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CATECHETICAL
LEADER



THE DOOR OF FAITH

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the Door of Faith

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(Part 2)

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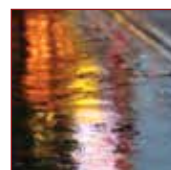
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TRUST...AND SURRENDER

Bill Miller

National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



Colleagues in Christ:

Over the past several days, I have been busy gathering material for a retreat that I will be facilitating in the near future. "Trust and Surrender" is the theme, specifically how one learns to trust enough to surrender all to God. While I do not consider myself an expert on the subject,

I can say that I have done a good deal of reading (and praying) concerning this theme...and how to implement it in my own life. In fact, over the past two years, it has been the predominant theme in my sessions with my spiritual director. I am convinced that this area of my life is one to which the Holy Spirit wants me to devote a significant amount of time and energy.

While researching material for the retreat (and for my own journey) I happened upon a gem of a book written over 20 years ago by Sue Monk Kidd, called *When the Heart Waits: Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions*. You may recognize Kidd as the author of a best seller from several years ago titled *The Secret Life of Bees*. While that book was a novel, the other is a work of non-fiction written in an autobiographical style. Kidd uses a significant "spiritual crisis" in her own life to demonstrate the concept of giving oneself over completely to God. During the process, she researches and applies some wonderful principles of spiritual development given to us over many centuries by such spiritual masters as Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, and Henri Nouwen, just to name a few.

As a backdrop for her insights, Kidd uses the popular metaphor of the caterpillar who becomes a butterfly, to reinforce the notion that the spiritual "seeker" must be willing to give oneself completely to the "sacred darkness" of the unknown (symbolized by the chrysalis/cocoon) in order to enter the journey of transformation. She posits that, as human "caterpillars" hoping to be transformed, we all too often short-circuit the process by succumbing to fear, which can be a paralyzing emotion. In this scenario, we decide to let fear keep us from actually entering the darkness of the cocoon. We simply fail to see the darkness

for what it can be...a sacred place of solace where we can meet God in quiet contemplative prayer.

Apart from the significance of this metaphor for our individual spiritual journeys, there are significant implications for our journeys as catechetical leaders as well, whether our milieu is the parish, the diocese, or the national catechetical scene. For example, as we examine our efforts to develop and maintain sound catechetical programs at every level, are we prepared to admit that sometimes significant changes might be called for in the way we deliver the Good News of Christ to our constituents? Are we willing to risk spending additional time/energy/money that might be necessary in order to give catechists the education and resources they need in order to truly embrace and proclaim the Good News? Are we willing to take the time that we need as individual catechetical leaders in order to attend to our own spiritual well-being...to take time for spiritual formation, educational training, and (most important) for prayer, in various forms? Are we willing to call a halt to our frantic busyness in order to allow for the quiet darkness of silent contemplative prayer that the Lord often uses to work miracles within the minds and hearts of disciples? This is just a sampling of the kinds of questions that may be challenging us.

In a world and a culture that rewards "the quick fix" and covets the ability to control other people and things, God is once again reminding us just how countercultural the gospel message can be. The spiritual formation of the individual, including his/her catechetical formation process, is part of a journey with many steps...many chapters. The journey is intended to be slow and thoughtful, taking one moment at a time. We are not meant to be "in control" but to align ourselves with the will of our creator who knows what we need, even before we ask, and lovingly wants to give that to us.

As you continue to move through this catechetical year, be not afraid! Instead, prepare yourself to trust in the love, guidance, and strength of the Lord. Do what you can do...what you believe (after fervent prayer) you are being called to do...and surrender the results to God. ■

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MAKE THE HARVEST PLENTIFUL

Leland Nagel



The seed was planted in the mission of our organization:

“Nurturing the continual spiritual, professional, and personal development of religious educators and catechetical ministers in the Church.”

It began to take root in the late 1980s when the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership developed standards for a parish catechetical leader which were reviewed and approved by the Commission on Certification and Accreditation of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. During the same time period, the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry developed standards for persons serving as youth ministry leaders and the National Association for Lay Ministry did the same for pastoral associates and parish life coordinators.

In the late 1990s, weeds of separation were pulled and pivotal work was done in aligning the various articulations of standards in use by the three ministry organizations and in identifying an initial listing of common ministerial competencies shared among the three. Developing this work still further, the organizations jointly prepared the document, *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers Serving as Parish Catechetical Leaders, Youth Ministry Leaders, Pastoral Associates, Parish Life Coordinators*. The document outlined five ministerial standards including relevant core competencies and specialized competencies for each of the ministries named. The document was approved in 2003 by the USCCB/CCA for a period of seven years, after which time a renewal of approval would be required.

In 2005, the National Association of Pastoral Musicians adopted the *National Certification Standards*. In 2007, the four organizations, joining together under the name of the “Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers,” agreed to work together on two related projects: a revision of the standards and, as a new initiative, the creation of a process for national ministry certification. This new initiative looked to an eventual harvest. In 2009, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions adopted the *National Certification Standards* and became a fifth organizational partner of the Alliance. This would increase the yield.

In this new edition, there are now four ministerial standards, instead of five—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. This change was made to correspond with the four formation-

al categories used in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, as well as in various national and Vatican documents pertaining to the formation of priests and deacons.

For each standard, core competencies applicable to all the ministries represented by the participating organizations are set forth, indicating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes identified as relevant to that standard. Where possible, effort was made to make the articulation of core competencies more concise and measurable so as to better serve the certification process, and also more reflective of the cultural diversity in the USA today.

In October 2011, the Commission on Certification and Accreditation of the USCCB granted approval of the national certification standards and certification procedures for a period of seven years.

In early 2012, the Alliance website (www.lcmcertification.org) was inaugurated and individuals from the five organizations were invited to apply for certification. Since the May 1 deadline, 24 applicants have been approved as candidates for national certification; eight of those are for parish catechetical leader. These 24 individuals have completed the first step in the certification process by submitting the application, recommendations, and other required materials.

The Alliance partner organization that represents each applicant’s ministry specialization has approved their applications, moving the applicants to the candidacy phase. NCCL expresses a deep sense of gratitude to the laborers of our Partner Certification Review Committee (PCRC), Ken Gleason, chair and National Certification Review Committee (NCRC) member, Charleen Kutra, Chris Malmevik, and Mary Jo Waggoner. The candidates’ next steps are to compile and submit their ministry portfolio according to Alliance guidelines.

Upon successful review of the ministry portfolio, national certification is awarded by the Alliance and the partner ministry organization that represents the candidates’ specialization. This certification will help ensure that lay people who serve in Catholic parishes are well-prepared, competent, and meet standards that are approved at the national level.

It is possible that the fruits of this work will have its initial harvest by the end of 2012. Help make the harvest plentiful. The next deadline to apply for national certification is March 1, 2013. It’s a great year to start a new year. ■

Two big ideas to help you open the door of faith

Bill Huebsch



The coming Year of Faith provides each of our parishes with a terrific opportunity to undertake renewal. But what exactly is the purpose of such a special year? How can we respond to it? What outcomes should we have as our goal?

As leaders of faith formation, we are all in a unique place to assist our pastors and people in this moment. Indeed, in many parishes, we faith formation leaders will add the new tasks of the Year of Faith to our currently busy schedules. So a follow-up question might also be, how can we do this without demanding too much of our people or ourselves?

You might start by reviewing *Porta Fidei*, the Holy Father's apostolic letter in which he sets forth his hopes and dreams for the upcoming Year of Faith (Oct 11, 2012, to the Feast of Christ the King in 2013). See the box at the end for a summary of it.

Given the wishes of the Holy Father for the church in this graced moment when we celebrate and observe the beginning of the Year of Faith and the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, what practical steps can you take as a leader to assist the people under your pastoral care? Here are two big ideas, each one stuffed full of smaller ideas.

BIG IDEA 1: HEAD FOR THE HIGHWAY

In Luke 14 we hear Jesus tell a parable about a fellow who threw a great dinner party! He invited important people from the community, but one by one, they all found an excuse not to attend. Not to be undone, the host sent his servants out to the highways and hedgerows, to invite one and all to come and take part in his banquet!

In the modern church, who is out at “the highways and hedgerows?” For many of us, these are your family members who no longer practice their faith. They are our neighbors and friends. They are people who live right within our households. They're not at the banquet of liturgy and parish life. And they might not know what they're missing!

So the first goal for the Year of Faith might be to teach and encourage your active parishioners to speak about their faith in appropriate ways when the right “moment of grace” arises

in their daily lives at home. You may need to coach them a little to “speak with confidence” about their own faith experience. Catholics are reticent to do this. They don't want to become “evangelizers” such as those whom they sometimes encounter at their front doors. But it need not be that way with us. Early this fall, begin coaching folks to recognize when the Spirit may be moving someone near them toward faith, and then to speak gently but assuredly about their own faith.

A MODERN HEDGEROW STORY

Here's an example of what I mean. Our neighbors recently came by one evening to sit on our front porch and have a glass of wine with us. I don't think they belong to any church, but their background is Lutheran. In the course of our chat, Nanette mentioned that their three-year-old granddaughter was very sick, maybe with cancer. (There is the moment of grace.) We responded with sympathy, but then I said, “I remember when my niece had cancer. It was tough, but our friends and family got us through it. And one day, Sarah came by (the pastoral worker from the local parish) and, I don't know how for sure, but she got us all in the bedroom to pray with little Sherry and, when we did that, *something changed.*” (There is the speaking with confidence.) Later in the kitchen, Nanette sidled up alongside me and said, “You're very comfortable with your faith, aren't you? I know you go to church on Sundays. Hmmm...” I knew she was thinking it all over. But I didn't push and I didn't preach; I just put it out there. God will do the rest. *We open the door of faith.* That's what the Holy Father is asking us to teach our people to do.

We call this by a big name that most people don't understand, the “New Evangelization” (*Porta Fidei*, 4). It's a great name, but I don't recommend using it if you want to teach folks how to do this. In plain old everyday English, we mean that we active Catholics should live our faith in a way that convinces others we have something really great, and then speak about it gently (without being annoying) when the right moment arises.

BIG IDEA 2: TEACH ABOUT VATICAN II

If we did invite all those inactive Catholics back, and they actually showed up, what would we ever do with them? We have a lot of work to do to get ready to receive and welcome

them. The Holy Father is suggesting (as did Blessed John Paul II) that the best way to do that is to implement as fully as possible the Second Vatican Council (*Porta Fidei*, 5-6). That's a tall order. It's so big that we cannot imagine how to even get started!

First of all, we have already started implementing the Council, and in most places, we're well underway! The fruits of Vatican II are abundant and we see them in the active faith of many of our fellow Catholics. But we can do more, of course, and this Year of Faith is the perfect moment to do that.

Step one might be to teach more about Vatican II:

- ❖ Add a unit this fall for the young Catholics in your parish, in the school or religious ed program, which introduces them to Vatican II. They're the next generation of leaders.
- ❖ Likewise in your youth program, add teaching elements about the story, the promise, and the outcomes of the Council. Vatican II ended long before our youth were born!
- ❖ And in your adult education program, use similar teaching tools to help everyone understand more fully what happened at Vatican II.

