



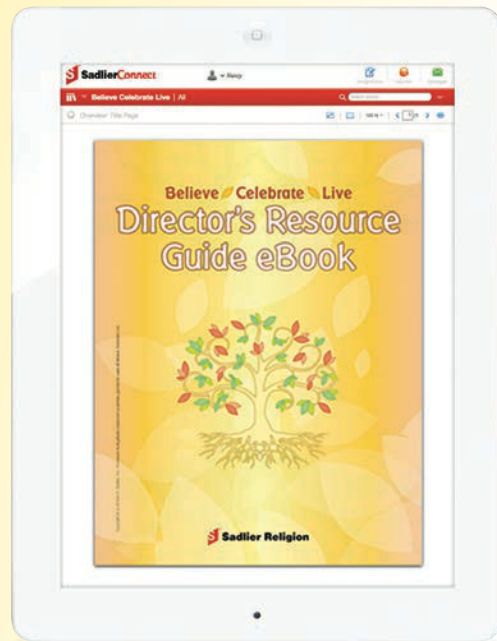
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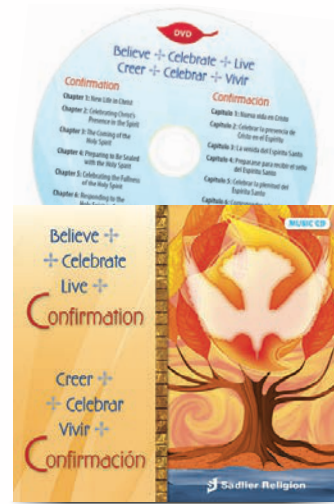
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Is Your Heart Hungry?

DENISE UTTER

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee. —St. Augustine

When I first heard the theme for our annual convocation 2019—Nurturing the Hungry Heart—the above words echoed in my mind. Having been formed by Augustinian priests in the parish where I worshipped for over 13 years and worked for a dozen years, their spirituality has heavily influenced my own. My children’s faith was formed by Augustine as well: they attended the parish grade school and high school; my oldest daughter went to Villanova University; my son had an Augustinian chaplain for his first two years at West Point. It’s like a thread that has woven through the years of our lives.

My boss and mentor those 12 years at St. Jude, Father Don Lewandowski, shared so many lessons that his words, along with the words of St. Augustine, are often part of my inner dialogue. Augustine’s lessons on life, faith, friendship, and more, such as, “The desire of your heart constitutes your prayer,” have become a part of my prayer life. I adopted as my own meditation themes the midwestern (Augustinian) values of truth, unity, and charity.

Preparing our hearts for the annual convocation

So, this year’s theme for the convocation made me pause and reflect on the emblem or seal of the Augustinian Order, which represents the saint’s spirituality: a flaming heart, symbolizing love of God and others, placed in front of the open book that represents Scripture, and an arrow piercing the heart, representing the Spirit of God piercing our hearts, calling us to continued growth in faith, hope, and love.

How hungry is my heart today? Have I allowed the longing of my heart to lead me closer to the nearness of God? Or have I allowed my heart to harden? What are the obstacles to knowing that nearness? To opening my heart?

This year I could say the struggles of our church and its impact on ministry (budget cuts, restructuring staff, hiring freezes) are obstacles. Certainly, I need to also acknowledge that the regular “dangers” of ministry can lead me away from the longings of my heart. As ministers, we prepare for Lent during Advent, look to next year’s calendar/programs/schedules as we walk through Lent or Holy Week, and sometimes see too much “behind the scenes.” Instead of growing in our own spirituali-


ty, in our own faith, we risk the possibility that we might simply “do” spirituality or “do” faith formation. At least, I have to watch for that in my own life.

Strong communities, building bridges

There is a Jewish Hasidic saying, “Carefully observe the way of your heart, then choose that way with all your strength.” I do believe we are in a period that requires discernment for and with the church, and such discernment requires a focus on the heart. Henri Nouwen says, “As discerning people, we sift through our impulses, motives, and options to discover which ones lead us to divine love and compassion for others and for ourselves, and which ones lead us away.” What am I called to today? What is God calling me to turn away from today?

I look forward to this year’s convocation as a kind of pilgrimage for the heart: longing, nurturing, preparing, and sending us forth as a community into our own communities. I believe ours is an important community, a bridge builder. I believe we can make a difference as we walk with one another, supporting each other, winning hearts for Jesus, going out to make disciples who follow Jesus with all their hearts.

This requires dialogue, dialogue that leads us out of ourselves and into intimate relationship (with God and others). In the Gospels, Jesus gives us an example of genuine dialogue again and again. Jesus himself is a bridge builder, between persons, one to another, one to the community; between people and his Father; between this world and the kingdom of God. Our dialogue during the convocation is the one step to becoming better bridge builders ourselves, to learn with and from one another.

I learned most not from those who taught me but from those who talked with me. —St. Augustine 

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Nurturing the Hungry Heart

MARGARET MATIJASEVIC

The 2019 NCCL Convocation committee discerned the theme of Nurturing the Hungry Heart after a lectio process, faith sharing, and reflection surfaced the common experience of hunger. In its history, the NCCL has been a communal support for the ministries of evangelization and catechesis, and this seemed a relentless prompting of the Spirit to encourage us to live into a communal aching and nurturing.

Every year, I am blessed to work alongside inspiring leaders who make a vision come to life with the convocation gathering. This particular year has provided immense moments of grace. When the committee gathered in March last year, there was no way for us to know where the church would be a year later, facing a crisis in leadership and deep hungering in the hearts of leaders throughout the nation. The prayerful posture of the cochairs, Katie Tassinari and Paulette Smith, has provided an opportunity for the NCCL membership to experience nourishment for the deep hunger in our hearts this year.

Preparing ourselves for nourishment

Each person’s hunger must be fulfilled uniquely, and the NCCL convocation has thoughtfully carved out a process to allow for such intimacy. From a day of prayer to an invitation to experience the face of Jesus Christ, we will be immersed in dialogue and discernment to be commissioned anew. The cochairs themselves have already practiced the prayer and discernment opportunities that the NCCL community will experience.

Paulette Smith reflects on her experience: “My desire to grow ever more deeply in relationship with Christ requires an attentiveness and openness to the spirit of God revealed to me in new ways each day. I am often distracted, though, by my long and unrealistic to-do list, the challenges and sometimes frustrations of daily living. Not to mention the plan for my life that I have laid out! It was within the context of this seemingly busy life that an invitation was extended to cochair the NCCL Convocation. Was it part of my plan? No, it was not. However, I was able to open my heart to the Spirit speaking through others and to voice my Yes to the journey. And, I’m delighted and grateful I did.

“The work of the committee has been sacred work and a source of joy and inspiration. It was in honest and open sharing and listening, one to the other, that allowed the naming of the challenges, the hurt and discouragement of our church, that we the


body of Christ find ourselves in. It was in the naming of these hurts that we were able recognize that we have a deep longing for healing and a need to care for and nurture the hurts that lie in our deepest and collective selves. We also recognized a need for action: a call to be solution builders, bridge builders, and to be part of a dialogue to discover new ways to be church together, ever grounded in the person of Jesus and attentively listening to the urgings of the Spirit.”

Discerning the work of the Holy Spirit

Katie Tassinari said, “It has been my joy to be part of forming a convocation team of passionate diocesan and parish leaders in evangelization and catechetical ministries from across the country. As we came together, we felt the Holy Spirit nudging us with a convocation theme that challenges and leads us. We could not have known that the summer we were heading into would be so painful for our people. As we grappled with the news and wondered how the convocation could become a place of healing and new direction within in our church, we were able to step back and realize the Holy Spirit had already done that work.

“Our 2019 Convocation theme is ‘Nurturing the Hungry Heart: Longing, Nurturing, Preparing and Commissioned.’ The Spirit has led us in a direction where we can come together as church with our individual and communal longing, our need for healing and nurturing, and then move forward in new directions. It will be a new Pentecost for the church with our day of preparing, where we invite bishops and priests to join us in the conversation, and our day of commissioning, when we are sent back to our homes and parishes to live out the mission with a new fervor. Our prayer is that we no longer allow business as usual to prevail and that we will be sent forth on fire to nurture the hungry heart.”

