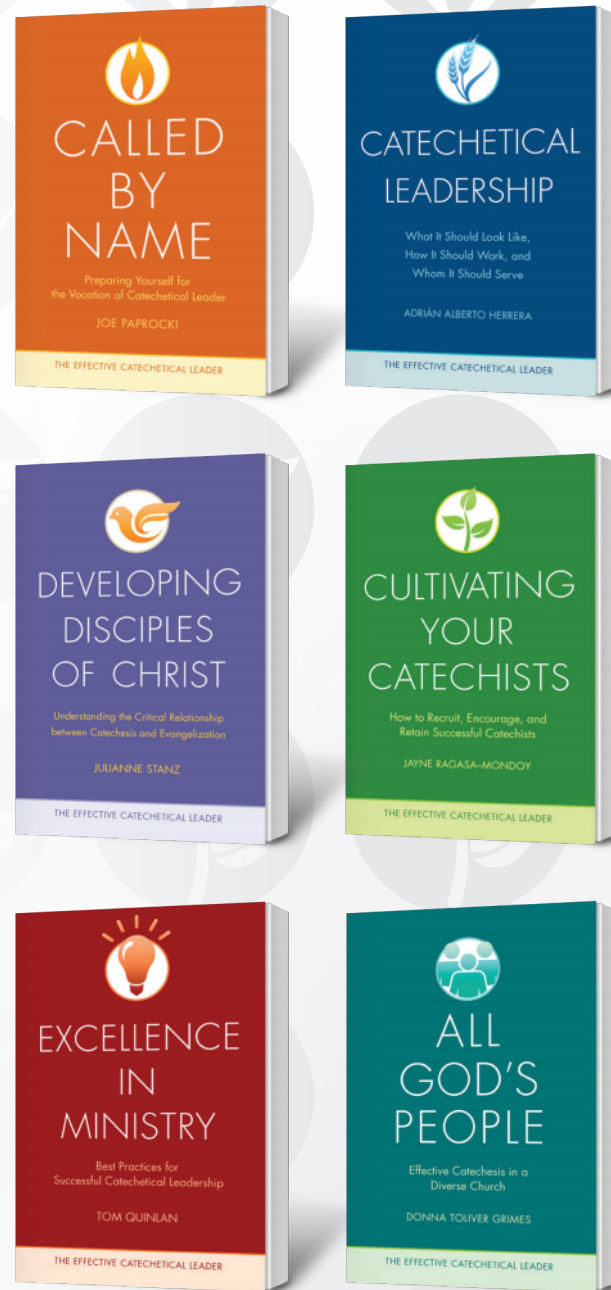
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FEATURES

6 With Fire in Our Hearts: The Journey to an Evangelizing Catechesis	Jo Rotunno
12 No Hablo Español	Noelle Garcia and David McHugh
14 Accountability and Pastoral Care: Leadership in Thorny Situations	Tom Quinlan
18 Engaging Teenagers: Reclaiming the Art of Scavenging	Mike Patin
22 Proclaiming Joy through Social Media	Paul R. Sanfrancesco

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IN EVERY ISSUE

4 From the President <i>Forming a Shared Vision for NCCL</i>	Denise Utter
5 From the Executive Director <i>Thriving through Transitions</i>	Margaret Matijasevic
24 Evangelization <i>Are You Ready to Grow Young?</i>	Leisa Anslinger
26 Catechizing on Campus <i>This Lent, Allow the Liturgies to Breathe Life into Catechesis with College Students</i>	Kyle Turner
28 Fortifying Leaders <i>Let No One Disregard You</i>	Claire M. McManus

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forming a Shared Vision for NCCL

DENISE UTTER

In November, NCCL’s Board of Directors met with the Representative Council and explored the reason we exist and the difference we want to make in the world. We had some energizing dialogue and some difficult conversations. If we had been too attached to ideas, methods, tools, or the way “we’ve always done things,” this might have been painful, but it seems as a church we are coming to the realization that we cannot continue with business as usual.

First, before the sacred work of dialogue, we knew we needed to remember those on whose shoulders we stand. Many have done the work before us, and the accomplishments made in recent years (deliverables, resources, support) needed to be recognized and celebrated.

Our executive director shared the good news that NCCL has made a difference in our ministerial world. The digital outreach of the 21st Century Catholic Evangelization and Strong Catholic Family Faith Formation is significant. As a user of these resources, I am grateful for NCCL’s support. The sites’ analytics suggest the potential digital outreach in three years could be 8.5 million users. Add to that, *Catechetical Leader* magazine, numerous blogs, webinars, and more, and it is clear NCCL has contributed much to the church. Still, there is more work to be done.

New directions

Next, we acknowledged the feelings we carry when we’re moving into new places, new ways of being. In his book *The Land Between*, Jeff Manion says, “I firmly believe that the Land Between — that space where we feel lost or lonely or deeply hurt — is fertile ground for our spiritual transformation.” He continues, “The desert is not intended to be [the Israelites’] final destination but rather a necessary middle space where they will be formed as a people and established in their connection to God.”

In such a time as this, we are being formed as God’s people. We are called to wear many hats, reimagine faith formation, evangelize those in the pews and those who have become disaffiliated. We are called from ... and through ... and to. The problem when we are called *from* is that we often know more about where we’ve been than where we’re going. Can you think of a time when you were called *from* a place, a job, a ministry, or a relationship *to* another? When you first knew you were making that move, when you had to let go, what did you feel?

In our conversation, we acknowledged anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, grief, even pain in those moments. Moving forward requires some “letting go,” requires more strategic *visioning* and less strategic *planning*. Our Global End policy states: “NCCL exists to promote the ministries of catechesis and evangelization within the Church’s teaching mission and to enhance the ministerial effectiveness of its members in their service of leadership to the Catholic Church through the interchange of ideas and mutual support.” What does this look like for you?


Accompanying new leaders

The first time I attended the NCCL convocation, I thought that’s what NCCL was — *just* a spring conference. I didn’t know what the business meeting was, and I sure didn’t think I was meant to attend. I didn’t know what the forum was, or how I might participate. I did not identify the event as our annual membership meeting but, instead, as a conference for professional development and spiritual growth. I was a new parish catechetical leader.

How do we accompany new ministry leaders? The Representative Council identified this and other priorities. We talked about expectations, understanding the changing landscape, taking bold postures in the national scene, partnering and collaborating with other national organizations. We imagined what it might look like to truly be a *member-driven* organization.

This is the work of policy governance. When I prepared to chair my first board meeting in July, I participated in an eight-module course on policy governance (thanks to the stewardship of our members to the Excellence in Governance Fund.) I believe the members of this organization will reap the benefits of this education of the board. We learned about “ownership linkage,” the idea that the members’ values and priorities must drive the work of the organization.

In short, you matter! Your passion for the mission of catechesis and evangelization, your commitment to your particular ministry and to our Catholic Church, should inform everything we do. This is *our work*. It is not the work of the board (though surely, we are accountable to you). It is not the work of the executive director (though surely her goal is to help us attain these goals) — it is *our work*. NCCL’s Representative Council and Board of Directors are working together to make sure members’ needs are known and realized.

Together, *we* are the NCCL. 

Thriving through Transitions

MARGARET MATIJASEVIC

Transformation is often considered an overwhelming invitation — yet it is the crux of our faith. Currently, the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership is going through various transitions of membership, leadership, and identity.

I began my role as executive director during a time of transition. With the sudden loss of my predecessor, Lee Nagel, NCCL went through a time of mourning. After much prayer and discernment, I said yes to the invitation to become NCCL’s next executive director. Since that time, NCCL has made great efforts and accomplished far-reaching effects with its projects these past years from the communally drafted strategic plan, rooted in accompaniment of each other in this shared ministry. The thousands — potentially millions — of people we have reached in our efforts is something for which to take pause; to recognize God’s generosity; and to be thankful. You have produced new life and energy in these efforts.

Growing and changing together

Yet, as is the calling, we are destined for more. This past year has seen strategic conversations, the election of new officers to the Board of Directors, investment in leadership training, and the requirement of taking feedback from members to incorporate change. NCCL is committing itself, through its members, commissioned leadership, and staff, to prioritize and accomplish freshly named commitments that focus on stewardship, professionalism, resources, technology, and the landscape of ministry today.