Knowing and telling this great story over and over again, generation after generation, is how the Spirit who is so present in church, fills us with the fire of love.

But, as the Holy Father points out in his apostolic letter, merely "knowing" is not enough. Our hearts must also be moved into ever-deeper intimacy with Christ. This encounter with Christ is the heart and soul of the Council.

EIGHT WAYS VATICAN II CALLS US TO INTIMACY WITH CHRIST

- ❖ What if we gathered folks in small groups to have genuine conversations about our faith, based on our authentic teachings? This would allow them to respond to the **universal call to holiness**, a theme of the Council. (See Church, ch. 5.) In small groups we encounter Christ in one another. How marvelous is that?
- ❖ What if we studied ways, within all our rubrics, to make our **liturgy more participatory and welcoming**? (See Liturgy, no. 11.) I belong to a parish where we do this as a regular part of parish life, and the result is simply amazing. The smallest gestures go a long way!
- ❖ What if we reached out in our community to **non-Catholics**? We don't have to go very far to find them: about half of your households have non-Catholics living in them. Give them a role in the formation of their children. Offer them a welcome to parish events. Include them in our public prayer

more explicitly. (See Church, no. 14-16.) A little outreach might open a door for faith.

- ❖ What if we used a parish-based retreat or other means to introduce people to the **paschal mystery** in a more understandable way? In the Council documents, this was a key idea. (See Liturgy, no. 6 for example.) When we help people learn to incorporate sacrifice in their own lives, their faith soars!
- ❖ What if we taught the households of our parish that they are indeed the **domestic church**? (See Church, no. 11, among others.) Provide a means for them to gather in small groups with other households for meals and faith sharing. We know that when parents live their faith at home, their children are much more likely to remain active in their faith as they grow.
- ❖ What if each Catholic parish became a haven of **justice and peace** in each of our communities? What if we were known for being "people of Matthew 25?" Such an active outreach might both attract absent members and open the door of faith to others. (See Church in Modern World, no. 26, among many others.)
- ❖ What if we created new ways to help our folks pray, with **devotion for Our Lady and the Saints**? (See Church, ch. 8.) When we develop this piety anew, it must be more communal and liturgical and less private than in the 1950s, but such devotional life will arouse the faith of many!
- ❖ And finally, what if we took the initiative in helping youth, young adults, and adult Catholics and their households, to actually and intentionally **form their consciences and follow them**. At the moment, we resort to repeating the rules in an even louder voice, but this doesn't help form conscience. (See Church in the Modern World, no. 16, and the *Catechism* #1776 and following, especially #1785.)

These two big ideas,

- ❖ guiding active members to speak with confidence to inactive ones (the new evangelization in numbers 4, 7, and 10 of *Porta Fidei*)
- ❖ and teaching about Vatican II and implementing it more fully (*Porta Fidei*, no. 5, 6, 12, and 14),

are what the Holy Father envisions for the Year of Faith. But it's also what we all want, am I correct? We all want to welcome and re-engage the People of God. We all want to deepen our encounter with Christ. We all want to let our faith lead us to justice. We all want a Sunday liturgy that really soars!

So, even though we're all too busy already, let's roll up our collective Catholic sleeves, put our shoulders to the wheel,

make our plans, and let this Year of Faith reinvigorate our parishes! Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your love! Amen. |

Bill Huebsch is a longtime NCCL member. He directs the work of the pastoral center at PastoralPlanning.com, in partnership with 23rd Publications. He leads the work of the Vatican II Center also found at PastoralPlanning.com.

A SUMMARY OF PORTA FIDEI

from Benedict XVI

Let's consider what the Holy Father has in mind for this special Year. He published an Apostolic Letter (a "*motu proprio data*") entitled *Porta Fidei* on October 11, 2011, to announce and shape the Year of Faith. In it, he made these points, using these or similar words:

- ❖ The "door of faith" (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his church. People cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a lifelong journey of faith. (#1)
- ❖ I have often spoken of the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever-clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ. (#2, #3)
- ❖ It also seemed to me that timing the launch of the Year of Faith to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council would provide a good opportunity to help people understand that the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, "have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition." (#5)
- ❖ "The Church, 'like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God', announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1 Cor 11:26). But by the power of the risen Lord it is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, its sorrow and its difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that it may reveal in the world, faithfully, although with shadows, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it shall be manifested in full light" (*Lumen Gentium*,8). (#6)
- ❖ The Year of Faith, from this perspective, is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord. In the mystery of his death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 5:31). (#6)
- ❖ Today, as in the past, Christ sends us out to the highways and hedgerows (Lk 14:23) of the world to proclaim his gospel to all the peoples of the earth. (#7)
- ❖ We want to help everyone be more able to speak about his or her faith when appropriate. This is also a good time to renew our love for the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. (#9)
- ❖ We also want everyone to rediscover and profess our basic Catholic beliefs, to celebrate, live, and pray them. (#9, #11)
- ❖ But St. Luke teaches that knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless the heart, the authentic sacred space within the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and to understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God (cf. Acts 16:14). (#10)
- ❖ We will have to come together with each other in our parishes in order to achieve these goals. (#10)
- ❖ The Catechism of the Catholic Church will serve as a tool providing real support for the faith, especially for those concerned with the formation of Christians, so crucial in our cultural context. (#12)
- ❖ During this time, we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2): in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offence received, and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the paschal mystery. (#13)
- ❖ The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of caring for those who are vulnerable, hungry, and in need of justice. Faith without charity bears no fruit. Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love. "As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). (#14)
- ❖ May this Year of Faith make our relationship with Christ the Lord increasingly firm. Let us entrust this time of grace to the Mother of God, about whom we say, "Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45). (#15) |

The Door of Faith Reflects the Experience of Our Lives

Margaret Matijasevic Sardo



The Door of Faith, “always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church” (Benedict XVI).

Doors. They provide us with an intense image to ponder. Doors can either conceal, or let in. They can secure, or extend hospitality; be opaque or transparent. Essentially *doors are reflective of an experience that is happening beyond its parameters*. One might need to assure that what is behind the door is kept out of harm’s way. Or perhaps one might want to welcome others into the space, encouraging presence and fostering companionship. However, I wonder, if the Door of Faith is one that is “always open for us,” why aren’t we constantly walking through it? Perhaps, we don’t always recognize it despite its constant presence in the moments of our lives.

THE RATIO OF LIGHT TO DARKNESS

Consider the Door of Faith as the lived reality of our very own lives. We can only come to encounter the Divine in the living of life, which is itself a gift of the one God. No matter one’s catechetical training, each is exposed to God through the mysterious journey of their own life. Our life holds the opportunity to accept the gift of faith, and thus is the very door through which we must step if we are ever to enter into relationship with our God. But it would seem that our lives can be opaque or transparent, or a little of both, either bringing us closer to God, or further away. Perhaps it is an oversimplification that encourages us to assume that we have all experienced “opened doors” in our life... Perhaps it is too much to expect that we catechetical leaders are easily capable of understanding and engaging the God who awaits encounter with us... And even though God relentlessly yearns for relationship with us, it can seem that for different reasons we attempt to live behind closed doors, if only in a single area of life that is far too delicate to be touched. In this place, we find ourselves living alone in the comforting cool of a darkness that we think conceals. Yet still, some might be professing faith in God for all to hear, sharing that faith with others, shining a light of hope for the world. Our humanity has areas of life that are darkened and shadowed, while it also has areas that glimmer with light. The ratio of light to darkness may be varied, but it seems to be the reality of our human condition to live in both light and dark-

ness as we relentlessly struggle to come to know hope in the complexity of life’s transgressions.

If our own lives are “ushering us into the life of communion with God,” this year might be calling us to an attentiveness of the areas of our life that are closing us off to this communion. What are those areas of our lives which are reluctantly shared with God? Are there areas of our lives where we are resisting the surrender to the sacramental life of the church? This Year of Faith is inviting us to ongoing conversion, allowing ourselves the opportunity to indulge in the love our God extends to us, a door that never closes on us, despite perhaps, our desire to close it off ourselves.

An opaque door. An area of life where the darkness dominates making it difficult to expose. I am reminded of two distinct occasions. The first, a memory of visiting prisons in Tijuana, Mexico, where people are caged as if animals. I can recall the image of hands extending out of dark caves, yearning for nourishment, as some pilgrims offered basic sustenance in rice cooked in broth. Startled by the idea that prisoners are only fed by local families or charities, not by governmental means, I realized how simply hope can extend itself. Perhaps the world around us allows the decisions we have made to feel isolated in darkness. But our God arrives, with simple acts, extending hope by reaching out to the hand desperate to be touched, and as hands touch, there is a reminder that darkness is not where we are meant to live. Secondly, I recall sitting with some local leadership, praying in the form of *Lectio Divina*, when an intense feeling of nervousness and compassion sparked in me simultaneously as our local bishop suggested that we all have areas of our life that are darkened, areas where we do not allow light to enter. And I have been moved so deeply by that conversation and imagery, as it was so filled with a remarkable sense of experience in its simple wording, especially coming from a man that is able to hold the complexity of church realities.

A CALL TO HOPE

There are always areas of life in which we are tempted to close the door to healing. Perhaps these are the areas that the Year of Faith is asking us to surrender, when we are offered the hope of “not keeping the light hidden.” In the closed realities of our life, there is a false adjustment to how we see the possibility of God’s nature. It limits the profession of faith that we have

opportunity to claim, as we desperately shut the door, blinded in darkness to the possibility of life. It is as if we are used to seeing in the dark; our eyes somewhat adjust, but don't realize the brilliance of our own ability of sight until the light shines again. Could your own darkness be the door that hides your relationship with a same sex partner? Could it be your challenges with celibacy? Could it be a loss of love for a spouse? Or an addiction? Or the acceptance of your children who no longer find meaning in coming to church? Or, perhaps, it might be in calling yourself Catholic, but finding the strength or reason to join us at the table too difficult. Or, as with all of us at some point along the way, is it simply that you feel unworthy before the altar of the Lord, holding tightly to the darkness of which you cannot let grow into God's movement of love in your life. The doors of our life experience that are closed allow us to live in darkness, slowly believing our unworthiness, or the unworthiness of others. And in all honesty, our perception of life adjusts as we get used to living in that darkness. But, this is where the Year of Faith calls us to offer hope.

It would seem that glimmers of hope shine in encounters with Christ. This is not some romantic theology that considers Christ to be an obvious beacon that just miraculously shows up one day. Sometimes, I wonder if we want to overly program that experience of the Christ-encounter, submitting to the temptation to romanticize the notion that "if we build it, and make a program out of it, they will come." An encounter with Christ is far more countercultural than our need to "program" things, while gathering statistics to prove our productivity. The Real Presence is a glimmer that eases into your life, with gentleness and care. It is the bumping into another pilgrim on the road, who somehow takes the time to encounter you, to know you, the whole you, opaque door and all, and gently knocks on the opaque door, respectfully touching it. With such sincerity, there is a willingness to admit the door is closed, and a slow trickling of grace begins to seep under the doorway. Gently offering glimmers of light through the cracks. Allowing one to recognize, with new vision, the possibilities of the very life they are living.