★ ★ ★

This membership gathering will move us toward discovery together. We will each be called, with our unique discernments, to bravely say yes as a group to our renewed commission. 

Unity in Diversity: Ministering in an Intercultural Parish

KATELY JAVIER

The disciples were gathered in the upper room waiting for the Lord's promise, when suddenly they heard a sound from heaven that filled their home like a violent wind. As tongues of fire descended upon their heads, the Holy Spirit rested on the apostles. Prompted by the Spirit they each began crying out in different languages. From outside the room, peoples from distinct nations—"Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:1-13 NABRE)—all heard proclaimed the wonders of the Lord in their native tongues. In loud cries heard from outside the upper room, the apostles began their mission of proclaiming to the nations that Jesus Christ is Lord on the feast of Pentecost.

The profound Pentecost encounter highlights a diversity of peoples united in harmony by the Holy Spirit. This moment of unity is the birthplace of our church and the beginnings of its mission. Today, as we strive to further the mission of the apostles, we must ask ourselves frankly: Does our church resemble the spirit of Pentecost? Do our parishes make possible unity in the Lord that celebrates the diverse realities and cultures of God's people?

As disciples of Christ, each of us is called to work toward unity in diversity in our parish communities. This authentic unity is made possible through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit *and* the deliberate openness of each parishioner to the encounter and integration of all peoples into the fabric of our ecclesial communities.

Diversity in American Catholicism

Across the nation, our church has experienced a paradigm change in the cultural makeup of each parish community. More and more, parishes are becoming increasingly multicultural as immigrants from all parts of the world find their home in previously predominately European-American neighborhoods. This paradigm change has been the cause of contention for those serving in ministry. Too often, failed attempts at incorporating incoming cultures into the preestablished culture of a local community has caused leaders to grow frustrated and resistant to efforts of integration. The magnitude of this "issue" of diversity has led some to dream of the "good old days"—of

the days when parishes were divided by ethnicity and those of immigrant backgrounds would congregate in parishes of their own cultural makeup. Considering the implications of this line of thinking, though, one may come to notice that a reversion to past models of segregated parishes is in fact contrary to the image of church God intended for his people.

As depicted in the scene of the apostles at Pentecost, one of the effects brought about by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the unity of God's multicultural people. In looking at the many faces and languages embraced by the Spirit, one sees that God's intent for the church is not division, but unity in him. The unity in diversity shown at Pentecost teaches us that multicultural communities are not problems to be solved but rather the reality of church our communities should strive to reflect. Following the example of the apostles, we must first see and then embrace cultural integration as an opportunity to grow in the unity that comes from Christ himself. In striving to respond to God's call for unity among his multicultural people, we must equip ourselves with the necessary tools to effectively minister to peoples of different cultures.

Understanding culture

The foundation of our work as interculturally competent ministers begins with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the concept of culture itself. Though the word "culture" has an array of different definitions, with few fully grasping its scope, there are universally identifiable dimensions to culture that all ministers should recognize. As outlined by the USCCB's Intercultural Competencies Module 2, cultures have three identifiable dimensions: ideas, behaviors, and materials. (The five intercultural competency modules are available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/intercultural-competencies/index.cfm>).

When encountering different cultures, one will find that each group has different philosophies, or ideas, which govern the community's unified way of viewing and interpreting the world. Within each culture, these ideas inform the group's particular belief system, its moral code, its shared language, and its way of interpreting God, each other, and others. As one might expect, knowledge of a culture's shared ideology requires consideration of the history of a people's country of origin and the prevailing theories of that native land. Through the understanding of the





ideas that have formed a culture, one is able to better appreciate and respond to the thinking of those we encounter.

Rooted in the respective ideologies of each culture are specific guidelines for the appropriate or inappropriate behaviors of a people. Within each culture, there are detailed understandings of ways in which members are supposed to behave themselves in different settings. These understandings for appropriate or inappropriate behavior vary across cultures depending on each group's views on family, community, and society. These rules of behavior can also vary in form and meaning. Pastoral ministers must be cautious of the fact that the kinds of behaviors that are "normal," or acceptable, in one group may be highly offensive in another, and vice versa. One must practice prudence in the way one interacts in the encounter of a new culture, always asking, in a spirit of humble encounter, for the clarification of behavioral norms before proceeding as within one's own culture.

Beyond the ideological and behavioral dimensions of a people, each culture expresses themselves through a variety of material things. Within each culture, different materials reflect the communities' shared values, beliefs, and ways of living. Embedded in each culture's foods, artwork, traditional garments, and home essentials are the resemblance of that culture's conceptual understandings of themselves and the world around them. In engaging with the mate-

rial dimension of a culture, one must hold great respect toward the items considered culturally relevant. These items, though they may seem unimportant in our American context, hold significant meaning to the culture it identifies. Particularly when encountering our immigrant brothers and sisters, these items may be the only tangible pieces of their native homeland. Cultural items are cherished; they are parts of a person's identity and cultural heritage.

In looking at these varying dimensions of culture, one can begin to understand the complexity of its definition. Culture is in this sense like an iceberg—it has an array of different components that make up its whole. On the surface, one can easily identify some cultural traits (behaviors or material things), but the elements of a culture that fully grasp the depth and breadth of a community exist in what lies hidden beneath the surface. To begin effectively engaging in ministry that integrates a variety of cultures, we must move from appreciating a culture's surface values to holistically embracing the cultural iceberg.

Assimilation vs. Integration

As we engage with cultures that differ from our own, we must be aware of the distinction between ministry of assimilation and ministry of integration. In the past, we have too often settled for assimilation where the spirit of Pentecost calls us to integration.

According to the US Catholic bishops' *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry*, "Integration is not to be confused with assimilation. Through the policy of assimilation, new immigrants are forced to give up their language, culture, values, and traditions" (4). In essence, the process of assimilating incoming cultural groups into the dominant culture within the parish belittles the group's cultural identity. Working toward greater assimilation of cultures does not advance the mission of unity in diversity but stifles it as one community is forced to give up their identity for the sake of fitting within the dominant cultural group. In many cases, immigrant communities, or minority groups, are marginalized by attempts of assimilation and may leave the church as a result.

By contrast, the goal of intercultural ministry is the greater integration of all cultures into the fabric of the parish. The US bishops continued, "By integration we mean that all [cultural and ethnic communities] are to be welcomed to our church institutions at all levels. They are to be served in their language when possible, and their cultural values and religious traditions are to be respected." This understanding of integration calls for a spirit of welcome that sees those of a different culture not as an "other" but as brothers and sisters in Christ integral to the whole Christian community. Through integration, our church grows in unity and experiences in a new way the multifaceted reality of the rich diversity that makes up the body of Christ. Ultimately, the integration of diverse cultures—each proclaiming the name of the Lord in the language, expressions, and

customs of their native peoples—is the embodiment of the feast of Pentecost and reflects the richness of the church.

Five principles for integration

Inspired by the example of the apostles at Pentecost, we must work toward the effective integration of all cultures into our parish communities. This work of integration is a process, one that calls for the deliberate openness of each to the encounter of all. The process should begin through a shared understanding of the five key principles for ecclesial integration outlined in the USCCB's Intercultural Competencies Module 5. Following each principle are recommendations for the effective implementation of the process across parish communities.

1. ARTICULATE A VISION OF MINISTRY BASED ON ECCLESIAL INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION.

The first step in the process toward integration is the articulation and adoption of a unified vision of integration among the different ministerial leaders in the parish. As a part of the articulation of the vision, all in ministerial leadership should be able to identify the different cultures in the parish and learn the cultural nuances of these communities. In developing methods for the inclusion of these cultures, the pastoral team should develop standards for parish programs that are mindful of the specific needs and realities of the varied cultural groups. The articulation of this vision, and the creation

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of culturally sensitive standards for parish events, will ensure that all on the pastoral team have a clear understanding of the goals of integration and shared steps for implementation.

