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CATECHETICAL  
LEADER



# CALLED TO MERCIFUL, MISSIONARY FORMATION

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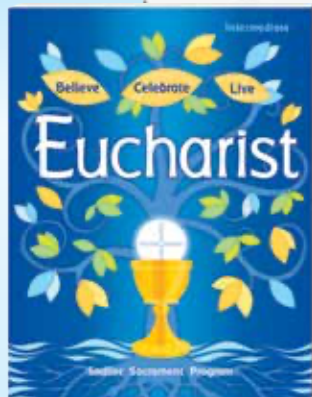
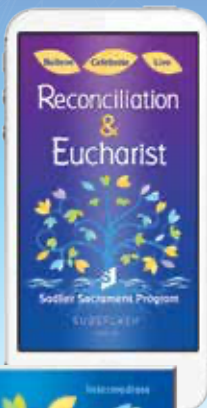
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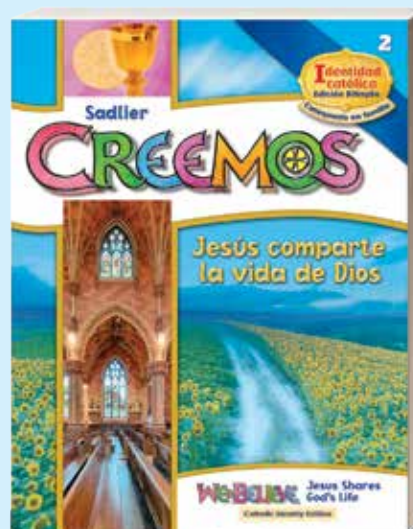
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# IT FEELS GOOD TO MAKE A DEPOSIT

Ken Ogorek



## National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

Making a deposit in your bank account generally helps bring about a good feeling. A deposit is a resource; your deposit can be drawn from and used for helpful activities.

As catechetical leaders we know the value of a deposit. We work with a precious deposit every day.

### OLD-FASHIONED?

An NCCL speaker recently said, “Remember that phrase we used to use? Deposit of faith?” I thought to myself, “Used to? I use that phrase all the time!”

When we engage in faith sharing — when we share our Catholic faith with folks via the ministry of catechesis — we draw on the deposit of faith. God loves you so much that not only can you know him intellectually, but he also takes the initiative in revealing himself to you. Throughout salvation history, in sacred Scripture and sacred tradition, God both affirms what common sense tells us about him and reveals truth that we can’t discern by our own power. This set of revealed truths, especially, is called the deposit of faith.

### IT’S FUN TO SHARE

One of the most important activities of catechetical leadership is sharing the faith. We love sharing our Catholic faith by helping catechists educate in every sense of the word: to share information to draw out the presence, goodness, and knowledge of God that dwells in our hearts.

Most of us entered this ministry because we love to share our personal faith as well as the faith of the church. The teaching of the Catholic Church informs us and forms us by God’s grace; in turn, we help others to hear the beautiful proclamation of God’s saving truth.

### GOOD OLD ST. PAUL

In addition to sharing the faith, we have another grave obligation in the arena of ideas. We must guard the deposit! Jesus calls the devil the father of lies. St. Paul points out that the devil disguises himself as an angel of light.

Error easily creeps into human discourse — especially given the reality of our woundedness by original sin. Some

errors are minor, like “The church no longer wants us to give things up during Lent or Advent; she only wants us to do something extra.” Other errors are more severe.

So-called hot-button issues perennially tempt even the most learned catechetical professionals to tell folks what they might like to hear — even if it contradicts a basic doctrinal or moral teaching of the church. Examples such as “We don’t really need Jesus for salvation. After all, we are all rowing in the same direction, just in different boats; we really shouldn’t discuss sin and guilt. In our enlightened age, these concepts will just drive people away from church; missing Mass is no big deal. God understands how busy we are and expects us to make mature decisions from among several fine options.”

“O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.” “Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14). The concept of guarding the deposit is profoundly biblical; it’s also very practical given our susceptibility to deceit.

### NCCL: SHARING AND GUARDING FOR 81 YEARS STRONG

The National Conference for Catechetical Leadership is a resource for diocesan and parish staff as well as additional folks involved with the endeavor of catechesis. We help people share our faith in a variety of ways that only a strong, national, professional organization can. A hallmark of my board presidency has been guarding the deposit of faith as well as sharing it.

Sharing the faith is often pretty enjoyable. Guarding the deposit isn’t as fun. But catechetical leaders must do both.

Please continue praying for NCCL. Pray that our organization will keep authentic catechetical renewal moving by God’s grace. Pray that our members will have joy for sharing faith and fortitude for guarding the deposit. And please pray for yourself: that God will continue enveloping you in his steadfast love, helping you be Christ to those you serve, sending you the Holy Spirit to instruct your heart, help you know what’s right and constantly enjoy his holy comforts. ■

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# NCCL: ENGAGING MEMBERS THROUGH STORYTELLING

Margaret Matijasevic



Storytelling is as old as ancient cave and rock paintings and as modern as social media collage graphics. Storytelling is at the heart of our catechetical ministry. Jesus, the master storyteller, is our model.

Our professional network's story is one of vocation, paradigm shifts, and growing modern approaches to church leadership. It is a story not found in a textbook, but from the lived vocational stories of each of its members. It also has the succession experience of the disciples in the upper room, as NCCL is a community of believers who gather, share their fears, and together experience the Spirit's movement.

The catechetical story of our nation is rooted in missionaries of catechesis, varying from ordained, religious, and lay, all of whom set out to share the gospel with the people of God. NCCL is the organization where the catechetical potential of yesterday was commissioned and is where the potential of a catechetical vision for tomorrow is ignited, fueled, and set ablaze.

## IMPORTANT NARRATIVES FOR 2016

The 80th NCCL Annual Conference and Exposition in Jacksonville, Florida, began its opening with a white paper discussion panel. Three millennial writers engaged the larger membership of NCCL in diversely challenging perspectives. The writers named three possibilities:

- \* stepping outside the parish and into downtown warehouses to encounter and evangelize
- \* considering those that left the church as insightful contributors to potential models for today's church
- \* using digital media as the main place to stay connected with parishioners

The conversations these writers sparked were striking. Many members stated, "I found hope for tomorrow hearing them speak," or "They were so articulate, I felt affirmed in my work and vocation." What I found interesting is that the sacred story of the organization shifted that day. The story included the realities of the millennial experience of faith and their perspective on catechetical approaches as key contributors to NCCL's narrative. This was a monumental moment for NCCL.

According to nonprofit best practices, telling stories is an essential component for millennial engagement, donor support, and membership retention, but it is not just any story they want

to hear. People are engaged with positive stories. Millennials, in particular, are drawn to stories that require action, and they desire to be considered a part of the active component.

"One way to show Millennials how their support is making a difference is by cultivating relationships through communications, and specifically by telling stories. Stories naturally demonstrate impact in a tangible way and when they are told well, they make the reader feel like the hero," said Vanessa Chase, president of The Storytelling Nonprofit ([npengage.com/nonprofit-marketing/engaging-millennials-to-be-nonprofit-storytellers/](http://npengage.com/nonprofit-marketing/engaging-millennials-to-be-nonprofit-storytellers/)). NCCL has an advantage in this, as the catechetical story has always been that way. Jesus is the hero. And as disciples, we share the gospel that Jesus lived, empowering others to do the same.

When gathering with the NCCL's board of directors this summer, there was a noteworthy shift in their approach to strategic planning. Language and expression became the priority, versus just the plotted goals of strategy. Strategy is more than goals, but an encompassing of a narrative that is described in its process to fulfillment.

The board of directors plans to look at the national landscape and respond to God's call to catechize. Through the perspectives of various committees and support of the representative council, the board was able to put language on possibility, through a comprehensive strategic plan, including a description of what NCCL is committing to. Themes that evolved were rooted in the depths of the ministry of catechesis, including evangelization and discipleship; professional development; membership; and product development. For each theme, the board prioritized projects, with measurable outcomes to assist NCCL in assessing their continued contribution to the catechetical story.

## WHAT'S YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE STORY?

As NCCL moves into a new strategic direction, project-based priorities will be open to the participation of members. Each member can share in the responsibility for stewardship within the organization through their time, talents, or resources. This model of member contribution toward strategic priorities guarantees that the storytelling of NCCL will be heard robustly throughout the nation. Each member of NCCL will be encouraged to be a steward of the growing story.

What will be your contribution to that story? ■

# The Hour of the Laity

Maureen Sullivan, OP



There are some moments in human history that should never be forgotten. The Holocaust would be an example. The horror of humanity's inhumanity to others is a dark moment in human history, but we remember it so that we seek to prevent something like this from ever happening again.

But, not all significant moments in human history are so dark. Just last year, we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. This council was called by Pope John XXIII for the purpose of renewing the church. At its conclusion, the council fathers issued 16 documents that serve as the official teaching of the church today.

One of those documents focused on the role of the laity in the church. Many have referred to Vatican II as "the hour of the laity." The following article discusses how Vatican II continues to play a significant role in the church today given the theological outlook of our current pope, Francis.

## CHANGES IN THE ROLE OF LAITY

In the last 50 years, the vocation of the layperson in the church has flourished ... so much so that contemporary readers may be surprised to come across an article on this topic. Why bring this up now? Haven't we reached the point where the spiritual gifts of the layperson have been recognized? Haven't we learned the theological reasons for the importance of the layperson in the church?

The answer to these questions is yes and no. There are still places in the church where the lay person is not experiencing the fullness of his or her vocation. There are still members of the laity who are not aware of the history of the layperson in the church, and this history is an important element in the laity's self-understanding.

It is clear that the laity has enjoyed a position of importance in the life of the church since Vatican II. With the decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, the laity has now embraced a variety of ministries. However, this has not always been the case.

When asked about the role of the laity in the mid-19th century, Msgr. George Talbot, who had served as secretary to Pope Pius IX, responded: "To hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These

matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters, they have no right at all." This quote is a good indication of how the laity was viewed in the church in the years leading up to Vatican II. There was a marked division between the clergy and laity, between the sacred and secular.

This separation of clergy from laity was further enhanced by a model of church that prevailed right up to the eve of the Second Vatican Council. Anyone trained in Catholicism before Vatican II would be familiar with this model, frequently referred to as the "pyramid" model of church. This pyramid reflected one's place in the church. At the top was the pope, followed by cardinals, bishops, priests, nuns and — last — the laity. The higher one's place on the pyramid, the holier one was (or so we thought).

As a result of this division between cleric and layperson, it was understood that the mission of the church was in the hands of the hierarchy. It was "their" apostolate, and any involvement of the laity in this work was understood as "assisting" the hierarchy with their ministry. That the layperson had the right, even the duty, for an apostolate of their own in the church's mission was simply not considered.

The fathers at Vatican II would correct this notion. Their study of the Bible would have a direct bearing on the development of a theology of the laity. In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15, we read about the council of Jerusalem, the very first council in the church's history. It was called to settle a serious dispute in the early days of the church — how to reconcile the admission of non-Jews into the church. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, agreement was reached in this matter not only by the apostles, but "with the consent of the whole church." Peter offered a theological foundation for the inclusion of the non-Jews: "And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us." This "giving of the Holy Spirit" to all believers would become the cornerstone of a theology of the laity.

As a result of this insight from the New Testament, the council fathers began to understand that the model of church in the New Testament was primarily a model of communion. This word means "fellowship" and is the hallmark of New Testament ecclesiology. The significance of this theological principle cannot be overstated. If the Holy Spirit is the "soul" of the church, given to each member at baptism, then



the notion of the church as the people of God, building up the body of Christ with the individual gifts and charisms of the faithful, means that each member has a truly significant role to play in the mission of the church. Each person, cleric or lay, has a legitimate voice. Each member can be a source of truth.