With a fresh approach to committee structure and work, the potential for what we do together could surpass the reach of the last strategic plan, which calculated a potential 8.5 million persons reached with just one facet of the commitment. In fact, without a doubt, the additional thousand new parish catechetical leader members, the largest increase in NCCL membership in its history, are already demonstrating that this is true. But what is most challenging through any invitation from our Lord is the recognition of our need to respond.

During the fall Representative Council meeting this past November, I was challenged by the discussion. At one point, I said, “I recognize that if these priorities and discussions are to be addressed and accomplished, I have to change. But it is not just me that has to change as your staff, it is each of you ... in your own capacity that needs to change.” What tendencies do

each of us have toward our communal engagement in NCCL, and how can we each change them so that the deep needs of our membership and our shared ministry and vocation can be nurtured? This is not the work of one person, a staff, an organization; this is the work of our vocation, our ministry, our church. We need to change and be accountable to those deep longings that God has instilled within us, so we can better understand God’s working in our lives.


Living into each new moment with grace

During that moment of the Representative Council, I recognized anew the potential of our community of faith. With the current climate of the church, and all that we are struggling to understand and hold, one truth is surfacing consistently: we must commit to change. Not one group of us, not one individual person, but each of us in our own capacity has to take significant strides toward entering into the paschal mystery: to die to one methodology, tendency, habit, or failed system and to enter into complete emptying of the self, what I refer to as *the most challenging pause of Holy Saturday*. This is the component of faith and living that we often want to skip over or rush through, but truthfully, we cannot.

Human development theories have suggested that over various methods, the real work of human growth is being intentionally aware of our actions and recognizing the tension between who we once were and who we are committed to becoming. Our intentional pausing and reflecting during those moments of transition allow us to know the deep mystery of Holy Saturday. We are not what we once thought, what we once clung to. The human spirit, with trust in the Lord, can transition into much fuller and deeper ways of living that give us a deeper gaze upon God’s love for us. We enter new life ... new potential ... new awareness of God’s ways that are beyond our wildest imaginations.

As we enter Lent, consider:

- ✦ What is it that your deepest recesses long for?
- ✦ What changes do you need to make to attend to their nourishment?
- ✦ What preparations must occur for you to respond?
- ✦ How might the world be impacted with your commissioning into new life?

Seek God’s assistance in giving you the strength to live your responses. 

With Fire in Our Hearts: The Journey to an Evangelizing Catechesis

JO ROTUNNO

How different our catechesis is today from what I experienced over 50 years ago in my small-town Catholic school. What I recall are rote prayers and memorization. I still have copies of the three catechisms that were the foundation of my childhood faith formation. Now and then I browse through them, recalling the cadence of the answers I memorized, seeing again the lurid images of a child burning in the fires of hell or the sight of a man in a hospital bed bandaged like Lazarus in the tomb. A caption informed me that his suffering offered him the opportunity to make reparation for the temporal punishment still due for his sins in God's accounting book.

There was nothing fundamentally untrue in my Baltimore catechisms. We still believe that people can venture so far from God's will and into themselves that they will refuse God's offer of eternal happiness. We still believe that we can be purified and united with Christ's sacrifice by accepting our human suffering and offering it to God. But we teach these things so differently today. For those who long to return to the simplicity and certainty of earlier catechism days, read on. There is a better way!

When I was 21, with 16 years of Catholic education as my foundation, I couldn't have defined the words *evangelizing catechesis*. Nothing I'd received as a child or a college student had been named *catechesis*, and if I'd heard the word *evangelize*, I thought it only referred to the work of missionaries bringing the faith to pagans in faraway lands. Today, I embrace an evangelizing catechesis as the only way to inspire and nurture faith. My mission is to set hearts on fire, but it has been a very long journey from my dog-eared catechism to how I catechize today.

From catechism to catechesis

The *catechetical movement*, as it is known, was influenced by the work of groundbreaking educators and psychologists in the late 19th century who had great insights about human development. As the 20th century progressed, religious educators and publishers began to understand that children are not miniature adults but that they grow and evolve in their psychosocial as well as their thinking abilities. Ever so slowly, these insights began to creep into children's textbooks. The "Q and A" approach of the Baltimore Catechism expanded to include end-of-chapter activities that might include such questions as "What can you do, beyond attending Mass, to honor the Lord's day?" or "What are three blessings you could thank God for

today?" We might still ask such questions now. But then, the starting point was still in the doctrinal questions and answers.

The event above all others that brought a sea change to religious instruction was the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. From that council emerged a radically new understanding of God's revelation. The church recovered a biblical understanding of God, who speaks to us in the context of our daily lives. We saw again, in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." This led to a radical rethinking of how we teach the doctrine of the Catholic faith.

In 1968, only three years after the close of the council, Carl Pfeiffer and Janaan Manternach published their groundbreaking religion series, *Life, Love, Joy*. It took the council's theology of revelation and applied it to children's religious education. These books upended the catechism approach by placing the starting point in the child's own life. As Janaan explained it, "If you are going to find God, you will find God in life." Other publishers soon followed with their own fine series, and since that time, program after program has tried to refine and expand this basic approach. More than the era of "balloons and banners," those early days were a time when we acknowledged that all we know and all we teach is grounded in the fundamental insight that we seek God in the only place we can — in the midst of the world God created.

Another major influence on the way we teach today was the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The restoration of the ancient catechumenate — the way people were brought into the Catholic faith — was mandated by Vatican II. Between the first and fourth centuries, as the church expanded, it became harder for people to accept the way of Christianity, and a lengthier process of preparation emerged. Later, with the practice of infant baptism and other factors, the catechumenate declined. The council, seeing its wisdom in light of the pattern of human growth, decided to restore it, and in the 1990s, this mandate began to become a reality.

The council and the RCIA renewed our use of the word *catechesis*. Rooted in an ancient Greek word meaning "to echo or resound," it reminds us, first of all, of the power of Jesus's preaching and ministry, a power that turned hearts so quickly that fishermen would drop their nets on the spot and follow him. It suggests the effect of the words and works of the apos-



There's an axiom spoken often in the catechetical community: "If you don't touch the heart, the head and hands aren't likely to follow."



bles who continued his work, through whom thousands might be converted in a single day, or the charisma of some of the Church Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who once preached to his catechumens these words about the Holy Trinity: "Above all guard for me this great deposit of faith for which I live and fight, which I want to take with me as a companion, and which makes me bear all evils and despise all pleasures: I mean the profession of faith in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. I entrust it to you today" (quoted from his orations to catechumens in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 256). I owe my faith to many great people, but few have spoken as powerfully to me about the Holy Trinity as these words do, and I wonder how many of us have ever managed to speak of the Trinity, the heart of what we believe, with the same passion.

Later influences

Another outgrowth of Vatican II was the development of the "General Catechetical Directory" (1971) and national catechetical directories adapted by local bishops' conferences to address the needs of the people they served. We now have the second generation of these two directories. Both teach that our catechesis is to be inspired by the ancient catechumenate, but what exactly does this mean?

Whether our audience is those preparing for the sacraments of initiation or those in their postbaptismal catechesis, the "General Directory for Catechesis" (1997) offers clear guidance: an awareness

that our work is initiating and inspiring people for their later lives as missionary disciples; that the work of catechesis belongs to the entire welcoming community; that all catechesis must be culturally adapted to the needs of our learners; that catechesis is lifelong; and that it must be centered on the paschal mystery, the source of our salvation (see 91).

The RCIA's great insight is that coming to faith, whether for children or adults, is a gradual process of conversion to Jesus Christ and that Jesus himself should be at the core of catechesis. It's only when we've been touched to our core by his person and message that we'll want to follow his way of life and embrace the 2,000-year tradition that flows from it. It's a bit like falling in love or meeting a person with whom we feel a deep kinship. It's only when we care deeply for them that we want to know more about them — how they think and how they live. Catechesis is rooted in Christ — he is the lens through which we see reality. This brings us squarely to the evangelizing aspect of catechesis.

Evangelizing catechesis

There's an axiom spoken often in the catechetical community: "If you don't touch the heart, the head and hands aren't likely to follow." The gospel message has power and it's the heart of all we do. As a priest said to me once, "In the end, it's all about the simple message of Jesus." Does that mean that doctrine is less important?