2. FOSTER THE INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL IN ALL CULTURES.

The embodiment of the vision for integration is contingent upon our understanding the particular elements of our own culture and those of other cultures in our parish communities. Following the example of Jesus, we must share faith using language, materials, and images that the whole community can relate to. Using modes of expression that are familiar and that embrace every culture is a skill that must be developed through study and encounter; space for experiences of encounter among people of different cultures should be made available to parish leaders and parishioners alike. These encounters should strive to create a spirit of shared learning and appreciation among all as the parish begins to grow in unity and communion.

3. PLAN WITH THE PEOPLE, NOT FOR THE PEOPLE.

As the parish grows in a spirit of encounter and integration, it must also must shift its understanding of parish programming from a model of ministering *to* cultures to ministering *with* peoples of different cultures. The programming of parish events or initiatives should incorporate—from the onset—members of the varied cultural communities. As a united body, all members should listen to each other’s nuanced perspective and actively participate in the development and execution of parish functions. This collaborative spirit allows for a greater representation of the communities in the life of the parish while infusing each event with the beautiful richness of the diverse peoples in the community.

4. BROADEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF MINISTRY GROUPS, PROGRAMS, AND STRUCTURES, AND CAST A BIGGER NET.


The integration of distinct cultures into the life of the parish should not assume common ministerial needs or objectives. The varying experiences of a particular culture may call for a specific form of

ministry that may not be necessary for other groups. Differences in ministerial needs and experiences should not be a cause for concern. These differences are reflections of the reality of God’s diverse people and are important elements of a culture’s identity. Ministers should be attentive to the needs expressed by each culture and respond in a culturally sensitive manner.

5. EMPOWER PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES AND ETHNICITIES INTO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.

The involvement and formation of leaders from varying cultural groups in the ministerial roles of a parish is crucial to answering the church’s call for unity. True unity in diversity implies a shared responsibility for the mission of integration among all represented cultures. As new cultures are integrated into the community, invite each culture to foster and identify leaders that are able to represent their cultural reality to the larger pastoral team. The inclusion of these new and culturally representative leaders will enrich the vision of integration and inspire further unity across the whole community.

Remain open to the Spirit *and* the encounter

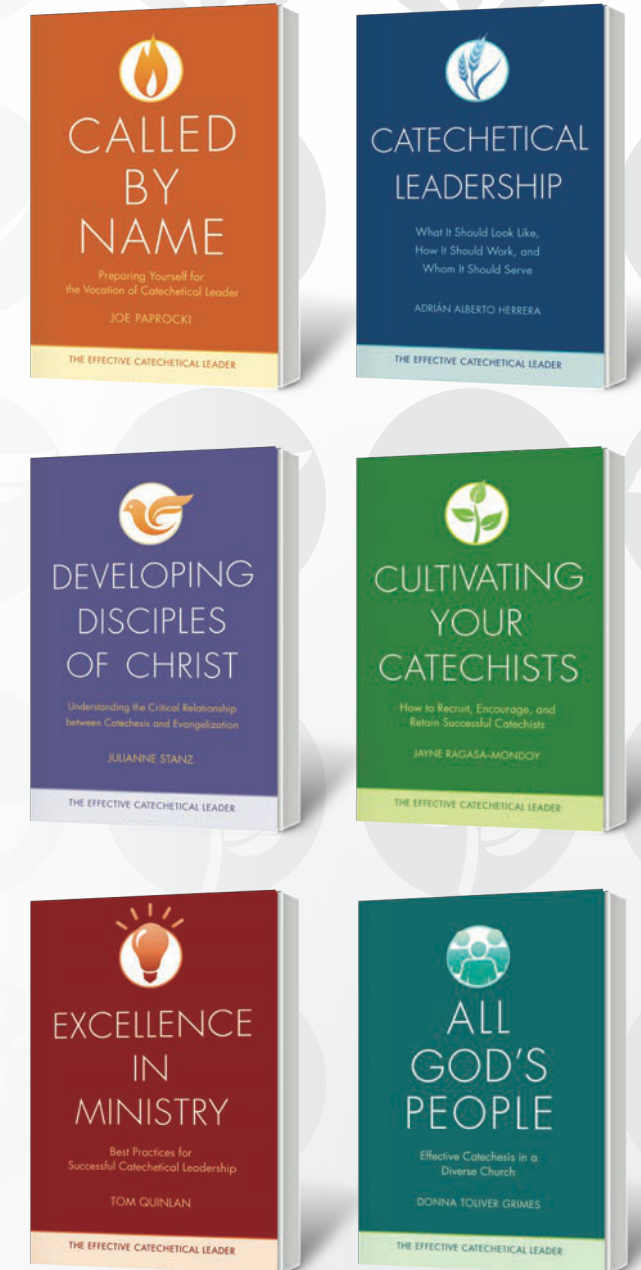
On the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit moved the apostles to go out to encounter God’s people and share the good news of Christ with all. That same Spirit moves us to encounter our brothers and sisters of different cultures in our parish communities and beyond. Open always to the power of the Spirit, we must remain committed to the mission of encounter and work toward the integration of all cultures into the life of the church. Remaining open and committed to all our brothers and sisters, our church will come to reflect ever more perfectly the image of Christ’s people—a diverse, unified body of Christ. 

Kately Javier is the coordinator for adult formation and Hispanic catechesis for the Archdiocese of Washington. She holds a bachelor of arts degree with double majors in political science and theology and religious studies from the Catholic University of America. Contact her at javierk@adw.org.

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... our church will come to reflect ever more perfectly the image of Christ’s people—a diverse, unified body of Christ.

Reaching the “Nones” as Missionary Tacticians

NICK MAYRAND

For at least a decade now, reports of rising numbers of “nones” have been swirling, especially in reference to everyone’s favorite target: my very own brunching, protesting, debt-ridden millennial generation. During that same time period, parish leaders inspired to en flesh the vision articulated in recent church documents have been hard at work finding ways to foster communities of missionary disciples. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that calls to evangelize the nones have proliferated in Catholic circles as of late. Thanks in large part to the persistence of polling agencies and a relentless barrage of secondary think-pieces confidently wielding polling data to explain what’s gone wrong (or right, depending on one’s starting point), it seems we can now point to an extraordinarily convenient “other” living in our own backyards toward whom we can direct our evangelization efforts.

If we take the long view, the growing awareness of this new mission field for those interested in taking up evangelical modes of being Catholic—modes whose existence still puzzle the many Catholics who grew up associating evangelization with other forms of Christianity—can be seen as an important step in the right direction. Most of us have come to the realization that the days of relying on thick Catholic subcultures to pass on the faith to new generations are largely over; this reality means that we’re now forced to confront some of the same challenges with which our brothers and sisters in other Christian denominations have been grappling for far longer.

For example, shorn of the thick family connections to neighborhood parishes characteristic of US Catholicism in previous generations, people in their 20s and 30s today often find themselves feeling the need to decide what faith community, if any, they will join. And, as we hear over and over from the pollsters, the Catholic Church is struggling to attract and keep these folks in an era of increasingly fluid religious identities.¹ Even prior to the recent scandals, it had become abundantly clear that the Catholic Church in the United States has arrived squarely in what one of my mentors, US Catholic historian William Portier, has referred to as “evangelize or die” time.

Evangelize or die. When we really stop to think about it, it’s nothing new for the church; in fact, I can conceive of few better phrases for describing the church of the first couple of centuries AD. It is, however, still relatively new for Catholics in the United States. As we forge ahead in this fresh, challenging reality, therefore, we also need to be willing to name dynamics

that threaten to derail our well-intentioned evangelization efforts from the start.

If we want to discern the best ways to reach the young folks at the fringes of our faith communities, we must also talk about what we should not do. The rest of this essay moves back and forth between warnings about possible stumbling blocks and positive proposals for serving as gospel witnesses in the midst of the millennial nones.

Dead End #1: My millennial none is every millennial none, and they want nothing to do with Catholicism.