Vatican II uncovered another theological principle which contributed to the council's theology of the laity. It is referred to as the "Law of Incarnation." When the second person of the Trinity took on the human condition in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, when divinity entered humanity in a unique manner, theologians came to realize that all things in creation, in the physical world, could serve as reflections of the sacred — realities that mirror God.

This is further based on the theology of creation. If God is indeed the source of all creation, something of the creator is left in the created. It is why we look like our parents; they left something of themselves in us. As cocreator of every human

person, God left something of God in each of us, the Spirit of the risen Christ which we call grace.

In the New Testament, St. Paul relies on this concept when he tells us that each of us is "a letter from Christ." Incarnational theology leads us to view all members of the church as continuations of the incarnation and cocreators with God in the transformation of the world. When this principle becomes part of the laity's consciousness they realize that they are called to participate in this transformation — that they are indeed the presence of God in our midst.

One of the bishops at Vatican II said that the faithful have been waiting for a recognition of their place, their dignity, and their vocation to the mission of the church. A careful reading of Vatican II's *Decree on the Laity* demonstrates that the hour of the laity did indeed occur. Still, when Vatican II ended, another bishop — reflecting on the achievements of the council — maintained that the fruits of the Second Vatican Council would not be sufficiently understood for another 50 years.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Well, we are now at that point, 50 years since the council closed. Where are we now? Is the need for the laity to transform the church a part of our consciousness today? Are we passionate about our role in the church? There is a principle in theology which maintains that when people see us, they see God. The presence of the risen Christ in each of us demonstrates how this can happen. We are “letters of Christ” to each other.

The Second Vatican Council opened the door for the “age of the layperson” in the church. Have we walked through that door? Perhaps some of you are familiar with the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant minister who was taken prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. He was executed in that camp in 1939. Bonhoeffer underwent something of a transformation while in prison and left us some of his theological reflections. Contemporary theologian, John Dick, has written about Bonhoeffer and in one of his writings, Dick maintains that Bonhoeffer believed that someday a time would come when Christians would once again powerfully proclaim the word of God so that the world could be transformed and renewed by it. But of course, our efforts to transform our world begins with a meditative reflection on our personal relationship with God. Before we seek to renew others, we must renew ourselves.

## A MISSIONARY WITH A DISCIPLE’S HEART

Perhaps, the time to assume our unique role in the church has been made all the more appealing given the theological outlook of Pope Francis. Shortly before his election to the papacy, Pope Francis made an impassioned plea to those engaged in religious education, claiming that the goal of such education is formation — the shaping of a life. He speaks of a vision of life, a way of looking at reality, a conscience. For Francis, being a Christian means being a missionary with a disciple’s heart, a reality that requires a personal encounter with Christ in the community of believers.

Characteristic of this discipleship is a humble manner, a careful listening, and attention to what Francis calls the “seeds of the Word,” that is, whatever is true and holy in our world. This universe bears the imprint of our Creator. Hence, as noted above, all things can speak to us of God. Such incarna-

tional thinking is central to Francis’s thinking. As a result of the divine entering the human condition, the power and the presence of God can act in and through created realities. It also maintains that the church in every generation is being called to new ways of being present to the world, that each and every change requires a new incarnation of the divine in our midst. Francis’s incarnational thinking leads him to view all members of the church as continuations of the incarnation and cocreators with God in the transformation of our world, our parish, our family. Francis invites us to understand the implications of incarnational theology for ministry and evangelization.

Everything in our contemporary situation suggests that we are living at a turning point in the church’s history. Just as Vatican II focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in our midst, we too must be open to this presence; it is key to evangelization. We do have the promise of the risen Christ that he would send his Spirit, that this Spirit would teach us the truth. Do we take these words from Scripture as merely pious sentiments or do we truly believe that the Spirit of the risen Christ remains with us and in us? Not long ago, one of the bishops of Vatican II was asked what he thought was the greatest obstacle to evangelization in our world today. He answered: “It is the lack of faith among Christians as to what — by the power of the Holy Spirit — they really are.” When we read the words of the risen Christ, promising to send the Spirit to teach us the truth, do these words have any real meaning for us? Are our lives any different because we know we are not alone on this journey or in this ministry? Will our presence be an indication to the people we serve that a prophet of God has been among them?

These are challenging questions. And I for one am grateful to Pope Francis for announcing this Holy Year of Mercy. On one level, it does have a connection to Vatican II. Francis announced his Holy Year decision on December 8, 2015 which was the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II and he made an explicit connection to the council. There is another similarity is that Francis appears to share the same pastoral approach to evangelization as Pope John XXIII, the pope who called Vatican II.

Francis’s decision to celebrate a Year of Mercy promises to have a powerful influence on us and on our ministries. When we reflect on this Year of Mercy, the natural focus is of course

## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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

Authors’ views do not necessarily reflect those of NCCL. Letters to the editor and submissions of news items are encouraged. Send to *Catechetical Leader* at the address above or e-mail [nccl@nccl.org](mailto:nccl@nccl.org).  
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on God, the unconditional lover, the source of mercy. But in our reflections, we also turn to the recipients of that love and mercy — the restless humans who are so very aware of their wounded natures, their frequent failings, and their need for the one who created them. And sometimes, when we dwell on our limitations, it is so easy to think we are simply unworthy of the incredible unconditional loving God who has been revealed in Scripture.

### CALLED TO BE THE FACE OF GOD

A wonderful cardinal from Great Britain, Basil Hume, who died in 1999, once made this claim: “It is harder for many people to believe that God loves them, than to believe that God exists.” This claim probably touches the hearts of many believers who feel so unworthy of the gift that has been given to us. Still, Pope Francis tells us that God understands us. God waits for us. God does not tire of forgiving. For Francis, the name of God is “Mercy.” We are invited into an intimate relationship with our God. Only when this coming to know God is personal for us can others enter into God’s mystery through us. As ministers of the faith, we are called to be the “face of God” to others because when they see us, they see God.

It has been said that Pope Francis has made the power of God’s mercy the central theme of his papacy. And Francis himself has given us a clue to why God’s mercy is so close to his heart. In an interview with a journalist, he was asked: “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” Francis’s response to this question is incredible. He replied: “I am a sinner.” This is not false modesty on the part of Francis. Rather, it is an example of a deeply spiritual man who understands the woundedness of the human condition. It is this humility of Francis that makes him such an authentic messenger of God’s mercy. For Francis, mercy means more than simply a canceling of a punishment. Divine mercy is God’s love reaching out to us in our concrete situations — with all of our needs. Can we reach the point where we believe that God’s medicine of mercy is stronger than our sins? Francis believes that when we finally feel this merciful embrace that is when our lives can change.

We could use the example of a woman who finds out she will have a baby. Once she becomes aware of this precious reality inside of her, her life changes. She knows if she smokes, the baby smokes; if she drinks, the baby drinks. We too are carrying a precious reality. As the beautiful song “Earthen Vessels” claims: “We hold a treasure not made of gold in earthen vessels wealth untold.” Theologian Karl Rahner once wrote: “The real challenge in accepting the God-man is not simply *that* God exists, *that* God is the creator, *that* God acts in some way to save us ... no — the real challenge is to accept that we human beings are the very ones with whom God shares divine life.” Many of you who are reading this article are probably what we might call “cradle Catholics” ... that is, baptized soon after we were born. Sometimes I find myself envying recent converts to the faith. Their belief in

God is almost palpable. I find myself wondering if I have begun to take my faith for granted. I wonder if my faith has become simply routine. Am I stuck in my sense of unworthiness, or am I on fire with a passion for the God with whom I am in relationship? Such concerns offer another reason for the importance of this Year of Mercy. Francis invites us to see God through transformed eyes, through a renewed faith.

In calling this Year of Mercy, Francis has given us the opportunity to examine our relationship with God. This opportunity should lead us to a conversation with God because now we are invited to see that Mercy is in fact God’s name. Mercy is who God is.

All of these deepened insights need to serve two purposes: obviously, they can strengthen our personal relationship with our God, but they must also influence our ministry, our attempts to evangelize. You and I have the privilege of awakening in others what has been there all along — the divine presence.

According to Pope Francis, we are in a new epoch, undergoing profound changes. In a presentation on the crisis affecting the social and moral values of believers today, Francis acknowledges that this crisis presents a serious challenge to evangelization. In this regard, the pope offers a new perspective on evangelization. He maintains that our proclamation of the gospel must focus on the whole person in his or her concrete situation. He believes that a special effort is needed to preach the message of Jesus in a way that enables Christian values to transform each and every culture, purifying them if necessary. But this emphasis on the need to make the gospel meaningful in the concrete, in the real world of the faithful today, brings us back to a basic belief of Vatican II.

Pope John XXIII wanted Vatican II to be a “pastoral” council. This word means that John wanted to present the truths of the faith in a way that is close to men and women of the time and which accepts their difficulties and tries to answer their concrete questions. The pope of Vatican II and the pope of the Year of Mercy have this goal in common. The emphasis on the importance of incarnational theology is also shared by both of these popes. It is what makes the “local” church so important. As Vatican II taught us, we who minister to the people of God, we who have been graced with the Holy Spirit by virtue of our baptism, we who thereby have a voice and serve as a source of truth in the church must ground ourselves in the call of Vatican II to rightfully assume our mission in the church — always attentive to what Francis calls the “seeds of the Word.” That is, all that is good and holy in our world because these seeds enable us to see the presence of God in our world, in ourselves, and in each other. ■

*Maureen Sullivan, OP, PhD, is professor emerita at St. Anselm College in New Hampshire. She also serves as a religion consultant for the William H. Sadlier Publishing Company.*

# Tú eres mi otro yo — Mercy and Immigration

Arturo Bañuelas



On his recent visit to the United States, Pope Francis told the Catholic bishops about immigrants: “Do not be afraid to welcome them... I am certain that, as so often in the past, these people will enrich America and its church.”

Every November, hundreds of people from the three neighboring dioceses of El Paso, Texas, Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico celebrate a Mass along the U.S.-Mexico border. An altar is placed on the Mexican side of the fence and another one on the U.S. side. The three local bishops preside at the Mass. A 16-foot high, strong chain-link fence divides the countries, but it cannot divide us as a people of faith who share a profound conviction for justice, especially justice toward immigrants.

At the last Mass, we remembered the more than 350 persons who died in the desert in 2015 trying to cross the border into the United States. The eucharistic celebration is a great mixture of peoples and cultures from three states and two countries joined by faith at the border.

Taking place at the border, the rich, multivalent symbolism of the Eucharist is a reminder of the intimate relationship between God’s mercy and the plight of immigrants. We are a eucharistic people in solidarity with the mission of mercy that Jesus has entrusted to us. Immigrants cross our border daily to offer a better life for their families. Most of those who cross are fleeing from violence, death, torture, poverty, and hunger.

## UNITED BY THE EUCHARIST

The Mass calls us to mercy and justice to eliminate the destructive distinctions between those who have so much and those who are destitute. At the Eucharist we are all equal. It strips us of our arrogance that one culture or class is better than another one. In the context of worship, immigrant, resident, citizen, undocumented, bishop, laity, poor, and rich are all equal, brothers and sisters together in need of God’s mercy and called to share that same mercy with others. The world may want us divided by nationalities, class, gender, race, religion, language, and politics, but at the Eucharist we are at home with each other as God’s family, united in a common vision of a world without segregated borders.

Celebrating the Eucharist out in the open — breathing the air and the dust of the border — reminds us that the Mass is not simply a private devotion for pious persons disconnected from the sufferings of the poor. The Eucharist affirms our preferential option with and for the poorest. Today, our struggling immigrants are among those poorest in our midst. Mercy makes clear that serving the poor and fostering justice is an integral part of our worship. It moves our hearts to give worthy praise to God.

