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**CATECHETICAL
LEADER**



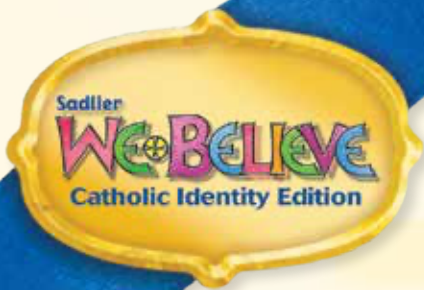
INNOVATIVE
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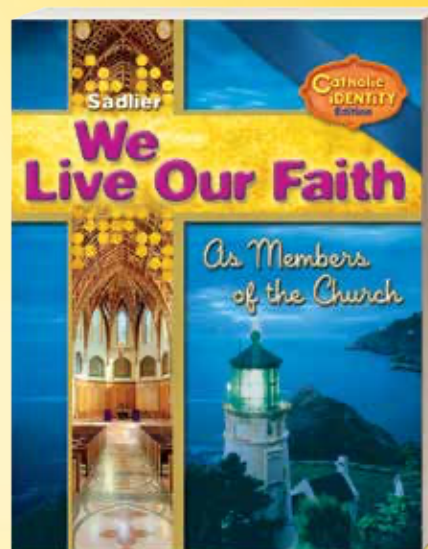
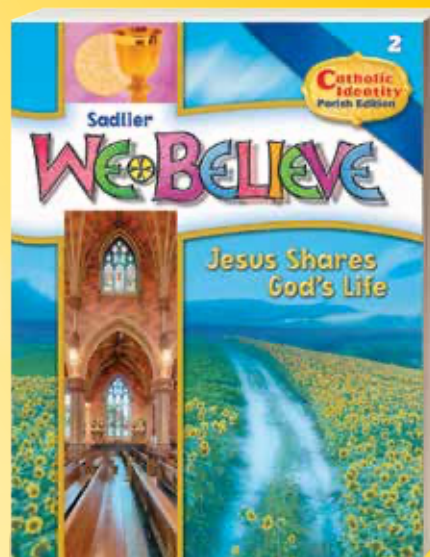


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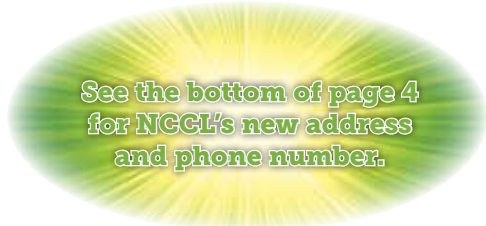
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for NCCL's new address
and phone number.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES

Ken Ogorek



National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



NCCL executive director, Margaret Matijasevic, challenged us at the annual meeting in Buffalo to include our bishops as members of NCCL. By extension, I encourage PCLs to keep pastors in the loop regarding our organization. Whether PCL or diocesan director, please share the letter below such that our chief shepherds and catechists feel the same enthusiasm for NCCL that our gathering in Buffalo — and our upcoming conference in Jacksonville — instilled and will inspire for our ministry.

Dear Bishops of the USA,

Will you continue praying for authentic catechetical renewal?

My name is Ken Ogorek, and recently I was elected to a three-year term as president of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL). NCCL's newly-elected slate of officers ran with a message that some changes might be in order for the organization to navigate the realities of catechesis in our time.

Specifically, as baby-boomers transition to retirement, young adult catechetical leaders — whose zeal for the faith you likely know well — must be welcomed to NCCL via intentional outreach and a warm embrace throughout all of our conference activities. NCCL has done some good work in the past by God's grace; we need your support to instill a sense of missionary discipleship through excellent catechesis for years to come.

So I ask for specific action on your part:

- * Please continue praying for authentic catechetical renewal in God's holy Catholic Church. We have Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium's guidance to equip us for ministry; surely your prayers combined with those of many will help NCCL's efforts bear good fruit.
- * Encourage your diocesan catechetical director and staff to be involved members of NCCL. We evaluate our efforts constantly, rejoicing when helpful actions are affirmed and adjusting when what we do isn't resonating with those who share

the deposit of faith such that our most precious treasure — Jesus Christ — lives as Lord and Master for each current and prospective disciple participating in catechesis.

Thank you in advance for your ongoing prayers and intentional encouragement of NCCL as our country's premier professional organization for those serving in catechetical ministry. With filial affection, I am,

Prayerfully yours in Jesus,

Ken Ogorek

President, National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

GRATITUDE, PROMISES, GENERATIONS

Thanks, Lorraine et al!

One of my fondest hopes in running for NCCL president was that some honest conversations would occur about the future of our organization. Those conversations occurred thanks in large part to the articulateness and availability of Lorraine DeLuca's slate during our annual meeting in Buffalo. Our members owe Lorraine, Mike, Mary Fran, and Michelle a debt of gratitude for their service to NCCL — past, present, and future!

WE WILL FULFILL...

Our slate — Libia, Ellie, Jayne, and I — made promises en route to being elected president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. We promised to seek ways of honoring NCCL members transitioning toward retirement. We promised to use the data in A Crucial Key (NCEA 2009) to reach younger generation Xers and millennials more effectively. We promised to help our executive director focus on generating new members, a crucial key to NCCL's future if there ever was one!

Now is the time to move toward fulfilling those promises. If you have ideas for how NCCL can and should walk the journey toward retirement with our senior members, please email them to me: kogorek@archindy.org. While I can't promise that each idea will come to fruition (that's above my pay grade), I assure you that all will be heard. ■

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CONVERSION AND MISSION

Margaret Matijasevic



Pope Francis tells us, “[There] are two elements which are essential for Christian life: *conversion* and *mission*. These are intimately connected. In fact, without an authentic conversion of heart and mind, the Gospel cannot be proclaimed; at the same time, if we are not open to mission, conversion is not possible and faith becomes sterile” (Address to Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, Nov 2014).

As hands are outstretched to commission and bless thousands of catechists this September, we earnestly pray for the desire for ongoing conversion of hearts, and its effect on mission. We trust and believe that God will touch the hearts of these individuals, penetrating their being to reveal Christ’s mercy and love as they echo the faith. But for the catechist, is there recognition of the answer to this fervent prayer for an ongoing conversion experience to penetrate their ministries?

ONGOING CONVERSION

To recognize this experience of ongoing conversion is not often as expected, as it is reminiscent of the surprising envelopment of self in the other when falling in love. A description of such entry into love doesn’t necessarily have a recognizable beginning or end; it’s an ongoing, organic experience of expression of the innermost self, which finds freedom in the discovery of wonderment in being alive alongside another.

Ongoing conversion is much the same. There is no particular moment of beginning or ending, but there is an open reception to encountering Christ all around; a fluidity of relational expressions between persons of all ages and genders, walks of life, and cultural manifestation. A deeper loving of humanity. A wider recognition of Christ. A freer expression of the self as God created it to be.

Pope Francis models such in his very public expression of ongoing conversion. He enters into encounters with various

figures, from world leaders to the poorest ones suffering. He transitions seamlessly between the barriers of humanity, and places his authenticity in its depths, with gentle embraces and astute words of seemingly ordinary wisdom. The joy-filled, authentic ripples of such is grace, exposed on the tenderness of our Pope’s face, and is the call of all catechists.

CONVERSION REQUIRES RISK

Just like love though, conversion requires risk. It requires reaching beyond boundaries and limitations, touching the fringes of the human experience. It requires a missionary zeal that dares to be vulnerable and bold altogether. A recent conversation about the canonization of Junipero Serra was challenging, as it required a facing into the definition of a modern missionary. Images flashed during this experience: The migrant, traveling across the country barefoot in burning sand to provide for their families; the trafficked person clinging to hope despite the misery of their forced living conditions; The innocent hand of a child offering food to a homeless person; The catechist creatively planning, searching profusely through resources, for ways the gospel can be heard by those whom they serve. A missionary is someone who is sent forth to realities that are beyond their grasping, and still models hope through the essence of the gospel.

As the commissioning of catechists is celebrated this Catechetical Sunday, perhaps the prayer of conversion and mission is not one we only extend formally to those who dedicate themselves to catechesis, but also one we offer to all of us, living the experience of hope-filled clinging in our families, workplaces, within the heart of society, as well as on the fringes. This is the call of the Christian witness: conversion within relationship and missioning into the extraordinariness of the gospel message! ■

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Sharing the Great Story

David Loftus



In her widely-read, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell offers a challenge to believers everywhere. She invites us, or rather dares us, to learn to articulate our story in the light of the Great Story of Jesus. I believe that Weddell has hit upon one of the crucial elements of sharing faith authentically. It is to

our own detriment that we find ourselves as “catechetical leaders” with all the skill and knowledge necessary to communicate the teachings of the church, but without having developed the essential skill of sharing our own story of encounter with Jesus. How can we possibly hope to give an account of the reason for our hope (1Pet 3:15) if we have not learned to articulate our experience of that hope? The seemingly elusive promise of great catechesis in our time is not a result of the stereotypical weaknesses of the catechetical enterprise perceived by many on both the “right” and the “left.” Rather, I am beginning to question whether the poverty of our efforts lies precisely in that we neglect a truly comprehensive approach to our mission and ministry by avoiding the sharing of our personal witness. Perhaps we struggle to recognize in our own lives our encounters with the living Christ? Perhaps we struggle to share those narratives as we share the faith that has been shared with us? Perhaps we have relied too often on sharing the doctrines of our faith without sharing its heart? Perhaps we have relied too often on sharing what our church teaches and presumed too much that people have already met the person who inspires our church?

What follows is my own effort to begin such a narrative. It is not intended as a theological treatment, nor as a catechetical blueprint of any kind. It is simply an effort to share the work of God in my own life, joining the dots between lived experience and faith, between my life and the life of the Incarnate One. Perhaps it will prompt others to similarly share.

EXPLORING THE MOVEMENTS OF THE STORY

I enjoyed a good childhood. There was nothing special about our family. I was born the eldest of six children to my parents,

though the last to be born, Mary, didn’t survive but a couple of days. So as siblings, we usually speak of five children. I grew up in a small village in the rural West of Ireland, where my parents had been raised. My grandparents lived nearby, my maternal grandparents only a few hundred yards down the street, and my paternal grandparents not half a mile away. As the first-born grandson I enjoyed not a little favor at the hands and hearts of my grandparents.

My dad’s dad had a small contracting business. He handled mostly small-scale construction jobs within a 50-mile radius or so, and it wasn’t uncommon for him to come by our house and collect me to take me with him to various job locations. On one occasion, when I was about eight-years-old, I travelled with my grandfather to a jobsite on a nearby island. This island was

connected to the mainland by a bridge, and the jobsite was a schoolhouse located on the western side of the island. As such, the schoolyard opened right onto the great North Atlantic. There was a small grassy play area outside the school, bounded by a wall about three feet high. Beyond that was a small cliff-drop to the ocean.

On this particular day, the weather wasn’t the best. There were rain showers coming in off the ocean and the skies were grey. At one point, I was outside on my own. I remember standing in the doorway of the schoolhouse looking out at the ocean. There was an overhang protecting me from the light rain. As I looked westward, I could see darker clouds making their way ashore and I could see a literal wall of water where it was obvious that the rain was about to get heavier. I was drawn out of my shelter in the doorway, and the next thing I knew I was standing on the wall watching the storm move toward shore.

I stood there watching as the wind and rain blew against me, partly held by the winds as I leaned into them. And as the storm made landfall — with heavy rain and gusting wind — there I was on the wall enjoying the magnificence of it all. And in that moment, I saw how small and insignificant I was in relation to the strong permanence of the land beneath me, in

*And as the storm made landfall —
with heavy rain and gusting wind
— there I was on the wall enjoying the
magnificence of it all.*



relation to the vast ocean that seemed to have no end before me, in relation to the power of the crashing tide on the cliff below me, and in relation to the unstoppable storm which surrounded me. Still, in that moment, the world became a small place, as I was enfolded in the certainty of a presence, about me and through me.

