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CATECHETICAL  
LEADER



# Encountering Christ

## IN THIS ISSUE:

Encountering Christ  
in the Family

Mentoring Young Adults  
into Ministry

Becoming an Evangelizer:  
Paul's Story and Yours

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## RELATIONSHIPS

Bill Miller



## National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



In one form or another, much of what I have previously written in this column has been about relationships. Of course, no relationship is as important as our relationship with the Lord.

In the interview that Pope Francis gave to the various Jesuit magazines of the world, published late last summer, he focused on the importance of that relationship. Michael Gerson, a columnist for *The Washington Post*, wrote a commentary on the Pope's interview that appeared in various newspapers throughout the country on September 25, 2013. He interpreted Francis' message in these words: "True religion...is an affair of the heart."

This is not to suggest that doctrines and dogmas are unimportant; however, it does place them in proper perspective. That is, they are important as tools to assist us in building a loving relationship with God. Pope Francis is talking about a religion that puts our relationship with God, manifested in large part by our relationships with our fellow human beings and indeed with all of God's creation, "at the heart of it all."

The church teaches us that God is always inviting us into relationship, always reaching out to us, offering us countless opportunities to fall ever more deeply into the love that is God. This affair of the heart grows in those who are open to conversion, and those who are willing and able to express gratitude. Such individuals find that — perhaps gradually or perhaps suddenly — they are able to see and appreciate the world in new ways...able to acknowledge the Holy Spirit constantly at work for the good of all creation.

Relationships are built and maintained through meaningful interaction, communication, the sharing of stories, and the indications of deep care and concern that one person shows to another. As Jesus built relationships with his disciples, he taught them of his love for the Father by the way that he prayed. Moreover, he taught them of his love for all people by the way he lived and the stories (parables) he shared. He used these gifts to sow the seeds of conversion and transformation. Ultimately the story of his life, a life completely

given for us, was (and continues to be) the greatest love story of all time. In the telling and retelling through the centuries, it has transformed the lives of countless people who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart for love.

When I was young, I attended a small Jesuit college. During those formative years I was privileged to experience spiritual direction for the first time. One priest in particular had a huge effect on my life. With his patience, wisdom, and love he helped me grow and mature into a young adult, and he gave me the tools to better understand the process of discernment. I had grown up in a religious family, learned well my catechism answers, and felt the love of God as conveyed through my family and friends. But Fr. O'Brien took me to the next level. He modeled for me a love and concern that I had rarely (if ever) experienced from anyone outside my family. It was a love that had no strings attached, no conditions or expectations...a love that was filled with the goodness of God, calling me ever deeper into God's embrace. It was then that I began to realize that my calling in life was to help people build their relationships with God. What a phenomenal gift Fr. O'Brien gave me! Along the way, many others have helped me understand and refine that gift more fully, and one person in particular showed me the fruit of that relationship in her own life.

I will never forget the first day I met Marilyn, who is now my wife of 34 years. She was so full of the joy and the love of the Lord that it burst forth from her like a spring of living water. In that moment, I heard words whispered from deep within me that said, "I want what she's got!" As I got to know her, I realized that what she had was based on her unshakable knowledge that *God exists and loves her unconditionally*. It's as magnificently simple yet comprehensive as that.

After 34 years of marriage and 40 years in catechetical ministry, I am more convinced than ever that life is all about relationships, and that every relationship in life is relevant in some way to the ultimate relationship...our relationship with the Lord. May your relationship with our Lord be ever growing, ever new, everything you have ever dreamed it could be, and more! ■

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# THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

Leland Nagel



A year ago, who would have thought the definition of the new evangelization, as described in the *Lineamenta for The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, would take on such meaning as it has with the election of Pope Francis? Pope John Paul II originally proclaimed the new evangelization as “one that

is new in its ardour, new in its methods, and new in its means of expression.” What examples can you think of that give form and function to these three new ways of evangelizing?

Following are examples from Pope Francis.

## ARDOUR

Prior to his election as pope, Francis said, “And if I had to choose between a wounded church that goes out on to the streets and a sick, withdrawn church, I would definitely choose the first one” (Feb. 24, 2013).

At the International Conference on Catechesis for the Year of Faith, Pope Francis proclaimed, “It’s not proselytism that makes the Church grow, it’s testimony.” Quoting Benedict XVI, he also said, “A catechist’s work is not a job.” Francis then added, “Careful. I did not say working as a catechist, I said being a catechist, because it is to do with life. A person guides others towards Jesus through their words, life, and testimony. Being catechists requires love, an ever stronger love for Christ, love for his holy people... being a catechist isn’t a job or a title, it’s a vocation, an approach to life” (Sept. 27, 2013).

In a dialogue with Eugenio Scalfari, founder of *La Repubblica*, Francis stated, “This Vatican-centric view neglects the world around us. I do not share this view and I’ll do everything I can to change it. The Church is or should go back to being a community of God’s people, and priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls, are at the service of the people of God” (Sept. 24, 2013, and released Oct. 1, 2013).

## METHODS

In the traditional foot washing ritual on Holy Thursday, Pope Francis washed the feet of ordinary people and deliberately included two women and two Muslims at the detention center for juvenile offenders in Rome, Italy.

At World Youth Day the Holy Father stepped inside a small Fiat Idea, not the usual automobile choice for a papal visit. Stefano Cabizza, a 19-year-old engineering student in Padua, Italy, gave a letter addressed to the Pope to a cardinal one day

during Mass in Castel Gandolfo. Cabizza never imagined that a few days later he would hear Francis’ Spanish accent at the other end of the line: “*I am Pope Francis. Let’s call each other by our first names*” (Aug. 22, 2013).

Pope Francis wrote “*An open dialogue with non-believers*” for *La Repubblica* (Sept. 11, 2013).

Pope Francis gave an exclusive interview, *A Big Heart Open to God*, with *America* magazine (Sept. 30, 2013).

## MEANS OF EXPRESSION

Priests are called to “*be shepherds with the smell of sheep*” (*Chrism Mass, St. Peter’s Basilica, Mar. 28, 2013*).

“*An injured Church is better than a closed Church*” (International Conference on Catechesis for the Year of Faith, Sept. 27, 2013).

“*It is not proselytizing, it is love*” (Dialogue between Francis and *La Repubblica’s* founder, Eugenio Scalfari, Sept. 24, 2013, and released Oct. 1, 2013).

The new evangelization is not over. If you missed the mark last year, begin again.

Use the occasion of this new year to renew your own efforts; after all, in the words of Charles Cardinal Journet, “God is constantly knocking at the gate of my heart to invite me to go beyond the state I have reached, because my whole life should be a journey on the way to Love.”

Answer the knock at your heart; fashion new ways to share your passion. Create new methods to engage the head, the heart, and the hands. Ignite the fire of evangelization. After all, if we are the salt of the earth, then “we gotta shake it.”

Keep in mind the admonition of Pope Francis at the International Conference on Catechesis this past September: “If a catechist allows themselves to be overcome by fear, they are cowards; if a catechist is too easy going, they end up looking like a statue in a museum; if a catechist is rigid they shrivel up and become sterile.”

Francis’ final appeal to catechists at the International Conference on Catechesis for the Year of Faith was a direct reference to the United States’ theme for Catechetical Sunday: *Open Wide the Doors to Christ*. “Dear catechists, let us go out, open the doors and be bold enough to trace new paths for the proclamation of the Gospel.” ■

# Encountering Christ in the Family

Libia Pérez-Howard



Family life is crucial in the development of a person. Families provide basic needs for children, fostering physical, emotional, and social growth. Families also assist in spiritual development; the way one is raised often determines the quality of one's relationship to God, church, and community in the future.

Today, with individualism becoming more normative in our culture, reminding ourselves that family comes first is a constant struggle. Accomplishments are almost exclusively interpreted through an individualistic, as opposed to family, perspective.

Children in our society often achieve success in education and employment. Some parents, however, do not participate in this and struggle to cover basic needs on their own. Ironically, the very child who has been supported, nurtured, and loved by a family for 18 or more years is expected to move out of his/her home. Individualism deeply shapes and influences both the family unit and faith development today.

In regards to faith, passing on Christian values is jeopardized not only by individualism but also by secularism. Children are raised in today's secular environment where God is relegated to second, third, or even last to other priorities. God is rarely mentioned in public schools. Social media can be a good thing for catechesis, but it also can divide families by putting the focus on the machine and not the person.

By the grace of God, many parents still bring their children to be initiated into the Christian community. However, there are often big gaps in formation between the time they bring their children to be baptized, receive first Communion, or be confirmed. Many bring their children because it is customary in their family to do so, but they are not convinced themselves that that is what is best for them.

How a person first encounters Jesus within their family is interconnected with the rest of the church and society. As

leaders in our faith community, we can and need to help parents/guardians be the first evangelizers of children.

## TWO TYPES OF SOCIETIES

There are two types of societies: socio-centric and ego-centric. Each one has its pros and cons. I write from a socio-centric perspective; it is not a perfect model, but it is the lens through which I view my experience as the woman I am today.

I grew up in a big family. Our household included ten siblings, my parents Guillermo and Ana, my uncle Atanasio, and often a cousin of ours or a godchild of my parents. Since we lived in a *barrio* in the city and our family originated from the rural area, there was always an additional relative who would stay with us during the week, either because they were studying or working. There were other 'temporary guests' staying with us for different reasons as well. Finally, it was wonderful to have my grandmother (*abuela* Juana) living a block from our house. She came to live with our family for her final five years.

In a socio-centric community, the individual represents the family. One's triumphs represent family triumphs. Shame is communal. Unless an unmarried young adult had no choice but to go away, he/she would never dream of leaving the family home before married.

Living at home from a socio-centric perspective is not synonymous with how the ego-centric culture understands 'providing' for someone. It means, rather, that a person takes an active part in the dynamics of the family, helping with chores, expenses, caring for the sick and elderly, contributing to the guidance of younger siblings or relatives, and having fun as a family member. The adult child still has friends with whom they go out and share in groups. These friends, however, also become friends of the family.

The extended family, godparents, and neighbors are also very much involved in the upbringing of the children, helping instill family values and beliefs. They even step in to help economically if needed. Family is always bigger than people living under one

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*How a person first encounters  
Jesus within their family  
is interconnected with the rest  
of the church and society.*

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Photo by Steven Depolo

roof. The saying, “It takes a village to raise a child,” very much applies here. The *National Directory of Catechesis* recognizes the role of the extended family by saying that its members “often take on a primary responsibility in transmitting the faith to younger members. Their shared wisdom and experience often constitute a compelling Christian witness” (29 D).

### ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

Throughout Sacred Scriptures, a relationship between people and God is narrated. It points to the individual as part of a community and family. The Son of God, divine and human, was also born into a family unit. The family as the nucleus of society gives each of its members the necessary tools to participate in the wider society. The relationship of children with their parents, siblings, and other members of the family, teaches the person how to relate to others and how to be responsible members of a society.

