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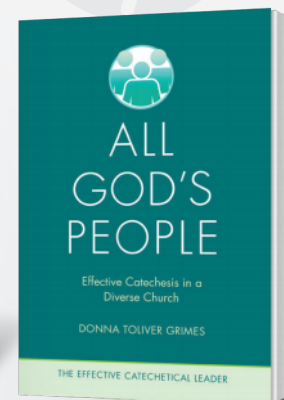
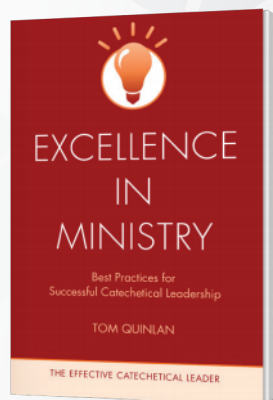
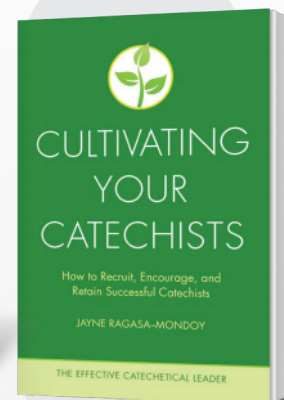
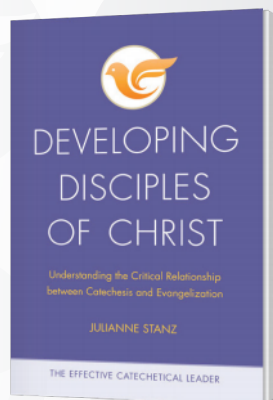
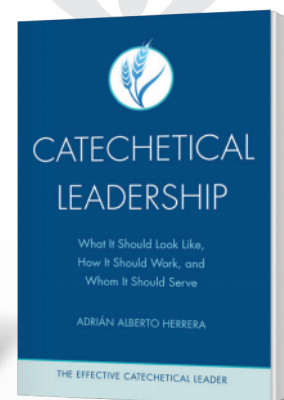
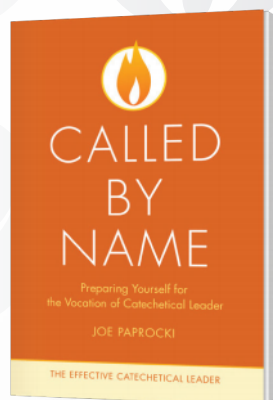
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Sitting in Stillness

D E N I S E U T T E R

“Be still and know that I am God!” — Psalm 46:11 NABRE

This has always been one of my favorite prayers, prayed at times when I need to quiet the world around me, when I need to be alone with God, as I try to shut out my own thoughts and make the space to hear God’s voice. It was the mantra that allowed me to enter my own inner chapel through the years.

When Becky Eldredge spoke of the inner chapel at the annual NCCL convocation this year, I pondered at how long it had been since I sat with that mantra. We entered the first day of the convocation with a retreat, facilitated by Becky, focused on longing—the longing God places within us to seek him, to want to be known and loved by him—and remembering the promises of God from Scripture. Her reminder to visit that inner chapel set the tone for the week.

There is a rhythm to our work, as there are rhythms in our liturgical year, but too often we forget the value of rest in that rhythm. Author Bonnie Gray calls this “spiritual whitespace”:

Whitespace. It’s the space on a page left unmarked. Untouched. Whitespace makes art beautiful. Whitespace is an important concept taken from the world of art and design. Whitespace is not blank—it breathes beauty and gives the eye a place to rest ... Our souls are canvases too, longing for quiet and beauty ... Spiritual whitespace makes room—room in our hearts for a deeper, more intimate relationship with God, room in our lives for rest, room in our souls for rejuvenation. (*Finding Spiritual Whitespace: Awakening Your Soul to Rest* [Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2014], 20–21)

Wrapped in prayer

I said at the convocation, I needed this. I needed to begin in prayer and to participate in this personal and communal prayer. A huge thanks goes out to the liturgy team led by Diana Macalintal and Nick Wagner. I have never been to a conference where I felt so completely wrapped in prayer. The prayer felt personal and intentional.

A huge thanks also goes out to the planning committee, who so carefully planned the week’s process. They ministered to the ministers who attended. I know from conversations that I was not the only person who walked into the conference tired, a little burdened by what our presenter Kathleen McChesney called the church’s twin crises (the abuse scandal and the leadership crisis). Some are hurt, struggling with the crises. Some are numb,

having busied themselves with ministry so as not to sit with the realities too long. It was important to pray with it, to speak to it, and to begin what I believe was very much a healing process.


And so wrapped in prayer we moved into the leadership roundtables, a process of reflection that began with questions about what we had noticed in recent years of ministry, what we’d experienced, what we think about it all, what we feel, and what we want—each person at a roundtable speaking the answers to all of those questions before the next person spoke. I heard stories that moved me, broke my heart, and inspired me.

When we finally came together at the end to remember that we are a commissioned people, I felt encouraged, empowered, to go out and be Church once more; to seek to heal those who are hurt, those who are struggling; to help others, wherever I can, come to know the love of the one who created us to know him, to be known by him, to be loved by him. If everyone in that room felt so empowered, so healed through this process, there is great hope, even amidst the crisis.

Blessed and broken

Ours is a beautiful church, with beautiful and broken people who walk with one another. Roy Petitfils encouraged us to remember our blessings and our brokenness, and he reminded us to nurture those relationships with God and with others.

This is what I walked away knowing: without visiting that inner chapel, without spending time with our Lord, without paying attention to personal and communal prayer, without nurturing my relationship with God and my relationships with others—I cannot minister to anyone. I am no good for anyone else.

This NCCL community helps me heal, holds me up, strengthens me, and reminds me what my call to ministry is all about. For that I am grateful. 

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Two by Two

MARGARET MATIJASEVIC

During the 2019 NCCL convocation's sending forth ritual I was asked to proclaim a message from Pope Francis, which was originally expressed in 2015 to Ugandan catechists. Without being able to foresee the impact these words would make, I simply read it over a few days prior to the liturgy. The entirety of the week, though, prepared me to authentically proclaim what lay beneath these words.

As I replay in my head this memory, I see beauty in specific moments. From the vantage point of the ambo, I see the membership gathered around, shifting their posture and gaze upon the direction through which grace is revealed by words. I can recall the surprising burning of my heart when the words left my lips and the invitation to be captured by the abundance of faces, somehow allowing me to narrow in on individuals, making eye contact and feeling the depths of their emotion, as the assurance of the words settled within. I can envision their eyes tearing up as we gazed upon each other, and as my own voice cracked.

I remember the prayer that day.

I know that your work, although rewarding, is not easy. So I encourage you to persevere Even when the task seems too much, the resources too few, the obstacles too great, it should never be forgotten that yours is a holy work. ... The Holy Spirit is present wherever the name of Christ is proclaimed. He is in our midst whenever we lift up our hearts and minds to God in prayer. He will give you the light and strength you need! The message you bring will take root all the more firmly in people's hearts if you are not only a teacher but also a witness. ... Your example should speak to everyone of the beauty of prayer, the power of mercy and forgiveness, the joy of sharing in the Eucharist with all our brothers and sisters. (Pope Francis, Visit to Munyonyo and Greeting to Catechists and Teachers, Nov. 27, 2015)

Called to witness

We have been commissioned as catechists to witness, yet our sending forth is continual and often in circumstances that are not as we had anticipated. These times may be more tumultuous than you had expected. The church has been navigating disappointment, frustration, and hurt and it has left many overwhelmed and overburdened. Yet it is through the truth of the resurrection that we cling to hope. We prayed that day in May for strength and light, laying upon the cross our petitions, and we have continued to pray for one another since. There is a radiant encounter of God's gentleness in that sacred praying.


This experience has challenged me to look at the vocation of the catechist, the vocation that is uniquely mine, and uniquely yours. In my prayer life, I get glimpses of my journey, when God patiently repeats to me that which I do not yet fully understand. This message from Pope Francis has left me recalling my days as a director of religious education.