RECOGNIZING CHRIST

Our sacramental life as a church celebrates this vision — celebrates the grace that seeps through the cracks of those opaque

doors of our life. The sacraments are more than the realization of our living into the Paschal Mystery over and over again throughout the various stages of our lives. They essentially are the visibility of that which we understand about the depths of our lives that relentlessly pull us toward God. They are the celebration of living and wearing the profession of faith that acknowledges that our God is loving and merciful, and shines hope in all with which we have faced.

To surrender our lives to the sacramental life of the church is to understand that the lives we live are the distinguishable experiences of Christ-revealing grace. In every moment... we are gifted with the opportunity to be that grace, and to receive that grace. And perhaps, the opaque areas of our life can transform our understanding and living of a faith that has been carried on through "men and women of consecrated lives" for centuries. The history of our sacred story becomes our reality. The paschal mystery is extended to us through Christ's very own lived experience, and it is our sacred story as we live that encounter with Jesus. Just as Christ surrendered to the cross and darkness covered the land, so too we surrender to the cross, allowing the darkness we hold to be released. Just as the Father raised Jesus from the dead to resurrection, scattering the darkness, so too we are called to new life, gleaming radiantly with the light of yet another conversion. Once more, by the grace of God, an opaque door has been opened, revealing to the world the experience of grace unfolding, piercing through any obstacles, and moving us to life beyond our human parameters. Once again, we find ourselves recognizing the encounter with Christ glorified.

Our very own lives are the response to the Year of Faith. Sure, we may try our default mode as catechetical leaders — Programs, Documents, Hypotheses. But if we are honest with our own need for conversion, our own recognition of opaque doors, then we might recognize that we are called to a deeper response. What that is for each person will be unique, but essentially it would seem that it is rooted in allowing ourselves to see what is beyond the parameters of our opaque doors with graced light shining on it. It is allowing another to gently knock on the door, respectfully touch it, and assist in opening it. It is coming to the deep awareness that the entirety of the life lived is the *Porta Fidei*, even those areas that seem

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dark. The profession of faith is knowing that God is able to ripple grace-filled light into the wholeness of who we are as individuals, and who we are as church. It is a contagious reality that just naturally touches those we encounter, as it is an authentic living of life. It is wearing the faith of the church, rather than hypothesizing about what it could look like, or trying to hide what it really is. It is putting on Christ for the world to see and know, rather than making excuses for why one might be unworthy to do so. It might challenge us to accept the light into areas of our humanity, and even as an institution of church. It is a door flung wide open with the comforts of home, as it is the sustenance for the journey in which our emptiness finally finds nourishment. We recognize that we have arrived again to a deeper relationship with our God, able to profess our faith more boldly through our own ongoing conversion.

I have to confess that I read over *Porta Fidei* multiple times. I read it with excited eyes, dreaming of the possibilities of

hope. Will this be the year that we grow ever more deeply into our role as the People of God, an authentic priestly people, extending our very selves as hope to this world? That would mean it would be up to each one of us to take seriously the call to conversion, whether lay or ordained, religious or secular. Dare we allow God's grace to seep through the cracks of our darkened realities and gently expose that which lies within the parameters of the opaqueness? It calls for an openness to adjust our vision, which until now may have been limited. That is what brings light to this world: The recognition of Christ as a fellow pilgrim on the road, who walks alongside us, despite darkness and shadows, confidently sharing light and His way. Now that is evangelization. See again, with restored vision, the always-open door of faith! ■

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Faith: Holding It All Together

Frank P. DeSiano, CSP



Catechists are primarily in the business of faith. Fundamentally, catechetical ministry is all about holding the various dimensions of faith together — with one primary purpose: to help instill, or deepen, faith in a brother or sister. The more a catechist can keep these dimensions in mind and heart, the more effectively she or he can serve God’s purposes.

The sections in the Catechism of the Catholic Church on faith push Catholics to understand and accept different nuances of faith. The Catechism’s initial take on faith centers on the idea of obedience (cf. Rom 1:5, and 16:26), not in the authoritarian sense of “obey,” but rather in its more elemental meaning: to hear something deeply and respond to it. Faith, then, comes to us; but faith also involves a response on our part. (See CCC, #142-144).

Faith, in this sense, ultimately is grace, the free and unmerited gift of God to humankind. From this notion, much in accord with modern ideas of religious freedom, we know that faith cannot be forced upon people. (Catechists find this out when students turn 16!) But the grace dimension of faith (CCC, #153) brings in the human reality of decision and assent: “. . . believing is an authentically human act” (CCC, # 153). This paradoxical combination fits naturally with the human matrix of faith and understanding — that the divine gift of faith cannot be alien to the human drive to know, to grasp, to understand. In this way, faith lies open to study, to other human forms of knowing, particularly to science (CCC, #159).

A further element of faith that combines various dimensions involves the way faith fundamentally is an act of trust in a person (namely, God), but also an assent to the things that we believe about God. We completely submit intellect and will to God (CCC, #143); faith involves “trusting in God and cleaving to the truths” God has revealed (CCC, #154). The main models proposed for us in the Catechism are Abraham and Mary — those who opened themselves up to God’s invitation, almost with no certain knowledge but with total acceptance and trust.

Grace, gift, human act, understanding, trust, explicit content: these are what catechists have to hold together.

FAITH TODAY

Catechists juggle all these dimensions of faith one way or another, although those catechizing older children and adults deal more explicitly with some of these elements. We do this in a contemporary world which puts emphasis on certain aspects of faith, particularly on faith as a decision, as a choice. Billy Graham’s magazine was called *Decision*, and the ever-growing number of congregational variations in American Protestantism makes faith look a lot like a supermarket. One has to choose one’s brand! Decision!

How different our Catholic emphasis is — how readily we can mostly focus on faith as a grace, and as a set of truths to be accepted. How rarely we emphasize faith as this “trusting” and “obedience” which the Catechism underscores in various places. How can catechists bring greater emphasis on faith as a choice, a decision, without running into some of the distortions that can arise in Protestant understandings?

Catholic catechists today have to get beyond the classroom, beyond our book-centered approach to faith by helping others *experience* faith as the opening of the depths of their spirits to God. We cannot do this just by talking. Rather, we need actions, behaviors, environments. Through a process of meditation, can catechists show how the human heart opens itself to the divine? Through a process of quiet prayer, can teachers and religious leaders help people experience the grace of God as that uniquely unfolds in the mystery of Jesus and his Spirit?

Catechists need to be comfortable with their own experience of faith — how they have come to “hear deeply” (=obey) the haunting call of God behind every moment of their lives. They need a sense of how their own stories of faith have unfolded throughout the various phases of their lives. Seeing the process of faith in their lives will help catechists understand the various stages of process that people are going through today. Catechists, then, have to accept their own process of conversion — it’s clear moments, it’s ongoing nature — to help them facilitate the work of God’s grace in the hearts of others.

I am always surprised at how rarely Catholics think of themselves as converted, as disciples. Perhaps we have over-emphasized the content of faith and underemphasized the act of faith in our Catholic approach, and in our Catholic experi-



ence. As a result, the truth that we have responded to faith by a *decision* to accept God as Jesus reveals God, by a *choice* powered by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, has become unclear in the lives of Catholics — even though we are living lives of conversion every day of our Catholic experience. I think it is impossible for anyone to receive Holy Communion with any kind of fervor and not, in fact, be converted. We may not use the language, but we certainly have the reality — our lives personally centered on the God that Jesus reveals. Faith, as the Catechism states, is a human act! Can we reflect on this and accept it?

DISCIPLESHIP

When catechists accept and explore how discipleship operates in their lives, they can find the human and gospel vocabulary to help others come to discipleship through conversion. Of course, because we Catholics have to hold it all together, conversion can happen in a variety of ways depending on the particular psychology and history of the person. American believers do themselves a disservice by making faith seem almost exclusively a cry of the heart from desperation — I'm a sinner, a drunk, an adulterer, or a "wretch" — and only by throwing myself into God can this degrading state be changed! True enough in the lives of many. But just as true is the grace-filled reality of growing up in an environment of conversion, of finding openings to the divine in generosity, in a passion for social justice, in caring for others, in seeking truth, or in serving beauty.

Discipleship results from a life that opens itself to God in such a way that it places God at its center, and follows (=obeys) God. Discipleship results from God's grace-filled gift accepted as a way of life through concrete and repeated decisions (=conversion). Discipleship happens in a community of disciples who support each other by creating the environment in which hearts open more and more to the fullness of divine love.

Of course there is *content* in all of this. We are, after all, disciples of Christ and, in Christ's Spirit, followers of the

Father's will. Our minds naturally want to know this God, to know about this God, and to relate this God to all the other things that we know. Can the content, however, give life to a believer unless it is constantly related to the *relational elements* of faith as gift, as response, as trusting, as cleaving?

For catechists, discipleship can mean a more relational approach to the life of faith. Its wellspring is prayer — the expression, personal and communal, of the relationship we have with God in faith. Prayer cannot be just an "addendum" to what we are doing as catechists. Prayer has to be the seminal starting point because prayer makes us more aware of the gift, and opens our hearts to the gift. I wonder how often catechists lead their pupils (=disciples) into experience of personal prayer? I wonder how often catechists do guided meditations, or *lectio divina*, or personal witness? I wonder how often teachers of religion make themselves vulnerable to grace, and to their pupils, by showing (=testifying) what an open heart looks like? How often does any of this happen in religion "class" or RCIA "class"?

All too often, I'm afraid, it's much easier to grab the textbook, or the class outline, and delve into the content of faith, letting the wellspring of faith dry up.

HOLDING IT TOGETHER

A starting place for catechists to appropriate a greater faith dimension in teaching/sharing is this: get in touch with the breadth and multi-dimensional reality of one's own faith life. We can look at the various aspects of faith that are going on inside our own hearts, especially those beyond repeating the time-tested formulations of faith.

First, get in touch with faith as a gift, the undeserved offering of divine friendship given to humankind, and empowered in our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit. Can we allow ourselves to be swept away by the reality of our own faith, the sheer amazement of being able to relate to the depth and breadth of the divine, to know that every step of our lives is grounded in infinite love and gift?

Secondly, get in touch with faith as a trust — the way we place our whole being, with confidence, into the hands of this God who loves us? Find the ways we have cried for God, found God's presence, felt God's assurance, experienced God's correction, grown through the darkest moments of our lives into a fuller realization of God. Look at the psalms we pray, the language of our Eucharist, the moments of personal prayer (in meditation, in adoration, in petition) as testimonies of our total trust in God.

Thirdly, let these senses of grace and trust infuse the content of faith that is so important to us. What does the doctrine of the Trinity really say about the infinite depth of an all-loving God? What does the paschal mystery say about the ultimate drama of human existence, about staring at death and walking through it, about the surprising experiences of resurrection in the simplest of our lives? How does the doctrine of the Incarnation upend all our expectations about existence? These doctrines have to be alive in our hearts, in our emotions, and not just in our heads.

Fourth, relate the content of faith to science, to knowledge, to culture — to the whole human enterprise. Jesus, after all, did not see his mission as abstracting people from their everyday existence (even though detours of Christian life have at times put it that way). It is in and through our human existence that Jesus opened up the amazing reality of the Kingdom: a powerful new understanding of God's radical presence to us, and the transformation, as a result of God's love, of the way we look at and treat each other.