Family is the nucleus of the church. In family, children are evangelized. “Parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children” (*Familiaris Consortio* 39). The Holy Family serves as the paradigm for catechesis and evangelization. The child Jesus learned how to relate to God from his parents, Mary and Joseph.

Children learn about true love in family life. Families teach children who God is and introduce them to the community, where faith becomes public. Parents are called to be the representation of God in the family, and to be models of a healthy relationship with God and others. For Christians, it is in the family where the child first encounters Jesus, learns to relate to him and to be his disciple: To love God with all his/her heart, with all his/her soul, with all his/her mind; and to love his/her neighbor as him/herself (Mt 22:37-39). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says it very clearly:

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues....Parents should teach their children to subordinate the ‘material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.’ Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them. (2223)

By the time a child begins to prepare for holy Eucharist, he/she already should have a clear knowledge of who God is and

what it means to live as a Christian, in spite of not being able to fully comprehend this. A shorter life experience should not be equal to ignorance of the Trinitarian God:

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. (CCC 2226)

In the socio-centric model, responsibility to guide a child is not merely the responsibility of household members; this responsibility rests within the entire community, beginning with nearby relatives, godparents, and neighbors (considered to be *la segunda familia* — the second family.) Parents are never alone in the endeavor of modeling faith to their children.

Children learn from the events that happen in the lives of each member of the family — including learning from the mistakes of others. Parents can use any kind of incident to help form the conscience of a child. Conscience formation depends upon families to sort things out.

#### PERSONAL EXAMPLES OF THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

Christ is encountered concretely at home in loving relationships built upon forgiveness, compassion, and reconciliation. A few examples of my experience follow.

I learned about unconditional service to others from my mother. My mother was the one who took care of a neighbor child who was very sick and whose mother was dying of cancer. She was the one who would cure the sick dog or hen, the one who accompanied neighbors to get their birth certificates in remote places, and the one who lobbied for providing hospitality for needy people from the community. In her old age, mom does what she can to help others by praying for them.

What impacted me the most from my father's example was the way he lived in a spirit of reconciliation. Testimony to this is that he never raised his voice, but we always knew where he stood when we went to complain about one of our siblings. His favorite phrase: “¡Pero, eso pasó ayer!” (That happened yesterday, didn't it?) We knew that it had happened only a couple of minutes before, but we understood exactly what he meant.

From my grandmother, I learned about devotion. She was a *rezandera* — the one that leads the novena for the dead. My *abuela* did not know how to read or write, but she knew how to pray the rosary in the most beautiful and “complete” way. She was the one who would make sure that there was always an altar with the *Santos* and a lit candle.

When my father had a bad accident and was unable to work, my baptismal godparents stepped up to help our family. My

*padrino* brought two liters of milk to our house every day for two solid years while my father was incapacitated.

All the members make up the family, and each can make a unique contribution to creating the basic environment in which a sense of God's loving presence is awakened and faith in Jesus Christ is confessed, encouraged, and lived. Within the Christian family, the members first begin to learn the basic prayers of the tradition and to form their consciences in light of the teaching of Christ and the Church. Family members learn more of the Christian life by observing each other's strengths or weaknesses than by formal instruction. (NDC 29 D)

#### ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN THE PARISH COMMUNITY — AN EXTENSION OF THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

For parents, education of children represents their “true ministry” (FC 38), beginning in the home and continuing in the church community in partnership with pastors, catechists, and other ministers. It is the responsibility of the faith community to support and assist the parents in the exercising of this ministry and to help the family to fulfill its task of “sharing in the life and mission of the Church” (FC 17).

The church community is the communal “*padrinos/madrinas*” (sponsors/godparents) for the family, helping the parents in their role of primary catechists of their children. Catechesis is the responsibility of the whole faith community. It is the “common responsibility,” under the leadership of the pastor, of the “Christian community, a task that involves all” (GDC 224).

Parents want what is best for their children. They usually try to be the best parents they can be by modeling the good things they learned while growing up. In regards to passing on faith, parents also try to do the best they can.

My 30-plus years of catechetical experience tells me that many parents feel inadequate when it comes to explaining the faith to their children. Some parents who do not believe in God simply follow a family tradition, bringing their children to the church for sacramental preparation. Others come to support the child because he/she wanted to make their first Communion or confirmation. To top these situations, many parishes lack the trained catechetical personnel to fulfill the responsibility entrusted to them by the church.

In the United States, many parents are raising their children without the support of an extended family system. Sometimes when trying to raise children according to the teachings of Jesus and the church, parents might feel as if they are swimming against the current in a river full of religious pluralism. It can be overwhelming for parents to take on a task that in many countries belongs to the whole family (including the extended family) and the neighborhood, as it happens in socio-centric communities.

Both my husband and I are theologians. We had the privilege of being able to discuss with our children the teachings of the



Sacred Scriptures and the Tradition of the church. Nonetheless, it was not an easy task because we lacked a support system where the values we were teaching our children could be reinforced and strengthened.

In our married life, we have belonged to two parishes. When our children had questions about the Sunday readings or the homily, we were provided with an opportunity to continue a catechetical conversation. Still, while participating in catechesis at both parishes, programs were sacramental but not systematic. Besides that, as Christian parents, it was a difficult task deconstructing inaccurate catechetical teachings by unqualified catechists.

It is imperative, then, that the church is intentional in helping families become small communities of faith — places where faith in God develops throughout the years, and where the vocation to respond to God's call is fostered. As it is well stated by the CCC, "The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents" (2226).

Through its catechesis and witness, the church community can be a strong pillar in the life of each family member. What follows are some practical comments and suggestions based on my experience as a member of my family both in Venezuela and in the U.S. and as a catechetical minister for the majority of my life.

1. Pay special attention to the lone immigrant. That is, the person who comes to this country without any relatives or friends. It is brutal for the mind and soul to be uprooted from the environment in which one grew up, having to begin anew, to develop a "new" life, new relationships. It does not matter under what circumstances the person left his/her country of origin. Lend a listening ear and a supportive shoulder.
2. Any family needs the support of other families in order to become an ideal place where each member can grow in the faith. Follow up with newlyweds or parents of newly baptized children. A support system needs to begin as soon as they register for marriage or baptismal preparation. Develop a system of sponsor/sister families — train families to accompany other families in their role as new spouses or parents.
3. Offer catechesis for all ages — *from womb to tomb* — including catechesis for children of pre-school age. These are the years in which the children can be more influenced by any figure of authority. There is no time to lose.
4. Do not wait until your parish needs someone to coordinate catechesis or youth ministry to begin sending people to train for these ministries. "The single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a professionally trained parish catechetical leader" (NDC 54 B).

5. Prepare catechists to exercise their ministry to the best of their potential. Both initial and ongoing formation are crucial. Good textbooks are not enough.
6. Consider offering systematic catechetical formation for parents. Several priests have adopted this model in Chicago and the results have been amazing! Parents speak of how the formation helps them to grow in their own faith and to be able to talk to their children about the faith.
7. Help families re-discover the value of the faith tradition practices they do at home and to understand what it means in relation to their Catholic faith and be able to explain it to the children.
8. Provide resources to parents that give them tools to help the children and themselves be critical, through the lenses of Christian values, of what they see in social and mainstream media, and be able to converse about it as a family.
9. On July 1, 2013, the Archdiocese of Chicago launched the *Year of Strong Catholic Parents* as part of a five-year Strategic Pastoral Plan that is in its third year. It offers resources that parishes can use in the faith formation for families (check [archchicago.org](http://archchicago.org)). An initiative for this year's Strategic Plan is a process called *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* (see [familyministries.org](http://familyministries.org)), a national initiative presented in partnership by NFCYM, NCCL, NAC-FLM and NCEA. The main goal is to help parishes partner "with parents to bring home the faith."

A parish needs to find initiatives that fit well with the reality of its community. The important thing is to make sure that the parish is "the privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents" that it is called to be (CCC 2226).

"Because they gave life to their children, parents have a most serious obligation and the right to educate them. It is therefore, primarily the responsibility of Christian parents to ensure the Christian education of their children in accordance with the teaching of the Church" (CIC 226, 2). The responsibility for this, however, does not stop with the parents. All of us in the community of faith are responsible to help them in this endeavor.

In a poem, Pablo Neruda writes, "*Cuando se tiene un hijo, se tienen todos los hijos del mundo.*" (When you have a child, you have all the children in the world.) The children of our community are our children. We are all members of one big family that goes beyond the doors of the house inhabited by immediate family members. May the grace of God, through the Holy Spirit and the example of the Master Catechist, Jesus Christ, guide us in this ministry. ■

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# Mentoring Young Adults into Ministry

Beth M. Knobbe



I always anticipate that look on a student's face the first time I willingly hand over my keys. It is usually in response to a simple request — extra snacks from the storage locker or needing to print handouts for a meeting. Without a second thought, I hand them my keychain and send them on their

way by saying, “Just bring them back when you're done.” Then I watch for that sideways glance at their realization that they (temporarily) have unlimited access to my office, the sacristy, the printer, and the snack closet!

I've worked with college students for nearly ten years. I generally trust them with more responsibility than others deem necessary and sooner than most would deem wise. Our students serve as small group leaders, retreat facilitators, and mission trip coordinators. One of the great joys of my work is that I get to mentor them as they minister to their peers. Initially, these small acts of trust instill confidence in them, and they quickly discover that there is much they can do without ever asking permission or needing approval.

My appreciation for mentoring came long before my arrival at the Sheil Catholic Center and my work with college students at Northwestern University. As a young adult, I spent the first ten years of my professional career in corporate consulting. I worked for a wonderful organization where mentoring was inherent within the culture. I cannot think of a time when I did not have a more seasoned consultant whom I could call upon for advice, feedback, and reassurance.

When I made the transition from the corporate world to professional ministry, these were the kind of relationships I sought. As someone new to ministry, I benefited from mentoring relationships with clergy, religious, and lay leaders. In my work with college students, I see how mentoring makes a difference — not only in the lives of our students, but also in the life of the church!

As we continue to place the future of our church into the hands of the next generation, we owe it to them (and to ourselves) to equip them with the tools of faith, the wisdom of the tradition, a love of liturgy, a desire for prayer, and greater service to the poor. Mentoring is a great model for doing that.

When I talk about mentoring young adults into ministry, I'm really talking about the many different ways we work with young people as they grow to see how their gifts can be used to serve God's people. This may be within a young adult group at your parish; on a larger scale, it also includes mentoring young adults as staff, as volunteers, and as leaders of ministries, whether that is leading the youth group, directing a choir, participating in liturgical ministries, serving on parish councils, coordinating retreats, organizing social justice programs, serving at the soup kitchen, orchestrating a fundraising event, or accomplishing many other things within the parish and beyond.