Jesus, with his sacrifice on the cross, invites us to share in the lives of the crucified among us. This is why the Eucharist as sacrifice calls us to a deep solidarity with the suffering. Jesus’s sacrifice calls us in our own brokenness to embrace humanity’s brokenness and then to commit ourselves to alleviate the causes of this brokenness. This includes solidarity with the farm workers who, from sunrise to sunset, work the fields for low wages; hotel maids, many single mothers struggling to feed their children; victims of human trafficking, families of inmates, the homeless, the hungry, and those living in substandard conditions in the *colonias* (poor neighborhoods). They are present in our worship.

## DIVINE LOVE AND SERVICE

At the meal before his death on the cross, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples showing his disciples that solidarity and service are intimately related to the Eucharist. The Mass sends us out in mission to give voice and heart to the sufferings of the immigrant and to incarnate in our service to them Jesus’s own embrace of divine love. This is divine mercy in action.

The synoptic gospels mention the words of institution — “This is my body. This is my blood. Do this in memory of me.” The eucharistic passage in John’s Gospel used on Holy Thursday has Jesus humbly washing the disciples’ feet. In this gesture of divine love and service, we see the profound connection of God’s eucharistic love with merciful service to others. If we are going to enter this sacred mystery of the Mass seriously, we need to translate it into service to others, especially washing the feet of the poor. This solidarity of service takes





us into a deeper intimacy with God and helps remove from our hearts any taint of racism and pride that become obstacles to life with God and each other. Thus, we are empowered to build a more just human family of God.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, the liberating struggles of immigrants give us a profound insight into God's mercy. This divine mercy is pure gift of God accepted and lived in the mercy we offer to others. Immigrants challenge us to be merciful to enlarge our capacity for compassion. Mercy is about being just, compassionate, kind, caring, and trusting of our brothers and sisters. It opens us up to see the good in others and leads our hearts to a welcoming hospitality of the stranger. The lack of mercy reproduces division and affirms people's racially motivated hatreds toward immigrants. Because mercy brings us face to face with our own weaknesses, it melts our postures of righteousness toward others and disarms us from holding others to a different standard for possibilities of love. In our solidarity with the immigrants, mercy becomes a life-changing moment *for us* as we discover the incredible mercy of God *to us*.

I was recently in conversation with a couple who shared with me their view that immigrants should be in our country only legally. We can all agree with this view. However, the process to become legal is costly, cumbersome, and very lengthy. At times the process may take up to 18 years. Mercy enables us to compassionately see beyond the common legalistic perspectives while acknowledging that there is an unjust and broken immigration system. Jesus, while keeping the laws of his time, showed that mercy comes first and is above the law.

Fear often becomes the reason for our lack of mercy. Fear separates us from each other and fills us with mistrust. Mercy moves us beyond the fear and frees us for real compassion to accept the gift of the immigrant in our midst. Mercy frees us from racism in our hearts because it refuses to allow vengeance, arrogance, superiority, egotism, and pride to determine who we are as a people. Without this mercy in our hearts we are doomed to be enslaved in our inner darkness. Mercy is about our inner spiritual strength to become consumed with love for others and re-energized to become more a person of justice and compassion.

Immigrants offer our society an opportunity to learn that mercy enables us to see our commonness in both our brokenness and in our beauty, and therefore impels us to stand firm in our convictions of justice and the common good lest we allow ourselves to be destroyed by the weaknesses of fear and racism.

## MOVED TO ACTION THROUGH MERCY

God's mercy moves us to action on behalf of the suffering immigrants, and fosters in our hearts a desire to be part of God's promise of a reign of justice and peace. For this reason, mercy toward others is never silent about immigrants' miseries. In our just relationships with each other, hope for a better future happens.

At the border we witness that mercy enables us to restore bridges of friendship between peoples of diverse backgrounds. With mercy, solidarity happens because we accept the other in our hearts without the conditions that often derive from our personal insecurities toward others. Mercy enables a prophetic encounter for a new future. Most importantly, God's mercy helps us to question ourselves, asking if our comfortable lifestyle has anything to do with the sufferings of others. In this way, our acts of mercy become transformative moments of new grace.

Concretely, the relationship between mercy and the presence of immigrants calls us to support all efforts toward a just and comprehensive reform of the immigration system in our country. New immigration reform is a very complicated process that has come to divide many among us. Often it is fear and racism that inform the political narrative about immigration reform instead of facts

and the human story of the immigrants.

All discussion about immigration reform must begin with mercy, which leads to compassion. This means that we fundamentally acknowledge that we are all brothers and sisters; and that we are each other's keepers. Immigrants are members of our family who bring gifts from God. As a nation of immigrants, we are all on the same journey, and we need each other so that our nation will honor its founding values of freedom, human rights, and human dignity. We are each other — our Amerindian ancestors teach us that "*tú eres mi otro yo*" (you are my other self). We are each other, intimately linked as one.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION

Today's talk about immigration is often based on malicious myths about immigrants and about our U.S.-Mexico border. These often turn out to be lies that promote a form of racism masquerading as a false nationalistic patriotism. These debates demonize immigrants as an excuse to not embrace them as neighbors. This type of subtle prejudice is commonly heard today in intolerant political rhetoric. We hear political arguments about building a big wall, deporting millions, and wanting to militarize the border for security in an area that is consistently rated one of the safest areas in the country. No

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matter how you feel about it, the issue of immigration affects all of us. For this reason it is important to look at the facts.

In our parish, we serve several of the immigrant detention shelters filled with immigrants. Recently, we sat down to listen to a mother with her two-year-old baby girl emotionally devastated because she left her house in a hurry when thugs entered her home in El Salvador to steal. They killed her husband and son. Knowing that she would be killed also, she got her daughter and escaped through a back door. Not long ago a seven-year-old boy from Honduras was brought to the shelter hungry from a two-month journey. He was skin and bones, practically starving. He was separated from his father at the border.

Pope Francis understands the migrant's predicament:

I would also like to draw attention to the tens of thousands of children who migrate alone, unaccompanied, to escape poverty and violence: This is a category of migrants from Central America and Mexico itself who cross the border with the United States under extreme conditions and in pursuit of a hope that in most cases turns out to be vain. They are increasing day by day. This humanitarian emergency requires, as a first urgent measure, these children be welcomed and protected. (Pope Francis Papal Message – Mexico, Holy See, *Colloquium on Human Migration and Development*, July 14, 2014)

It is important to listen to the human toll immigration causes and equally important to know the facts. For example, often in the media we hear that immigrants are a drain on our economy. However, the truth is that economic studies show that immigrants contribute more to the economy than they use. They pay over \$140 billion a year in income, property, sales, state, and federal taxes. In fact, immigrants are a source of economic boom in many cities throughout the country. However, the belief that immigrants abuse the U.S. welfare system couldn't be more incorrect. Millions among the poorest immigrants are actually ineligible for government assistance because they lack legal residency. So they have no access to food stamps or government health care.

We also hear that immigrants are criminals. Again the truth is that immigrant communities are among the safest communities in the nation. The facts prove that the majority of immigrants are in the U.S. with legal visas. Only about one-quarter of immigrants are undocumented. Politicians claim that the solution to immigration is greater border enforce-

ment for greater border security. But even the border patrol acknowledges that this claim is misleading.

Serious studies indicate that immigration reform would actually save our nation billions of dollars and help reduce the deficit by billions. Besides reducing the national debt, reform would allow numerous undocumented immigrants to obtain work legally, and start businesses that would ultimately create jobs for native-born Americans. These are a few important facts often twisted in favor of anti-immigrant fear propaganda. It is time to change the narrative that promotes fear of immigrants to the real stories of how they contribute greatly to the fashioning of our great nation.

### MERCIFUL AND NECESSARY IMMIGRATION REFORM

It is imperative that we move toward an immediate immigration reform if our nation is to rise above its misguided insecurities about the border and those who daily cross it. Migrants are dying in the desert. We cannot drown in our insensitivity in the face of such suffering. We have to face the truth of what is happening with our immigrant brothers and sisters. Mercy tells us that we cannot fail to engage and unmask the lies that perpetuate the enormous trials migrants encounter.

Pope Francis calls us to action filled with mercy to address the plight of immigrants. In our country, it means immigration reform that will make our nation new, restore our nation's highest values of freedom, human dignity, human rights, and everyone's right to a prosperous life.

Borders begin in our hearts. Mercy shows us that we can be big enough, our hearts capable enough, our souls eager enough, our faith strong enough, and our convictions firm enough to change what cruelty lays claim to in our lives. The immigrants are the poor in our midst, missionaries of hope who challenge us to live lives of mercy in solidarity with their daily struggles in the building of God's reign of justice, peace, and joy: a world without racial barriers, a world united in one vision of our common communion and human dignity: "Do not be afraid to welcome them." ❏

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# Shifting Our Focus: A Missionary Approach to Catechesis

Rich Curran



Our Catholic Church documents make it very clear what the goal of catechesis is. “The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Trinity” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5). This pastoral statement from St. Pope John Paul II in 1979 seems to contradict the pastoral practice of many Catholic educators and catechists.

As I travel across America working with parishes and dioceses, it has become quite clear that many pastors and coordinators of catechetical ministry seem to focus their efforts and resources to ensure their students receive training in Catholic terms, practice, and moral behavior before they are confirmed. It seems to be common practice to justify such a topic-based, cognitive approach as we “joke” about how many of our confirmation students and families we never see again once anointed by the bishop so we need to “make sure” they know the information now.

While I agree that learning and being formed in such content is a very important part of understanding and becoming a mature, fully initiated Catholic, it seems to place the affiliation process with the Catholic Church in the head. Such an approach to catechesis seems to want to ensure young men and women are aware — in touch — with what the Catholic Church believes and teaches.

The problem is that being *in touch* with the church is not the primary goal of catechesis. The *definitive* goal of catechesis is to provide an intimate experience of Jesus; the definitive goal is not to teach religion, but to nurture an *encounter* with Jesus Christ. When I looked up the word “definitive” in the dictionary, *Webster’s* defined the word this way: “*not able to be argued about or changed: final and settled: complete, accurate, and considered to be the best of its kind.*”

I have yet to see a textbook create an intimate encounter with Jesus Christ. Studying the terms, beliefs, and rituals of the Catholic Church is without question high on the formation to-do list. But if I never pay attention to the definitive aim, how far will it get us?

We have too many parishes that seem more interested in getting children and families to know *about* Jesus and his church

rather than getting them to *know* Jesus, personally, intimately, relationally. Maybe our youth are leaving in droves after confirmation because *we* failed to help them learn what exactly intimately knowing Jesus Christ looks like. Did we position our students to encounter the Lord? Have *we* encountered the Lord ourselves so we can share as a witness, not a teacher?

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

To understand our current catechetical challenges, we need to pause and reflect backward. Before we can know where we need to go, we need to know where we have been and where we are now. Prior to 1885, catechesis in the United States was very diverse and uncoordinated. Every diocesan bishop determined the catechism that would be used in his diocese and each pastor implemented the bishop’s directives as they were able to. A wide variety of catechisms were used, usually originating from the country of the immigrant population. Organized catechetical efforts were reserved for seminaries where the church wanted to ensure its clergy were knowledgeable of the faith.

For this reason, the Catholic bishops of the United States gathered at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884. At this meeting, a committee of bishops was appointed to write a new catechism based on the *Roman Catechism* (1565) and the *Catechism of St. Robert Bellarmine* (1597) but adapted to use in America. The result was the publication of the *Baltimore Catechism* (1885), as it would be called, written primarily by Most Reverend John Lancaster Spalding, Bishop of Peoria, Illinois.

