



CATECHETICAL LEADER



Grace and Faith

IN THIS ISSUE:

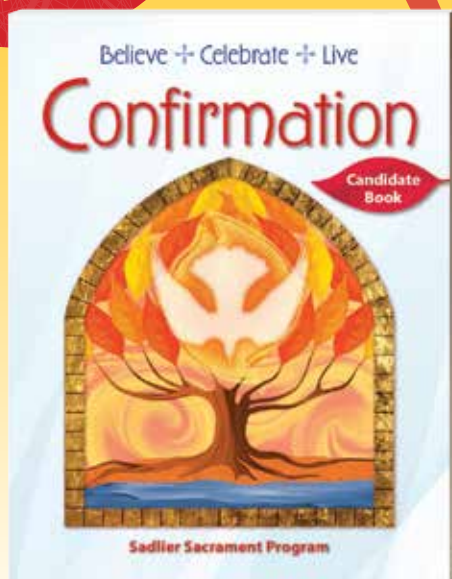
Faith Formation for the Generations

Overcoming Fear
in Middle School Ministry

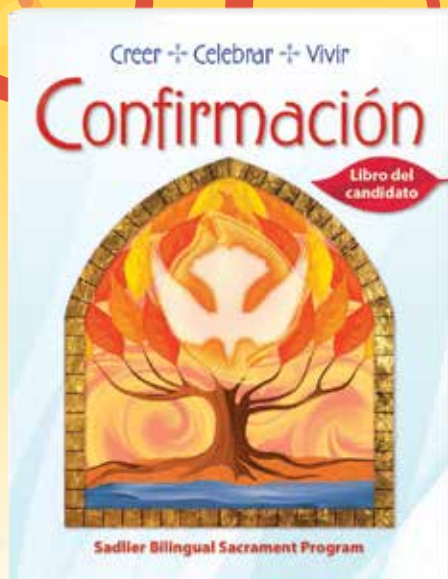
Naming Grace in the Domestic Church

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BLAMING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ken Ogorek



National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

The Holy Spirit sometimes gets credit for the good fruit that he helps to bear. Sadly, we sometimes blame the Holy Spirit for bad results of sloppy processes undertaken in the name of discernment.

There is no higher authority than the individual's informed conscience.

In practice, the word *informed* often gets lost in the shuffle. If I don't ...

- * know and continue studying church teaching, especially in the realm of morality,
- * celebrate the sacrament of penance frequently and receive Jesus often in holy Communion,
- * seek spiritual direction at least informally via reading (especially sacred Scripture), conversation, and attentiveness to events around me,

then the authority of my conscience is weakened. Saying "My conscience is permitting me to do thus-and-such" is not truly comforting because I've allowed my conscience to get out of shape.

Similarly, if a discernment process lacks reasonable ingredients, there's no guarantee that the Holy Spirit is acting through it just because we call it discernment.

I visited a parish recently that had several openings on the pastoral council. Parishioners were asked to write names of fellow parishioners on slips of paper (folks who they thought would be good council members). The names were placed in a basket, the Holy Spirit was invoked, a few slips of paper were drawn from the basket, and the new council members were announced.

There was no consideration of specific council or parish needs. No discussion of nominee gifts, talents, charisms, abilities, strengths. No opportunity for persuasion, coalition building, voting. Because the Holy Spirit was mentioned in prayer and the word *discernment* was used, parish leaders presumed that God's will became manifest.

How does your province choose its delegates to NCCL's rep council? Is it merely pragmatic ("Sue's the only one

who wants to do it so we suppose it'll be her") or is there a deeper process?

How does NCCL's Leadership Discernment Committee decide whose names are on the ballot for at-large board positions? How will you choose what officers to elect when my term as president ends in May of 2018? What process does your forum (Parish Catechetical Leader Forum, Diocesan Director Forum, Diocesan Staff Forum) use to decide who the forum leaders will be? These are important questions. They determine in part the degree to which NCCL's future will unfold.

Our executive director, Margaret Matijasevic, has worked hard in recent months to articulate, with the help of a task force, what specific procedures are part of NCCL's various discernment and election practices. These clarified protocols are helping to guide the selection of NCCL leaders in ways that try hard to be insightful, transparent, and reasonable.

No election or discernment process is perfect. Your willingness to identify room for improvement and suggest helpful enhancements to NCCL discernment practices, procedures, and protocols will help refine the way we choose leaders for our professional leadership organization.

Inviting the Holy Spirit to participate in decision-making processes is essential for catechetical leaders and all disciples of Jesus. Our procedures should ensure that the Holy Spirit is sitting at the decision-making table, not just peering in through the window.

When good, sensible election and discernment procedures are coupled with fervent prayer to the Lord and Giver of life—the Holy Spirit—whatever results come to fruition do honor to the Spirit of God and help manifest the kingdom as fully as feasible this side of heaven.

May truth and unity permeate your province's activities and figure prominently in your broader NCCL participation. May your membership in NCCL be life giving, and may the fellowship our organization provides help you experience God's love in ever-deeper ways.

I hope to see you at our annual gathering in the near future. May God bless you today and always! ■

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A JOURNEY THROUGH TRANSFORMATION

Margaret Matijasevic



As church leaders prepare to attend the USCCB's Convocation on the Joy of the Gospel in America, the Annual NCCL Conference theme will focus on transformative leadership. Some of the Spirit's most inspiring work comes from the unexpected congruence that often occurs in movements

that coincidentally collide while attending to the deeper realities of hopeful needs that tug at our hearts. Catechesis and evangelization transform lives, and we are called to be part of that transformation.

During the initial planning, the NCCL conference committee discussed that transformation begins in a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is only through nurturing that relationship and through honest discernment of choices made in our own lives that we can begin to know the depths of our faith. Monday's theme is attentive to the qualities and steps that assist us in being open to continual transformation in prayerful living. The committee concluded that only by starting there could we ever transform our parish and diocesan ministries, our national impact on catechesis and evangelization, and our global outreach in sharing the gospel.

The following three days of the conference look at those various levels of our discipleship and shared vocational call as catechetical and evangelization leaders. With a commitment to the constant nurturing of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we can then enter into the call of public ministry. Our lives begin to reflect the imagery of Christ to others, through a methodology of missionary discipleship demonstrated in accompaniment of others on the journey. The relational aspect of our personal prayer is what we then offer to others. The personal call of transformation influences the possibility of a communal transformation.

On Wednesday, as your executive director, I hope to kindle the fire within each member of NCCL that illuminates the importance of the national voice of catechesis. Rooted in the themes of Monday and Tuesday, the NCCL membership will come to discover that the vocation of the local catechetical and evangelization leader has a national impact. With a significant influence on the national history of catechesis and evangelization, NCCL members will recognize that the call for transformation in the ministry is ongoing. During such a contentious political climate, the call of the missionary disciple is

even greater, and our influence on the nation's perspective of human dignity is directly correlated to our response as leaders in forming consciences fully and journeying alongside others to demonstrate what hope-filled life with Christ can provide. What will be the successful models for our young people to say yes to the call of discipleship? What will transform the adults of our nation into deeper authentic relationships with Jesus Christ? What are we being called to offer as catechetical and evangelization leaders in the nation? And how does membership in NCCL influence the potential of the gospel's effective reach?

By Thursday, we will recognize that the gospel isn't something for us to hoard personally, locally, or even nationally. It is something we are called to bring to the world. Missionary disciples cannot contain their joy and hope. We are called to share abundantly with the world that which we are privileged to know. As the world becomes more accessible through technology, the call of disciples is dramatically shifting to something greater than that which is within our parish, diocesan, or even national boundaries. Young people expect catechetical leaders to offer them models of faith that are relevant in their discipleship to the world. Young people yearn to know how to share faith in the world.

I am hopeful that NCCL members will be the ones to offer new methodologies for catechesis and evangelization. And I am inspired that the Annual NCCL Conference is a good foundation, unique to our vocational role, to assist in the larger USCCB discussion that will launch us forth to be the joy of the gospel in America. Through transformational experiences at the NCCL Conference, catechetical leaders across the nation will be able to influence the practice of living out the principles of Pope Francis's *Joy of the Gospel*. The people we form, our catechists and our families of faith, will be directly impacted by our contribution in sharing joy. But we have to be dedicated to a transformation of our models and committed to a constant adjusting of our demeanor to one of accompaniment in the realities people live within today.

Only through a committed prayer life of personal transformation to a life of discipleship in Jesus Christ can catechetical and evangelization leaders impact the local, national, and global experience of the *Joy of the Gospel*. Let's commit and make 2017 the year that NCCL members influenced the growth of discipleship in unexpected, Spirit-filled ways. ■

Faith Formation for the Generations & Seasons of Adulthood

John Roberto



The typical parish adult faith formation program is a “one-size-fits-all” program—a Lenten speaker series, a small-group renewal program, a Bible-study program, a retreat experience, to name a few examples. The offerings are designed to address the needs of all adults. This approach—while it may represent the best a parish can do with limited resources, staff, and time—no longer fits the reality of today’s adults.

One of the key features of 21st-century adult faith formation is addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys at each stage of adulthood: young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid-50s–mid-70s), and older adults (75+). Each of these groups today reflects both a developmental stage of adulthood and a generational identity. We have this interesting convergence of life stage and generations that will be true for the next decade or so.

- * Young Adult Life Stage & the Millennial Generation (born 1980–99)
- * Midlife Adult Life Stage & Generation X (born 1961–1979)
- * Mature Adult Life Stage & the Baby Boom Generation (1946–60)
- * Older Adult Life Stage & the Builder Generation (before 1946)

We are well aware of the developmental uniqueness of each stage of adulthood. Generations also provide unique identities formed by cultural, social, and historical forces. Think about the differences between the four generations in these categories:

- * Generational relationship to institutions
- * Relationship to authority in every institution
- * Family relationships
- * Work-life balance
- * Communication style
- * Technology usage
- * Learning style
- * Spiritual and religious expression
- * Worship style

We also know that among today’s adults there is an increasing diversity of religious-spiritual identities, of participation in church life, of religious practice, and of the importance and significance

of religion and faith in their lives. There is a spectrum of religious-spiritual identities (and corresponding needs): those who are religiously or spiritually committed and engaged in the faith community; those who are less religiously committed and participate occasionally in the faith community; those who have left established churches and religion but are still spiritual and spiritually committed; and those who are unaffiliated and uninvolved and claim no religious identity.

Generationally, the highest levels of religious practice and engagement are found in older adults (Builders) and mature adults (Boomers), with decreasing engagement among midlife (Generation X) and young adults (Millennials). Approximately one in four Gen Xers and over one-third of Millennials are not religiously affiliated, and the number of unaffiliated Millennials is growing. They are participating less in church life and Sunday worship. Religion and spirituality may be important to them but are not usually expressed by participation in churches.

Given this great diversity across the adult stage of life, it is imperative that adult faith formation programs, activities, and resources are *targeted* and *tailored* to the lives of adults—at each stage of life and in each generation.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR THE 21ST-CENTURY

First, adult faith formation needs to be *person-centered*, not content- or program-centered. The content, experiences, programs, methods, and delivery systems need to be designed around the lives of the adults we serve. So much of adult faith formation is developed from a provider-centered, program-driven model in which denominations, publishers, and churches determine and deliver the content and programming.