The abundant sharing of charisms, creativity, resources, time, and relationship by a diverse set of people has sustained me personally. When I began this ministry, I found myself quickly immersed in an experience of authentic community, a group of people that has become the most influential on the defining of my personhood. They have shaped, molded, and sustained me throughout the discovery of dimensions of a life of faith.

Sent forth, together

The integrity of the catechetical community has continually revealed to me that which has been beyond my comprehension but arises from immense longing: the loving grace of God's mercy, care, and companionship. We know that this work is not for the fainthearted. We are sustained by a deep well of internal hope and goodness in the individual persons called to it, the catechists. The catechists, through their witness, provide authentic relationships in the person of Jesus. And you and I will never be exhausted in that Good News.

The first catechists, commissioned to spread the gospel, were always sent forth two by two. The disciples we accompany may or may not be well formed in faith, but the journey of their discovery and awareness of its presence in their lives becomes our ongoing holy work. We can calendar, program, and resource this holy work, but it is ultimately uncontainable in such. It is demonstrated and alive in authentic relationship, clinging to hope, rooted in love. This is what makes the Good News permeate the world.

Ours is a life of witness during demanding times. The way to live that witness authentically is to ensure we are provided and cared for. The members of NCCL seek to support each other through the mutual interchange of ideas, as expressed through our ENDS policies, but that is made known through the wisdom God plants within our unique, individual stories of faith and service. We have a boundlessness to our witnessing of Christ in this world, as God generously gives us the light and strength we seek. Only two by two do we live into it fully. 

Discipleship Isn't as Exciting as Youth Ministry Makes It Seem

TIMOTHY P. O'MALLEY

At first glance, ministry to young people in the United States is flourishing. In high school youth ministry, American Catholics attend national programs including the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), the Steubenville and Lifeteen conferences, and mission trips. Young adult ministry, although underfunded, is active in many American dioceses. Over the course of a year, young adults can attend frequent theologies on tap, go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land or walk the Camino de Santiago, attend weekly Mass with one's peers, and go to World Youth Day. To a disinterested observer, the path toward renewing youth and young adult ministry is nothing more radical than investing even more in such programming.

The success of such ministry, at the same time, carries the seeds of its own destruction. Ministry to young people in the United States relies almost entirely on the transformative power of events. The individual is personally moved through an encounter with a colossal number of young people actively practicing faith, such as at NCYC; a walk on the Camino, which produces a religious and social solidarity with one's peers; or a week in the foothills of Appalachia, building houses and learning to meet the hidden Christ in the poor. Such events may be good, opening the young Catholic to a transformative encounter with Jesus Christ. There is something about attending World Youth Day, recognizing in the sheer presence of Catholics throughout the globe that the church is not reducible to a chancery office; the church is a living, breathing body of men and women from throughout the globe.

At the same time, such events play into an insidious phenomenon of American religion. Americans tend to determine the truth value of a religious claim by whether or not it moves the individual affections. But what happens when the effects of the powerful experience fades away? When adoration of the Eucharist is done in a small chapel, devoid of the emotional register produced at most youth conferences? When one attends weekly Mass at a parish where there are 500 non-young adult Catholics rather than 25,000 of one's peers? When the mission trip to Guatemala is but a memory, a series of pictures on Instagram?

Such an approach to religious practice, grounded primarily in the experience of a certain register of affections, will eventually lead to many young people leaving the church. For our lives are simply not that exciting. We adore the living God in quiet parishes, in our living rooms, in our commute on a Tuesday morning, and in those daily encounters with the hungry, thirsty homeless men and women on city streets.

The renewal of youth and young adult ministry must prepare the young not for transformative, almost out-of-body experiences of religious faith in solidarity with one's peers; instead, the religious formation of young people must propose Catholicism as a complete hypothesis, a way of ordering one's life that is not dependent on a totalizing experience that produces the strongest of feelings.

A new provocation: Awakening the religious sense

Servant of God and founder of Communion and Liberation Father Luigi Giussani proposes a method that serves as an antidote to the emphasis on transformative experience that characterizes American catechesis to young people. Giussani, of course, is not against the possibility of a transformative experience. He grounds his approach to education of the young in the integral nature of human experience: "Experience is our *understanding* something, discovering its meaning. To have an experience means to comprehend the meaning of something. This is done by discovering its link to everything else; thus experience means also to discover the purpose of a given thing and its function in the world" (*The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia [New York: Crossroad, 2013], 98–99). For Giussani, human experience is not separated from the flow of life. Instead, it is that which allows the person to discern the meaningful and thus mysterious character of all existence. Human beings must be taught to experience reality as gift, as a source of love.

My adaptation of Giussani's method of education involves three dimensions: provocation, hypothesis, and verification. This method of catechesis depends on the authority of a teacher who knows his or her students and is capable of serving as an authentic source of authority and love. It is a long-term approach, requiring the building of a relationship over years.

The first dimension of this method is provocation. Provocation is not equivalent to getting someone's attention. Too often, the large events discussed above get attention and provoke an experience of social solidarity that is unparalleled, but they fail to provoke additional questions—they stand as experiences apart from life.

Giussani's understanding of provocation is different. The human being has been made to ask ultimate questions. What is



the meaning of life? What is love? What is authentic friendship? For Giussani, each human being has this religious sense, this orientation to the ultimate that sin has not destroyed.

But, the human person also has been taught to not ask such questions. We embrace ideologies that make it impossible to wonder, to ask questions that matter. We do not ask about the meaning of life, the nature of love, or what constitutes real friendship. Instead, we simply live our day-to-day lives in a kind of practical atheism whereby only the visible and tangible matter.

The goal of provocation is to reawaken the young person to asking questions. A good teacher provokes not through emotional manipulation but by daring to ask the ultimate questions of the student. Students want to talk about the nature of love. They want to discuss friendship. They want to be provoked.

Big events can be aids to provocation; they may allow the student to enter into the kind of liminal space where they do ask the big questions. But it is not the event that is the *telos* of such formation; it is the moment of provocation, the moment in which the student asks, “What is the meaning of life?”

Christian provocation has two key dimensions. First, provocation is always grounded in the scriptures. It is Jesus Christ who is the answer to the human heart’s deepest longings. It is the God-man, fully human and fully divine, who provokes in us the ultimate question: What does it mean to be human, now that God has dwelt among us? A big-event approach to ministry cannot attend to the one-on-one conversations that are necessary for good provocation.

Second, provocation emphasizes beauty, silence, and contemplation. Provocation is an inward awakening, for every person has to ask the ultimate questions on his or her own. Too often, big events in ministry overwhelm the young Christian, functioning almost as a saturated phenomenon, taking away all capacity for wonder. We need to allow space for the young person to work on his or her inner life, to encounter the ultimate questions that are always present in the human heart, if only we listened. Who am I? What is my destiny? Learning to attend to these questions is not simply a task of the young adult but an essential task of Christian maturity.

A new hypothesis: Proposing ultimate meaning

Catholicism, of course, is not an experience of a generic religious sense. Giussani knew this. Yes, every human being has a longing

for God. But, Christianity has also proposed an ultimate hypothesis about this God as enfleshed in the Scriptures, the Creed, the sacramental life of the church, the formation of life in Christ, and the spiritual life. In other words, we have answers to the deepest questions of the human heart.

Youth and young adult ministry must propose the full hypothesis of Christianity. Too often, in such religious formation, the sole emphasis is on social solidarity. Of course, at a developmental level, young people are looking to belong. They’re looking for authentic friendship. This is a good insofar as it provokes the young person to seek in Christianity the ultimate hypothesis for life.

But, the catechist must also be capable of showing the fittingness of the hypothesis offered by Catholicism. Take the Eucharist, for example. Often, young people find it difficult to attend a Sunday Mass with boring preaching and bad music. *Is it really necessary to go every week? Can’t I pray alone?*

In Catholicism, the Mass offers a hypothesis that such young people need to hear. The Mass is not a private experience whereby we feed our spiritual life apart from the church. Instead, it is within the liturgy that the absolute, total, self-giving love of the Word made flesh becomes available to us within the church.

