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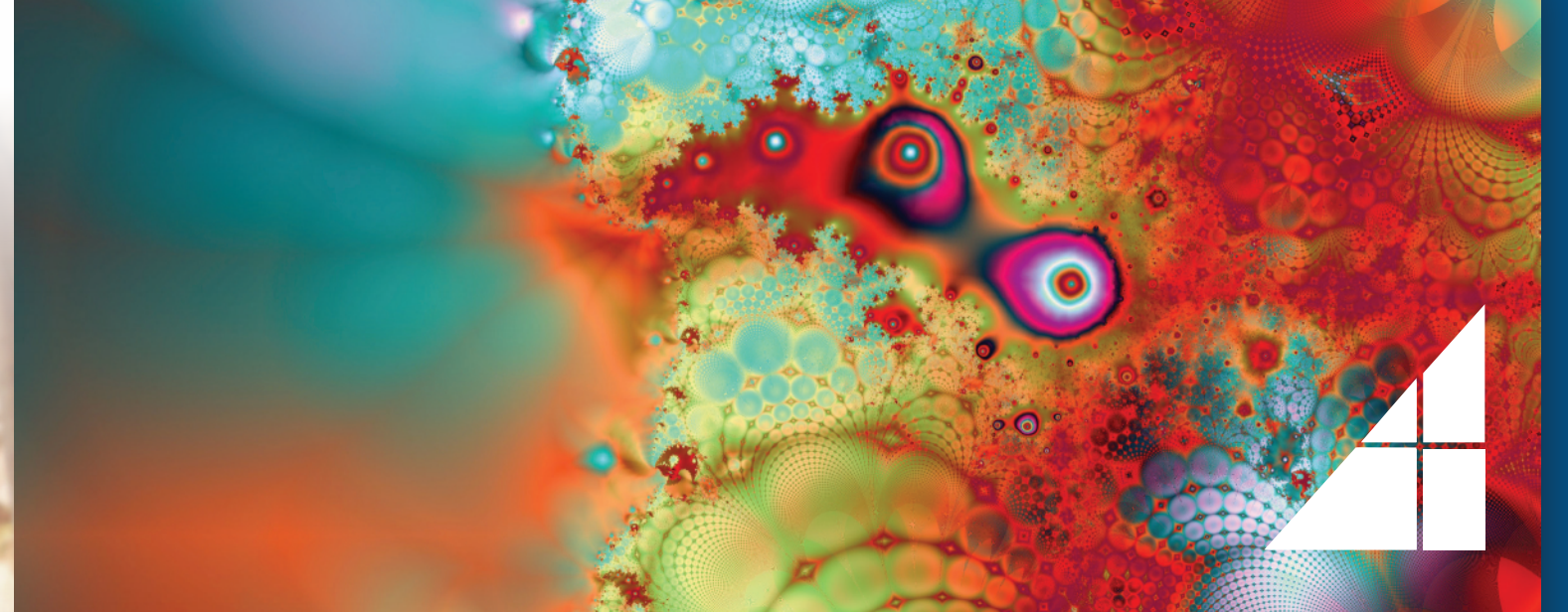
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Accompany One Another

DENISE UTTER

If you've read Sherry Weddell's *Forming Intentional Disciples*, then you know that the first threshold of conversion is trust. In recent months, news reports reveal the many reasons we need to rebuild trust in our church. On some days it might seem difficult to answer, "What do you do?" I answer "I work for the Catholic Church" with joy most days, but on some days, with sadness for the injured people, and for our church herself.

It becomes clear to me how important gospel accompaniment is in these times. I have hope because of the people who accompany me — good lay ministers, religious, priests, and soul friends, people who embody Jesus's promise: "I am with you always."

Jesus shows us how to accompany others in his presence to the isolated, marginalized, and the hurt: the woman at the well, the lepers, the grieving widows, the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). There we see disciples who are "downcast" — despondent, dispirited, despairing. Jesus comes along and walks with them. He listens. He hears their discouragement and pain. He carries that with them before he unpacks Scripture and teaches them what they missed and what they were walking away from. He is revealed, and they turn back to Jerusalem, to the community and the church.

Jesus's accompaniment must be the model for our ministry: Ask questions. Listen. Share stories. Risk vulnerability. Create bridges of trust. Walk with one another. Look for Jesus. Share your sightings.


I once told parents, "I believe the sacrament of reconciliation is a gift, but my practice doesn't always model that belief." As I shared my resistance, I mentioned an occasion when I went through my "laundry list" of sins: being angry with my husband, impatient with my children, judgmental of my neighbor The priest cut me off: "My dear, what's on your heart?" Tears streamed down my cheek as I told of my struggles. It was 2004, the height of the abuse scandal. I told him how angry I was with church leadership, for the pain caused, for the mistakes made, for the words chosen, and, if I was honest, for making my job as a minister more difficult. I told the priest that, some days, I was having difficulty even praying.

I don't remember the words he said, but I'll never forget his gaze, his kindness and mercy, and how it washed over me. I hadn't realized how angry I was until he asked, "What's on

your heart?" In a moment the anger and pain were relieved, but the healing took time. When I shared this experience with parents, I was surprised, and embarrassed, at the tears that fell. Then as parents talked in small groups about times they struggled with faith or found it difficult to pray, I heard the concern and saw parents' tears falling. One dad shared anger about the abuse scandal and then expressed gratitude for having a safe place to name his doubts, concerns, and struggles. One divorced mom cried as she shared how hard it was some days to stay in the church, and she worried if her children would share her faith. She was grateful to share her story and have others offer compassion and understanding. Sharing had not changed her situation, but it allowed her to navigate it for the moment — because she felt less alone.

People need to talk about their hopes, dreams, pain, and sufferings. They need fellow travelers who share the journey of faith (and parenting). Where do we offer this type of accompaniment in our parishes and programs? We are called to this ministry of building bridges of trust so that, we hope, the brokenness in our church doesn't discourage people from growing in greater intimacy with Christ.

This was our message at NCCL in Chicago this past June: Christ accompanies us, as we are called to accompany one another. David Wells reminded us of the two-shouldered yoke, the one we share with Christ to carry our burdens with us when we are weary. Sister Dianne Bergant told us, "Discipleship has to do with the relationship with the teacher; it's very personal and it's very relational." Father Richard Fragomeni revealed that the best credential he brought was his human vulnerability; the same is true for us.

In *Sacred Companions*, Dr. David G. Benner cites the story of a friend who was not happy with his church but continued to go to services. When asked why, he said, "Church keeps me in touch with others on the spiritual journey. Spiritual growth is just too hard to maintain alone." We need the witness of those who have gone before us. We need the companionship of those who walk with us today. Let us be soul-filled companions, in the spirit and example of Jesus. Let us companion one another in the light of the challenges of today. 

Being Bugged by the Divine

MARGARET MATIJASEVIC

"Business as usual is killing us." — Ansel Augustine

What a statement.

Yet its echo permeates the NCCL membership body. Since gathering in Chicago for our annual conference on the themes of accompaniment and proclamation, this was the most repeated statement in various contexts, in various groupings, and with varied implications.

The statement challenges the considerations of my role as executive director, the methodologies of our organization, and our comprehension of our mission to serve in today's reality. As Ansel Augustine accompanied NCCL members in an engaging process of self-reflection, we experienced looking deeply within to begin to identify any personal contributions to a fractured model of leadership. In any process of change, the initial steps require a deep gaze upon our denial, followed by our acceptance of the contribution we may have made to its existence. Each of us, in our own limitedness, achieved a sense of clarity and consensus that Ansel Augustine is right: we have contributed to this paradigm. *Business as usual is killing us.*

That initial gaze upon such a painful truth provided an authentic invitation to God's mercy and companionship. Exposure of the wound began the invitation of freedom to name it, to address it, and to transform it. As merciful as God is, this process did not take long to begin. Various presenters provided the membership tools and resources to accompaniment from diverse experiences and perspectives, almost naturally allowing God to make room within this woundedness for Christ to hold and gently move us. Contrasted with woundedness, there was the amazing testimony of Edwina Gateley, who not only inspired beauty in pain but modeled for catechetical leaders today the process of identifying misconceptions of accompaniment and revealing the truth of what Christ provides.


If business as usual is killing us, and we know it ... then what are we to do?

Edwina Gateley suggested a few key insights:

1. As holy women and men, we must seek silence. And in that silence, we can identify the whispering of God. *What are the whispers saying to you? What does the wound "business as usual" surface for you? Where are you called?*

2. She states, "God takes advantage of us; the minute we are stupid enough to say, 'Here I am. Send me,' God gets excited and we get bugged by the Divine. We can ignore it; but we will be bugged by the Divine." *What are you saying yes to? What is God bugging you to do? How can you live into that divine calling?*
3. "Radical prophets are rocking the boat, accompanying people that nobody gives a damn about." *Who is not being cared for that you feel called to give a damn about? What does this radical prophesying look like with your gifts and charisms?*
4. "Our task in accompaniment is to remind people of who they are ... deep down. Because we know who we are, deep deep down. Without those whom we accompany, our own stories and lives are not whole. Thus, we need to allow ourselves to flow with God's goodness and grace, a juiciness. We have to flow with God" (Gately, with influence from Hildegard de Bengin). *What part of your story is missing? How will you live into the calling to fulfill it?*

Though the temptation to reflect on such questions and challenges may stop at our own personal bugging from the Divine, there is a larger mission conversation that needs to take place. The NCCL membership is united in a common mission, the teaching mission of Jesus Christ, and it is greatly important that the contexts in which we reflect spiral into the larger mission. The *business as usual* phrase struck a chord for a reason. This reflection is not personal; it is communal. In fact, our personal prayer will require a communal change as its response.

As I consider the implications for the NCCL membership and organization, I see a meaningful opportunity to claim our accountability to each other and the larger mission of catechesis and evangelization. What do I need to change within myself to be more accountable? What does that mean to my colleagues in ministry? To those whom I serve? How can I be part of this communal change by accompanying others — and allowing myself to be bugged by the Divine? 