Certainly not. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has brought a much-needed clarity to what we teach, and the conformity review process, whereby the United States bishops evaluate and approve curriculum for all ages, has been helpful. The church's doctrinal tradition is one of its treasures, but let's not lose sight of the fact that all our doctrine would be meaningless if it didn't serve to illuminate the great mystery of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

The "National Directory for Catechesis" today speaks of the goal of postbaptismal catechesis in words we should all know by heart: "Catechesis aims to bring about in the believer an ever more mature faith in Jesus Christ, a deeper knowledge and love of his person and message, and a firm commitment to follow him" (19A). These words echo an insight of Pope St. John Paul II, who taught us that evangelization is not only for the nonbeliever, as I thought in my youthful naiveté.

In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, he spoke first of the need to continue the church's mission to those who have not yet heard of Christ, but then he said we also must evangelize those still strong in their faith and those whose faith has become weakened (33). Who are these people? They're people in the pews and people who've left the pews. They're our friends, the parents or spouses of our learners, our own children, our clergy, and those of us who catechize. We catechists and our clergy may stand at the fulcrum, called in a unique way to evangelize, but we too need constant renewal — a "new evangelization."

Three elements

A catechesis that evangelizes has three strong elements: passion, presence, and imagination.

Passion. Jesus lived and proclaimed the kingdom with passion. Saints Peter and Paul went about their mission with a fervor and an urgency that we wish we could have in the same measure. Mary Magdalene had passion when, blessed to be the first to witness the Resurrection, she ran back to announce to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" The disciples who recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread in Emmaus had passion when they raced back to Jerusalem to announce the same good news with their hearts burning within them. The Lord asks no less from ministers of the word today.

Today, many of us lead busy lives that first-century catechists could not imagine, but anyone who wants to have the same effect on their seekers will need to summon the same passion. We can only find it through an ongoing encounter with the word of God, through reflection and prayer, and through an awareness that we can never know enough, that we are only, as Tom Groome has put it, "leading learners." We are messengers from Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit, whom he sent to his church, who speaks through us and empowers our mission. It is only our passion that will grow like-minded disciples.

Sister Anne Marie Mongoven, a leading post-Vatican II religious ed-

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ucator, wrote: “Pentecost fire is what makes us catechists. It warms us, enlightens us, burns us. It leads us to recognize the Mystery in our lives, at least glimpse it occasionally and share it. The only way we as catechists can continue to live and minister is to be on fire and share the fire that is in our hearts” (*The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 282).

Presence. We all know the stories of Jesus, who was so present to people that he knew in the midst of a boisterous crowd that the hem of his garment had been touched by someone, who noticed Zaccheus sitting watching in a tree and invited him down to dine, who took the time to sit and talk with a Samaritan woman, who had time as he was dying to offer forgiveness to a criminal crucified beside him. We all have bad days when we’re impatient, when children clamor for our attention, or when older youth or adults challenge everything we say. Summoning patience and a compassion that allows us to look beneath the moment comes from a constant desire to imitate the one whom we proclaim.

Imagination. I once met a catechist who had found a package of some sort of elastic sticky substance in a toy store. She looked at it for a while and wondered how she could use it with fourth graders. The “sticky stuff” became the impetus for an activity to teach the meaning of being the body of Christ. She cut out arms, legs, hands, feet, and heads from poster board and labeled the body parts appropriately. In the class, she instructed teams to use their wad of sticky stuff to go fishing for a “body part.” Then each team sat and discussed a way they could use that part to build up the body of Christ. When all the parts were affixed to the poster board trunk of a human body, the teams explained their work to one another. She then summarized for them the importance of working together as a body to make Christ present in the world.

An activity like that might seem far-fetched and takes time, but it’s teaching with imagination, and it beats asking students to read aloud from a textbook. Which children will remember what they learned that day when a parent asks what they did in class? We teach the

content, not the page. Catechizing with imagination involves knowing what concept the curriculum tells us to teach, knowing who our learners are, and deciding, as Jesus did with parables, what we can do to engage them in a way that will help them link the concept to their experience. Against that standard, sticky stuff works.

Hearts on fire

Pope Francis is renewing the church with his focus on the gospel. He proclaims the simple message of Jesus with passion because he knows the Lord well. He has a deep concern for the needs of people, especially the poor and marginalized, and he challenges us to hear their cry and to act with compassion. He has imagination, humor, and sheer delight for the gospel. He understands where an evangelizing catechesis must be grounded: “Let me ask you: Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness?” (“Gaudete et Exsultate,” 151).

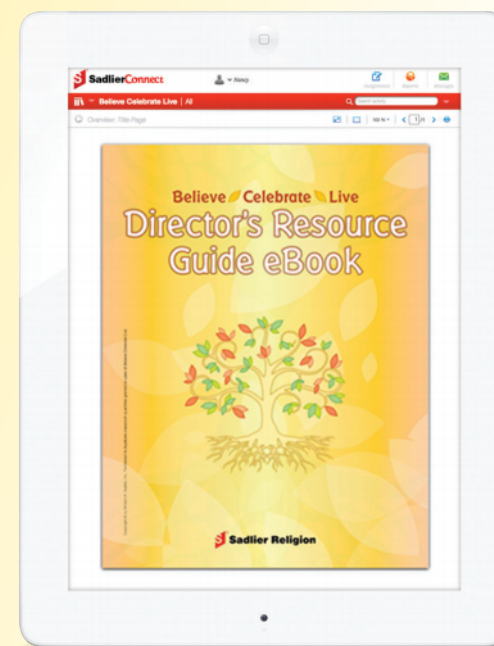
When we can answer that question, we’ll be catechists who evangelize with fire in our hearts. 

Jo Rotunno is a lifetime catechist, trained for her ministry by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. She retired in 2014 as publisher at RCL Benziger after 30 years in religion publishing. For over 20 years, she has been the director of the Echoes of Faith catechist formation project produced by RCL Benziger for NCCL. A native of Kentucky, she lives today in Plano, Texas. Contact her at jorotunno44@gmail.com.

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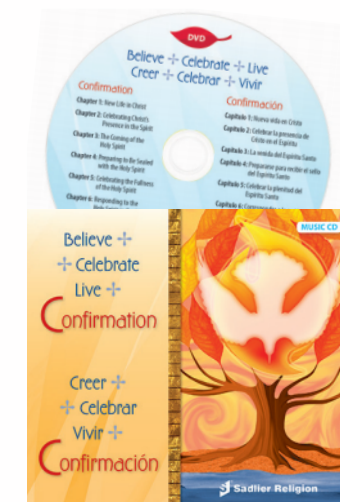
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No Hablo Español

NOELLE GARCIA AND DAVID MCHUGH

When people ask me if I am Mexican, I respond, “No ... I’m a Mexican’t!” It’s okay, though, because I married a Puerto Rican’t! One of the things that is most frustrating for me, with the last name Garcia, is that I am not bilingual. My father speaks Spanish fluently but because of discrimination that he faced in south Texas, he worked very hard to get rid of his accent so that he would not be considered uneducated. He did not want me to have an accent.

The Lord has a way of reminding us of where we come from, however, as about five years ago we felt called to move to Dodge City, Kansas — a bilingual parish in a bilingual town! Even our rusty Spanish has been utilized to its fullest capacity!

We will welcome all

When my husband, David, was hired to work with the youth of the parish, he was hired with the expectation that he would work with the “Anglo” youth group. The Spanish-speaking ministries were flourishing, but the English speakers could not attend because they did not know Spanish. The English-speaking youth group was dying. My husband’s first thought was, “There is no way that I am going to just work with one demographic. If I am the youth minister of the parish, this group will welcome all.”

Sure enough, he has the most diverse ministry in the parish. Kids who live in trailer parks, kids whose families live in mansions, black, white, Mexican, Guatemalan, and more come faithfully. It began with one simple premise — not “all are welcome,” but “all are invited.”

Bringing two (or more) very different cultures together is difficult, not just because of a language barrier but because each culture may fear that coming together means sacrificing who they are and their heritage or compromising their values. We need to acknowledge this fear. We need to acknowledge past wounds experienced from racism or discrimination or even from someone we know who said something hurtful — any of which can lead to a generalization about a group of people. One caution: we need to be careful of tokenism, including cultures, for the sake of seeming diverse, versus genuinely welcoming people to bring their own cultural experience and identity as part of the body of Christ.