We encounter this love in the Scriptures, in the assembly, in the singing, and most fully in the transformation of bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood. The sacrifice of the Mass is God’s *exitus*, the bending down of God into radical, intimate relationship with the human person. This love is available at each Mass, no matter the quality of the homily or singing (although both should probably be better!). And it is this gift of divine love, the sacrifice of the Word made flesh, that brings the church into existence as Christ’s body.

Further, the indwelling of this sacrificial love in the church affects the salvation of the whole human family. The Mass is the sacrifice of praise offered by the whole church. The sacrificial love of God has drawn together men and women into a communion of love, into the church. The church is not a gathering of like-minded individuals who just happen to worship God together. Instead, the Mass makes the church possible. We receive infinite love, and thus we are to become infinite love.

Every dimension of the church’s teaching may be understood as a hypothesis, proposing to the young person a way of life that he or



Johannes Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*, 1664 (Source: Wikimedia Commons, PD-Old-100)

she could not construct on his or her own. For this reason, the catechist of young people cannot just be hip, Birkenstock-wearing traveling evangelists who have not yet appropriated the depths of the Tradition. Catechists need to not just know the rudiments of the Tradition but have a capacity to unfold its meaning for the young adult, to show the vitality of what the church proposes.

This is not merely an intellectual task! The catechist possesses an authority grounded in his or her person. They live what they proclaim. They live what they proclaim in the community of the church. This is what Francis ultimately means by accompaniment. Accompaniment is not walking with someone even if they walk off

a cliff. Rather, we must walk with those looking for meaning, proposing the ultimate hypothesis—God is love—as manifest in our very being.

A new verification: Become what you receive

The main problem with the transformative-event approach to youth and young adult ministry is that it produces a radical gap between mundane life and religious life. Religious life is a constant epiphany. Daily life is not.

In proposing the ultimate hypothesis of the church to the young person, it is not enough to elicit a reaction. The young person must

verify the hypothesis in his or her own being. He or she must become what they receive.

This means that youth and young adult ministry emphasizes the need for verification. If we propose the Eucharist as offering a hypothesis of ultimate love, we have to let the young person discover the truth now on his or her own. They have to go to Mass without being forced to!

Here, the task of verification once again requires accompaniment. It requires a community of young adults who can walk with one another, who can assist in the process of personal verification. At the same time, it often requires spiritual direction or a mentor who can help with the process of verification.

The work of verification, of living faith in daily life, requires turning our approach to youth and young adult ministry upside down. It is not enough to have a transformative encounter. We need to invite young people to live the Christian faith in their daily lives, to discover the various ways that the hypothesis we offer in the church not only answers the ultimate questions but actually allows us to dwell in a world of meaning, of friendship, and of love that produces a whole new culture.

Verification, in Giussani, is integrally linked to the problem of culture. Too many evangelization movements, particularly those addressed to the young, are exclusively concerned with the salvation of individual Christians. Language such as “winning souls for Christ” exhibits this sclerotic focus on individual salvation, a misreading of the “personal” nature of the encounter with Christ as an individual encounter.

But, the gospel is not meant just for the appropriation of individual Christians, who are saved as isolated monads apart from the rest of humanity. Evangelization is always about the creation of a culture, a world in which the ultimate hypothesis offered by Christianity becomes flesh in education, art, music, and even sport. As Giussani writes at the conclusion of *The Risk of Education*:

The cultural phenomenon ... becomes a journey of recognition, a path of affection, and a process of appropriating and using reality for one’s own purposes. In so doing, one becomes an adult and in turn generates newness in history. Depending on the type of image projected and the type of encounter made, one will in turn awaken the same reaction in others. (120)


This verification is, of course, a moment of risk, and not simply because it opens up the possibility that the ultimate hypothesis of love unto the end may be rejected. It is a risk because it means that Christian culture will and must develop. This culture is not a monolithic reality, meant to be used as a source of security erected against the barbarians on the hill. It is the task of each generation to propose anew this hypothesis to our age and to develop those cultural resources that mediate such an encounter.

Conclusion

Ministering to and teaching young people requires a renewal—ironically, one that makes such ministry less focused on the stages of adolescence or emerging adulthood unto itself. Such ministry has placed a good deal of attention on the role of social solidarity, attempting to spur young Catholics to an affective experience that leads to conversion. But this approach, reaping some early benefits in the lives of the young, is insufficient. It results in a faith that is easily left behind once such affections disappear.

Giussani’s approach to educating the young may serve as a way out of a pedagogy focused primarily on the affections. As a church, we have too often separated the problems of youth from the adult world, a separation that at times is unfolding at the synod in Rome. In reality, young people want exactly what adults want—a proposal of an ultimate meaning, a sense of the ordering of life, that can make sense of friendship, life, death, disappointment, love, and their destiny in the world.

They want a culture that can support them in this form of life, a day-to-day program for ordering existence to the sacrifice of love revealed in the Word made flesh. It is not the fault of the young that they have not encountered this culture. It is ours. As Father Julian Carron, Giussani’s successor as head of Communion and Liberation, writes, “Education is not the kids’ problem; it is the adults’ problem, our problem. Only if we adults have this engagement with the real in its totality can we communicate a meaning” (*Disarming Beauty: Essays on Faith, Truth, and Freedom* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017], 162).

The renewal of ministry to the young in the church will not be the result of rare liminal events in the life of a young person. It will be immersion into a culture, an encounter with the mystery of love at the heart of existence. Large events will have a role in this project. However, they will be but a moment of provocation, spurring the young to enter more deeply into the experience of Christian life—an integral, quotidian, but transformative way of ordering our lives as disciples. If we want a new evangelization, in the end, we need a new culture with new models of lifelong discipleship. 

Timothy P. O’Malley is the director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life, where he also serves as academic director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy. He teaches and researches at Notre Dame in the areas of liturgical-sacramental theology, catechesis, and aesthetics. He is the author of numerous articles and books, most recently *Divine Blessing: Liturgical Formation in the RCIA*.



Let's Watch Our Language

JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP

“A rose by any other name smells as sweet.” That might be true, but what about the names, the words, the language that we use? Do they mean something? Do they have an impact on what we think? how we act? how we feel about ourselves, each other, our world?

Most people would agree that language is very powerful. Language plays a significant role in shaping our image of the world, of ourselves, and of God. What we call something says what we think about it. Language educates and forms our thinking. Language goes hand in hand with social change: both shaping it and reflecting it.

Young children tend to think very concretely and only later develop the capacity for abstraction. This means that the words we hear in childhood form images and pictures that remain with us for the rest of our lives, even after we have learned to think abstractly.

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” Formative language isn't just about using a different word here and there; the words we use influence a whole mind-set. “Where language is weak, theology is weakened.”

Let's explore and play around with some words and phrases that we might find ourselves using daily. This, of course, is not the definitive word. By the time you read this, some of these might be obsolete because we will have found other ways—better ways—of expressing the mystery as we understand it at that time.

The language of our catechetical endeavors

Avoid: all “school” language

It is easy to talk about classes, classrooms, students, teachers, and homework. Yet, catechesis is much more than an educational enterprise. It will be a long time before we can change that mind-set for people, but can we begin the paradigm shift by using different language? “Catechist” says something different than “teacher.” “Religious education sessions” or “gatherings” do not sound as school-ish as “classes.” The terms “youth,” “youngsters,” “young people,” and “children” encompass more of the whole person than just their role as “students.”

It is a wonderful practice to suggest home activities following each catechetical session, but let's not call them “homework,” which has such a negative, have-to connotation for many children. “Family activities,” “home reflection time,” or a myriad of other enticing names can be used that will remove it (we hope) from the school model.

All these suggestions apply equally to the faith formation program in the Catholic school setting. When sharing faith, school teachers are catechists. They have a different role at that time than when they teach science, geography, or mathematics.

This brings us to “religious education” itself. That term has been used in the past several years to try to get away from the terms “CCD” and “catechism.” Now there is a growing realization that “religious education” doesn't say it all either. Does it keep us in an education model? Does it imply that it's only for children or that it's only about facts and knowledge and skills? For many, the preferred term today is “faith formation,” which reminds us that the journey is lifelong; that it is about more than memorizing the doctrine; that it is about being converted to a specific way of life as disciples.