Until recently, the vast majority of Americans had never heard of the nones. Any effort to talk about the nones used to necessitate a cheesy joke about habits or an awkward spelling exercise (“It’s *n-o-n-e-s*, nones!”) to distinguish the nones from their homophone—a lesson I learned the hard way after a group of bewildered undergraduates left my class wondering how on earth pollsters could possibly be finding 35 percent of millennials to be nuns and questioning the sanity of religious leaders concerned about evangelizing women, who seemed just a bit interested in God already!

Within the past year or so, however, references to the nones have become increasingly common. The category carries a certain commonsense appeal for the many people involved in parish ministry struggling to figure out the millennial generation (not to mention the baffling generations following behind it). The nones category seems to allow us to gather together into one bloc the young people in our lives who seem unwilling to commit to our faith communities.

This powerful sorting move is simultaneously frightening and comforting: comforting because discovery of this bloc’s broader existence suggests that it’s not just a problem with one’s particular parish or, more painfully, with one’s specific parenting choices; frightening because one increasingly feels as though we’re surrounded by an ever-growing mob of nones who seem to care little about our cherished faith traditions.

When conceived along these lines, fear of the nones can lead us straight into the arms of purveyors of narratives proclaiming the belated arrival of a European-style secularism to America’s shores. Some of them praise the nones for finally sloughing off the shackles of religion, taking delight in the apparent





triumph of science and reason. Others vilify the millennial nones for putting the nail in God’s coffin in America, advocating for a bunker-style Catholic faith as the only possible response in the face of this marauding nones army.

Alternative Route #1: View fluid religious belonging as an opportunity.

Thankfully, serious scholarship shows us that the picture of the nones outlined in the previous section is deeply flawed. Ever since the nones were first mentioned in the pages of a social science journal in 1968, scholars have highlighted the surprising variety of people who check the none box in response to survey questions about religious preference or affiliation.

Far from forming a united front of atheists hellbent on driving God out of our world, the nones’ ranks are remarkably diverse. They include, for example, folks who check the “none” box on the survey because they cannot choose between the two religious communities to which they belong, individuals who are 100 percent convinced that God exists but less convinced by the specific Christian church that they used to call home, and people who grew up in homes that did not practice any particular religious tradition but who are not closed off to doing so in the future.²

As parish leaders, it’s vital that we recognize that one of the defining characteristics of the nones group is its fluidity. Robert Putnam’s team of researchers found clear evidence of this in a panel study—a study that follows the same people over a period of time instead of taking a snapshot of a singular moment—with which every parish leader should be familiar. The study found that roughly 30 percent

of the people who identified as nones on the initial study indicated affiliation with a particular religious group just one year later.

However, the overall percentage of nones remained the same over that same stretch of time. How could this be so? A comparable percentage of those who affiliated with a particular religious group in the first study shifted to the nones category in year two!³

In other words, Putnam’s study shows us that beneath the surface of the snapshot polls we see on our Twitter feeds, a remarkable fluidity is at work, with people wandering into and out of religious commitments at surprising rates. Our task, therefore, is to do what we can to be ready in the moments when that fluidity offers us a gift. When that none wanders into our parish fish fry, are we doing our best to sweep them into the life of the parish, or are we passing up the only chance we might get with that person because we’d prefer the easy conversations with lifelong friends to what could very well be an awkward swing-and-miss with the new face in the room?

Dead End #2: Beware the strategic mode of evangelizing the nones.

Church historians and theologians often make the point that something monumental happened when Constantine legalized the practice of the Christian faith and grafted it into the workings of an empire. For the first few centuries of the church’s existence, Christians had endured periods of persecution and were largely forced to live out the gospel within structures beyond their control.

Priest-philosopher Michel de Certeau has described this sort of powerless existence as one marked by the exercise of *tactics*—calculated actions performed within spaces determined and organized by

external powers. But once Christians assumed positions of temporal power within empires, they were able to shift from that tactical mode into a deployment of *strategies*—actions that emanate from one’s position of power with the intention of influencing and managing those “out there” (for their own good, of course).⁴

In our current context, it’s becoming increasingly clear that our church’s *strategic* days are largely behind us in the US. The last vestiges of whatever “power” we may possess are dissipating in scandal during our church’s long summer (and fall, and winter) from hell. We no longer have the luxury of standing outside the fray as master strategists who can send out scouts, draw up battle plans, and carry out sweeping programs. We’re increasingly thrown back into the tactical mode characteristic of the early generations of Christians, scratching out our existence in the midst of forces that seem far beyond our control.

We must be very wary, therefore, of the allure of *strategic* modes of reaching the millennial nones. The more time we spend safely huddled in parish offices creating strategic programs for bringing young people into the fold, the less time we’re spending in the company of these young people, listening to their specific hang-ups, interests, and needs as we witness to Christ in the ways we accompany them. The more well-intentioned parish surveys we conduct and obsess over, the more we trick ourselves into thinking that we can strategize our way out of the gritty, tactical evangelizing work that our current context requires.

Alternative Route #2: Practice the art of the weak.

De Certeau calls tactics the “art of the weak.” They’re actions that we carry out “in enemy territory” without the benefit of a view from

above that would allow us to see the “adversary as a whole within a distinct, visible, and objectifiable space.” The tactician does not get to stay in one safe place “in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection” but is constantly out searching for the momentary cracks that form in the structures that usually work against the tactician’s own goals. In the end, the “space of a tactic is the space of the other.”

I suspect that the previous section’s warnings about parish surveys and strategic programs may be music to the ears of many parish leaders who have long questioned their effectiveness; however, most will feel some hesitancy about this proposed shift to practicing the “art of the weak,” for weakness is not something we normally strive to embrace in the US today.

Operating in this mode can be especially difficult when we’re convinced that we have the truth, that we have something (or, more accurately, someone) to share that others want in the depths of their being. Why must we constantly humble ourselves for those who are repeatedly missing the boat? (Of course, for those steeped in the Scriptures, these questions tend to answer themselves almost as soon as they leave our mouths.)

In many ways, Pope Francis endorses the “art of the weak” in his actions (e.g., visiting a youth prison during World Youth Day to bring the event to those who don’t have the freedom to attend, as opposed to demanding their release) and in his writings. For example, in “Gaudete et exsultate,” he repeats some remarkably blunt warnings about our approaches to evangelization that first appeared in “Evangelii gaudium”: “A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism,

whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others” (EG, 94).

When we’re willing to give up the pretensions of the God’s-eye view, the perch from above the messiness that tempts us with the notion that we can analyze and classify, inspect and verify, we allow room for grace. The art of the weak allows the Spirit space to operate in a world of planners and strategists.

So what does this art of the weak look like when it comes to our approach to the millennials on the fringes of our faith communities? First, it requires a willingness to get out of our parishes and into the places where these millennials spend their time. Then, we must be willing to listen to them and look for the “cracks” that de Certeau points to in his discussion of tactics. The foothold might be their struggles with student loans and our willingness to connect them with an evangelizing disciple from our parish who also happens to be a finance expert. Or, it might involve extending an invitation to take part in a *Laudato si’*-inspired project at the parish that connects with their concern for the future of our planet.

Shifting into tactical mode can be incredibly difficult, and the tactics required will be as varied as the millennial nones themselves are varied. If you want somewhere to start, I suggest picking up the Acts of the Apostles and rereading it with this notion of tactics, the art of the weak, near the front of your mind. Observe the many ways in which the apostles model this vulnerable way of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ within a world that often wanted very little to do with them, and ask God to show you how to follow the example of those expert tacticians.


Final Thoughts: “In fear, we plan our Church with statistics ...”

Reflecting on his work with waves of eager missionaries en route from North America to Central and South America in the 1960s, priest and social critic Ivan Illich challenged his readers to resist the temptation to adopt strategic modes of evangelism: “In fear, we

plan our Church with statistics, rather than trustingly search for it.”²⁵ Lovers of Mark’s Gospel may detect here the striking resonance with Jesus’s words in the story of Jairus’s dead daughter: “Fear is useless, what is needed is trust” (see Mk 5:36).