Where our love comes from

The theological basis for the things we are about to share can be found in the church’s own documents and even in Scripture: In Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit descended as tongues of fire over the Apostles’ heads, they began speaking

in different languages. The Lord sent his Spirit to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world, and truly it is a miracle that the church did spread throughout the world from 11 men with no social media! In his message to the Galatians, though, St. Paul says there is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, woman or man (3:28). There is the person and love.

Christians were truly revolutionary in breaking down barriers. Our identity first and foremost is that we are children of God. This makes the gospel accessible to everyone. Not just the rich or people who can read — everyone. We encourage you to read the document *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, which says:

The reception of Christ’s message thus gives rise to a culture whose two fundamental components are, in a completely new way, the *person* and *love*. (3)

“It must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture.” (2, quoting “Veritatis Splendor,” 53).

To be one is to be whole

In this brief article, we cannot give the surefire action plan that is guaranteed to work in any place, but we can give you some tips that we found helpful in our own work and ministry: Invite, Invest, and Integrate. Simply saying “All are welcome” is not an invitation. To truly reach out and evangelize one another or grow in understanding and respect of one another, we need to be intentional about inviting. Who are the leaders who have influence within the community who would be willing to have a dialogue about bringing the different communities together? When you invite, is there something that they can contribute? Will they leave feeling not only welcomed but fed? Are you serving each other or simply asking them to show up for the sake of showing up?


Invitation leads to investing. The people that are asked to attend something should also be asked to share their gifts. They should be invited to invest. Once there is investment, there is ownership. Multicultural communities need to understand one another’s struggles and values before they can begin to have productive friendships and relationships with the body of Christ.

Finally, integrate. Integrate means “to make *whole*.” It means that when the body of Christ functions as parts and never together, we are incomplete. Coming together in worship means that we are

making our community *whole*. That said, it is not necessary to split up every part of the Mass or program to have equal representation of language or culture. It is *crucial* to ensure that each culture is able to participate, however. This can be achieved by inviting and encouraging people to pray in their own language. Providing Scripture translations. Allowing the community to sing in their own language — at the same time! The best example of true integration is World Youth Day. Groups from all over the world can be heard praying and singing in their own languages at the same event, side by side, welcoming and inviting each other to participate.

One last note: As ministry professionals we need to be very sensitive to the fact that the biggest threat to culture is family life. All the church documents on multiculturalism emphasize that culture is learned in the family. As we work in ministry, we should consider how we are promoting the family, because they will promote and foster the culture.

* * *

As you discern what the Lord is calling you to do in your parish, look up the images of Our Lady. Mary, when she has appeared around the world, has always appeared as someone in the culture. Christ and his church should invite, invest, and integrate in a way that maintains cultural values, works to heal wounds stemming from discrimination and prejudice, and allows people to pray and worship in the context of their cultural identity. We must always take care to remember the dignity of the person and our call to love them — that will guide our multicultural ministry better than any program or translation software! 

Noelle Garcia is a Catholic recording artist and speaker with World Library Publications and One Voice Media. She has a master’s degree in theological studies from Newman University and travels about twice a month all over the country teaching and sharing the Good News! She currently lives in Dodge City, Kansas, with her husband, David, and their five children.

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Accountability and Pastoral Care: Leadership in Thorny Situations

TOM QUINLAN

Often when a parent complaint reaches a diocesan catechetical office, it is about a parent wanting something that the parish is not permitting. And quite frequently, it revolves around sacramental reception. In the normal course, my wish as a diocesan catechetical director was to hear from all involved parties before trying to come to any kind of assessment of the situation.

My wise former boss and director of the catechetical office in the Archdiocese of Chicago, Carole Eipers, once said to me, “Don’t be drawn into believing the first person that gets to you.” Indeed, I’ve learned time and again that there are not two but three sides to every story. Another lesson I’ve learned over the years is that it is not typical for someone to be 100 percent in the wrong — or for that matter, in the right. Most of the time, there is *nuance* to be parsed.

Every year there were “concerns” from parents who felt their parish was not treating their family fairly. I always tried to take great pains to listen with openness and care for the person on the other end of the line. And regardless of the legitimacy, or lack thereof, in their concern, I thanked them for being a parent desiring Catholic formation for their children and for being a committed Catholic disciple and role model to them. Of course, I was fully aware that this may or may not have been quite the case — but I was hoping to encourage and inspire parents with positivity rather than cynicism.

There is an oft-invoked refrain from ministry folks who fancy themselves as leaning more to the *pastoral* side of a conflict-resolution equation. “You can’t deny the sacrament.” There is truth in that statement, of course. But it is entirely unnuanced and not terribly pertinent.

On the other end of the continuum there are those in ministry who tend to take more of a *definitive* approach when it comes to holding children and parents accountable as they gauge sacramental readiness. In this approach, rules are made to be followed, and exceptions should be doled out grudgingly, when, for example, a student misses more than the allowable number of sessions.

How is your ministry inclined to operate?

Through the years parish catechetical leaders heard me exhort them to be “yes” people in their ministry. By this I meant that our default mode should be an inclination toward the needs and wants of our people — and not generally to be a stumbling block to them. We should resist the temptation to enter into

ministry encounters with a “no” already poised on our lips or in our hearts. However, I also wanted leaders to be able to say no, whenever appropriate, to parents and others. This is *necessary* on occasion and a part of sound leadership.

Parish catechetical leaders should not be afraid, just because a parent complains to their pastor or a diocesan official, that they will be pressured to back down. This would risk putting a formation program on a slippery slope to lost credibility. Short-term expediency at the cost of long-term ministry integrity is never a good trade-off.

My encouragement to all of us in ministry is to say yes whenever possible and no when necessary. But, even in saying no, we should be always seeking to find, in dialog with others, a creative solution — a new and different yes that may not have been obvious at first. Your open-minded, open-hearted pastoral presence with parents (who, remember, view you as “the church”) may win them over to Christ Jesus and Catholic faith, even if just a little bit. (Pope Francis would applaud such a style of leadership. And so would Jesus!) Another way of putting this is to try to find *win-wins* instead of wanting simply to be *right*.

When push comes to shove in difficult situations, here’s a broad, balancing-act principle that should guide the ministry of parish catechetical leaders: *Yes, every person matters (and matters greatly) and we should pastorally extend ourselves in genuine Christian love for our people. But, at the end of the day, we are responsible for the overall good of the program and parish above any particular person or special interest.*

How your ministry can serve the greater good

We never want it to be an either-or choice and should work every facet to untangle such knots. But, should such a dilemma prove irreconcilable, sound leadership precepts require you to serve the *greater good*, using whatever principles and value judgments are appropriate. If granting one or more special exemptions, for example, will likely have a broadly negative impact on a program (folks do talk to one another, after all), the leader is obligated to either resist granting such or be prepared to effectively justify the accommodation.

It takes time and effort to imbue a sense of accountability into a program where there may have been little in the past. To build a culture of accountability over time, there must be a

determination to accomplish this from not only the program leader but also the pastor. (Please be sure your pastor is on board with an effort to ratchet up accountability.) In addition, there must exist clear policies and guidelines, they need to be in sync with diocesan policies, they must be communicated appropriately (and, ideally, referenced multiple times and by multiple means), and they must be consistently applied. Finally, there must be *patience* as account-

ability grows and becomes a perceived value in the program. It can take considerable time to get there, as cultures don’t turn easily.

In the meantime, and even after a culture of accountability has largely been achieved, we are called to remember that the heart of Christ’s law is mercy. Every situation is different, where static policies interface with a unique set of subjective circumstances in-

BUILDING A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY: THE EFFECT IS WORTH THE EFFORT

Every parish should have expectations (a.k.a. requirements) for children and families in a catechetical program. Programs, by definition, have structure and requirements. We should not shrink from this reality. When we don’t acknowledge and uphold program requirements, we are telling parents that our program of forming people in the Good News of Jesus Christ is less important than programs for sports, scouting, band, and other activities that do hold participants and families accountable to standards and expectations.

Just one example of building accountability into a parish program’s culture relates to parent sacrament preparation requirements. Let’s say that a parish requires parents to attend one or more sessions of required parent-specific formation for a sacrament. (This, in our era of new evangelization, should be a no-brainer, occurring in every parish and for all families engaged in preparation for sacramental reception in a parish.) And let’s presume that a certain number of parents do not attend a required session. (Parishes should, by the way, consider offering such a session at least twice, to allow more parents to fulfill this initial requirement. It would be reasonable to require that only one of a child’s parents must attend — while inviting both.) What to do in such a situation?