We can no longer focus on how to get every adult to participate in a small faith-sharing group or to come to the Lenten series or to study the Bible. Adult faith formation is no longer about finding *the* program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with a variety of faith formation content, experiences, activities, programs, and resources. In this way, adult faith formation intentionally nurtures *communities of learning and practice* around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities of adults today.

We now need to develop four types of adult faith formation—tailored to the four seasons and generations of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults. With

the abundance of print, audio, and video content and the easy accessibility of digital media, churches can offer a greater variety of adult faith formation activities tailored to the needs of each season and generation. The digital world has given us resources to build faith formation around particular spiritual or religious interests, passions, or concerns. We no longer have to worry about reaching a “mass audience.”

Second, adult faith formation needs to be *comprehensive and balanced*. It needs to be developed around eight primary faith-forming processes that facilitate faith growth and incorporate essential knowledge and practices of the Christian faith. These eight have developed out of the Christian tradition and from research of the processes that make a difference in promoting discipleship and faith maturity across the life span:

1. Caring relationships
2. Celebrating liturgical seasons
3. Celebrating rituals and milestones
4. Learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life
5. Praying and spiritual formation
6. Reading and studying the Bible
7. Serving people in need, working for justice, and caring for creation
8. Worshipping God with the faith community

These eight processes provide both a *framework* for faith formation and the *content*—knowledge and practices—of the Christian faith. (Note the connection with the six interrelated tasks of catechesis.) Adult faith formation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood through these eight faith-forming processes.

Third, adult faith formation provides a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of people across the life span. Adult faith formation *content* can be available anytime and anywhere, tailored to the lives of adults. Adult faith formation can be *multiplatform*, incorporating seven environments—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, churchwide, in the community and the world (in online spaces and physical places)—to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.

Fourth, adult faith formation recognizes that learning is a *process of active inquiry*, with the initiative residing within the individual. Faith formation recognizes that the motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning. Connected to this reality is that adult faith formation needs to provide the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving people an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth—with trusted guides who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs.

Fifth, adult faith formation is *digitally enabled*—blending community settings with online learning environments and

utilizing digital tools for learning and faith formation—and *digitally connected*—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, peer experiences, and home life using online and digital media *and/or* reaching people in home life with online content and experiences that connect to church life.

Adult faith formation can now utilize digital technologies and digital media to engage people with faith-forming content anytime, anyplace—and expand physical faith formation settings through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere. (For an example go to SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.)

Sixth, adult faith formation needs to be designed as a *network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources*—in physical places and online spaces—that can offer adults “playlists” of engaging and interactive content and experiences tailored to their needs and interests—all offered *on a digital platform* that makes it easy for adults to find and follow pathways for growth in faith.

A network approach enables congregations to become centers for adult learning and faith growth by utilizing the best of the new digital technologies to bring an abundance of meaningful and engaging faith-forming experiences—both in the congregation and in the world, and in a variety of media—to all adults.

A network approach not only offers a variety of content but also a variety of settings for experiencing the content. This diversity of offerings is facilitated by the creation of an online platform (website and social media platforms) that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and that provides an online opportunity for people to learn from and connect with each other. (For an example go to SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.)

Seventh, adult faith formation is increasingly *curated*. In order to expand faith formation offerings, leaders will need to become skilled at *curating* content, experiences, programs, activities, and resources from a variety of sources—especially online and digital media—and becoming match-makers by matching content with adult needs. We are moving *from* an emphasis on developing religious content, designing and managing programming, and teaching/facilitating learning *to* designing faith-forming environments, designing digital platforms for faith-forming content, and curating religious content and experiences.

DESIGNING ADULT FAITH FORMATION

Using the seven principles and practices as a guide, here is a checklist for designing adult faith formation.

1. Focus the content

- ✱ Use the eight faith-forming processes as an organizing framework for developing adult faith formation.
- ✱ Connect the life issues (developmental, generational) of a season/generation of adulthood to the eight faith-forming processes. In the words of Tom Groome, faith formation moves “from *life to Faith to life*.”

- * Develop specific topics in each faith-forming process. Specify how each topic addresses their unique needs.
- * Curate content—programs, activities, resources, online and digital media—that addresses each topic.

2. Address the learning styles

In curating and creating adult faith formation, take into consideration the distinct ways each generation of adults likes to learn. For example, training in the corporate world is emphasizing microlearning and episodic learning—smaller units of learning that can be combined into extended learning programs. A microlearning unit could be 5, 10, or 15 minutes in length. This style appeals more to the younger generations than older generations. (Just think of how the typical YouTube video is 3–5 minutes in length today, but ten years ago was typically 10–15 minutes or longer.)

In general, we can say that each generation has the following preferences (which does not mean they won't learn in other ways):

Builders

- * Lecture and expert presentations
- * Activities that take into account their age-related abilities to hear, see, and move
- * Connection of the topic to their experience
- * Structure and predictability (no surprises); low-risk learning environment
- * Independent skill-practice time
- * Printed resources and books for study

Boomers

- * Group interactions and discussions
- * Storytelling
- * Chances to try new skills independently
- * Stable, risk-free environment but interaction with others too
- * Practical and fun activities that allow for team exercises
- * Use of technology as means for learning
- * Blend of people who prefer printed books and people who learn online

Gen Xers

- * Opportunities to learn by doing
- * Lots of experiential, direct-experience activities
- * Shorter, episodic learning experiences
- * Visual learning (images, videos)
- * Practical and relevant focus (What will I do with this learning?)
- * Discretion to complete tasks their own way
- * Independent, self-directed learning
- * Use of technology where possible, including online learning, video, etc.
- * More digital resources than printed resources

Millennials

- * Microlearning and episodic learning experiences
- * Lots of activity-based group work

- * Fast-moving, interactive activities
- * Visual learning (images, videos)
- * Technology-enabled learning using their own devices
- * Collaborative learning environments with peer interaction
- * Entertainment and learning at the same time

3. Provide a variety of ways to experience the content

- * Offer formation in multiple environments: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, churchwide, in the community, and in the world.
- * Design a program for multiple environments—offer it as a gathered program at church, as a small-group program in a variety of locations, and as a self-directed program. For example, video record a gathered presentation and then use the video to create a small-group program and an independent learning program.
- * Build a digital platform (faith-formation website) to present all of the opportunities for faith formation—in physical settings and online spaces.
- * Use social media (a Facebook group) to connect people participating in a common program, activity, or experience. Social media platforms can help create *communities of learning and practice* around shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to move from a “one-size-fits-all” approach to adult faith formation designed around the lives of adults from young adulthood through older adulthood. Apply the ideas in this article (and resources suggested below) by developing a small-scale pilot project focusing on one season of adulthood. ■

RESOURCES

Lifelong Faith Journal: Fall 2015 & Winter 2016 Special Issues on Adult Faith Formation. Available at lifelongfaith.com/journal.html (free).

Roberto, John. *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*. Naugatuck: LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.

———, ed. *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation, The*. Naugatuck: LifelongFaith Associates, 2015. Available at LifelongFaith.com.

Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

John Roberto is president of LifelongFaith Associates and works as a consultant to churches and national organizations, teaches courses, and conducts workshops in faith formation. He is also the project coordinator of the Certificate in Faith Formation for the 21st Century—a two-year online ministry education program sponsored by Vibrant Faith. His latest publications include *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* (editor and coauthor, 2016), *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* (editor and coauthor, 2015), *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century* (2015), and *Generations Together* (coauthor, 2014).

A GUIDE TO THE LIFE TASKS OF THE FOUR SEASONS OF ADULTHOOD

(Excerpted from chapter 8 in Roberto, *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*.)

Key characteristics of young adults

- * Exploring their identity
- * “Tinkering”—putting together a life from the skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand
- * Developing and maintaining intimate relationships with trust, love, and care
- * Transitioning from their family of origin toward establishing independence in living arrangements, finances, career, and other aspects of their lives
- * Differentiating self without repudiating or replacing their family of origin
- * Developing a career and occupational identity
- * Adjusting to the expectations and responsibilities of the “adult” world
- * Committing to a marital partner
- * Starting families and having children
- * Engaging in a religious-theological reevaluation and, sometimes, reinvention

Key characteristics of midlife adults

- * Exploring how the self is adjusted in the context of committed family, work, and civic relationships
- * Anchoring themselves in a particular way of life filled with commitments and relationships
- * Maintaining intimate relationships with other midlife adults while developing the capacity for new kinds of relationships with those younger and older than themselves
- * Caring and guiding the next generation, and often caring for the older generation
- * Building extensive personal networks for themselves and their families
- * Evaluating their lives at its midpoint
- * Reflecting on “What are we spending and being spent for? What commands and receives our best time and energy? What causes, dreams, goals, or institutions are we pouring out our life for? To what or whom are we committed in life and in death? What are our most sacred hopes and our most compelling?”
- * Engaging in family life and parenting children, adolescents, and, often, young adults
- * Seeking a religion that emphasizes personal identity, religious experience, and a quest for religious identity in community

Key characteristics of mature adults

- * Addressing the challenge of generativity
- * Addressing the challenge of integrity
- * Experiencing physical changes and decline, coming to terms with the cognitive changes related to a changed perspective on time and a personal,

existential awareness of death; seeking to stay physically and mentally fit

- * Disengaging from their primary career occupations, launching second or third careers, and developing new identities and new ways to be productively engaged
- * Retiring from full-time work and planning for sufficient income that will last into their later adult years
- * Blending (part-time) work, volunteering and civic engagement, pursuit of new interests, travel, and their role as grandparent into a new lifestyle for the mature adult years
- * Providing for their own or a spouse or partner’s long-term care needs
- * Establishing new patterns of relating to spouses, children, siblings, parents, and friends; leaving some existing relationships and beginning new ones
- * Experiencing changes in the marital relationship now that parenting responsibilities are minimal
- * Moving to the very core of their faith tradition, while appreciating other religious traditions
- * Seeking to be in service to others that is mission driven and can make a difference
- * Seeking spiritual growth in a time of life transitions and in a time when they are searching for meaning as they enter the second half of life
- * Seeking intergenerational relationships to share their lives, stories, and faith across generations

Key characteristics of older adults

- * Remaining vital and actively engaged in the lives of their community, church, social network, and family well into their 80s and 90s
- * Experiencing changes in their bodies and a decline in mental and physical ability
- * Continuing to learn and process new information
- * Addressing the challenge of integrity
- * Taking on new roles as senior citizens
- * Experiencing losses of friends and loved ones: death of a spouse, family members, and close friends
- * Facing the growing and continuous challenge of maintaining their independence
- * Becoming reconciled to their impending death and accepting their personal mortality
- * Growing into a deeper, more personal faith
- * Being engaged in the life of faith communities with a more traditional worship experience
- * Desiring to continue their learning as Christians

Faith Formation with Young Adults

Kyle Matthew Oliver



As a dedicated faith formation resource person with a specialization in digital media, I have observed that young-adult ministers are asking very different questions from other age-based or lifelong faith-formation professionals and volunteers who seek out our center's guidance. They want to know the

following:

- ★ How can we find new ways of funding our outreach to young adults?
- ★ What is the relationship of campus ministry to young-adult ministry?
- ★ What kind of church are we becoming?