During an era riddled with more polls, statistics, and information than any other time in human history, the temptation to try to solve the “rise of the nones” by turning inward and deploying a strategic response will remain very strong. Opting instead for the “art of the weak” requires an act of deep trust that God is very much at work in our midst, drawing the people of God together in ways that we cannot always see or control. Let us go out then as missionary tacticians, drawing strength from Christ’s enduring promise to be with us always, until the end of the world (Mt 28:20)!

Notes

1. For more on the fluidity of modern American religiosity, check out Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s landmark book, *American Grace*.
2. See Elizabeth Drescher’s *Choosing Our Religion* for specific stories from her extensive interviews with America’s nones.
3. Chaeyoon Lim, Carol Ann MacGregor, and Robert D. Putnam, “Secular and Liminal: Discovering Heterogeneity Among Religious Nones,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 4 (2010): 596–618.
4. See de Certeau’s essay, “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).
5. See Ivan Illich, “The Seamy Side of Charity,” *America* (1967). 

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Go, Make Disciples! Catechetical Leadership as Evangelization

JAYNE RAGASA-MONDOY

God came out of himself to come among us, he pitched his tent among us to bring to us his mercy that saves and gives hope. Nor must we be satisfied with staying in the pen of the 99 sheep if we want to follow him and to remain with him; we too must “go out” with him to seek the lost sheep, the one that has strayed the furthest. Be sure to remember: come out of ourselves, just as Jesus, just as God came out of himself in Jesus and Jesus came out of himself for all of us. —Pope Francis, general audience, Saint Peter’s Square, Mar. 27, 2013)

Our mandate—as baptized Christians and certainly as catechetical leaders—is to leave our comfort zones and find the lost sheep—the one that has strayed the furthest. I must admit that in my early years of catechetical ministry, I possessed a limited understanding of what it really meant to exercise the kind of Christian leadership that Francis describes. I focused primarily on those with/to whom I minister. In other words, I stayed in the pen of the 99 sheep.

But Jesus has a way of coaxing us out. I did volunteer work for several organizations, eventually accepting appointments to their boards of directors/trustees. Through personal interactions I discovered that many of my fellow board members were cradle Catholics who no longer practiced the faith: my lost sheep! Inspired and accompanied by Jesus himself, I began to explore ways that catechetical leadership principles and evangelization could be applied in this new environment.

Leadership as charism

A charism is given to us by God not for our own sake but to be given away for the good of others. It is one of many special graces “oriented toward sanctifying grace and ... intended for the common good of the Church” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2003). The gift of leadership is certainly to be counted among these gifts. More than tending to the many details of program operations, the charism of true leadership envisions new possibilities to model and inspire Christian discipleship.

Yet when we read §54.B.5 in the *National Directory for Catechesis*—which outlines the responsibilities of the parish catechetical leader—these verbs jump out: *direct; plan; implement; evaluate; recruit; form; develop; collaborate*. While essential, these familiar actions point to the gift of management, not leadership.

But read a bit deeper into the text and the true aspects of leadership begin to emerge. Catechetical leaders are to be “fully initiated, practicing Catholics who fully *adhere* to the Church’s teaching in faith and morals and who are *models* of Christian virtue and *courageous witnesses* to the Catholic faith” (emphasis added). In other words, we who are called, formed, and sent by Jesus are delegated by him (through our bishop or pastor) to *lead* by envisioning new possibilities for proclaiming and transmitting the gospel and inspiring others to participate in this vision.

Beyond the primary place of ministry

As catechetical leaders our skills naturally apply within the context of the Catholic institutions we directly serve. But here’s what happened when I exercised these skills outside of my primary place of ministry:

I serve on the board of trustees for Saint Louis School, a K–12 school for boys established in 1849. Its Catholic, Marianist identity is integrated into all aspects of its academic, co-curricular, and sports programs. It has historic ties to Saint Damien DeVeuster. Its notable alumni include Oscar and Golden Globe award winner Dean Pitchford, former Hawaii lieutenant governor James Aiona, and athletes Marcus Mariota, Tua Tagovailoa, Brandon League, and Benny Agbayani. Its prep football program is nationally ranked in the top ten. Needless to say, the school receives heightened visibility and media attention, especially in local sports. It takes strong leadership and commitment to be faithful to its Catholic identity and mission.

Although we’re volunteers, board candidates are selected through a rigorous process designed to assemble a group of “leaders among leaders.” Once selected, each board member serves on one or more standing committees in the areas of academics, finance, governance, facilities, and more. I chair the mission integration committee, which is tasked to provide formation experiences to educate the board on our Catholic, Marianist identity and mission so as to influence our deliberations, decision-making, and implementation processes.

Looking around the room at my first meeting, I felt my level of anxiety and insecurity rise. My fellow board members were men and women at the top of their fields in law, medicine, business, professional sports, and more. Some were raised Catholic and continued to practice the faith; others had drifted

away from Catholicism or were raised in other faith traditions. Although passionate supporters of Catholic education, they generally considered evangelization and catechesis to be the responsibility of the sponsoring religious order and religion teachers. Formation in faith was not disregarded; it was just not necessarily on their daily radars. I began to question how I could possibly be a competent leader of mission integration.

I recall turning to our Blessed Mother in prayer. Mary, a seemingly insignificant young woman from an insignificant little town, could have been intimidated by God’s plan for her, but her faith led her to say yes. Emboldened by her example, I was determined to not only inform the board but also proclaim and transmit the gospel in this new setting.

And Jesus has indeed accompanied and blessed us. Over time the board has grown in their understanding of mission. They respectfully engage in prayer, catechesis, faith sharing, and retreats. The school’s Catholic identity and mission influence the decisions and outcomes of each committee. What is most rewarding is that several board members are now openly connecting their personal and professional lives to the gospel—asking the hard questions, pondering the truths of the church. One self-professed “former Catholic” participated in the sacrament of reconciliation and now attends Mass regularly.

Five principles of leadership

I turned to the Gospel of St. Luke as I reflected on this experience and (not surprisingly) realized that Jesus could have written the book on what is widely extolled as contemporary leadership excellence for organizations. Five essential principles are clearly evident in Jesus’s style of leadership: vision, influence, commissioning, em-

powerment, and reflection. Each principle holds the potential for us to proclaim and transmit the gospel beyond our primary places of ministry. Here’s how the five principles of leadership and evangelization connect:

PRINCIPLE 1: LEADERS HAVE A CLEAR VISION.

The Baptism of Jesus. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” Jesus said to him in reply, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Mt 3:13–17)

Jesus’s salvific vision for us was surely well beyond the scope of understanding of those who witnessed the act itself: his grace flowing into the action of baptism, elevating it to sacrament so that, in Christian baptism, the grace of Jesus flows into us. It is a bold vision wrapped in mystery—truth partially revealed and partially concealed—utterly compelling and purposeful. When interacting with other leaders we, too, can communicate a Christ-inspired vision that is compelling and purposeful by asking, for example: What moral obligations drive revenue-generating decisions? How does our work impact the poor and marginalized? Envision compelling new ways to transmit the gospel in all places.

PRINCIPLE 2: LEADERS INFLUENCE OTHERS.

The Temptation of Jesus. Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert

for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.” Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’”

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and:

‘With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’” When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time. (Lk 4:1–13)

Jesus teaches us that his power and authority come from the Father and that true leadership does not require temporal power, position, or authority to achieve a goal. We understand that a title does not magically transform a person into a leader and, in fact, relying solely on one’s position for authority or to gain power can backfire pretty quickly. In our interactions with other leaders, share examples of ways that you influence others through example, not by authority or power.

PRINCIPLE 3: LEADERS CO-MISSION.

The Call of Simon the Fisherman. While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him. (Lk 5:1–11)

Jesus was the master of “volunteer engagement.” Armed with a compelling vision and capacity to influence, he began the process of co-missioning. He recognized that fishermen Simon, Peter, James, and John had great potential and, through meaningful interaction, helped them to realize and enthusiastically respond to his call. We can model for others a Christ-inspired style of leadership that values personal encounter, targeted engagement, and invitation toward achieving a goal.