The language of our sacramental celebrations

Avoid: “celebrant”
(when referring to the presider)

“Liturgy” means “the work of the people.” We have all gathered to celebrate; we each have a unique and important role. At liturgy, we are all celebrants. The leader is the presider, the one who gathers and leads the community in prayer.

Avoid: “attending” Mass

We celebrate liturgy. We participate in liturgy. “Attending” often conveys the idea that it is a spectator sport.

Avoid: “getting” the sacraments

Sacraments are not *things* we get. They are celebrations; they are the actions of the community. We celebrate the sacraments. They empower us to be someone who lives in a different, a radical, way.

“Getting confirmed” sounds very passive.

“Receiving first Communion” doesn't begin to address the mystery and challenge of *being* the body of Christ.



“Made reconciliation” sounds over and done with.

All of our language needs to stress the reality of sacraments as actions that are participative and ongoing. We don’t get or receive sacraments; as we celebrate them, they affect (or should affect) our lives forever.

Avoid: “confession”

The act of confession is one portion of the sacrament today. The process of conversion, sorrow, forgiveness, and reconciliation is much broader than the few moments of confessing our sins. The renewal of the sacrament has recognized that process by naming the sacrament penance or reconciliation.

Avoid: the concept that confirmation is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit

... if our language conveys the idea that this is the first time we receive the gift of the Spirit. Confirmation is certainly a deepening of the gift of the Spirit in our lives; but the Spirit was given to us at baptism. Sometimes so much stress is placed on confirmation as the sacrament of the Spirit that we lose touch with the reality and importance of baptism.

Avoid: “preparation” for sacraments

We really can’t prepare for sacraments. The word “preparation” explains one reality of our experience, but it seems so limited.

First, sacraments are faith experiences. They are mysteries. They are actions that we do, not things we receive. Sacraments have much to do with our relationship with God (and the Catholic community). We can certainly do much to open ourselves to growing relationships, but we don’t preplan or prepare for relationships. We nurture relationships; we spend time on relationships ... and that process is an ongoing reality. Sometimes when we talk about preparing for something, the mentality (and the reality) is that we prepare for it (get ready for it), and then it’s all over with. That’s not the mystery and celebration of sacraments.

Second, preparation (or whatever we call it) doesn’t begin the year the young person (or youth or adult) will celebrate the sacrament. Preparation begins the day they were born. All that their family—and the church—surround them with every day affects their faith lives and their relationship with God and the Catholic community.

Avoid: language that indicates that sacramental preparation is getting ready for just one day

This happens often with first Eucharist. We talk about getting ready for the Big Day. But sacramental programs are about preparation for

life. Sacraments are about living in a unique way for the rest of our lives. Everything that we do in parent meetings, children’s sessions, and family events needs to stress that. We can’t dwell so exclusively on the day of first Eucharist that families get the message that that’s what this year is all about: the celebration of only *first* Communion.

Avoid: RCIC (Rite of Christian Initiation of Children)

There is no such thing. The rite is the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which contains a rite and process for children of catechetical age.

Avoid: “program”

The RCIA has reminded us of the difference between a program and a process. A process usually takes more time, is much slower and more purposeful than packaged programs, which sometimes give the impression that everyone fits into the same mold. Perhaps we should use “process” much more often than “program,” especially when talking about catechesis for all sacraments.

The language of some of our church words

Avoid: using the word “church” only in reference to the building

Church is predominantly people. All that we say and all that we do need to mirror that.

The third-grade year is usually a study of church. Before sessions begin in September, we invite the third graders to interview three people, asking them the question: “What does church mean to you?” In one parish where I ministered, the vast majority of the answers were all about the people and their community life together. In another parish where I ministered, the predominant answer was a description of the church building. Why was there such a difference?

In one newly formed parish a school building was being used for the celebration of liturgy. Displayed in the vestibule were the architectural plans for the church building they were going to construct, with the caption: “We’re building a home for our Church.”

Avoid: “work”

When talking about the work of the parish and the work of the church, “ministry” is a much better description of our baptismal call to share faith and life with each other. Can we also, as pastoral staff, talk about ministering *with* rather than ministering *to*?



Avoid: “volunteers”

When talking about those involved in the life of the parish, “volunteer” often connotes something extra, something that you don’t have to do but decide to do to be helpful (which is wonderful!). Yet, those who are involved in the life of the parish and all its ministries are doing that because baptism confers the right and calls us to the responsibility to share in, contribute to, and lead the community’s life.

Hidden language that impacts the listener

Avoid: “you”

Why not use “we”? “You” can sound very preachy, judgmental, or dictatorial. We are in this together. We are one family on a journey.

Avoid: “but”

Use “and.” We often use “but” when we are going to discount or disagree with what came before. That can put someone on the defensive as well as close their minds to our idea because we have just discounted theirs. “And” helps us to keep things in balance.

Language that colors our attitudes

Avoid: all violent language

We don’t have to look far to realize that we live in an extremely violent society. Everyone’s life has been touched by it, probably in countless ways. We deplore it and say we want it to stop.

Do we contribute to it in unconscious ways? Listen to your language. Even when we don’t mean to be violent, our language might be. We have become so used to it, often we don’t even notice. Instead of writing a check, we *cut* a check. We *crunch* the numbers. We *grab* a bite to eat. The winner *hits* the jackpot. We work at a *breakneck* pace. Our backs are *killing* us. We *execute* a command. We *shoot* an email.

We have products that *shout* it out, *fight* stains, and *combat* bad breath. We *destroy* bacteria and odors. An ad recently proclaimed, “Our mints can *beat up* your mints.” We even say, “We’ll *kill* you with kindness.”

When we finish something, we *terminate*. Instead of just a due date, there’s a *deadline*. We drink Orange *Crush*.

Sports talk is full of violent language: We *beat* them. They *massacred* us. *Strike* out. Competition contributes a great deal to violent language. (A topic for another article.) One glaring example is the ice-skating competition entitled *Ice Wars*.

The ads that entice us to various forms of entertainment promise *heart-stopping* action, *relentless* roller coaster rides, *eye-popping* action, *hammering* suspense, a *high-voltage charge*.

Avoid: sexist language

“A five year old playing with friends argued that boys were better than girls. When he was asked why, he responded, ‘Because God is a boy, isn’t he?’”³

Things have changed.

The arbiters of American English—activist lexicographers, textbook editors, the style sheets of major newspapers, high-visibility broadcasters, politicians seeking re-election—have steadily worked to avoid and even expunge ... gender stereotypes from our language. The major publishers of elementary school textbooks disallow not only what used to be standard “generic” speech, but also stereotypical gender depictions in the accompanying art. A primary reader already in 1980 depicted “Old McDonald” as an old woman on her farm. In 1976 the National Council of Teachers of English voted that it is preferable to say “Each of them handed in their papers” rather than the traditionally taught “Each handed in his paper.”⁴

In all that we do in the field of catechetics, we need to reflect this respect and equality. When Scripture passages use “man” instead of “humanity” or “brothers” instead of “brothers and sisters,” we need to find a way to be inclusive. Scripture was *translated* into English. In the past, translators *chose* to translate the concept of humanity into the word “man.” (Translators also chose to translate the Holy Spirit as a masculine “he” in English, even though it is a feminine “she” in the original language.) Scripture has evolved over time. Translations have changed in minor areas as we change in our perceptions and understanding. Inclusive language is one example of our changed awareness of ourselves.

Some people will say that language is no big thing, that it really isn’t that important. Pretend for a moment that you are a female teenager participating in a weekend liturgy on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time at your parish church. The liturgy’s opening prayer sets the tone: “Lord our God, help us love you with all our hearts ... and to love all *men* as you love them.” The Scripture reading from Year A proclaims: “*Brothers*, you are among those called ... that many of you are wise, as *men* account wisdom ... Let *him* who would boast, boast in the Lord.”

The intercessions include a petition “that all *men* might discover peace in their faith.” The fifth preface prays: “You chose to create *man* in your own image, setting *him* over the whole world. You made *man* the steward of your creation to praise you day by day.” The fourth eucharistic prayer continues: “Father, we acknowledge your greatness. All your actions show your wisdom and love. You formed *man* in your likeness and set *him* over the whole world to serve you, *his* creator. ... Even when *he* disobeyed you and lost your friendship, you did not abandon *him* to the power of death, but helped all *men* to seek and find you. Again and again you offered a covenant to *man* and through the prophets taught *him* to hope for salvation.” Could we blame this young woman for asking, “Why should I come to church when all I hear is language that leaves me out?”