Minding the Gap: Ministry and Transition from Youth to Young Adulthood

PAUL JARZEMBOWSKI

One of the joys in my work for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops is being able to take part in or speak at large national and international gatherings of Catholic youth and young adults. I also have the joy of hearing from parish, campus, and diocesan leaders about retreats, missions, Bible studies, adoration, Theology-on-Tap, and more. Combined, these efforts show me that parishes, campuses, and dioceses are doing some heroic work. Because of their investment, youth and young adults are connecting with the Catholic faith in new and exciting ways.

However, I am also aware of the research that indicates that only 14 to 22 percent of these young people will still be active as they mature into adulthood.¹ I wonder, then: Where will the active young people in the church today be in three, five, or ten years? Will they be among the 14 or 22 percent who are still active, or will they be in the 78 to 86 percent who are less connected?

Recently, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University and Saint Mary's Press

collaborated on a combined quantitative and qualitative research project focused on disaffiliated young adult Catholics called *Going, Going, Gone*. The project illuminated some fascinating findings, key among them being the vital role that listening to young people has on faith engagement. One of the young adults interviewed for this study was "Chris," who has largely abandoned the practice of Catholicism in recent years. What makes his story stand out is that his faith development was rich with catechesis, regular Mass attendance, and participation in mission work and youth ministry activities. And yet, despite these experiences, as he transitioned from youth to young adulthood, he fell away from the church.²

Chris's story may reflect the situation faced by many church leaders across the country as they see their previously active young people disengage and join the ranks of the ever-growing population of the "nones" — the sociological term that refers to those who now claim no religious affiliation.

In the preparatory document for the global Catholic Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment,³ the Vatican took notice of these trends: "A rapid process of change and transformation is the main characteristic of contemporary societies and cultures (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 18). The highly complex nature and pace of this process is creating a situation of fluidity and uncertainty never before experienced."

These new realities are fueled not only by the dynamic transitions that young people are facing today but also by the lack of accompaniment in many religious communities. Youth and young adults are going through incredible transitions, in many cases without support from people of faith. In previous generations, such accompaniment was natural in the close-knit community life in which young people were raised. However, this is not today's reality. So we must learn to provide accompaniment in new ways to respond to "the highly complex nature and pace" of life in the 21st century.

Defining young people

Before proceeding, it is important to define some terms to better understand young people's transitions. The global synod this year has used the Italian word *giovani* to describe the protagonists of this conversation. The term "refers to persons who are roughly 16 to 29 years old" (Part I) and is common in Europe, Latin America, and other countries. However, the United States does not have an equivalent term; we define "youth" as adolescents (usually 13 to 18) and "young adults" as collegiate and older (usually 18 into the 30s). In his November 2017 report on the synodal process to the bishops of the United States, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, president of the USCCB, noted that "the age-range of 'young people' ... is comprised of several different groups including high school youth, college students, and young adults," noting also that "they come from many ethnic and cultural communities" ("Talking Points on the Synod Preparatory/Consultation Process").

As one looks at these age groups, we can identify three uniting factors: (1) they are increasingly absent from our pews, (2) they are



experiencing frequent and rapid transitions, and (3) they lack intentional ministry and accompaniment during their transitional moments. One could even argue that a key reason for the first of these factors (the disaffiliation and disengagement of youth and young adults from the church) may be a combination of the second and third factors. With this in mind, church leaders must become more aware and conscious of the transition moments of youth and young adults (“mind the gap,” to borrow a phrase) and place a greater intentionality on accompanying them at such critical times.

Awareness of the transitions

In his landmark study on human development, psychologist Erik Erikson outlined the various life stages: infancy, childhood, school age, adolescence (“youth”), early or young adulthood, general adulthood, and mature adulthood. Between each of these are moments of transition.⁴ While transitions are an ongoing part of life, the journey between youth and young adulthood can be one of the most dramatic. Some of the key moments include the search for self-identity, a search for companionship (to connect with others who appreciate their newfound identity), and the avoidance of isolation as they move into college, the working world, and new homes (beyond their family of origin).

In the United States, a major boundary line in this transition is the “age of majority,” the phrase that indicates the financial, educational, and legal barrier beyond which society deems someone an “adult” versus a “dependent.” At this age (in the US, typically 18), young people leave high school and enter college, begin working on their own, or enlist in the military. The “age of majority,” then, is a key moment in the life of a young person. Today, the “age of majority” is further complicated by the new phenomena of *extended adolescence* and *emerging adulthood*, in which a person does not achieve key developmental touchpoints before age 18.

The transitions from youth to young adulthood are fraught with ups and downs, celebrations and frustrations: puberty; driving; graduation; moving away to college; turning the legal drinking age; starting and leaving a first full-time job; falling in love; getting married; having children; moving from one place to another; coping with the divorce or death of parents and other family members. Some transitions take place simultaneously with others. For example, when a young adult loses a job, her financial situation becomes more tenuous and fluid; consequently, she may quickly and aggressively seek other opportunities or move to where economic prospects seem more promising. This process can have a significant impact on relationships, health, and emotional well-being. Transitions can beget other transitions, creating a cycle of constant movement and having ripple effects far beyond the initial source of the transitional journey.

Because these transitions can be both joyous and anxiety-ridden, the spiritual lives of young people can be profoundly impacted by these experiences. Their engagement with religious communities and their personal prayer lives can change positively or negatively, which often depends on the level of accompaniment and support from people of faith. It is crucial, then, for pastoral leaders to have a greater awareness and understanding of these and other transitional experiences.

Intentional transitional accompaniment

Once we pay greater attention to the transitions that youth and young adults are experiencing, we should feel compelled to take the next step: intentionally accompanying and guiding them through those critical moments or transitional processes. Practically speaking, here are seven ways in which pastoral leaders can engage in this accompaniment:

- 1. Connect young people to mentors and spiritual directors.** In the synod consultations across the United States in 2017 and in the deliberations of young adults at the pre-synod meeting in Rome in March 2018, young people mentioned how they lack, but also strongly desire, mentors and spiritual guides. Helping youth and young adults find a spiritual director will give them a chance to journey with another person through key transition moments and see how God might be speaking to them. The one-on-one relationship that a young person forms with a mentor or spiritual director can be the glue that connects them to the community of the church.
- 2. Create a culture of mystagogy.** As church leaders, we do wonderful work leading people toward sacramental encounters like confirmation, marriage, and baptism. However, we often struggle to continue the journey afterward, and many young people disconnect from the church after receiving these sacraments. In his apostolic exhortation “Amoris Laetitia”



(2016), Pope Francis affirmed the insights of Pope St. John Paul II in “Familiaris Consortio” (1981): “Pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament” (223; see FC, 69). This is true not only of marriage but of all key sacramental moments in the life of a young person. What is needed is a *renewed culture of mystagogy*: an unpacking of these sacramental moments and continued catechetical engagement to foster an ongoing encounter with the Lord Jesus. We can intentionally create a faith formation process to follow young people’s confirmation and marriage and the baptism of their children and an ongoing mystagogy connected to the Eucharist. In so doing, we can both strengthen these sacramental moments and bring renewed life to our communities.

- 3. Invest in pastoral ministries for youth, collegians, and young adults.** While there are many laudable *volunteer* efforts to reach young people in the church, one of the lasting ways to foster pastoral accompaniment is by *financially investing* in ministries to these different groups. Note that because each age demographic’s realities are distinct, it is highly recommended that they not be lumped together. The dedicated leaders in parishes, campuses, dioceses, and Catholic organizations are an underappreciated treasure who have accepted the call to accompany young people, especially in key transition moments. Investing in them and building up their ministries will certainly have a positive impact on the overall effectiveness of the church’s work with youth and young adults.
- 4. Have an exit strategy for age-specific ministries.** When I was in parish ministry, I spent a lot of time developing strategies for inviting young people into the church. Where I fell short, however, was helping those same young people transi-

tion onto the *next phase* of their lives. I did not have a good strategy to guide youth into young adulthood or young adults into adult faith formation and the parish community. I should have asked myself: Where will these young people be in one, three, or five years, and how can I help them get there? Today I suggest introducing young people to opportunities and people beyond one’s own ministry area: walking high school and college seniors through their graduations and introducing them to Catholic leaders and ministries in the next phase of life. One reason young people may detach from the faith during the transition between youth and young adulthood is simply because they were not accompanied to the next stage of their journey. Providing an “exit strategy” for those making that leap forward, especially after graduation from high school and college, is key.

- 5. Collaborate with ministry leaders in other areas of church life.** One of the ways to ensure that young people are introduced to the right people in the next phase of church life is to have a strong relationship with leaders in other ministerial areas. We may be tempted to connect only with those in a similar line of work. However, it is important for those in pastoral leadership to collaborate regularly with others on projects, initiatives, and events — vocation directors, religious educators, pastoral care ministers, marriage and family life directors, and those working with young people in other contexts, especially youth, campus, young adult, and pastoral juvenile ministries — including in cultural communities other than one’s own. A spirit of collaboration makes the overall work of the church more effective and fruitful.
- 6. Support parents and families of youth and young adults.** Young people are not the only ones going through transitional



experiences as they age; so are their parents and extended families. As mothers and fathers watch teenagers mature into young adults and start college, enter the working world, move away from home, and find new relationships, they too need the love and support of the church community. Our ministry with youth and young adults should include families, too. Pastoral leaders might consider hosting faith-sharing groups for the families of young people, connecting them with spiritual directors or holding programs on how they can guide young people at home and in conversations around the dinner table, by phone or social media, and when they return home for holidays.