My favorite section of the teaching on faith in the Catechism begins with CCC #163, faith as the beginning of eternal life. Theology has often posited faith (along with hope and love) as theological virtues because they have God as their *object*. Switch it around. These virtues have God as their *subject*: they are the result of what God is doing in us, his new creation, the

signs of the divine indwelling that John's Gospel talks about. God brings about these amazing powers in us, transforming our minds (faith), imaginations (hope), and actions (love) so that they correspond with that ultimate divine project: the Kingdom of God.

The invitation is to look at discipleship as living eternal life through the powers that God's Spirit brings about in us, raising our potentiality far beyond anything we could ever have foreseen, raising our human existence into loving unity with the divine.

This is what we are doing when we catechize. We are helping the Spirit of God work in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, uncovering for them the faith that is potential and actual in their lives, and empowering them to live in communion with God and God's people. As we call people to discipleship, we expose for them the various levels of faith that our Catholic experience has unfolded throughout history, throughout the life of our Catholic people. Such a life, so astonishingly rich, comes to consciousness through faith; from faith, it spreads to every other dimension of spiritual life — and every dimension of human life — until God's life engulfs all ages. ■

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CATECHESIS SINCE THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: AN INCOMPLETE REFLECTION (PART 2)

Gerard F. Baumbach



In this issue,¹ we continue to understand the significance that the Second Vatican Council had in shaping current catechesis and redefining the role of all the faithful to better share the message of Christ.

ANOTHER LOOK: COUNCIL, CONTENT, PROCESS

The Second Vatican Council identified the role of all baptized in the active promotion of the faith. *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) notes the essential role of the “domestic Church,” stating that “parents, by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.” However, neither parents nor children are “alone” within the Christian community: “all the faithful, whatever their condition or state — though each in his own way — are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect.... The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office.”²

The mystery of the incarnation demonstrates that the Son of God is one with us; “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14). What saving love! Jesus Christ, the One with whom union is possible through this astonishing gift of the Father, was “tested in every way, yet without sin.”³ He is the One that death cannot hold and the One whom we seek. He offers us the way of life and the way to live in the Spirit as the church, through which we come to participate in the life of the Risen One as “a priestly, prophetic, and royal people.”⁴ This is enlivening and stimulating. “The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ [as priest, prophet, and king] and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them.”⁵

The Council reaffirmed the particular role of bishops in caring for the baptized and in calling all people to belief in Christ. As they continue to address the many catechetical needs of the church, our bishops, our chief catechists,⁶ preach and teach with hope. *Christus Dominus* says, “When they exercise their teaching role, bishops should proclaim the gospel of Christ”⁷ in a proclamation given for all (and today, in a time of new evangelization, for those who need or seek to “hear anew”). They also need to “ensure that catechists are adequately prepared for their task, being well-instructed in the doctrine of the Church and possessing both a practical and theoretical knowledge of the laws of psychology and of educational method.”⁸

Catechist formation remains an essential and challenging priority. This formation, inclusive of the authentic witness of Catholic teaching and its application for Christian living, goes beyond understanding and methodology. It must include discernment and spiritual formation, and prayer with other catechists. Ongoing witness to life in Christ — in service to the gospel through the witness of the church — demands no less. What is true of renewal in faith for all also applies to those serving in the ministry of catechesis: “The New Evangelization invites people to experience God’s love and mercy through the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist and Penance and Reconciliation.”⁹

When Pope John XXIII opened the Council on October 11, 1962, he spoke of the importance of “sacred doctrine.” He used such terms as “treasure,” “patrimony,” and “doctrinal penetration.” The Holy Father also stated that “the substance of the ancient doctrine of the Deposit of Faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.”¹⁰

1 Abbreviated reference information is included in Part Two of this article for sources that were referenced in full with their first use in Part One. See Part One for complete reference information for these sources.

2 *Lumen Gentium*, 11-12.

3 Cf. Letter to the Hebrews 4:15.

4 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 783.

5 *Ibid.*, 783. Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 18-21.

6 NDC, 54A.

7 *Christus Dominus*, 12.

8 *Christus Dominus*, 14.

9 Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization, 2012: 3.

10 Pope John XXIII. *Address Delivered by His Holiness Pope John XXIII at the Solemn Opening of the Second Vatican Council, October 11, 1962*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference:8.

Doctrine offers us substantial ways of participating in the living heritage that helps to shape the tradition we share and the people we are. Such doctrinal exposition requires attentive study. Creedal statements are invitational, opening us to a wider world of reflection, tradition, and Christian life.

Before the Council, major developments were underway within educational theory and catechesis (e.g., the importance of attention to the experience of the learner), forming a type of “religious education template” for what would transpire. Methodological advances followed a conglomeration of factors over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, with such factors well-summarized by Mary Charles Bryce, O.S.B., in her 1981 article on the “Evolution of Catechesis from the Catholic Reformation to the Present.”¹¹

Three years later, Johannes Hofinger, S.J.,¹² would trace international developments in an article about the “journey of catechesis.” The article appeared in *The Living Light* a few months after Hofinger’s death in February 1984. Hofinger identified catechetical movement along a 20th century path that included focus on a search for a more effective catechetical methodology and an emphasis on the essence of the kerygma.

The necessary early 20th century search for a new and “life-centered”¹³ methodology, which did much to advance catechetical practice, was, in the end, insufficient. Emerging concern for identifying the core “content” of catechesis was captured by emphasis on the kerygma, the good news of salvation. But this was to be more than a better way of “delivering” content; rather, it was an invitation to proclaim and participate in the mystery and love of Christ. What, indeed, is the essence of what we teach, if none other than the core of the good news focused on Christ? Building a relationship with Christ was essential, not just for understanding, but for all of life. As Hofinger pointed out, “this phase accomplished much more than answering the question, ‘What is to be taught in genuine catechesis?’”¹⁴ Combining “the Bible, the Liturgy,

Doctrine and Christian Living,”¹⁵ it struck at the heart of what we believe and how we are to be formed as disciples in witness to God’s love given in Christ.

Yet, even this renewed sense needed to be linked more intentionally to the lives of the catechized. Hofinger’s survey identified a third phase, around the time of the Council, and one that affirmed that “any valid catechesis must take into account the *particular situation in which its recipients live*, according to their age, cultural and social background, and their own individuality.”¹⁶ He would later add, “The promoters of the human approach provided us with a fine roof; but, unfortunately, instead of placing the roof upon the walls, they constructed the roof on the grounds beside the edifice; and now it needs a fourth phase for elevating this valuable roof to its proper place upon the walls.”¹⁷ And so he called for a phase that “will be the result not primarily of scientific research but rather of a new spirit which has its proper source in a deep religious renewal.”¹⁸

A heightened sense of pastoral integration of many elements that contributed to sound catechetical approaches had already emerged. For example, activating catechetical plans rich in biblical, liturgical, ecclesial, and natural signs¹⁹ — and reflective of contemporary approaches for understanding the learning-teaching experience — placed broader demands on the catechist and the catechized. The “catechetical bar” was set high with expectations for all age groups.

Religious renewal and catechetical renewal witnessed a surge in the development of methodological approaches that seemed to become a center-point for religious education. Some practitioners and scholars also understood “curriculum” as being more than what the term “course of study” might predictably imply.²⁰ Over time, specialized approaches for adult faith formation, family faith formation, inter-generational catechesis, and “whole community” catechesis also became part of the expansive catechetical environment. There was much territory to visit and explore.

Some observers might propose that one outcome of process-driven developments was a type of content-process dualism, resulting in a less integrated reliance on “holy scripture, tradition, liturgy, and on the teaching authority and life of the

11 Mary Charles Bryce, O.S.B. “Evolution of Catechesis from the Catholic Reformation to the Present.” In John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr. (Eds.), *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*. Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc., 1981: 204-235. Other important reading about historical topics surrounding catechesis leading to and through the 20th century includes Berard L. Marthaler, OFM Conv., “The Modern Catechetical Movement in Roman Catholicism.” *Religious Education*, Vol. LXXIII, No. 5-S, September-October 1978: S77-S91; Catherine Dooley, “Evangelization and Catechesis: Partners in the New Millennium.” In Catherine Dooley and Mary Collins (Eds.), *The Echo Within: Emerging Issues in Religious Education*. Allen, TX: Thomas More, 1997: 145-159; and Anne Marie Mongoven, “The Story of Renewal.” In Anne Marie Mongoven, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*. New York: Paulist Press, 2000: 36-63.

12 The reader may recall that Hofinger was the world’s catechetical link to Josef Jungmann, S.J., Austrian Jesuit, prophetic voice for a kerygmatic approach to catechesis, and eventual peritus at the Council with regard to liturgy.

13 Johannes Hofinger. “Looking Backward and Forward: Journey of Catechesis.” *The Living Light*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (June 1984), 350. Copyright ©1984 by William H. Sadlier, Inc., New York, NY.

14 Ibid., 351.

15 Johannes Hofinger, S.J. *The Art of Teaching Christian Doctrine*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957. 21.

16 Johannes Hofinger. “Looking Backward and Forward: Journey of Catechesis,” 354; italics in original.

17 Ibid., 356.

18 Ibid., 357.

19 See *SLF*, 42-46.

20 For example, consider the book *Fashion Me A PEOPLE: Curriculum in the Church* by Maria Harris, a scholar of religious education of the era. One chapter is entitled “Curriculum: The Course of the Church’s Life.” Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

Church”²¹ for catechesis, thereby impacting doctrinal understanding and active discipleship.

Other observers might propose that the impact of efforts to promote Catholic teaching and active discipleship in living the Christian life would have been markedly weakened without implementation of advances in developments of methodological approaches rooted in the social sciences.

Perhaps it is wise to look back to post-conciliar documentation and ahead to more recent support to enrich our revisiting the catechetical landscape. Here we find both clarifications and challenges, sometimes in the same sentence.

For example, Pope John Paul II wrote, “It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy: Christianity is inseparably both.”²² The Holy Father explains why such disharmony is not to be promoted. He says:

Authentic catechesis is always an orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given of Himself to humanity in Christ Jesus, a revelation stored in the depths of the Church’s memory and in Sacred Scripture, and constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living, active *traditio*. This revelation is not however isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. It is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it.²³

Insight gained from knowing the catechetical environment within which one catechizes is essential. For example, *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization* provides clear guidance. It states, “Catechetical methodologies are based on the proclamation of the faith from Sacred Scripture and Tradition and their application to human experience, or they are based on human experience examined in light of the Gospel and teachings of the Church.”²⁴

Catechetical leaders in the United States can refer to the *National Directory for Catechesis* for developing cohesive

catechetical approaches: “Effective catechesis should feature no opposition or artificial separation between content and method. Similar to the dynamic present in the pedagogy of God, catechetical methodology serves to transmit both the content of the entire Christian message and the source of that message, the Triune God.”²⁵ Furthermore, “Catechetical methods employ two fundamental processes that organize the human element in the communication of the faith: the *inductive method* and the *deductive method*. . . . The deductive method, however, has full value only when the inductive process is completed.”²⁶

Hofinger’s observations are just one example of the thinking of the time; other scholars and other approaches and issues could be cited, but space does not allow. Less than two years after Hofinger’s challenge and about six years after *Catechesi Tradendae*, a proposal was made for a catechism for the entire church. The setting was the 1985 synod that focused on the 20th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was the first officially declared worldwide catechism since the 16th century *Roman Catechism*, an outcome of the

Council of Trent. The new catechism, “based on the vision of catechesis found in”²⁷ *Catechesi Tradendae*, has had a major impact on catechesis in the United States. As a significant reference sourcebook, the *Catechism* serves the pedagogy of faith with its systematic presentation of the profession of faith, liturgy and sacraments, living the Christian moral life, and prayer. The *GDC* identifies the *Catechism* as “the doctrinal point of reference for all catechesis.”²⁸

For 400 years the term “catechesis” had been, at least in some quarters, essentially a synonym for the word “catechism.” Such a synonymous relationship does not exist today. This era benefits from greater understanding of the nature of the

*Insight gained
from knowing
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catechizes is essential.*

21 *Christus Dominus*, 14.