## YOUNG ADULTS SEEK MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

I recently discovered a document\* written by 130 young adult delegates who were present at the Third Continental Congress on Vocations held in Montreal back in 2002. This document, while written in the context of a vocations conference, contains tremendous insights into how young adults perceive the church. Most profoundly, these young adults share what they long for in their faith journey and what they are hoping for from the church today. In summary, this is what they are asking for, in their own words:

- \* We seek wisdom and knowledge and will use those gifts in return to enrich our church. Please give us the resources we need to be what God has called us to be!
- \* We seek to grow in understanding and knowledge of prayer, to discern our vocations in Christ, and to learn all aspects of our faith.
- \* Inspire us with open dialogue.
- \* Introduce us to objective mentors who are truly open to God's will for us, and can serve as wisdom figures. Offer us a safe place to seek answers and grow, and direct us towards a deeper spiritual life.
- \* We ask you to enrich our identity by providing us with opportunities for meaningful catechesis, ongoing formation, and education. Deepen our understanding

\* Young Adult Statement from the 3rd Continental Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life Montreal, April 18-22, 2002 (Available online at: <http://www.houstonvocations.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Young-Adult-vocation-promotion.pdf>)

of our Catholic history as well as the present realities of our faith.

- \* We ask that you support and train us to become leaders and risk-takers for the sake of God's kingdom.
- \* We desire authentic and true witnesses to our faith who are not afraid to be vulnerable in sharing their story, including their strengths and weaknesses.
- \* We want to stand as church on issues of justice, as together we work to return to humans their dignity!
- \* We want the church to provide opportunities for authentic faith encounters; specifically, special time that is set aside for spiritual growth.

Truly these young apprentices in the faith are seeking valuable mentors to journey alongside them!

## WHAT IS MENTORING?

As we think about engaging Young Adults and drawing them deeper into the life of the church, first consider those individuals who have been important mentors in your own life. Who has been a mentor to you and what are the qualities, characteristics, or moments by which you best remember them?

As I think about the mentors throughout various stages of my career, I recognize several commonalities. A good mentor accepts me where I am and at the same time challenges me to grow into my full potential. Mentors help us learn by offering knowledge, skills, opportunities for self-reflection, and by graciously providing feedback.

The best mentors are generally not direct supervisors, and s/he is more than just a role model that I admire from afar. A good mentor is personally invested by spending time, money, and energy, and may even take risks on my behalf.

In working with young adults, it is important to remember that mentoring is not the same as parenting, counseling/therapy, spiritual direction, reconciliation, management/supervision, or career coaching. Although, there will certainly be times when we find ourselves counseling, advising, coaching, and even parenting our young people. You may even find yourself in the role of confessor or spiritual director, but mentoring is something different.

Furthermore, mentoring in the context of church is a means of discipleship where young adults come to know Jesus and grow in a desire to follow his mission. Mentoring is a form of evangelization, sharing the Good News with others, bringing forth the kingdom of God, and expanding your ministry.

Mentoring invites young adults into leadership and becomes a natural way for us to pass the torch to the next generation. Finally, mentoring at its best is a mutual endeavor, where we learn and grow in faith together.

## JESUS AS A MENTOR

Of course, our greatest example of a ministry mentor is Jesus himself! Scripture is filled with stories of Jesus inviting, sending, encouraging, and directing the disciples. Mark 6 is a fascinating look at Jesus' interaction with the disciples and how he mentors them and shows them what ministry involves. From this one chapter, we can identify five key lessons about how we too can mentor young adults into a life of discipleship in the church.

### 1. A good mentor teaches by example

*When the Sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. (Mk 6:2-3)*

I can only imagine what that conversation was like for Jesus and the disciples after Jesus was chased out of town. Was he disappointed? Did he make excuses? Did he dismiss it, as if it were not important?

The people of Nazareth seem to have some preconceived notions of who Jesus ought to be. As mentors, what expectations do we have of our young adults? Do we select or invite based on

their family background, what we know of their siblings, or the manner in which they live out their faith? Rather, can we instead get to know them for who they truly are and recognize their future potential?

As a good mentor, Jesus also allows the disciples to witness his success and he does not hide from his critics. "He could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them" (Mk 6:5). Jesus does not let the criticism of a few hinder him from serving those who are most in need. One of the best things we can do for young adults is serve as a role model at all times, especially in adversity.

### 2. A good mentor gives followers a mission

*He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick — no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. (Mk 6:7-9)*



Photo by chiesADlbeinasco

What does Jesus do next? He sends them out! He gives the disciples a mission. They have enough knowledge and an example to follow, so Jesus sends them out on their own. And note, Jesus does not go with them. He does not follow along to hover over their every move or mistake.

There are so many areas of parish life where young adults are willing to step in if they are asked! What might happen if we let young adults run our \_\_\_\_\_? (Fill in the blank: RCIA team, parish council, liturgy commission, annual fundraiser, parish picnic, youth group, Facebook group, etc.) What would be the challenges? What would be the best possible outcome?

I encourage you to give young adults a job to do and trust that they will do the work. Often it takes an initial invitation and some encouragement, but give them the resources that they need and then give them the freedom to figure out how to do it on their own. They will likely do things different than they've been done before, but sending them is key!

Jesus' advice for young adults is to take only a pair of sandals but not a second tunic. Essentially, what he means is travel light. What matters most is who you are and not all the extra stuff that you carry. I have often found that having one or two young adults in visible leadership immediately attracts other young people. When we send them out, with only a walking stick in hand, they have a way of connecting with their peers that draws others into the mix.

### 3. A good mentor points out the potential risks

*They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. King Herod heard of it, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead..." Others were saying, "He is Elijah..." But when Herod learned of it, he said, "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up." (Mk 6:13-16)*

At first glance, the beheading of John the Baptist appears to be a strange insertion among these "sending forth" stories. The gospel writer shows us two extraordinary examples of leadership — one admirable and one not so. As a mentoring exercise, it is important that we pay attention to these lessons.

Although, we hear very little of John the Baptist's story in this short excerpt, we recall that Mark's Gospel begins with the ministry of John. As a leader, John is characterized as one who points the way to Jesus (Mk 1:2). He speaks the truth to power (Mk 6:18), and he pays the ultimate sacrifice with his life (Mk 6:27).

In this same story, we see Herod fall to some of the greatest temptations of leadership. There is a temptation to compare ourselves to others and grow jealous of those whom we deem as more successful (Mk 6:20). There is a temptation to please others, make a good impression, or worry about how we will be perceived. (Mk 6:26) And we have a moral obligation to do what is right, even when it is not the popular choice. (Herod chose to have John beheaded, doing away with the enemy, as opposed to loving his enemy.)

What are the resistances that young adults face and what are their potential pitfalls? Young adults with new ideas and fresh energy will surely encounter well-meaning staff and long-time parishioners who echo the age-old refrains, "But we've always done it this way. We tried that years ago; it will never work. What if it gets out of hand? You can't just let them take over."

As a mentor, you can help bridge the generation gap, bring diverse communities together, and show them how the old and new can simultaneously co-exist.

Similarly, the young adult culture itself invites all kinds of potential pitfalls — materialism, individualism, a sense of entitlement, desire for immediate gratification, and sexual obsession to name just a few. Young adults are certainly not unaware that these exist, but sometimes they rely on an expe-



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rienced mentor to help them name and address where those things are getting in the way of living a life centered on Christ.

What is most important is that our work is focused on Christ and his mission. Help young adults keep Christ at the center of all that they do! Begin and end time together in prayer, ground one another in Scripture, and wisely discern next steps.

#### 4. A good mentor celebrates successes

*The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. (Mk 6:30-31)*

The fourth story in Mark 6 is the feeding of the 5,000, which begins as the apostles are returning from their mission. In working with young adults, be sure to celebrate their successes! Listen to what they’ve accomplished. Help them process what they’re learning. And then give them opportunities to rejuvenate their own spiritual lives.

One of my favorite moments when I’m working with our students on retreat planning, invariably it always happens, is that I need to miss a meeting. Often they get more work done while I’m gone than when I’m there. And they are so excited to share what they’ve accomplished! Acknowledging and celebrating their success instills confidence, it creates a greater sense of ownership, and continues to engage them in the process. It also reminds me to delegate some of those trivial but necessary details, which frees me to do other tasks.

There are two other important lessons from Jesus the mentor in the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples come to Jesus with a problem, and what does Jesus do? Jesus doesn’t solve the problem for them. He puts the challenge back on them, “How many loaves do you have?” He walks them through it. As a mentor, it is so important to have a sense of when to step in and when to hold back, when to delegate responsibility and when to do things yourself. Jesus knew when it was his turn to say the blessing, but he is in no way taking away from the work the disciples have already done.

Finally, Jesus trusts that the disciples have enough. He doesn’t say, “Are you sure you couldn’t find ten loaves and five fish, or 100 loaves and 15 fish?” Among themselves, the disciples have five loaves and two fish, and that is sufficient. As a matter of fact, it is more than enough! How often do we underestimate the value of the gifts that our young adults bring? We think, they’re so young, they don’t have the right training or enough experience.

I try to remember this when my students say, “I can’t lead prayer! I couldn’t possibly write a witness talk for retreat! I’ve never led a small group!” I always say to them in return, “Have you been baptized? (Yes.) Well, then it’s time we put those baptismal graces to work. In the baptism rite, each one of us is anointed into the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ. You’ve got everything you need right there!” Give them

that gentle reminder — by virtue of their baptism, they have what it takes.

#### 5. A good mentor comes to their aid

*About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them. They had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.” He got into the boat with them and the wind died down. (Mk 6: 48, 50-51)*

Finally, the last story in Mark 6 is the calming of the storm at sea. After the feeding of the masses, Jesus sends the disciples off in a boat, while he stays to dismiss the crowd and then goes up the mountain to pray. In the middle of the night, he sees that they are struggling with the oars against a mighty wind.

The final lessons of Jesus the mentor: Pray for the young adults in your community, as they are likely struggling with many things. In regards to your mentoring relationship with them, check in from time to time, even if it is from afar. And when they cry out for help, be ready to come to their aid. Jesus sends the disciples to the other side unaware that a storm is brewing on the sea. Likewise, we are probably unaware of all the challenges our young adults will face.

However, knowing today’s young people, there are a few things we can keep in mind. Young adults want to know that their life experience is taken seriously, and they want to hear the church respond to issues that are most important in their minds and hearts. This includes engaging in meaningful dialogue about the sex abuse crisis, women’s roles in the church, the church’s teachings on homosexuality, the role of other religions in society, a response to war and violence, and questions about immigration and living in a global society. Furthermore, young adults want the church to engage with them in their intellectual and spiritual struggles, and to not simply spoon-feed answers to them. The church needs to be relevant and ready to respond to the questions of the day. Mentors play a crucial role in guiding young adults to the resources they seek.

Like Jesus with the disciples in the boat during the storm at sea, a good mentor can bring a sense of calm to an otherwise tense situation. Mentoring is about a relationship and one that is best modeled through our relationship with Christ! Hand our young adults the keys to the faith and trust them with unlimited access. ■

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# Becoming an Evangelizer: Paul's Story and Yours

Margaret Nutting Ralph



*This article is based on a "TED Talk" keynote address and follow-up workshop presented at the 2013 NCCL Conference.*

On their USCCB website, the Bishops of the United States ring a clarion call for the new evangelization: "The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the gospel message and go forth to proclaim the gospel." This call is to all Catholics. In this article, I would like to reflect with you on how we become evangelizers and, as catechists, on how we help others become evangelizers, too.