The difference is that young-adult and campus ministers are always working at the margins of the church, especially in the “old-line” churches (mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics considered together). When you live at the margins, you *need* to ask questions about how you relate to the center.

Young-adult ministry operates on three distinct margins: demographic, cultural, and developmental. At the demographic margins, Millennials are the largest generational cohort in American history. Young adults are everywhere—except, of course, in church. Pew Research reports that only 18 percent of Millennials say they attend religious services “nearly every week” or more as of the late 2000s.

Religion may well become more important to the Millennials as they age, but slight upward trends do not change the experience of church for the young adults who *are* currently attending, where the young-adult experience can be one of isolation and alienation. It is often difficult to form a “critical mass” for young-adult fellowship or programs.

At the cultural margins, there is a disconnect between young adults and the rest of the church: churches led primarily by Baby Boomers are not responding well to the needs and values of the younger generations, and at the same time, it's sometimes unclear precisely what young adults are looking for. Although such strategies as ordaining more young-adult clergy or placing more young-adult leaders on church governance bodies are helpful, they will not by themselves make churches more attractive or responsive to young people.

We need a broad and inclusive conversation about the values each generation brings to what it means to be Christ's church in the world. Young-adult ministries will flourish if the values Millennials bring with them to church find a place to take root.

At the developmental margins, the in-between-ness of young adults is a huge part of why congregations are so flummoxed about them. Churches have long served children, youth, parents, empty-nesters, and elders. But emerging adults are a special kind of moving target, no longer youth but not quite adults.

How can churches meet twentysomethings where they are developmentally, supporting them in their transitions without condescension? How can the self-focused still contribute in a mutual way in intergenerational relationships? Those who are finding creative answers with specific approaches provide some helpful ways forward in young-adult ministry.

FINDING CRITICAL MASS: A MOVE TOWARD THE REGIONAL AND THE POST-DENOMINATIONAL

A common way to create a critical mass is for faith groups to band together for young-adult fellowship and ministry. Just as judicatories and larger regions have long employed youth coordinators to resource congregations, so now many are hiring young-adult ministers.

A related trend is happening in college ministry. Once, campus “chaplaincies” functioned like university student organizations for particular denominations. Today multiple denominations sponsor unified ecumenical ministries; campus missionaries bring students from multiple colleges together for regional student fellowship; and distinctions are dissolving between young-adult and campus ministry.

Notice, for example, a network coordinated in part by the Episcopal campus chaplain at New York University. Some of that chaplain's best practices include focusing on relationships—a lesson that churches everywhere are (re)learning with help from community organizers after years in the program-based wilderness—and letting go of competitive worries.

“Commonplace” is a yearly young-adult gathering for prayer, fellowship, and leadership development that started in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington but has grown to a regional event. Our denomination is looking to sponsor similar events in other regions.

What no denomination can afford to continue is the habit of trading on denominational loyalty alone. In the Episcopal Church, campus ministries flounder when they say, “We’ll be a home for all the Episcopalians on campus.” Many Episcopalians aren’t looking for such a home, and many more don’t particularly care if the Episcopal shield is on the sign out front.

A post-denominational approach acknowledges that the broader Christian tradition is much more important than the way denominations slice and dice that tradition. Denominational identities can help us form distinctive, authentic Christian communities that don’t assume a membership model of the past (“every Methodist will join our group”) or require a degree in the history of the Reformation in order to keep up with community worship and prayer practices.

This is good news for faith formation leaders. We’ve long known that the message of the gospel, the power of personal relationships, and the freedom to explore the rich diversity of the Christian way are more important factors than denominational brand identity in the forming of a mature and lively faith.

AN EMPHASIS ON SERVICE IN COMMUNITY

Following the popularity of secular programs like the Peace Corps, Teach for America, and AmeriCorps, almost every Christian denomination has created some program for service domestic or abroad, many of which predate their secular counterparts. These programs are a terrific response to the realities of emerging adulthood, providing food, housing, and employment at a time when many cannot find work; bringing young adults seeking to make a difference to areas of great need; incorporating vocational discernment about the future; and connecting them to faith communities when they are least likely to seek such connections.

These programs are changing Christian culture because they provide a positive model for how being the church is about more than Sunday worship. They serve as catalysts for outreach in their host communities. Participants become living signs of being a Christian in the world. The director of one program speaks of these ministries as fundamentally diaconal: interns bring the needs of the world to the caring attention of the church. In so doing, they are changing church culture.

Many secular and faith-based organizations find that an emphasis on service addresses the issues springing from Millennials’ waning religiosity and distrust of institutions. *The 2013 Millennial Impact Report* found that 73 percent had volunteered in 2012 through some nonprofit organization (22), compared to 18 percent who regularly attended religious services.

Service connects with young adults in a way that worship or church activities may not. It may not be easy for most Millennials to invite a friend to church. But inviting them to serve? That is a way to plant the seed of faith.

THE LENS OF AUTHENTICITY

In his book *Varieties of Personal Theology: Charting the Beliefs and Values of American Young Adults*, David Gortner found that social capital and education levels are far more significant factors than religious background in shaping the theological beliefs of young adults. An upbringing in a faith community, says Gortner, hasn’t mattered much for most of today’s young adults when it comes to their beliefs about God and the world. Yikes.

Nevertheless, Gortner found that “many young adults engage in [the] work of theological re-evaluation and reinvention—regardless of their affiliation or involvement with actual religious institutions” (328). Robert Wuthnow believes young adults’ often-individualistic approach to faith is the natural result of the lack of support religious institutions have offered them in their developmental transitions compared to that offered to youth (12).

We can both change church culture and further respond to young adults’ developmental needs by becoming a place where they feel safe to be themselves: anxious about their economic prospects, conflicted (or not) about their sex lives, doubtful about historical doctrines of the church, and so on. We have to be not just tolerant of tinkering, but pro-tinkering co-tinkerers.

Young adults need to be encouraged to own their faith, to make it real and concrete in their lives. The motto of the catechumenate program at Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis—“Your questions are not in the way—your questions *are* the way” (emphasis added)—is the appropriate backdrop for understanding the overwhelming emphasis, in communities successfully reaching young adults, on *authenticity*.

This theme has been particularly important at the Commonplace gatherings mentioned earlier. At the first event, participants were invited to share personal faith stories and to make sense of the idea of “resonance.” But the storytelling wasn’t the only way participants exercised their individual expressiveness. Musical and visual arts, including traditional hymns in nontraditional arrangements on some instruments rarely used in worship, were incorporated into our worship and prayer.

Prayer stations allowed us to share our intercessions and thanksgivings with God through drawing, writing, and sitting with images. A designated live note taker drew together the evening’s themes by painting an entire canvas in the span of our time together. It was a holy thing to see the fruit of our creativity laid before God as an offering.

At the expanded Commonplace event the following year, my colleague Jason Evans of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington made a helpful distinction in a workshop about making space for young adults in congregations. He proposed that congregations ask their young adults, “What can we build together?” rather than “What do you need?” because the former encourages authentic contributions to the wider church from a contingent

who loves to tinker, to hack together, to build *with* and *on* what they already have. By contrast, “What do you need?” smacks of consumerism and the notion that the church has the answers.

The lens of authenticity is helping many young-adult ministers find success by gathering around food and drink. Pub Theology brings the church to an authentic young-adult gathering place and usually destabilizes the expert-novice distinction often present in parish-based theological formation. Presbyterian pastor Adam Walker Cleaveland has written blog posts about his experience (start with “Theology Pub (2.0) in Ashland, Oregon”), and RENEW International offers resources for the licensed Roman Catholic version, Theology on Tap. If music and praise trumps reflection and study in your community, Beer and Hymns is a more recent development. Lutheran author and pastor Keith Anderson has a helpful “How to Host Your Own Beer and Hymns Night” post.

The Dinner Church model helps demystify the Lord’s Supper by putting it back into its original context: table fellowship. A founding model is St. Lydia’s, now in Brooklyn. The minidocumentary produced by StoryKeep introduces the St. Lydia’s approach.

It’s wrong to think of these approaches as merely luring in young adults with promises of food and booze. It’s about meeting them where they already are, trusting in Christ’s presence among any gathering of the faithful and the seeking, easing barriers to invitation, and acknowledging that the kinds of faith questions you’d ask in a pub or at a dinner table are just as legitimate as the ones you’d ask in the pastor’s office or parish hall.

I would not be much of a digital missionary (my official job title) if I did not finally mention the intersection of digital media with young-adult ministry. Online spaces are a primary outlet for all kinds of authentic expression, including religious expression. We shouldn’t assume that young adults demand or even desire that all our faith formation practices have an online component, but strategic efforts can lead to additional “faith touches” amid busy young-adult lives, reach new young adults (see Naughton and Wilson, 43), and help the church embrace the cultural fullness of American life in the 21st century.

A ministry to watch is The Slate Project in Baltimore. This Lutheran-funded, ecumenically shepherded church plant

appeals to young adults’ longing for authenticity by promising “Christianity Without the Crap.” Four times per week, Pastor Jason Chesnut and company create savvy faith content intended both for in-person and online followers. A recent Throwback Thursday post just before Reformation Day included an inspirational quotation from Luther about everyday Christian vocation. A Jesus Coffee Monday post by copastor Sara Shisler Go asked: “Just ‘Cause It Is in the Bible, Do We Have to Agree With It?” Intercutting dramatic performance of the text, video clips from popular culture, and evocative images overlaid with text, Chesnut’s YouTube videos represent a giant leap forward in biblical storytelling. The Slate Project is modeling for us all a new kind of proclamation in the native media of young adults: Not slick, but real. Not preachy, but faithful. Not gimmicky, but grounded in the culture that surrounds us. If that’s not authentic gospel witness, I don’t know what is.

SUPPORTING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT: YOUNG ADULTS AS PILGRIMS

In his 2011 book *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith*, Barna Group president David Kinnaman describes three categories of church “drop-outs”—nomads, prodigals, and exiles.

Nomads are “wandering from church” and “wrestling with faith,” prodigals are “rejecting” Christianity or leaving for another faith, and exiles have concluded that the church is the last thing their relationship with Jesus needs, that they can be more faithful by exiling themselves from “cultural Christianity” to seek a deeper, authentic faith in Christ (69, 83).

Faith formation is for all kinds of young adults: ones who have stayed in church, ones who have left, ones who have found other churches and communities in their time of exile, and ones who might be open to such communities. We can capture something of Kinnaman’s nomads and exiles, and something of the special developmental situation of young adulthood, regardless of one’s orientation to the church, if we imagine young adults as pilgrims.

Though all of life, and especially the life of faith, is a journey, young adulthood is a journey of meaning and adventure in a particularly intensive way. Leaving home, launching a career, starting a family—these are foreign lands indeed. Remember-

CATECHETICAL LEADER

PUBLISHER: National Conference for Catechetical Leadership
Catechetical Leader (ISSN 1547-7908) is typically published four times a year by the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), 415 Michigan Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20017.

Authors’ views do not necessarily reflect those of NCCL. Letters to the editor and submissions of news items are encouraged. Send to *Catechetical Leader* at the address above or e-mail office@nccl.org. Phone: (202) 756-5512
Fax: (202) 756-5519 Contact NCCL for reprints.
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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NCCL, 415 Michigan Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20017.

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ing this may guide us as we minister to these pilgrim travelers. “What are you seeking, pilgrim? What is your quest?”