The *Baltimore Catechism* was structured in a question and answer format to ensure uniformity and clarity of knowledge. The question and answer format of this catechism became very popular in dioceses across America.

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) was introduced to the United States in 1902. It provided an entire program aimed at improving how catechesis was systematically conducted within a diocese. Within the CCD, catechists received training, teaching materials were standardized, and dioceses began to more closely oversee how catechesis was conducted within the parishes.

The modern catechetical movement in America really began following World War I when chaplains, interviewing soldiers



returning from the war, were astonished to find that many soldiers did not practice their faith while away from home, nor could they give expression to that faith very well. New approaches to teaching the faith that moved from rote memorization to engaging the learner in the life of the Christian community were developed.

A major turning point in how the Catholic Church understood catechesis was the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II did not produce a specific document on catechesis, though it was considered. However, two of the documents from Vatican II did have a profound effect on the ongoing development of catechesis worldwide. *Gaudium et Spes*, (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), challenged the church to engage the modern culture and recognized that the gospel must be proclaimed so that it can be heard and understood in every culture. *Dei Verbum*, (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), established that Catholics were to proclaim Christ incarnate and help people develop a relationship with Him.

In 1971, the Congregation of the Clergy produced the General Catechetical Directory (GCD), which built upon the documents of Vatican II. The GCD presents catechesis as a ministry of the word and places emphasis on correct teaching; it established faith in Christ as the goal of catechesis; and names word, worship, and service as the primary tasks of catechesis (85-86).

The following year, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was published, which reintroduced the ancient process for preparing and forming adults and children of catechetical age who are seeking baptism or full communion within the church. The process includes formation, instruction, and training in worship, Christian service, and community living. The Rite also allowed for the completion of study based upon the individual believer and not the school calendar (42-43).

In 1974, Pope Paul VI gathered bishops from around the world at a synod to address the critical issues facing the church. The result of that synod was *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (On Evangelization in the Modern World), which made it clear that the church's primary work is to call people to Christ, that catechesis is an essential part of the process of evangelization, and evangelization is to introduce all people to Christ and help them develop a relationship with him (14).

Three years later, Pope Paul VI called the bishops together for another synod, and this time the focus was on catechesis. The result of the synod was *Catechesi Tradendae*, (Catechesis in our Time), which was published in 1979 and is a foundational document for all modern catechetical efforts. *Catechesi*

*Tradendae* places the emphasis on the catechesis of adults, calls for a complete and systematic presentation of the Christian message, and recognizes that all catechesis must be presented in a culturally appropriate manner (21). The Vatican Synod of 1985 celebrated the 20th anniversary of Vatican II and produced the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), which shaped all local catechisms, catechetical textbooks, and formation of catechists.

In 1997, the Holy See, greatly influenced by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Catechesi Tradendae* and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, published its revision of the General Catechetical Directory, the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC). The GDC summarizes the development of catechesis from 1954 until the present, calls for a new evangelization, places catechesis as a moment in the process of evangelization, emphasizes the importance of the community life in Christian formation,

sees adults as the primary audience for catechesis, names the RCIA as the model for all catechesis, and names the six tasks of catechesis: knowledge of faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching to pray, education for community life and missionary initiation (85-86).

Gathering all of the wisdom from the documents listed above, the United States Bishops published the National

Directory for Catechesis (NDC) in May 2005. The National Directory makes it clear that you must first know whom it is you are trying to catechize and the cultural influence they experience. The NDC outlines the tasks essential for sound catechesis: bring people into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ; establish the standards needed for authentic catechesis; examine the life a Christian is called to live; name the various groups to be catechized starting with adults and moving to adolescents and then children and suggest principles for catechizing each group; explore the roles of those who carry out the task of catechesis; examine organizational structures needed for effective catechesis and the necessary resources for quality catechesis.

Church documents give evidence of an implicit understanding of this shift in effective education practice. The NDC states, "Adolescents develop the ability to reason deductively, making the use of systematic, formal methods of instruction more feasible. Despite this, deductive methods are more effective when preceded by induction — approaches that provide 'experiences of lived faith, in which the message of salvation is applied to specific situations'" (181).

In *Catechesi Tradendae*, St. Pope John Paul II explains that catechesis must "bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures" and "seek to know these cultures

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... learn their most significant expressions ... and respect their particular values and riches.” In this way, catechesis will offer cultures “knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought” (53).

### FROM MAINTENANCE TO MISSION

With all of the documents affirming the same need to shift our catechetical efforts, why are so many parishes still obsessed with formation that focuses almost exclusively on content? If there is any phrase in Catholic ministry that epitomizes the worst in catechesis, it’s, “That’s how we have always done it.” Now that summer is here, many catechetical programs across the country will take last year’s parish calendar and explore “locking in” the same dates for the new year after a quick review of the public and private school calendars. Gosh knows we can’t have a conflict! While on one level I understand this process, I also know it is this very process that is the problem.

We were baptized to evangelize. Our mission field is in the community, the athletic field, the grocery store, and around the dinner table. As catechetical leaders, our definitive focus is on providing fertile soil so encounter opportunities (and there are many) can be nurtured, identified, and embraced.

Building a bridge between the sacred and the secular as our documents ask requires we understand that, like it or not, the culture has formed our children to learn through experience. This would seem to create the ideal opportunity for encounters. This is also where studying the RCIA model, noted in church documents as the “preferred” model for all catechesis can be beneficial. The RCIA process is broken down into distinct periods, with a formal rite that marks the transitions between these periods. Each step allows catechumens and candidates to reflect on their journey and to discern how they may follow Christ more closely.

### RCIA AS A MODEL

The first period is the inquiry or precatechumenate. This initial period is characterized by a “come and see” attitude. Those inquiring into the Roman Catholic faith come together as a group and learn the basic outline of the Catholic faith through weekly meetings. It is a time for surfacing questions about the faith and what it means in our daily living. This period concludes with the Rite of Acceptance, where the Catholic Church welcomes you as one on the journey toward full membership within the church.

This initial period in the RCIA takes an entirely different approach from the traditional catechetical model: In the RCIA there is an assumption that the catechumen has not had an experience of conversion in Jesus Christ and is exploring the faith having no prior experience with the community. This is known as pre-evangelization. The traditional catechetical model assumes that the child wants to be present and the parents fully support the faith formation of the child both at church and at home. Because of this assumption, the child

is ready to begin formal learning. What would happen if we assumed that most students and families in our programs have *not* been pre-evangelized? What if we focused efforts to ensure parents don’t lose contact with the parish between baptism and first grade and used this period as a period of “come and see”?

The second period of the RCIA is the catechumenate. During this period, candidates and catechumens move through an in-depth look at the faith professed by the Catholic Church. This period typically lasts until the beginning of Lent and concludes with the Rite of Election. However, ideally, the catechumenate lasts as long as required. Individuals who are unbaptized are now called the elect, or “chosen by God.” The Rite of Election marks a decisive point on the journey, where an individual publicly states that he or she intends to become a Catholic. This period would seem to affirm that studying the deep wisdom and richness of the church is a part of the process; it is just not the only part. In the traditional catechetical model, the student does not profess their desire to stay Catholic until the end of the process: confirmation.

The third period is called purification and enlightenment. This period continues what began in the catechumenate, with an emphasis on personal conversion and the development of a personal relationship with God. Again, we see a significant divergence of approach between the RCIA and catechetical classroom model. In the RCIA model, the closer you move toward full initiation, the more the focus shifts to identifying encounter and relationship experiences. In the classroom model, the closer the candidate gets to confirmation, typically, the more the lesson plans amp up the volume of content and doctrine the student needs to know. To teach children (and adults) how to recognize when God draws near to them on their own road of life requires they are apprenticed by a disciple who has experienced an encounter themselves and freely witnesses to how their heart burned.

When I lead parish missions, staff training days, or catechist formation sessions I always build in a time for the witnesses to practice witnessing. This allows the young disciple to learn that knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus. Witnessing provides an opportunity for the young disciple to hear the genuine joy and internal peace that come when you turn away from the selfishness and sin of the culture and embrace a sacramental way of life.

Witnessing is essential to evangelization. “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if it does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.’ ... It is primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus — the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41).

The conclusion of the third period is when the elect receive the sacraments of initiation. Usually completed during the Easter

Vigil, those who have never been baptized are baptized and receive confirmation and Eucharist becoming full members of the Catholic Church.

For students in the traditional catechetical model, once they have been fully initiated through the sacrament of confirmation, the formal classroom catechesis ends unless the parish has a specific youth ministry program or catechetical program for post-confirmation students and adults. In the RCIA, the process does not end after full initiation. Following Easter Sunday, those who were a part of the RCIA enter the fourth period called mystagogia. This period continues for several weeks after Easter. It is a time when the newly initiated (called neophytes) learn the practical aspects of belonging to a parish and some of the many ways that our faith can be lived out in the world.

What would happen if the last contact we had with our newly confirmed was not the night of confirmation? If we are more deliberate about nurturing an authentic Catholic community within their learning groups each year, would they be so quick to leave those groups? Would they want to stay connected with the people they had shared profound moments of spiritual growth, laughed, cried, and struggled with and come to view as authentically different from the often superficial relationships they experience in the world and on social media? Why don't we see teens that have been involved in a youth ministry model outside of the classroom model disappear so quickly after graduation?

### LEAVING THE UPPER ROOM ... AGAIN

Fear is a terrible thing. It causes us to become so worried about all that could go wrong that we choose to remain with the familiar, even when we know the familiar is failing. The disciples in the upper room knew this fear as well. For them, their fear was grounded in a real threat of physical harm. For us, it is fear of changing something so familiar and so comfortable. We know our lesson plans well. We know which weekends will be busy and which weekends we will rest. We have our schedules and we like them. New approaches will be confusing, tiring, and may create disagreement in our parish. People may get mad at us and tell us how crazy we are.

And some people will come to know the Lord as his way of life.

Today's catechetical leader needs to recognize that the Catholic Church's position as an authoritative cornerstone for society has changed in the minds of many people. Whereas for many generations, people followed the instruction, rules, and advice of the church without question, the postmodern generation rejects such an absolute position. In saying this, it is important to clarify that this modern reality does not mean that what the church teaches no longer applies to modern people nor does it infer that the church's mission has become irrelevant. This recognition of modern culture simply means that today's learner is not open to receiving what the church teaches because the church has not first established credibility and relationship with the learner. When the church makes a special effort to establish significant

relationships with its members, we see a very different result and attitude. Jesus, the apostles, the missionaries were always on a mission. The mission was *toward* people's lives and brokenness *first*; then they explained God's ways.

Rather than lining up the number of lesson plans with the number of weeks in the year, spend the first few weeks building a community that invites them to share their life, their hopes, their fears, and their faith. Rather than placing students in a class based upon their grade, know that they are an individual first and are an apprentice who may be at a different spiritual level than their peers. What if classes were placed more like we do in day school where students at one spiritual development level were placed in one group and students in another spiritual development level were placed in a different group? Why? Because some families *do* nurture the faith in their child and others do not. Each requires a different approach and each requires us to know how the children we are entrusted with are actually progressing.

Missionary catechesis seeks to know the student and his or her needs. Because we value every human life, the children and their families are more than just individuals who fill our enrollment numbers. They are people with joys, sorrows, sufferings, and hope. So how do we know them at this level? Be more intentional.