The process of becoming an evangelizer involves call, conversion, conviction, witness, and service. As we explore each step of this process, we will turn to Paul, one of the world's greatest evangelizers, as our model. In addition, as an example, I will reflect on my own life in order to demonstrate how a catechist recognizes and names Christ's presence in his or her own personal experience. The goal is to encourage you to share your stories so that you model for others the personal witness that is a necessary component of effective evangelization.

## CALL

Paul experienced a very dramatic call while traveling to Damascus. He was not expecting a call; to his way of thinking, he had already been called and had already been converted. As a strict Pharisee, he was so certain of his deep religious convictions that they were the basis for Paul's persecuting those who were following "the Way," those who were disciples of Jesus Christ.

We read three accounts of Paul's call story (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16; 26:9-18). While the accounts differ in details, they all tell the same core story: Paul is surrounded by a bright light and hears a voice ask, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Paul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice responds, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:3-5).

These words deserved deep contemplation on Paul's part, and on ours as well. Jesus did not ask Paul, "Why do you persecute my followers?" Rather, Jesus asked, "Why do you persecute me?" Jesus identifies totally with his disciples. As we will soon see, this identification of Christ with his followers will come to have a profound effect on Paul's understanding of the church

as the body of Christ and on the social justice ramifications of such a belief for those who receive the body of Christ in Eucharist.

After this profound experience, Paul is blind for a while. He is forced to realize that he needs others: the gifts of others are absolutely necessary for Paul to even function. Soon, God sends Ananias, who heals Paul, restoring his sight. It is not just Paul's physical sight that has been restored, but his spiritual insight as well. Paul, now with a very different understanding of who God would have him become and what God would have him do, is filled with the Holy Spirit.

## CONVERSION

Paul's experience of call, as well as his subsequent activities and experiences, resulted in a deep, on-going conversion on his part (see Phil 3:4b-12). Before the call, he was sure he was right. He was a faithful Jew, a strict observer of the law. After the call, he no longer persecuted others in God's name, and he was open to new understandings, not just to calling others to new understandings.

As a person who was raised Catholic before Vatican Council II, I can identify with this attitude of certainty that precedes a call to on-going conversion. Like all Catholic children who memorized the Baltimore Catechism, I was taught that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church. Question 166 of the Catechism asked, "Are all obliged to belong to the Catholic Church in order to be saved?" The answer was: "All are obliged to belong to the Catholic Church in order to be saved."

I was in college during Vatican Council II. Our theology teacher had a guest speaker talk to our class about the changes that were taking place in the church on the subject of ecumenism. The guest speaker said that our posture in ecumenical discussions cannot be, "We are right, and you are wrong. When you see things our way we can have visible unity." I remember raising my hand and asking, "How can our posture be anything else, since we are right and they are wrong?" I, along with our pilgrim church, needed to get over my certainty and be open to an ongoing process of conversion before Christ's will for his Church — that we all be visibly one — could begin to be fulfilled.

Paul expresses his awareness that his conversion will be ongoing in his letter to the Philippians: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection for the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3:10-12). Paul expects not only to nourish the faith of others, but to be nourished by their faith as well: “For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Rom 1:11-12).

## CONVICTION

The New Evangelization calls each of us to believe and proclaim the good news of the gospel. What is that core good news? Paul became convinced of the following truths:

- \* Jesus Christ is alive and present. Paul experienced Jesus’ presence himself. He knew for a certainty that Jesus had risen from the dead, was still alive, and was with his people.
- \* The effect of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection is that Christ has conquered sin and death. Christ offers salvation to both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:21-26).
- \* This salvation is a gift, not something anyone has or could earn. It is received not by obedience to the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3: 21-25).
- \* These truths result in practical consequences in terms of behavior. We must love one another: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8).
- \* Paul knew that he was called to be a witness to these truths to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-9).

Paul’s letters are filled with advice about how to live in fidelity to these core truths. That the truths form a single unity, which we call the *gospel*, is seen when Paul teaches the Corinthians about the reality and significance of Eucharist. Paul’s account of Eucharist (56 AD) predates all other accounts that we have. Mark’s Gospel, the earliest of the gospels, was written nearly ten years later (65 AD).

Paul established the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (51 AD). Now, some five years later, he is writing the Corinthians, reminding them of his past teachings, answering some questions that they have asked, and correcting them for some of their behaviors, behaviors that were unloving and therefore not giving faithful witness to the gospel.

The Corinthians’ behavior at Eucharist was one area that deserved correction. Why? Because when the Corinthians were gathering in each other’s homes to celebrate Eucharist as part of a shared meal, the needs of some poor people in their midst were being ignored. Paul says: “When you come together, it is

not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing” (1 Cor 11:20-22a)?

Paul then reminds the Corinthians of what he had received from the Lord, that Jesus, on the night before he died, took a loaf of bread and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24b-25).

Paul then goes on to teach the Corinthians the consequences of receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ in regard to their behavior. Paul says, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves” (1 Cor 11:27-29).

As a Catholic who believes that Christ is truly present in Eucharist, what I heard in this passage was an affirmation of what I already believed. I thought that Paul was telling the Corinthians that if they receive Eucharist without recognizing that they are receiving the body and blood of Christ, they eat and drink judgment on themselves. Certainly Paul shares a belief in Christ’s real presence in Eucharist. Earlier in his letter to the Corinthians Paul has said: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16)?

However, I now think that Paul is not repeating that teaching here. Rather, Paul is accusing the Corinthians of failing to recognize the body of Christ in the body that is the church. Paul is telling the Corinthians that when they ignore the poor in their midst, thus failing to recognize the body of Christ, they eat and drink to their own condemnation. Paul was well aware that the way in which a person is treating a follower of Christ is the way that person is treating Christ himself. Paul remembers that the question the risen Christ had asked him had been “Why are you persecuting me?” Having persecuted Christians and participated in Stephen’s death (Acts 7:58-8:3), Paul knew exactly what it was to fail to discern the body and so be responsible for the body and blood of Christ.

## WITNESS

Evangelizers of the Good News of Jesus Christ need to be able to give witness to their personal experiences of the presence of the risen Lord in their lives. As we have seen, Paul does this constantly. He tells those he is evangelizing the details of his own call, conversion, and conviction. As Catholic evangelizers, we are called to do the same. As catechists we are called to teach



others how to become witnesses, too. Why is the ability to give witness an essential component of evangelization? Pope Paul VI explained the answer to this question in his document *Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (par. 41).

As part of my own on-going process of conversion, I asked myself what had happened that had enabled me to understand Paul, to realize that by using the phrase “without discerning the body” Paul was speaking of the body of Christ that is the church. Perhaps part of the answer is that I had, for such a long period of time, failed to recognize the body of Christ in my fellow Christians. That is what Paul was accusing the Corinthians of doing, although for a different reason.

In addition, I think this added insight rests on an experience I had about 20 years ago when my father was dying. My parents had moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where I live with my family, so that I could take care of them in their late years. My father had suffered a series of strokes, with the last stroke resulting in him being unable to speak, swallow, or communicate in any way. My mother was also an invalid. So, it fell to me to be with my father in the hospital.

The doctors asked me to sign a permission form to allow them to provide my father with a surgically inserted feeding tube. I didn’t know what was best. I definitely wanted to prolong life, but I didn’t want to artificially prolong the dying process. I also did not know if we could take care of my father at home with his feeding tube. I didn’t want my parents to have to live apart.

Not knowing what to do, and feeling very alone, I signed the permission.

Immediately afterward I got on the hospital elevator and faced front. A woman’s voice behind me said, “I don’t think you recognized me.” I turned to look at her and said, “I’m sorry, I don’t recognize you.” She replied, “Well, it’s no wonder, because when you give a talk we all know who you are, but you don’t know who we are. I attended several talks you gave for the RCIA on Scripture. I love your work.”

Not wanting to engage in conversation, but not wanting to be rude, I said, “Thank you. What is your work?” She said, “I work for Option Home Care. Have you heard of us?” I said that I had not. She replied, “Well, this is just a for-instance, but say a family member has had a stroke, and say he can’t swallow, and say he has a feeding tube, and say you want to take care of him at home. We teach people to do that.”

I was flabbergasted. I explained to the woman that this was exactly the situation we were facing. I had just signed the permission for the feeding tube. She said, “Now, I don’t want you to worry about this. If your father comes home I will come to his home and teach everyone how to take care of him.” My father did come home, and she did do just that.

However, four weeks later my father was back in the hospital with a high fever. I noticed that his lips and tongue were getting crusty and mentioned that to the nurse. She must have been having a bad day because her response had to do with how demanding families are and how understaffed hospitals are. I again left the room and got on the elevator. However, the





Photo by Matus Laslofi

elevator shook, and I feared I was stuck between floors. When the doors opened I realized that the elevator had not moved.

No longer trusting the elevator, I exited and started to walk down the steps when a woman's voice behind me said, "I don't think you recognized me." I did not recognize the woman, so I said, "I'm sorry. I don't recognize you. She said, "I took a Scripture course from you about 15 years ago. I love Scripture." Remembering what had happened four weeks earlier, I asked, "What do you do?" She replied, "I supervise the nursing care of geriatric stroke patients." I immediately told her my father's situation and she assured me that she would take care of it immediately. She did. My father did not come home again. He died soon after this event. However, that nurse was attentively and lovingly taking care of him the whole time.

On reflecting on these experiences soon after they occurred, I felt overwhelmed with gratitude for God's providence. I had felt alone, had been a total mess, and God had sent his follower's not only to take care of my father, but to comfort me and my family during our time of grief. I did not initially connect these events to any particular Scripture passages. However, the next time I was teaching the post-resurrection appearance stories, I began to wonder if perhaps I was understanding them then for the first time.

What are the authors teaching through those stories in which the people who know and love Jesus — Mary Magdalene, the apostles, the disciples on the road to Emmaus — fail to recognize him? I think the authors are teaching their original readers, and us, what Paul was teaching the Corinthians. The risen Christ is in our midst in and through his body, the church,

but we often fail to discern the body. This has been the case ever since the resurrection. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), we Catholics recognize the risen Christ's presence in Eucharist, but do we recognize Christ's presence when two or three are gathered in his name? Do we recognize Christ's presence in the stranger who is a fellow traveler on the road, particularly in immigrants? Do we recognize Christ in Scripture? Do we recognize the presence of the risen Christ in the poor, the marginalized, in those whom we have been taught are sinners? Since this experience 20 years ago, life for me has been an on-going process of becoming aware of Christ's presence all around me. It is now the risen Christ who lovingly says to me, "I don't think you recognized me."

### SERVICE

With his keen understanding that the risen Christ completely identifies with his followers, that Christ is present in Eucharist, and that those who receive the body of Christ become the body of Christ, Paul teaches new Christians their responsibilities toward others as members of that one body of Christ. We all have gifts, and those gifts are meant to be used in service to the community (1 Cor 12:12-27). One of those gifts is the gift of teaching. As catechists, may we be open to new understandings, may we be evangelizers, and may we teach others to be evangelizers too, giving witness to the presence of the risen Christ in all of our lives. ■

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# Making Disciples— for a Lifetime!