If young adulthood is to be a time of dynamic faith formation, these are the questions we need to ask over and over again. The participants in many campus ministries and young-adult fellowships do not seem to be on pilgrimage together. At its worst, the campus ministry I participated in during college was where I went to escape the pilgrimage—to grab a home-cooked meal with friends after church and avoid all the pressing questions of my future.

A pilgrimage is just a trip if there is not both a journey and a meaning connected to the journey. There is some risk that young adults are not asking big life questions during this time in life. There is a much greater risk that they are asking them without any consideration that church or even God might have anything to do with them. I have stressed the need to focus on relationships (people before programs). As those relationships deepen, we gain the trust to share the road together.

How do we help create this space for meaning-making, how to mark that—as a group—we are growing in faith, how to reach out for guidance and support from others, and how to invite Christ into our hearts as we travel by the Spirit? Pilgrims in Christ is the name of the intensive year-long catechumenate program at a parish in Washington, DC, that has guided my listening and my contributions in these conversations. A traditional, formal, weekly catechumenate program such as Pilgrims isn’t likely to fly in any stand-alone young-adult community, though I have been shocked by the numbers of young DC professionals who make the journey as a small but significant minority in this adults-of-all-ages experience.

I do think that the idea of the catechumenate—that there is a body of Christian knowledge and a distinctively Christlike way of living—resonates with young adults. How should we describe it, this spiritual curriculum? At Commonplace 2014, my colleague Melanie Mullen and I jotted down the big items:

- * Basic knowledge of the Bible and reading it for spiritual fulfillment;
- * Basic knowledge of church traditions and worship and a commitment to letting them shape us over time;
- * Basic knowledge of theology and an ability to use it to reflect on everyday life;
- * Basic knowledge about prayer and spiritual practices and a willingness to explore them in a committed way;
- * A passion for justice and mercy and a commitment to serving others and the common good; and
- * A sense that we are “in this together” as a people, sharing our joys and sorrows, marking the major passages in life.

Your community’s list might be different depending on your tradition, your gifts, your theological commitments. But you can help the people you serve make their meandering way through that territory over time.

Programs may be out. Formal curriculum may be deadly. Service may be the starting point, or fellowship over beers or a good meal. But a pilgrimage requires a sense of direction, progress, and thorough exploration. If we’re serious about forming faith that will continue to sustain young adults as they age, we have to trust that the Christian spiritual tradition has much to offer. We need to give it a chance to do its work, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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They Could Trample Me: Overcoming Fear in Middle-School Ministry

Katie Prejean McGrady



“Katie, come downstairs. It’s time to leave!”

My mom was shouting from the kitchen, her car keys jingling in her hand as she waited for me. I didn’t want to go downstairs, because I didn’t want to go where she wanted to take me. A few days before, a postcard addressed to me had arrived at the house. It was red,

clip art and Comic Sans font mashed together, inviting me to come to the first bimonthly middle-school Bible study held at our parish. It wasn’t that I didn’t like the Bible, although I guess I had never really thought about it despite my years of Catholic school education up to that point. It wasn’t that I didn’t like the youth ministers—they were kind ladies. It wasn’t even that it was a Sunday afternoon and I just wanted to stay home and read in my room. I didn’t want to go because none of my friends were going to be there. We’d talked about it at school on Friday and had all concluded that we weren’t going, and I didn’t want to be the doofus that showed up to school Monday morning having gone, unable to stand up to my mother.

“Katie, come on! We need to go if you’re going to be on time! We’ll go get ice cream after if you want.”

She said the magic words ... *ice cream*. No sixth-grader can turn down ice cream on a hot August afternoon. I hopped off my bed, bounded down the stairs, and off we went to my first middle-school Bible study at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church.

Years later, while working as the youth director at that same parish, the pastor asked me if I wanted to be responsible for middle-school youth ministry in addition to running the high-school programs. Immediately, without hesitation, I requested the chance to hire someone to take on that specific role. I explained that middle-school youth ministry was an animal unto itself, and that there was no way I would have the time, energy, or creativity to do it well if he also wanted me to run high-school events, our Life Teen program, and confirmation formation. He agreed with me, and I breathed a sigh of relief. In all honesty, it wasn’t just the practical reasons that kept me from taking on middle-school youth ministry: it was the fear of working with that age group. Even in middle school I didn’t necessarily want to hang out with other middle

schoolers ... what would compel me to want to work with them as an adult?

This attitude toward middle-school ministry is not unique to me. There seems to be a pervading fear of working with middle schoolers, for whatever reason, in parishes, dioceses, and schools. They’re too immature, too chaotic, too fidgety, too little, too all-over-the-place, or too silly. They’re not old enough to “get it yet,” but they’re not so young you can do “kid” stuff with them anymore. They can’t drive themselves, so appeals have to be made to both them and their parents, and they are often distracted by opportunities elsewhere. Beyond all that, a different type of creativity is required when it comes to middle schoolers: shorter attention spans require more succinct lessons or talks, more kinetic movement and engaging activities, and fewer traditional methods. It takes time to come up with the right recipe to reach these young people, time that many folks in ministry don’t have readily available. So instead, we pawn off the middle school to someone else, we do the occasional event when we have the energy, or we forget about this age group altogether, claiming we’ll pay attention to them when they’re “old enough to understand.”

I don’t say these things as condemnation: I say it from experience. It’s exactly what I did with my pastor. It’s exactly what I thought throughout my entire time in parish youth ministry. In fact, it’s the reason I teach in a high school, because I fear the middle schoolers that could trample me should they decide to stage a coup. But what would it look like if we not only admitted our fear of middle schoolers but also sought to creatively engage them? What would it look like if we acknowledged our hang-ups about this age group, moved beyond what holds us back, and started to bring order into the chaos? If we targeted this group, wouldn’t it be easier to go deeper with them in content and style when they’re older? If we spent intentional time ministering to them directly, on their level, would they be drawn to come back in high school, college, and even as young adults and adults? What if we “hooked them” at precisely this age, when they are quickly won over and open-minded? What if we moved past our fear of middle schoolers, harnessed our anxiety, and targeted them specifically with evangelization and sharing of the gospel? What if we specifically sought them out, met them on their level and terms, and built relationships with them so they could build a relationship with the Lord? That’s the kind of



ministry that could change lives. That's the kind of church I think middle schoolers would love and return to again and again. That's the classroom they'd look forward to entering, the youth minister they'd anticipate seeing, and the catechist they'd remember forever. That is precisely what we should be doing in middle-school ministry: seeking them out, loving them for who they are, and intentionally leading them to the One who loves them most. Let's set aside our fears of their trampling power and get to work.

To truly reach the hearts, minds, and souls of middle schoolers, we have to first understand a few critically important things about kids at this age. We have to know the landscape we find ourselves in, looking at the entire scope of the forest so we can zoom in on each individual tree. Knowing where we stand can help us discern where to go forward. Thus, there are a few things to keep in mind as we take on this great challenge of working with these kids.

The first is this: they are just that ... kids. Our culture today is seemingly obsessed with "growing up now." Not too long ago, I had a nearly half-hour conversation with an eighth grader who had her entire life mapped out: she would come to my high school, then go to Louisiana State University, then eventually go to medical school, and, by the time she's 30, be a practicing pediatrician in her hometown. I'm three years away from 30 and I don't have as much vision and planning as this 12-year-old. This trend is everywhere: tweens, teens, and young adults are consistently told that they must have a plan, vision, goal, and model for success or they are doomed to failure. It's why I think so many young adults end up stalling in college or purposefully delay moving out: there's a fear that they don't have it figured out, so let's stay home where it's safe and the electric bill is always paid. We have to first approach middle schoolers with an attitude that they're still kids and deserve to remain childlike for a little while longer. They may have a nicer cell phone than I do and be more tech savvy than I am, but they're still children who should be allowed to make mistakes, be messy, goof around, and have fun without the fear of admonishment, failure, or being seen as silly and immature.

Because they are children, there is still a great sense of innocence within them. Yes, they are exposed to a lot and have access to mature entertainment, but they still have that wide-eyed wonder that excites, challenges, and invites them into amazing experiences unique to their age. This innocence is something we should cherish and protect, not because we want to hide them from reality but because we want to help them enjoy this period of discovery and joy for as long as possible. Innocence doesn't mean stupidity: it means openness and trust. This is seen most in the free-spiritedness of middle schoolers. Their innocence means there's no sense of embarrassment or shame yet. They are completely silly and goofy, unafraid to participate in the cheesiest of games or activities. There isn't this pervading fear of judgment or rejection ... yet.

Every year, the high school at which I teach hosts a huge homecoming pep rally. Students, alumni, parents, and kids from the feeder schools attend this evening rally filled with music, skits, the coach's pep talk, and the presentation of the homecoming court. Last year, about halfway through the pep rally, the show choir/band began to play "Shut Up and Dance" as sort of a segue from one activity to the next. Without hesitation, a few seventh and eighth graders rushed to the center of the gym and began dancing. Totally carefree, unafraid of the hundreds of eyes fixed on them, they were having the most fun of anyone there. Gradually, more and more middle schoolers rushed to the center of the gym, while all the high school students sat in the bleachers, stunned at what was happening. And none of them moved. Not a one high school student went to the floor to dance. They sat there stone-faced, arms crossed, with a few eye rolls mixed in. It was as if they were horrified and offended that these middle schoolers were having the time of their lives. It's like a switch had not yet flipped in the middle-school brains: they wanted to have fun, which meant dancing in front of hundreds of people they didn't know, not caring what anyone thought.

This joyful innocence is precious, and it's obvious it doesn't last forever. It's an outward expression of an inward reality for most middle schoolers: they crave fun, attention, affirmation, and community. It's not that high schoolers or young adults (or even adults) don't have those same basic needs, but sometimes we filter ourselves to the point of staying in the bleachers. A middle schooler doesn't put up that wall just yet: they want to dance. They want to laugh. They want to chase a beach ball, play the game, watch the cheesy video, and do it with everyone else around them.

This isn't to say that middle schoolers are incapable of sitting still or grasping substantive, deep content. Far from it. In fact, their innocence, openness, and trust manifest in the way they can focus. Middle schoolers remember stories, and they have their own to share as well. Middle schoolers can fixate on key themes and ideas, and I've found that they can often tell me the point of a lesson or talk with more detail and insight than high schoolers. There's a pervading fear that middle schoolers can't handle a talk or lesson longer than ten minutes, otherwise they'll get fidgety and bored. If all we ever do is give them the little bit of content in piecemeal portions, then yes, they will be unable to handle more. But what if we went a little more in depth each time? What if we built on an idea week after week, diving into a topic and unpacking it for them more and more, bit by bit? What if we challenged them—and then watched them rise to the occasion—with listening, learning, and sharing what they've heard? They are kids, yes, and we need to remember they have innocent, fun-driven hearts and minds: but those hearts and minds are desperate for truth and molding just like anyone else's. We cannot be afraid to give it to them.

Reaching middle schoolers is so critically important because we are approaching young people who find themselves at a very transitional and impressionable point in their lives.

Knowing our mission and what the land in which we stand looks like, we can now begin to explore some methods that work well with this age group.