PRINCIPLE 4: LEADERS MENTOR AND EMPOWER.

Out of love for his followers, Jesus recognized their need for ongoing, systematic formation—of mentoring and coaching toward transformation. Throughout his ministry Jesus used structured discourse, such as the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20–26) and purposefully constructed “teachable moments.” He taught, mentored, and modeled new attitudes and behaviors not as ends to themselves but in order for his disciples to understand who he was—the Son of God.

We can illustrate this principle to other leaders by upholding “human resources” as a most sacred resource. Advocate for ongoing mission-centered formation that recognizes the dignity of the human person, empowers, and builds trust not as ends but as means for encountering God. Be a leader who serves, mentors, and empowers.

PRINCIPLE 5: LEADERS REFLECT.

Jesus prayed at the most important moments of his earthly ministry, among them before choosing the Twelve (Lk 6:12), at the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28), and during his agony on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39–46). He taught his disciples how to pray as a community by teaching them the Lord’s Prayer (Lk 11:1–4).

Reflection is concerned with thinking deeply about issues. Effective leaders regularly engage in this process of conscious and honest analysis of one’s personal beliefs, experiences, actions, and outcomes. When we, as catechetical leaders, elevate reflection to prayer we become better equipped to assign value beyond personal gain,

aligning all efforts toward the common good, and ultimately toward the will of God. Be a leader who prays and discerns the will of God.



When we apply the five principles of catechetical leadership beyond our primary place of ministry, we engage in Jesus’s vision for us as evangelizing disciples. Be a “leader among leaders.” Seek the lost sheep and, as Pope Francis often urges, come out of ourselves and accompany Jesus, proclaiming and transmitting the gospel in all places. After all, the God-given gifts—charisms—we possess as catechetical leaders were meant to be given away for the sake of building up the church. Go, make disciples!

With over twenty years of experience in corporate, educational, and pastoral settings, **Jayne Ragasa-Mondoy** believes Catholic leaders in every profession can be effective evangelizers. She holds a master’s degree in pastoral leadership from Chaminade University of Honolulu and is the director of religious education for the Diocese of Honolulu. Jayne is the author of *Cultivating Your Catechists: How to Recruit, Encourage, and Retain Successful Catechists* (sponsored by NCCL, published by Loyola Press, 2017), a national speaker, and the vice president for NCCL.



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What We Learned From Storefront Evangelization

ELLEN KUCHERA

Four years ago, the Catholic parishes in Waterloo, Iowa, took a leap of faith and created a center for evangelization called COR at 220 East. COR at 220 East is a downtown storefront building located in the heart of Waterloo. “COR” is Latin for “heart” and is an acronym for the action words “Come, Observe, Reconnect.” This describes the conversion process that we hope each person that walks through the door will experience. Everything we do at COR strives to point to Christ offering his heart and to provide guidance when one is ready to offer their heart to him in return.

In reflecting on our experiences over the last four years, some dominant themes within evangelization emerge.

Evangelization is incredibly challenging

The vision guiding our evangelization efforts needs to continually be brought before the Lord, revisited, and repurposed to reignite our souls to seek out and accompany our brothers and sisters. If one does not go to the Lord to guide the vision and then keep this vision at the forefront, it is easy to get swallowed up in lack of numbers, criticisms, financial burdens, and the overwhelming task at hand that is never complete.

In relooking at our vision for COR, I find myself once again fired up at a time of questioning, discernment, and seeming lack of passion. What exactly is our vision? COR is a center for evangelization, designed to strengthen parishioners in intentional discipleship, provide a safe environment for inactive parishioners to be reintroduced into the faith community, and reach out to the rest of the community whose hearts are longing for the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the book *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), Sherry Weddell describes conversion as a dynamic process in which every person experiences the Holy Spirit working and moving in their lives, even if they are not yet an intentional disciple of Jesus Christ. She identifies five thresholds of conversion. COR involves the entire process of conversion, yet focuses on the first three thresholds.

Initial trust is the first threshold of conversion. Weddell states that initial trust is when “a person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some kind

of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God” (129).

In reflecting on this, we realized that no matter how great our programs, how sleek the website, or how innovative the marketing, if someone does not trust the church, chances are slim that they will step onto church grounds and come to programs. COR seeks to create positive associations by building trust in an environment that is nonthreatening and comfortable, meeting people wherever they are in the process of conversion. At COR, a guest will experience radical hospitality and opportunities to encounter Catholics in general settings, whether it be chatting over coffee, gathering for a private event, viewing an art exhibit, or listening to a band.

In the midst of these events that appeal to all audiences, conversations of faith can be had if so desired by the guest, who is aware of the presence of the faith-filled Catholic volunteers that have welcomed them. These community events provide the setting in which gentle evangelization can happen.

Ample faith formation opportunities are also provided in order to foster **spiritual curiosity** and **openness**, the second and third thresholds of conversion. This takes the form of listening sessions, open question-and-answer forums, movie nights, and monthly discussion nights. Once someone is at a point of **spiritual seeking**, the fourth threshold of conversion, the focus will shift away from COR and into the life of the parish, as they are “engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he or she can commit to Christ in his Church” (130).

The intentional disciples in our parishes are then led back into life at COR. Those that have decided to “drop one’s nets” to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus” (130) embody the fifth threshold of conversion, **intentional discipleship**. They are the people that are willing to invite and accompany their friends and family members to events at COR. They are those that will be the evangelization ministers, living out COR’s mission to bring the church and the community into closer contact with each other. At COR events, they are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit in discerning how to best build trust, foster curiosity, proclaim the Good News, and lead people to the heart of Christ and the church.

The vision of COR is solid. Steeped in the church’s mission to evangelize, it is a new and creative way to encounter people and introduce them to the Good News, and it provides a con-



crete avenue for intentional disciples to evangelize. In the midst of challenges such as lack of adequate finances and staff, low participation numbers, and cultural adversity to commitment, it can be easy to lose sight of this vision and be lured back into the comfortable life of a parish that Pope Francis calls us out of. In one of his addresses at World Youth Day 2013, he said,

I want a mess. I want to see the Church get closer to the people. I want to get rid of clericalism, the mundane, this closing ourselves off within ourselves, in our parishes, schools, or structures. We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel. It is not enough simply to open the door in welcome, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people! Let us courageously look to pastoral needs, beginning on the outskirts, with those who are farthest away. Go and look for them in the nooks and crannies of the streets.

Evangelization efforts cannot be done alone

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” —Matthew 18:20

This well-known verse from Scripture is often used as affirmation to validate the presence of the Lord in our efforts, making it easy to miss its challenge: *Don't go alone*. When we try to do everything ourselves, the door is open for the evil one to move into the isolation and set up obstacles. We have found this to be the case for COR, which has one staff person dedicated to it, but its potential far exceeds what one person can make happen.

A subcommittee was set up and dedicated to COR but eventually fell to the wayside due to the challenge of bringing everyone

together for regular meetings. With a four-parish collaborative structure, empowering pastors, parish staffs, and parishioners in something that does not seem to be directly their “own” has been quite difficult.

Volunteer recruitment efforts have been minimally successful. To begin to remedy these issues, we are seeking to hire a coordinator of evangelization that can work with our COR staff to help plan and promote COR events, mobilize parishioners, and ultimately evangelize as “two or three gathered together in his name,” with the Lord being the driving force.

Evangelization is about fighting for the one lost sheep

COR at 220 East is a place to intentionally encounter people that are not in the pews of our parishes on Sundays. COR honors the slow process of conversion, which is unique to each individual, through empowering intentional disciples to discern how best to build bridges of initial trust and positive association through community events and by fostering spiritual curiosity and openness through faith formation programming. We have found that many of our programs and events at COR draw a small crowd.