22 *Catechesi Tradendae*, 22.

23 *Ibid.*, 22. Cf. *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6: AAS 58 ([1966], 999).

24 *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*, 11. See Note 35.

25 *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, 29.

26 *NDC*, 29 (and referencing *GCD*, 72 after the last sentence); italics in original. Consult “Divine and Human Methodology,” Chapter 4 of the *NDC*, in its entirety; the paragraph quoted from above also includes quotations from *SLF*, 176 and *GDC*, 150. Also, Cf. *GDC*, 150-151; cf. Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*, 2012: 11, Note 35. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/upload/Disciples-Called-To-Witness-The-New-Evangelization.pdf>

27 Berard Marthaler, OFM Conv. “A New Meaning of Catechesis,” 14.

28 *GDC*, 93.

human person, greater appreciation of the impact of multiple intelligences for catechesis, enhanced awareness and understanding of doctrinal teaching, and a widening of appreciation of enriching dimensions that give shape to cultural diversity. We also benefit from the treatment of Catholic social teaching as an essential dimension of the church's doctrinal foundations.

A fundamental resource, "this Catechism does not set out to provide the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed."²⁹ As this century unfolds, catechesis continues to benefit in no small measure from established and growing reliance on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

THE WORD OF GOD, INCULTURATION, AND A RESOUNDING "YES!" TO CATECHESIS

Through the voices of many serving catechesis, including catechetical leaders, the comprehensive unity of sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture continues to assert itself 50 years after the start of Vatican II.

Yet we serve with even greater awareness of the obvious: "precisely in our day educating in the faith is no easy undertaking." Pope Benedict XVI uses the term "educational emergency" to refer to this challenge, noting "the increasing difficulty encountered in transmitting the basic values of life and correct behaviour to the new generations, a difficulty that involves both schools and families and, one might say, any other body with educational aims."³⁰ It is no surprise that this tone helps to shape the Lineamenta prepared for the synod on "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."

The Word of God sustains, directs, and envelops us in God's care while simultaneously calling us to risk gospel living marked by faithful witness. We may walk to Emmaus but we run back to Jerusalem. Catechetical leaders cannot wait to share what they witness. The church, "on earth, the seed and the beginning of . . . [the] kingdom,"³¹ is watered by our expressed discipleship and Christian witness within life relationships marked by joy and struggle.

We enter into a living tradition; with diligence and care we commit to faith and heritage alive in hearts and minds of witnesses to faith in our own age and time and in times gone by. The richness and hope of Catholic teaching cannot be under-

stated, nor can that sacred trust of "authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition,"³² [which] has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant."³³

Catechetical leaders informed and formed by Vatican II know that no one culture is *the* culture of opportunity in matters of faith; the gospel is for all and ministerial witness applies to all. Emphasis on the inculturation of the gospel infuses catechesis with enriching and fresh awareness that "the incarnation of the only Son of God is the original inculturation of God's word."³⁴

Today's catechetical leaders are expected to develop programs in service to families, the elderly, young adults (single and married), adolescents, children, newly-married, and other constituencies. Catechetical leaders offer "tried and true and sometimes new" approaches for shaping participation in the diverse life of the Christian community. They reach out to distant horizons well beyond familiar and comfortable boundaries so that the gospel can be offered to all.

No longer clearly separated, threads of diversity weave together a blend that respects heritage and history while finding meaning and lively expression of faith across cultures and generations. Even complex interactions with parishioners are vital to shaping the parish's response to the gospel as a community of faith. In helping to form communities with an incarnational awareness, catechetical leaders share with other disciples mysteries so powerful that words alone fall short of explaining why they do what they do.

The six tasks of catechesis continue to be reflected in "real time." This is no small achievement for all who have stayed the course in this vital ministry. The catechist immersed in this ministry — seeking no thanks but offering thanks to God for the privilege to serve — is reminded that "among the laity who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honor."³⁵

As a catechist looking back to the Council and ahead to the next moment, the catechetical leader continues "to mature as a person, a believer and as an apostle."³⁶ He or she must know the message of faith and be aware "of the social context" from within which one catechizes. This is especially important as cultural diversity continues to enrich the church.

29 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 24.

30 *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*. June 11, 2007. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070611_convegno-roma_en.html

31 *Lumen Gentium*, 5. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 541.

32 *Dei Verbum*, 10. Cf. Note 8 in DV after the term "Tradition": "Cf. First Vatican Council, *Dogn. Const. on the Catholic Faith*, c. 3 (on Faith): *Denz.*1972 (3011)."

33 *Ibid.*, 10. Cf. Note 9 in DV after the term "alone": "Cf. Pius XII, *Encycl. Humani Generis*, 12 Aug 1950: *AAS* 42 (1950) 568-569: *Denz.* 2314 (3886)."

34 *NDC*, 21A.

35 Pope John Paul II. *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer), 1990, 73. http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0219/_P8.HTM

36 *GDC*, 238.

Perhaps one realistic example of *savoir-faire*,³⁷ in addition to Jesus himself, is that of Mary, his mother and Mother of the Church. By her fiat, she shows what risk and coming discipleship are about, regardless of the era in which people live. Any rebirth of interest in new forms of discipleship need not stray far from her. “The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer.”³⁸ It goes without saying that teaching about “Mary, Star of Evangelization,”³⁹ remains an important priority for catechesis and offers, as well, new opportunities for creative engagement of the six tasks of catechesis.

The impact of Vatican II yielded a spurt of interest in new ways of participating in the life of the church. But this way of participation was and is a way to live, not just a way to work or even to serve. When the Spirit seizes us forthrightly, there is no turning back, only toward. And this turning includes an oddity, for it involves joyful embrace of the cross — a difficult lesson for many to consider, let alone understand in contemporary life. “Only the light of faith and meditation on the Word of God can enable us to find everywhere and always the God ‘in whom we live and exist’ (Acts 17:28).”⁴⁰

One outcome of Vatican II is that of sustained collaboration among persons engaged in diocesan and parish catechetical ministry, within networks of Catholic schools, and across other Catholic institutions.

For example, consider the priest and his role in catechesis, related to his experience of Holy Orders. Identified by the *NDC* as “absolutely essential contributors to an effective

catechetical program,”⁴¹ priests “owe it to everybody to share with them the truth of the Gospel in which they rejoice in the Lord.”⁴² A post-conciliar document identifies the priest as “the *catechist of catechists*.”⁴³ Such a “catechetical call” is both opportunity and gift. In addition, the catechetical service of deacons offers enriching and distinctive perspectives as “the deacon participates as an evangelizer and teacher in the Church’s mission of heralding the word.”⁴⁴

As a result of the Second Vatican Council, new opportunities arose for the laity to join with the ordained in serving the people of God. Those serving in consecrated life secured many positions as part of a catechetical schematic that also attracted married and single people. Gifts of collaborative trust continue to reinforce service on behalf of the church’s catechetical ministry. This is no insignificant responsibility. The lay faithful, with a baptismal call lived and deepened over a lifetime, have much to continue to offer the church, including input from seasoned, new, and younger catechetical leaders.

I pause here to recover a memory shared in Part One of this article about two women (one a mother, the other a religious) who influenced my own catechetical journey about 40 years ago. They were significant but not sole contributors to my ministerial

formation, which came in a variety of ways, including from women and men religious and from many devoted catechists and catechetical leaders.

For example, the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph staffed various ministerial posts at the parish where I served as a DRE and helped to form me in hospitality, spirituality, and elements of leadership through their witness of “undiminished



37 See *GDC* 238 on “The dimensions of formation: being, knowing, and *savoir-faire*.”

38 *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

39 See *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 82 and *NDC*, 74.

40 *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (“Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People”), 4.

41 *NDC*, 54B2.

42 Austin Flannery, OP (Ed.). *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. Presbyterorum Ordinis* (“Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests”). Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1975, 4. Cf. Galatians 2:5.

43 Congregation for the Clergy. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1994, 47; italics in original.

44 *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005, 31.

faith.”⁴⁵ These religious women regularly invited me to their dinner table and to moments of prayer. I recall many more from other communities who have given lives of service and exemplary leadership in diocesan and parish catechetical settings.

The Second Vatican Council still beckons us to risk-taking discipleship. That is exactly what many people did half a century ago, taking risks as disciples in faith, offering their lives in witness to faith and service to the church, oftentimes not knowing for sure what they were undertaking. This was certainly the case for many who responded to the call to embrace the ministry of catechesis.

The commitment implied here is modeled by the women who find the emptiness of the tomb of the Risen One a reason for belief. They run to tell others of their experience, “fearful yet overjoyed.”⁴⁶ Luke tells us that despite their sharing their experience, the women are not believed.⁴⁷ When reflecting on faithful discipleship, we may observe that it is almost as if they “heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?’”⁴⁸

Similarly, one can invoke the account of Peter’s response to Jesus’ question, “[W]ho do you say that I am?”⁴⁹ in exploring this type of commitment of the faithful leader. Peter demonstrates firm commitment in his confession of faith: “You are the Messiah.”⁵⁰ Although Peter’s deep sense of commitment might be deemed questionable in light of his forthcoming denial of the Lord, he subsequently demonstrates faithful adherence to the living word in proclaiming, “God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses.”⁵¹ Peter, one who weeps bitterly⁵² along the way of discipleship, is not one who “gives up.”

The witness of the catechetical leader is born of high but not impossible expectations, with such ministry limited to “Only fully initiated, practicing Catholics who fully adhere to the Church’s teaching in faith and morals and who are models of Christian virtue and courageous witnesses to the Catholic faith.”⁵³ Such a person commits one’s life to Christ, and in so doing, loses one’s life in him. In this way, the leader invokes with firm but powerful simplicity the words of the psalmist,

“Here I am;/ your commands for me are written in the scroll./ To do your will is my delight;/ my God, your law is in my heart!”⁵⁴

With confidence in what he or she proclaims, the leader invites others to the experience of the Risen One and to the experience of self-examination. This is part of the new evangelization, that recognition that each of us is called to a renewal of self and a re-commitment to the church of the ages. “The faithful become agents of evangelization through living witness and commitment to the Gospel.”⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

The Second Vatican Council dealt with the realities of a world that could not anticipate the extraordinary developments in technology or communication. These have changed the way in which we look at and occupy the world in which we live. Although global terrain has shifted, one thing remains: the love of God for each person. And we offer that love to others.