7. **Allow more time for silence and discernment.** The constant flow of activity in a young person's life can further complicate transition moments. The church, in her wisdom, offers all of us wonderful tools to see, think, and act more clearly in tumultuous times: silence, prayer, and the art of discernment. We need to encourage youth and young adults (and those of us who minister with them, too) to slow down and provide opportunities to hear God's voice amid their busy lives. Offer retreats, spiritual direction, holy hours and adoration, reconciliation, lectio divina, devotions, ritual, Liturgy of the Hours, contemplative prayer, and the Ignatian examen. In those moments, it is also good that young people learn to discern — to talk with God about their futures and where the Lord may be leading them. Teaching the art of discernment to youth and young adults will help them navigate life's journeys, especially the critical transition experiences.

There are certainly more than seven ways to create a culture of intentional accompaniment, and this can happen in a variety of settings and with young people at varying levels of religious and spiritual praxis. These seven are a beginning; they are simple ways to be more intentional about journeying with young people through their transitional moments.

Finding hope

Accompanying young people can overwhelm and tire us and fill us with doubt about whether our efforts will have any impact. But there are signs of hope. In the aforementioned *Going, Going, Gone* study, one story that caught my eye was that of "Justin," an active churchgoer who struggled with his faith as an adolescent. Because of the patient accompaniment of his pastoral leaders, Justin remained connected to the church into his collegiate and young adult years.⁵

Justin is a sign of hope. While the growing trends in religious disaffiliation are sobering, many active young people are still in our families, on our college campuses, in our parish and diocesan ministries with youth and young adults, and at national and international gatherings of young people. We are also aware of the strong presence of Hispanic-Latino young people, both immigrants and second- and third-generation US citizens, who comprise a significant amount of the Catholic population under 30 today. While they may faithfully participate in the church at this point in their lives, we cannot assume that they will

continue. We are called to accompany them through the transitions they are experiencing in their personal and family lives, in their ecclesial engagement, and in their work in the world.

Knowing that we would need examples of such robust accompaniment, the Lord gave us the Blessed Mother, who experienced much turmoil and transition in her life, just like we do. After undergoing societal scrutiny as an unwed expectant mother in Nazareth, she accompanied her son, Jesus, through his youth and young adulthood and persecution and death. After his resurrection, she accompanied his fearful young apostles to the upper room to await the coming of the Holy Spirit — just as she had cooperated fully with the Spirit three decades prior when she declared, "May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38 NABRE). Mary is a model for us, guiding the church through centuries of uncertainty and struggle.

The young woman at Nazareth and the queen of apostles at Pentecost reminds us to have hope. Once we are intentionally aware of the transitional moments of young people and walk with them in our homes, parishes, and campuses and in the world, God can work wonders through us. May we discover a new Pentecost of renewed engagement among youth and young adult Catholics across the country and around the world.

Notes

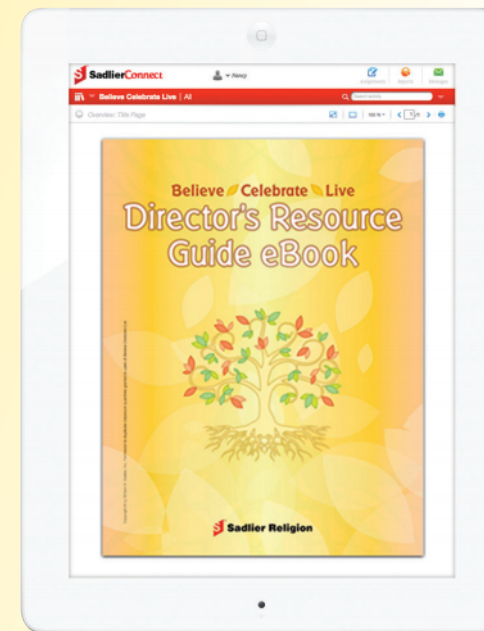
1. Fourteen percent of self-identified Catholic Millennials and 26 percent of self-identified Catholic Generation Xers attend Mass weekly. Mark M. Gray and Paul M. Perl, *Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among U.S. Catholics* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [CARA], Georgetown University, 2008. See Gray, "Sacraments Today Updated," Nineteen Sixty-four (blog), CARA, August 16, 2016, <http://nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com/2016/08/sacraments-today-updated.html>).
2. Chris's story can be found at <http://catholicresearch.smp.org/my-story/>. See the full study in *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2018).
3. Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly, "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Preparatory Document," available at <https://tinyurl.com/yd775vko>.
4. Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (Extended Version) (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).
5. Justin's story can be found at <http://catholicresearch.smp.org/my-story/>. See the full study in *Going, Going, Gone* (complete publication information provided in note 2, above).

Paul Jarzembowski is assistant director for Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life. He has consulted with and given presentations to over 250 dioceses, parishes, and Catholic organizations in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean and at the Vatican.

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Rediscovering the Journey: The Catechumenate Inspires All Catechesis

JOSEPH D. WHITE

This is a decisive moment for catechetical ministry in the United States. With the secularization of our larger society, large numbers of people leaving the church, and fewer people receiving formal catechesis than ever before, we are challenged to consider what will bring renewal to our ministry. What models can we look toward that will help us imagine more effective ways to hand on the faith in today's world? I propose that our catechetical future might be found in a reflection on an ancient aspect of our tradition — the catechumenate.

The idea that the catechumenate could serve as a model with which to animate post-baptismal catechesis is certainly not a new idea. The “General Directory for Catechesis” calls the baptismal catechumenate “the model of [the church’s] catechizing activity” (90). How are we as catechetical leaders called to model the baptismal catechumenate in our work? The GDC points to five elements of the baptismal catechumenate that serve as “the source of inspiration for post-baptismal catechesis” (91).

The fundamental importance of initiation

GDC 91 states, “The baptismal catechumenate constantly reminds the whole Church of the fundamental importance of the function of initiation and the basic factors which constitute it: catechesis and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.” More and more, those in catechetical ministry in the United States are realizing what was pointed out more than 20 years ago: “many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion” (62). The sacraments of initiation remind us that at the heart of conversion is an encounter with Jesus Christ. This encounter is not a one-time event, for we know that the Christian life is a “process of continuing conversion” (56).

A catechesis inspired by the sacraments of initiation calls us to live out our baptismal call, to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to allow ourselves to be formed as a eucharistic people. In his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis points out that “in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (120). As catechists, we are called to accompany the baptized as they discover and use the gifts God has given them and live out their faith at home, in the parish, and in the community.

The responsibility of the community

A second element of the catechumenate that inspires catechesis, according to the GDC, is that “the baptismal cate-

chumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community” (91). Citing the Second Vatican Council’s “Decree on Missionary Activity in the Church (Ad Gentes),” the GDC points out that initiation should be the care of not only priests and catechists but the whole community, especially the sponsors. The element of “community responsibility” inherent in the catechumenate reminds us that catechesis is an “apprenticeship in the entire Christian life” (30). The witness of the Christian community testifies to those being catechized that there are many different ways to live out our faith, but we are all called to be witnesses.

In an address to catechists in the year 2000, Pope Benedict (then Cardinal Ratzinger) said that “to evangelize” means to “to show this path — to teach the art of living” (“Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists,” December 12, 2000). Those being catechized who have encountered Christ in the kerygma — the initial proclamation of the Gospel — seek next to know how to follow him. One of the well-established principles of education that I have studied as a psychologist is the idea that *telling* someone how to do something is far less powerful than *showing* them how. This brings to mind the oft-cited words of Pope Paul VI: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (“Address to the Members of the *Consilium de Laicis*,” October 2, 1974).

Helping catechists be effective witnesses requires paying special attention to the formation of catechists. Their witness will flow from a spirituality that finds its root in each catechist’s own encounter with Jesus Christ and the relationship that grows from that encounter.

In considering the role of the entire community in catechesis, we must never neglect the family — the domestic church — who are certainly the most important members of the community with respect to catechesis of children and teens. How to more effectively engage parents and families in catechesis and move away from a school model of parish catechesis is one of the most pressing questions in many faith communities today. We must never tire of pursuing new models to accomplish this, because to resign ourselves to a routine of forming only children with limited parental involvement is to do a great disservice to both the child and the parent. The family has a privileged place in catechesis. When we give up on involving parents, we unwittingly give the illusion that weekly parish-based catechesis will ade-

quately form a young person in faith; yet we know full well from both church teaching and experience that this is not so. We also do a disservice to the whole parish community when we are satisfied with forming only children, because we are failing to provide adequate structures for the realization that formation in the faith is a lifelong process. While a focus on forming parents and whole families still does not provide comprehensive adult faith formation (for example, it does not address the needs of singles or older adults in the parish), it is often a first step toward a program of lifelong faith formation, since adults will sometimes do for their children what they would not do for themselves.

The power of the paschal mystery

A third element of the catechumenate cited by the GDC as an inspiration to all catechesis is that “the baptismal catechumenate is also completely permeated by the *mystery of Christ’s Passover*” (91). The connection between the catechumenate and the paschal mystery reminds us of the salvific power of the gospel. So many aspects of our culture today cry out for redemption—from economic disparity, racism, a culture of death that sees human persons as disposable. The same Jesus who died and rose to new life proclaims these words to us: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rv 21:5 NABRE). There is power in the gospel — power to change the world. But this change must begin within each of our hearts. In the sacraments of initiation, we enter into the paschal mystery, we die in Christ and are raised to newness of life. From that point forward, our lives are “hidden with Christ” (Col 3:3), we have clothed ourselves with Christ (Gal 3:27), and we are following “in his footsteps” (1 Pt 2:21). It is Christ in us that will bring newness of life to our culture and our world.

God is active in every culture

A fourth element of the catechumenate that inspires all catechesis is this: “The baptismal catechumenate is also an initial



Because we are created by God for relationship with God, the “seeds of faith” exist in every culture and in every person.

locus of inculturation” (GDC, 91). Because we are created by God for relationship with God, the “seeds of faith” exist in every culture and in every person. Some examples might be our admiration for selfless heroes who sacrifice their lives for others, our awe in the face of great beauty in nature, and the bond of love between a parent and child.