I have always felt that video-recording such sessions — or having other impactful media resources on hand for showing — was the appropriate way to handle no-show parents. They could be informed of available opportunities to make up the session in person at the parish offices. Before and after showing the formation-session video or other resource, spend a little time with them building relationships and doing some casual, but inten-

tionally evangelizing, faith formation. (Handing parents a DVD or giving them a web link to view a parent session is not an effective way to build accountability or relationships, for obvious reasons.)

The multiple benefits to such an approach include the following:

1. The parish catechetical leader does not need to personally conduct multiple full make-up sessions.
2. All parents will eventually experience the benefit of the provided formation.
3. Importantly, a perception will develop among parents that parish requirements and expectations are to be taken seriously.

I offer this one specific practice not just from the world of theory. It was effective and bore fruit in my ministry as a parish DRE, and I’ve seen parishes successfully implement something of this sort during my time as diocesan catechetical director.

★ ★ ★

Some intentional effort, up front, will pay dividends over time. If the required formation is good and impactful, perhaps even transformative, parents will come to embrace accountability and ultimately experience it as blessing. A positive sign is when they come up after a formation experience and say with sincerity and a smile, “Thanks for having made me come! I needed this!” In that moment, you will know that you’re on the right track, and the hard work of creating a culture of accountability serving the mission of Jesus and the church will feel so worth it!

volving real people. Accountability doesn't rule out special accommodation, but there must be sound, principled reason for it — and circumspection about possible unintended consequences.


If this all seems perfectly confused, perhaps you get the point. What is called for in adjudicating dilemmas and disagreements is ... *wisdom*. Pray for it, regularly. It is a much-needed gift from the Holy Spirit for all in catechetical leadership.

You've not been put in your position to merely make or keep people happy. That is not leadership. You hold a position whose ultimate concern is to help draw people closer to the truth and love of God revealed in Jesus and Catholic faith. Stay close to Christ Jesus and stay open to the Holy Spirit and you should be well positioned to respond to conflictual situations with divine grace (and natural graciousness) and find Spirit-led resolutions that are right and constructive, if not always easy. But be sure that you have sound program guidelines that are clear and well communicated and focused on the evangelizing-catechetical mission of the church, for that will be the ground on which you stand in such challenging moments of what we might call "accommodation discernment."

A final word on accountability. It is not the antithesis of pastoral sensitivity. This is a false dichotomy. To hold another accountable is actually an act of love and care. It is an invitation to the person to grow, to be enriched, to become empowered. It is respectful, both

of persons and of the faith we hold dear. If we, in ministry leadership, believe that the church has something true and beautiful and potentially transformative to offer our people, then we ought not to sell out the catechetical experiences and sacramental reception cheaply and easily. (See sidebar for more on building a culture of accountability.)

No, the church must not *deny* the sacraments. However, it may *delay* sacramental reception when appropriate thresholds of preparation have not been fulfilled or readiness is not clearly demonstrated — for the good of not only the program as a whole but also, indeed, the child and family in question.

Finally, be sure to develop affirmative language — such as "The sacraments deserve ...," "Our parish highly values the place of parents ...," and "We take seriously our responsibility as a parish" — in how we articulate our program policies and sacramental guidelines. Do so proactively and broadly through the catechetical program handbook or sacrament prep enrollment information (requiring parental sign-off). Represent this approach when engaged in dialogue with unhappy parents. This is so much more helpful than responding with a language of insinuation and judgment. 

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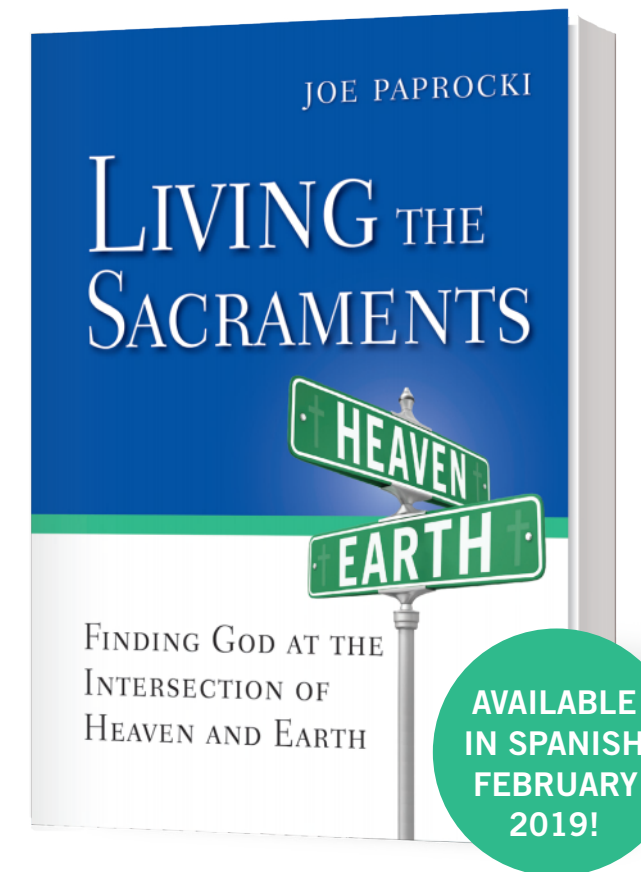
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Engaging Teenagers: Reclaiming the Art of Scavenging

MIKE PATIN

I often get asked how to be effective in engaging teens. I think it's because I've worked with teenagers in a variety of settings for over 30 years. This does not make me an expert; it simply means I've made a ton of mistakes in trying to be a catechist, evangelist, and minister among them. I don't know all of the answers, but I do have some thoughts and will share a few principles for those practitioners and leaders who journey with our young brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let's start with "a message from our sponsor":

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away." (Matthew 13:44-48 NABRE)

This imagery of "scavenging" feels appropriate and powerful when discussing engaging teenagers in faith. Scavenging, to me, implies a patient searching, a journey with hits and misses; but more importantly, it also implies a conviction that there are riches or treasures of great price to be discovered — treasures worth the investments of time, energy, and sacrifice.

A scavenging church

The church (in America) in the last few years seems to be asking questions around this issue of engagement with teens. We know how societal changes, family structures, the digital revolution, the pace of modern life, and shrinking financial and personnel resources in churches all affect our day-to-day efforts in faith sharing. These factors, along with contemporary research about declining church attendance and religious affiliation, have dioceses, parishes, and ministers doing some serious soul-searching.

Books and programs like *The Amazing Parish*, *Divine Renovation*, *Rebuilt*, and *Forming Intentional Disciples* help us to reflect on current practice and to recommit to engaging others in sharing a vibrant faith. This is encouraging to me for two reasons: First, it signifies a more intentional conversation and attitude about outreach, which I believe coincides with

Pope Francis's call to go out into the streets and not be a museum-like church. Second, I am encouraged by the choices of materials because there is no one "miracle cure." If I knew all the secrets and the ins and outs of engaging teenagers, I would be selling it through one of the publishers, lecturing across the United States, and receiving a medal from the pope for being the next great pastoral theologian of the 21st century. If there were one solution, we would be witnessing full churches, missionary disciples on fire, and continued revitalization in the life of the church.

My mistake for 30 years has been believing there is one solution — the holy grail of teen ministry — that I could then share with the world. I sense many leaders have been on the same crusade with me. Give me the map, give me the recipe—step 1, step 2, step 3, and then success. It doesn't exist. That is both disappointing and freeing. Engaging people in the faith is not a seek-and-recover mission; it is a search-and-discover mission. It really is more like a scavenger hunt.

Setting out for a scavenger hunt

Programs are nothing more than opportunities for relationships to happen.

Programs are spaces for companionship, accompaniment, and encounter.

Please reread those two sentences again, slowly. And now, a third time. Post them for catechists and volunteers to read. If we do not firmly believe and reclaim this value each and every time we lead some program, class, or event, we will be distracted from where true evangelization, catechesis, and discipleship can happen.

We must remember the *how* (relationship) comes before the *what* (programming).

With this in mind, I will offer thoughts on two main areas of engagement with teens: relational engagement and programmatic engagement.