I have been teaching parishes to develop an Individual Spiritual Plan (ISP) — similar to an IEP for students with special needs in day school — for every student and family. This way you can sit down each year with every family, face to face, and learn how we can serve them personally on their journey. We then begin to view our parents as partners. We can identify every student's preferred learning style, strengths, and struggles. We can map out the application approach to the content with the parents, so the apprentice child (and parent) can see specific ways the teachings of the church can be implemented at home, in school, at the ball field. Finally, meeting face to face creates a direct, relational Catholic connection for our families who are overwhelmed and underappreciated. We meet them, just like the woman at the well at midday, at their wells when the culture has overwhelmed them.

The first step of catechesis is evangelization. Evangelization is not about how to get people to come. Evangelization is about where we need to go to find them. This is the mission of the church. It is our great commission. |

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# The Dynamics of Conversion in the RCIA

Michael Marchal



Through my work with RCIA participants, I have come to understand the dynamics of conversion. In my book, *The Spirit of Conversion*, I wrote about Donald Gelpi's theory of fivefold conversion. I have since come to three new insights about the process in general.

First, while repentance often drives the conversion process, it is not the only factor. Though the desire to mend our flaws and move on to a richer and more mature self is crucial, that desire is what I have come to think of as the “push” part of the participant's motivation. The “pull” is love, for our sense of the Divine in some way present and our deep yearning for a more authentic relationship with the good God become ever more important in the process of conversion. And in a healthy process I believe that these two motives are closely related.

Second, I appreciate Aristotle's comment that virtue lives in the middle. Not just at the beginning of the conversion but along the way as well, we can be too carried away or else become disengaged. Both are flaws because we become too narrowly focused. Balance is a sign of a healthy process.

Third, human development requires an intermediate phase of change and growth before a new identity is embraced and “settles in” as our new self. Taking on a new identity means that for a while ideas are provisional, values experimental, and behavior tentative.

Only through such a period of flux does a new and richer self emerge—especially for those who truly yearn for conversion.

The type of liberating love at work in the middle, the “adolescent” level, is *philia*: reciprocal, mutual, give-and-take friendship, no matter what form it takes to aid growth within that specific component. The type at work in the third is *agape*, some form of self-sacrificing love.

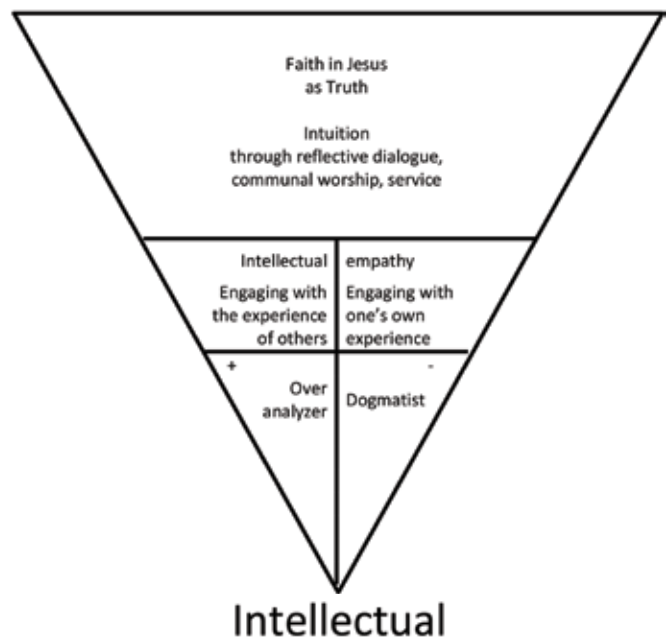
The five components of conversion are: intellectual, emotional, personal moral, sociopolitical moral, spiritual. In this article, we will look at the intellectual and emotional components.

The graphics below are meant to be read from the bottom up. The plus and minus signs on the first two levels are not evaluations; instead they indicate the type of imbalance at that level. A plus sign indicates overemphasis; a minus, underengagement.

## THE DYNAMICS OF INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

Intellectual conversion is not merely our mental assent to a formula of belief. In the Creed, we do not say just that “I believe *that* there is one God ...” but “I believe *in* one God ...” The latter is a statement both of acceptance of a vision of ultimate reality and of commitment to a relationship with a Trinity of Persons. That richer meaning is built upon the process of learning how to use our rational and intuitive minds maturely in our personal quest to develop a right relationship with the living God.

Some never begin the journey of intellectual conversion. Lacking curiosity, they have a view of the world and themselves and God which they are comfortable with and have never felt



a need or call to examine it more closely. When faced with a possible change, they seem to reject it offhandedly, without investigating the reasons behind it. “Open to growth” is not a phrase they live by.

For some, a life situation awakens them. Often it is because of a personal event such as the serious illness of someone they love: My grandma is the best person that I know; how can a good God allow her to suffer so much? Sometimes it is because

of an event in society: If America is a Christian nation, why did we invade Iraq without provocation? Whatever the reason, intellectual seekers begin to analyze their understanding of themselves and their world; they look for implications and discover contradictions. And so they begin this journey of conversion by trying to sort out the concepts and images that they already have of God.

### Trap A: The overanalyzer

The trap for such seekers is that they can begin the journey by trying to figure life out entirely on their own. They become locked up in their own heads, trapped in their own set of definitions and preconceptions, logically analyzing the data over and over. Many fundamentalist Protestants whom we encounter in RCIA ministry are caught up in scriptural proof-texting. They are strongly focused on the implications of isolated verses and miss the larger context (cf. the Westboro Baptist Church).

Yet, coming to know the living God is not like solving a math problem; it is more like developing a friendship or even falling in love. The way out of this trap is through what I would call *intellectual empathy*, the shape that *philia* takes in this type of conversion. Overly analytic intellectual seekers need to get out of their own heads and encounter another perspective. They must become engaged not so much with the *ideas* of others but with their *experiences*, and thereby learn concretely how others have made sense of life.

Perhaps by reading a book, taking a course, joining a study group, or even engaging in a random conversation, they at last see the world through someone else's eyes. From my experience, this exploratory phase — intellectual “adolescence” — is triggered by their contact with role models. For it is not just the content of the course that makes it a growth experience for a student; it is the inspiration and modeling by the teacher. It is not just the give-and-take within the discussion group that the seeker connects to; it is the congruence of life experiences and challenges that other participants reveal in the course of the conversations. Or it is the book repeatedly read or the movie repeatedly watched because the seeker finds the plot and the characterization inspirational.

Religiously, it is the homilist whose authenticity makes the themes of Scripture come alive or the retreat group whose acceptance of the seeker provides the confidence for them to move at last out of his or her own head and into a shared search for truth.

What such experiences bring to an intellectual seeker is faith — a trust not only that asking questions about the meaning of life and its connection with God is all right, but also that answers are available — if they go outside themselves. And so presenters and above all sponsors play a crucial role during this phase because they can serve as intimate role models; they can show personally how insight and wisdom and a deeper life of prayer have been gained through the life experiences and not just abstract ideas.

### Trap B: The dogmatist

Another category that I have encountered frequently among intellectual seekers, though, is the dogmatists; those who resist the journey of intellectual conversion. This resistance does not mean that they are not interested in the teachings of their religion and in learning more about the contents of their faith. In fact, they are often very devout and good people. Unlike the Overly analytic, though, the faith of their community is not an ongoing and living reality for them.

The trap in which they are caught is a historical naiveté in their approach to dogma. They seem to have identified one intellectual and cultural expression of how to be Catholic with the way things have always been — and should remain forever. I have found this rigid, anti-intellectual approach most evident among the traditionalist or restorationist movement within Roman Catholicism, especially in regard to liturgy.

An obvious example is found in the advertisement in our diocesan paper in which a Mass in the Extraordinary Form is described as being celebrated in the “timeless Latin Rite.” Which rite does the advertisement refer to? In Milan, Mass in the Ambrosian Rite can be celebrated in Latin. Throughout Spain, Mass in the Mozarabic Rite can be celebrated in Latin. Anywhere in the world, the post-Vatican II Mass can be celebrated in Latin.

Moreover, how is the celebration that they are referring to “timeless”? Since the celebration is legitimate, they will be using the Missal of John XXIII from 1962, a radical simplification of its predecessor. That previous Missal had been authorized by Pius XII less than a decade before, after his major reforms of the Holy Week liturgies. (It seems to be the one preferred by schismatic groups.) In this context, the word “timeless” clearly expresses some deeply felt and cherished aspect of this group's liturgical experience, but historically it makes no sense.

This kind of fundamentalism is found not only among Catholics. In this country many of the candidates who are drawn to RCIA are coming out of similar dogmatic backgrounds, only focused on the Bible rather than liturgy. As one friend of mine who directed an RCIA process in the Bible Belt South for several years remarked, “the smiles that came over the inquirers' faces when they realized that they could actually ask real questions indicated how liberated they felt.”

It is from this kind of rigidly dogmatic but naïve attitude that Pope Francis seems to be struggling to set the church free. As he remarked recently, we must focus not on rules but on people.

It is precisely through *philia* expressed as intellectual empathy that this type of intellectual seeker also can escape from dogmatism. It is through encounter that they can learn to have faith in the experiences both of others and of themselves. For, like the overly analytic, the dogmatic need to cease treating religious doctrine as a set of theorems, and theologizing as a form of mathematical thinking; they need to turn instead to inductive thinking which seeks for meaning in life and relationship with God not only in creeds and rulebooks, but

through authentic encounters with other seekers on the same journey, some of whom are farther along the road.

And so, just as with the overly analytic, the dogmatic need presenters and sponsors as role models and guides. Reading and discussion groups are important for them as they begin to move more and more into the intermediate phase of intellectual conversion because both can challenge them to really think — deductively *and* inductively — and to see the world and God in a perspective different from the one that they had regarded as the only source of Truth by sharing in a richer experience of faith commitment.

### Intellectual maturity

These techniques and the sponsors who serve as “threshold people” into an intellectual life of greater logical rigor and intuitive understanding are not the end of the journey but the catalyst for its continuation. They introduce the intellectual seekers to the great Tradition created by two millennia of faithful Christians. Literature, especially poetry; philosophy and theology; art and music are only some of the treasures waiting to be shared by each new generation of believers. For our Tradition is not contained just in treatises and creeds, but in all the means that Christians have used their minds to express their understanding of both who God is and of who we are in God’s sight.

In other words, for both the overanalyzers and the dogmatists, the intermediate phase must end as they move beyond into the form that *agape* takes in intellectual conversion. A mature life of faith is marked by an awareness of *mystery* in its technical sense. For the believer, a mystery is not a puzzle which the human mind has not yet solved; instead, it is a reality, larger than ourselves, that we are caught up in — such as love or suffering or death — but do not fully understand.

Thirty years ago my friend Richard was sitting at the hospital bedside of his mother who was dying painfully of cancer. At last he had to ask her the question aching within him: Why would a good God let her suffer so much? Her answer was direct: If God’s own son ended up on a cross, how could she complain?

Her belief embodied a vision of the world in which suffering was not just an evil to be avoided or a punishment for sin. It was a part of life; and she could accept that fact, not because she had figured it out, but because of her profound trust in God, who had experienced what she was going through, and would at last bring her to something better. Her faith was not the sacrifice of her reason to something irrational; it was the surrender of her reason to someone greater.