What we have been talking about is horizontal inclusive language—that which describes human beings. Vertical inclusive language, which

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refers to God, is an even more delicate issue within our church today. Yet, without changing language, can we be faithful to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the images of God in Scripture?

The Catechism reminds us that God “is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes” (370). And “God transcends all creatures. We must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, image-bound or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God—‘the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable’—with our human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God” (42).

Our tradition uses feminine images of God. The Old Testament likens God to a woman who gives birth (Dt 32:18; Nm 11:12; Is 46:3-4). The Book of Isaiah speaks of God as a mother who comforts her children (Is 66:13). The New Testament also has feminine imagery, which is not frequently quoted. Jesus compares himself to a mother hen who watches over her brood of chicks (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34) and to the wisdom woman (Mt 11:28-30), who in the Old Testament is a personification of wisdom and a direct attribute of God (Prv 1:20-33; Sir 24:1-34; Wis 7:22-9:18). These examples remind us that all language about God uses analogy to attempt to describe the indescribable. Although masculine images have been most frequently used, they are not exclusive, even in Scripture.

We are called to respect every person, to embrace and enhance the dignity of all human beings. If inclusive

language is one way of doing that, then it is worthy of our call as catechetical leaders to heed and live Paul’s words: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28 NRSV). 

Notes

1. Rosalie Maggio, *The Bias-Free Word Finder: A Dictionary of Non-Discriminatory Language* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1992).
2. Madeleine L’Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* (New York: Convergent Books, 2001), 40.
3. Gail Ramshaw, *Liturgical Language: Keeping It Metaphoric, Making It Inclusive* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996).
4. Interdivisional Task Force on the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society, *Guidelines for Inclusive Language* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1981), 2.

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HELPFUL RESOURCES

Cleaning Up Biased Language: Toward Creating an Inclusive Society (8th Day Center for Justice)

The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing by Casey Miller and Kate Swift (Harper and Row)

In Whose Image? by Jann Aldredge Clanton (Crossroad)

Liturgical Language: Keeping It Metaphoric, Making It Inclusive by Gail Ramshaw (The Liturgical Press)

When Christians Gather by Neil Darragh (Paulist Press)



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Why Children in the RCIA Need a Community, Not a Classroom

NICK WAGNER

It is easy to get the impression that children's faith is formed in a classroom. Many parish websites list expectations describing what children are to have learned by the time they reach each grade level. In many parishes, you are likely to see children sitting in desks, listening to a teacher explain to them the theology of Jesus or the church that meets the learning requirements for each grade. The teacher is likely using a teacher's version of a textbook that all the children have. The children probably have homework they have to do, and they are likely tested regularly on their mastery of the material.

I don't train grade-level catechists, but I do often train RCIA catechists who are ministering with children who want to be baptized. I worry that RCIA catechists turn too readily toward the model used in parishes for forming faith through a schoolroom, textbook-based program. The language I often hear from these RCIA catechists indicates they sometimes think of children who were not baptized as infants as unfortunate souls who got left behind in school. Instead of rejoicing that the child is at the beginning of an awesome faith journey, they fret about how we are going to "catch the child up" with the other children in their grade.

Or the catechists see the entire catechumenal process as a burden to be avoided if possible and endured if necessary. One catechist I heard of used an incorrect interpretation of the age of reason to have a six-and-a-half-year-old baptized as an infant so she could "slip him in under the wire."

The six core principles for the catechumenate

When we are forming unbaptized children of catechetical age, our guiding document is the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. If a child is no longer an infant and has attained the use of reason, he or she cannot be baptized as an infant. (See Canon 852:1 and RCIA 252.) Neither canon law nor the RCIA give a definitive age at which children attain the use of reason. It varies for each individual.

The formation of these children should not be based on grade-level expectations but rather on the six core principles of the adult catechumenate:

You can find the six core principles in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the RCIA:

4. The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.

5. The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place.

1. GRADUAL PROCESS

It is not uncommon to hear of parishes who have a mandatory one-year or two-year RCIA program for children. However, the first principle of the RCIA is that faith formation cannot be predetermined by a calendar or class schedule. It is a gradual process, led by the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, we should not rush a child who is not yet ready to take on the disciplines of faith. On the other hand, we should not inhibit children who have more fully cooperated with God's grace and are anxious to become full members of the body of Christ. The RCIA says this about the length of formation: "The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough—several years if necessary—for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong" (76).

2. COMMUNITY

The place of formation for child catechumens is in the midst of the community, not in a classroom. The RCIA says that initiation "is the responsibility of all the baptized" (9). It is impossible to get "all the baptized" to show up to your classroom. But it is very possible to immerse the child catechumen into the life of the parish. By their example, the Christian community apprentices the child in how to live as a missionary disciple.

The Christian family

The primary manifestation of the Christian community for children is their family—the domestic church. It is true that families these days are often broken, and some have little or no understanding of how to live as Christian disciples. Nonetheless, the family is the first place of formation, and the parents are the primary catechists for their children. Therefore, a huge aspect of the formation of child catechumens has to include the formation of the entire family. That will be a challenge for most

of us, and it will require more skill and creativity than we might think we have. But it is essential. There is no way around it. If your formation of child catechumens is the best there is, but the family remains weak in faith, it is unlikely the children will grow to be strong disciples.

The Sunday assembly

Right along with family as a manifestation of Christian community is the Sunday assembly. Children and their families must be regular participants in the worship life of the community. Liturgy is the premier place in which we encounter the risen Christ. This encounter is the very essence of what it means to be a disciple. When a family

says they want to get their child baptized, they are saying they want to be part of the worshipping assembly (even if they are not yet fully aware that is what they are saying).

Christian witness

A third manifestation of the Christian community is in our public witness. We live in the world, not as bystanders, but as people on a mission. Our mission is especially oriented to the poor and the marginalized. Every child catechumen and her family must grow in faith by actively announcing the good news of Jesus's saving love to the world.

M Y S T A G O G Y :

is scripturally based

takes place within a liturgical setting

is addressed exclusively to the Christian community

has the goal of formation of Christians rather than providing religious information to Christians

—Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Liturgical Press)

corresponds interior disposition with our words and gestures

enables us to live what we celebrate

is an encounter with Christ that interprets rites in light of events of our salvation

presents the meaning of the signs in the rites

brings out significance of the rites for Christian life

—Pope Benedict XVI, "Sacramentum Caritatis," 64

Q U E S T I O N S F O R A M Y S T A G O G I C A L C O N V E R S A T I O N

After Mass or a family event or a parish activity, a catechist or a sponsor can ask some of these questions.

- * What was your most memorable moment?
- * What was your favorite part?
- * What did you see/hear/do/feel?
- * What does that mean to you?
- * What does it remind you of from the Bible or from our Christian traditions?
- * What does it tell you about your faith?
- * What does it tell you about God?
- * What does it say about Christ?
- * How did the rite or event communicate that?
- * If that symbol could speak, what would it say to us about our faith?
- * How does this experience change you?
- * How does this shape or change what you do in your daily life or believe about God?

3. PASCHAL MYSTERY

The entire formation process for child catechumens “must bear a markedly paschal character” (RCIA 8). I won’t kid you. You’re going to have to struggle with what that means and how to accomplish it. You can tell from reading the Gospel stories and the beginning of Acts that the disciples who lived with Jesus in the midst of his paschal journey didn’t fully understand it. If the founding saints didn’t get it, how will we? And how will our children? We learn what it means to die to ourselves and rise in Christ through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

4. CONVERSION

Every time I am at a first Communion or a confirmation, it is obvious to me which children have had a conversion experience and which have not. Sometimes, it is also obvious that many of our child catechumens have not had a true conversion at the time of their initiation. We are obligated to provide conversion opportunities for child catechumens and not to pressure them into the initiation sacraments before they are ready.