Dennis L. Johnson, Jr.



We know discipleship-making in the church has fundamentally changed since the Second Vatican Council, and we know that many of the advancements in our formational frameworks have come from outside traditionally theological disciplines. Psychology, sociology, and technology are significantly reshaping the ways we transmit and relate the message of faith. Recognizing this paradigm-shift has helped to rekindle a central-task of evangelization — namely, fostering an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

To be effective in the present era, faith formation must incorporate a personal element; it must connect with people on a heart level, and it must impact people's daily lives lest the opportunity for true conversion be significantly limited or completely lost. The times have changed. In former generations one could presume that individuals had an ongoing, explicit, and active relationship with the Lord; whereas, today this can no longer be assumed. Catechetical professionals used to be able to expect that those seeking their assistance would come with some experience of organized religion, but today this is no longer the norm. Instead, the pervasive lack of familiarity with ecclesial practice leaves *many* baptized Catholics (and virtually everyone else) disconnected from the church, and the absence of inculturated Christian experience breeds a presumptive religious ignorance that can no longer be addressed solely (or easily) by parish-centered approaches. To develop mature discipleship among parishioners, and non-parishioners alike, the church must expand its influence beyond the temple walls.

## WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHY

Not long ago, I gave a presentation at a parish where I had participants self-identify themselves on the continuum of Catholic practice. Some saw themselves as Mass-only parishioners, others added a ministry or two, and still a few more were part of the minority who spend most of their lives at the parish. However, the truth (as I pointed out) was that they all were “super-Catholics” given today's declining statistics where roughly 75 percent of us don't regularly attend Mass. Rather than digressing into an analysis of why, I'd rather move us toward thinking about what. Surely you and I believe that the

Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives, but let's face it, the majority of Catholics aren't living that way. The culture of Catholic life isn't changing, *it has changed!* So maybe we need new starting-points and new metrics to rejuvenate the vibrancy of Catholic communal life and to lead us more fully into being a Eucharistic people. More important than asking “why?” is to resolve the issue of “what?” we intend to do differently. After all, Jesus said, “GO and make disciples” (Mt 28:19).

In recent years, bringing people to Christ has become more individualized, more particular, and more complex. The recognition of these changing dynamics, at least in some fashion, gave impetus to the promulgation of the *Year of Faith* and a call to renew Catholic life on very basic levels — beginning with Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ as primary points of inspiration for a new evangelization. Consequently, I've been promoting a softer response in our diocese driven by the broader planning question, “Now that the Year of Faith is over, what happens next?” At the heart of this inquiry is the recognition that our focus should be less about animating a specific celebratory period and more about enlivening a faith that can be more profoundly engendered over a lifetime. In many ways, we chose the long road but to help us get started on the journey we made some refinements to our short-term programming schema.

## GROWING INFLUENCE

We began by trying to grow our circle of influence. For example, we expanded our annual catechetical conference making it more accessible to a wider array of ministry genres by increasing workshop offerings and adding more language options. These changes helped to make the event more palatable to fostering mature discipleship by offering something for everyone.

We inaugurated our first-ever Congreso Juvenil (young adult congress) with a defined Hispanic cultural lens but making it bilingual and accessible to everyone. We created an adult faith formation seminar for parish leaders and interested adults (the event was conducted bilingually in English and Spanish). We gathered college Catholic campus ministry leaders to unify vision, to coordinate efforts, and to share best practices. We developed a morning of reflection program for seniors as well as small-group facilitation training — both of which we took on the road. And, recognizing that we were underserving our growing Latino community with regards to lay ministry

formation, we instituted a new parish-based Catholic fundamentals program. Many of these initiatives were operated in partnership with multiple chancery departments. This past summer we held a diocesan Liturgy Conference to enhance our liturgical practice and we also celebrated our first-ever Conference on Marriage.

Building upon these labors we sought to enhance people's spiritual lives by intentionally promoting the primacy of the Word of God through the use of *lectio divina*. This is an ingenious technique for our postmodern, pluralistic society; its flexible use makes it ideal for personal or communal study; its meditative simplicity makes it accessible to novice, intermediate, and advanced disciples alike. By including *lectio divina* in the majority of the aforementioned events (either as the main theme or as a complimentary element) we have been able to successfully model and encourage its use with individuals, families, and in parishes. Most important for our demographics, it is equally applicable and bears fruit regardless of ethnicity, language, socioeconomic background, etc.

### BUILDING URGENCY

And finally, we instilled urgency for change with our bishop's Holy Thursday announcement of the priorities that will occupy our chancery work for the next couple of years: enkindling deeper faith, forming leaders, and harmonizing ministries. Obviously, we want to practice the principles of good stewardship by enabling people to engage in the life of the Christ and the church, by identifying individuals' talents and maximizing their gifts, and by streamlining our pastoral efforts with administrative efficiency. These priorities live within the overarching pillars that the bishop had already identified as the focus of his episcopal ministry in our diocese: vocation, formation, and charity. Essentially, this entire corpus finds its unity within the mission of evangelization.

As we proceed this year, we will be taking a huge step back to reexamine and evaluate our current programming. We had already incorporated some online formation opportunities but we need to do more. The bishop has asked that we revamp our lay ministry formation program to make it more accessible, permeable, shorter, and less expensive. This is a huge



Photo by Andrew Hyde

undertaking. We're also looking at the formational assistance we can provide to parishes to help with the business/administrative side of their existence, and professional development and training events aimed at pastoral councils, finance councils, business managers, and pastors. After all, there is both an external aspect to ministry (how to engage people more fully in the faith and in ecclesial life), as well as an internal one (how to improve our management and application of limited resources in ways that enhance ministry and breed vibrancy). The pervading challenge in addressing these needs is more sociological than theological because our changing demographics are placing new demands upon us. The status-quo is no longer effective and we can no longer depend on the ways we have been doing ministry; we must find creative approaches to meeting people's needs both pastorally and practically.

### AGGIORNAMENTO

Intuitively, the election of Pope Francis may be the Holy Spirit's way of underscoring the need for a post-Council aggiornamento. Since his election he has been taking notable steps to incline the church's posture more toward people and addressing their needs — both in what he says and by how he acts; so far Francis instills a heart of service and humility bundled in joy and it is refreshing to see people taking notice — Catholics, non-Catholics, non-believers, and skeptics. Ironically, his actions have also made his voice more credible — not progressive or conservative, but rather, prophetic. Our new pope's call for us to evaluate our motivations and to revise our approaches in order that we, the church, might

become more interpersonal and customized in our ministering to God's people is fundamentally solid.

In many respects, the church is coming full-circle and presently greets the dawn of this new era in much the same way as early first-century Christians did at the onset of growing the church following Jesus' resurrection. Sharing the Good News requires both a modeling and a catechesis that connects with people's lives so that it might instill new ways of being which will ultimately become the cornerstone building blocks for encountering God's call and for ongoing conversion. This is not a new concept, and it should be obvious that intimacy with Christ must be at the center of all our actions. Jesus' command is clear, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples" (Jn 13:35).

I began this article by noting that changing times require different approaches. One implication of this is our need to be more immediate. Perhaps our studies (diagnosis) need more trending data (prescription) in order that we might stay more focused on where we need to be going instead of on where we have been. Technology is reshaping the face of everything we know. Globalization is shrinking time and space. Integration is replacing expertise with basic know-how. Today's educational models are being remolded in response to secular dominance which they are not trying to fight against, but rather incorporate (for example, my son is just beginning high school and is required to take an online course in order to graduate — even as some of us might still prefer standing firm against parents who seek to home-school their children's faith formation). Our purview must be meeting people's needs today while preparing them for the world they will live in tomorrow (and the next day in heaven). This is sometimes counterintuitive for a church whose anchor-points often come from a historical past. Therefore, as catechetical professionals and leaders, we must journey as if we are piloting a rowboat —gazing backward at the buoys and harbors of our Tradition as we row and navigate course onward through the present currents without fear. This may require a new type of leader and the face of leadership is also transitioning in the church (and not just with the pope).

Today's ministry personnel are more diverse than they used to be and this is good. However, to be effective, we must become increasingly adept at working in an ambiguous, pluralistic society. We need to be equipped to tend to a multicultural flock in ways that establish unity without uniformity. More and more we will find ourselves serving in intercultural and intergenerational settings where we will need to employ multifaceted formats that engage individuals, families, parishes, extra-parochial entities, apostolic movements, and the entire local church (arch/diocese). The bottom line is that leaders cannot be content to only be in charge; they must lead and they must actively take part in managing the changes and transitions we face.

## A NEW EDUCATIONAL PYRAMID

Educational theory is being reshaped, too. The ongoing debate between andragogy and pedagogy is subsiding amidst recogni-

tion that complementary and integrated methodologies offer more effective ways to teach. Social media's influence and a plethora of Internet/cloud-based learning modules have won acceptance for self-guided learning. These trends are affecting catechetical formation in positive ways; they open the door of faith to more people.

Today's competency-driven frameworks are quickly replacing traditional, self-contained programming models. In my own diocese, we are embracing this approach by creating multiple competency schemas that can utilize and share a variety of formational opportunities. This learner-centered approach is customized to individual need, making it more attractive to both learners and formators (and more efficient, and less expensive). The fact is, the entire educational pyramid most of us grew up with is being recreated. In the past, we were taught something, then we expanded our understanding, and finally we applied it into our lives. Today, the opposite is the case. First, we use it; second, we grow our understanding, and lastly we learn about it. If you're a skeptic on this point, think about how you learned to read, to do basic arithmetic, to use your computer and compare that against how you learned to Google, to use Facebook, and to use Twitter.

Do we lose something when we change? Yes. Will we be left behind if we don't change? Yes. Will change always be part of our reality? Yes — and the pace will likely increase, not decrease.

I'm presenting some bold suppositions but I'm not advocating that we discard the truths of our faith nor the practices that we value most. I'm also not suggesting that any of the steps we are taking in my diocese are perfect — far from it! But, they are steps and they will get us moving toward crafting a response to the needs of our times.

Discovery comes with journey — the road to Emmaus, the Good Samaritan, the lost sheep — this is the Christian paradox. Today the church has to emerge more people-centered and relational, and our models of evangelization, initiation, and catechesis must reflect this shifting landscape. The educational models and paradigms of our times have drastically changed and on our horizon a new sunrise awakens for the church's mission. This is a refreshing and intuitive challenge calling all of us to renewal. In these shifting and paradoxical times, we are given to profound reflection on what it means to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, and even more importantly, in discerning what it takes to share in the ministry of echoing the gospel as catechists, catechetical leaders, and ministry professionals. In essence, if we do not meet people at where they are, then we will most likely, in effect, not meet people! ■

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# Following @Pontifex

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome



Can the desire to encounter the sacred co-exist with meeting the profane in one digital space?