For the first time, on my own — without parent, priest, teacher, nor catechist to tell me — I encountered the living God. It was God's presence that made the powers of nature seem so small to my childhood reality. Standing atop the small wall looking into the Atlantic Storm crashing onto Achill Island, wave after wave of wind and rain, I felt loved, cherished, and totally embraced by a God who kissed me that day. From that day forward I have never questioned the existence of God. I have felt close and far-removed at various points in my life, but never have I doubted the reality of the One whose presence overwhelmed me and filled me up on that particular day.

A CHANGE IN DIRECTION

Since then, I have come to appreciate the subtle yet profound disturbance in my life that experience birthed within me. The truth is that from that day onward, I was going to seek out and discover this God. I determined at a relatively young age that I wanted to know this God better. As a teen, that meant asking people and reading. My parents had fostered a voracious appetite for reading within me and I read everything I could understand that would help me to come to know and understand this God better. I was a torment to my parents and a scourge to my teachers. Every priest I met was targeted with

questions at one point or another. I read books, newspapers, magazines, and novels — whatever it was that seemed to draw my attention in the direction of this God who came to greet me as a child. Looking back, I can say that it was this insatiable desire for encounter that drew me to consider spending time in a seminary.

I really didn't want to become a priest; I was to be a civil engineer and create massive transportation hubs. But the more I studied and learned, the more enmeshed in my search I became. I had no intention of becoming a priest, but somehow it just followed that my particular path led me along this particular journey. I had no desire to work with people, or even to spend time with them. My introversion shied away from the public work that is so characteristic of being a priest among God's people. I had no desire to serve the poor, to work away from home, to shelter the indigent or accompany the lost; I just wanted to come to know God better.

Thus, it was revealed to me, the great irony of my life! I could only come to know God better by coming to know and serve his people, my people. It was a con of immense proportions, to my mind. It was unfair and simply not on. Years later I would read the story of Jacob wrestling the angel of God in the night and of God's cheating him (Gen 32:25-31), and I would nod my head knowingly, "yes!" I had learned that sometimes God is prone to cheating in order to have his way. Good to know for future reference.

So it was that I found myself in a seminary, with access to all sorts of learning in books and in experiences. I found myself

developing skills to better enable me to discern and discover. And gradually, I came to understand that God was toying with me, dancing ahead of me, as though just around the corner of my vision. Eventually, I came to understand that if I was to come to know God, really, if I was to enter into a relationship with this game-player, I would do so only by letting go of the plans I had in store for my own life and recklessly abandoning myself to his promptings.

Looking back, I have to say my years at All Hallows seminary were some of the happiest of my life. It was there I learned to greet both success and failure in my life; I began to understand and at once be completely amazed with human nature, and I was introduced to the person of Jesus as an adult. As a child, I had learned stories about Jesus and had a basic grasp of the story — or so I thought. Now, in seminary, I had the opportunity to study great minds of people who developed relationships with Jesus and who had lots to say about him. I confess I was really drawn to those subjects that talked mostly ‘about’ Jesus. It is a small regret to me that I didn’t pay more attention to Scripture at the time; I later learned it is in the lived experience of the person that God becomes fully alive. This is why I am so often feeling I’m behind the curve in coming to know Jesus. The old adage attributed to St. Jerome has it right: ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

The first time I considered some foundational questions for each of the gospels was an eye-opening experience for me. Learning to appreciate the relevance of the answers behind seeming simple questions like when, where, and for whom was this written brought me to delight in the nuance as the person of Jesus began to explode off the pages in front of me. I came to understand it most likely that none of the writers of the gospels were actual witnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus; once the initial shock wore off, I came to understand the delicate implications of these master narrators for tracing the story of my own encounters with the living Christ. As each of the gospels portrayed a profoundly significant image of Jesus, I began to explore my own image of Jesus, and to understand that we all develop such images, and they’re not always as similar as we might like to think. I also came to understand my need to pay closer attention to the context within which Jesus lived and acted. Where I neglected context, I usually deepened my misunderstandings. And how I would learn to share my story of Jesus would require an attentiveness to, and a care for, those who would be listening to my story.

ENCOUNTERING JESUS

All that we learned in the seminary only began to make sense to me much later. While on internship in a parish in South Central Los Angeles a little over a year before my ordination, I came to the realization that I was horribly unprepared

for priestly service. I remember writing to the rector at the seminary and expressing this sentiment with no small disappointment. His sage response has remained with me since and has served me well. “David”, he wrote, “seminary can’t prepare you for priesthood. It can only offer you a variety of tools that may be of service to you. It is God’s people who will make a priest of you, not us.”

It wasn’t until after I was ordained that the language and the arcane philosophical debates began to bear some semblance of connectedness to life. Newly arrived in a place thousands of miles from my home, family, and any real support structure, I began to enter upon a life of ministry with and among God’s people. The words of our seminary rector were shown to be true.

My first shock came to me with all the force of a realization I’d rather deny. I came to love these odd people, even though they drove me to distraction at times. These were God’s people as surely as I was God’s beloved child. Each and every one of them was as precious to God as I was. This opened my eyes to the basic truth that Jesus uttered, to the mission that he said he came to fulfill. His own heart was so moved for the people of his own time, I knew exactly what was meant when we read in Matthew’s Gospel:

*I came to love these odd people,
even though they drove me to distraction
at times. These were God’s people
as surely as I was God’s beloved child.*

At that time Jesus said in reply, “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes,

Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light. (11: 25-30)

His proclamation of the kingdom of God was a very simple one: God is love and God loves each of us. Our origin and our destiny both lie in God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:16-17).

This is the truth of our reality and it can neither be changed nor altered in any way by anyone. It is God’s gift and work to and for us. This is the heart of the message of Jesus’ own proclamation of the kingdom of God among us.

Not only did Jesus preach the kingdom of God with his teachings and his parables, but he went further and showed us how

this works. He showed us what the kingdom of God looks like whenever he rolled his eyes with exasperation at his disciples, whenever he laid his hands on the eyes of a blind person, or the ears of a deaf person. He showed us that the kingdom of heaven is alive and bubbling over with joy as the lepers arrived home to their families and friends and took their place in the communities that once expelled them. He showed us that the kingdom of heaven is alive whenever we don't turn our backs on one of those weird people in church, the mentally ill among us, when we hold hands with and hug the stranger in the pew with us, or when we give a helping hand to the dejected soul at the end of the freeway off-ramp.

THE FACE OF JESUS: THE FACE OF COMPASSION

One of the more challenging and, at the same time, life-giving aspects of my ministry is that I am present with people in some of their most difficult struggles in life. This is where you will find many priests acknowledging that we feel most like a priest in these moments. We are most like Jesus in the lives of our people when we encounter them in moments of healing. It is a grace with which God has abundantly blessed me, and I can never express the profundity of my gratitude for the blessing adequately. When I speak of these moments of healing, I am particularly speaking of those moments in which we manifest and encounter the presence of Christ in the lives of those who are physically ill, and perhaps facing their mortality, as well as those moments where people face their spiritual illnesses and are facing their mortality in a different way.

In the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, I find myself accompanying people in their illness, often in the more acute moments. When I am called to the bedside of someone facing the possible end of their life, it is a grace to whisper words of prayer and consolation to the dying, but also to the living. I remember that sacraments are for the living, and not for the dead. I see the compassion of Christ enfolding family members in hospital rooms and blessing those present with an invitation into love — love of the person they are releasing, love of the God who blessed us with their life, love of one another in our pain and letting go, love of our neighbors who all walk the paths we ourselves walk. To be sure, I also see the terror and fear, as well as the inconsolable in people. But it's not for me to save the world. That responsibility falls to Jesus; I am simply his disciple and servant.

In the sacrament of reconciliation I find myself accompanying people in a similar way. Here though, the immanent death is not terminal as much as yielding to new life. As I have experienced many times as penitent, I also experience as confessor, the boundless grace of God restoring people to the life to which he calls us. I remember always the words of

the gospel where Jesus reminds us: "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:9-10).

My humble service in this moment of divine human encounter that we call "sacrament" is to bear witness to this simple truth. No matter what choices we make in life, no matter what decisions seem to draw us farther from life in God, we are never abandoned by God and so whenever we turn toward him once more, no matter how far we've walked away, there he is at our shoulder, ready and waiting to embrace. The incarnate God is no farther from us than our own skin.

AFTERWORD

The story of our salvation is narrated in Scripture, in our rich and varied rituals, and in the very living of our lives. The goodness and love of God may often be questioned in our times because of the challenges we encounter. The truth is our questions do nothing to diminish the reality of the mystery of God among us. Our occasional willfulness may lead us to

One of the more challenging and, at the same time, life-giving aspects of my ministry is that I am present with people in some of their most difficult struggles in life.

doubt and to wrestle with the divine, but it is important for us to note that our willfulness is matched only by the relentless pursuit of God — God comes, God seeks us, God finds us, and always draws us back toward him, until we finally are in a place where we can acknowledge the love of God in our lives.

What does it mean to say God loves us? What does it mean to say that Jesus died for us, that Jesus is risen from the dead? So what? So everything! This is the Great Story.

No matter what happens in our world, no matter how crazy our world is, no matter what evil comes to confront us in our lives, no matter how many are martyred for their faith, no matter how brutally we treat one another, the love of God is greater than our willfulness. The passion of God for us is stronger than the most powerful evil. Even death itself is conquered by the love of God made flesh in Jesus. That is the power of the resurrection. Even death itself is made to be nothing in the light of God's love for us. There is nothing that can keep us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And that is great news. This is indeed a Great Story and it demands to be shared. ■

A priest of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and a graduate of both All Hallows College, Dublin and of Boston College, Fr. David Loftus currently serves as pastor for Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Northridge, CA. Previously he served in the Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education as coordinator and consultant for Catechist Formation and for Adult Religious Education.

Invest in the Church Today for a Better Tomorrow: U.S.-Born Hispanic Youth

Miriam Hidalgo



When you walk into my office, one of the first things you will find is a bulletin board full of important articles of importance to me, some more personal than professional. For example, there is a small article called “Portrait of a Director” which details an interview with my mother when she was a diocesan director of Hispanic ministry. Several hashtags and their significance have taken over my bulletin board, including #BringBackOurGirls, #ICan’tBreathe, and #NoMore, just to name a few. On another small paper I have the words: *Our Food and Our Faith*, a movement my sister and I are launching which is about the decisions we make — *as Christians* — about what we *eat*. At the very top of my bulletin board you will find a black-and-white photocopy of an article called “Hispanic youth are the U.S. church’s best investment.” The article appeared in the *National Catholic Reporter* on September 7, 2007 and was written by Rev. Kenneth G. Davis. Even after moving seven times to four different states, I have managed to keep this article as a reminder to never lose my focus and to keep working on what I am most passionate about. It reminds me of the reason why I studied theology and pursued a degree and vocational career in ministry.

In May 2014, I was sponsored by Loyola Press to present a learning session in both English and in Spanish for NCCL. I chose the topic of my presentation to be about the immediate and effective ministry needed for U.S.-born Hispanic youth. I believe that if we truly want to see the U.S. Catholic Church alive and well in the future, we need to invest in this particular group, *now* rather than later. Franciscan Kenneth G. Davis, whom I have never had the privilege to meet and personally thank, could not have written a better article on the importance of an urgent and resourceful ministry to Hispanic youth. His article, which included statistics of that year as well as some of the findings from the 2006 Encuentro, left quite the impression on me, and though it was short and sweet, it has always motivated me and given me hope.

THE JOURNEY

My parents came to the U.S. from Guatemala but my siblings and I were born and raised in tiny Rhode Island. We grew up in a strict Catholic home; my mother was always involved in ministry so the parish was like our second home. Something

I remember doing as a teenager very often after Sunday Mass was hiding from the usual clique of young adult parishioners who were always hunting me and my siblings down in order to invite us to the parish youth groups. What held us back from attending these gatherings was the Spanish language. Although as children we spoke Spanish very well, as teens we began to speak it less. But before we knew it, we were in *el grupo juvenil* and it was at these gatherings that I began to appreciate my faith *and* my culture.