Relational engagement: Being interested over interesting

Many ministers and catechists worry that we (yes, we) are not young enough, hip enough, or up-to-date enough with the music, media, and entertainment choices of young people. We

doubt whether we can connect with them. We fear that we as people and our programs are not *interesting* enough to warrant the attention of young people. This fear is one of the greatest contemporary detriments to good and effective ministry. Feeling awkward and reluctant to approach and show our willingness to engage young people is a critical challenge that we must address within ourselves and the other adults with whom we minister.

I propose that our (often unspoken) insecurity about being uninteresting misses the boat completely. As good gospel-based scavengers, we must reclaim the genuine, holy curiosity of being *interested*. Basically, it is not about us; it is about them.

Young people want to know that they warrant our attention. They want to be noticed. A priest friend of mine shared how students on his college campus today are worried about "three main things: academics, relationships, and the future. If faith can fit in after that, then it's OK." The priest spoke of these young people's high level of anxiety and stress. They want someone to notice what they are going through. They are seeking success, popularity, and happiness. The age-old psychological needs of meaning, identity, and belonging remain strong within them. They are scavenging too! Our young people are seeking pearls, treasures, and something worth giving all they have for.

We know and believe that we are called to be interested companions, co-scavengers, and to have Jesus join us on this journey. To be interested, I think we must go back to his question to his disciples on the road to Emmaus, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" (Lk 24:17) We need to show our interest in young people by wanting to know who they are outside of our catechetical and ministerial programs. This means showing a healthy curiosity about their anxieties and relationship struggles. It is important for us to break open the lives of young people like Jesus did.

We are called to show true care and presence in these challenging days of their growth. They need genuine companions and a community of adults who are both interested and supportive while they formulate the questions that their souls are asking. The follow-up document to this year's papal synod (on youth, young adults, and vocational awareness) stated that young people want their concerns and questions about life and the church to be taken seriously. They want conversations and not just platitudes and pat answers.

When Pope Francis talks about the themes of encounter and accompaniment, he is very clear about our need to be genuinely in-

terested in any and all of our brothers and sisters—simply because they are our brothers and sisters. Too many times, many of us are driven with good and sometimes not-so-good motives of wanting to convert young people. While we want their transformation in Christ, we must first be genuinely interested in their lives — both their struggles, worries, and concerns and their gifts, hopes, dreams, and ambitions.

This means a return to investing in relationships with teenagers. It means learning to have conversations that do not always fall within the strict guises of curriculum. It means becoming wonderful conversationalists and walking companions as teens (and their families) struggle. It means making and providing spaces for good, focused conversations to happen.

Now, what to do in those spaces?

Engaging programs: Variety, movement, dialogue

"This is boring." We've all heard this from teens (and, in my case, all too often). What does it mean? While I am not absolutely sure, I think it can mean three things:

1. I don't *understand* what's being offered.
2. I have no *connection* to what is being offered; where does it intersect with my life?
3. I am not significantly *involved*.

How do we combat any of this?

I once heard a Protestant pastor say: "I want to make it as difficult as possible for people to sit there and look at me with a holy stare." Countless books have been written on specific methodologies and program ideas to prevent the "holy stare." I would like to briefly highlight three key values that I believe help express our interest and desire to connect with, communicate understanding to, and more greatly involve our young people.

Variety: The average attention span of a seventh grader is close to seven minutes. Yet we design lectures and programs of 30 to 90 minutes without any change of activity, venue, or methodology. Remember the old variety shows on television (the Smothers Brothers, Carol Burnett, Donnie and Marie, Sonny and Cher)? These shows included diverse segments — audience question and answers, a monologue, a sketch, a musical number. Multiple formats were used

to engage the audience around a specific theme. We need to remember this in designing experiences and programs: variety matters. We should use multiple dynamics: discussions, skits, games, videos, music, activities, crafts, and more.

As a speaker and presenter, I find myself focusing on employing variety in terms of content (story, joke, teaching point, question) and method (movement, dialogue with a neighbor, video clip, demonstrations).

Let me add that *variety* does not mean we are always about incessant noise. We must also weave in experiences of silence, solitude, and prayer, gradually increasing their duration as comfort levels grow with such experiences. “Unplugging” is a taught (and sorely needed) skill that must be a part of our variety.

Movement: We are physical creatures. I have heard it said that

“teenagers are hormones with legs.” They have an energy that must be acknowledged and willingly tapped into. Moving can be anything from changing positions in a room to going to different rooms or sites within a single catechetical experience. It can be a game in which people have to move or a poll question where teens move to a certain corner of a room to express their answer to the question. A fear of losing control has to be replaced by an embrace of involving and directing teen energy. Stagnation is a detriment to any vibrant faith. A good practice is to not stay physically stagnant for too long.

Dialogue: Jesus taught via conversation. He asked amazing questions. He listened for unspoken questions. He filled in blanks, corrected misunderstandings, enhanced incomplete interpretations, and taught “with authority.” I believe his authority came, in part, from his willingness to accompany people who were hungry to be heard — people looking to voice their questions, fears, wounds, and


needs. People listened when Jesus spoke because they experienced, knew, and believed his listening heart. And heart was speaking to heart. Young people need to experience disciples who model this sort of conversational companionship.

Use discussions, polls, and media (video, news, Twitter) to stimulate thought and conversation and to get at what young people worry about and value. Evoking some response and being willing to hear what is often not being said behind spoken words (even anger, doubt, flippancy) opens the door for good conversations about faith.

The joy of the gospel

When Jesus speaks of the person rejoicing over the treasure or pearl they have found, I immediately associate that with what we want young people to realize: that life in Christ is a great treasure. Life

in Christ is worth the effort, the searching and scavenging, and the risk of everything. But we are called to see that seeking out our teen friends is worthy of the same type of scavenging journey — *they* are pearls of great price worth *our* sacrificing much for.

There is no one miracle cure. This scavenger hunt is a journey of continual experiments and surprises. May we be faithful in accompanying teens as Jesus accompanies us all in leading us closer to him and sending us out to others. 

Mike Patin, “the Engagin’ Cajun,” is from Louisiana. He has spent over 30 years serving the church as a high school teacher, coach, diocesan staff person, and youth minister. Since 2003, he has been a full-time “faith horticulturist” — speaking across North America to young people and adults on connecting Catholic faith to everyday living and living life faithfully and joyfully. Contact him at mikepatin@yahoo.com.



Proclaiming Joy through Social Media

PAUL R. SANFRANCESCO

“The church and its members must continue to go out, continue asking what God is calling them to and continue finding new ways to respond,” challenged Pope Francis to youth delegates of national bishops’ conferences in a meeting with them in March 2018. However, such a challenge exists not only for youth and young adults but also for those who work with them. In a constantly changing world, catechists are invited every day to find ways to respond, to proclaim the joy of the gospel, using whatever resources they can find. One of the most significant resources available to them is social media.

Pew Research states that as of August 2017, 67 percent of Americans get some or all of their news from social media. Think about it for yourself. Where do you get most of your information, your questions answered, your topics researched? If social media serves this function for news, information, and research, it also is the vehicle for other forms of communication, including the spiritual. Today, our faith needs to have positive, factual, and creative ways to share teachings and reflect on how the gospel responds to young people’s questions and needs.

Making time for evangelization

As one who has the privilege of traveling throughout the nation speaking in dioceses, parishes, and schools of religious education about how to cultivate a social media presence, a constant concern I hear about is a lack of time. Life is busy and people’s plates are full. One way to address this is to think of social media not as an extra but as an extension of what you currently do for evangelization! (Yes, even those for whom “technology is not my thing.”)

In parishes and schools of religious education, we experience so many times during the day that make us proud to be Catholic, from the simplest kindness such as a child helping another child tie a shoe, to the crowning of Mary during a May Procession, to your bishop coming to your parish to administer the sacrament of confirmation. All of these occurrences are indeed opportunities to share the joy of the gospel. They are evangelization events! Whether directly or indirectly, we need to take advantage of social media to proclaim the works and wonders of our Catholic faith.