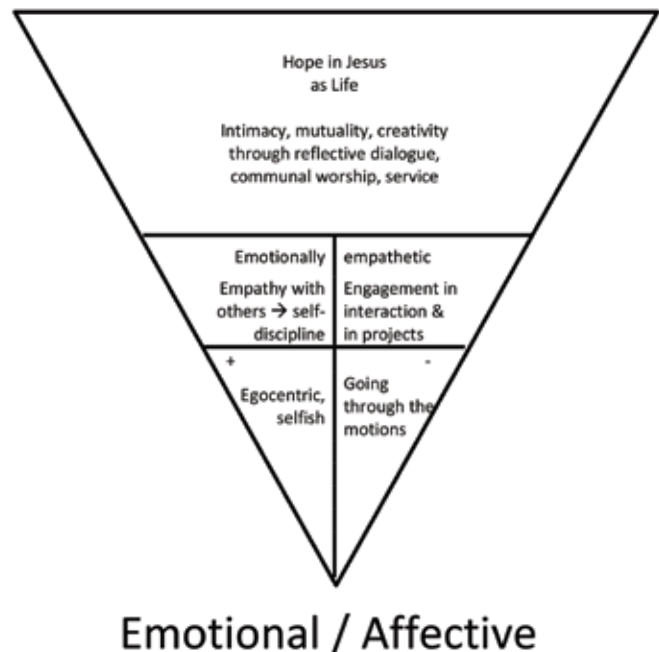
Shared service of others, communal worship, and especially reflective dialogue about the meaning of life and of our relationship with God will keep our faith Tradition alive. As Pope Francis has insisted so often, we are not fundamentalists with all the answers contained in our books; we are a faith-filled people on a journey who, with the help of the Spirit, will come to discover anew in every age how Jesus is the Truth.

### THE DYNAMICS OF EMOTIONAL CONVERSION

Emotional conversion often seems to be underappreciated by Roman Catholics. We presume that conversion is primarily, if not solely, an intellectual process.

Yet a moment’s reflection on how our own growth as human beings and as believers has been shaped and embodied by music and art and ritual opens up this dimension of conversion for us.

Our emotions bring energy and vitality to our lives and connectedness to our relationships. They also drive our creativity as we strive to express what is going on within us.



### Trap A: The egocentric

Learning how to express ourselves authentically, yet appropriately, is one of the crucial challenges of growing up. As a mother remarked to me recently, every one of her children had seemed so sweet, almost without original sin, until they learned to talk. Then “no” and “mine” entered their vocabulary, and the real work of parenting began.

Some people never seem to escape from the narcissism of childhood but are trapped in the power of their current feeling. And we encounter them repeatedly in our daily lives: the man in a rush who lets the door slam in our face, the Italian woman who tried to stand on my arm on the armrest so that she could get her bag into the overhead bin, the woman who would not move her seat up because she was tired so my sister could not even eat during an eight-hour flight. And we could all confess our own similar acts of self-absorption.

How such emotional seekers have been trapped is revealed by the isolation and consequent loneliness that they experience. Their relentless egotism does indeed bring them pleasure; yet

it also keeps them from contact with others, and thus with the love of God present in all those around them. Trapped in themselves, their quest for self-satisfaction usually becomes more frenetic and driven.

The initial way out for such seekers is through *emotional empathy*, the form that *philia* takes in this context. The egocentric need to become aware of the deep feelings of others. And they are usually startled into such awareness by contact with genuinely happy and mature people. Whether it be a parent or a coach, another member of a team, or a coworker, someone invites them into connectedness. They begin to experience reciprocity and thereby learn how their words and actions affect not only themselves but others.

This growing experience of the give-and-take of friendship leads them at last to self-discipline; they learn to restrain their search for gratification by focusing their energies no longer on short-term personal gratification but on the success of a larger group in the hope of a less immediate but richer long-term satisfaction.

I remember an RCIA candidate whom we worked with about a decade ago. His contact with the generosity and support of his fiancée convinced him to leave his well-paying but toxically competitive job for one less lucrative but with a supportive environment—and ultimately led him to the RCIA.

And I remember a college student with little self-confidence who had been caught on a merry-go-round of partying until she had joined a friend for a social gathering of the parish's young adult group. There she discovered how people could laugh and talk and joke, but not in a competitive or mean-spirited way. That discovery led her to take control of her life and to search in the RCIA for the source of her friends' genuine happiness.

Both of these people who were seeking escape from the trap of their self-centeredness found it through encounter with truly happy people. Hope came alive in them, and they found the energy to connect with others and find new life through reciprocal relationships.

### **Trap B: The unwarmed heart**

Just as egocentric seekers are trapped by their self-centered emotions, so their opposites are isolated by their lack of inner vitality. This category ranges from those who are simply shy to those who are severely repressed. The common challenge is that they cannot express their authentic feelings. And, just as connection with genuinely happy and mature people enables the egocentric to restrain, discipline, and direct their feelings, so contact with such people enables those who lack vitality to come alive, to find self-acceptance and a confident self-expression.

Such seekers need the teacher who can open up for them the treasures of the human heart revealed through plays and novels and serious music. They need the friend who takes them to the arena concert where they discover a new favorite performer

whose songs say aloud the feelings which they have never been able to voice. They need the coach who is interested not just in winning but in building a team of disciplined but supportive players focused on doing their best together.

And they need an RCIA team focused on learning their stories, gifts, and challenges. If all we do to “sort fish” is to find out whether a new inquirer is baptized or not, catechized or not, and then hand them a book, we have failed to show that emotional empathy that is crucial for this kind of seeker.

Several years ago the group headed toward initiation at Easter Vigil was composed of younger seekers challenged primarily by emotional conversion. The most intense moment in their catechetical process came during the preparation for the first scrutiny when we were reflecting on the story of the Samaritan woman. One young woman shared how she had never felt that the well of life would ever produce any water for her other than tears; she shared that she had previously attempted suicide. We made certain later that she was getting appropriate psychological support, but the immediate acceptance and affirmation by her peers and the team gave her the confidence and hope to continue.

Just as the focused emotion of the RCIA rituals is important for the egocentric, so for her as well their very physical and expressive character was crucial. The beauty of the communal singing, the caring but firm touch of the pastor as he laid on hands, the simple gesture of kneeling—all warmed her heart. The sensory richness of Vigil was even more powerful for her. We are blind to much of the work of the Spirit if we think that the only important work of conversion is done in catechetical sessions.

### **Emotional Maturity**

The interaction with truly alive but contented people that restrains the egotist and enlivens the unwarmed heart is not the end of the journey for emotional seekers but the catalyst for its continuation. Although the growth experienced by sharing in the life of prayer and service of a supportive community is real, the danger that lurks in this intermediate phase is the self-centeredness that can still be part of emotional empathy. There is still “take” as well as “give” in reciprocal friendship. If growth stops and the center of focus remains myself, then hope dies and vitality fades.

For example, I have known several people who had fantastic experiences on urban plunges and mission trips and who came home on fire through their experiences. These people continued to sincerely care for and be concerned about the poverty and exploitation that their new “friends” were living in, but these emotions never led to any actions to alleviate those conditions. Instead their consumerist lives continued much as before. In the long run, the retreat experience seemed to be very much like a challenging vacation.

In other words, the participants in a mission experience failed to move beyond emotional empathy to *self-sacrificing love*. For

once again we are caught up in a mystery, in a reality larger than ourselves that we can experience but never truly grasp. Those truly mature emotionally know that “it is better to give than to receive.” Fully developed emotional conversion not only understands and appreciates the “other”; instead, the *hope* which it embodies drives an individual on to selfless service of the “other.”

A premier example of this is the parents’ care for their children. My peers are deeply nostalgic for their child-rearing years. Despite all the hassles, complications, and exhaustion that come with raising little ones, those years were a golden time of self-giving.

Similarly, as a teacher, I realized I was going to get into heaven if I became the man my sophomores needed me to be. They were caught in the intellectual, moral, and emotional challenges of a burgeoning maturity driven by hormonal and physiological changes over which they had no control. In the midst of their chaos, they needed me to be firm but understanding, strict but kind, challenging but supportive, wise but willing to listen—and all of this for a solid forty-five minutes a day. I had to be totally present to them and decide on the spot what to say and do. It was an exhilarating and exhausting experience, and I look back on it with nostalgia.

As Matthew 25 tells us, in serving the needy we are serving Christ—whether we recognize him or not. And, as St. August-

tine described his conversion experience, it was in his reflective memory that he found God’s presence and care that had been there all along. And it is in the freedom from self-absorption that such moments of selfless giving bring that the emotional seeker becomes aware of the Mystery in which they have been caught up.

When emotional maturity unfolds, give-and-take reciprocity moves into mutuality. My feeling good moves into intimacy. Sentiment becomes creativity. Good works open the door to hope for ourselves and others because the mystery of God’s faithful love has been at work in us and through us, bringing not just pleasure but joy to the believing heart.

Just as with intellectual conversion, shared service of others, vibrant communal worship, and reflective dialogue will bring the Body of Christ alive in each age. The constant renewal of our hope by the power of the Spirit within will help us discover anew how Jesus is the Life. **I**

*Michael Marchal has degrees from Xavier University and Fordham University and is retired after teaching high school for 44 years. He has been involved with worship at Bellarmine Chapel of Xavier University and has served a term on the archdiocesan worship commission. He has published numerous articles on education and liturgy and four books: Parish Funerals, Adapting the Liturgy, the award-winning The Spirit at Work, and Towards the Table.*



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# You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit

by James A. K. Smith

Reviewed by Dan Thomas



*You Are What You Love* is an insightful and visionary discussion of how to do Christian education in our postmodern world. The key, according to Smith, is first to get in touch with what we truly love, test those loves in the light of the gospel vision of the reign of God, allow ourselves to be formed by liturgy, and follow God's commission to "image God, unfold creation's potential, and occupy creation" through "faithful presence."

Liturgy is a key to understanding the message of this book, but Smith understands it in the broad sense that includes not only our traditional understanding, but also its use as the stories that are told by our cultural "liturgies" as well.

As a Christian philosopher, Smith wants to explore the definition of what it is to be human. Often in our churches and our culture, we picture humanness as thinkingness, that is, we are what we think. He says, "no," we are what we love and our lives

are determined by what it is that we love. This is the basis for the approach to Christian formation Smith takes in this book.

The title of chapter 2, "You Might Not Love What You Think," expresses an essential element of this formation process. "The body of Christ is that unique community of practice where members own up to the fact that we don't always love what we say we do — that the 'devices and desires' of our hearts outstrip our best intentions" (30).

That is due to the "secular liturgies" that are a significant part of our experience. His presentation on the mall as a temple captures this reality perfectly. We are unconsciously formed into the gospel of consumerism with its three tenets: "I'm broken, therefore I shop," "I shop with others," "I shop (and shop, and shop ...) therefore I am."

In order for us Christians to recuperate and re-form ourselves in relation to what our heart truly loves, we need to immerse



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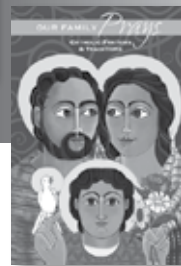
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ourselves into the liturgy of our tradition, which begins with our coming into the presence of God.

“Christian worship is nothing less than an invitation to participate in the life of the Triune God” (70). Our worship must become formative, not merely expressive. “Instead of the bottom-up emphasis on worship as *our* expression of devotion and praise, historic Christian worship is rooted in the conviction that God is the primary actor or agent in the worship encounter” (72). “Christian worship doesn’t just teach us how to think, it teaches us how to love, and it does so by inviting us into the biblical story and implanting that story in our bones” (85).

An essential element of this process is to replace the stories of the secular liturgies of today with the stories of God, Jesus, the Spirit, and our church that bring the message of the reign of God. Christian worship is to “let the Spirit of God, with whom nothing is impossible, convince us that *this could be*: that despite a million voices crying otherwise, the gracious good news of the gospel is *true*” (94).

In his discussion of the “liturgies of the home,” Smith begins with this vision: “The smile of the cherishing mother that evokes the smile of the infant is a microcosm of a cosmic truth: that God’s gracious initiative in the incarnation — ‘[God] first loved us’ — is the provoking smile of a Creator who meets us in the flesh, granting even the grace that allows us to love [God] in return” (112).