Faith was no longer something my parents had to force upon me because I began to embrace it on my own and I was proud of my ethnicity. Although the discussions and topics that were covered during these gatherings were quite strong and very direct (teen pregnancy, drug use, violence, poverty, death, peer pressure, etc.), I felt comfortable. These topics were issues that had arisen within my own extended family and even at school. I began to enjoy the presence of my peers; we all desired to know more about Christ and we were still questioning our faith but willing to do *something*. Our pastor and adults in the parish played key roles in our formation because they were very supportive and always present.

After some time, my mother and the youth leaders began to encourage me to participate in youth ministry events in the English language for two reasons: because I was fluent, and so that there would be some kind of Hispanic presence at those events. The two ministries differed in so many ways. One example was that most youth ministry events were facilitated by adults. Overall, I was able to fit in when the time came; I was sometimes uncomfortable but did my best to participate. Having gone through youth ministry and *pastoral juvenil*, I decided to form a ministry specifically for U.S.-born Hispanic youth at my home parish. I used the organizational skills I acquired in youth ministry and the spiritually enriching piece I gained from *pastoral juvenil* to form this new ministry. I continued to work with Hispanic youth at the diocesan level and tried to make sure we were reaching out to U.S.-born Hispanic youth by making our events a little more bilingual and bicultural. Still, there were always more immigrant youth in the Hispanic events, and Anglo youth in the English-language events. Where was my generation?

BUMPY ROAD

My experience growing up in ministry was not always positive, especially since I was exposed to both ministries. We



— Hispanic youth— were always placed at the bottom of the ministry chain. I remember being treated as lower-class delinquents who were eventually going to steal or destroy something. Yes, we were always grateful to be given opportunities for retreats and enrichment — but it was a constant battle. For example, many of the young Latinos (please note that not all) came from low-income families, were undocumented, or from single-parent homes; but most of the Anglo youth came primarily from middle to upper-class families and two-parent homes. Even with this information, Hispanic youth events were still being offered at the same cost as our Anglo counterparts. Due to these circumstances, the youth leaders would hold fundraisers, food sales, and at times, we even gave from our own pockets so that we could hold our events. Our retreats would be full and we never turned anyone away who showed up at the door; instead we made sacrifices to give them our beds because we knew we could easily just sleep on the floor and skip a few meals so that the participants could eat. We were scolded for these actions yet denied the opportunity to offer more of these retreats throughout the year.

I remember a particular time when I asked those in authority if we could use colored ink for our brochures so that the Latin American flags on the brochures would be distinguishable. Our request was denied because “the cost would be too high,” yet we knew that the English-language brochures were made of a glossy paper, full of color, pictures, and overall, very attractive. I also remember times when we asked for material for our retreats and were told that we could use whatever was “left over” from the English-language retreat. There were countless times we were accused of stealing objects or food from the retreat centers and parish halls, or breaking things; I even remember being accused of moving objects one inch from their original location. These were incidents that I, or other leaders, tried to deal with quickly and privately, yet it always reached the wider youth community. I could remember

the haunting words a young Latino teen once said: “If we can’t feel welcome in the church, then we shouldn’t be here.” Efforts were always made on our part to continue our outreach and ministry to Hispanic youth, despite the discrimination we faced with those at the decision-making level.

JUST THROWING IT OUT THERE

In the article previously mentioned, Fr. Davis made the following daring remarks:

“The future of the church in the United States will be largely determined by our ability to form leaders, both clerical and lay, from this generation of Hispanics. Hence, wise stewards must ask: Why do we continue to invest disproportionate amounts of Catholic youth ministry resources in non-Hispanics? Can we invest more in this booming youth market for our faith? These leaders respond enthusiastically to investments made in them.

The truth is that there *are* amazing results when effective and intentional ministry is provided to Hispanic youth. This includes formation in lay leadership and religious vocations at the parish and diocesan levels. I do not think Fr. Davis was suggesting we completely ignore non-Hispanic youth, but I do believe he was suggesting that we stop ignoring Hispanic youth. To prioritize one group over the other is simply wrong!

One of the first strong comments Fr. Davis made in the article was the following: “One cannot do Hispanic Ministry without including youth nor can one do Catholic youth ministry without including Hispanics.” This continues to be an unresolved issue. Our Hispanic Catholic community often gets too caught up with ministering to the first-generation Catholics (those born in Latin America). Many parishes have several vibrant ministries, ecclesial movements, and overall a strong

faith community; yet if one looks around at the membership, they will probably only see first-generation Latinas.

On the other hand, many diocesan youth ministry offices cater mostly to Anglo youth because they claim to lack the resources for Hispanic outreach or they just assume Hispanic youth fall under the responsibility of the Hispanic diocesan office. Also, many of these same offices believe that since most Hispanic youth speak English, they could easily just participate in any diocesan youth event. However if there is no visible Hispanic leadership or content related to their own reality and spirituality, Hispanic youth will most likely not participate. This is the same with *any* ethnic group: the leadership and the content must parallel their specific culture and needs. If there is no intentional outreach to Hispanic youth — meaning they are not included in the organization and decision-making— then they have every right to not participate.

U.S.-born Hispanic youth are overlooked, forgotten, and misunderstood within the Hispanic community and in the wider church community. They are passed around as someone else's problem; they go from one leader to the next, from one office to the next, and so on. It is important to note that this is not the case in some areas of the U.S. but an unfortunate reality in many. As a result, many young people are left searching for *something* but once they do not find it, they may fall through the cracks and just leave the church. Though some may remain as faithful parishioners, most will not assume church leadership or religious vocations. In my own experience, I saw many young people who could have been excellent church leaders; I also knew of many young men who were discerning a vocation to the priesthood. Neither of these young people received the spiritual nourishment and guidance they so desperately needed in order to pursue these paths.

Going back to the article, Fr. Davis pointed out a couple of the conclusions gathered by the youth at the *First Encuentro for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry in 2006*, which coincidentally, I always point to:

- * We want to be the bridge-building leaders between language and ethnic group that our church needs.
- * We want to contribute to the mission of the church and be part of the decision-making at both parish and diocesan levels.

U.S.-born Hispanics, like me, have the potential to be bridge-builders. We are capable of being the force of unity between cultures. We have the potential to be advocates and strong leaders at the parish and diocesan level. We have the ability to understand both the U.S. culture and our own cultural background. We can gain the skills to be very bilingual and bicultural. This, of course, is a process that requires a commitment on behalf of the leadership. How much time and resources is the leadership willing to invest in order to understand and respond to the generational differences and particular needs of U.S.-born Hispanics? It is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We can no longer allow for just one Hispanic

voice to be at the decision-making table; that particular voice will not speak on behalf of all Hispanics.

THE INVESTMENT PLAN

The 2014 *National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry* done by Dr. Hosffman Ospino revealed two “Signs of Vitality” and three “Areas that Require Immediate Pastoral Attention” that directly relate to this topic.

According to the study, one of the signs of vitality is the presence of, “a new generation of young Hispanic pastoral leaders in the context of parish life.” The study revealed that many of these leaders were U.S.-born; most likely they were mentored and supported — just as I was — and if we could do more of that, we would see more of this new generation of leaders. As stated previously by Fr. Davis, young Hispanics *respond* to investments made in them. The other sign of vitality states that, “Hispanic Ministry in parishes is essentially ministry with youth and young families.” Hispanic young people represent a vast number of the U.S. Catholic population today; therefore, we can no longer afford to not include them in all areas of ministry and to not consider them when we are developing our ministerial programs at the parish and the diocesan levels.

One of the areas of concern from the *National Study* was about the lack of pastoral outreach to U.S.-born Hispanic young people; another concern was about the lack of leadership among this same group — at the diocesan and parish levels. Frankly, many of the other areas of concern listed in the study could be addressed by investing more resources in U.S.-born Hispanic youth.

Parish leaders must come together and organize efforts to reach U.S.-born Hispanic youth. Adult and young adult leaders who enjoy working with youth should invite, encourage, mentor, and form youth into leadership. Give them spaces to gather and opportunities to grow spiritually according to their own needs and pace. Give them seats at the decision-making table and encourage all parish ministries to include them in their outreach and in their teams.

It is important to start when they are young because if they see that they are not intentionally included, they will drift away and most likely never see the church as a place where they belong — perhaps just a place for their parents. Dioceses across the U.S. must also take these steps. Is the vocation office making an effort to reach bilingual and bicultural U.S.-born Hispanics, or are they only looking for vocations in Latin America? Are the large diocesan youth gatherings being organized by, with, and for U.S.-born Hispanic youth? As Fr. Davis notes: “Churches and other organizations that invest resources commensurate with the percentage of young Latino and Latinas in their membership and recruit them into leadership will flourish; those that do not will founder.” The question I pose to you today is: which will you do, flourish or founder? |

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Disciple Building in Youth Ministry

Tom East



Pope Francis tells us, “[This] is what Jesus wants today: missionary disciples.”¹ In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he goes on to say, “The Church is herself a missionary disciple” (40). “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization” (120).

I ran into a colleague who is in youth ministry for the American Baptist Church. He asked me what was new in Catholic youth ministry; I asked him how much time he had! I started to share about Pope Francis’s call to missionary discipleship. He stopped me and said, “But you’ve been encouraging youth to be engaged in service and work for justice for a long time. How is this different?” His question made me stop and think. The difference is that Pope Francis has situated missionary discipleship as a means of being Christ in the world by healing, sharing good news, and witnessing to the faith in a way that combines lives of service and faithfulness with evangelization.

In this call, our life as disciples becomes a witness and a proclamation of the Good News. It is all about “both and.” Our life of faith is service *and* witness. As disciples we are engaged in justice *and* evangelization. This kind of life flows from an encounter with Christ’s presence that draws into deep relationship with the community gathered in his name.

This is a description of our hoped for outcome of youth ministry: the formation of missionary disciples. This outcome leads us to really look at all of our ministries in a new way.

LOOKING AT YOUTH MINISTRY WITH NEW EYES

In many parishes, much of the effort put into ministry with youth focuses on participation and promoting education in the faith, providing a very programmatic response to adolescents that complements the evangelization and formation that they receive at home and as children within the community. The problem is that many youth haven’t been evangelized and don’t have a relationship with Christ that would provide the context for the good activities and helpful faith learning that they find in youth ministry and in sacramental preparation programs. This could be the reason that so many youth

discontinue their practice of the faith after they have been confirmed.

Instead of focusing on participation and learning, we could be focusing on spiritual growth. Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson identified a similar dynamic in their book, *Move — What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*. They described this as the “Church Activity Model for Spiritual Growth.” In this model, “a person who is far from God participates in church activities which produces a person who loves God and loves other” (17). Their work in listening to members of these communities revealed that the premise behind this model is faulty. Many people who are attracted to participate never really grow spiritually and a large percentage of community members feel stuck in their spiritual growth.

What was needed was a focus on the individual faith journey. They identified four phases and three movements. An aspiring disciple moves from *Exploring Christ* to *Growing in Christ*, then moves from *Growing in Christ* to being *Close to Christ*. The final movement is *Becoming Christ-Centered*. What surprised the researchers was the large number of faithful members in good churches who felt that they were stuck after their initial exploration of what it means to be a Christian. These churches seem most suited to attracting members but the ministries did not provide enough differentiation to really help members grow spiritually from one phase to the next (21).

In a 2009 *Group* magazine article titled, “The Future of Youth Ministry,” authors engaged a variety of leaders in thinking about this current moment and looking ahead. “Our promotions are performance-driven — tied to the number of bodies that show up for our events. ...we default to techniques that are beholden to numerical growth more than spiritual growth...” In the future, youth ministry needs to move from being focused on the large group events, characterized by the spotlights and microphones, to small-group faith conversations and engagement in service as the vehicles for promoting authentic spiritual growth.