*We are living in historical times* — this cliché resounds about many current events and cultural developments today. At times, this phrase is a reflection of the grand sweep of life unfolding; at other times, it is an acknowledgement of something extraordinary breaking in, elevating the importance of our day and time. A historical moment emerged for the church in the powerful way this past spring with the unexpected resignation of now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and the election of a new pope of many firsts. Being church during this interregnum and conclave was truly witnessing history happen.

On March 13, 2013, the day that Pope Francis was elected, I was present in St. Peter's Square. This would be a surprise to read for my colleagues at Loyola University New Orleans, since in fact I was in a departmental meeting with them for most of that day. But, I was present in Rome nonetheless through the Twitter stream that flowed steadily down the screen of my iPad. The hashtag #conclave became the architect of a sacred gathering space through which countless people from around the world became part of the moment, part of the historical event. From lamenting the rainy weather to waiting for the smoke to, yes, even levity brought by the Sistine Seagull, I was there. When the name Bergoglio was announced, the excitement and energy reached me through the lively scroll of the Twitter feed. It was exhilarating to experience the impromptu community that emerged in cyberspace, to feel part of the sacred and historical moment through this online medium. In the midst of this historical moment, the experience of celebrating the election of Pope Francis together through Twitter is the clearest sense I have had of cyberspace being a sacred space.

## EXPERIENCING THE SACRED ONLINE

Sacred spaces are portals to the numinous; they gather us into the presence of mystery, into a clear awareness that there is something more. In a sacred space, we get a glimpse that our existence is part of a greater whole, a broader reality, and has

a larger, though perhaps veiled, purpose than the day to day and here and now. In a sacred space, we are connected — to God, to creation, to one another, to oneself — and this sense of connection invites awe and beckons us into mystery. In the natural world, the starry sky, the ocean's horizon, the height of a mountain ridge, or the depth of the Grand Canyon all evoke this sense of sacred space. There is something vast, timeless, and we are part of it.

Religious traditions have expressed such experiences of the sacred through a grand variety of practices and rituals. In the Catholic tradition, the church ritualizes her encounter with the sacred through the liturgy, and we thus understand our worship spaces as sacred spaces — spaces where we gather into the presence of mystery and sense that connection to God, creation, self, and one another. This connection is sacramental: it is an invitation into Divine mystery that is at once deeply rooted in the tangible, embodied aspect of the gathering. Bodies are an essential aspect of liturgical sacred space:

the body of the assembly who acclaims, stands, sits, kneels, offers the sign of peace; the body and blood of Christ in the elements that are blessed, broken, offered, and consumed; the body of the presider who manifests in word and deed Christ the High Priest. In the Catholic tradition, worship

spaces need bodies, and an empty sacred space is one that conveys an expectation, waiting for a gathering of people to fill it in worship.

Since embodied presence is fundamental to the Catholic sense of sacred space, exploring what it means to experience sacred space online has been an interesting task. Online gatherings are deemed disembodied by some, or at least differently embodied than what it is to physically share a space with another person. As advanced as communication technology has become, my Twitter presence on papal election day was fundamentally different than it would have been actually standing in anticipation in St. Peter's Square. Sorting out this fundamental difference of what it means to be present is an enduring question in our digital media age, one that shifts as newer and richer communication technologies emerge. Following from this are further questions for theological investigation: whether we can experience the sacred or even

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*Sacred spaces are portals  
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the sacramental while online, or whether a gathering point on or through a digital medium can authentically be called sacred space. Undeniably, the potential is there, but how do we distinguish the online emergence of the sacred from a traditional, physically-embodied understanding of gathering in the presence of mystery? Or should we follow the lead of media scholars and question whether to distinguish sacred spaces online from those offline at all in a world where such a distinction is becoming obsolete?

## FOLLOWING @PONTIFEX

The authentic sense of shared enthusiasm through Twitter on papal election day granted a novel experience of sacred space for me, and left me both moved and fascinated anew by the power of social media. After his election, I joined 2.8 million other people to follow @Pontifex on Twitter to keep up with Pope Francis. I was also hoping to re-enter that sacred space of communal enthusiasm I experienced on March 13, 2013. In the months since, following @Pontifex on Twitter has been a rocky descent from this mountaintop, seasoning my initial experience with complexity and challenge.

The regular activity under Pope Francis' name is replete with inspiring words, clearly shared from the spirit of a man who seeks to humbly share the gospel with the world in word and in spirit. Pope Francis' words are open, accessible, and boldly go to the heart of the matter. He simply tells it like it is, in the truth of the gospel. For many, it brings joy to pause with his words, then to quote and re-tweet them as digital proclamations of Good News.

His tweets are the seeds sown in cyberspace, but as in the parable, the digital realm offers a variety of soils for them to land. The replies under each papal tweet, coupled with those who incorporate his name, manifest the wayside, as well as the rocky, the thorny, and the good soils. Some reply with gratitude and faith-filled enthusiasm. Other comments regularly include the profanity of hostile flaming. Some others are cynical or straightforwardly negative, but remain respectful in tone. Openly hostile and profane comments often get a rise out of those who arrive with more positive intentions, and replies back and forth document their battles. Witnessing this collision of sacred and profane reveals a jarring difference

between the Spirit-filled Twitter gathering on the Pope's election day, and the mixed spirit of the replies under @Pontifex since then. While #conclave may have invited many of us into a sacred gathering space of a digital sort, @Pontifex seems to be a battle ground where differences harshly collide.

## SACRED SPACE, BATTLE GROUND, OR DIGITAL AGORA?

When faced with the profane nature of some of the replies under the Pope's Twitter account, those who administer @Pontifex had a decision to make. It would have seemed appropriate to categorically remove flaming comments from the feed, thereby editing the participation of those interacting with @Pontifex; numerous professional organizations and institutions reserve and act on this right. Yet, their decision is evident in that interacting with @Pontifex remains open to all, even those posting profanity. This decision diminishes the probability of @Pontifex as a sacred digital gathering space, akin to what many Twitter users experienced on papal election day. At the same time, it is an opening to another kind of gathering space: a digital agora, where the sacred, profane, and all there is in between are present and free to express themselves.

The decision to create a digital agora reveals a value on radical hospitality, even if the presence of the other is discomforting or offensive. While allowing the offensive may or may not lead to authentic dialogue, it communicates openness to it along with the resolve to recognize the freedom and dignity of the one casting stones. Such radical hospitality follows Christ's own model: moments that stand out during his passion and execution when he honored the freedom of his persecutors, even when that freedom brought violence on him. In this vein, @Pontifex is witnessing the fullness of Christ-like openness to all.

At the same time, following Christ into this digital agora is challenging and disturbing (as it should be challenging and disturbing to meditate upon the cross itself.) Given a choice, I would rather seek out the empty tomb in the garden and gather in the sacred space of the joyfully shared enthusiasm of Twitter on papal election day. Yet, the cross and the resurrection go together as do the present, thorny experience of life with the glimpses of hope of what it could be if it were lived to the fullest. In the meantime, the agora is the best place to

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be present and open to a conversation, one that could lead to authentic communication and true community.

@Pontifex as a digital agora may challenge and disturb the faithful who gather there, but it also holds on to the potential of sacred space. This summer, Pope Francis animated it with his presence during his World Youth Day visit to Brazil, extending the traditional plenary indulgence offered for the pilgrimage for the first time to those who were present through this social medium as well. How his Twitter feed can be spiritually edifying to believers who seek to participate in the pilgrimage in this way, then return to being the open digital agora that may exhibit harsh profanity, is a serious question to continue to ponder. On Twitter, where papal audiences can be as large as a 2.8 million people, the boundaries between *urbi et orbi* become blurry. Can the desire to encounter the sacred co-exist with

meeting the profane in one such digital space? While the witness to openness is a profoundly Christ-like value, will it drive away those believers who are turned off or even harmed by the harshness of Internet flaming? Witnessing hospitality to those who are angry and act offensive is a profound example of evangelization, but the pastoral considerations become complex for how to also best serve and edify those who gather around @Pontifex in faith, seeking the sacred in an online space. As the church grapples with this, @Pontifex continues to sow Good News in 140 characters or less, trusting in the Spirit to prepare good soil for it on and offline. ■

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# Speed Witnessing

Alice Noe

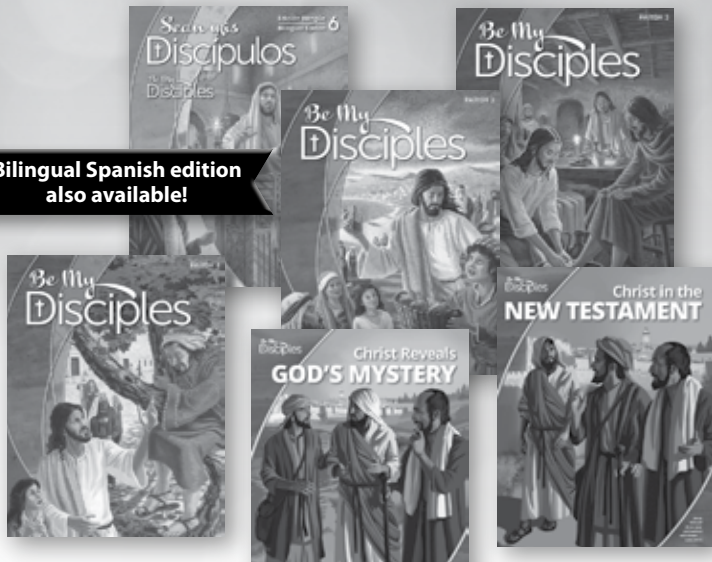
Speed dating. Elevator speech. Personal ad. These are terms we often hear. I came across “elevator speech” last year while attending the local Catholic business people’s breakfast gathering. The leader explained that an elevator speech was developed to take advantage of the impromptu opportunity to speak to another person who might buy your services or product if you found yourself on an elevator together. If you have 45 seconds to make your pitch, what do you say? The plan for that morning’s meeting was to practice our elevator speech so we would be prepared if the opportunity arose. I looked toward the businesswoman next to me and wondered aloud how I would be able to use this in my archdiocesan office setting. She encouraged me to participate anyway and see what happened.

The chairs were rearranged into two, long rows facing each other. We had a few moments to prepare our elevator speech, then we sat in the chairs. At the ring of the bell, I had 45 seconds to tell the person across from me about my business and how it would be the solution they were seeking. The bell rang a second time and the other person had a chance to give their pitch to me. When the bell rang the third time, the people in one row moved one seat over, and it all began again. Other than it being hard to hear because the pairs of chairs were seated too close together, everything went well. I learned a lot about their businesses and they learned about my goals at the archdiocese; later I thought it would have been better if I’d told them about the quilts I make for sale.

*If you have 45 seconds to make your pitch, what do you say?*

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## 45 SECOND WITNESS

The questions stayed with me over the next several months, “How could I use this process?” So, I decided to turn it into “speed witnessing.” At a gathering of adult faith formators, I offered it as an introductory activity. After giving them the background and instructions, they had a few minutes to prepare a 45 second witness about a time in their life when God had touched them. We arranged the chairs in pairs around the room; I rang the chime, and they began animatedly telling their stories. Afterward they said they learned more about each other in that 45 seconds than they ever had before, plus they were evangelized through spiritually uplifting stories.