These common experiences of being human have, within them, divine presence. It is a short journey from these moments to an experience of encounter with Christ. Too often, our catechesis has been focused on drawing distinctions between the sacred and the profane, the physical and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred. But God speaks this word to us: *incarnation*. Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine. He entered into the world of human experiences and gives us an opportunity to find God in our own. The great contribution of St. Thérèse of Lisieux was not a profound theological construct but the idea that a sure path to holiness was to be found in offering the smallest of everyday moments to God, finding God in even the most mundane of tasks. Pope Francis addresses this inherent spirituality of daily life in his apostolic exhortation “Amoris Laetitia,” stating, “The Lord’s presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes” (315). Our daily lives are not distractions from the spiritual journey but, rather, the vehicles for it.

Being formed into the fullness of faith

The fifth element of the catechumenate cited by the GDC as a source of inspiration for catechesis is the idea that “the baptismal

FIVE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR POST-BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS

1. The initiation sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist remind us of our call to be missionary disciples.
2. The essential role of the whole community in the initiation of catechumens increases our awareness of what it means to live our faith.
3. The baptismal catechumenate reminds us of the centrality of the Easter Vigil, the focal point of the Christian liturgy, and its spirituality of baptism, which inspires all catechesis.
4. The baptismal catechumenate reminds us that God dwells in every person and every culture. The incarnation of the Son of God, made man in a concrete historical moment, is the ultimate example of this truth.
5. Finally, just as with the catechumens, the ongoing formation of the baptized has a gradual character expressed in definite stages; it has a connection with meaningful rites, symbols, and biblical and liturgical signs; it has constant references to the Christian community.

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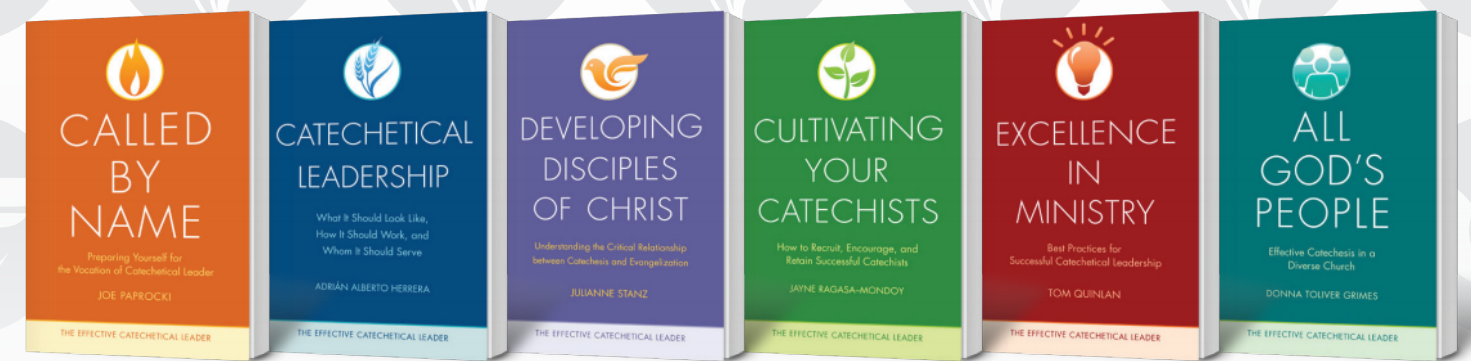
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catechumenate as a process of formation and as a true school of the faith offers post-baptismal catechesis dynamic and particular characteristics: comprehensiveness and integrity of formation; its gradual character expressed in definite stages; its connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs; its constant references to the Christian community.” The catechumenate models for us the idea that there is a fullness of faith to which we are called. In a society that is increasingly polarized, in which people gravitate to information that supports prior knowledge and strongly held opinions, our faith invites us to dive deeper, to grow, and to learn. The prominence of party politics in our culture today causes many individuals to identify with political party first, and faith second. This can result in our embrace of an incomplete gospel — an understanding that complements our everyday lives but doesn't transform them. The catechumenate reminds us to look at the fullness of the faith and allow it to change us.

Even so, this is a gradual and lifelong process. The catechumenate reminds us that God reveals himself to us more and more as we are ready to hear and understand. We see this in salvation history as God reveals himself to his people, first through creation itself, then through a series of covenants, and most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. We also see this in our own lives, as we reflect on our own faith journeys and the ways in which we have grown and changed. This aspect of the catechumenate reminds us to have a developmentally responsive approach in catechesis, realizing that every learner is in a different place in his or her own journey and that our call as catechists is to proclaim the message of Christ in a way that meets the needs of the learner — to say it in the way they can best hear and understand.

God gave us five senses, and the rites of the catechumenate allow us to experience moments of conversion in concrete and multisensory

ways. Taking this as an inspiration for all catechesis, we are reminded to facilitate catechetical experiences that appeal to those who learn best by seeing, by hearing, and by doing. Dr. Howard Gardner's often-referenced theory of multiple intelligences is still a useful paradigm with which to consider whether we are speaking to all learners in our catechetical methodologies.

Finally, we must continue to be mindful of the community in every stage of the catechetical process. Ours is not a solitary faith but a communal one. It's not “Jesus and me” but rather “Jesus and us,” for we are the body of Christ.

It is, I think, a very Catholic idea that we should look to something ancient in order to find something new. Here we go back to the beginning. May all catechesis find renewal in the catechumenate — that initial journey of conversion — for it is in these sacraments of initiation that we are joined to Jesus Christ and his church — ever ancient and ever new. 

Dr. Joseph D. White is a clinical child psychologist and a national catechetical consultant for Our Sunday Visitor Publishing. He is the author of *The Way God Teaches: Meeting Special Needs*.

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Stories Have a Role in Nurturing Faith

JOELLYN CICCARELLI, JULIANNE STANZ, AND TOM MCGRATH

We all have a story of faith. Hearing the words “Once upon a time” or “I’ve got a great story to tell” can instantly send a thrill of expectation into our hearts. Story engages the part of us that harbors anticipation and hope, including hope for the hopeless and rescue for the lost.

The power of story is a vital element in the life of Catholics. In fact, according to “Go and Make Disciples,” the USCCB’s national plan for Catholic evangelization from 1999, we all *are* a story of faith. As followers of Jesus Christ, our greatest storyteller, we know that telling stories is a way to build bridges that connect us with others and more deeply with God. It has often been said that “the shortest distance between two hearts is a story.” Story paves the way for deep understanding and personal transformation because it transcends the distance among generations, races, and states in life.

An effective way to prepare people, young and old, to open their hearts to our Catholic faith is to expose them to stories that echo, explicitly and implicitly, the Good News of Jesus. As Jack Shea, theologian and storyteller says, “Effective communication within any tradition is always a matter of one generation holding the next to its heart.” That describes what happens (sometimes literally) in the telling of stories.

When we can connect our own small stories to God’s grand story, our seemingly insignificant stories gain new meaning, purpose, direction, and depth. Entering into well-told stories that echo God’s grand story of salvation helps children and adults alike inhabit the kingdom of God as citizens who belong rather than tourists just passing through.

Stories work!

Stories are one of the most effective ways to evangelize, invite deeper conversion, and offer spiritual truths in a way that people can receive. When we are listening to stories, our defenses go down and our attention goes up. And as Julianne Stanz of the Diocese of Green Bay often says, “An arrow aimed at the head won’t pierce the heart.”

Employing stories as a formal part of a faith formation lesson is a strategy that makes great sense — because it works! Think back on your own life and answer these two questions as best you can: Who in your early life had the biggest impact for good on your faith? How did they make that happen? If you were to tell a group of friends the story of the person who inspired

your faith and how it happened, we’ll bet that would prompt others to recall and share similar stories from their own lives.

Stories stay with us. They make a home in our imaginations and continue to inform our ways of thinking, acting, and choosing all through our lives. Think of a story from when you were young (a book, a movie, a campfire story) that remains vivid in your imagination even today. Odds are it’s a story that reveals or points to some aspect of faith.

Utilizing stories in religious education sessions allows you to reach your audience in ways that are more powerful and immediate. Lauren Holloway, founder and chief of The Storytelling Agency, says, “Storytelling gives you the opportunity to talk *with* your audience, not *at* them.” Just as using art in the classroom allows a whole new entry point to help you reach the students’ hearts and imaginations, stories “sneak up” on the listener and deliver your message. As St. Ignatius said about reaching people with no seeming interest in faith, “Go in their door, and bring them out your own.”

Getting to the heart of the matter

Telling stories is a “pull” strategy rather than a “push” strategy. You tell the story and it pulls people into the lesson, information, or inspiration with which you want to influence them. It’s a strategy of attraction rather than promotion, drawing listeners and readers toward what fascinates their hearts. Many today have not heard the Good News or may have heard bits and pieces of the Christian story but have not accepted it fully. They seem to get lost in the labyrinthine complexity of the teachings and doctrines of the church and, to use a popular expression, “miss the forest for the trees.”

Stories that illuminate Christian principles or church teachings provide natural opportunities to evangelize and to invite people to deeper conversion. When we are listening to stories that reveal spiritual truths in creative, entertaining ways, our defenses go down and our attention goes up.

Stories stay with us.



THE KERYGMA: THE SALVATION STORY IN FIVE ACTS

(with support material suggestions)

Act I. God is love and has created me for relationship with him.

- * Scripture: Genesis 1:26–28
- * Prayer: The Lord’s Prayer
- * Saint: Gianna Beretta Molla (*Loyola Kids Book of Saints* by Amy Welborn, 14–16)
- * Children’s Books: *You Are Special/Tu Eres Especial* by Max Lucado; *Leo’s Gift* by Susan Blackaby and Joellyn Cicciarelli

Act II. I have broken my relationship with God by my sin.