Fifty years ago, many catechetical leaders responded with integrity, trust, and by the decisions of their lives to the questions, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Perhaps some leaders experienced uneasiness about the responsibility they were assuming. And perhaps some do so today. Such discomfort is a blessing worthy of the faithful servant, who lives secure in a foundation built on Christ, Master Catechist and cornerstone of faith.⁵⁶ In such an ecclesial setting, love knows no end. “Since God has first loved us (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10), love is now no longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”⁵⁷

May our own re-commitment to catechesis, an energetic “Yes!” deeply enriched by the Second Vatican Council, remain rooted in the love of Christ, the One who first loved us, as we serve as co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord.⁵⁸ “Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy. We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works.”⁵⁹ |

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45 Austin Flannery, OP (Ed.). *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. Perfectae Caritatis* (“Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life”). Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1975, 25.

46 Matthew 28:8.

47 Cf. Luke 24:11. See Luke 24:12 for Peter’s subsequent response.

48 Isaiah 6:8.

49 Mark 8:29.

50 Mark 8:29.

51 Acts of the Apostles 2:32.

52 Cf. Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62.

53 *NDC*, 54B5.

54 Psalm 40:8-9.

55 *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*, 10.

56 Cf. Acts 4:11 and Ephesians 2:20.

57 Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love). Encyclical Letter, 2005, 1. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html

58 Cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.

59 Hebrews 10:23-24.

Porta Fidei: A Door for the New Evangelization

Sara Blauvelt



Jesus' final words to his disciples make abundantly clear the mandate of evangelization: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,"¹ and yet, the

concept of evangelization is one with which the church still struggles today. Increasingly, people are seeking spirituality apart from religious institutions, and moral relativism and secularization are rampant; all of this robs people of their dignity as members of the family of God. As the church struggles, the post-modern world cries out for evangelization, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Year of Faith proposed by Pope Benedict XVI provides a wonderful opportunity for the faithful to explore "the unfathomable riches of Christ."² Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, the Pope notes that reflection and rediscovery of the Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are to be the focus of the year. In *Porta Fidei*, the apostolic letter that introduces the Year of Faith, he notes, "The texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, 'have lost nothing of their value or brilliance.'" As such, they are normative texts for the faithful and, in particular, provide sustenance in the call to the New Evangelization. The very elements specifically addressed in the Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can infuse real vitality to the New Evangelization.

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

The first topic undertaken by the Council was Sacred Liturgy. Liturgy as "the work of the people," the work of redemption, is essential. However, in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, liturgy had taken on a mechanical nature. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* regards seriously the involvement of the worshipping assembly when it states,

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of liturgy, and to which the Christian people, 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people' (1 Pet 2:9, 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.³

Sacrosanctum Concilium makes evident the call to build up the Kingdom of God on earth through the Eucharistic celebration.

Those conformed to Christ, through baptism and the sacraments, should understand not only the reforms brought about by the Council, but should also understand the reasons behind the changes. Grounded in such knowledge, the faithful are able to take part in the full, conscious, and active manner called for by the Council. Furthermore, through such lived participation, they are empowered to sanctify the world as they come to this deeper understanding of the liturgy.

DEI VERBUM

The Council highlights the need for intimate encounter with the Word of God in the work of *Dei Verbum*, the Constitution on Divine Revelation. The Council, concerned for misunderstanding or lack of understanding, this time, of the riches of Revelation, set forth to articulate doctrine on Revelation and its transmission: "What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way, the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes."⁴ *Dei Verbum* establishes the nature of Revelation, its sources, and the relationship between scripture and tradition.

1 Mt. 28:19-20, The New American Bible. (Wichita, KS: Fireside Bible Publishers, 1998).

2 Eph. 3:8.

3 Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), 14, in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 7.

4 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), 8, in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 754.

This constitution begins with an understanding that Revelation is an act of goodness and love, and then moves to acknowledge the role of Scripture in the life of the church. The Council draws attention to a single deposit of faith: “Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal.”⁵ This understanding was and is essential to Catholic identity. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Tradition, Scripture, and the Magisterium work for the salvation of souls.

It is essential today for the faithful to know, through study of *Dei Verbum*, that it is God’s great love for humanity that impels him to reveal himself to man. In the closing paragraphs of the Constitution, the Council fathers enjoin the faithful: “Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man.”⁶ For those entrusted with teaching the faith, there is directive to become immersed in the Word: “Therefore, all clerics, particularly priests of Christ and others who, as deacons or catechists, are officially engaged in the ministry of the Word, should immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study.”⁷ This directive is as true and binding today as it was 50 years ago.

LUMEN GENTIUM

Translated as “light of the world,” *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, reinforces the Christocentric nature of the church. As such, this document details the essential element of all catechetical endeavors — Christ. The call to evangelization, to draw all together in Christ, is stressed from the outset of this document: “The condition of the modern world lends greater urgency to this duty of the church; for, while men of the present day are drawn every more closely together by social, technical, and cultural bonds, it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ.”⁸ These words, written 50 years ago, have lost none of their urgency today. The aim of *Lumen Gentium* is to explore the mystery that is the church and its relationship to the kingdom.

Furthermore, the impulse of the Holy Spirit is given greater focus. The Pilgrim Church is at work in the world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For those who seek to pass on the faith, *Lumen Gentium* offers great strength to trust in the Holy Spirit as guide, source of gifts, principle of both the church’s unity and unity with God.

5 Ibid, 9.

6 Ibid, 25.

7 *Dei Verbum*, 25.

8 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 1, in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 350.

Of particular interest is the call to holiness that must animate the lives of the faithful: “It is quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness, a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society.”⁹ In this teaching, every human is meant to be a saint. This teaching may not be startling today, particularly because Blessed John Paul II used this theme for the Jubilee Year 2000. However, at the Council, it threw open the doors of holiness to everyone, not just priests and religious. The challenge half a century later is to accept this special vocation.

GAUDIUM ET SPES

From the Church in the Modern World arose a profound concern for people of the world. Translated as “joy and hope,” the message of *Gaudium et Spes* is attentive to the mission of the church in the world. From the outset, this Constitution highlights the solidarity of the church and the world. It expresses that the church and the world are mutually inter-related: “There is no human law so powerful to safeguard the personal dignity and freedom of man as the Gospel which Christ entrusted to the Church.”¹⁰

At the core of this Constitution is the dignity of the human person. Man as the image of God must undergird evangelizing and catechetical efforts, for it provides God as both principle cause and ultimate end of man. Appreciating the basic goodness of man, the constitution addresses sin, the dignity of intellect and moral conscience, and the excellence of freedom. At the same time, it addresses the mystery of death, the causes of atheism, the nature of marriage, and the proliferation of birth control, all of which are threats to human dignity. This document’s modern relevance is undeniable. Aware of the challenges that face the church and world today, *Gaudium et Spes* speaks prophetically when it says, “At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, it is to carry out its task.”¹¹

The world vision of *Gaudium et Spes* is reflected in the passages that discuss what the church offers the world and what the world offers in return. In the end though, the Kingdom of God is the focus: “Whether it aids the world or whether it benefits from it, the Church has but one sole purpose — that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished.”¹² Is this not at the heart of transmitting the faith?

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, promulgated on the 30th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, presents

9 Ibid, 40.

10 *Gaudium et Spes*, 41.

11 Ibid, 4.

12 Ibid, 45.



a compilation of the Christian message as it has been lived out in the liturgy and tradition of the Catholic Church. As a compendium, the Catechism provides a concise collection of doctrine, a single deposit of faith and morals. It offers in its four pillars an interrelated message of creed, liturgy, life in Christ, and prayer. Presented distinctly, the intertwined nature of these elements of faith are ever present.

A particular beauty of the Catechism is that it is open to sharing the gospel message and the tenets of faith in a manner most appropriate to those being evangelized or catechized. Such an approach is essential as one encounters seekers on the journey and endeavors to share the Good News; that is the very heart of the New Evangelization. This flexibility is helpful in its pastoral approach; however, it requires that the evangelizer or catechist be firmly rooted in these truths and have a solid understanding of the tradition he or she seeks to pass along. Pope Benedict acknowledges the challenge of the task at hand:

The Year of Faith will require a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church

has received, safeguarded and proposed in her 2000 years of history.¹³

A disciple sharing the faith must know the teachings of the faith and give testimony to these truths with his or her life.

OPENING THE DOOR OF FAITH

The New Evangelization understands the complexity of the missionary mandate to proclaim Christ to all people and the reciprocal nature of sharing the faith. This entails that those exercising catechetical ministry be flexible, adaptable, sensitive to the needs of their audience and above all, be rooted in a deep personal relationship with Christ. Furthermore, it entails that the catechist be well-versed in the doctrinal teachings that give confidence to the profession of faith. By taking seriously the reflection the Pope is calling for, the Year of Faith has the potential to infuse vitality in all aspects of evangelization and catechesis, and to the life of the church itself. ■

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¹³ *Porta Fidei*, 11.

Lent 4.5: A Catechetical Response to the Church's Teachings on Caring for God's Creation

Joseph Mitchell, CP

"If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."

— Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, January 2010

This iconic quote from Pope Benedict's World Day of Peace message of 2010 is just one of many times the pontiff has spoken out on the environment. In April of 2012, the Holy Father's book, *The Environment*, was published in hardcover. It is clear that Catholic educators are being called to find the proper catechetical response to the Pope's repeated calls to examine our stewardship of the Earth. Where do we begin?

Lent is a time when Catholics and other people of faith are predisposed to do something a little extra. What if we could incorporate Pope Benedict's statements into our lenten catechesis? The Lent 4.5 program offers parishes and schools the opportunity to engage in a faith formation that responds to the need to support Catholic Social Teaching on the environment and creation care.

Many of our habitual and daily choices are damaging God's creation and producing an unjust world. Typically, we tend to think of the planet as a resource for our consumption, not a sacred gift placed in our stewardship. This mentality drives our economy and influences our purchasing decisions. In this materialistic culture, everything is designed to make us consumers.

The gospel challenges us to transform the way we understand, use, and consume the materials of this planet. Jesus spoke frequently about the dangers of excessive consumption. He warned of the spiritual peril brought on by too much stuff. Lent 4.5, a program of the Passionist Earth and Spirit Center, tries to be honest with what the gospel says about simplicity. It offers Christians practical ways to be different from our purchase-driven society. It is the path to a life that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich.

Simplicity has long been a noble Christian virtue. The gospel clearly places a priority on the reign of God and suggests that excessive attachment or hoarding material possessions can undermine the spiritual life (Lk 6:20-25). It abounds with injunctions to resist becoming a slave to belongings (Lk 16:13-15). It suggests that accumulating too many things can result in devastating anxiety (Mt 6:26-34). The many admonitions that warn against allowing wealth and over-consumption

to become a main concern are not legalistic axioms, but guideposts to a life of freedom and spiritual fulfillment (Mt 19:21-23).