5. AN ADULT PROCESS

Because the church says the catechumenal path is suited to a spiritual journey of adults does not mean children cannot walk that path. We expect a lot of adult behaviors and adult decisions from children in other parts of their lives. In preparation for any sacrament, we are asking children to take up the cross of Christ and to be willing to sacrifice for the sake of others. It’s not kid stuff. That’s why true conversion is so important. It takes strong faith to make this kind of adult-level commitment.

6. THE PROCESS VARIES

Every child and family will have been led to you by unique paths. And their destinations will vary as well. We are not the guides along the way. The Holy Spirit is. So we have to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we help each child find their own steps along the way of faith. This is another reason a classroom model won’t work. We can’t assume that everyone’s journey will begin at the same time,


progress in the same way, and end in the same place. Imposing artificial structures for the sake of keeping a “class” together is not being true to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Are we providing conversations or classrooms?

As the children experience the Christian community in the domestic church, the worshiping church, and the serving church, it is important to help them name what is happening to them. To do that, we have to design regular and meaningful conversations.

These conversations are different from classroom teaching. A classroom teacher tends to tell children what they should know. An RCIA catechist instead asks children and their families what they have experienced and what they have learned from those experiences. It is through these meaningful conversations that catechists will be able to affirm children and their families in areas where they are growing in faith. And catechists will be able to guide children and their families in areas where they might make adjustments in order to conform themselves more closely to Christ.

In essence, these kinds of conversations are a form of catechesis called *mystagogy*. You are exploring more deeply with the children and their families their encounters with the risen Christ and the mystery of Christ’s paschal journey lived out in many varied ways in our parishes and families.

I completely understand this is an ideal vision. That’s the point, isn’t it? Who among us wants to strive for a compromise, a less-than-best vision of discipleship? None of us can live fully in the ideal world presented in the rite. However, we can try. By striving for a full vision of discipleship, we are better able to see what small steps we might take today to move closer to a formation process that creates lifelong followers of Jesus. 

For a free e-book, Six Proven Ways to Improve Your Children’s RCIA, go to <http://teamrcia.com/childrens-rcia-free-guide>.

Nick Wagner is the editor of *Catechetical Leader* and the co-founder of TeamRCIA.com, a free online resource to help parish teams form Christians for life.

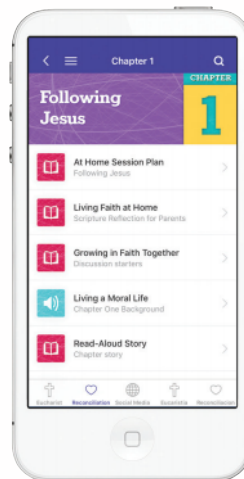


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Front and Center: The Eucharist and Missionary Discipleship

KEVIN M. DOWD

The celebration of the Mass is, above all, an act of worship. That worship is fundamentally an act of love: the sacrifice of the cross. It was the perfect fulfillment of Jesus's own description of "no greater love" (Jn 15:13). We enter into this perfect offering of love through sharing in the Eucharist.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the supreme fulfillment of the Great Commandment. Worshipping God, together with Christ as the body of Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, is the perfect manner of loving God above all things. Serving the hungry, the thirsty, the vulnerable, the needy, and the marginalized—these are all eucharistic acts. Our acts of charity, service, and sacrifice for others are joined to the one perfect sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist and become an integral part of our loving God above all things.

How do we help bring a generation of Matthew 25 Catholics into the eucharistic heart of the church so that they become John 6 Catholics as well? If we nurture their commitment to service and human rights without catechizing about the Eucharist as "the source and summit of the Christian life" ("Catechism of the Catholic Church," 1324; "Lumen Gentium," 11), then we may be helping the secularization process. After all, what is the difference between the good works that an atheist or a secular humanist does and the good works done by a Catholic? Without the Eucharist, all we have is philanthropy.

We need the Eucharist to transform acts of human goodness into something divine, salvific, and of eternal meaning. The commitment the younger generations have toward human rights and dignity, toward service and care for those in need: these are inherently eucharistic. We should make the connection explicit. Our catechesis should express our participation in the Mass as it relates to the Great Commandment of love, helping a generation that likes to serve be connected explicitly with the Eucharist as source and summit. In light of this understanding, I propose teaching the Eucharist as three movements.

Movement 1: Receiving

In the first movement, the central catechetical point is the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As Catholics, we believe that Christ is fully present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the consecrated bread and wine and that when we go to Communion, we receive Christ himself.

Among the themes that deserve emphasis in Movement 1 is that Christ gives us his body and blood as spiritual sustenance for the Christian life. We are on an exodus to the Promised Land, and the Spirit comes "like the dewfall" to give us manna in the desert (Ex 16:14). Pope Francis reminds us of the teaching of the early church in this regard: "The Eucharist ... is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" ("Evangelii Gaudium," 47). We come to the Eucharist not because we are perfect and deserving but precisely because we are sinners, weak, and unworthy. As long as we come with the right intention, in the state of grace, we come with faith in the Divine Physician who came not to call the righteous but the sick (Mk 2:17).

Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). One of my liturgy professors at Boston College, John Baldovin, makes the case that the celebration of the Eucharist over the centuries represents the most fulfilled command in the history of the world. Movement 1 of this catechesis, then, should not be afraid to challenge: Jesus's command has been fulfilled for 2,000 years—are we to be the first generation to drop the ball?

Movement 2: Becoming

The key catechetical point of the second movement is summed up in St. Augustine's teaching: "Receive what you are" (Sermon 272) and "become what you receive" (Sermon 227). Among the many reasons that Catholics receive Communion—for the promise of heaven, for the forgiveness of sin, for unity, for peace and healing, for nourishment and strength in the spiritual journey—surely a critical reason is to become what we receive. We receive Christ to be divinized, to share the very life of Christ. This is a foretaste of heaven, for though heaven is beyond our ability to describe or imagine ("Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard" [1 Cor 2:9]), we know it is to live with Christ in the very dynamic of eternal and perfect love and unity that is the Trinity. We are accustomed to the dictum of Matthew 25 that advises us to see Christ in those who are in need. We are less accustomed, perhaps out of humility, to see that we are Christ in the world.

This is the great point of connection with a generation that likes to serve. It is critical to demonstrate that their commitment to human rights and dignity, their care for the poor and for the planet, and their resistance to injustice and oppression are indeed eucharistic.



Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that Mass is about more than what happens in the church building: “The priest dismisses the people with the words: *Ite, missa est*. These words help us to grasp the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. In antiquity, *missa* simply meant ‘dismissal.’ However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word ‘dismissal’ has come to imply a ‘mission’ (“Sacramentum Caritatis,” 51). Eucharist implies missionary discipleship. We are sent out not only to do the works of Christ but also, more radically, to be Christ, to “become what you receive.” Benedict XVI quotes St. Augustine on this sublime mystery of our faith:

The great Bishop of Hippo, speaking specifically of the eucharistic mystery, stresses the fact that Christ assimilates us to himself: “The bread you see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. The chalice, or rather, what the chalice contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. In these signs, Christ the Lord willed to entrust to us his body and the blood which he shed for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have received them properly, you yourselves are what you have received.” Consequently, “not only have we become Christians, we have become Christ himself.” (36)

In my college classes, after the final exam, I hand out a kind of diploma, which includes the words widely attributed to St. Teresa of Avila: “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.” It is partially wrong—Christ has a real body in the Eucharist, however hidden from our senses. Yet, it is also true: “You are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (1 Cor 12:27). I find that students resonate deeply with this message, the mystery of Christ’s presence in us and, through us, to the world.

Pope St. Paul VI spoke about this mystery in his encyclical on the Eucharist, “Mysterium Fidei” (1965): “here is more than one way in which Christ is present in His Church” (35). Of the various ways, the Eucharist is a “way that surpasses all the others” (38). “This presence,” he said, “is called ‘real’ not to exclude the idea that the others are ‘real’ too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man” (39). Among the other modes of Christ’s presence, Paul VI mentions Christ in us: “He is present in the Church as she performs her works of mercy, not just because whatever good we do to one of His least brethren we do to Christ Himself [Mt 25:40], but also because Christ is the one who performs these works through the Church” (35).