When faced with the question of whether this initiative is worth the financial investment, an important variable to compare is the percentage of parish salaries and budgets allocated toward the overwhelming number of parishioners that are not in our pews and the percentage dedicated to regular Mass attendees. In many parishes, the disparity will be huge. Although some may feel that the parish should not leave the flock to retrieve one stray sheep, did not the father rejoice at the return of his prodigal son? Larger percentages

of parish budgets can and should be reallocated to our mission to go out and find the lost sheep and bring them home.

If we do not focus on evangelization, on taking the gospel to the nooks and crannies of the streets, we risk becoming a church that is closed in on itself. Francis states, “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*,” 49). Evangelization is dirty work. It is trusting in the slow work of God, who changes hearts over time, a change we may or may not witness firsthand. We plant and nurture the seeds, but God causes the growth in his own way and in his own time.

Evangelization is person centered

I will conclude this reflection with some stories of the lost sheep we have encountered, for these encounters alone are the fruit of our labor. Some have come home to the flock and some have not (yet). We entrust their conversion to the Holy Spirit, confident that we have and will continue to accompany them in whatever way possible.

★ ★ ★

A former Catholic stopped into COR one afternoon desiring to reconnect with the church. A coworker friend of hers, a parishioner in one of our parishes, told her to stop by COR because she would be comfortable talking to someone there. An evangelist offered her coffee, sat down, and had a wonderful conversation about her experience with the church. The evangelist helped her set up a time to go to reconciliation after a weekday Mass and then met her for Mass and prayed for her while she experienced the sacrament. While the

evangelist's help was critical here, so was the parishioner's, an intentional disciple that used COR as a means to bring a friend back to the church.

★ ★ ★

For four days before the Iowa caucuses in the last presidential election, a campaign office in Waterloo was using COR for overflow space for their volunteers. At one point a COR evangelist started talking to one of the campaign volunteers. He was a former Catholic and was venting about how the church is too involved in the political sphere, especially when it makes its opinions known on particular issues.

The evangelist explained that our faith and our lives are not divorced from each other, so we absolutely must be concerned about political issues. The evangelist also mentioned that the church balances its strong opinions on issues by not endorsing candidates because it values each person's ability to discern and think for themselves. They respectfully went back and forth on this for a while, and then the volunteer asked the evangelist if they were caucusing. The evangelist admitted that they hadn't planned to, due to frustration with the political process.

The evangelist ended up caucusing that year. It is seemingly a small measure, but the evangelist sought to build trust with the volunteer and in the meantime was also called to task themselves in a lesson of faithful citizenship.

★ ★ ★

“Faith & the Meaning of Life” was the first topic for a Catholicism 101 series at COR. A small crowd of seven people showed up:



- ★ Participants represented a diverse age range, from 20 to 50.
- ★ They represented a variety of religious backgrounds, including practicing Catholics, inactive Catholics, Protestants, and agnostics.
- ★ The inactive Catholics lacked a trust in the church due to past experiences.
- ★ Over half of the attendees were not affiliated with our Catholic parishes but saw the signs advertising the event outside and walked in. One young man was on his way to a local bar to drink with coworkers after a work meeting but stopped in instead.
- ★ Participants were extremely receptive to the Catholic perspective and were all comfortable asking questions and sharing their views, which were at times both similar and different.
- ★ The Catholics in the group did an awesome job of sharing their passion for their faith as well as elements of our rich tradition of reason.

This is such a beautiful testament to our mission to evangelize. It is not even about immediately making converts, for that is up to the Holy Spirit, but it is about building bridges of trust, going where people are, sharing the fire within and what faith has to say about the meaning and purpose of our lives, and leading all to the heart of Jesus. COR has served as a critical piece in this mission, for those non-Catholics that came wouldn't have joined had this been held on the grounds of a parish property.

★ ★ ★


Once a month at COR, one of the parish pastors leads a movie night. In addition to advertising in parishes, COR staff have promoted these movie nights to the broader community, primarily through the online social networking site called Meetup. Typically two to four people from the Meetup group attend any given movie night. None of them have been Catholic. Some of them come once and have not returned.

Others show up consistently each month to watch a movie ... with Catholics ... with a priest facilitating discussion. COR is a comfortable space to break the barrier for this to happen. Evangelists are present each month to work on building trust and foster spiritual curiosity among the Meetup guests. Have any signed up for RCIA meetings yet? No. Are we well into the process of conversion? Absolutely.

★ ★ ★

A local nonprofit organization that works with the Burmese refugee community in Waterloo has subleased some of the office space at COR for the past four years. Both the employees and clients of the nonprofit have become very familiar with our organization. COR evangelists have built trust, particularly with the employees. They often will come to us with questions about Catholicism or even challenges to the church to respond to the needs of the refugees. Invitations have been offered on a few different occasions to attend some of the COR events. While none of the employees have moved from passive curiosity to active openness and seeking yet, we will continue to pray and work to get there. The seeds have certainly been sown.

★ ★ ★

The story of COR is one of great excitement and passion and equal challenge and discouragement, but these one-on-one encounters make it all worth the fight. Changing any of the negative perceptions of the Catholic Church in the Waterloo community is alone worth the financial investment. The potential of what can be done is often overwhelming, but we must do all we can and challenge ourselves to leave the flock for a bit and fight to bring the lost sheep home. How can this call become central in your areas of ministry? 

Ellen Kuchera is the associate director of young adult ministry for the Catholic parishes in Waterloo, Iowa. She piloted the COR initiative there, was on a keynote speaker panel at the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership in 2016, and has presented at the University of Notre Dame on evangelization and young adult ministry.

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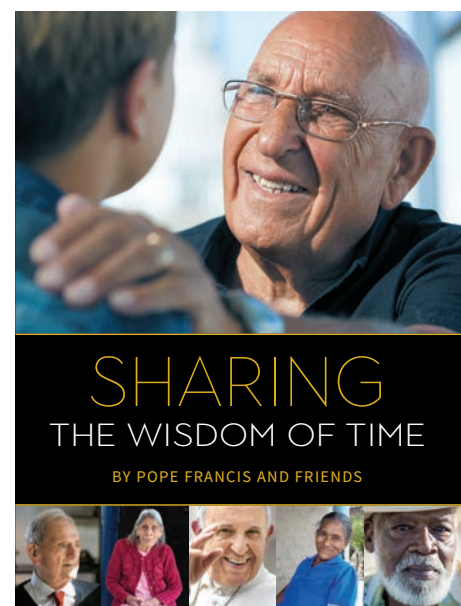


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Life on Campus in the Midst of a Toxic, “Post-Truth” World

KYLE TURNER

Things in our society have shifted tremendously in the past few years. Polarized political divisions are deeply entrenched; one only needs to spend a few minutes on social media or peruse the headlines of mainstream news to catch a glimpse of the vitriol within the discourse of the day. In two of the last three years, the annual Oxford Dictionaries “Word of the Year” has reflected this reality (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year>). In 2018, the Word of the Year was *toxic*. Two years prior, the Word of the Year was *post-truth*. The choice of these words speaks to the reality of our current social and political climate, which is certainly not lost on the myriad young people who walk our college campuses today.

Voices crying out on campus

Recently, I came across a folded-up, handwritten reflection/prayer that had been left behind by an anonymous student in our campus chapel. On the outside were written the words “Love Conquers” with a small hand-drawn heart next to them. Upon opening the piece of paper, I was stopped in my tracks by what I read inside:


The division is still here.
The hatred & fear is still here.
The fear of color is still here.
Our president is dumb.
Blind to others’ pain...me too.
We are, we are busy, yet bored.
BUT
Love still somehow exists.
Friendships form, families laugh,
food is shared, the sun rises.
Lord, help me to love abundantly each day.
When I feel bored & restless,
help me be transformed by your love and go out.
Live. Love. Eat. Pray. Dance.

In reading this note for the first time, I was struck by the honesty that emanated from the page. Toxic hatred, fear, and racism were identified as present realities (our local experience of this toxicity was real: our campus had experienced a series of racially charged hate-speech incidents in the latter half of 2018). The words in this reflection speak to how our “post-truth” world is affecting at least one particular college student. He or she expresses feelings regarding President Trump while also recognizing his or her own complicity in turning a blind eye to the suffering of oth-

ers—a real-life recognition of what Jesus preached about in the beginning of Matthew 7.