Dr. Kara E. Powell and Brad M. Griffen found other evidence helpful to us in our quest to form young disciples. Their research into “Stickyfaith” looked at the factors for young adults who continue to practice the faith. They found a large number of youth who participated in youth ministry activities and who thought that they would continue with faith practice but didn’t. The difference for those who did continue was the development of a personal prayer life and the engagement in

¹ Pope Francis, September 14, 2013 Radio Address for Vatican Radio. <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-jesus-wants-missionary-disciples>.

the communal practices of faith.² The research shows that it isn't just about showing up or filling the chairs.

In his work *Young Catholic America — Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church*, Dr. Christian Smith identified specific pathways for Catholic youth who remain committed and practicing. These youth were “well-formed in Catholic faith and practice as children, whose faith became personally meaningful and practiced as teenagers, whose parents (reinforced by other supportive Catholic adults) were the primary agents cultivating that lifelong formation” (186).

His work emphasizes the importance of religious experience (encounters) as well as the development of the skills that are needed to participate in the communal practices of faith. Youth will continue to do things as young adults that they are good at and that they have experienced as being helpful in their life. Youth who never really become skilled at participating in liturgy or being part of the faith community will likely not continue as young adults.

Catholic youth who become more adept at being Catholic, like attending Mass or Sunday school more, will continue to engage in these behaviors during the transition to emerging adulthood. (197)

This research points the way to renewed ministry practices that focus on spiritual growth and the engagement in the practices of being a disciple. Forming young disciples is intentional and goes beyond getting them to show up and be in the chairs while they experience energized performances. *More is just more. Slick is just slick.*

These perspectives remind us of these key factors in our efforts in helping disciples grow:

2 Dr. Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Dr. Cheryl A. Crawford, *Stickyfaith — Youth Worker Edition — Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-term Faith in Teenagers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publications, 2011), page 21.

- * Focus on spiritual growth and the needs of individual youth.
- * Focus on helping youth feel a sense of belonging.
- * Help youth develop internal faith practices.
- * Help youth engage in communal practices of faith.
- * Focus on service, faith-sharing, witness, inspiring prayer, and hands-on faith experiences.
- * Support parents, families, and faith-filled adults sharing faith with youth.

GROWING YOUNG DISCIPLES

In Sherry Weddell's book *Forming Intentional Disciples — The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*, she shares her experience that an emphasis on discipleship at all ages changes our ministries. “The presence of a significant number of disciples changes everything...” (80).

Her work seems to reinforce the importance of having communities with visible, active, intentional disciples. This gives youth something to look towards — a model of what it means to be a faithful adult.

So, where do we start? We start by acknowledging that something is shifting and changing, that our ministry needs to begin with the young person today and the ways that he or she approaches faith. Frank Mercadante, Director of Cultivation Ministries, explains the shift we are experiencing:

Many of us who are older, we came from a modern perspective. We took a cognitive approach to faith; we led with the head. Youth today are postmodern. Much of their truth comes through experience. They consider emotion so much more a part of how they understand life.... This requires a real shift and retooling in how we do youth ministry. And that's why it's so important that we learn to become archi-

OTHER RESOURCES

More than Dodgeball Blog – Simple Youth Ministry

<http://blog.simplyyouthministry.com/tag/rick-lawrence/>

Discipleship Focused Youth Ministry

http://www.discipleshipym.com/?utm_source=Discipleship+Focused+Youth+Ministry&utm_campaign=4dfe9f9a8e-Email_Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b73bc36566-4dfe9f9a8e-326907449

See especially:

- * Video — What is Discipleship Focused Youth Ministry?
- * One Thing that MUST Change in Youth Ministry (February 24, 2015)
- * 10 Tips to Consider When Starting a New Discipleship Group (March 3, 2015)

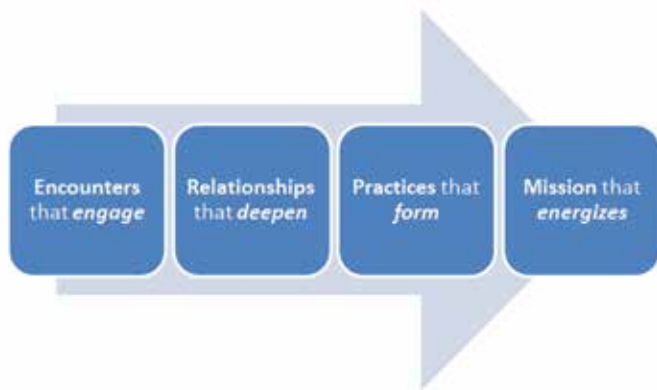
The State of Youth Ministry by Rick Lawrence

http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/state_of_ym_part_1_-_group.pdf

pects of encounter. We need to look at giving them an experience of God that is both horizontal and vertical, vertical in the sense that we need to become architects of encounter with Jesus Christ as opposed to simply giving them a cognitive understanding of Jesus Christ. Faith will always be head, heart, and hands, but the access ramp today is much more the heart and the hands and later on down the road comes that cognitive understanding.³

Research with young adults, conversations with young people, and experience in ministry reveal four experiences that help young disciples grow as witnesses and as people in mission.

ENCOUNTERS THAT ENGAGE



Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, young people are often bewildered and filled with questions. They long to encounter Christ, and they want to have someone walk with them in their questions. They want a first-hand experience of God, and they want that experience to be connected to their everyday life.

Youth encounter God in sacraments, prayer, community, in the Word, nature, service, witness, friendship, acts of kindness, hospitality, silence, creativity, art, and music.

According to Cardinal George, “(Pope Francis) wants bishops to be part of this culture of encounter — encountering Christ and therefore encountering those that Christ loves. Once you have the relationship, then the ideas make sense. Otherwise, it’s a debating society. So you don’t start with the idea. You start with a person and relationship. The pope is reminding us of this.”⁴

How can we rethink our ministries with youth so that we are providing a series of encounters and opportunities to reflect on these experiences? How can we become architects of encounter for young people?

3 Frank Mercadante, Cultivation Ministries, Video: “Frank Mercadante on Encounter” posted on the YouTube channel for the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI-0jUAZfsU>.

4 Cardinal Francis George, *The Chicago Tribune*, Interview on December 19, 2013. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-12-19/news/ct-george-pope-quotes-met-1218-20131219_1_jesus-christ-gift-freedom.

RELATIONSHIPS THAT DEEPEN

Youth hunger to belong, to have a community that cares about and accepts them. Like all of us, youth can feel insecure and wonder if they are worthy of love and friendship. They experience God’s presence in a community when they experience being welcomed, accepted, affirmed, and challenged. Relationships deepen their experience of God and provide models for discipleship.

Relationships experienced in the community gathered as the Body of Christ deepen the experience of encounter. Frank Mercadante explains this dynamic:

Engineering or architecting that encounter with Jesus Christ in the vertical way is critical but in addition to that young people need that horizontal encounter. That encounter is with the Body of Christ. You see, young people today are not so much looking for something to believe in as much as something to belong to. So we need to be a Church that accompanies young people. An important part of encounter is relationships which are the highest priority of young people today. So we need to learn how to bring about encounter in community and develop more of an accompanying approach.

Youth experience belonging in their family, in the church community, in friendships, in mentor relationships, in peer relationships, and in a variety of communities in which they gather for common interests and shared action.

How can we retool our ministries, take on an accompaniment model for ministry, and build the relationships that will help young disciples grow?

PRACTICES THAT FORM

Youth hunger to know and understand what friendship in Christ really means in their life. They want to know the gospels; they seek the teachings of the faith. They long for a way to find answers to their questions.

Youth grow in their faith understanding when they experience faith in action, when they learn about Scripture, and when they learn about the teachings of our church. They are formed by the practices of discipleship:

- * prayer
- * reading the Bible
- * growing in faith
- * living faith
- * witnessing
- * belonging to community
- * participating in Mass and reconciliation

MISSION THAT ENERGIZES

Youth hunger to make a difference, to be able to contribute and share their gifts. They learn about their gifts through relationships and through the community. Someone trusts them and gives them a chance to do something that matters, something that makes a difference for someone.

Youth experience having a chance to serve others through acts of service, ministry, and leadership.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

To form adolescents for discipleship, we can build on the resources of our community and elements of our current youth ministry practice. But we need to look at some things in new ways.

Look broadly at the youth population and develop targeted ministries for different segments. Some youth and their families are looking to go deeper and become more engaged in formation and service. Other youth and families need evangelization and invitation. Some young people are anxious to come to weekly gatherings and join communities; others resist this kind of participation but are longing to have someone to talk to about their faith. We need a differentiated approach that begins with the variety of young people.

Engage families and see parents as part of our ministry. Parents need to be inspired and equipped to take the lead in the spiritual formation of their children.

Look broadly at our community and engage lots of adult disciples who are willing to spend time with youth. Notice I didn't say, "Recruit more youth ministry leaders." Discipleship is about developing the practices of being a disciple of Jesus which is something we learn in community and in relationship with other disciples. Who are the adults in your community whom you want youth to "catch" faith from?

Focus on spiritual growth and attend to youth in a holistic way. Youth are more than just a family member or learner. Our ministry responses and faith formation need to address and engage the whole young person and look at ways to help each young person take the next step. It is especially important to invest time in helping youth who have experienced evangelization and encounter to take the deeper steps toward accountability, witness, and engagement in mission.

Help youth do what disciples do and get good at it! Our ministries could focus less on participation and learning information and more on skills and practices of being a disciple. When youth are good at praying on their own, reading the Bible, participating in Mass and the sacrament of reconciliation, engaging in service and witnessing to their faith, they will continue to do these things and seek communities and relationships that support them in being disciples.

Touch their hearts and make it personal. Youth yearn to belong and relate to people who care about them and value them as individuals. To build this relationship, we need to learn

names, know youth, and provide ministries that move, inspire, and engage.

Provide multiple contact points. Youth grow in commitment through a variety of relationships. They benefit from hearing different voices that provide an echo of faith.

Listen and include the youth, families, and leaders from among the diverse cultures within the community. Dioceses and parishes are learning new ways to come to know and include the needs and gifts of people from various cultures in developing authentic and inclusive ministry responses.

Go where the youth are, including technology. The roots of youth ministry are to go to the corners where youth hang out. To do this today, we should be going to the web, and we should be meeting youth in technology as a means to draw them towards gathered participation with the faith community.

Engage youth in ministries that help them belong, believe, and share their gifts. These elements address fundamental human needs that profoundly shape the youth and young adult years. Ministry that addresses these elements develops the commitment and identity that are foundational to formation as growing young disciples.

Jesus said many things to his disciples, but there were two things that he explicitly told them to do:

"This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19).

And

"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" (Mt 28:19-20).

Youth ministry that is disciple-building will follow these commands. We will lead youth to encounter Christ in Eucharist and to grow in friendship and faithfulness in their relationship with their loving God. We will also lead youth to go out and be missionary disciples. They will go beyond us as they lead lives of witness, faithfulness, healing and justice, catching others in the energy of their faith as they go.

A version of this article also appears on the websites for the Center for Ministry Development: Youth Ministry Access (youthministry-access.org) and Fashioning Faith (fashioningfaith.org). |

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The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Where a Child Can Fall in Love with God

Mary Heinrich



For the past year, my 16-year-old daughter, Clare, has been enrolled in our parish process for the Rite of Confirmation. I find that on the eve of this sacrament of initiation, I am reflecting on her journey as a child of God. I recall that as I held her in my arms on the day of her baptism, my prayer was that she would “fall in love with Jesus and with his church.” I am grateful for all the ways she has been formed in faith, whether that occurred at home, in school, or at the parish. There is one particular method, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, that has been an answer to my prayer as a parent and a catechetical leader, because it allowed her, and subsequently the children in our parish community, to fall in love with God.