BE RELATIONAL

Middle schoolers respond, react, and connect most with those people who take the time to simply “be” with them. “Relational ministry” is often billed or credited as being an important “aspect” of our ministry and teaching. To be honest, I think it is the first thing we have to focus on, because an authentic, honest, trusting relationship with a young person is the only access point to being able to share about the truth and love of Jesus Christ. Relational ministry is practiced by Jesus himself: time and again we hear of Jesus sharing a meal with the same people to whom he preached. Jesus wept with the people mourning Lazarus’s death *before* he raised him from the dead. He entered into their pain. Jesus spent a few days with the people in the Samaritan woman’s town, and during their time together with Jesus the people grew in faith and devotion to him.

Jesus embodies the old adage: they don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. This is especially true for middle schoolers, who want to see you less as someone who has a lot of information and facts and more as someone who knows how to laugh, who may struggle, or who is unafraid to just be uniquely yourself. I find that the best moments of ministry with middle schoolers happens when I’m just eating lunch with them, or throwing the Frisbee, or joking around about awkward moments to which we can all relate. It is this relationship with each other that will lead to growth in a relationship with Jesus himself.

DIALOGUE > MONOLOGUE

When I was a kid, I hated when people talked *at* me. I didn’t want adults to talk down to me: I wanted them to talk *with* me. I had thoughts and opinions. I had ideas and questions. The adults that influenced me most—the teachers I remember and youth ministers I loved—were the ones that spent time sitting with me and sharing conversation, not standing in front of me pontificating. Do we engage our middle schoolers in dialogue, even if it’s just simple conversation revolving around their family, friends, school days, sports teams, musical experiences, or video games they’re playing? Talk half as much as they do: not only will you learn a lot about what they already know (or misunderstand), but you’ll also gain great insight into what’s going on in their day-to-day lives.

At a youth conference this past summer, I stood at my booth signing books and T-shirts for about two hours after my talk. It wasn’t like there was an extraordinary number of people waiting in line to make a purchase. Instead, I was asking each person that came to the booth what their favorite part of the conference was so far, which led to some of the best conversations I had all weekend. The answers were varied, giving me great insight into what was working and (in some cases) what wasn’t. Along with the good information for my own personal

edification was the chance for each person to verbally reflect on the powerful moments of the conference. It was like a live-action journal experience. The best answers came not from the adults (who were often in a hurry) or the high schoolers (who were sometimes afraid to say the wrong thing) but from the middle schoolers, who would instantly and unabashedly give their honest, heartfelt opinions and thoughts. It was refreshing to sit back and hear what they had to say, knowing that they were consciously reflecting on the encounter with Jesus they were having. It reminded me that the best ministry I could do was not delivering a keynote or signing a book—it was sitting and listening, giving them a chance to open up, process, and share.

MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY

Our culture is inundated with noise. Televisions are on constantly, every channel running some sort of programming at every hour of the day. The Internet never stops churning away with a constant bombardment of 140-character Tweets, perfectly filtered photos, and Facebook comment debates. We keep our headphones firmly planted within our ears to listen to a constant stream of sound. We are rarely quiet and still, which means we are often unable to hear the still, small voice of the Lord as he whispers into the depths of our heart.

Prayer should be a constant, ever-present priority in our life, and that priority must be visible and shared with middle schoolers. We must define prayer for them and give them practical tips, tools, and methods to pray. Whether it’s Pope Francis’s Five Finger Prayer, novenas, the Rosary, methods for Scripture reflection, how to spontaneously pray, or playlists for worship, we have to flood middle schoolers with prayer more than the world drowns them with noise. Not only should we show them how to pray, but we must also let them see us praying ourselves. The witness we give will be far more powerful than the lesson about the topic. If we say “prayer is important” but never lead them in it or do it ourselves, then we are speaking hollow words that have no lasting melody.

BE REAL

I believe that middle schoolers are the most authentic age group: they are so uncomfortable in this awkward phase of growth that they can’t be anything but themselves. There’s no hiding, no duplicitousness, no fear, no pervading sense of judgment from others or shame of self, and so they are truly authentic ... which means we have to be as well. They can see straight through a phony. They know when we aren’t being honest, they can tell when we’re disinterested in them or the subject, and they will totally reject you and what you’re sharing if you come off as someone who is merely “selling a product.” We have to be ourselves, unafraid to share our heart, show them our own struggles, and be honest. If that means we answer “I don’t know” to a question or say “I’m sorry” when we make a mistake, then so be it. We can’t be afraid of these humbling moments. In the same vein, we can’t be afraid to point out the hard truths we are challenging them to accept. Being real sometimes means being honest with them *and* us.

Being real means being unafraid to go deeper as you teach or minister on a tough topic. Being real means we are committed totally to the effort it will take to build a relationship with them and lead them to the Lord.

DON'T SHY AWAY FROM SUBSTANCE

I was invited to speak at a middle-school retreat in the spring of 2013. The diocesan director told me, point blank, that none of the talks would be longer than eight minutes, because he knew that none of them could sit still for that long because no speaker could keep them engaged. I jokingly said, "Well, you should find better speakers." I was able to convince him to give me a 30-minute block of time, promising him that I would do engaging things that would break up any monotony. Over the course of the half hour, we moved from game to story to teaching to story to game to teaching to story—I split up the time and, by the end of it, had not only won their attention and affection but also had given the same substantive theological teaching. And they handled it beautifully.

Middle schoolers should not be relegated to being given "just a little bit" simply because of their age. It is precisely because of their age—and their innocent openness—that we should challenge them with inspiring, honest, deep teachings. Yes, we may have to modify our methods to be engaging, hands on, kinetic, and fun—but just like Chef Boyardee, we get to give them their veggies without them knowing! And you know what? If they find out there was Truth woven throughout, I guarantee they'll appreciate it.

Don't treat middle schoolers as if they're incapable of having an intelligent, prolonged, focused thought. I have seen numerous moments when they've grasped something quicker, and more deeply, than many adults in the same room. In a world that gives them yucky fast food by way of relativistic heresies, give them the five-star feast of Truth.

HAVE FUN WITH THEM

I was recently blessed to speak at an event with over 5,000 middle schoolers gathered in an arena for a full two days of talks, prayer, and fellowship. We started the day with a high-energy band, shifted to a beat-bumping DJ with some fun stories, and had a couple of jugglers emceeding throughout the day, all before I ever took the stage for a 25-minute talk and half hour of adoration. The first four hours of the day were pure fun and silliness, giving these middle schoolers a chance to just have a blast. They jumped around, sang the songs, and took all the selfies. The first day of this event, I stood side stage watching them, observing the unadulterated joy of these kids. The second day, I joined in, hopping around right in the middle of them. For just a few minutes, I escaped into

my twelve-year-old self who wasn't worried about what people thought of me. I didn't care that my dance moves were awful and my voice was off key, because neither did they. We were all just having fun *together*. That first part of the day—the fun and warm-up—made the afternoon that much more powerful, because they were primed, ready, and open to the truth of Jesus Christ we shared with them. The same thousands of kids who had jumped around all morning screaming at the top of their lungs listened intently to my talk and knelt in complete silence in front of Jesus present in the Eucharist that same afternoon. It was precisely because we had fun that they were more open to what else we had to share with and show them. They are free of their inhibitions—so too should we be.

*Middle schoolers
should not be relegated
to being given "just a little bit"
simply because
of their age.*

There is no denying that middle-school ministry is challenging. Sometimes they seem too loud, too fidgety, too immature, or too flaky to even bother with. The investment in middle-school ministry is one of the hardest we will ever make, but it is not without great reward. The day I went to

that first middle-school Bible study will stand out in my mind forever. The lesson wasn't particularly earth shattering. I honestly don't even remember what passage we talked about. The snacks were uninspired—fruit snacks and goldfish are fairly standard in middle-school world. There weren't even that many people there; in fact, there were just three of us: the two youth ministers and me. Ms. Maria and Mrs. T didn't turn me away, saying "Come back next week when more people show up," nor did they do a single thing differently than if there had been 50 of us there. They broke open Scripture and shared stories, we played games, they asked me questions—it was one of the best afternoons of my life, and not even because my mom took me out for ice cream after. I felt seen that day. I felt appreciated. I felt known. I felt welcomed. I felt loved. Two middle-school youth ministers spent time with an awkward middle-school kid and made me feel like I was the most important person they knew and the best person they could be with for those couple of hours. They were unafraid to spend the time, teach the content, ask the questions, and lead the prayer. They didn't shy away from the challenge. They saw the value of investing in just one middle-school kid, who has since gone on to teach theology, lead youth ministry, and travel the world speaking and writing books about Christ. Their investment changed my life forever. Their time meant the world to me. Their witness to Jesus inspired me, and their ministry challenged me to meet and love him for myself. Middle-school ministry is so worth it—we just have to get past the fear that they may trample us with their constantly moving, tiny little feet and embrace their effervescent, nonstop, unadulterated joy, innocence, and fun. ■

Katie Prejean McGrady is a teacher, youth minister, author, and speaker. She is the author of Room 24: Adventures of a New Evangelist (Ave Maria Press).

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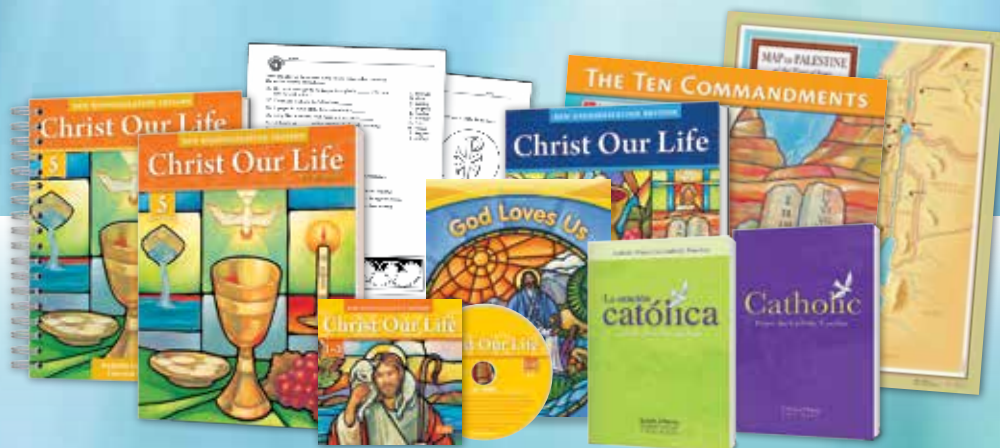
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Leaving a Legacy of Faith: Naming Grace in the Domestic Church

Mary Pedersen



A CALL TO CATECHETICAL LEADERS

Pope Francis recently posed these thought-provoking questions: “What is the inheritance I will leave with my life? Will I leave the inheritance of a man, a woman of faith? Will I leave this inheritance to my children?”

(<http://www.romereports.com/2016/02/04/>

[pope-at-santa-marta-the-best-legacy-we-can-leave-the-kids-is-faith](http://www.romereports.com/2016/02/04/pope-at-santa-marta-the-best-legacy-we-can-leave-the-kids-is-faith)). As catechetical leaders we face equally challenging questions: What inheritance will our parents leave to their children? What inheritance will we leave as faith formation leaders? How will we help our parents to leave a legacy of faith—a legacy of grace?