Recently, I used it with a group of people I’d never met before who attended a workshop on evangelization at the archdiocesan catechetical day. After listening to their frustrations

about evangelizing, I spoke with them about developing several short, witness stories about how God had touched their lives. I explained that they needed a repertoire of personal stories that they could use in the classroom, on the street, at the bus stop, in line at the grocery store, or in the parish hall after Mass. Everyone easily caught on to the idea; being prepared to tell a personal story eased some of their fear about evangelizing the next time the opportunity arose.

I’m sure as catechists and leaders we can find more ways to adapt the concepts of speed dating, elevator speeches, and personal ads which are being used in the business world. ■

*Being prepared to tell  
a personal story eased  
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*Alice Noe has recently served the Archdiocese of Washington in the areas of adult faith formation and leadership development. To learn more about this process, contact her at [aliceonly.noe@gmail.com](mailto:aliceonly.noe@gmail.com).*



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# Telling Our Story: Challenging the Catholic Aversion to Getting Personal

Tom Quinlan



The parish catechetical leaders in the Diocese of Joliet are trying something new this year, something exciting and long overdue. And I'm fairly certain we have the Holy Spirit to thank!

Last May, I had the privilege of attending an international and interdenominational gathering of Christian leaders in London. The encounter was a blessing in so many ways. It stretched me and gave me some new ways of seeing my ministry and the church. Two particular experiences came together to provide an insight with practical application that I brought home.

First, I had the pleasure of engaging in conversation with Christian evangelicals. I say "pleasure" because they were delightful people, warm, and welcoming and very transparent in their ardent love for Jesus Christ. There was no off-putting mistrust or challenging of my Catholicism. To the contrary, they seemed sincerely interested in learning more about Catholic faith and expressed a sense of kinship, a oneness in Christ, that engendered hope and joy in me.

Second, I heard a few presentations from Patrick Lencioni, a systems consultant who has written many books and is tapped to serve corporations in Silicon Valley and across the nation. He is public in his Catholic faith and is unafraid in weaving the best of Catholic tradition and wisdom into his talks. (You should check him out on YouTube.) He is also very funny.

## RADICAL TRUST

Lencioni talked about the necessity for effective evangelists to be *real*, making themselves vulnerable for trust to develop in any group dynamic. He asserts that a team is never really going to breakthrough and move to a better place until there is radical trust among members of the team. And trust is an outgrowth of members feeling safe enough to share their

thoughts and feelings honestly. Lencioni challenges us to lead by example and create cultures where it is safe to risk, to share honestly, to be vulnerable with one another.

These seemingly unrelated experiences coalesced and caused me to imagine a path for growth in our DRE deanery groupings. The relational and professional dynamics in these inter-parish associations is actually quite strong. Our catechetical leaders meet regularly, enjoy each other's company, pray together, network and share good practices, support one another, and attend to their ongoing professional development and personal formation. I'm very proud of how these deaneries have come to function.

I have been a partner in ministry with many of our DREs for over a dozen years now. I know them well in some respects. And yet, when reflecting upon the natural inclination the evangelicals I met in London had for sharing their faith, telling of their journey to Christ, I realized that I don't know my parish catechetical leaders as I should. And they don't know me.



Photo by zeevvez

For all our conversation about so many things, we catechetical leaders in the Diocese of Joliet were not sharing in a meaningful, intentional manner who we are as people of faith. Why is this? We *are* people of faith. We have good and warm relationships to one another. And yet, there seems to be something in our shared Catholic DNA that inhibits us from thinking to reveal some of our faith journey, indeed our life journey within a faith context, with one another. After experiencing the natural inclination in evangelical culture for personal faith sharing, it occurred to me this is a great deficit in our Catholic culture and something that needs to be challenged.

Story is, of course, the mode in which Jesus taught. Story is evocative. Story is multivalent. It teases the imagination and

draws us in. It teaches without being didactic. Story, especially personal story, deepens relationships.

## TELLING STORIES

I came back from London wanting to know my parish leadership colleagues better. I wanted to know who they are as people of faith, where they've been, what their struggles and joys have been, how they came to ministry. And so, I invited, exhorted, and maybe ever so slightly guilted our DREs to begin the practice, at each of their deanery meetings, of taking time for two or three members to tell us about their path, about their journey, their story. I asked that this become part and parcel of every meeting. And yes, when asked I went first in telling my story.

Our parish catechetical leaders have embraced this practice well. People take their turn only when they are ready and they share as they wish. No one should ever feel invaded in this. Everyone listens with respect and people seem to be genuinely enjoying the opportunity to share and to learn from one another at this richer, personal level of meaning. And

yes, it would be fair to say that some comfort zones are being stretched along the way.

## TWO HOPES

I have two hopes for this. First, that we will bond more deeply as colleagues who are open to being real with one another and able to accompany one another as a more authentic community of believers. Patrick Lencioni properly recognizes that until we risk with one another, we will continue to skate on the relational surface and never be able to achieve greatness as a unit. Certainly, in the telling our story, we risk making ourselves vulnerable. There is risk in revealing a degree of who we are authentically, in our struggles and doubts as well as in our accomplishments and hopes. Such intimate sharing, given and received, can potentially help us to feel more invested in one another, more trusting, more personally gifted, and less alone.

My second hope is that as we practice this generous and humbling act of personal sharing and reflection upon the movements of grace in our lives, we catechetical leaders will grow in our inclination and ability to model this skill with

# NCCL Evangelization Website: Growing a Curated Site to Serve Members and the Church

Tom Quinlan

**B**ack in May at the annual conference in Cleveland, NCCL's Evangelization Committee unveiled [21stcentury-catholic-evangelization.org](http://21stcentury-catholic-evangelization.org) as a place anyone on the Internet can go to find useful information relating to evangelization from a Catholic perspective.

Cathy Cornue and I, as co-chairs of the Evangelization Committee, have greatly enjoyed supporting the continued build-out of this site under the leadership of Lois DeFelice and John Roberto and their team of committee members. We felt it would be helpful to provide more insight into the development of and purpose for this curated website. And so, below are excerpts

from an interview I conducted with Lois and John on this subject.

### **What is digital curation and why is it an important component of today's pastoral landscape?**

Lois: *In catechesis today, we have started to be part of the digital world with our resources and ways of interacting. At NCCL, there has been conversation for years around bringing "best practices" together. As part of the evangelization committee, we looked at how this could become a reality. John Roberto brought the expertise of web design to the committee and the adventure of digital curation began!*

John: *I want to quote Beth Kanter from Beth's Blog, "Content curation is the process of sorting through the vast amounts of content on the web*

*and presenting it in a meaningful and organized way around a specific theme. The work involves sifting, sorting, arranging, and publishing information. A content curator cherry picks the best content that is important and relevant to share with their community. Content curators provide a customized, vetted selection of the best and most relevant resources on a very specific topic or theme."*

*A faith formation curator is someone who continually finds, groups, organizes, and shares the best and most relevant content and experiences on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. Content curators can provide a personalized, qualified selection of the best and most relevant content and resources available. They do not create more content, but make sense of all the content that others*

others, namely, catechists, children, and parents. What a blessing it will be if our sharing at DRE meetings can translate into an entire ecosystem of Catholic people becoming comfortable with and skilled in this practice!

Recognizing that everyone has a story imbued with grace, one that dynamically plays out within the context of our collective story of saving grace in human history, is powerful. Articulating it and sharing it with others is gift. Told through the lens of faith in Jesus Christ, our life story can and should be essentially catechetical! Empowering others to do the same, to recognize their life as meaning-filled, their story as grace, may

result in communities evangelizing one another in an organic, integrated, and powerful manner.

It's early but good fruit is blossoming as a result of this effort in our diocese. I'm grateful to the giftedness of evangelicals, the wisdom of a systems-thinker...and the Holy Spirit for helping me to leave London last May with one less blind spot in my understanding of catechetical leadership. ■

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*are creating. Curation is an evolving idea that addresses two parallel trends: the explosive growth in information, and our need to be able to find information in coherent, reasonably contextual groupings.*

*The emerging role of the faith formation curator is to: 1) research and aggregate a wide variety of content and experiences available from a great diversity of sources, 2) evaluate quality and appropriateness, 3) organize and deliver via a faith formation network and website, and 4) communicate the resources available to your audience through a variety of media and connect them to the content and experiences.*

#### **What is the purpose for the NCCL curated evangelization website?**

*Lois: To offer a one-stop place that assists diocesan offices, catechetical leaders, evangelization directors, and others. As members submit content to be placed on the site, anyone who visits the site will have a great sampling of the latest tools and resources.*

*John: The front page of the website states it nicely. It seeks "to provide approaches, strategies, and resources to help parish and diocesan leaders address three audiences for the transmission of the Christian faith: initial*

*evangelization, rediscovering faith, and evangelizing catechesis."*

#### **What is on the site and how can people use it and benefit from it?**

*John: There are six tabs people can open with a growing multitude of information and resources available within each one. They are 1.) Understanding Catholic Evangelization; 2.) Religious Trends; 3.) Effective Practices and Approaches; 4.) Evangelization Organizations; 5.) Evangelization Resources; and 6.) Educating Leaders.*

*In its current form, the Evangelization website does a good job of providing people with content for understanding and developing evangelization in pastoral settings.*

#### **What do we want to accomplish with the site in the future? What content and features do we hope to add?**

*Lois: In the future, we hope to continue to grow the content through the efforts of the committee and through submissions from visitors to the site. And our subcommittee just began a discussion of offering training webinars so that the website can be interactive.*

*John: We will make the website more interactive, e.g., forums where peo-*

*ple can exchange ideas, get answers to questions, and get help finding resources from the community of people using the website.*

#### **What do we wish to ask of NCCL members (and others) to help the site to become all it can be?**

*Lois: We invite all NCCL members and others who visit the site to join us in building a one-stop place to find the best resources and tools for evangelization.*

*John: The big issue for me is having people identify effective practices and models of evangelization in Catholic parishes that we can add to the website. We want to make this site a clearinghouse for the best knowledge, practices, and tools for evangelization.*

*In addition to asking members to submit resources and other content, I wish to invite all to go and subscribe to the site and share the site with others (including those not affiliated with NCCL). Together, we can build [21stcenturycatholicsevangeli-zation.org](http://21stcenturycatholicsevangeli-zation.org) to be the go-to site for all things Catholic evangelization in the months and years ahead. Everyone reading this can consider themselves part of the team!*

# Flipping Faith Formation

Claire M. McManus



Faith formation is a balancing act between the head and the heart — a constant interplay between handing on the treasury of doctrine, while fostering true discipleship. Some parishes have turned to the innovations that have arisen in the world of business and education to achieve this.

## FLIPPED CLASSROOM

A “flipped classroom” reverses the traditional model of lecture followed by homework so that the learning is received at home; allowing the classroom to be used as a time when skills are practiced and interactive activities can take place. The time spent in the classroom is transformed into a workshop where peers work together on a project and instructors respond to each person individually.