EXPERIENCING FAITH THROUGH A CHILD’S EYES

Monica is nine. The seed of faith, alive in her heart, has been deeply sown and nurtured in her since she first came to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd when she was three. Entering the Atrium, the environment prepared for the religious life of children, she carefully chooses a lovely sheet of paper and the perfect calligraphy pen. She silently sits down at a small table. In peace and with enjoyment she writes:

There’s a place where I can be myself;
a place with treasures on every shelf.
A place to learn about God and pray;
A place where I’d like to be all day.
It’s just called “Atrium,” quite a short name,
but it’s still a wonder all the same.
I just love that little room where I can be myself,
and I can explore as I please,
those treasures on the shelves.

Such poetry from the heart of a child! It is easy to see she enjoys her work. The gospel has been sown lavishly in her heart through the announcement of a catechist who has studied long and hard to serve the religious needs of the child and an environment prepared with simple and essential materials she calls “treasures.” She finds this little room “a wonder.” She loves the freedom found in this place set apart where she can truly “be herself.”

Monica’s experience is at the heart of the work. It is an experience found in children throughout our nation and our world. It is sown with care by the catechists, who share a particular commitment to the religious dignity of children.

THE ATRIUM

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the faith formation of children ages three through 12. It is based on Sacred Scripture, liturgy, and the educational principles of Maria Montessori. The children gather in an Atrium, a prepared environment, containing beautiful yet simple materials. The materials are given to the children to aide their meditation on and absorption of the theme presented whether the theme be the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery, or the kingdom of God. The term “Atrium” refers to the place in basilicas of the early church where catechumens were prepared. For the child, too, the Atrium is a place of preparation for life in the church. The Atrium is one of the elements that assists the relationship between God and the child.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd takes special care in preparing the religious environment suited for the child. Everything done in the space is aimed toward helping the child enter into a more authentic relationship with God.

For a virtual tour of a Level I (age 3 – 6 year old) Atrium, go to: stpiushome.org/#!/catechesis-of-the-good-shepherd/c18h8.

The materials in the Atrium are often three-dimensional wood representations of a Scripture text, or items that represent what is found in the Mass or the sacrament of baptism. The materials are linked to the biblical and liturgical sources. The materials may include a relief map of the land of Israel, dioramas representing Infancy Narratives or Kingdom Parables or a model altar and articles of the Mass. The most essential truths of the Christian message are presented to the youngest children. After receiving the presentation of the gesture of the Epiclesis, at age four, Clare quietly worked with the chalice and paten, slowly repeating the gesture of the priest at Mass. She then took paper and pencil to draw an image of the priest’s hands making the gesture. On each hand, she drew a large red heart. When asked about the heart, she said, “That is God’s love coming down through the priest’s hands.”

Our parish, Saint Pius X in Urbandale, Iowa, offers both a traditional model of faith formation as well as the Catechesis

of the Good Shepherd. When parents ask me to explain the difference between the two or which one they should choose for their child, I begin by talking about the traditional model, as parents are familiar with the classroom setting, where the children will have a textbook, accompanied by prayer, service music and art expression. In the traditional classroom, the primary relationship is thought to be between the teacher and the child. I explain to the parents that Montessori discovered a third, often silent partner in education: the environment. Even though the environment is silent, it can be intentionally prepared so that it better meets the developmental needs of children.

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, instead of reading from a textbook about the altar and the vessels the priest uses during Mass, the Atrium materials include a model altar, with a small model chalice, paten, crucifix and candles along with other articles. The child is offered the names of these articles and given the opportunity to prepare the altar using the articles. It is believed that young children learn best through the work of their hands. In their engagement with three-dimensional materials first given to them in a presentation, children are better able to absorb the Christian message being announced by the catechist or the themes they find most vital in their religious life. Following the presentation, the children are given the opportunity to choose and work with the materials on their own.

Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, who founded the work of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, observed with children that children's way of engaging in relationship with God is very different than for adults. It is during a process of repeating freely chosen work of their hands that children begin to listen to the interior teacher and hear the message of a particular truth. It is through such a sensorial experience, that children are invited into a relationship with God. It is an opportunity to enjoy the love God has for them.

THE ROLE OF THE CATECHIST IN CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The role of the catechist is taken very seriously in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. In CGS, the catechist is first the preparer and facilitator of the environment. It is an essential part of the catechist's own formation in this method of catechesis to make the materials by hand, as much as possible, that are used by the children in the Atrium, as well as to prepare and care for the environment. In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the catechist is both the one who proclaims the kerygma and at the same time, the one who sits side by side with the child and meditates on the meaning of the Scripture or a particular rite of the church. The aim of The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd speaks to the relationship between the child and the adult in the Atrium. Its purpose statement is: "To involve adults and children in a religious experience in which the religious values of the childhood are predominant, keeping in mind that the contemplative nature of the child indicates to the adult a

certain way of drawing near to God." We offer our parents the opportunity to visit the Atrium and to experience a presentation just as it is offered to the children. Upon entering the Atrium, parents recognize that they want to share this gift with their child.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd emphasizes the value of forming the adult catechist in order to best prepare the adult to work with children. There are three levels of formation an adult can receive in order to work with children from the ages of three through 12. Level I formation is for working with children age three to six. Level II formation is for working with children six to nine and Level III formation is for working with children nine to 12. Each formation experience for adults offers a wealth of information on theological, biblical, and liturgical themes as well as the methodology used with the children. A presentation as it is given to the child, is shared with the catechist during the formation course. The catechist also receives background in the vision and discoveries of human development made by Maria Montessori, which gives a particular respect and understanding to children's develop-

RESOURCES FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

- ★ *Like Leaven: Accompanying Children on their Spiritual Journey* by Patricia Coulter.

This book provides a thoughtful, serious look at the adult's formation in this method. Patricia Coulter's research with seven catechists explores the experience of formation for adults who accompany children on their spiritual journey that not only prepares adults to nurture children, but also reveals how children nurture adults through this method of catechesis. Published by The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

- ★ *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children*, by Sofia Cavalletti.

This book describes an approach to religious formation that is biblical, sacramental, and at the same time, deeply respectful of children. Published by LTP.

- ★ *The Development of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Inside the Atria in Rome*, by Sofia Cavalletti.

This book contains a photographic record of the materials for the three age groups as well as historical photographs, and drawings by the children in Sofia Cavalletti's Atrium *Centro di Catechesi Buon Pastore*, in Rome. The commentary is by Cavalletti, who along with Montessorian Gianna Gobbi, developed this approach to the religious formation of children. Published by LTP. Finalist for the 2015 Excellence in Publishing Awards from *The Association of Catholic Publishers*.



ment. Each formation course is approximately 90 hours. For the catechist beginning a formation course, it takes time to enter into the rhythm of the Atrium. The catechists in my parish community have shared numerous times how this new pace has influenced not only their work with the child, but their home life and their relationships with their families and co-workers.

As a parish catechetical leader, I have found the formation my catechists receive through Catechesis of the Good Shepherd not only prepares them for their role as catechist with children, but also, personally benefits them and deepens their involvement in the life of our parish community. The catechists have often remarked how their own faith is enriched by this formation. Several catechists have gone on to other areas of ministry within our parish community and the background they received in CGS continues to be a gift for our entire parish family. We have presented the baptism materials to parents at baptism preparation, used the altar and baptism materials for those children who are “out of sequence” in their sacramental preparation, presented many of the themes offered in CGS to the adults in RCIA, and to families in our intergenerational events. Parents, both mothers and fathers, speak regularly with other parishioners, with family members, and their co-workers about how they value the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for their children. I hear them comment

about their son or daughter’s anticipation and joy as they look forward to their time in the Atrium each week.

Adam is four. As he returns to the Atrium after a long summer break, he walks peacefully from shelf to shelf. He lingers at the nativity diorama. His small hand reaches out to gently touch the Good Shepherd material. He looks at the small model chalice. He approaches the prayer table and sits before it and quietly whispers: “I have missed you so much!”

Moments such as this one with Adam, occur as children return to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium to contemplate and enjoy their relationship with God. The children who come to the Atrium share a similar enjoyment as they grow in the love and knowledge of God. ■

Mary Heinrich is Coordinator of Faith Formation at Saint Pius X Catholic Church in Urbandale, Iowa. She has served as a parish catechetical leader for 30 years, with a BA in theology and a Masters in Pastoral Studies (MAPS-CGS) from Aquinas Institute of Theology / St. Louis University. She currently serves as the Chair of the CGSUSA Board of Trustees. For more information about the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, contact Mary at maryandkurt12@gmail.com or visit CGSUSA.org

Is Faith a Private Matter?

Steve Mitchell



On July 8, 2010 Penn Jillette uploaded a five-minute video he made after one of his magic-comedy Las Vegas style shows. He does this often, but on this date he shared an encounter with a Christian who gave him a New Testament inscribed with the gentleman's name and contact information. Jillette

was clearly moved by the exchange, by the man's sincerity, and while this encounter didn't convert him from atheism, it clearly moved him.

"I don't respect people who don't proselytize. If you believe there is a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life and you don't share that with people because it is socially awkward, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize. How much do you have to hate someone to believe that eternal life is possible and not tell them? If I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was a truck coming at you and you didn't believe it, that that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you, and this is much more important than that. This man cared enough about me to proselytize.

"How much do you have to hate somebody to believe eternal life is possible and not tell them?"

(excerpt from YouTube)

There are many church documents and Scripture passages that I will later share, that support, encourage and demand that we share our faith with people. For me, one of the most compelling and cogent cases for a more public faith is made from one of the least likely sides of the equation, from an atheist.

I believe that Jillette meant to say evangelize as his misuse of the word proselytize is evident.

I've been involved in the ministry of evangelization for over 20 years. Over those years of prayer and study about evangelization, this YouTube video has had the most profound effect on my mission as an evangelist. It is a very up to date and modern way of saying what the church has been saying for centuries, what Jesus himself proclaimed and the Scriptures trumpet.

"The Church sees an immense multitude of people who need the Gospel and have a right to it, for 'God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'" (1Tim. 2:4).

People need the gospel and beyond that, people have a right to it.

PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO THE GOSPEL

Think about the lengths to which we go, to assist folks accessing those things that we believe are their right to possess, such as; education, health care, voting rights, and their right to the basic necessities of life. Taxes and governmental structures are imposed and designed toward this end. Yet, while extensive resources are expended to ensure these rights, incredible obstacles are erected to prevent peoples' rights to something far greater, something eternal.



There are structures that make sharing the good news of Jesus more difficult, but I submit that in many cases they are socially instituted obstacles and not yet legal ones. There is a "code," an unwritten rule that especially Catholics have adhered to for far too long. "We don't talk about faith or politics." Friends, these are two of the most important topics of our time, one has eternal consequences and the other has significant immediate consequences. We must find a way to have meaningful

discussions in a respectful way.

WE HAVE A DUTY TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

In addition to people having a right to hear the gospel proclaimed, we have a duty.

In my role as the National Director for Alpha in a Catholic context, I have the opportunity to travel the country and attend meetings, workshops, and of course celebrate Mass. I always grab the diocesan paper or parish bulletin and turn to their vision and mission statements. I imagine the many hours of discussions, the effort that went into those statements of who they are and what they are about. However, I have not yet found a more compelling and direct mission statement than the one Jesus left us:

"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:19, 20).

They have a right to hear the gospel and we have been commanded by Jesus himself to share the gospel.

"Who has the mission of evangelization? By divine mandate, the duty of going out into the whole world

and preaching the gospel to every creature rests upon the whole church. The work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 59).

I suspect there is little disagreement with these two points that are made above and summarized here:

- * Everyone has a right to the gospel
- * We have a duty to proclaim it

I think the rub tends to come not so much with the what, but the how. Many people will say, “OK, I get it and I even agree, but I’m at a loss, what do I do? I don’t want to go knocking on doors or stand on the street corner thumping my Bible.”