This is the fundamental difference between a secular humanist who does good works and a Catholic Christian (and those who share our eucharistic faith, especially our Orthodox brothers and sisters). Our faith tells us that we are not merely acting on our own, nor even acting corporately with other members of society, but rather we are enabling Christ to act in us, to be us. Christ is continuing to bring the work of salvation to fulfillment through our free-will reception of him in the Eucharist and our willingness to make him present through us in all the places we find ourselves. This is an integral part of what it means to be the church. Our work is not simply philanthropy or social work; it is salvific. It is not merely our own good work; it is God’s work of redemption.

This sounds lofty, and it is. We are not worthy of the call to which we respond. Nonetheless, it is true. St. Paul reminds us that he (and we) are “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col 1:24). What was lacking? His sacrifice was perfect. And yet, there it is in Scripture: a reminder that Christ wants to incorporate all our sacrifices and sufferings—all our imperfect acts of love—into his one perfect sacrifice of love. What was lacking was nothing except this extension in time and space, this embrace of all that is good and true and beautiful. The celebration of the Mass is that extension. We receive Christ in order to go out and make up in our flesh what was lacking. We receive in order to wash the feet of others in humble service. We receive in order to become.

Movement 3: Offering

The key catechetical point of the third movement is that we share in the one perfect offering of love that is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross through our “full, conscious, and active participation” in the Eucharist (cf. “Lumen Gentium,” 11 and “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” 14). This is the significance of the ritual of bringing the gifts up to the altar. It is not only the bread and the wine that we bring up from the community to the altar. These gifts are symbolic of everything we are offering, everything that we want cleansed of imperfection and offered in perfect love. They are symbolic of us, offering the fullness of ourselves and our lives in union with Christ to the Father in the Spirit. Benedict XVI taught that this gesture of bringing up the gifts, in fact, indicates an offering of all creation to the Father in Christ:

The Synod Fathers also drew attention to the presentation of the gifts. ... This humble and simple gesture is actually very significant: in the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and

presented to the Father. In this way we also bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world, in the certainty that everything has value in God's eyes. ... God invites man to participate in bringing to fulfilment his handiwork, and in so doing, gives human labour its authentic meaning, since, through the celebration of the Eucharist, it is united to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ ("Sacramentum Caritatis," 47).

We offer what we have done, in our own poor way, asking forgiveness for our failings and purification of our charity. Our little, seemingly insignificant works gain eternal and infinite value as part of Christ's saving work. Thus, in holy Communion, we not only receive Christ, but Christ receives us.*

Pope St. John Paul II reminds us that this is "especially urgent in the context of our secularized culture, characterized as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency" ("Mane Nobiscum Domine," 26). Without the Eucharist, our social justice efforts lack the "source" that will bring them to their "summit." If

we do not enter into the Eucharist, offering our good works and projects—indeed our very lives—with Christ, then the words of the psalmist may be ours: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor" (Ps 127:1).

Conclusion

The Eucharist involves this dynamic of movements in love. It is not simply a static understanding of the Real Presence in the consecrated host and wine. It is integrally related to what Francis calls "missionary discipleship" ("Evangelii Gaudium," 120). The dynamic holds the synoptic Gospel accounts together with John's account. As Pope St. John Paul II taught:

I would like to emphasize ... the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a *practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society*. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically


* "...it is verily flesh and verily blood. And these when eaten and drunk, bring it to pass that both we are in Christ and Christ in us." St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, Book VIII.14.



affirming the criterion of service: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mk 9:35). It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the “washing of the feet” (cf. Jn 13:1–20): by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. (“Mane Nobiscum Domine,” 28)

Thus, the pope continues,

I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31–46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged. (28)

The younger generations are already there in many ways: They are concerned about the crises and tragedies the pope mentioned, and many others. They care about service to others. They care about justice. They are willing to wash the feet. We have a lot to learn from them concerning living out genuine Christian faith. We also have something valuable to share: We can bring those who have not yet made the connection an explicit understanding that their works are eucharistic, are indeed missionary discipleship. We can help these faithful Matthew 25 Catholics to become John 6 Catholics as well. In learning from each other, we can come to a deeper “authenticity of our eucharistic celebrations” and a deeper fulfilment of the Great Commandment of love. 

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Living Into Our Gifts

LEISA ANSLINGER

I often tease that I studied theology because my brain can't handle math. Of course, this is only partially true. I studied theology because of my deep and abiding love of our Lord and desire to serve in pastoral ministry. But the truth is, there are certain fields of study that were never appropriate options for me—fields related to math or science literally did not compute. Perhaps because of this glaring deficit in my academic abilities, I learned early on that none of us can do everything and that it makes much more sense to partner with others than to try to do things on our own. We are best able to serve when we draw on one another's talents and build complementary partnerships.

Sharing our best contributions

Many of you have experienced the CliftonStrengths (previously known as StrengthsFinder) assessment. The essence of the research on which CliftonStrengths is built helps us recognize the benefits of drawing on our talents and forming complementary partnerships so that each person has the opportunity to contribute from his or her strengths. Our talents are natural ways in which we interact with the world, the ways we naturally think, feel, or behave when we are at our best. The research clearly shows that “we are at our best when we do what we do best.” Weakness fixing at most prevents failure. Let me illustrate this by inviting you to think

about two situations in your recent experience:

- ★ When was a time in which you faced a challenge and did not feel equipped to do what needed to be done? How did you handle the situation? What happened as a result?
- ★ When was a time in which you faced a challenge and knew you had exactly what was needed? What did you do? What happened as a result?

The difference in these two situations was talent. When we know we have exactly what is needed, there is very likely a talent, or more than one talent, that contributes to the ways in which we approach and resolve the situation. When we feel we do not have what is needed, we are likely in need of a talent or strength that is not in our wheelhouse. In this sort of situation, we must either draw on a talent that we do have or turn to someone who has talents that are different from our own.

New beginnings


I raise all of this now as we approach the autumn. For many in catechetical leadership, August and September are a little like beginning a new year. We resume programs or begin new ones, taking up the rhythm of processes, meetings, and celebrations that comprise the ministry we share and seeking to

do so with newfound joy, energy, and commitment. Look back at those two questions and the situations that came to mind.

- * Are there things you do that need talents different from the ones with which God has richly blessed you?
- * Whom might you draw into partnership with you to best accomplish these responsibilities?
- * Your programs and processes will thrive when many people help to bring them to life. Are there talents, things that you naturally do well, that you rarely have the opportunity to offer?

Intentionally seek out opportunities to share your gifts in new ways with others. You may have just what they need to serve, lead, and grow in the way you are called together.

When I was a freshman in high school, I encountered algebra for the first time. I felt lost the first month. Every day. Finally, after class one day, a newfound friend approached the teacher with an interesting proposition. Could Sister Alice seat me next to my friend? She would explain what Sister was trying to teach us, very quietly, in a way that would help me learn. Sister agreed, and within two weeks, I understood the material well enough to pass the first exam with a solid B. Without my friend's help, I would have faced every algebra class like I was slogging uphill. That is what it feels like to face a situation for which we do not have the needed innate talents. Instead, I was given a gift that has served me throughout my life, an appreciation of the value of complementary partnerships.

As we serve as catechetical leaders, let us find the grace and wisdom to share our talents generously as often as we are able and to seek out the gifts of others. It takes all of us doing what we can to contribute our talents and gifts to make Christ's presence and salvation known in the world. 

Leisa Anslinger is the associate director for pastoral life for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. She is the author of *Impact*, a monthly resource to form people as disciples who live and grow as good stewards (catholiclifeandfaith.net/everyday-impact).

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT STRENGTHS?

If we accept the fact

that God has created us with certain abilities,

that He has created us to do certain things very well,

that He loves us and has a plan for our lives,

that He has been actively involved in a creative process of turning our talents and abilities into strengths, and

that He will empower us as we surrender to the Lordship of Christ,

then we will become the persons He created us to be and get to experience the glorious, abundant life of being alive in Christ.

Summary:

The critical issue is what we believe about God. Is He the Creator? Did He create us? Did He create us with an intention, a purpose in mind? If so, He would most certainly have created us with the abilities and capabilities to do His will.