Reflecting further, Pope Francis stated, “The best thing we can pass down in life is our faith, faith in the true God, the God who is with us always, God who is our Father never disappoints.” As catechetical leaders, we sometimes struggle with ways to assist our parents in transmitting the beautiful faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps, we have missed one of the most important tools for passing on the faith—helping our parents to serve as first preachers to their children.

“The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the *first preachers* of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state” (Lumen Gentium, 11; emphasis mine). Many catechetical leaders have summoned parents to serve as primary educators (*magistri*) of their children, yet few have called and equipped parents to serve in this sacred task of preaching (*praecones*) to their children.¹ When we help our parents to serve as first preachers—first heralds—in the domestic church, they will leave their children a legacy of faith.

This is a call for catechetical leaders, at the service of the Christian family (Familiaris Consortio, 1), to awaken and inspire parents to assume their role as first preachers to their children and to adequately equip parents to carry out this vital ministry. Indispensable to this worthy goal is providing parents with a preaching method effective for proclaiming “God’s wonderful works” (Sacrosanctum Concilium [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], Dec. 4, 1963], 35(2)). Equipped, parents will gain a greater understanding of the gospel, a new appre-

ciation of preaching, and a deeper relationship with Christ and their children.

NAMING GRACE IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH AS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD FOR PARENTS AS FIRST PREACHERS

For the most effective preaching method for parents, we turn to the best of homiletics. As a mother studying preaching, I was especially struck by Mary Catherine Hilker’s foundational work, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*. Her theology, practices, and ideas on preaching as *naming grace* resonated with my experience of proclaiming God’s wonderful works in my own domestic church.

PREACHING AS THE TRANSMISSION OF GRACE

Naming Grace aligns with Pope Francis’s recent advice on preaching:² “Homilies should be the transmission of God’s *grace*. Simple, so that everyone can understand them and everyone will want to become a better person” (<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/11/10/makes-homilies-short-and-simple-says-pope/>; emphasis mine). Preaching as “naming grace in the domestic church” makes the gospel accessible to parents and strengthens the home because all members recognize that their family “is holy not because it is perfect but because God’s *grace* is at work in it, helping it to set out anew every day on the way of love” (*Follow the Way of Love*, 9; emphasis mine).

Grace—God’s active presence—is experienced as peace, love, forgiveness, healing, strength, courage, joy, and beauty in all our ordinary and extraordinary days. God’s loving presence is everywhere—catching fireflies, gazing at the moon, rocking a feverish baby, conversing at the dinner table—for those who have eyes to *see*. *Naming Grace* also acknowledges and confronts the *dis-grace* of the world—violence, hate, poverty, discrimination, injustice—and the seeming lack of God’s presence, which children experience as loneliness, bullying, sickness, death of a loved one, and more. “Only ‘the eyes of faith’ sees God’s presence in a world that often stands ‘in contrast’ to the promise that God is ‘God of the living’” (Hilker, 36–37).

Guiding our parents to *name* grace is key for families to experience the fullness of God’s presence in the home. “The first man’s first task is to name When I name moments ... I



discover my meaning and God's ... This naming work never ends for all the children of Adam. Naming to find an identity, our identity, God's" (Voskamp, 53). Together, parents and children grow in faith as they begin to recognize and *name* God's beauty, to discern and *name* God's movements, to read and *name* God's faithfulness. Like our Creator, in naming we create; when parents *name* grace, they create and spark faith. "The way in which adults speak about God gives the unseen God a reality for children" (Stonehouse, 133). Parents, the very face of God to their children, make God real and tangible by naming grace in the domestic church.

Naming Grace supports the Catholic sacramental principle "that grace is made present by being expressed" (Himes, 11). The more we *name grace*—God's presence—the more abundantly God's love reigns. Naming grace in the domestic church unleashes the ability of both parents and children to spy God working in their lives. When parents *name grace* as siblings reconcile, the more likely brothers and sisters will forgive one another in the future. When parents *name grace* at the dinner table, the more likely children will recognize Christ's presence in the Eucharist. The more we *name grace* by saying "I love you," the more God's love will flow between members of the domestic church.

THREE MODELS OF NAMING GRACE IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

As first preachers, parents will find that opportunities abound for naming grace in the domestic church through spontaneous praise, sacred reflection, and scriptural exploration—all incorporating the child's experience and leading to an encounter with Christ. With these three models, only the parent can adequately preach, for only the parent knows the heart of the child.

1. **Naming grace in the domestic church as spontaneous praise** brings the parent and child into spontaneous praise for the goodness, beauty, and love of God. The parent speaks simply when recognizing God's presence in the moment. Spontaneous praise can be as effortless as declaring, "What a glorious day! Look at the sky and the amazing streaks of red, pink, and purple. Thank you, God, for this beautiful world!"

2. **Naming grace in the domestic church as sacred reflection** is based on theological reflection, as a "way of doing theology that starts from the experience of life and leads to searching in faith, for deeper meaning, and for the living God" (McAplin, 70). A parent takes a child's important positive or negative experience—the death of a grandparent; the bullying by a classmate; the winning of a race—and then aids the child in reflecting on the experience in the light of Jesus. As first

preacher, the parent helps the child to *see* God's presence in order to bring meaning to an experience.

3. Naming grace in the domestic church as scriptural exploration focuses on the *kerygma* because “the younger the child the more capable he is of receiving great things and the child is satisfied only with great and essential things” (Cavalletti, 283). Beginning with a Gospel passage, the parent proclaims God's wonderful works by reflecting on Scripture through the child's experiences—always directed to the *kerygma*. Pope Francis reminds us “to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 35). He later adds a most fundamental and accessible understanding of this beautiful *kerygma*: “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” (164). Naming grace in the domestic church helps the parent and child to discover their stories within God's story.

In all three models, naming grace in the domestic church arouses the faith of the child, draws the child into a relationship with God, facilitates the child's search for meaning, brings hope to a given situation, helps one realize his or her vocation as a beloved child of God, and leads parent and child into prayer and worship.

EQUIPPING PARENTS FOR NAMING GRACE IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

How can we, as catechetical leaders, equip parents to preach by naming grace in the domestic church?

1. Present parents with a working definition of *grace* (God's loving, active, presence).
2. Help parents acquire eyes to *see* God's presence (wherever there is love, peace, joy, beauty, forgiveness, there is God).
3. Aid parents in understanding the child's spiritual capacity (children are capable of grasping deep realities and of undergoing mystical experiences of God).
4. Equip parents with the characteristics of the young child: children are attracted to the small; are drawn toward the most essential; are oriented toward reality; are filled with awe and wonder; are attracted by beauty; are filled with joy; are drawn to deep, loving relationships; possess absorbent minds; and learn through repetitive work of the hands (Garrido, 11).
5. Provide parents with Pope Francis's succinct definition of the *kerygma*: (“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” (EG, 164).
6. Give or cite examples of reflecting on beauty, experience, and Scripture through the experiences of a child (www.naminggraceinthedomesticchurch.com).
7. Encourage parents in their sacred task as first preachers (God has *chosen* parents to serve as first—and best—preachers of the Good News to their children).

Preaching, whether in the grandest cathedral or the most humble home, is always the movement of the Holy Spirit compelling pastors and parents to proclaim God's wonderful works. It is our hope and prayer that when parents hear the call to preach, their hearts will be “so touched by this invitation that proclamation, heralded speech, and glad tidings must be told” (Harris, 135).

The time is now! “There is no other choice than to go to the family's aid and give them personal help” (<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1404421.htm>). While it may sound challenging, empowering parents to preach by naming grace in the domestic church creates exciting possibilities for making disciples and passing the faith on to the next generation. In doing so, we elevate the status of parents as ecclesial leaders in their own domestic churches. More importantly, we help our parents leave a beautiful legacy of faith—a legacy of grace—to their children.

NOTES

1. *Magistri* is the Latin term used for *educator* in the Second Vatican Council documents; *praecones* designates a person who acts as a herald.
2. The term *homily* is designated as preaching within the eucharistic celebration.

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A New Approach: Evangelizing in the Classroom

Anita Houghton



How can we evangelize in the classroom? As a diocesan coordinator, former DRE, and longtime catechist, I have pondered this question at length. A unique ministry experience inspired me to explore new avenues of formation in order to help children become lifelong disciples.

BACKGROUND

The pontificate of Pope St. John Paul II prepared the church for a renewed missionary thrust and summoned her to a new evangelization. John Paul II made it clear that evangelization is not an optional activity but an urgent duty; the goal is to renew the world through conversion to Christ. Pope Benedict XVI gave new force to the work that John Paul II began by creating a new council for promoting the new evangelization and calling a world synod of bishops in October 2012. This propelled evangelization to the top of the church's agenda. Evangelization as a missionary thrust continues in the pontificate of Pope Francis.

For catechists and faith formation leaders, the call to the new evangelization is a call to incorporate evangelization into the faith formation process. Although many catechetical resources have weaved themes of discipleship into their curriculum, their aim is still *catechesis*. Evangelization is not the same as catechesis. Evangelization is the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ and the response of a person in faith (Go and Make Disciples (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002), 10). It aims at *initial* conversion: the acceptance of a personal relationship with Christ, a sincere adherence to him, and a willingness to conform one's life to his. Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a *personal decision to follow him as his disciple* (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 17B). Catechesis, on the other hand, is the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. Catechesis assumes that the person knows Christ. Catechesis is a *moment* in the process of evangelization, but it is the *teaching and maturation stage* (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 18). It is concerned with *ongoing* conversion and growth.

Today's young people need both: evangelization and catechesis. In a culture that is increasingly secular, we can't assume that our children know Christ when they walk through our doors.

CATECHETICAL LEADER

One of the most important things we can do as teachers of the faith is to evangelize our children at an early age. According to the Barna Group, the primary window for effectively reaching people with the Good News of Jesus's death and resurrection is *in their childhood*, because it is during these years that they will develop their spiritual and moral framework for the rest of their lives. Nearly half of all Americans who will ever believe in Christ will do so before reaching the age of 13 ("Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids: Research Releases in Family and Kids," Oct. 11, 2004; <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/> (accessed Oct. 23, 2016).

The absence of evangelization can leave a gaping hole in the process of bringing someone to faith. It contributes to the phenomenon we have labeled as "sacramentalization," in which children receive the sacraments but do not have a lived relationship with Jesus Christ.

AN "AHA" MOMENT

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to facilitate a six-week faith study at a local university chaplaincy that provided great insight into ways in which evangelization can be incorporated into a classroom setting. The faith study, *Discovery*, is the first-level study of a set of resources published by Canadian Catholic Outreach (CCO), a Canadian campus ministry apostolate dedicated to evangelizing young adults. The faith study is designed to proclaim the gospel and equip participants to become missionary disciples. The six-week study is done in a small-group setting to allow for a relatable and dynamic proclamation of the Good News.

As I studied the leader guide in preparation for the sessions, I was intrigued by the method and content of the study. I found this study to be decidedly different from catechesis. Its method was not catechetical—it was *evangelistic*. What's more, the impact on the students was transformative. Conversion was happening before my very eyes. The study along with a dynamic worship environment yielded an explosion of faith to what was previously a dead campus ministry.

I must admit that, until I facilitated *Discovery*, I never really knew what evangelization "looked like," even though I had studied all the church documents on evangelization in the course of my theological studies. Over the course of the next year, I had the opportunity to facilitate *Discovery* several

times, and I found that the study consistently yielded the same results.