Before we wade into the how, I share two deeply held beliefs that inform and animate the how for me.

- * The essential kernel of the gospel — salvation offered by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus — deserves the best and most compelling presentation we can make.
- * The hearts of those people who the Holy Spirit is stirring, those that are led to us, deserve the most compelling, loving, and understandable presentation of the gospel we can make.

THE GOSPEL AND PEOPLE DESERVE THE BEST WE’VE GOT



Both of these principles are driven by what is aptly summarized in the statement by Paul VI in *Evangelization in the Modern World*: “The work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizer an ever increasing love for those whom he is evangelizing” (79).

Out of love, wanting only what is best for the person we are evangelizing, the person the Holy Spirit has put in front of us, we offer our

best, the gospel — the Good News of Jesus deserves our best and out of love so do the people we encounter.

I was recently at a conference in Los Angeles, and there was a guy who called himself an evangelizer (though based on the above I disagree). He was on the street corner with a megaphone and a huge backdrop of a Bible shouting many, unloving things. Do the people passing by feel loved? Is the love of God being communicated? Is it the most effective and compelling presentation? I think not.

So how?

I go back to Penn Jillette’s YouTube post, which encapsulates so much of our Catholic teaching on how to share our faith. Out of love, sincerity for the other is transmitted. The person first experiences and knows beyond a doubt of our sincere love and concern for them. Then, we make ourselves available at their convenience, to their questions and to where they are on their journey to faith. It is their journey, not ours! It is their bus; they get to drive and by God’s grace and our relationship with the driver, we get the privilege of riding along.

I find that many of us Catholics spend a significant amount of time answering questions that people aren’t asking. Is that love? When I find myself responding this way, it’s not for them but to make myself look and feel good. “Hey this is what I know, whether it is something you really care about or not, I’m going to share it with you.”

Here are two golden rules when it comes to sharing your faith:

People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

People don’t listen until they have first been heard.

Stopping long enough to truly listen to people accomplishes both goals. It lets someone know how much you care, at the same time affirming their dignity as a person. They matter, what they think matters, and if you listen — or if you don’t — either way it comes across.

Once we know what their real question, issue, wound, or state in life is then we can speak into that. Just diving right into what I think they need has not often worked.

Through many years of getting it wrong, I have learned that arguing isn’t very effective either, as I have never seen another person converted by my proving them wrong. I have engaged in apologetics and there is a place for it, as a form of sharing my faith. However, I personally have never heard anything like the following: “Oh, I see it now, I’ve been wrong my entire life, you’re right, let me call the priest right away to sign up for RCIA.”



Envision a bridge building project — there is a divide that must be crossed in every relationship and building a bridge of trust with a person is the only way to cross that divide. I’ve been guilty of being more interested in being right, more interested

in my own journey and my own mission of evangelization, than I am in the other person. Sometimes, in my eagerness driven, not by the gospel, but by my ego, I've attempted to cross that bridge of relationship too early, attempting to carry the weight of the truth on a bridge of relationship I haven't yet invested enough time and energy in. Too eager, the bridge collapses due to the weight of the truth being applied to a bridge of relationship that isn't yet ready. I haven't done enough work, the work of building relationship, which is my responsibility.

WHAT WORKS BEST?

So how do we actually share our faith? What seems to work the best? How are people most receptive?

First, share your own story, of what God is doing in your life.

Before you can share your story, you must know your story. It is easier than you might think. Pick a time when God worked a grace in your life and reflect on it. Pray about it and ask the Holy Spirit to "remind you of all truth," and answer the following three questions:

- * What was my life like before the grace of God pierced my heart?
- * What happened when his grace flooded my life?
- * What is different?

Based on these three questions you can reconstruct your story of a time of encounter with Jesus that led to conversion. These three questions will guide you in being able to share your story in five minutes over coffee or as a 20-minute testimony in front of a group.

EVANGELIZATION IS A WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Most important, this is the Holy Spirit's work and I am honored and invited to participate — to play an important role, a supporting role of faithful participation through which the

Holy Spirit chooses to work. Given that it is his work and not mine keeps two important points at the forefront of my mind:

- * First, the most important component to sharing your faith is prayer.

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household for over 30 years said:

"Going out to evangelize without praying is like a fireman showing up to fight a fire without water."

- * Second, remember you are not responsible for the harvest.

I'm most encouraged by the story of the sower and the seed: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how" (Mk 4:26-27).

Like the sower, my part is to scatter the seed, very liberally and without prejudice, but then I go to sleep and God does the work.

These are the reasons that I love Alpha. It's all there, the radical hospitality, the way we build the bridge of relationship with the guests, giving them the freedom and space to ask the question that is most important to them. The way we listen to them, honoring their dignity, their Divine gift of free will. Alpha is a method and process, offering a way for us to walk with the guests on their journey by design and training, focusing on their questions, and avoiding the temptation of hijacking their journey, and turning it into ours. We share our stories with them and scatter the seed, bathing the entire process in prayer, and trusting in the Holy Spirit to act. He's never let me down. |

Deacon Steve Mitchell is the National Director of Alpha in a Catholic context. He currently serves the Catholic community of St. Joseph in Lake Orion, MI.



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Doing Your One Percent

Kristina M. DeNeve



In 2013, the book *Rebuilt*, by Fr. Michael White and Tom Corcoran, captured the hearts and minds of many American parishes.¹ However, most parishes did little beyond read and discuss the book. It was just too much time and work to change. However, the Church of the Nativity basically overhauled everything; changes were made throughout the parish from the youth ministry, to the music at Mass, to the creation of small group faith formation.

One of the biggest impediments to “doing evangelization” is “starting evangelization.” Starting evangelization can be like planning a major home renovation: there is just so much that needs to be done and all the pieces are so interconnected that it is overwhelming to think of beginning. Indeed, when collaborating with parishes, I regularly hear that they cannot initiate intentional evangelization efforts because the parish needs to first improve on its welcoming and hospitality.

While Church of the Nativity did *end up* changing almost everything they did, it did not begin that way. It began by the pastor and youth minister attending a conference hosted by a Protestant church. It started because these two individuals used their already scheduled Family Friendly Friday series to share what they learned at that conference.

Which brings me to the 1% Solution, Tom Connellan’s recommendation for introducing change (and by change, I mean improvement) into our lives.² The thrust of this book was that we cannot be 100 percent better at everything, but we can be one percent better at anything and everything that matters to us.

He makes a great point. Matthew Kelly’s research on “dynamic” Catholics found that the majority of the contributions and work in a parish is completed by 7 percent of the parishioners.³ Forget about the 80-20 rule, the common adage that tells us that 20 percent of the people accomplish 80 percent of the work. In our parishes, it is 7 percent. Seven!

WHERE DO YOU BEGIN? WHERE DO YOU START?

The best place to start is with the one thing that keeps nagging at you; the *one* thing that keeps coming up in your mind and

heart and will not go away; the *one* thing that screams your name, and you are probably already passionate about.

As Christians, we believe that God is always inviting us — inviting us into deeper relationship with God’s self and with our neighbors, which in turn helps us to become more the person God created us to be. The Holy Spirit works in and through our lives. (To help me remember this, I like to think of Ordinary Time as actually being Pentecost Time.)

GETTING STARTED

Here are a few tips on getting started with evangelization, as inspired by the 1% Solution:

- ✱ Newton’s Law of Motion is that unless acted upon by an outside force, a body at rest stays at rest and a body in motion stays in motion. This not only works for watermelons dropped from tall buildings, but for our evangelizations efforts.
- ✱ Action often leads to motivation instead of the other way around — we can act our way into right thinking much easier than we can think our way into right acting.
- ✱ The first step can be as small as you’d like, but it should be undertaken intentionally with evangelization at heart. One can meet wedding parties at the church to unlock the doors with or without a loving, open, evangelizing spirit.
- ✱ We can do ministry for 30 years, but without deliberately practicing our craft, we might actually just be doing one year of ministry 30 times over. The Holy Spirit will work through us, but we still need to show up.
- ✱ Finally, remember the Sabbath. Intentionally set aside time to rest, recover, and pray, preferably daily (in the form of breaks), weekly (Sabbath), and semi-annually (vacation).

“But the gospel must first be preached to all nations...do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. But say whatever will be given to you at that hour. For it will not be you who are speaking but the Holy Spirit” (Mk 13: 10-11). ■

Kristina M. DeNeve, PhD, is the Adult Faith Formation and Evangelization Coordinator for the Diocese of Honolulu. Contact her at kdeNeve@rcchawaii.org.

1 White, Michael and Corcoran, Tom. (2013). *Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Matter*. Ava Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana.

2 Connellan, Tom. (2011). *The 1% Solution: How to Make Your Next 30 Days the Best Ever*. Peak Performance Press, Chelsea, Michigan.

3 Kelly, Matthew. (2012) *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic: How Engaging 1% of Catholics Could Change the World*. Beacon Publishing, Boston, Massachusetts.

How to Read the Bible

by Harvey Cox

Reviewed by Dan Thomas

Reading the Bible in the 21st century requires that we read it differently than we have done for much of our past. Our contemporary understanding of the universe, our sense that there are other religions that make valuable contributions to our understanding of God, a realization that biblical history has a different objective than the scientific history, and a sense that symbol and myth give meanings beyond the literal are only some of the ideas that change the way we read and understand the Bible.




In this new book by Harvey Cox, we get an approach to the Bible that combines the scholarly (Bible Study) and the ordinary (biblical studies) ways of reading Scripture into a spiritual reading that combines “objective” and subjective experience into a way of making Scripture part of our lives.

Cox picks out what he considers to be crucial books that demonstrate the various tools that can be used to deepen

and broaden our understanding of Scripture: The chapter on Genesis for “source analysis;” Exodus for the contribution of archaeology; Joshua for the various genres of history, legend, and saga; Job explicates literary theory; the prophets “form analysis;” the gospels “redaction history;” Paul’s letters are clarified through “empire studies;” and Revelation’s meaning through the history of “canonization (the process of its acceptance into the canon),” and “effect history (i.e., how the text was used throughout its history).”


UNDERSTANDING HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE

According to this book, there are three stages of understanding Scripture: the narrative stage, the historical stage, and the spiritual stage. The narrative stage takes the texts “at face value and more or less literally.” The historical stage puts “emphasis on the context in which a particular biblical book was written, for and to whom, when and why.” The spiritual stage approaches Scripture as “holistic [including] inner and outer, personal and social” (2). The example Cox gives of the



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spiritual interpretation is the way Martin Luther King was able to take the texts of Exodus and touch the real experience of his followers of oppression and the journey to freedom.

Throughout the book Cox avoids using the word “critical” in his use of biblical scholarship because so many understand that word in the negative sense of criticizing rather than analyzing. Thus he presents redaction history, form analysis, the history of interpretation method, empire studies, and the rhetorical approach to guide the reader through the books of the Bible he discusses.

One of the intriguing insights in his discussion of the book of Job is how its protagonist comes to appreciate the place of the poor and their exploitation by the rich as a result of his own suffering. “Job’s worldview now embraces angry, impatient protest against injustice” (97-8).

His section on Paul is enriched by his use of empire studies; “its basic premise...is that ‘the Roman Empire is not just the background of Paul’s letters; it is the foreground” (166). Thus, Paul’s message is twofold: a new reign of justice and love overthrows Roman rule and, secondly, the communities he founded would become networks of mutual aid, replacing the patronage system favoring those already in power. Paul is not so much fighting the Jewish community, but Roman oppression.

The chapter on the book of Revelation is essential reading since it challenges the image of God as the destroyer and the violence in which the Christian community revels. He does this by putting it into context and seeing “Revelation [not] as a description of the coming of the end of the world, but of the coming end of the Roman Empire” (193).