Thus, the home becomes the place that extends what is experienced in the liturgy. “[W]e should also consider how the liturgies of the household *grow out of* and *draw us into* the liturgies of the congregation” (114). He points out the crucial idea that “baptism both makes and signifies a social reality” counter to what our society’s vision of the family is as “a private, closed home as part of the American ideal of independence” (117). He makes an insightful comment in this context when he states: “The promises in baptism indicate a very different theology of the family, which recognizes that ‘families work well when we do not expect them to give us all we need’” (117).

There is a very powerful and what some would consider conservative picture of how youth ministry fits into his idea that it is the heart that we must form and transform; thus, entertainment is not what youth ministry is about, but a bringing of young people into the traditional practices of Christian life.

The final chapter offers a vision of discipleship’s ultimate purpose to involve oneself in “vocational liturgies” whereby we come to service in the world God has made in God’s image, which if we make real, will achieve what is truly God for us all. ■

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



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# Practicing Accompaniment and Mercy

Teresa Burns



As a parish catechetical leader, I get a little defensive when people assume that all I do is work with children. We still have a lot of work to do in educating people about life-long faith formation. I would say that I work primarily with adults: recruiting and training catechists, coordinating Bible studies and other adult faith-formation opportunities, and more often than not, talking to adults about life and faith.

Along with pastors, parish catechetical leaders are likely people's first point of parish contact. Whether someone is moving into the parish, needs assistance, or is looking for information for sacrament preparation or other faith-related opportunities, they will most likely first connect with the pastor or parish catechetical leader.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis is clear about how pastors — and PCLs — should respond to those who come to them with merciful accompaniment.

Although she constantly holds up the call to perfection and asks for a fuller response to God, the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm. Let us not forget that the Church's task is often like that of a field hospital. (291)

## MERCIFUL ACCOMPANIMENT

I've been thinking a lot about the skills a person needs for merciful accompaniment in parish catechetical ministry. Many PCLs have degrees in theology or pastoral care or certification in catechetical ministry. This is good and necessary. We need to know what we are teaching. There are, however, other critical skills that are required of PCLs that don't come with academic training.

## ACTIVE LISTENING

The one skill I use the most is listening. I have not always been a good listener. I used to pretend to listen to people, but while they were talking, I was formulating my response or thinking about something else. Over the years, I have become more intentional about listening to people. It has taken much retraining, but now when I listen to people, if I find myself drifting to another thought or formulating my response and not focusing on what they are saying to me, I ask the Holy Spirit to help me focus. I also use active listening skills, such

as making eye contact and paraphrasing back to the person what I heard them say. Paraphrasing what I've heard allows the person to acknowledge that I heard correctly or to clarify what they really meant to say.

## ENGAGED DIALOGUE

Another skill that I've cultivated is engaged dialogue. I used to jump to conclusions, thinking that I knew what a person needed as they asked a question. As soon as someone finished their question about parish programs, sacrament preparation, or anything else, I would jump right in to share the technical aspects of their inquiry, such as dates, times, requirements, etc. Practicing engaged dialogue means that rather than jumping into the technical information, I invite them to share more about their story and their expectations. It takes more time, but once I've listened to their story, I can continue to dialogue with them to discern the best response to their needs.

## COMPASSION

It may come naturally to some, but others may cultivate compassion with prayer and intentionality. The practice of compassionate listening and response is critical for PCLs and all parish ministers. Pope Francis wrote, "The Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to families and to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters" (200). Practicing compassion implies that PCLs and pastors will open themselves to creating an atmosphere of understanding and open dialogue.

Practicing compassionate active listening and engaged dialogue is a process by which PCLs and pastors can practice "merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate. That is the mindset which should prevail in the Church and lead us to open our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society" (312) and all whom we accompany in our parishes.

Of course, prayer must envelope all of our encounters with others. The regular practice of connecting with God instills in us a humble openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With prayer, combined with compassionate, active listening and engaged dialogue, we may become beacons of Christ's merciful love and compassionately respond to those who come to us for direction and guidance. ■

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# The Unintended Consequence of the New Evangelization

Claire M. McManus



When St. Pope John Paul II called for a new evangelization in the last decade of the 20th century, he sent the church into a period of self-reflection and renovation of its way of proceeding. In a 1990 homily, he offered some guidance as to how this evangelization should occur. “A solid catechesis at all levels, especially in the family and among young people, has to follow the announcement of the Good News. The invitation to believe has to be accompanied by timely instruction on all that the Lord has wished to teach us through his church. It would be an error to catechize without having evangelized previously, just as it would be equally wrong to evangelize without later attending sufficiently to instruction in the faith received.”

Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed a great deal of innovation in the church’s approach to evangelization. A high priority has been placed on evangelizing adults, and parishes have demonstrated many ways to gather them in and try to light a spark in their faith.

Over time, dioceses have embraced adult evangelization, renamed their offices and in some cases, reduced their focus on systematic catechesis, relegating it to an anachronism that represents a bygone era. Parishes have followed suit with some actually placing blame on their catechetical programs as if they are the cause of the exodus of souls from the congregation. One large diocese even encouraged its parishes to do whatever it takes to evangelize the adults, even if it means getting rid of their religious education program for youth.

One catechetical leader named the issue in his blog, where he reflects on the need for a moment of evangelization. “This life-change, or conversion, is the key factor missing in parish catechetical programming today, and it is an integral part of the New Evangelization.” He suggests that catechists and catechetical leaders lack the spark that evangelizes. Taking this to heart, a parish declared that it has ended its catechetical program for youth in favor of evangelizing adults so that they might develop future catechists who are on fire with their faith. They don’t mention what will happen to the youth of their parish while they wait for this fire to be kindled.

## UNEXPECTED OUTCOME

St. John Paul II probably did not expect his exhortation to focus on evangelization to become the death knoll of catechesis. The world of social science calls this the law of unintended consequences. Technology often lends itself to this phenomenon, such as the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg

leading to the invention of eyeglasses, as all the new reading material revealed that many people were farsighted.

This was a positive outcome, but sometimes an innovation can have a detrimental effect, like Prohibition in the 1920s leading to the growth of organized crime. One sociologist noted that unintended consequences can also be impacted by basic values. The Protestant ethic of hard work and asceticism, for example, paradoxically led to its own decline through the accumulation of wealth and possessions. Future church historians may observe that the new evangelization led to the demise of children’s catechesis.

The pendulum has always swung between catechetical content and methodology, but now it is in danger of becoming unhinged from its pivot by the new evangelization. It is time that the misunderstanding between catechizing and evangelizing be resolved, for we need both in play if we are to serve the mission of the church.

## CATECHESIS IS PART OF EVANGELIZATION

Evangelization is not just a moment in which a person falls off the horse and is blinded by the light, but can also be a process. St. John Paul II explains this in *Catechesi Tradendae*.

Evangelization — which has the aim of bringing the Good News to the whole of humanity, so that all may live by it — is a rich and complex, dynamic reality, made up of elements, or one could say moments, that are essential and different from each other, and that must be kept in view simultaneously. Catechesis is one of these moments — a very remarkable one — in the whole process of evangelization.

There is definitely a need to evangelize adults, particularly if we are asking them to be catechists who echo the Good News. Our children also need to be evangelized, and our catechetical programs are the perfect place where this can happen. Those who are skeptical about systematic catechesis have overlooked the fact that the kerygma still forms the foundation of the teaching. Innovation is necessary and welcome so that the Good News can be proclaimed to the youth of this technological generation.

Children, however, have the right to receive the kerygma in a way that is age appropriate and mindful of their capacity to learn. It is time we lose the language of either/or, evangelization vs. catechesis, and focus our effort on both/and. ■

*Claire M. McManus, STL, is the director of faith formation for the Diocese of Fall River.*

# A Plan for Harnessing the Evangelizing Power of *Laudato Si*

Patrice Spirou



It's a great day to be a catechist! Pope Francis is on a mission to evangelize the world and is putting effective faith-sharing tools right into our hands.

One of those tools, the encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home*, is a wake-up call to all of humanity. It is a cry for people to reach beyond their differences and unite behind the cause of caring for the gift of our earth. This letter reminds us of the interdependence we share with one another and our natural environment, the health of which is vital to our survival.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis is sounding the alarm, urgently reaching out to people of all walks of life. "Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet ... In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" (3).

Thankfully, the "Francis Effect" seems to be having a positive impact in creating such a dialogue in the United States, opening minds to the importance of caring for the environment. In November 2016, the *Georgia Bulletin* reported on a Yale School of Forestry study. The data found that following the Pope's address of this topic during his visit to the U.S., the number of Americans who were concerned about global warming and considered it to be a moral, human rights issue had increased.

## COMMON GROUND

It's quite amazing to observe Americans from all creeds, cultures, political parties, life styles, and traditions experiencing a shift in their viewpoint due to a Catholic pope and his writings. Who would have thought it possible? *Laudato Si* provides an easy and natural opportunity to go beyond our comfort level and engage in evangelization by lovingly listening, sharing, and joining with others to work toward the goal of a healthy environment for everyone. By picking up the mantle of apostleship and introducing the message of the sacredness of our earth, we are given a rich common ground and a reverent space for us to extend our hands and hearts to people of all beliefs.

Now, for the practical question: What can we do? Let's be honest, most people, even Catholics and most catechists, are never going to read *Laudato Si*. So how can we get the message out? Well, Atlanta's Archbishop Wilton Gregory decided to help us by reaching out to scientists of all faith backgrounds at the University of Georgia and asking them to devise strategies for implementing the encyclical. Together they produced

*Laudato Si* action plan for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, an amazingly, comprehensive and useful guide for putting Pope Francis's vision into practice.

## THE ACTION PLAN

One of the great things about this action plan is that it is *free!* For a downloadable copy (we're saving trees) go to <http://archatl.com/catholic-life/refreshatl/>

The action plan was announced on April 5, 2016, at an interfaith event held at the UGA Catholic Center. The plan offers practical ideas and activities for energy and water conservation, recycling, cleaner transportation, food distribution, sustainable landscapes, helping those impacted by climate change, taking political action, and much more. It definitely includes something for everyone!

The *Georgia Bulletin* also highlighted the diversity of the organizations with whom the plan will be shared explaining that the "Jewish-Catholic dialogue work has already started with Atlanta temples to partner on environmental efforts." In addition, "Dr. Gerald Durley, Baptist minister and board member of National Interfaith Power and Light, helped unveil the action plan with an impassioned speech. The retired pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church of Atlanta, called environmental efforts the 'civil rights issue of our time ... Everyone has a right to clean air. Everyone has a right to toxic free water and to live in harmony with God's total creation,' said Durley. 'Pope Francis reminds us that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves.'"

Please consider using *Laudato Si* and the action plan in your parish, community, diocese, and beyond. These powerful tools for evangelization teach "reversing the threat of global climate change and environmental degradation, and existing more sustainably in harmony with God's creation" is a spiritual work that unites us as brothers and sisters in the human family to protect and nurture the gifts God has given us. In the end, we may just find that together we have been evangelized. ■

*Patrice Spirou is assistant director of religious education in the Office of Formation and Discipleship at the Archdiocese of Atlanta. She has more than 25 years of experience serving and teaching in Catholic schools and parishes. Patrice is a passionate advocate of family-centered faith formation.*

# Catechetical Sunday Prayer: The Faith Prayed

Maria Schuette



“Happy are those who believe that they are not wasting their time when they escape from the glaring publicity of the day, and dare to stand face to face with solitude. It is then that heaven appears. And how are we to speak of heaven if we have never seen it?” (Fr. Raoul Plus, SJ, *Radiating Christ*)

Wasting time. We have all done it, but rarely want to. Our time is much too precious and highly coveted. However, the Lord asks something very demanding of our time — to surrender it. And yet, we feel guilty when we do.