- * Scripture: John 1:7–9
- * Prayer: The Confiteor; The Daily Examen
- * Saint: Vladimir the Great (*Loyola Treasury of Saints* by David Self, 130–132)
- * Children’s Books: *Enemy Pie/Pastel Para Enemigos* by Derek Munson

Act III. Jesus restores my relationship with God through his life, death, and resurrection.

- * Scripture: Acts of the Apostles 2:22–24, 32–34
- * Prayer: The Creed; The Stations of the Cross
- * Saint: Francis of Assisi (*Loyola Kids Book of Saints* by Amy Welborn, 205–210)
- * Children’s Books: *Horton Hears a Who* by Dr. Seuss; *The Story of the Cross* by Mary Joslin (for preschool and children with special needs); *Dear Pope Francis/Querido Papa Francisco* by Pope Francis, 32–33

Act IV. Jesus invites me to trust him, to turn from sin, and to give my life to him.

- * Scripture: Corinthians 15:1–14; Luke 18:35; Mark 8:22–25
- * Prayer: Ignatius of Loyola’s “Suscipe (Take, Lord, Receive)”
- * Saint: St. Edith Stein (*Loyola Kids Book of Saints* by Amy Welborn, 191)
- * Children’s Books: *Drop by Drop* by USCCB; *The Gift of Nothing* by Patrick McDonnell

Act V. Jesus has poured the Holy Spirit into my heart to bring me to new life in his church, and he sends his church on mission so that others can experience that new life.

- * Scripture: Titus 3:4–7; John 7:37b–39a; John 1:15
- * Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit
- * Saint: Catherine of Siena (*Loyola Treasury of Saints*, 152)
- * Children’s Books: *The Gift of Nothing* by Patrick McDonnell; *Green Street Park* by USCCB; *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats; *Shh — God Is in the Silence/Shh — Dios está en el silencio* by Fiona Basile

A final consideration

Through a well-told, meaningful story, belief is inspired, knowledge is solidified, and hope is renewed. Jesus himself knew that story is the path to creating faith — that the power of story opens people up to the truth. With Jesus as our model, we too should make good use of stories in evangelization, religious education, and spiritual formation.

We encourage you to tell your own personal story of coming to faith and knowing the love of God. When you do, be sure to end with a specific call to action — an intentional invitation for the listener to consider taking the next step in his or her relationship with Christ. Too often we bring people to the decision point but never explicitly make the invitation. Simply asking, “Would you like to experience more of this Jesus?” or “Would you like to come to know him better?” is a direct and powerful way to offer someone the gift of Christ. And that’s how the story continues.

More than passing on information,
our goal is always to introduce our hearers
to a person — Jesus. We share the gospel by
proclaiming the story of salvation.


One benefit of using stories as part of a lesson is that stories reflect and honor the complexity of life, offering many entry points for listeners to open themselves and become ready for personal movement or change. Good stories leave room for the use of imagination and invite all involved to enter into mystery, awe, and faith. The space between another’s story and your own is a fertile space in which the Holy Spirit can work.

As catechetical leaders we are always trying to present the Good News in ways that hit home. More than passing on information, our goal is always to introduce our hearers to a person — Jesus. We share the gospel by proclaiming the story of salvation. In a word, we’re proclaiming the kerygma. “Kerygma” is a Greek word used frequently in the New Testament to describe the initial proclamation of the gospel in order to introduce a person to Christ with the intention of conversion. Personalizing the gospel message — telling hearers what Jesus has done for us and inviting them to respond in faith — can be a powerful experience for people. This personalization moves listeners from seeing the gospel as a story that happened outside of themselves to seeing it as a reality that they participate in.

Pope Francis often speaks of the role of the kerygma in the catechetical process: “In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. The kerygma is trinitarian. ... On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you’” (“Evangelii Gaudium,” 164).

The events of our salvation can seem so remote because they happened long ago. But the drama of being lost, found, loved, and

blessed happens in every age and is available to everyone who hears and believes. Stories can populate our imaginations with the possibility of God’s saving love reaching hearts now and making the gifts of the Holy Spirit available to us today. They can affirm the five key messages of the kerygma — creation, the fall, the paschal mystery, conversion, and life in the Spirit — and prepare us for a life of faith.

We can use stories to tell about the saints and heroes of our faith, and we can use stories to teach about moral and spiritual virtues, but in light of the church’s raised focus on evangelization and missionary discipleship, we offer a way to use stories to teach the kerygma (see opposite page). “The Kerygma” is the story of our salvation in five acts, at the heart of which is the paschal mystery. “The Kerygma” capsulizes the grand story of God’s saving love for us, a story that gives meaning to all our individual stories; it’s the paradigm for understanding our lives through the lens of God’s love. We offer suggested Scripture passage(s), saint(s), Catholic prayer, and popular children’s stories that echo, interpret, and/or point to each element of the kerygma. The varied literature choices and diverse genre offerings allow catechists to customize lessons to meet program needs and serve children’s individual learning styles and developmental stages. 

This article was developed as part of two presentations, one at the Mid-Atlantic Congress (Joellyn and Tom) and the other at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress (Joellyn and Julianne), both in 2017.

Joellyn Cicciarelli is president of Loyola Press and author of *Leo’s Gift* (Loyola).

Julianne Stanz is the director of discipleship and leadership development for the Diocese of Green Bay and the author of the book *Developing Disciples of Christ* (Loyola).

Tom McGrath is director of mission and identity at Loyola Press and author of *Together: Preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist as a Family* (Loyola).

SHORT VERSION OF THE KERYGMA:

I was / God did / I am

Sharing the Message of Mercy through the Big Screen

DOUG TOOKE

As Americans, we really have no concept of what it means to be persecuted for our faith. We may experience uncomfortable arguments, maybe a few insults, some rejection, but we are not asked to face torture or death for what we believe. At the heart of ODB Films' box office release of *Paul, Apostle of Christ* is this difficult theme of persecution. *Paul* offers a moving depiction of some of the personal lives behind the birth of the early Christian Church. It brings to life the real struggles, fears, and challenges of some of the individuals of this time, powerfully portraying the historical context of the early church and what life may have been like for those followers of Jesus trying to live out their new faith in the face of the life-threatening persecution and danger of Emperor Nero's Rome. It addresses

the human themes of love, grace, guilt, forgiveness, mercy, discernment, and perseverance. Nobody is beyond God's mercy: perhaps above all, this is the lesson of St. Paul's life. The message of mercy is the motivation behind ODB Films' desire to bring *Paul, Apostle of Christ* into parish communities. But it didn't start here. Allow me to explain ...

How ODB got started

Outside da Box was founded as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization in 2005 with the purpose of creating short films that help teens know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. The name of the ministry is its ethos: Do things differently. Not just to be dif-

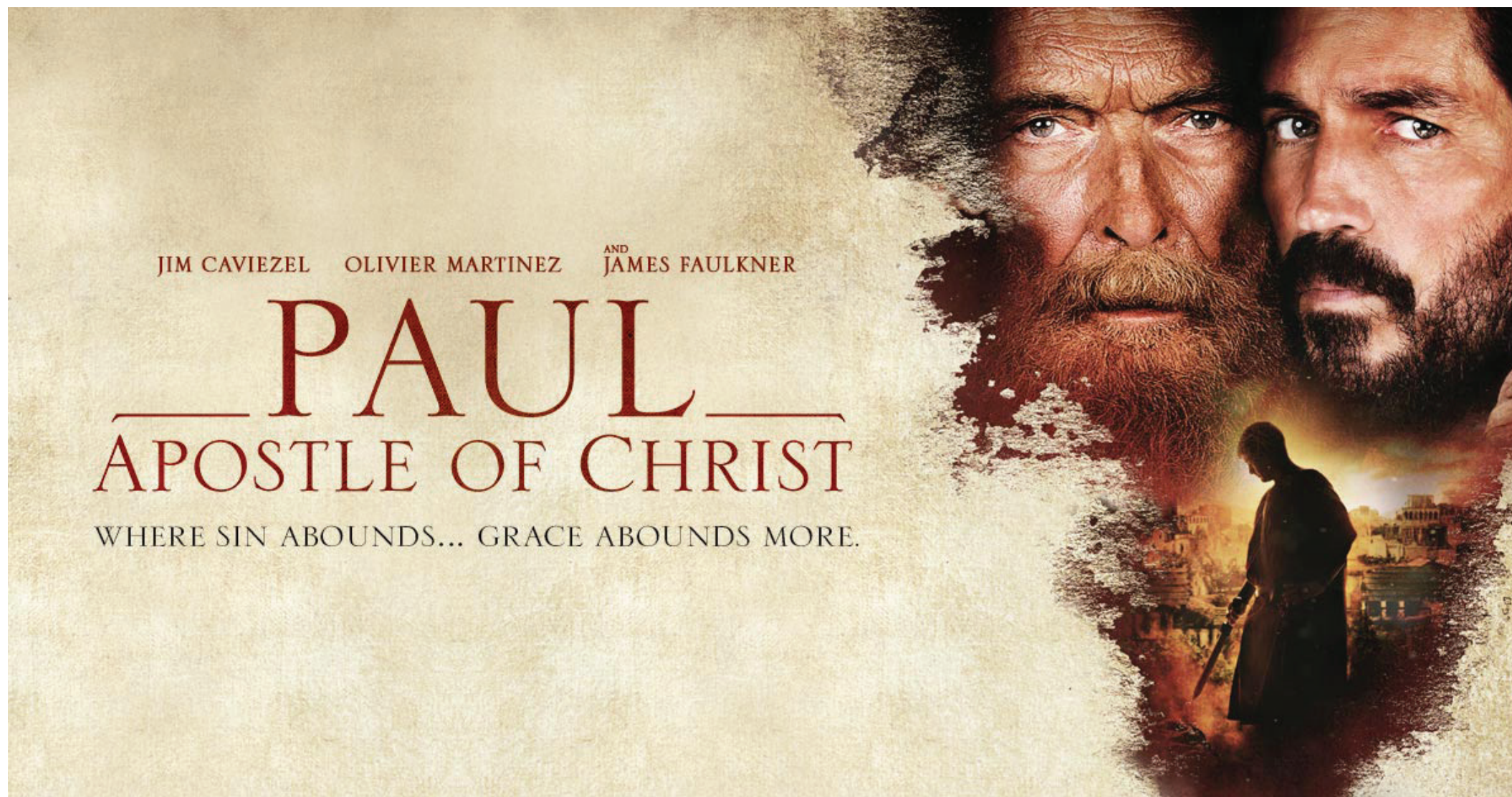
ferent but to address something critical. To fill a void and to do it with excellence.