He closes with his description of the spiritual way of reading scripture:

The Spirit...makes its presence felt throughout the Bible.... This is the Spirit that manifests itself in both individuals and groups, in both nature and history, and in the animals and plants we live with every day. It is the Spirit of God that both comforts and disturbs and that cannot be channeled or contained by institutions or doctrines. The point is that if we do not read the Bible with a genuine openness to being spoken to, perhaps upset and shaken by what we find in it, we will have missed the message. (217) |

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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At Work in the Vineyard: Catechesis with Children with Special Needs

Judith Brusseau



Every parish has children whose needs may not be adequately met in the regular approach to religious faith formation, and ours is no different. A typical classroom presents challenges for our students with special needs: there may be too many children, too much activity, or noise and light levels that impede their learning ability.

This year, Holy Trinity Parish in Washington, DC, celebrated ten years of our ministry to children with special needs and their families. Our program, called “Shepherd’s Flock,” was created in response to parents who were asking for faith formation for their children. When we began the program, there were only a few students; today a lively community is flourishing. Shepherd’s Flock has become so much more than “a program.” It is an essential, life-giving part of our parish and one that helps us live out our mission to share God’s love with the world.

BUILDING A SPECIAL NEEDS COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Our pastor enthusiastically supported creating the program, and subsequent pastors and lay leaders have continued this support. This is critical since there are so many resources that a program like this requires, both physical and financial.

Getting parent buy-in was simple, but open and honest communication was critical. We had to understand their expectations and learn the abilities of their children. We needed to document and plan for sacramental celebrations. We used a registration form and interview questions, which can be found at your local parish or at ncpd.org.

While finding appropriate space can be a challenge, it’s important to use a space that is safe for children who move around quite a bit and who may be sensitive to noise or lighting. A traditional classroom with bright lights, decorations around the room, and rows of desks is not conducive for our learners with special needs. Our catechists spend about 30 minutes turning a meeting room into a workable classroom.

It was important for us to recruit volunteers with experience. Our parish had professional teachers who work with children with special needs, which gave us a head start. Volunteer catechists needed additional training, which the parish was committed to providing. Several of our Shepherd’s Flock catechists are trained in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; this is a real time commitment, but it has made a difference for our children. Our catechists interact with children on their individual

levels and bring a variety of materials for various learning styles. It is not a scripted, traditional, age-level lesson plan.

With parish support and well-trained catechists, we are able to offer a Shepherd’s Flock class every Sunday at the same time we offer our faith formation classes. Some of our students rotate between Shepherd’s Flock and a regular classroom each week, depending on their abilities. Others attend Shepherd’s Flock exclusively. The children meet in one room with several catechists; we have found that a one-to-one teacher-to-student ratio works best.

Curriculum resources are becoming more plentiful. Through the years, we have transitioned to a model based on the “Atrium” found within the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. However, we use other resources, as needed, to meet the needs of each child. A one-size-fits-all approach just doesn’t work. Dioceses may have resources or an office for persons with disabilities.

A COMMUNITY OF OPENNESS

Parents have praised our program for welcoming their children into sacramental preparation. (Guidelines for catechesis and sacramental preparation differ by diocese.) Loyola Press has a multifaceted curriculum designed especially for use with children with special needs, The Adaptive Program Finding God. We use this with great success. In addition, Loyola also has adaptive kits for reconciliation, Eucharist and confirmation preparation.

We end each class by singing “We Are Marching” which the students love. Hand gestures and other movements let them involve their entire body in the song.

Most importantly, we have built community. We celebrate monthly Masses with our families who have children with special needs, including their siblings. This is followed by a potluck dinner. Often, children celebrate the sacraments at these Masses, and it truly demonstrates a Christian community of acceptance and openness. ■

Note: The National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) was established in 1982 to implement in parishes and dioceses throughout the United States the 1978 *Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities* (ncpd.org).

Judith Brusseau has served as Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation and Religious Education at Holy Trinity Parish in Washington, D.C., for the past 14 years. She also serves as an animator on the PCL Forum Team and is the PCL Representative for the Baltimore-Washington province.

Tweeting with a Purpose

Claire M. McManus



Back in 2013 when Pope Francis began tweeting, it immediately caught the world's attention. Two years later the phenomenon is no longer "that" he tweets, but "how" he tweets. The annual Twiplomacy analysis of Twitter use reported that in 2014 President Barack Obama was the most followed world

leader with nearly 57 million people. Pope Francis was second to Obama with 19.5 million Twitter followers on nine language accounts. The expanse of the Pope's influence is far greater than the number of his followers, however. His messages are re-tweeted with an average of 9,929 re-tweets per tweet, more than nine times the spread of President Obama's messages. Why is Pope Francis such a Twitter superstar? Is it the message or the messenger? Whatever the reason, it is clear that those in charge of Pope Francis' @Pontifex account are both intentional and strategic.

One thing that becomes apparent when perusing any Twitter account is that there often is neither rhyme nor reason to the tweets most people send. Even if one isolates those Twitter accounts dedicated to promoting Catholic causes, it is hard to discern a common theme or purpose. One often sees a mish-mash of posts ranging from gospel exhortations to calendar updates. A bishop tweets that the Holy Spirit inspires us to acquire the likeness of God, oh and he'll be at the Knights of Columbus at St. Mickey's next Thursday. It would benefit these causes if they applied some of the principles of business marketing strategies to their Twitter posts.

EFFECTIVELY MARKETING FAITH

In the post-conference workshop following the 2015 NCCL Conference in Buffalo, participants learned to re-focus their social media efforts. Anthony Carabache from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association Secretariat brought the insights of business marketing campaigns to bear on faith formation settings. Participants, eager to learn how to make effective use of social media in their various settings, learned to focus on one theme, use one tool, and drive it hard.

SET SMART GOALS

Some of the principles applied to marketing are readily adapted to faith formation settings, most important of which is to set smart goals. Smart goals are specific, measurable, and achievable. In order to set these goals for a social media campaign, one must identify the desired change that is sought. For example, do you want to get more parents involved? Are you trying to reach out to young adults who are disconnected from the parish? Are you trying to reach high school teens that drift away after formal faith formation ends?

IDENTIFY THE MISSION

Once the goal of the campaign is determined, the next step is to identify the mission or motivation. If the goal is to reach young adults, is the mission to draw them back to Mass or is it to give them messages that will help them to grow in discipleship? This will help determine the perspective that the campaign will promote, and which tools will be employed.

POPE FRANCIS PROVIDES AN EXAMPLE

Pope Francis' social media campaign is a good laboratory to test the principles outlined above. All of the pope's tweets on the @Pontifex account are either gospel exhortations or calls to holiness. There are no newsy tweets about the pope's daily schedule, but when he is travelling to a foreign country his exhortations are relevant to the region and specific to that audience. Other Vatican agencies, such as Vatican News or *L'Osservatore Romano* use their Twitter accounts to report on news or the daily activities of the pope. These agencies use multiple social media tools to keep the pope's followers informed, but Pope Francis speaks directly to the people through his tweets.

The presumptive audience is Christian, as the messages often allude to gospel values or Catholic piety. Thus, it is presumed that the perspective of the messages is the teaching of Jesus Christ and his church. The target audience is broad, reaching those with Twitter accounts in several languages. Since it is not obvious that the millions of followers are Christian, perhaps the goal of the @Pontifex account is to carry out the mission outlined in *Gaudium et Spes* "to read the signs of the time and interpret them in the light of the Gospel."

Pope Francis is not timid about engaging in conversation with the world. He is always positive and matches his online presence with meaningful, face-to-face engagement. He uses his Twitter account to challenge the world to live up to the highest expectations of the gospel. This may not be a measurable goal, but it certainly is specific, and it has many people listening. We may never match Pope Francis' superstar media presence, but we will be on the right track if we set our goals, identify our audience, and scatter the timeless perspective of Jesus Christ into the far reaches of the Twittersphere. ■

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

Three Hundred Years of Discernment: The Chinese Rites Controversy

Marc González



Our history is filled with stories of men and women in conversation with various cultures. A very long cultural conversation began in 1645 and ended in 1941. The Chinese Rites Controversy, as it is called, shows us the church attempting to understand cultural rites of the Chinese in light of a European

viewpoint communicated second or third hand, sometimes reflecting different missionary strategies and competition. The conversation was not with the Chinese people themselves, but about them and long-standing cultural practices.

The Jesuits were successful as missionaries in Japan and used that success to expand to China; they sent Michele Ruggieri, SJ, and Matteo Ricci, SJ. Their policies and practices had four major components:

1. Accommodation and adaptation to Chinese culture;
2. Evangelization from the top down beginning with the literate elite, if possible the emperor;
3. Indirect evangelization by means of technology to demonstrate the high level of European culture; and
4. An openness to and tolerance of Chinese moral values and ritual practices.

The last point is the spark of the controversy.

WHY THE CONTROVERSY?

The controversy began when Juan Bautista de Morales, OP, was expelled from China during a persecution in 1638 and returned to Rome. He presented the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith a series of questions that attacked the Jesuit method with the Chinese rites. In 1645 the Congregation agreed with de Morales and condemned the Chinese rites practices of the Jesuits. In 1651, the Jesuits sent a delegation to Rome pleading their case; in 1656 the Holy Office, with papal approval, sided with the Jesuits and recommended flexibility to the Chinese rites. The conflict revolved around three main points:

1. Whether certain Chinese names or terms are appropriate for God, the soul, and heaven;
2. Whether the civic rites regarding Confucius, family ancestors using incense, prostrations, and food offerings were permitted; and

3. Relationships with non-Christians: could Mass be said for non-Christian dead and non-Christian ancestors. Included is the Christian participation in non-Christian community celebration in honor of non-Christian gods.

The Jesuits, especially Ricci, felt certain accommodations to these rites were appropriate as an evangelical strategy while the other missionary orders did not make such accommodations. Thus, a 300-year process of discernment commenced among Rome, missionaries, and missionary bishops.

The Controversy ended in the 1930s when the bishop in Manchukuo (Japanese occupied Manchuria) wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the participation of Catholics in civil ceremonies, especially those including Confucius. The Ministry of Education replied: “The ceremonies in honor of Confucius have as their sole object to manifest exteriorly the veneration which one has for him, but they have absolutely no religious character.”

With this answer, the bishops promulgated guidelines for Catholics’ civic participation, which ended the Chinese Rites Controversy.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

We — the faith community — continue to be faithful to the Great Commission. We also continue to try to understand and dialogue with the cultures we encounter. So, what can be learned from the Chinese Rites Controversy? The following strategies are:

- * Find a gate keeper who can provide introductions
- * Show interest in community activities
- * Listen, listen, listen
- * Try to learn a bit of the language
- * When asking questions use “tell me about...,” “What is the significance for you of this...,” etc.

I would be very interested in your reflections on the question: *What can be learned from the Chinese Rites Controversy in your ministerial situation?* Any responses, disagreement, reflections, etc. may be sent to me at dr.gonzalez@dolv.org. ■

Dr. Marc González is the director of the Department of Faith & Ministry Formation for the Diocese of Las Vegas.

Philosophy and Catechesis

Brian Pizzalato



St. John Paul II wrote, “The Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it” (*Fides et Ratio*, 5). Leo XIII, in even firmer language, wrote, “The Church herself not only urges, but even commands, Christian teachers to seek help from philosophy” (*Aeterni Patris*, 7). The church gives those involved in the work of “communicating the truth of the gospel” a clear mandate.

In addition to the need for catechists to be well formed regarding matters of doctrine, pedagogy, and methodology, we must be well formed in philosophy.

St. John Paul II made clear, “All men and women...are in some sense philosophers and have their own philosophical conceptions with which they direct their lives” (*Fides et Ratio*, 30). All persons ask: “Is there a God? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? Why do bad things happen to good people? What is truth? What is right and wrong? Is there life after death?” The answers given to these questions — whether right or wrong — become the foundational principles by which they order their lives. Philosophy has to do with all men and women’s desire to know the truth about reality and the meaning of their own existence.