Through regular postings on social media, your parish or school of religious education can educate others in Scripture or church teachings, inspire others to live the works of mer-

cy, or invite others to “come and see.” Catechetical formation programs (the RCIA, daily or weekly religious education programs, prayer groups, service opportunities, study groups) are enriched and enhanced via social media. In addition to in-person meetings, social media connects people throughout the day, week, and year. It allows the message or work of a brief time people are together in person to be shared so that others not present can not only learn about it but also find ways to engage in it. Here is an opportunity to include others, from the working parent to the homebound.

Filling an online niche

In particular, schools of religious education need to reimagine the possibilities of instruction for young people. While

always emphasizing the faith community that joins together to worship each weekend, schools of religious education need to look at instruction beyond the classroom through social media. Young people wish to learn, if not firsthand by being there physically, then secondhand by engaging virtually. Social media provides this venue and can bring young Catholics around the world to interact directly with the worldwide church.


Learning about the faith through a single resource such as a published program, if not coupled with direct experience, will seem bland and, quite frankly, outdated to today’s youth. Today’s young church wishes to be engaged with the people and the issues related to faith. We have the resources to offer them these opportunities in our parishes, dioceses, regions, and nations and around the

world. We can create the culture that invites them to this way of experiencing the joy of the gospel.

But truly, it’s changing attitudes that will accomplish this good work. And change is never easy. For most catechists, this change will require a stretch greater than we may be comfortable making. But, what’s the alternative? We need to get our faith life online sooner rather than later. If we have no presence on social media, community members or others may be creating the message for us and without us.

How to get started

Where does one start in a parish or school of religious education? Evangelizers (that’s you and I) need to ask ourselves, “How can we take what we are doing here and now and extend the opportunity to include others not with us?” It may start small with shared recaps, videos, and other postings, but the possibilities will expand. Evangelizers will discover new and different ways to invite, engage, reinforce, and challenge each other to create multiple ways to bring others into the experience. Check around and see what your neighboring parishes and schools are doing, then check in with another diocese, here or somewhere else in the world! We have an entire planet from which we can learn ways to evangelize! (Make a connection with a parish or school bearing the name of your parish or school somewhere else, in either the United States or beyond.)

We must create ways to speak to the faithful and engage them online. It’s not about giving up all our traditional ways of evangelization. Rather, it’s about expanding and enhancing evangelization through social media. As Pope Francis stated in meeting with the 300 youth from around the world, “The Catholic Church needs the enthusiasm, daring and hope of young people so that it can preach the Gospel energetically and respond to the questions men and women raise today.” If we are not using social media in this positive way, we are missing a huge opportunity to reach even more people, especially youth and young adults, in proclaiming the joy of the gospel. 

Paul Sanfrancesco is a national technology consultant for William H. Sadlier, Inc. For over 20 years, he has worked in Catholic, private, and public education, including as director of technology for the 200+ schools of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and in collegiate teaching at Saint Joseph’s University and Neumann University.



Are You Ready to Grow Young?

LEISA ANSLINGER

As a church, we have taken time in the past two years to listen to young people in special ways, to hear their experiences of faith and response to the call to holiness. We have listened to their hopes, frustrations, and questions, and we have heard their desire to share the gospel with their peers. The recent Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, along with the many preparatory gatherings, surveys, and resulting documents, provides a means through which we may be attentive to the experience and needs of young people and to evangelize them.

A thoughtful and thought-provoking study of congregations, including a sampling of Catholic parishes, that are effectively engaging their young people was facilitated at Fuller Youth Institute from 2012 to 2015. Their summary and synthesis is reported in a book called *Growing Young*.^{*} Through an extensive qualitative listening and synthesis process, the study result-

ed in the identification of six core commitments parishes can make in order to evangelize young people. I believe the commitments may provide a helpful framework through which to reflect upon all we are hearing and being asked to consider within the synod process.

Let us briefly walk through the six core commitments. For each, I include a brief description of the commitment and a quotation from the “Instrumentum laboris” for the synod (paragraph numbers are noted) to guide our initial exploration.

1. **Unlock keychain leadership:** Actively involve young people in leadership and take their hopes and dreams into consideration in pastoral planning.

One young man spoke for many others when he replied as

^{*} Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016). See also an introductory video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiFo5BqGCGo>.



YOUTH, A TIME FOR HOLINESS

We believe that “holiness is the most attractive face of the Church” (*On the call to Holiness*, 9) and before we can suggest it to young people, we are called to experience it as witnesses, thus becoming a “likeable” community, as the Acts of the Apostles shows us on various occasions (cf. *On the call to Holiness*, 93). Accompanying young people on the ways of holiness becomes relevant only if we are consistent in the first place. St. Ambrose used to say that “every age is mature for Christ” (*De Virginitate*, 40), then this must also be true for youth! In the holiness of many young people, the Church recognizes God’s grace that is prior to the stories of each individual and accompanies them, as well as the educational value of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, the fruitfulness of shared paths in faith

and love, and the prophetic energy of these “champions”, who often sealed their being disciples of Christ and missionaries of the Gospel with their blood. If it is true, as many young people stated during the Pre-synodal Meeting, that a true testimony is the language that is in highest demand, the life of young saints is the true word of the Church, and the invitation to embrace a holy life is the most necessary call for young people today. A true spiritual dynamism and a fruitful pedagogy of holiness do not disappoint young people’s deepest ambitions: i.e. their need for life, love, expansion, joy, freedom, future and also for mercy and reconciliation. To many, presenting holiness as a horizon of meaning that is accessible to all young people and achievable in our ordinary life is still a great challenge.

Except from the working document for the 2018 synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.

follows to the OLQ [Online Questionnaire for young people by the Synod Secretariat]: “We want to be involved, appreciated, feel co-responsible for what is being done.” (199)

2. **Empathize with today’s young people:** Step into the shoes of young people and build meaningful relationships with them.

As one young man memorably expressed it, “in our contemporary world, time dedicated to listening is never wasted” (OLQ) and the Pre-synodal Meeting showed that listening is the truest and boldest kind of language that young people are vehemently seeking from the Church. (65)

3. **Take Jesus’ message seriously:** While this might seem self-evident, it is crucial that we “welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life” (*Growing Young* summary document).

The same variety [of experiences of spirituality and religiosity] can be seen in the relationship young people have with Jesus Christ. Many consider Him the Savior and the Son of God, and often feel close to Him through Mary, His mother. Others do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, but see Him as a good man and an ethical reference-point. To others, He is a character from the past with no existential relevance, or someone who is very distant from human experience (just as the Church is perceived as being distant). (30)

4. **Fuel a warm community:** Draw young people into the family of faith.

Countless BC [Bishops’ Conferences] state that young people want a “less institutional and more relational” Church, that is able to “welcome people without judging them first”, a “friend-

ly and proximate” Church, an ecclesial community that is like “a family where you feel welcomed, listened to, cherished and integrated.” (68)

5. **Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere:** The congregations in the study that are “growing young” prioritize young people and their families. Those that do not “grow old.”

Several BC note that young people are — and should be considered as — an integral part of the Church and that committing to them is a fundamental dimension of pastoral care. (31)

6. **Be the best neighbors:** “Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally” (*Growing Young* summary document).

Where the Church is seen as an institution that is actively engaged in civil and social promotion, they ask that this prophetic presence might continue with courage and fortitude, despite the climate of violence, oppression and persecution surrounding the life of several Christian communities. Many young people are asking the Church for greater operational pragmatism, touching on various issues: truly siding with the poor, caring about environmental issues, making visible choices of sobriety and transparency, being true and clear but also bold in denouncing evil in a radical way, not only in civil society and the world, but also in the Church herself. (71)

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This Lent, Allow the Liturgies to Breathe Life into Catechesis with College Students

KYLE TURNER

Much of my faith journey has been shaped through liturgical experience. Ever since my high school years, when I became involved in my parish's youth group, the liturgy has been at the center of my faith development. My love of and appreciation for the eucharistic liturgy only intensified during my undergraduate years; I think that a part of me has always intrinsically felt and known that the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed [and] the font from which all her power flows" ("Sacrosanctum Concilium," 10). My work in ministry over the past couple of decades has been as a liturgist and a minister working in faith formation in parishes and now on a college campus. Throughout, liturgical catechesis has been at the forefront of ministering with youth and young adults. As we near this upcoming season of Lent, we are given the chance to once again embark on a 40-day communal retreat as church. Lent provides a bounty of opportunity for liturgical catechesis with college students in order to delve deeper into this great season.