FIVE FACTORS OF FRUITFULNESS

What elements contributed to the conversion process? What was it about the content and method that made this study so fruitful? Based on my experience, five factors rose to the top:

1. *An experience of the personal love of God* — Students, for the first time in their lives, had the opportunity to experience God's personal love. The study created an environment of "encounter" through Scripture and prayer. God spoke into the hearts of these students through his living word and drew them to himself. No longer did they need to be convinced that God is real; they experienced it firsthand.

2. *A realization that they need a Savior* — The content of the study clearly spelled out the effect of sin: sin separates us from God, and this separation can be eternal. This realization helped the students realize that they *need* a Savior and prepared them for the full impact of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

3. *The intrinsic power of the kerygma* — The study contained a clear proclamation of the *kerygma* (the good news of Jesus's salvific work). An anointed preaching of the kerygma has an *intrinsic power* to awaken faith. Faith comes alive with the sudden recognition that the cross of Christ has a personal dimension: when Jesus hung on the cross over 2,000 years ago, my sins were present to him, and out of love for me, he gave his life to the Father to pay the price for my sins and open the way to heaven for me.

4. *An opportunity to make a choice to surrender one's whole life to Christ* — After experiencing the personal love of God, understanding the consequences of sin, and experiencing the personal dimension of the cross, the study culminated in presenting the following question to each student: *Do you want to make Jesus the center of your life and make a decision to follow him as his disciple?* Students who said yes were invited to renew their baptismal vows, pray a commitment prayer, and invite Jesus into their lives. Jesus always shows up when he is invited, and as a result, the students' experience of Christ was deepened.

5. *An open environment for discussion* — Students were encouraged to share openly and honestly during the course of the study. This not only provided a safe environment for discussion but also created opportunities for the students to bond and form friendships.

At the end of the six weeks, one could observe the following changes in the students: a change in their priorities and conversation, a hunger for the word of God, a desire to worship God, and a desire to share their experiences. This is a portrait of an evangelized person. I think it is safe to say that every catechist and Catholic school teacher longs for the same kind of transformation to happen in their classroom.

EVANGELIZING IN THE CLASSROOM

What if we, as faith formation leaders, introduced children to the faith in the manner described above? If we did, would we be more successful in forming children as lifelong disciples? I think so. If the children in our programs have not experienced initial conversion to Christ, then we need to be more

intentional about evangelizing in the classroom. Sometimes, we presume that evangelization happens in basic catechesis, but generally, it does not. However, it would not be difficult to integrate into a catechetical curriculum the opportunities for personal encounter, proclamation of the kerygma, and invitation to response. The children are already showing up to be formed—why not add evangelization to the mix? It is a new approach

with new possibilities. In addition, offering evangelization opportunities for parents would have a substantial impact on families. This fall, a parish in my archdiocese began an Alpha course (<http://alphausa.org/>) for the parents of their religious education students during the students' class time. The parents love the course and are experiencing conversion and a renewal of their faith.

Pope Francis writes, "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'" (The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium), 164). We must remember that we cannot convert the hearts of children. The Holy Spirit is the agent of conversion; we simply need to create an environment of encounter and present the gospel message, which in itself has intrinsic power. Let us answer the call to the new evangelization by proclaiming the kerygma and inviting our kids into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. ■

Anita Houghton is the author of Kerygma 4 Kids, a new evangelization resource for children published by ministry23 (www.ministry23.com/k4k). Anita is a regional coordinator of catechetics for the Archdiocese of Detroit and serves as a part-time professor at Sacred Heart Major Seminary.





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Great Catholic Parishes: How Four Essential Practices Make Them Thrive

By William E. Simon, Jr.

Reviewed by Dan Thomas



Here is another book about what makes for a great Catholic parish. One unique element is a focus on pastors as the source of the book's picture of what makes parishes great. This is, of course, both a strength and a weakness, because the pastor is the crucial person in parishes, but it would be valuable to hear from other sources as well.

The book comes out of the work of Parish Catalyst, an organization founded by the author to "wake up the sleepwalkers in the pews of Catholic parishes." It does this by working with the pastors and key members of their pastoral teams in a leadership training experience.

The training includes four essential practices:

- * Shared leadership

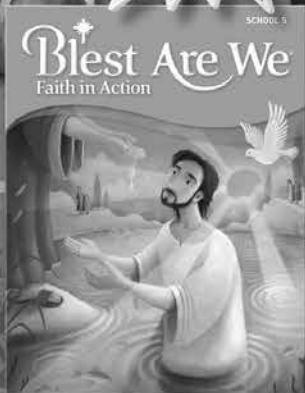
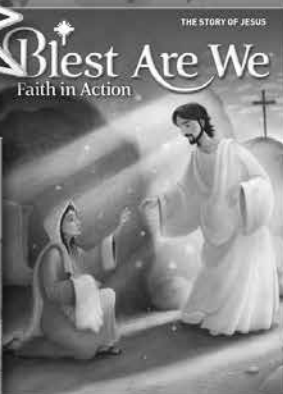
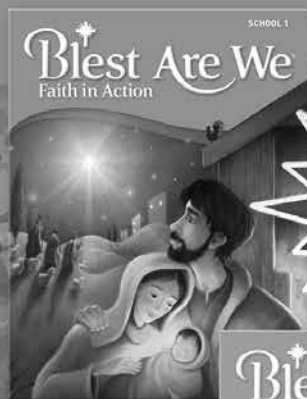
- * Planned discipleship coming out of spiritual maturity
- * Excellent Sunday experiences
- * Evangelizing

The book is divided into an introduction, four parts (one for each practice), and an epilogue. In addition, an appendix summarizes the statistics for the parishes surveyed and the strengths and challenges that the pastors identified. Each part is divided into two chapters: the first presents the value the practice brings and the second the challenges to realizing that value. Each chapter ends with crucial takeaways or challenges recapped.

Here are some significant excerpts:

Pastor self-care is crucial to the long-term vitality of strong leadership, and pastors who are leading well understand its importance. (29)

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The tendency to avoid confrontation was a thread that ran through pastor comments about sta  challenges. (35)

Numerous pastors expressed a desire to help their parishioners see their primary role in ministry as disciple making. (37–38)

To maintain the momentum and develop leaders successfully, it is essential to have a plan in place. One part of that plan needs to be the ongoing mentorship and development of current leaders. The other is the development of future leaders. (43)

Our pastors consider the spiritual growth of their people to be the strongest characteristic of their communities ... discipleship is the central focus of vibrant parishes. (58–59)

Involvement in a parish program does not guarantee a parishioner’s deepened commitment to Christ. (61)

Every parish opportunity begins and ends with encountering Christ. (63)

Matthew Kelly offers four simple signs of a dynamic Catholic: prayer, Bible study, generosity, and evangelization. (88)

Developing a larger parish welcoming culture has less to do with cookies and coffee and more to do with preparing those in the pews to step outside their comfort zones and be a welcoming presence to others, especially those whose interests are different from, or even in conflict with, their own. (89)

The three Hs—Hospitality, Homilies, and Hymns—are all crucial to making a Sunday worship experience extraordinary. (100)

The question changes from “Why don’t people come to Mass anymore?” to “Are we providing what people need from church?” (126)

Attraction not promotion. (137)

In the end, the purpose of evangelization is not to “make converts” or “fill the pews” but simply to open doors—to let others know the Good News that Catholic faith has made a positive difference in our lives and that God’s love is available to others as well. (146) |

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

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Don't Take the Clickbait

Claire M. McManus



Sensational headlines have grabbed the attention of readers since yellow journalism had its heyday in the 19th century. The latest iteration of yellow journalism is fake news flashing across social media, being accepted as gospel truth, and being shared until the story goes viral. People don't subject the story to any scrutiny because the title is so compelling that it must be shared. For the sites themselves, the title of an article is so important to its financial success that no one cares if it contains any truth. Social media needs flashy titles to capture viewers and lure them onto their sites. The use of the word *lure* has led to the metaphorical reference of using titles to fish for viewers. Flashy titles are the lures used for "trolling" and have come to be known as "clickbait."

Clickbait has entered the lexicon of social media and is described by the Urban Dictionary as "a pejorative term describing web content that is aimed at generating advertisement revenue, especially at the expense of quality or accuracy, relying on sensational headlines or eye-catching thumbnail pictures to attract click-throughs and to encourage forwarding of material over social media networks." In the arena of blogs and fake news sites, one can make up any story and send it careening through social media outlets in milliseconds. The 2016 election was rife with fake news stories, and in the aftermath many wondered if social media outlets bore some responsibility for the outcome. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg posted a lengthy reflection on his Facebook page, in which he defended his site but recognized the importance of keeping it free from hoaxes: "Our goal is to show people the content they will find most meaningful, and people want accurate news. We have already launched work enabling our community to flag hoaxes and fake news, and there is more we can do here. We have made progress, and we will continue to work on this to improve further. This is an area where I believe we must proceed very carefully though. Identifying the 'truth' is complicated. While some hoaxes can be completely debunked, a greater amount of content, including from mainstream sources, often gets the basic idea right but some details wrong or omitted."

Zuckerberg identifies the heart of the problem with clickbait stories; there's just enough truth in them to make the reader latch on. Catholic bloggers are not immune to the temptation

of using clickbait to lure readers to their sites. For example, one blogsite, Patheos, called out the Catholic news blog Pewsitter for its penchant for using misleading titles. Patheos' article lambasted Pewsitter in a sardonic article entitled "How to Write a Click-Bait Headline! On-Line Course Being Offered?" Pewsitter collects articles about Catholic topics and renames the titles using typical clickbait contrivances such as taking quotations out of context or using punctuation marks to influence how a reader may perceive the content. A story about the appointment of Bishop McElroy to the Diocese of San Diego was entitled "New San Diego Bishop McElroy:

Faithful see evil day of wrath, ex-Catholics heartened ..." The actual article was titled "New Bishop May Need to be a Miracle Worker," which pointed out that McElroy's progressive stance on some Catholic teachings was a cause of concern for some but a reason for hope for others. Pewsitter's title implied that the article was about the

faithful Catholics of San Diego fearing an Armageddon while those who left the church watch in delight.

Pewsitter states that it is an organization that strives to be faithful to the magisterial teaching of the church. People are invited to submit news as long as it meets the criteria of faithful Catholic teaching. "We don't want to promote dissenting organizations, bad theology, wayward politicians, immoral lifestyles, etc. In short, we are looking for faithful—not cafeteria—Catholics." By flagging these articles with clickbait titles, they are revealing an objective that goes beyond sharing stories of interest to faithful Catholics. Editors flag titles with question marks when they want to convey sarcasm or with an exclamation point to sway the reader toward outrage.

Jesus told Pilate, "I came to testify to the truth, and those who live in the truth hear my voice." Truth is the foundation of our faith. Clickbait may be a clever means of attracting a reader, but it is a manipulation of truth. Catholic blogs should be held accountable to the truth, even at the minute level of article titles. Social media outlets that feel the need to use clickbait to promote their sites simply are echoing Pilate's response, "What is truth?" ■

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The Kerygma and Catechesis:

Evangelization over Devangelization Michael J. Martocchio



By now, we should be aware that our catechetical ministry must be rooted in and suffused with evangelization. Much of the recent focus in evangelization has rightly been put on the importance of listening. By this, we have mainly meant listening to those we are evangelizing in order to understand “where they are” and how we can best communicate the gospel to them. At the same time, we also need to be self-aware and listen to ourselves. In other words, we must be cognizant of what we are saying and how we are saying it. We must ensure that we are evangelizing and not “devangelizing.”