In a world dominated by visual media, the need to use this medium to communicate the gospel was unquestionable. The church needs to speak the language of her young people. We scanned the horizon for accessible, relevant short film resources for Catholic teens and found nothing. We set out with a passion over the next 10 years to create something valuable; something beautiful; something that could be used at any point in a catechetical or youth ministry setting. Using short film content to introduce a topic grabs teens right at the beginning, and the movie medium represents relevance to them. Using that same film for your main content allows for fruitful

discussion and individualized application of the topic as it might uniquely pertain to the teens present.

In that first decade, we produced and distributed more than 150 short films, reaching thousands of young people in Catholic dioceses, churches, schools, and other Christian faith communities throughout the world. Award-winning films like *Zombies vs. Jesus* and our 60-film Video Catechism (VCAT) series provided the much-needed and much-wanted creative and relevant video resources that youth workers all over the world were desperate to incorporate into their programs and events.

In that decade, we also gave away (free of charge) more than 30,000 DVDs to thousands of individuals, churches, and organizations. We



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AFTER THE SHOW: QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE TEENS

- * Did you learn anything from this movie? If you did, what was it?
- * What is the message of this movie? Do you agree or disagree with it?
- * Was there something you didn't understand about the film? What was that?
- * What did you like best about the movie? Why?
- * What did you like least about the film? Why?
- * Who was your favorite character in the movie? Why?
- * Who was your least favorite character in the film? Why?
- * Did anything that happened in this movie remind you of something that has occurred in your own life or that you have seen occur to others?
- * What feelings did you share with any of the characters in the movie?
- * Did any of the characters in this movie make you angry? Tell us why.
- * Did you come to respect any of the characters in this movie? Who? Why did you come to respect that character?
- * If a priest or pastoral minister were to look at the actions of [select a character], what do you think the priest or pastoral minister would say about that person?
- * What were you thinking as you finished watching the film?
- * Would you recommend this movie to a friend? Explain your reasons.
- * What part of the story was the most powerful? Why?
- * If you had a chance to ask a character in this movie a question, what would it be?
- * If you had a chance to ask the screenwriter a question, what would it be?
- * If you were writing the screenplay for this movie, would you have changed the ending? Explain your answer.

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also brought Christ to the online world through our website, YouTube channel, and other social media outlets, with our films being viewed more than 2,000 times per day.

Where we are today

Today, ODB Films continues to thrive with a similar but expanded mission: to foster an encounter with Christ through artfully made, spiritually rich films. We took that same desire, passion, and creativity on which the company was founded and applied it to the feature film space with the release of *Full of Grace* in 2016 and *Paul, Apostle of Christ* in 2018. What sets ODB apart in this space is not its ability to produce top-notch films that are successful in the box office or in direct ministry circles but its ability to engage people in, through, and beyond the process. As much as we are called to create something beautiful, we are also called to love and serve the people with whom God has entrusted us during the production process. We act as the custodians of God's love for them in a space where the dollar often trumps the dignity of the human person.

As a not-for-profit entity consecrated to Mary in the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, ODB Films is boldly dedicated to direct service ministry. Families, youth, and young adults all hunger for life-giving discussion and engaging ministry opportunity. In response to that need, ODB Films developed Film & Reflection events for parishes, schools, and communities across the country (available in both Spanish and English). A Film & Reflection event is the full screening of either *Full of Grace* or *Paul, Apostle of Christ* (or both) followed by an engaging presentation and discussion led by a member of the ODB Films production team. It is the ideal family faith formation night — filled with stimulating conversation, great cinema, and edifying ministry encounter.

Host parishes elect to receive some or all of the following:

- * Extended viewing license for *Paul, Apostle of Christ* for up to 1,000 participants
- * A copy of the DVD and Blu-ray disc and poster (for the host)
- * A signed copy of the DVD and Blu-ray disc and poster (for door prize)
- * Promotional materials: 18" x 24" poster, banner ad, bulletin ad (digital copies)
- * A ministry discussion guide for large and small groups
- * An ODB Films team member to incorporate

into your parish mission, retreat, or conference for keynote or discussion (or both)

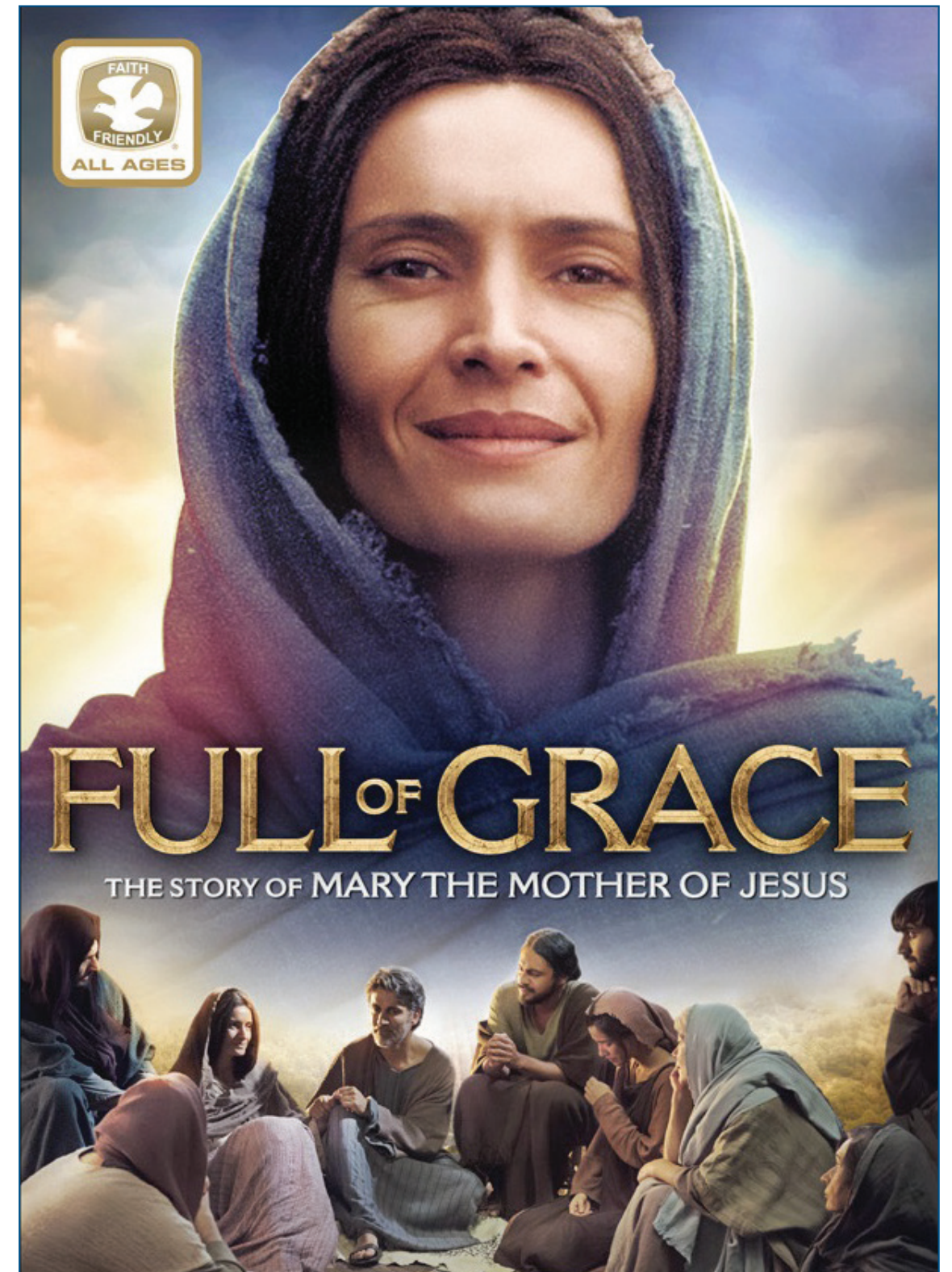
- * Onsite sale of ODB Films merchandise

Film & Formation is offered at different price points with different levels of commitment.

From engaging teens in the short film production process, to doing the same with those who accompany us in the feature film space, to providing Film & Reflection events in churches, we are often reminded that the films are just a tool that provides us with a multitude of opportunities to evangelize and show others what Christ's love truly looks like. Our films bring to life the real struggles, fears, and challenges of today in the people of our Christian origins. This solidarity with the foundations of our faith provides a bedrock for innovative discussion and evangelization. ODB Films is a ministry first. This is who we are. This is why we exist. 

Doug Tooke is the director of ministry with ODB Films as well as an adjunct staff member with Lifeteen International. With bachelor of arts degrees in both philosophy and theology and a master's degree in pastoral ministry, he has over 20 years of professional ministry experience. He has traveled to more than 100 dioceses in the past 15 years teaching, keynoting conventions, and training

youth ministers. He is also a recipient of the National Catholic Youth Ministry Award from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. If you are interested in learning more about ODB Films or in hosting a Film & Reflection event, visit ODBFilms.com/events.



The Jesus Formula for Campus Ministry

KYLE TURNER

Today's landscape is pretty different from what it was a couple of decades ago, when I was an undergraduate student. In reading today's *signs of the times*, one must recognize how real shifts have occurred in how today's traditional college students view their world as well as their place in that world.