RCIA in the context of community

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults offers rich blessing for all who have the opportunity to enter into the process, and this blessing is not limited solely to catechumens, candidates, and sponsors. The major rites of the RCIA are to be enacted specifically within the context of the community gathered for liturgy. Any campus ministry that has an RCIA process connected with its community can utilize the rites within the process for liturgical catechesis for the entire community. The Rite of Sending, the Penitential Rite, and the Scrutinies (which all occur throughout Lent), as well as each of the other minor rites of the RCIA, all have something to say about what it is that we do and who we are as Catholic Christians.

But how often do we place catechetical effort into exploring these rites for the full community who gathers for liturgy? Certainly the elect catechumens and candidates would explore these experiences in time spent with their sponsors and RCIA team members, but is catechesis on these rites offered for the rest of the community? If RCIA is offered on your college campus, this Lent's journey with those preparing for initiation into the church is particularly primed for the entire church gathered to reflect on and explore its baptismal call (as individuals and as a community). It may take a bit of creativity and certainly some work on the part of those entrusted as campus ministers to make this happen. How might greater catecheti-

cal emphasis on the rites of the RCIA become a reality in your community this Lent?

Exploring the liturgy through catechesis

And if the RCIA process is not a current reality for your college campus, what then? The Sunday liturgies throughout Lent, by their very nature, offer extremely rich content to explore through liturgical catechesis. This year's Lectionary cycle C Gospel readings have much to teach us about Jesus's identity, God's mercy, and how we are called to live our lives. Jesus's temptation in the desert on the First Sunday of Lent offers the gathered faithful the chance to reflect on their own experiences of temptation in life. The transfiguration in Luke's account on the Second Sunday of Lent grants us the opportunity to examine Jesus's manifestation as God's chosen Son. On the Third Sunday, we hear of the parable of the fig tree as a story about penance, a key aspect of our Lenten journey.

Perhaps a catechetical session could be offered exploring the Rite of Penance, coupled with a communal service of reconciliation with the opportunity for individual confession. On the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we encounter the parable of the prodigal son. It is a well-known tale that is rich for unpacking, particularly with college students. One idea for a catechetical exploration of this text is to read through the passage three times, each time emphasizing the point of view of each of the three main characters (the father, the elder son, and the younger son). Themes of jealousy, greed, and unconditional love as aspects of our humanity and how these themes relate to the real-life experiences of college students can all be explored.


The Fifth Sunday of Lent continues the Lenten theme of penitence and couples it with the admonition from Jesus, through his encounter with the woman caught in adultery, that we are not to condemn others. The theme of mercy coming out of

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this particular Sunday could easily be explored with students.

Each of the Sundays of Lent carries us forward as we journey through the desert of our lives. What a tremendous season to connect with college students as they face the real-life experiences of being young adults in the 21st century. Catechesis focused on what we are experiencing in the liturgy is a prime entrée into catechesis and ministering with college students as we head toward Holy Week and entry into the fullness of the paschal mystery during the paschal Triduum. 

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HOW TO INVOLVE THE ASSEMBLY IN THE SCRUTINY RITES

Liturgy planning teams, in an attempt to be sensitive to parishioners who find the RCIA rites disruptive, sometimes respond by shortening or combining the rites. Unfortunately, the result of this kind of pastoral adaptation is to diminish the symbolic power of the rites to do what they are intended to do and diminish the opportunity for assembly participation in the rites.

The solution is not to shrink the rites, thereby rendering them even more meaningless. Rather, we should strive to celebrate these rites to the full, drawing on the best of all our liturgical skill — especially Spirit-filled preaching and soul-stirring music — to bring these rites to life.

Parishes that have been successful in doing this have a better chance of not only increasing the participation of the faithful in the scrutinies but also making these rites a "draw" that parishioners look forward to annually.

It is crucial that we begin to celebrate these rites in a way that causes enthusiastic participation by the assembly. The rites are not magic. The elect won't be strengthened for their journey of purification and enlightenment simply by having the priest say the words that are in the ritual text. The elect also have to be surrounded by the love and prayers of an engaged assembly. If our parishioners realized how crucial their role is to the preparation of the elect for initiation, they would show up for these rites ready to do their part.

Excerpted from "Do your parishioners dread or love the Lenten RCIA rites?"



Let No One Disregard You

CLAIRE MCMANUS

Among the topics in the Effective Catechetical Leader series is the concept of leadership. *Catechetical Leadership*, written by Adrián Alberto Herrera, clearly distinguishes between Christian leadership and what the world expects of a leader. The title of the first chapter sums up Christian leadership in a nutshell: “Put Away the Pedestal: What Leadership in Ministry Looks Like.” This is a great lesson, but I’m not sure it should be directed at the catechetical leader, for few ever get to perch themselves on top of that pedestal.

Challenges to catechetical leadership

One of the blessings of serving at a diocesan level is serving so many faith-filled and competent catechetical leaders. Take “Mary,” for example. She is a veteran of over 35 years, has a master’s degree in education, and was trained in theology during her years in the convent. Her first Communion liturgies were well planned and beautiful. She had no trouble inviting people to serve as catechists, and she trained all of them using whatever was the latest version of *Echoes of Faith*. She organized Liturgy of the Word for Children and made sure there was a special liturgy for each grade level. Last June, when one catechetical year was ending and the next was being planned, she learned that the faith formation program would no longer have special liturgies and the Children’s Liturgy of the Word

was to cease immediately. It didn’t matter how competent this leader was, or how engaging those liturgies were, a new pastor was named and he had the final word.

In another parish in the diocese, a young woman, with her young children in tow, began her ministry as a catechetical leader. “Judy” prepared herself for ministry by getting a master’s in religious education and brought her creativity and innovative approach into the parish. Nearly 20 years later the faith formation in the parish had blossomed into a multigenerational and innovative program that utilized the best practices she had learned at trainings and conferences she had attended through the years. She found ways to enhance the confirmation program, adding more retreat experiences and intentional service opportunities, but June rolled around and with that came the new pastor. Within a year the extra retreats and service immersion experiences were taken away. Attendance was now taken at the family programs, and those who failed to show up were called and chastised.


Weathering change as a DRE

June can be a watershed moment for catechetical leaders, particularly in dioceses where priests retire before the newly ordained have a chance to grow and be mentored. When a new

pastor is assigned, he has the authority to change everything. In his explanation of how authority works in the church, Adrián Herrera sheds light on the challenge that directors of religious education face. While he reminds DREs that authority within the church has a “divine origin entrusted to human heads, hearts, and hands,” the “paper trail” of how authority is handed down is very revealing. Authority comes from God, was given to Jesus, entrusted to the apostles, and then to the bishops as their successors, who hand it to the pastors. “The pastor, in the name of the bishop, is entrusting you, the catechetical leader, with a share in this authority.” The line of authority from Jesus to pastor is encoded in canon law, but the share of authority between the pastor and his catechetical leader is at his discretion.

June pastor changes can also ring in a new vision for the catechetical leader. When “Alice” met with her new pastor for the first time, he asked her to explain everything that was done in the past year. He had come from a nice parish with a competent catechetical leader and was a little nervous about working with a new staff. The new pastor was so pleased to hear that faith formation in his new parish was more than a children’s program. There was so much going on for adults that he began to see possibilities that he never had before. He didn’t rubber-stamp everything Alice wanted to do, but they

had a shared vision of the goals of faith formation. This is the ideal that Herrera presents in his book. Quoting from Robert Greenleaf’s book *Servant Leadership*, Herrera suggests that “if someone is placed in a hierarchical authority, they consider themselves not on pedestals looking over people, but instead as *primus inter pare*, first among equals.”

There will always be examples of egregious abuse of power, but collaborative ministry is an ideal that can be reached by pastors and catechetical leaders. We have one mission in our church, and that is to evangelize. Herrera reminds us that without a well-articulated vision we are in danger of becoming managers of the faith formation program, not leaders. When both pastors and catechetical leaders have a shared vision, they will find that working together is the only path to achieve their goal. The power they both were granted by the Holy Spirit can now be used to get things done. 

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THE SERVANT AS LEADER

While servant leadership is a timeless concept, the phrase “servant leadership” was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in “The Servant as Leader,” an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, Greenleaf said:

“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

“The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest pri-

ority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”

A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid,” servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.

—*Center for Servant Leadership, greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership*



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