WHAT IS DEVANGELIZATION?

In many ways, devangelization is the opposite of evangelization. But, it is also more complicated than that. Devangelization is evangelization combined with elements that point away from the gospel and undermine the *kerygma*. For example, devangelization occurs when we tell those we are evangelizing about how bad all the other Christians (our fellow Catholics as well as those from other denominations) are and how lucky they are to have found us, who will show the way to avoid becoming like *them*. Devangelization also occurs when we place our (good and necessary) rules first without explaining the meaning behind them or, even worse, when we place our own preferences (liturgical or otherwise) at the center of our presentation of the gospel without acknowledging areas where there can be room for diversity of opinion. Devangelization occurs when we think less about communicating the truth and more about being right. In essence, our proclamation becomes more egocentric than Christocentric and, in the process, ceases to resemble the true kerygma.

Now, I want you to pause for a second because chances are that you have someone (or a group of people) in mind who you are pretty sure embodies exactly what I have just described. Perhaps secretly, like the Pharisee in Luke’s Gospel (18:9–14), you find yourself rejoicing that you are not like this tax collector (or insert whatever description you choose). Herein lies the creeping danger of devangelization. We often turn our evangelization into devangelization because we have in mind certain people or groups of people within Christianity whom we do not want to be like or whom we do not want those we are evangelizing to be like or associate with. What happens, however, is that the focus on Christ shifts to a focus

on whatever we envision as wrong within the Christian family. And, in fact, our proclamation becomes a condemnation. This temptation affects all of us no matter where we fall on the spectrum of the faith. Unfortunately, the tendency toward devangelization is not limited to one group or subsection of Christianity. It is a danger to which we are all susceptible.

Now, let’s be honest—devangelization often occurs with good intentions. We honestly and truly want others to hear the gospel accurately. Unfortunately, in this drive for accuracy, our gospel message can become poisoned and tainted because it becomes couched in polemic. Now, polemic itself is nothing new in Christianity. In fact, we should see polemic as a sign of vitality and take some comfort in the fact that Christianity is definitely not dead in our present age. If it were, there would be nothing to fight about because there would be nothing left to fight for. However, the fact that we

have disagreements among ourselves is not the essence of the kerygma; the saving love communicated in Christ is.

HONESTY WITHOUT BURDEN

As we close, let’s make one thing clear: in a catechetical context, we must *never* fear highlighting differences both among Catholics and among Christian denominations. It is essential to be honest in catechesis. Those we are catechizing should be prepared to meet different factions within our Catholic family or our wider Christian family. We should not, however, be too quick to point out the faults of others before we have fully presented the strength of Christ. Sometimes, the person we are evangelizing or catechizing is not in a position to be burdened with family rivalries. However, if we arrive at a place where such a discussion is relevant, we must always engage in that discussion with charity. Furthermore, we must always remember that this charity comes from within. If we harbor bitterness in our hearts, then our evangelization and catechesis will be bitter and hard to swallow. Yet, if our hearts are filled with charity, even for our rivals, then the sweetness of the love of Christ will truly flow from our evangelization and catechesis and give those that we are evangelizing and catechizing a taste of the eternal, where all division will cease. ■

Michael J. Martocchio, PhD, is the director for catechesis and Christian initiation for the Diocese of Charleston.

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Silos Shattered: Sharing Ministry Together

Leisa Anslinger



Recently, I was blessed to be one of a trio of presenters for a diocesan workshop. It was cosponsored by the diocesan offices for evangelization and stewardship. Clergy, staff, and parishioner leaders gathered for the half-day workshop that included brief, TED-style presentations, table discussion, large-group reporting time, and brief breaks between sections. The leaders who gathered represented parishes of varying demographics and regions within the diocese, different roles and responsibilities within their faith communities, and varying levels of formation and experience. Yet, they immersed themselves in the information provided, the process offered, and time with one another. The evaluations were extremely positive. As the diocesan leaders and presenters debriefed following the workshop, I found myself wondering why such collaborative endeavors are not more common. This is not a random question born of a particularly powerful experience, although the workshop was that for most of the people who participated. Rather, the day was proof that with commitment to do so, we can break out of the ministerial silos that comprise many diocesan and parish leadership structures. In fact, the diocesan leaders shared their gratitude for the opportunity to minister together.

Co-laboring in ministry is not always easy. I am certain this is not news to anyone! Sharing ministry with others can be messy and complicated. Days like the one described above require coordination, communication, and a shared vision of the mission of Christ and the church in the world. The result of such collaboration, however, is worth every effort taken, as ministry is strengthened and people are formed and sent to serve more deeply, all for the greater glory of God. Let us find new or renewed ways to get out of our silos and co-labor in ministry together:

Share common vision. Bottom line, the vision we share is quite simple: to lead people to Jesus, form them as disciples, and encourage them to live their lives as Christians in the world. Keeping this end-goal in mind ensures that our collaboration will be focused and effective.

Think generally and specifically. Even while working to break down silos and lead people to live and grow as disciples, it is important that each of us keeps our specific roles and responsibilities in mind. The diocesan leaders who hosted the workshop described above took time to connect person-

ally with the participants as they arrived and throughout the day. Their announcements and materials highlighted their specific areas of responsibility and the ways they are prepared to support the parishes in their diocese. They modeled effective collaboration, and the process they designed encouraged similar shared ministry among participants in their parishes.

Actively seek opportunities to serve together. We are all busy people. Most have more work to do than will ever be completed. Collaboration in ministry must be a priority in order for it to become a reality. Sofield and Juliano succinctly describe the movement toward collaboration in their book *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry* (Ave Maria Press, 2000). First, they explain, we simply coexist. Each of us has some general sense of identity, yet we exist separately and independently from each other. Next, we move toward communication. We share information, discuss things that we hold in common, and move toward a common sense of purpose. Cooperation follows. We coordinate calendars, for example, recognize that we are interdependent, and understand how programs and people are interrelated. Finally, we collaborate. We have a sense of common mission and work together toward common goals. Collaboration requires commitment between those who serve together. It does not happen by accident but rather as a result of shared theological, ministerial, and practical values.

Value one another. Collaboration assumes mutual value for one another. We cannot, nor should we, do it all alone. We are made to be with and for others, particularly as people of ministry.

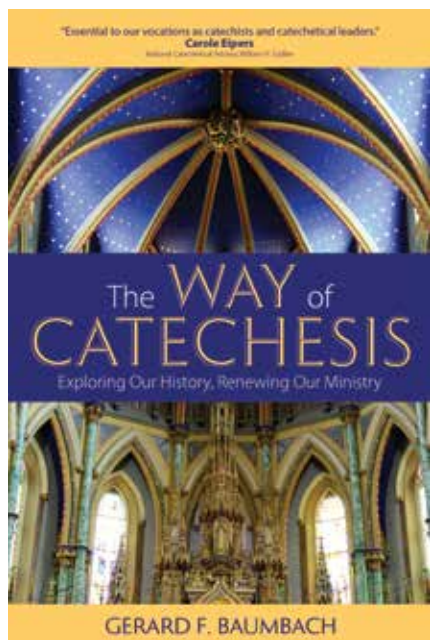
Build on the talents, strengths, and gifts of each other. “What I can do, you cannot. What you can do, I cannot. But together we can do something beautiful for God,” St. Teresa of Calcutta reminded us. Collaboration in ministry relies on the willingness of each person to recognize and draw on the gifts of others with whom they partner. The people involved will be more engaged in the tasks at hand, and the work shared will benefit as a result. ■

Leisa Anslinger is the director of Catholic Life & Faith, an online resource for helping leaders engage real people in real faith (catholiclifeandfaith.net). Contact her at leisaanslinger@gmail.com.

*Sharing ministry with others
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Books, websites, and media for the enrichment of the parish catechetical leader

Compiled by Dan Pierson



The Way of Catechesis: Exploring Our History, Renewing Our Ministry

Gerard F. Baumbach
Ave Maria Press

Drawing on more than 40 years of experience as a catechist, parish director of religious education, textbook publisher, and founding director of the Echo Program at the University of Notre Dame, Baumbach explores contemporary catechesis in light of its history.

This landmark book is an essential resource for every catechetical leader and will spur a new appreciation of the opportunities and challenges of catechesis in the church today.

Baumbach shows how catechists can follow the pedagogy of Jesus, “the way, the truth, and the life,” and he invites readers to an understanding of essential dimensions for handing on the faith and living in union with Christ the teacher.

Baumbach asks readers to consider how key issues and questions throughout the church’s history shed light on today’s questions and concerns. Numerous reflection

questions help the reader prayerfully reflect upon and personally integrate the lessons in their own lives.

Drawing from his own experience, study, and implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Baumbach highlights four characteristics—belonging, believing, discerning, and living—that help the reader connect the history of catechesis with their own faith and practice in the church today.

Each chapter includes a broad look at highlights of some important dimensions of the catechetical climate, weaving together influences that affected each era. In addition, Baumbach explains the role of key thinkers throughout the history of catechesis, including Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine, Peter Canisius, Charles Borromeo, and Josef Jungmann.

Those engaged in catechesis and evangelization at every level will find much to enrich their ministry and deepen their commitment to the church in this extraordinary book.

Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish

Janet Schaeffler, OP
Liturgical Press

Since the end of Vatican II, the church has officially published no fewer than eight major documents calling for adults to be the center of the church’s educational mission. And the Catholic faithful are calling on the church to quench their thirst for a deepening of their lived faith.

In *Deepening Faith*, Schaeffler offers a practical guide and source of encouragement to parish and diocesan committees, catechists, and adult faith formation teams. She outlines the essential foundations, methods, and strategies that can support this journey for today’s adults of all ages and generations.

A Church on the Move: 52 Ways to Get Mission and Mercy in Motion

Joe Paprocki, DMin
Loyola Press

Paprocki insists that there is good news: with the right plans in place, the Catholic Church—and the local parish specifically—will not only survive but thrive. *A Church on the Move* offers 52 practical strategies for moving parishes forward, principally by focusing on the one thing the church can offer that the world-at-large cannot: Jesus Christ.

“Every parish gets into a comfortable routine, so comfortable leaders rarely take a critical look at what’s happening and why.

“Paprocki gives us numerous ways to look at different aspects of parish, to try to get new perspectives on them. Short topics, each with questions for parish staffs to consider, make this a versatile tool for fine-tuning parish ministry.”—Frank DeSisano, Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes

Hosffman Ospino
Our Sunday Visitor

This is the main report emerging from the three-year National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry, conducted by Boston College. About 25 percent of all parishes in the country explicitly serve Hispanic Catholics, mostly in Spanish. This resource offers the most comprehensive analysis to date of pastoral outreach to Hispanic Catholics at the parish level, including dynamics and structures to pass on the faith. |

Dan Pierson has served as a diocesan director of religious education. He is the publisher of the five books in the Catechists’ Guide Reading Series by Steve Mueller, which provides the essential foundation you need to become a more respectful and competent reader of Scripture. Visit www.faithAlivebooks.com.

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