## PRAYER

In ministry, we know that prayer is essential to life. “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (CCC 2559). For those who work in ministry, we may not see our requests as being contrary to the will of God. All we demand of God is that our parish or diocese flourish and grow in holiness, right? How can any of that be contrary to God’s will?

The Catechism continues: But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; *humility* is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. “Man is a beggar before God” (2559).

Our begging before God poses a great challenge to our pride. How do we beg before God? One practical way is to enter into solitude with him. We humble ourselves, moving away from the publicity of the day, affirmations, phone calls, e-mails, highly important meetings, schedules, and our way of doing ministry and surrender it to a few short moments in solitude.

Mother Teresa testified to the power of prayer and solitude with Christ. “Our adoration has doubled the number of our

vocations. In 1963, we were making a weekly Holy Hour together, but it was not until 1973, when we began our daily Holy Hour, that our community started to grow and blossom.”

St. John Vianney was assigned to be the parish priest in Ars, France, which at the time was a place of lies, drunkenness, and rampant sin. In a matter of ten years, “Ars was no longer Ars” thanks to the devotion of this priest. “If we really loved the good God, we should make it our joy and happiness to come and spend a few moments to adore him ... and we should regard those moments as the happiest of our lives.”

## RESERVOIRS OF MINISTRY

St. Bernard said that “If you are wise, you will be reservoirs and not channels...The channels let the water flow away and do not retain a drop. But the reservoir is first filled, and then, without emptying itself, pours out its overflow which is ever renewed, over the fields which it waters... We have so many channels in the Church today, but very few reservoirs” (*Soul of the Apostle-late*, 55).

For those who work in ministry at a parish or a diocese, we more than likely have access to a chapel or church where the Blessed Sacrament resides. The Lord desires to assist us, love us, and inspire us. How often do we enter throughout the day to our parish church or chapel simply putting ourselves at the disposal of the King of the Universe?

Do we beg at the foot of the master expecting miracles to happen?

How can we move from being channels and become beautiful, self-giving, healthy reservoirs? ■

*Maria Schuette is the director of religious education and youth ministry for the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin.*

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# It All Comes Down to Change

Leisa Anslinger



“The Church’s pastoral ministry exists to sustain the work of the Gospel. One way it does this is by nourishing and strengthening lay men and women in their calling and identity as people of faith, as contributors to the life and work of the Church, and as disciples whose mission is to the world. To grow in discipleship throughout life, all believers need and are called to build vibrant parish and diocesan communities of faith and service” (OHWB, 3).

This simple statement at the outset of *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* makes clear that the goal of adult faith formation is ongoing conversion in Christ. When we think about it this way, at its heart, adult faith formation is about leading people to embrace change. Not only this, our role as diocesan and parish catechetical leaders requires us to be attentive to the ways in which current processes and practices may need to change in order to “nourish and strengthen lay men and women in their calling and identity as people of faith.”

## SPIRIT OF CHANGE

The Holy Spirit is the agent of change in people’s minds, hearts, and lives. Our role is to be attentive to and cooperate with the Spirit as we shape lifelong faith formation, recognizing that people are often resistant to change. I am sure we have all experienced the “we’ve always done it this way” impulse in ministry. Even when we know that a current process is less than effective, we tend to be more comfortable with what we know. The same is true for each of us in our personal spiritual lives. We may truly desire to grow closer in our relationship with God, understanding of our faith, and acceptance of Christ’s call to love and service, yet, old habits die hard. Change is rarely easy.

How do we lead people, our parishes, and our dioceses to change? I have thought about this often, and find helpful guidance in the work of Dr. John Kotter on leading and managing change.<sup>1</sup> I believe his eight-step process for instituting change is applicable, both to the systemic development of

adult faith formation processes and programs and to leading people to intentionally embrace ongoing conversion in Christ.

## A SENSE OF URGENCY

The first step in Dr. Kotter’s change model is to create a sense of urgency. Why is change necessary? What will the positive impact of change be? We must be convinced of the need to and understand the implications of resisting change. Until we know why the need for change is urgent, our tendency to resist and to stay on the current course will prevail, whether in relationship to diocesan or parish ministry or from the personal faith perspective. As leaders, we must light a fire in the minds and hearts of people about their personal lives of faith and among those who help us to fashion adult faith formation.

Ministerial: Change is necessary if we are not effectively engaging adults in faith formation and through it to spiritual growth, understanding of our faith, participation in the Mass, other sacraments, community life, service and mission. This is a tall order, of course, and no program or process exists in isolation. Yet, we must be honest in our appraisal of current offerings in order to effectively lead our communities toward ongoing growth in faith.

Personal: Why is growth in faith important? What will the positive impact of change be?

We often focus our invitations and communication for adult faith formation on the call — we are called to discipleship, called to know our faith more deeply, called to mission and service, and certainly this is true. Yet, we know that acceptance of the call is not the first step. Evangelization precedes catechesis. And we must be evangelized every step of the way. Evangelization is about the why: Why is a relationship with Jesus and the church important? What will change in my life if I make a commitment to Christ?

What needs to change in your personal life of faith and spirituality? What needs to change in the life of your faith community? The time to embrace change, ongoing conversion, and transformation in Christ, is now. ■

*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.*

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*Until we know why the need for change is urgent, our tendency to resist and to stay on the current course will prevail, whether in relationship to diocesan or parish ministry or from the personal faith perspective.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kotterinternational.com/the-8-step-process-for-leading-change/>

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Compiled by Dan Pierson

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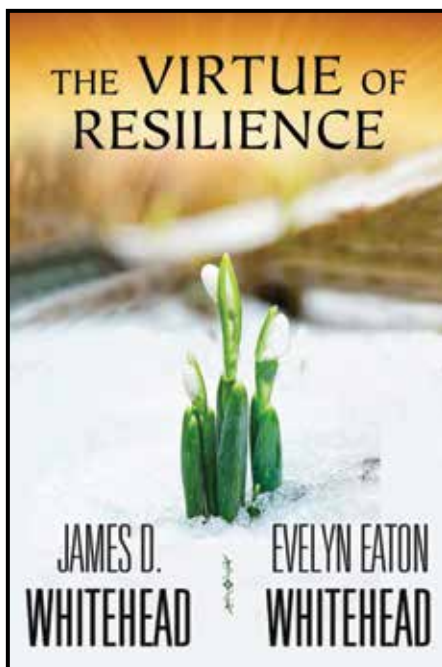
**The Virtue of Resilience** by James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. Orbis Books.

Resilience allows human beings to rally psychological and spiritual resources to withstand crises, weather repeated difficulties, and survive life's adversities. These noted spiritual leaders show us how to recover from emotional wounds and painful setbacks and teach us how to cultivate resilience in ourselves, our families, and our faith and civic communities.

James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, long associated with the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola Chicago, have lectured throughout the world and their books have been translated into many languages. Their unique combination of Christian theology and the psychological disciplines brings a distinctive approach to the spiritual and religious life in America.

**Reading for the Common Good: How Books Help Our Churches and Neighborhoods Flourish** by C. Christopher Smith. InterVarsity Press.

In this book C. Christopher Smith, co-author of *Slow Church*, looks at the local church as an organization in which both learning and action lie at the heart of its identity. He explores the practice of reading and, in his words, "how we can read together in ways that drive us deeper into action." Smith continues, "Church can no longer simply be an experience to be passively consumed; rather, we are called into the participatory life of a community. Reading is a vital practice for helping our churches navigate this shift." Discover how books can



help your churches and neighborhoods flourish.

**The Heart of Pope Francis: How a New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World** by Diego Fares, SJ. Crossroad Publishing Company.

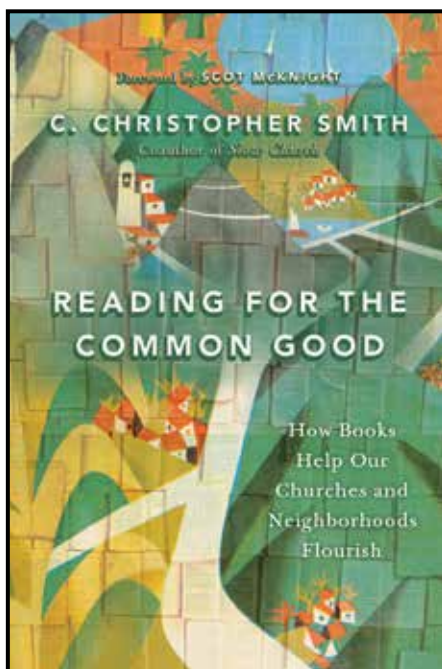
At the heart of Pope Francis's vision lies a keen interest in people and a passion for understanding the life experience of others. This book, written by a longtime friend of the pope, clarifies the underlying thoughts and choices Jorge Bergoglio has made throughout his life in developing a culture of encounter that he now proposes as the basis for the rebirth of the whole church, and the world. By reaching out, welcoming and listening to others, especially those that are often not

heard nor respected, Pope Francis has already changed the church more than we might even understand.

**Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit** (1st edition paper 2014) by Parker J. Palmer. Jossey-Bass.

In *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker J. Palmer quickens our instinct to seek the common good and gives us the tools to do it. This timely, courageous, and practical work — intensely personal as well as political — is not about "those people" in Washington, DC, or in our state capitals on whom we blame our political problems. It's about us. It's about what "we the people" can do in everyday settings like families, neighborhoods, classrooms, congregations, and workplaces to resist divide-and-conquer politics and restore a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." ■

*Dan Pierson* has served as a diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of [eCatechist.com](http://eCatechist.com), [faithAlivebooks.com](http://faithAlivebooks.com) and Faith Alive Books Publishing. He is co-author with Susan Stark of *Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Reflection* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2015). Contact him at [pierson.dj@gmail.com](mailto:pierson.dj@gmail.com).



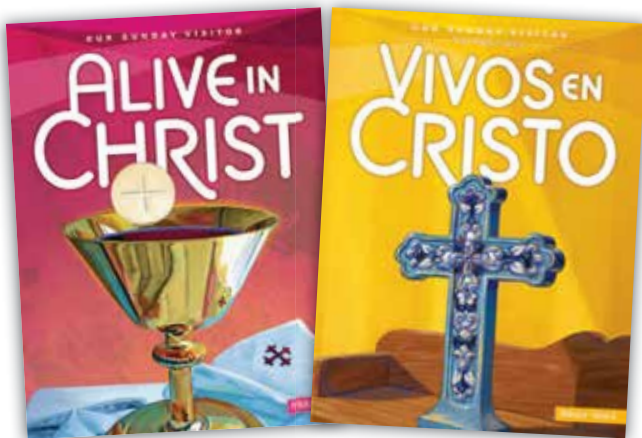
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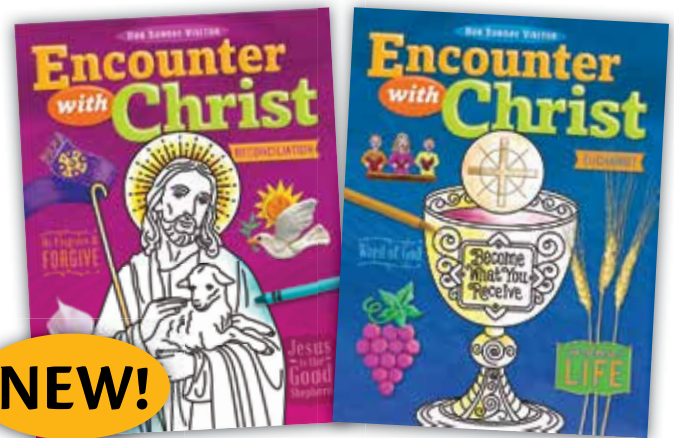
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