Our role in the midst of this climate

Coming across this note led me to muse upon what my role as a campus minister is when faced with the reality of today’s political climate. How do I possibly begin to evangelize, catechize, and minister to and with college students within the present-day swirling of toxicity, fake news, and alternative facts? In his 2018 Message for World Communications Day, Pope Francis offers a helpful reflection on the need for truth in communication: “Freedom from falsehood and the search for relationship: these two ingredients cannot be lacking if our words and gestures are to be true, authentic, and trustworthy. To discern the truth, we need to discern everything that encourages communion and promotes goodness from whatever instead tends to isolate, divide, and oppose” (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20180124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html). This guiding message offers wise insight for ministering with young adults on college campuses today. It centers on Jesus’s own message for communication, namely, the Good News that we find in the Gospels. Jesus is indeed the “way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6), and if we place our trust in him, the truth will indeed set us free (cf. Jn 8:32).

We as campus ministers would also be wise to *lean in* to and *connect with* the gifts and talents that college students bring with them when they step foot on campus. A viable hope is present in their experiences, energies, and genuine concern for others. The message of love that I found in that handwritten note is comforting: even in a world in which two of the last three Words of the Year have been *toxic* and *post-truth*, light is present. Sandwiched in between these two words, the 2017 Word of the Year was *youthquake*, defined as “a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2017>). We would do well to be open to and encourage a rising *youthquake* within our society. 

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Moving from “If only ...” to “Come grow with us.”

LEISA ANSLINGER

I have enjoyed many conversations in the past few months about ways in which we may engage young people more effectively through our parish communities. The conversations have been prompted by insights gleaned from the Growing Young study facilitated by the Fuller Youth Institute (see my column in the February issue, “Are You Ready to Grow Young?”). The initial conversation is often something like this:

Parish or diocesan leader: What do you think we should focus on in your upcoming visit?

Me: I have been talking with people recently about ways we might more effectively engage young people.

Leader: Yes, this is a big concern. But I can’t help thinking, if only they would come to Mass every Sunday ... if only they would get involved ... if only they would come to events and see how wonderful our parish is, if only ...

This reaction is especially intriguing when we consider the key findings of the study, which identified six core commitments of parishes that are effectively engaging young people. Among them is “having empathy for today’s young people.” Having empathy requires us to look at life and faith through the perspective of the people we hope to reach with the gospel.

The burden of belonging

Having empathy for young people today means seeing things through their perspective and, as a result, leading them to encounter Christ through the community. When we have empathy for young people, “if only” becomes “welcome,” “we are grateful you are here,” “come, grow with us.”

It is not easy to be a young adult today. The ways young adults connected with parishes in the past no longer hold true: the process of maturation is taking longer; many young adults wait to be married, have children, buy a home, get settled in a neighborhood. Many have difficulty settling into a career, and even when they do, they know it is most likely not going to be a lifetime position.

Our surrounding culture is at best ambivalent toward faith and religion, especially as expressed within the institutional church. And yet, young people are looking for a faith community that can be home for them, like family, a place where they will have people who care for them deeply, with whom they can explore primary questions about

Identity: “Who am I?”

Belonging: “Where do I fit?” and
Purpose: “How do I make a difference?”

In fact, the phrase used by young people in the study to describe their faith community was “like family.” The parishes that are effectively reaching out to young people are bridging them with others in the community, drawing them into relationship with each other and, through one another, to Christ.

Empathy is a personal endeavor

What strikes me about having empathy today is how this is not dependent on parish programs but rather is a person-to-person endeavor. The congregations that are “growing young” form people to accompany young people in such a manner: to be present to and with them, to share the love of God through meaningful relationships, across generations, person-to-person. When we have empathy for young people, we are attentive to their needs, recognizing that spiritual needs and growth are not separate from, but are integrally tied to, their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. The more fully we develop as whole people, the more readily we grow as holy people.

I thought of all this as I read the reports from the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment in November 2018. Much of what the young people who were present were seeking could fall into the category of “having empathy” for them and their peers, recognizing that “it is in relationships—with Christ, with others, in the community—that faith is handed on. For the sake of mission, too, the Church is called to adopt a relational manner that places emphasis on listening, welcoming, dialogue and common discernment in a process that transforms the lives of those taking part. ‘A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing”. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn” (122, quoting Pope Francis, “Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” Oct. 17, 2015).

How does your faith community have empathy for young people today? 

Leisa Anslinger is the associate director for pastoral life for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. She is the author of *Impact*, a monthly resource to form people as disciples who live and grow as good stewards (catholiclifeandfaith.net/everyday-impact).



Time to Step In and Step Up

CLAIRE M. MCMANUS

A spark of hope smolders in the aftermath of the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. Many saw this gathering as an opportunity to evangelize those young people who have left the Catholic Church or who have no affiliation with organized religion.

Judging by the Synod's final summary, promulgated on October 27, the gathering focused much more on being frank and open about the issues that keep the young away from the church. It isn't so much the *content* of the dialogue between the young people and the bishops but the *process* that brought these groups into conversation that inspires so much hope and may have a lasting impact on the future of the church.

A vision for involving the faithful

Back in 2013, soon after Pope Francis was elected, he proposed an ambitious reform of the way the church is governed. He wanted to govern in collegiality with the bishops of the local churches, always respecting their autonomy. Francis also wanted a "synodal" church. Synods are a familiar ecclesiastical structure used throughout our history, but synodality goes much further. A *synod* is an assembly of church officials who meet on a particular issue and advise the pope on how he should act. *Synodality* describes a process in which people in the local church participate in the governance of the universal church.

The 2018 Synod, with participation by many young adults and more than 30 women, had all the makings of a synodal moment for our church. To be clear, the lay people were both collaborators and observers, but they had no vote on the final proposals sent to Francis. Nevertheless, the Synod's final document is rife with the language of cooperation between the laity and the clergy, calling for a participatory and co-responsible church: "Motivated by this spirit, we can proceed towards a participatory and co-responsible Church ..., gratefully receiving the contribution of the lay faithful too, including young people and women, female and male consecrated persons as well as groups, associations and movements. No one should be put aside or put themselves aside. This is the way to avoid ... clericalism, which excludes many from the decision-making process" (123).

The laity's role in decision making in the church has never been obvious, often wrapped in the vagaries of *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines this as a supernatural consent on faith and morals, but

synodality seems to be much more concrete. For example, the 2018 Synod calls for more shared responsibility in parishes: "The parish needs to be rethought pastorally, in terms of ecclesial co-responsibility and missionary enthusiasm, exploring new synergies within its area" (129).


Preparing the faithful to lead

The Synod also calls for training in the skills of collaborative ministry and mutual listening, so important if the church is going to move in the direction of co-responsibility. "Church leaders with these capacities need a specific formation for synodality. In this regard, it would seem desirable to devise joint formation courses for young lay people, young religious and seminarians, especially where matters like the exercise of authority or collaborative ministry are concerned" (124).

Involving the laity in the governance of the church is not some 21st-century innovation. When it comes to the church, what seems new and innovative is usually a reemergence of ancient practices. "The Church has never been rigidly monochrome, but she has developed as a polyhedron of persons with varying sensitivities, origins and cultures" (131).

This re-recognition of the role of the laity comes at a critical time for the church. In just one example, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops—to address its cover-up of abusive priests—has already set as its agenda a process of accountability that must include "substantial involvement of the laity," particularly in areas of investigation, law enforcement, psychology, and other relevant disciplines.

The bishops are walking on the solid ground of canon law if they call on the laity for help. "According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which [the Christian faithful] possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church" (Canon 212.3).

The Synod of Bishops on Young People wants to "reawaken in every local reality the awareness that we are the people of God, responsible for incarnating the Gospel in our different contexts and in all daily situations" (128). The door has been opened a crack; it's time for the faithful to step in and step up. 

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