Without simplicity, discipleship and progress in the spiritual life are not possible. Like the rich young man who was laden with an over-abundance of material possessions, we are inclined to hear the message of Jesus but forsake the path and "go away sad," for like him we are attached to many things (Mk 10:22). Jesus reassured those who remained, explaining how simplicity can foster a fulfilling life that nurtures the inner Spirit.

When viewed through the lens of the gospel, simplicity becomes liberating for the prosperous and life-affirming for those who are poor. Voluntarily choosing simplicity reorients our hearts toward finding a treasure that will never perish. At the same time, when the virtue of simplicity influences our personal consumption habits we can bring forth a more just society and protect God's creation for generations to come. Lent is a great time to start.

PROTECTING GOD'S CREATION & EMBRACING GOSPEL JUSTICE

Through a measuring tool called Global Footprint, we are able to assess the impact of various lifestyles upon the Earth. It is a complex process, but a simple formula. At present, there are approximately seven billion people on the planet. If we were to divide the Earth equally among all of us, four and one-half acres would be available to each person.

From that four and one-half acres each of us would have to find everything we need to cultivate our food, the space and materials to construct our home, the energy to heat and cool it, the water for our lawn and toilets, a place to dispose of our wastes, the timber or plastic to put together our furniture, the fibers to produce our clothes, the metals to manufacture our appliances and cars, the petroleum for our transportation, and anything needed to make our gadgets and "stuff." Four and one-half acres would be each person's fair-share.

The Global Footprint accounting tool enables us to measure how much of the planet's productive land and sea is required to support the average lifestyle of any country. We can use it to calculate how many acres it takes to support the lifestyle of

an individual, an industry or a country. According to 2009 data, the amount of acres it takes to support the average lifestyle varies greatly from country to country.

- ❖ Tanzania 2.6 acres
- ❖ Saudi Arabia 8.6 acres
- ❖ India 1.9 acres
- ❖ Japan 10.2 acres
- ❖ Mexico 8.0 acres
- ❖ Canada 14.2 acres
- ❖ United States 22.3 acres

Regardless of our personal habits of consumption, anyone who lives in North America benefits from the infrastructures, food choices, travel options, medical advantages, and conveniences of a standard of living that demands a lot more than four and one-half. However, if this amount is our fair share of the planet's resources, then others must do with less so we can maintain our level of affluence.

For a long time, many people thought that a just world would be achieved by lifting others up to our standard of living. We now know that is impossible, given the spatial restrictions and limited resources of the Earth. Estimates suggest that it would take four or five planets to accomplish that elevation in lifestyles. But we only have one.

In addition, the waters of our rivers, streams, and oceans are turning toxic because of harmful industrial chemicals. The number of large fish in the oceans has declined by two-thirds in the last 50 years due to intensive fishing. The purity of our air is becoming polluted with dangerous emissions. As the toxic burden accumulates in people's bodies, we are beginning to realize that humans cannot be healthy if they live on a sick planet.

We Christians in affluent countries have a faith problem. Anyone who follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ cannot remain distant or indifferent to the consumption habits of our country. How can we share our planet with 6.5 billion people in a way that enables all of us to live with dignity? How can we live in a way that protects God's creation? These concerns are the heart of Lent 4.5. Our observance of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent can become a direct response to global poverty and help restore the integrity of God's creation. |

Fr. Joseph Mitchell is a Passionist priest who is the Executive Director of the Passionist Earth and Spirit Center in Louisville, Kentucky. He studied theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and earned a graduate degree in Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness from the California Institute of Integral Studies. His ministry includes presenting retreats in Christian spirituality, meditation courses, religious environmental programs, as well as workshops in the new cosmology and Great Work.



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The Good Pope: The Making of a Saint & the Remaking of the Church—The Story of John XXIII & Vatican II

By Greg Tobin | Reviewed by Daniel Thomas



Greg Tobin, the author of both novels and nonfiction books on the papacy, describes the changes in the church brought about by Pope John XXIII stating that he moved it from “a Roman Catholic Church that appeared to many to be tired, stale, and defensive in its stance against perceived enemies...” to a “Church with a newfound confidence to become the shepherd for the whole world” (xi).

It is remarkable that this man, born to a peasant family of 13 children in rural reaches of northern Italy, became the Pope who impacted church and world, changing both by his personality and his decisions. The future pope was a soldier-hospital worker and chaplain during World War I.

In 1921, Monsignor Angelo Roncalli became “God’s traveler” (as Pope Benedict XV described him) for the Propaganda Fide in Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. His success

in this work led to his diplomatic career, which took him to Bulgaria (1925), Greece and Turkey (1934), and France. In each of these places, he became deeply involved with the ordinary people of that country. “Roncalli set about his mission of learning more about Bulgaria’s Catholics by journeying all over the country” (57). This was the method he used throughout his life.

In 1945, the future pope was appointed nuncio to Paris, where he dealt with Charles de Gaulle and the issue of the “collaborationist” clergy, the Soviet and Turkish ambassadors, the priest workers’ movement, and again meeting the ordinary French people. He lived his maxim: “To look at each other without mistrust; to come close to each other without fear; to help each other without surrender” (87).

In 1953, he became Patriarch of Venice, was made a cardinal, and began the final part of his journey to the Papacy. “The administration of the diocese and the thousands of demands on

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his time and attention were, to him, secondary to the primary task of tending to the spiritual needs of the people” (93).

At the death of Pope Pius XII, Cardinal Roncalli traveled to the conclave with a round-trip ticket in his pocket. Of the 20 potential popes, whose biographies were written by a Roman newspaper, his name was not mentioned. He was elected pope on October 28, 1958, to the surprise of nearly everyone.

His first year as pope was a whirlwind of activity; he called for an ecumenical council and issued three encyclicals (*Ad Petri cathedram*, *Sacerdotii nostri promordia*, and *Princeps pastorum*). In these, he “articulated the themes of his papal ministry and of the council to come: engagement with the secular world, understanding the ordained priesthood as a pillar of the Catholic faith, and evangelizing—spreading the faith—everywhere on earth” (130-1).

Another value of this book is the author’s summaries of *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris* along with all the other encyclicals of Pope John XXIII. He puts them in their context, summarizes their content, and describes the response they received from the world press.

Vatican II began October 11, 1962, with the incredible procession into St. Peter’s Basilica and the equally incred-

ible opening address of Pope John XXIII challenging “those prophets of doom, who are always forecasting disaster as though the end of the world were at hand.” His invitation to observers from other religions and his support of dialogue were signals of his openness to the signs of the time.

Pope John XXIII changed the church, not in its dogma and teachings, but with an attitude that touched all, whatever their position, with an earthy spirituality that was welcoming and open. “[H]e expressed simply and eloquently religious concepts of human dignity, compassion, and peace in the language of the Church and in words and images understood everywhere throughout the world by Catholics and non-Catholics alike” (244). He was truly “the good Pope.”

The Good Pope can be a significant contribution in beginning to understand what happened at Vatican II 50 years ago. Many of today’s Catholics have little understanding of its impact on the Roman Catholic Church and of the immense significance of Pope John XXIII. Here is a good place to start. ■

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

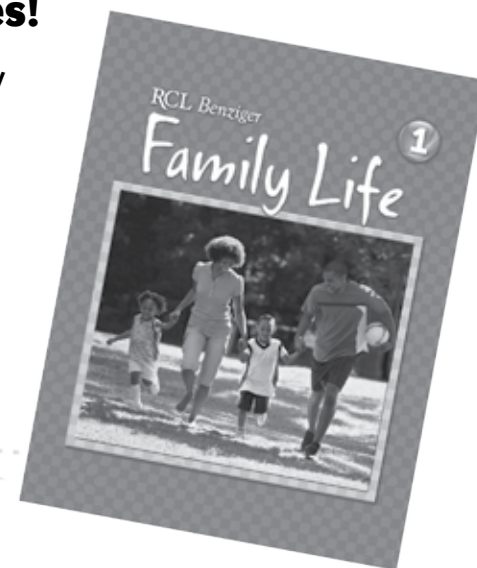
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Moving Home

Leisa Anslinger



My husband and I moved to a different city four years ago. The move was an experience of “good stress.” Our daughter was entering college; we downsized our house substantially; my husband was in a different office with new people, new professional expectations, and new daily rhythms. I traveled from a different airport. We immersed ourselves in a new parish community. We explored different cultural and artistic venues and learned to appreciate what our new city had to offer. We met new people and tried to make connections with them. And now, we have moved “home” to the city we left behind just four years ago.

Our lives of ministry are often filled with balance points: life in the parish or diocese, and life at home; juggling time between the people with whom we have relationships at home, at work, or in local or national ministerial organizations such as NCCL. Sometimes the balance seems easy, but often it is filled with daily priority decisions. At times we forget the same is true of every person we meet, particularly the parents with whom we interact.

People encounter numerous demands and are part of many communities, and finding the right balance can be key to bringing faith to life for each of us. The truth is, sometimes we forget that faith impacts all of the facets of our lives, or at least it should. We get focused on our little piece of the ministerial pie, or we focus on “service” within the church, and forget that the call to living faith is about *living*... 24/7, in every time, place, and circumstance. Called to holiness, we are called to help each other recognize God’s presence in the messy, complicated ordinariness of life. My pastor is fond of reminding married couples that their vocation is to live life helping their spouse get to heaven. Ahhh... or “ouch!” Do we really recognize the responsibility we have for one another’s life in Christ? How do we communicate this in a way that builds up the Body of Christ, the domestic church?

The move we recently made reminded me of the importance of “home,” and the realization that this is so much more about people, relationships, and the community of faith of which we are a part, and so much less about the building in which we live. Just as the Body of Christ is the people who

are the church, home is about presence, comfort, challenge; a place in which we live and move and have our being. Are we aware of this when we interact with parents, children, youth, or other adults? Do we remember that creating a community that is home for each and for all is among our highest callings? How is the community of faith a place that is home — a place where we are honest with each other, where we express the deepest of our desires, hopes, fears, and all that faith leads us to be and to do?

When we read the studies on religious life in America and we talk with one another about the role of catechetical leadership in our dioceses and parishes, it seems to me we might think about all of this in terms of *home*:

Sometimes the balance seems easy, but often it is filled with daily priority decisions.

❖ People want a community of faith in which they belong deeply. They want to meet people who know that *living* faith is truly possible.

❖ People are looking for real relationships, in which people hold one another accountable, ask each other to contribute, and know that every person matters.

❖ People notice others in the community who mirror the gospel with their living, in which Christ is the center, the beacon, and their sustenance. They will learn from those who allow the fullness of Christ’s life and love to shape who they are and how they live.

❖ People want to be cared for and recognized for all they are and do.

❖ In a conversation recently, a campus ministry pastor-friend was talking about this idea over dinner. He said that while we always begin with Jesus, we interact with others through a deep desire to meet *them*, hear their needs and hopes, and in so doing, meet Christ. “Our starting point is not what we know they need,” he explained. “Our beginning point must be the person, as a reflection of the great love God has for each of us.” And that, my friends and colleagues, is *home*. ■

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.