Notably, if we are attentive to recent polls such as the Religious Landscape Surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, the role that religion plays in the lives of college students today is different from what I experienced some 20 years ago. But college campus ministers and religious educators need not lose hope when engaging in their ministry.

Opening doors

We are entrusted with a precious responsibility to accompany college students on their journeys of faith, journeys in which many students find themselves struggling to make sense of how religion can and should impact their lives. I have found that in myriad occasions, college students have an *authentic* longing for relationship with the living God. I have learned how important it is to approach working with students as a ministry of encounter and engagement within this longing. Through this approach, the doors for evangelization and catechesis open to foster a bountiful harvest in the faith lives of young people searching for something "more" in their lives.

One day this past spring, a student entered our University Ministry suite in the student center looking to chat with a campus minister. I was free and happy to meet with her. I invited her into my office and we sat down. After some brief introductions, she started to share with me a bit about her life and why she stopped in on that day. A cradle Catholic, she was trying to seek out what role God was playing in her life now.

She shared with me, quite frankly, that even though she had been raised Catholic, she was "not like the other students who frequented University Ministry." It seemed she had a view of those students as being overly pious, while she viewed herself as one who could not live up to the standards that the church had set in front of her. She expressed feelings of inferiority and shame.


My general impression was that while she was feeling quite guilty for not being an actively religious person, God's Spirit was truly moving within her life. Despite an evident desire for relationship with God, she felt she was somehow not "good

enough" to enter into authentic relationship with the Divine.

Listening without judgment

In reflecting on this encounter later, what struck me most was that this meeting had been a perfect opportunity for me to be a compassionate presence for this young woman. What she needed was someone to welcome her without judgment, with an attentive ear to listen to her story. What she needed on that day was for someone to meet her where she was on her journey, in that moment, without pretense or agenda. She had a story that needed to be told, and she needed someone with whom to share her tale. I sensed that she had some anxiety about sharing her story, but I give her credit for taking the risk to engage with me as a representative of the ministry presence on campus to get her story out there and to further open the door to God's presence moving in her life.

We can look to Jesus's own approach to ministry as *the* ideal model to emulate in encountering college students who may not fit the particular "mold" of being regular, churchgoing young adults. Jesus reached out to people of all stripes and walks of life throughout his public ministry. His welcoming presence engaged individuals who otherwise were distanced from the religious community of the day. One need only reread the stories of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, inviting Zacchaeus down from his woody perch to visit the tax collector in his home, and healing the man born blind to see that Jesus regularly reached out to those who were on the margins of religious society.

Jesus shaped his earthly ministry as one of encounter and engagement. He met people where they were, he listened to their stories (and on occasion he had his own insight into their stories), he acknowledged where each was on their individual faith journey, and he recognized their longing for something more in their lives. In following this formula, Jesus forged relationships in ways that would not have been possible otherwise. College campus ministers and religious educators would be wise to follow his example. 

Kyle S. Turner, MA, STM, is associate university minister for liturgy at Regis University in Denver. He lives in Lakewood, Colorado, with his wife, Kristin, and two young daughters, Abigail Hope and Siena Grace. Contact him at kturner005@regis.edu.

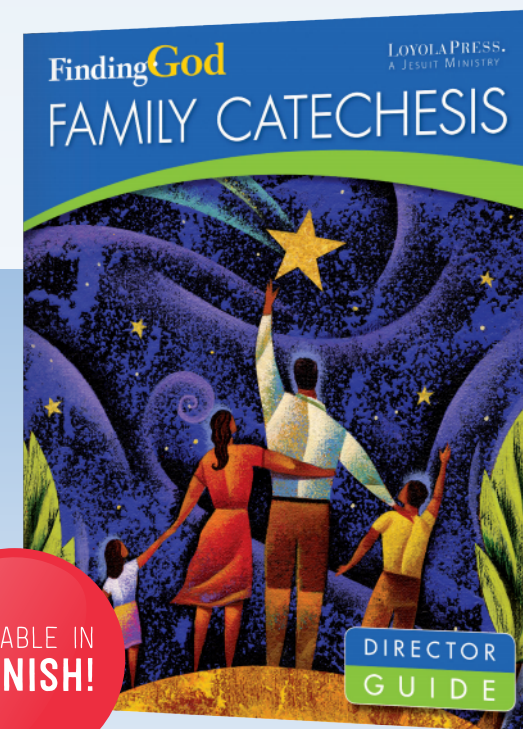
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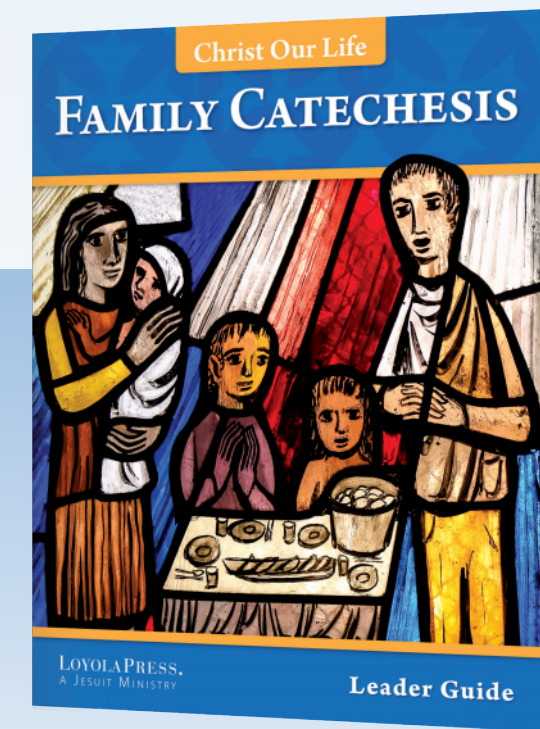
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It's All About Jesus: Ecumenical Friendships and Mature Adult Faith

THOMAS D. SAULINE

"It's all about Jesus," a Lutheran pastor friend reminds me regularly. We have served together for over ten years on the commission implementing the Lutheran Catholic Covenant between the Roman Catholic Diocese of Youngstown (DOY) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America North Eastern Ohio Synod (ELCA NEOS). Bishop Thomas J. Tobin (DOY) and Bishop Marcus M. Miller (NEOS) signed the covenant in 2000 to work together for Christian unity in prayer, study, and action.

The primary aim of catechesis

My Lutheran pastor friend has made me a better Roman Catholic. He talks a lot about his reliance on God's grace through his relationship with Jesus. Growing up Catholic, I did not talk much about my personal relationship with Jesus. Inspired by my friend, and affirmed by Pope Francis, I share more often

the good news of my encounters with Jesus. Whether praying with the Bible, celebrating the sacraments, or serving others, I sense more deeply the presence of Christ in my life. As a faith formation leader, I understand better the aim of catechesis as "communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ" ("General Directory for Catechesis," 80, quoting Pope John Paul II in "Catechesi Tradendae," 5).

I have made my pastor friend a better Lutheran. He often shares with me his homilies. I appreciate his insights into the Sunday readings. He welcomes my reflections. I think my love for the word of God deepens his devotion to sacred Scripture. Our ecumenical friendship is a sign of the unity all Christians share through baptism. We accompany one another in following Jesus, who desires for his disciples *that they may all be one* (Jn 17:21 NABRE).

Ecumenical friendships nurture mature adult faith that is "living, explicit, and fruitful" ("Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States," 49, quoting "General Directory for Catechesis," 82). My faith is living. I have fallen more deeply in love with Christ because of the Christian witness of my Lutheran pastor friend and of those in other denominations. Every encounter with another person is an opportunity to meet Christ. Through them I experience the loving mercy of God that Francis talks about. I am more willing to share the love of Christ with others.

What mature faith looks like

Mature adult faith is explicit. My Roman Catholic faith is more explicit because of my ecumenical friendships. My Lutheran pastor friend's love of Eucharist has deepened my devotion. His faith in the grace of baptism has strengthened my baptismal commission to be Christ for others. His respect for Pope Francis as a sign of Christian unity makes me proud to be a Roman Catholic.

Mature adult faith is fruitful. Christian love bears fruit in the service of others, especially those in need. Another Lutheran friend of



Mature adult faith is explicit.
My Roman Catholic faith is more explicit
because of my ecumenical friendships.

mine tells me the story about growing up next door to a Roman Catholic family. Her Lutheran mother would bake the cakes for the Catholic neighbors' first Communion. The Catholic family would work the Lutheran neighbors' garage sale to raise money for Lutheran World Relief. This backyard ecumenism demonstrates Christian love in action. Pope Francis told representatives of the German Lutheran Church visiting the Vatican that "in being at the service to those most in need, we have the experience of already being united: it is the mercy of God that unites us" ("Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Pilgrimage of Lutherans," October 13, 2016).

Adult faith formation happens in ecumenical friendships. They are invaluable opportunities for conversations among adults about what really matters (Jane Regan, *Toward an Adult Church*) — the saving work of God through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Whether Lutheran and Catholic parents discerning how

to raise their children, participants discussing a passage in an ecumenical Bible study, worshippers socializing after an ecumenical Thanksgiving service, or local Christian churches working together on a Habitat for Humanity project, these conversations form Christian faith. Person-to-person encounters with Christ happen when baptized adults pray, study, and serve together. Ecumenical friends mature together in a Christian faith that is living, explicit, and fruitful. They help one another remember that it's all about Jesus. 📖

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ECUMENICAL ADULT FAITH FORMATION SUGGESTIONS

- * Add an ecumenical link to your church website, e.g., <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/index.cfm>.
- * Attend an ecumenical Thanksgiving service.
- * Celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with local churches. See http://www.geii.org/week_of_prayer_for_christian_unity/.
- * Gather with some Christian friends during Advent or Lent for a prayerful reflection on the Sunday readings.
- * Organize a book study with a neighboring Christian church.
- * Participate in a local ministerial association.
- * Partner with local Christian churches to lobby for immigration reform, support a soup kitchen, build homes for poor families, and accomplish other works of charity and justice.