St. Edward the Confessor, a large parish in southern California, found a creative way to “flip” sacramental preparation, thereby opening time and space to focus on building a community of disciples. Recognizing the busy lives of families in an era of multiple sports and extracurricular commitments, the religious education team designed a confirmation and first Eucharist program that delivers sound catechesis at a time and space that does not require a physical presence within the walls of the church. The time and space opened up by this reversal allow them to focus on inter-generational opportunities centered on the Eucharist.

Back in 2010, St. Edward’s sent a team of people to attend John Roberto’s Church 2020 workshop. The purpose of this workshop was to educate the participants about the sociological trends in religious participation and to help them develop a strategy to evangelize those people within earshot of the gospel message. Using data from the various sociological studies about religious involvement, the participants were challenged to address the needs of their congregation using an innovative strategy that could be successfully implemented. The team from St. Edward’s recognized that the parents of children in their sacramental preparation programs struggled to remain committed to a faith community because of the competing interests of other activities, and so they designed a first Communion and confirmation program aimed at them.

## RESPONSIBILITY IN THE HOME

The first step toward reaching these parents is to meet them where they are. They are overcommitted to work and play, and though this is a lifestyle choice for most parents, they can be trapped in their own busy schedules. The catechetical team designed a program that placed the responsibility for cateche-

sis in the home and gathered the families within the walls of the church to form them spiritually. Parents preparing their children for first Eucharist are given the catechetical material with which to work, and resources via the website. They come together with their children for monthly, inter-generational gatherings that give the parents the formation they need to be their primary catechists.

The high school youth of St. Edward’s are like most teens in the United States...busy! Parish faith formation programs often lose the competition with work schedules, sports, and extra-curricular activities. Unwilling to concede the battle to bring sound catechetics to high school students, but sensitive to the needs of the families, St. Edward’s faith formation team, led by Donna Couch, turned to the “flipped classroom” as a strategy. Their two-year high school confirmation preparation program, on paper, is like most programs around the country; a mix of catechesis, spirituality, retreats, and service. The delivery of the components is quite different.

## CONFIRMATION APP

Couch did not need to be a tech-guru to make this happen, but she did need to look to the parish for people in high-tech fields willing to share their time and talent. As luck, or the Holy Spirit, would have it, a member of the parish designs mobile apps for a living. Mobile apps are designed for smartphones and allow the youth to explore the lessons without being tied to a computer or cubicle. The ninth-grade confirmation candidates go to the confirmation app each week to read the *Youcat*, answer questions, and submit the answers via email to the director of the program. They also respond to discussion questions on-line provided by their small group mentor. They come together with at least one parent for a monthly Sunday gathering for Eucharist and spiritual formation. In the second year, the tenth-grade confirmation candidates leave the app aside to attend a monthly gathering to study Scripture after they attend Eucharist. The retreats are inter-generational, sponsors take part in some activities, and the service component is facilitated by the teen and parent.

Evangelizing and catechizing in this world requires response to the needs of the people and adaptation of our approach. It also requires the courage to change. Henry Miller once said, “Whatever there be of progress in life comes not through adaptation, but through daring.” ■

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

# Let us evangelize: Six strategies

Leisa Anslinger



What does the new evangelization have to do with our ministry to and with parents? How do we keep evangelization in our mind's eye in our day-to-day comings and goings with parents and with all whom we meet?

A few years ago, Dan Mulhall, Fr. Jan Schmidt, and I facilitated a day-long workshop for pastors and catechetical leaders. During Dan's talk, he mentioned the new evangelization, which was still a somewhat new concept at the time. One of the priests became very agitated, saying that we have always evangelized. "Why do we need a 'new' evangelization? Isn't the 'old' evangelization good enough?" he asked. That encounter has stuck with me, perhaps because his question rings true in many ways.

We are and have always been called to evangelize. Perhaps part of the reason we need the new evangelization is that we did not effectively evangelize in the past. We all bear some responsibility for this. We did not realize how great the pull of the wider culture could be, nor did we anticipate the dramatic secularization of that culture in so short a span of time.

Yet there is a larger question, one that has bearing on all of us as people of faith. Did we, do we, have a real relationship with Jesus Christ, which compels us to share? Do the people who meet us now meet Christ through our actions, our responses to their need, our prayer with and for them? Do parents meet Christ through us and through the Christian community?

Much of the focus of the new evangelization is on those who are no longer with us, or those who are on the edges of the parish, coming to Mass only occasionally, with good reason. We know the statistics: among those who were baptized Catholic, 68 percent remain Catholic; 15 percent are now in some Protestant denomination; 14 percent are now unaffiliated; 3 percent belong to some other religion (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Project, Faith in Flux, February, 2011). Not only do we know this from statistics, we are experiencing this "leaking out" among our parishioners, family members, friends, and co-workers.

Yet what we sometimes miss when we discuss the new evangelization is that evangelization begins with each of us, as people of faith, as people who have and must grow in a deep relationship with Christ. As I write this, I think of the song, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me" and sing instead, "Let us evangelize, and let it begin with me."

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

With this in mind, how do we evangelize those parents who most seem to need to be touched by Christ's love, mercy, forgiveness, and peace? Let us apply the principles of engagement in order to glean insight and develop strategies:

1. Prayerfully re-commit ourselves to a rich, passionate relationship with Christ, lived through sacramental participation, prayer, deeper understanding of our Catholic Tradition and service, rooted in our local parish and diocesan community;
2. Reach out to those who are already on the path. They are the ones who will touch those on the edges, through their attention and invitation;
3. Offer moments in which those who are already deeply connected may be renewed, strengthened, and energized. During those opportunities, also help them realize their role in reaching out to others;
4. Set the expectations high, yet reasonable, and be pastoral. Help parents understand why specific things are asked of them and why, and remind them that you want to be their partner as they bear the responsibility for forming their child(ren) in living faith;
5. Meet parents in their need. Often this requires us to enter into their daily circumstances, helping them recognize the grace that is present, inviting them to respond to that grace in their daily lives;

Pope Francis painted a picture of this sort of evangelization:

Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage. (*America* magazine, September 19, 2013)

As catechetical leaders who wish to evangelize the parents and all whom we meet, may we find those new roads. May evangelization begin with us, as people who have fallen in love with God and who cannot help but share that love with others! ■

*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.*

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

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*Why 30 is not the new 20* by Meg Jay

*How books can open your mind* by Lisa Bu

*Your brain on video games* by Daphne Bavelier

*What we learn before we're born* by Annie Murphy Paul

*Reconnecting with compassion* by Krista Tippett

*Kids need structure* by Colin Powell

*A teen just trying to figure it out* by Tavi Gevinson

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The Diocesan Educational/Catechetical Leadership Institute was begun in 1997 as a five-day orientation program for new or nearly new diocesan leaders. In 2010, the Leadership Institute became an online program. While programs are offered free of charge to all interested individuals, they continue to serve the needs of diocesan leaders, parish catechetical leaders and catechists, Catholic school principals and teachers.

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To participate, go to:

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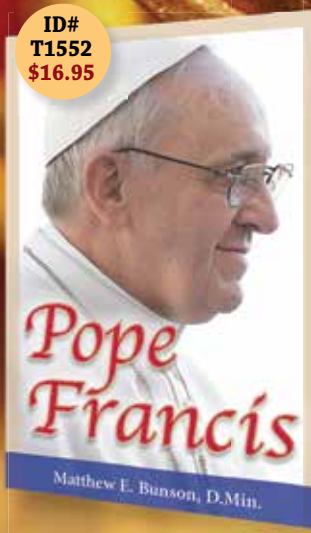
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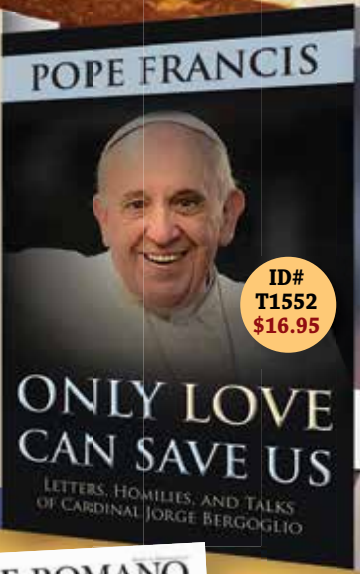
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*Dan Pierson served as director of religious education for the Diocese of Grand Rapids for 17 years and is the founder of faithAlivebooks.com and eCatechist.com. He is co-author with Susan Stark of What Do I Do Now? A Guide for the Reluctant Catechist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

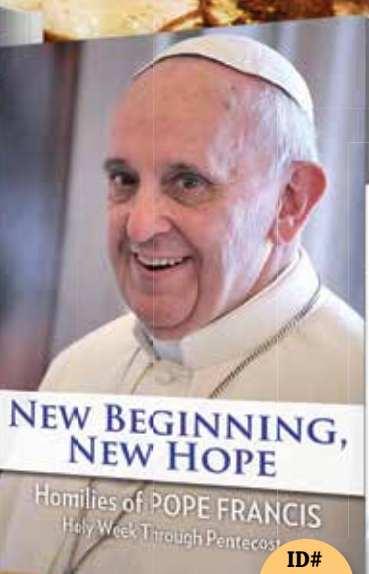
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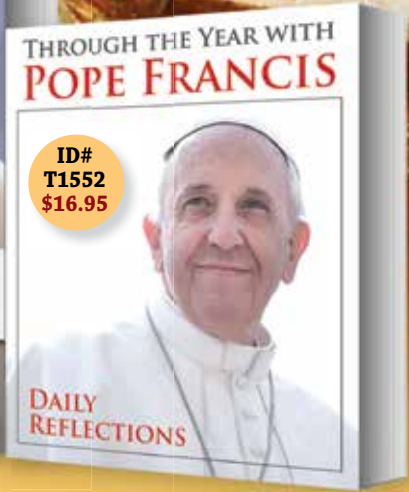
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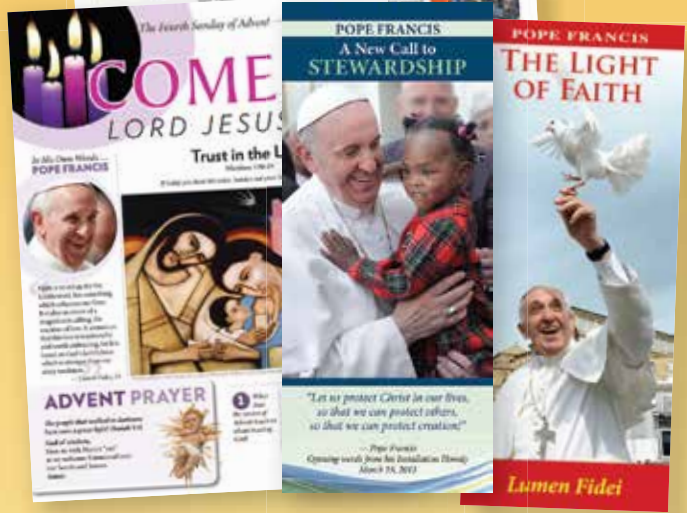


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