One area of great significance for catechesis is the importance of philosophy for inculturating the gospel. Ideas have consequences, for good or ill. “People seek in different ways to shape a ‘philosophy’ of their own — in personal convictions and experiences, in traditions of family and culture...” (*Fides et Ratio*, 26). Various false philosophies such as relativism, hedonism, consumerism, empiricism, individualism, etc. are penetrating forces that shape and mold minds and lives. Many people have found the wrong answers to the fundamental questions of human existence.

Understanding the underlying thought of a culture and those we catechize is a fundamental task for catechists. Pope Leo XIII put it this way, “Philosophy, if rightly made use of by the

wise, in a certain way tends to smooth and fortify the road to true faith” (*Aeterni Patris*, 4).

Catechists must be able to “respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4). This is the task of the church and thus, catechists.

CATECHISTS AS PHILOSOPHERS

Culture and human reason, and thus philosophy, are intimately linked. *Gaudium et Spes* states: “One must aim at encouraging the human spirit to develop its faculties of wonder, of understanding, of contemplation, of forming personal judgments and cultivating a religious, moral and social sense. Culture...flows from man’s rational nature” (59).

As catechists, we must take philosophy seriously and remember the intimate connections between faith and reason, and reason and culture. We must aim at helping those we catechize develop, and perhaps

regain, their faculties of wonder, of understanding, of contemplation. When the catechist gives him or herself to a better understanding of philosophy and philosophical issues, “he can do very much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 57).

My recommendation is that we work hard to include philosophical formation within our various catechist formation programs because “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth — in a word, to know himself.” (*Fides et Ratio*, Introduction). ■

Brian Pizzalato is the Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Lansing. Brian holds graduate degrees in theology and catechesis, biblical theology, and philosophy and has been involved in the work of catechesis for over 15 years on the campus, parish, diocesan and university levels.

*All persons ask:
“Is there a God?
Why am I here?
What is the meaning of life?
Why do bad things happen
to good people?
What is truth?*

Focusing on What Is Already Working

Leisa Anslinger



What is already “working” in adult faith formation in your parish or diocese? Upon what may you build for the future? I often ask these questions to catechetical leaders during conversations or in workshops. Often the responses are ambiguous at best. Perhaps this is not surprising. Many will say they rarely

focus on what is going well. Often, attention is pointed only toward what needs help, what is not working, what is lacking. And yet, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* guides us to build on what is already in place: “The [faith formation] plan builds upon the work already being done by the Catholic community in adult faith formation.” The bishops go on to list the many facets of adult faith formation in which there is much upon which to build: the catechumenate; renewal programs; Scripture study; faith-sharing communities; lay ministry and catechist formation programs; Catholic schools and parish religious education programs; sacramental preparation; Catholic media (16).

I find the Appreciative Inquiry process a very helpful framework for identifying what is “working,” and what still needs to be built upon for the future. A-I was developed and published by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivstva, with later publications that include Diana Whitney. Widely adapted and utilized in numerous areas of business, service, and organizational development, A-I approaches exploration of principles and practices from a positive, appreciative vantage point, encouraging creative solutions to visioning and planning. There are numerous websites that include summaries of the A-I process. I believe the most helpful is Appreciative Inquiry Commons, found here: appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm.

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE

By beginning this process with a positive focus on what is working, what needs attention is not being ignored. What is often missed is that there is much upon which to build for the future, either by learning from previous experience, or by expanding current positive elements of ministry.

Let us walk through the Appreciative Inquiry process. The following process includes a few guiding questions for each stage of the four-steps. As we begin, think for a moment about

adult faith formation, or one aspect of it, in your parish or diocese at the present time.

Discover: *What is working?* Be attentive! Think about processes that receive positive feedback, in which participation is growing, or through which people are compelled to learn more, to serve, or to invite others to participate. Ask others for help. Listen to their experience. Make a list of all of the processes or elements that are “working” now. Consider how you might build upon them for the future.

Be attentive! Think about processes that receive positive feedback....

Dream: *What is your vision or ideal?* Be intelligent. This is not time for pipe dreams. Rather, clearly stating the vision of what can be, might be, should be is important. In many ways, what

you are doing is identifying where you are (discover) and where you want to be (dream). Next, you’ll begin to think about what steps you can take to get you from the present to your stated future.

Discern: *What can be?* Be realistic. The original A-I process calls this step “Design,” but discernment seems much more appropriate here. We know that discernment includes prayer, and the wisdom of the community. Name the steps that you and your community can take in the short term, and if appropriate, also name a longer-term goal.

Do: *What will be?* Be responsible. The A-I process typically uses “destiny” or “deploy” here. I find “do” captures the essence of this step: who will do what, when, how, and in what timeframe? Make your plan SMART: Specific and measurable, motivating, attainable, realistic, and timely.

Not long ago, I was invited to facilitate a staff retreat for a Catholic organization. Among the items on their agenda was the need to identify new objectives toward their long-range planning goals. As I met with the retreat team in advance, I shared the A-I process with them, suggesting that this could be the perfect exercise to meet their needs. One staff member was very skeptical. At the end of the retreat, she approached me, grinning from ear to ear. “Not only did we accomplish a lot,” she said, “we also did it so pleasantly. I have never felt such energy at the end of a planning meeting. People are already asking when we will get started!” ■

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

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

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Pope Goes to Washington, New York, and Philadelphia

Pope Francis’s visit to the United States is an ideal time to offer programs for adult faith formation. Here are just a few resources to begin the planning. For a more complete overview, visit my article, “Pope Francis Goes to Washington” on eCatechist.com.

Books

Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer, and Action by Susan Stark and Daniel J. Pierson. Tarcher/Penguin.

The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope by Austen Ivereigh. Picador.

Walking with Jesus: A Way Forward for the Church by Pope Francis. Loyola Press.

Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives by Cardinal Walter Kasper. Paulist Press.

Family and Life: Pastoral Reflections by Pope Francis. Sadlier Religion and Paulist Press.

The Spirit of Saint Francis: Inspiring Words from Pope Francis. Edited by Alicia von Stamwitz. Franciscan Media.

Social Media

The Holy See
w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html

News.VA Official Vatican Network – Facebook
facebook.com/news.va.en?fref=ts

Catholic News Service
catholicnews.com

Catholic Apostolate Center
Pope Francis Portal
catholicapostolatecenter.org/pope-francis-portal.html

Crux (*Boston Globe*)
Covering All Things Catholic
cruxnow.com/

Salt and Light Media
saltandlighttv.org

The Pope App
By Pontificium Consilium de Communicationibus Socialibus
<http://www.news.va/thepokeapp/>

World Meeting of Families
worldmeeting2015.org

The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown by Paul Taylor. Public Affairs.

The America of the near future will look nothing like the America of the recent past. America is in the throes of a demographic overhaul.

Drawing on Pew Research Center’s extensive archive of public opinion surveys and demographic data, *The Next America* is a rich portrait of where we are as a nation and where we’re headed — toward a future marked by the most striking

social, racial, and economic shifts the country has seen in a century.

Recommended by Dr. Tom Walters, emeritus professor of Religious Education at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, his research interests have centered on parish and diocesan catechetical leaders in the United States: who they are, what they do, and their effectiveness.

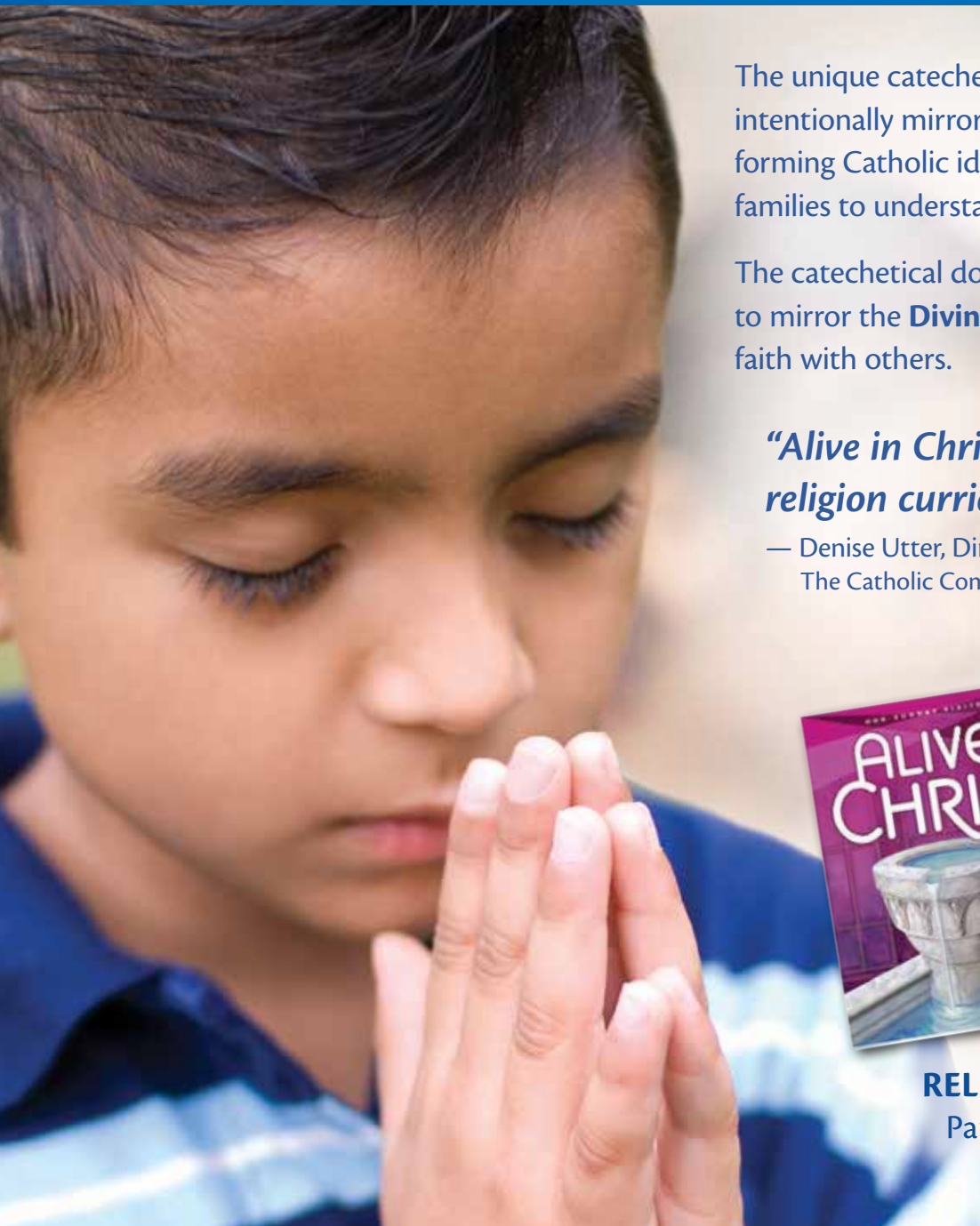
The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving by Lisa Miller. St. Martin’s Press.

The *Spiritual Child* is an exhaustive and compelling compendium of recent psychological and neurological research, all of which points in the same direction: Children who are raised with a robust and well-developed spiritual life are happier, more optimistic, more thriving, more flexible, and better equipped to deal with life’s ordinary (and even extraordinary) traumas than those who are not. Teenagers, in particular, are exponentially better off if they’re in touch with their spiritual sides — less likely to abuse alcohol and drugs, to engage in risky sex, to cope with depression. “In the entire realm of human experience,” Miller writes, “there is no single factor that will protect your adolescent like a personal sense of spirituality.”

Both *The Next America* and *The Spiritual Child* are valuable and commendable reading for understanding our present day culture and “signs of the times.” ■

Dan Pierson is the founder of *eCatechist.com*, *faithAlivebooks.com* and *Faith Alive Books Publishing*. He is coauthor with Susan Stark of *Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Action*. Tarcher/Penguin, 2015. Email him at pierson.dj@gmail.com.

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