Listening Is Essential

LEISA ANSLINGER

Listen. Stop and really listen. How often do we go through the days and weeks of our lives without really hearing all that surrounds us? The voices of family and friends; cries of babies and giggles of toddlers; the sounds of creation; the beauty of music, sometimes stunning in its complexity and at other times in its simplicity. Listen again. Now, to the hopes, dreams, and needs of the people in your faith community. People of all ages, with varying experiences of life and faith. Listen, as they attempt to put into words what they most desire in their lives. Words may escape them as they try to express what they long for, and yet, listen we must.

Shaping the culture

In a previous article in this column, we explored the role of culture in the parish and the way the community leads the people within it to live and grow in faith. As leaders, we have responsibility for shaping the culture in ways that will invite and encourage people to stretch, to extend beyond what is comfortable in order to live as Christian people in today's world. Our leadership requires us to always have this vision in mind and, with the vision firmly in our hearts, to discern what is needed within ministries and processes and within the parish as a community of believers.

Discernment requires listening—attentive listening in ways that will lead not only our people but us to stretch beyond what is comfortable: personally, as we continue to open our hearts to an encounter with the Lord, and pastorally, as we invite the Holy Spirit to guide our efforts to shape pastoral strategies and practices.

Recently, I had the privilege of attending training at the Fuller Youth Institute to better understand their study of congregations that are effectively engaging young people. (I will share more about the study and its implications in future articles here.) The training spanned six months, in which participants were encouraged to integrate their learning as they developed plans for the future. Participants included congregational and denominational leaders from throughout the United States. My cohort table included a leadership team from a small Baptist congregation in North Carolina, who invited me to participate in their discussions and planning. They shared how they had returned from the first training meeting anxious to get started. I think we can all relate to the excitement of returning from a conference or training ready to do something! As they had flown

home from the first training, they began to brainstorm all sorts of programs and events, getting excited by the possibilities. They had heard clearly and taken to heart how important it is to listen to the people we hope to engage; as a result, their plans emerged quite differently from what they had initially considered. Having listened, not only did they identify two specific areas in which to focus in the coming six months, but their young people were an integral part of the plans, ready to help lead and carry them out.

Ideas for listening


How do you listen to the people of your faith community as you shape pastoral life? Here are a few thoughts to consider as you prepare to listen, learn, and plan for the future:

Listen to the Gospel, to the deposit of faith expressed in the teachings of the Catholic Church, and to church documents: Carry the vision of people living and growing as Catholic Christian disciples in your mind and heart as you listen to their hopes, dreams, and spiritual needs.

Create structures for listening: Develop an annual pattern through which you invite people to share their ideas, offer feedback, and help you plan for the future. This might be accomplished through a survey online or in the bulletin, through focus or listening groups, or through already-existing committees or ministry groups.

Include what you hear informally: Be attentive to what people share with you in your day-to-day interactions within your community, and ask those who share leadership with you to do the same.

Include those who are not already deeply involved: Seek out those whom you do not know, especially people in age or ethnic groups who are not represented in the existing leadership structures.

Be prepared to act on what you hear: Maintain an openness to accepting constructive critique and adjusting plans, as you are able, to shape more effective practices in the future. 

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).

A Commitment to Conversion

CLAIRE MCMANUS

Many people realize the great impact Pope Francis's *Joy of the Gospel* can have on catechetical programs. Francis announced to catechists that the primary message they must deliver is the Good News of the kerygma, the message that our salvation lies within the *paschal mystery* of Jesus Christ. In the two stories that follow, we will see that we have some more work to do.

Narrowing the focus

The catechetical year was about to begin, but there was no one to replace the now-retired catechetical leader. The program had run well under her leadership, but the fact that there never were enough catechists had been masked by her covering gaps herself. The parish is in a busy suburban town where two churches were merged under the leadership of one pastor. He surveyed the situation and declared that the religious education program would focus only on the sacrament years, grades one and two for first Communion and grades eight and nine for confirmation. All other religious education would be the responsibility of the parents. They were given the books, told to attend a few mandatory meetings, and were then required to attend Mass on the weekends, with attendance taken to ensure compliance.

Lack of vocation

Another parish had a dedicated catechetical leader who managed to scrape together enough catechists to fill the classrooms, but most gave their hour each week, never bothering to come to Mass or take part in any formation, spiritual or otherwise. The catechists felt responsible enough to volunteer their time, but there was no sense of vocation. The catechetical leader was reluctant to place too many demands on her catechists, fearing that this would "scare them away."

* * *

In the first scenario, the pastor tried throwing a Band-Aid on a gaping wound that should have received a tourniquet. The increased numbers at Mass filled him with a temporary sense of satisfaction, but the notable increase in Mass attendance dropped off as soon as the catechetical year ended and the sacraments had been administered. The pastor hoped that even a brief exposure to the Gospel and his homilies would have an impact, but obviously they did not generate a desire to walk the path of discipleship.

The second scenario had a much different outcome. When the pastor first arrived at this parish and observed that he rarely


saw the catechists at Mass, he didn't blame it on parents or the catechetical leader but decided that the parish was in need of an evangelical makeover. Having been formed many years ago in the Cursillo movement, the seasoned pastor researched parish-based retreat programs that would nourish people's faith rather than relying on regional prayer meetings and reunions.

He found a parish retreat program that closely followed the Cursillo model and asked a group of parishioners to go on the initial three-day retreat with him. Not surprisingly, the forty willing participants who volunteered to join him in the training were members of the parish's inner circle. After this first group was formed, the excitement about the retreat began to spread, and the next year it was staffed by the first participants. Each year more parishioners attended, numbering in the hundreds after three years. The pastor created follow-up prayer circles, all of which are comprised by the laity, and now all catechists come from the ranks of those who attend the parish retreat.

Begin with encounter

We have received the same message from our recent popes that we must begin with an encounter with the living Christ before any other message can make sense. Still, we find it hard to break the old pattern of catechizing the unconverted. Pope St. John Paul II made it clear in "Catechesi Tradendae" that the aim of catechesis is to be the "teaching and maturation stage." This happens after "the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given Him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus" (20).

We have an immediate mandate to evangelize. We can't wait for perfect catechists to appear. Evangelization is hard work, requiring dedication and patience.

The formation of our catechists rightly focuses on the essentials of the faith, effective methodology, and understanding the faith journey of the learner. But first we must invite them into an encounter with the living Christ, or our catechists will have no faith to echo. 

Claire M. McManus, STL, is the director of faith formation for the Diocese of Fall River. Contact her at cmcmanus@dfrcs.org.

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

DAN PIERSON

Poverty: Responding Like Jesus

Kenneth R. Himes, OFM (Editor) and
Conor M. Kelly (Editor)
Paraclete Press

The poor will always be with you, Jesus said — but that doesn't mean Christians have ever figured out how to be with the poor. Pope Francis has emphasized a vision of a "Church that is poor and for the poor." This book takes a fresh look at the role of churches, and individual Christians, in relating to poverty and the poor among them. A strong focus is placed on the biblical and theological roots of the church's commitment to care for the poor.

At times praised as a virtue and blessed as a condition, poverty easily confuses us, and we are often left doing little to nothing to make a difference with and for the poor. As a social evil and a burden, poverty has elicited many kinds of reactions among the followers of Christ. It is time for Christians to figure out what to do about it.

Contributors include Pope Francis, PHEME PERKINS, SANDRA M. SCHNEIDER, IHM, and THOMAS MASSARO, SJ.

The Paulist Biblical Commentary

Paulist Press

The Paulist Biblical Commentary is a comprehensive commentary on the books of the Bible designed especially for those engaged in pastoral ministry. The volume consists of a commentary on each of the 73 books of the Catholic canon of the Bible and twelve general articles. While based on classical approaches to Scripture, the commentaries and articles are not limited to historical-literary issues but draw on relevant theological and pastoral ideas found in the text.

Rejoice and Be Glad Study Edition: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World

Pope Francis
Preface by Catherine Clifford
Foreword by Massimo Faggioli
Paulist Press

"We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case." (14)

Pope Francis's newest papal exhortation, "Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)," looks at the call to holiness in today's world, which is something we all can aspire to. No matter who we are, whether we are young or old, and no matter what our vocation, it is in the very act of living — with humility, kindness, and mercy — that we can become holy.

Everyday holiness has risks and challenges, but we do not have to settle for a mediocre existence. Rather, Francis challenges us to find a practical holiness, a "next-door" holiness.

The pope's overarching message here is this: we must cultivate seeing and acting with mercy. As he writes, "A person's perfection is measured not by the information or knowledge they possess, but by the depth of their charity" (37).

- * Chapter 1: The Call to Holiness
- * Chapter 2: Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness
- * Chapter 3: In the Light of the Master
- * Chapter 4: Signs of Holiness in Today's World

- * Chapter 5: Spiritual Combat, Vigilance, and Discernment


Chapter summaries, along with a study guide by Mark-David Janus, CSP, make this an approachable, uplifting volume.

The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully

Joan Chittister
Bluebridge Publisher

The Gift of Years reflects on many aspects of aging: the purposes and concerns, the struggles and surprises, the potential and joys. It invites us to embrace older age as a natural part of life that is both active and contemplative, productive and reflective, and deeply rewarding.

"Chittister beautifully downplays regrets and accents the rewards of a mature life. While she acknowledges the pain of old age, she focuses on the new beginnings that life can offer at this stage and discusses the need to stay involved, to put one's affairs in order, and to be open to new relationships." — *Library Journal*

"This collection of inspirational reflections ... abounds in gentle insights and arresting aphorisms ... Old age is rich for those who choose to thrive, not wither." — *Publishers Weekly* 

Dan Pierson has served as a catechist, Catholic school teacher, and parish and diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of www.eCatechist.com and Faith Alive Books, which publishes *The Catechist's Guide to Reading the Bible Series* (www.faitalivebooks.com).