Vatican II: The Advent liturgy of this millennium

Bill Huebsch



"I'm just a CCD teacher," a 26-year-old woman at a parish in Wisconsin told me one night. "Why do I need to learn about Vatican II? And why on earth would I want to teach the kids today about it? They're not interested."

To many people, Vatican II is ancient history. But there is actually great value in knowing about and teaching about Vatican II.

We should all understand the vision of Pope John XXIII and why he called this remarkable council. It changes our approach to ministry when we understand what happened there. Keeping the vision before us, telling this story over and over again, knowing our history well — these are all ways to help make Vatican II powerfully effective.

"Vatican II," Pope John Paul II once remarked, "was the Advent liturgy of the new millennium." It is vital for us to understand and implement this council at every level of church ministry and faith formation.

EVERYONE IS AFFECTED BY VATICAN II

It is our task to extend the renewal launched by Vatican II into the ministry of faith formation, to make sure we present the faith and ritual of the church in accessible language for modern Catholics.

What were some shifts in focus resulting from the Council? How did we re-imagine ourselves, re-describe ourselves, and re-understand ourselves as a result of Vatican II? And what does this have to do with our ministry in catechesis and faith formation?

GRACE

One of the most fundamental shifts that occurred at Vatican II is in our understanding of grace. Our new understanding of grace has significantly changed how we go about the business of pastoral ministry.

Grace is God communicating God's own Loving Self to us. God offers God's self to every human, not just to Catholics. To be conceived is to be offered grace. It's experienced as a loving, divine energy (or power) that fills us. It's absolutely free and it cannot be earned. It comes from God alone. The church leads us to discover grace by providing "moments of grace" through education, liturgy, and social teaching.

What this means for religious education is exciting! It means we must allow ourselves and our students to encounter the very person of Jesus Christ, not a theology system or a cat-

echism book. Encountering a person means developing an ongoing relationship. It means spending time together. How can we do this? How can we add the opportunity to encounter Christ to our current way of teaching?

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

We have that beautiful description of the church as the People of God in the Constitution on the Church, chapter two. What a major change in thinking! And yet, when we teach about the church and the church's teachings, most of the time we refer to the church as something outside ourselves, normally meaning "the people in Rome who run the church's central office." When we say, "the church teaches this or that," we mean "the magisterium in Rome teaches this or that..." It's them, but not us. After so many centuries of having it the other way around, it's difficult to think of ourselves as the church. We forget that *we are the Church*. How can we help our learners see themselves *as church*?

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

Also in the document on the church (chapter five) we find that lovely section calling *everyone* to holiness — a major shift in Catholic thinking. And the greatest way to live in holiness, the document tells us, is to live in *love*. This universal call to holiness has radical implications for pastoral ministry. The bottom line is this: This loving presence of God is already active and powerfully present in the lives of those learners whom we face every week. God, in other words, is acting in the lives of those people. God is not absent or distant. God is there and active. So no matter what else we do with those who come to learn, how can we help them discover the presence of God?

IN SUM

The four constitutions of the Second Vatican Council remain the normative guide for the modern church. They're also at the very heart of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Nothing about this Council has been lost — and the church has gained much in the past 50 years. Let's use this anniversary period as a time to teach about and implement more fully all the Council teaches.

Of course, I didn't give this whole answer to that catechist in Wisconsin. I simply said to her that night, "If it weren't for Vatican II, you probably wouldn't even be a catechist!" She paused for a moment eyeing me, and then said, "You're right, I guess. So what else did Vatican II do?" ■

Bill Huebsch directs the work of the online pastoral center at PastoralPlanning.com in partnership with 23rd Publications.

Getting Read on the Digital Continent

Russell Peterson



Sometimes I feel like my comments on Twitter are not being read by anyone; and there is a decent chance that I am correct. I tend to get on Twitter late at night and retweet an item or two and maybe add a comment of my own. I have noticed that when I am scanning down the tweets, it takes a while to get to 12 hours ago. I am following less than 100 people and organizations, but some of them seem to tweet very, very often. I lose interest in the tweets after a few minutes, and I rarely look at all of the tweets that I have received since my last time logged in.

If others are using Twitter in a similar fashion, I am only being read by the other night owls who happen to be on Twitter when I am. By morning, the stream of messages have buried my contributions. Facebook is not much better for me. I rarely get any likes or comments for messages that I post. Pictures and charts, however, do get some feedback. If I posted pictures of animals, I think I would get many likes and comments.

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE READ

I recently met with the marketing director for the Catholic camp in my diocese, and during the conversation he talked about best practices on Facebook. I was most interested. First, he stated that he has a variety of administrators so that the page does not get stale and administrators do not burn out. He added that the goal is to get fans to post comments and hopefully have them interact with each other through those comments. To achieve this goal, pictures and questions are more successful than comments or other styles of posts. He then began explaining reach and other Facebook terms that are part of the administrator tools. Afterwards, I went and checked these tools for the first time on a fanpage for which I am an administrator. It has been fascinating to learn which posts create an impact and which have no response; even more interesting has been watching the charts fluctuate up and down as the interest ebbs and wanes.

The time of day of a post is crucial for the success of the post. Whether success is determined by being read, clicks of “like,” or increasing reach, the basic fact is that posts are most effective when posted while people are on Facebook. Knowing your audience is important. Do the adults you are seeking tend to be on Facebook during the day or during their children’s sports practices? Teens are most likely to be on Facebook right after school. Putting your messages out when

people are on Facebook helps you from being lost. The same basic insight is true for Twitter.

BAD COMMUNICATION IS STILL BAD COMMUNICATION

Being on the digital continent through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media is a grand waste of time if your message is hastily crafted or poorly timed. Jared Dees, in a podcast for Ave Maria Press, stated that e-books and the Internet will not make all teachers into great teachers. Instead, his assertion was that it will make bad teachers worse and good teachers great. This is consistent with my experience visiting classrooms. The skills of the teacher and the quality of the lesson plan are amplified by technology; the Internet amplifies more than it transforms.

I am growing in the conviction that the same is true for parish communication and messaging. Those who have been crafting poor announcements and haphazard newsletters are not going to be suddenly great communicators because of social media. The ways of effective communication are expanded by social media. The reality, or effective and ineffective means of communication, remains the same. The need to study best practices is increased and the importance of a communication plan is more obvious.

HAVE A PLAN AND STUDY BEST PRACTICES

Social media provides a great opportunity for evangelization, catechesis, and communication with those we directly serve and, potentially, a wider audience. Without a communication plan and a knowledge of best practices, it is unlikely that the opportunity will be grasped. This is not a one-person endeavor. It is an area where collaboration and teamwork are extremely beneficial. Simply knowing when to post will be helpful. Knowing how to post will increase the effect. Learning and following best practices as well as having a team of administrators will further increase the probability of success. Social media is communication and good communication requires work and skill. ■

Russell Peterson is the associate director of catechesis for the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois. Contact him at RPeterson@diobelle.org.

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

Catholic Press Association Award Winners 2012

Here are just a few selections of over 50 titles that received Catholic Press Association book awards in June 2012. For a complete list, visit catholicpress.org.

Please share these recommendations with your catechists as well as with all members of your parish.

Why Stay Catholic? Michael Leach, Loyola Press, Chicago, IL.

This book resonates with the practical, the joyous, the spirit-lifting, and the reality of what it means to live as a Catholic even if Catholicism is something to which you have given little or no thought or believe you have given up following.

Practice Makes Catholic. Joe Paprocki, Loyola Press, Chicago, IL.

Designed to appeal to the eye and to the intermittent reader, Paprocki's book is a guide to the daily practice of Catholicism. It is rich with information, wit, and wisdom and short on preachy-ness.

Finding God in the Dark II: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Movies. John Pungente, SJ & Monty Williams, SJ, Novalis Publishing, Toronto, ON, Canada.

The authors' selection of films and their ability to connect the cinematic stories with the themes of the Spiritual Exercises is truly astounding. It is hard to do justice to the incredible accomplishment that this book represents.

Between Heaven and Mirth. James Martin, SJ, HarperOne, San Francisco, CA.

Rev. James Martin delivers an amusing and insightful look at the role of joy in spiritual life. Learn how to deepen your relationship with God and live a more joyful life through embracing humor.

The Monastery of the Heart. Joan Chittister, Bluebridge, Katonah, NY.

Chittister leads her readers to contemplate important and essential truths, not so much with the multiplication of words, but rather with strong images that tug at the heart. This book invites the reader to take small bits of wisdom and savor them.

Praying with the Earth. John Philip Newell, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.

This compact prayer book for peace incorporates beautiful artwork, prayers, and wisdom from the Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The morning and evening prayers for each day of the week seek to heal division and highlight a common spiritual desire for peace.

The Church and the New Media. Brandon Vogt, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, Huntington, IN.

The information provided in this book leads the reader not only to an understanding of the need for the church to be deeply involved in the digital revolution, but also offers practical suggestions for parishes as well as individuals to utilize this new media.

The Emerging Catholic Church. Tom Roberts, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

A picture of the Catholic Church is presented in a readable style in this compact volume, and will be of great importance to any dialogue. An easy read of not-so-easy topics; a real winner.

Grace Notes. Brian Doyle, ACTA Publications, Chicago, IL.

Brian Doyle is a gifted writer who has used his enviable skill to release the inner light that shines through daily realities. The reader will be touched by his stories and become more aware that life is filled with grace.

The Heart of a Priest. Paul LaPorte, Fr. Edwin Thome, Mission Communications, Traverse City, MI.

The Catholic faith endures in the hearts and hands of individuals. This is the moving story of a priest who quietly brought Christ's love and mercy to the mentally disabled, sick, and poor, and has been compared to Mother Teresa.

Children's Books

Images of God for Young Children. Marie-Hélène Delval, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.

This is an incredibly inspiring book illustrating the message that God is in everything and everyone we encounter, and that God is now. Timely, biblically based, and easily understood, children of all ages can hear the Word as it relates to them and the world in which they live.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. Anne E. Neuberger, Illustrated by Kevin Davidson, Novalis Publishing, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

This wonderful story of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is an inspiring story of faith, hope, and strength. Illustrations vividly depict the story of the first Native American saint.

The Ten Marys and the Angel Gabriel. Aurora Magni; illustrated by Francesca Vignaga, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ.

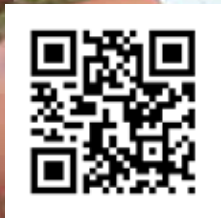
This charming story of perseverance, patience, and possibilities will capture the attention and imagination of children of all ages. ■

*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.*

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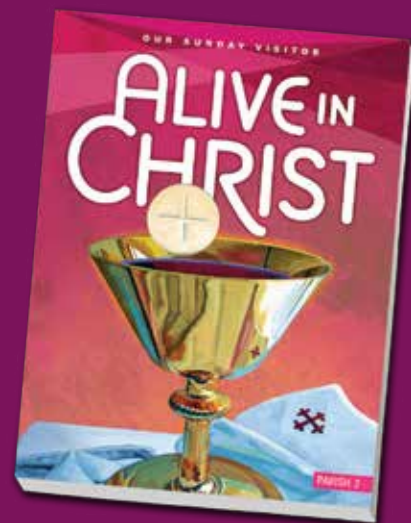
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