—Edward “Chip” Anderson and Scott McDowell, “Towards a Theology of Strengths,” page 7, <http://nomoreoverload.com/eStore/WP/Theology-Of-Strngths.pdf>



“Christus Vivit”

CLAIRE M. MCMANUS

“Christus Vivit” is going to change the way we form our youth and thus how we form ourselves for the ministry. This is not a document that comes to us from the lofty perch of an ivory tower but from the young people themselves who have been engaged in the synodal process since the initial inquiry went out in preparation for the 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Awareness.

Some will read “Christus Vivit” and find it challenging; others will be affirmed. The document is best understood as a continuum that began with the pre-synod inquiry and continued with the synod’s final document. “Christus Vivit” is Pope Francis’s reflection on these initial insights, which he delivers directly to youth, young adults, and all who are in their lives.

Guidance for those in ministry

Speaking to those who minister to youth, Francis called for greater formation in mentorship. The greatest role that a youth leader can play is to be a person who accompanies a young person on their faith journey. The synod raised the concern that “there is a shortage of qualified people devoted to accompaniment.” He went so far as to say that listening is a charism of the Holy Spirit that “might also receive institutional recognition as a form of ecclesial service” (244).

The synod called for the formation of young men and (especially) women. “Some young women feel that there is a lack of leading female role models within the Church” whose intellectual and professional skills are gifts ready to be given (245).

The qualities of a youth leader are deeply rooted in social and spiritual formation, which is crucial to their role as mentors. Mentors must be well rounded and nonjudgmental, able to recognize that youth are still on a journey that is not yet complete.

Francis called on the church to offer ministry to the young that is inclusive and focused on reaching out to the margins. He used the term “popular” to describe an approach that is “broader and more flexible,” a ministry that “goes out to those places where real young people are active, and fosters the natural leadership qualities and the charisms sown by the Holy Spirit” (230). Popular leaders, then, are those able to make everyone, including the poor, the vulnerable, the frail, and the wounded part of the journey. “They do not shun or fear those young people who have experienced hurt or borne the weight of the cross” (231).

Youth ministry needs to be “synodal,” a term Francis uses to describe a communal journey with the youth that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members” (206). The community takes co-responsibility for the formation of youth, which means we have to engage the parish, the schools, the sports programs—indeed, wherever they are connected. This challenges us to embrace the greater community and partner with them to form our youth.

The synod challenged traditional ways of gathering and forming youth, which will take great trust and courage to change.




Youth do not want to be programmed. “The young make us see the need for new styles and new strategies. ... Youth ministry needs to become more flexible: inviting young people to events or occasions that provide an opportunity not only for learning, but also for conversing, celebrating, singing, listening to real stories and experiencing a shared encounter with the living God” (204).

A twofold approach

Francis described a twofold approach to the young that begins with outreach and moves to growth. The young want to be empowered to be the protagonists of their faith journeys. Those of us who minister to the young must be willing to minister *with* them too.

Francis heard the youth when they talked about their catechetical formation. He reiterated the importance of the kerygma as the church’s greatest priority. The young must hear over and over again that God loves them, that Christ saves them, and that this same Christ is alive today.

He talks about the importance of youth having a “powerful experience of God, an encounter with Jesus that touched their hearts,” which should not be squelched by our catechetical programs. Often the only follow-up to such an encounter with Jesus “is a series of ‘formation’ meetings featuring talks about doctrinal and moral issues, the evils of today’s world, the Church, her social doctrine, chastity, marriage, birth control and so on” (212). As a result, many young people get bored or, worse, become downcast and negative. We are going to need to focus more on sharing faith than sharing doctrine or else we will miss an opportunity to form disciples of Jesus Christ.

“Christus Vivit” announces to the world that Christ lives! The youth of the world who contributed to its critiques and recommendations are showing the world that Christ is alive within them and that they are ready to accompany us on our journey too. 

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TWO MAIN COURSES OF ACTION

209. I wish simply to emphasize that youth ministry involves two main courses of action. One is outreach, the way we attract new young people to an experience of the Lord. The other is growth, the way we help those who have already had that experience to mature in it.

210. As for outreach, I trust that young people themselves know how best to find appealing ways to come together. They know how to organize events, sports competitions and ways to evangelize using social media, through text messages, songs, videos and other ways. They only have to be encouraged and given the freedom to be enthused about evangelizing other young people wherever they are to be found. ...



212. As for growth, I would make one important point. In some places, it happens that young people are helped to have a powerful experience of God, an encounter with Jesus that touched their hearts. But the only follow-up to this is a series of “formation” meetings featuring talks about doctrinal and moral issues, the evils of today’s world, the Church, her social doctrine, chastity, marriage, birth control and so on. As a result, many young people get bored, they lose the fire of their encounter with Christ and the joy of following him; many give up and others become downcast or negative. Rather than being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine, let us first try to awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain the Christian life. In the words of Romano Guardini, “when we experience a great love ... everything else becomes part of it.”

—Pope Francis, “Christus Vivit”



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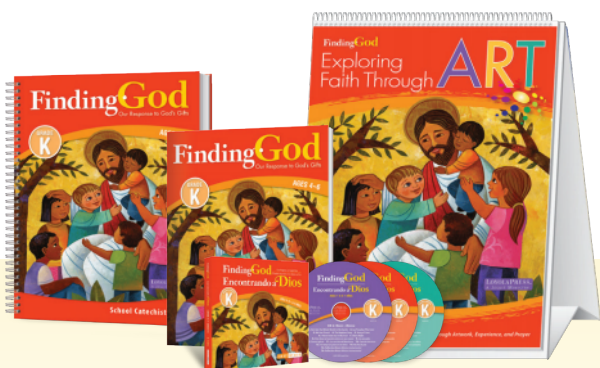
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Three Ways to Rejoice and Be Glad with College Students

KYLE TURNER

Commencement fell on a beautiful Sunday in May this year in Denver, Colorado. An early morning Baccalaureate Mass that day found our campus chapel packed to the walls with exuberant graduates and proud parents. We gathered to rejoice in the blessings received over the course of the last few years as well as to pray for the graduates as they were sent forth to the next adventures in their lives. In that moment, I realized that this is a profound pivotal experience in the lives of these young people. The ebullience of Sunday was followed by serenity on the Monday that followed, a quiet that was rarely felt when students were on campus.

A practical call to holiness

For those engaged in campus ministry work, the summer months often allow for an opportunity to refresh and renew our spirits as we gear up for another academic year of journeying with college students. There is a certain rhythm to the season that transitions us from one year into the next. We bid adieu to graduating seniors and prepare to welcome a fresh new class of incoming first-year students, bright eyed and full

of excitement. The summer months provide time and space for reflecting on our mission of working in campus ministry, namely how we accompany students on their journeys of faith during those relatively fleeting college years.

This summer, I am reflecting on how Pope Francis's 2018 apostolic exhortation "Gaudete et Exsultate" connects to ministry with college students, namely the traditional undergraduate students with whom I work. His "modest goal" is outlined right at the beginning of the document: "to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us 'to be holy and blameless before him in love' (*Eph 1:4*)" (2).

I wonder how many of our traditional undergraduate students know that each one of them has been chosen for holiness. I fear the reality is that not many of them do. So, this ties directly in to our work on campus and leads to a few questions that can frame reflection on one's mission work within campus ministry: How are college students called to holiness? How do they

HOLINESS IS NOT JUST FOR CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.

Are you called to the consecrated life?

Be holy by living out your commitment with joy.

Are you married?

Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church.

Do you work for a living?

Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters.

Are you a parent or grandparent?

Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus.

Are you in a position of authority?

Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.

—Pope Francis, "Gaudete et Exsultate," 14

even know that they are called to holiness? How might we better assist them in hearing, heeding, and living out this call to holiness?

Practicing accompaniment with college students


Francis's modest goal is a clarion call for the accompanying of college students at this particular time, and it serves well to be a guiding light for how we approach ministry, evangelization, and catechesis with college students. What does this look like as we hit the ground running when the bulk of students returns to campus in early fall? A few thoughts come to mind in my initial reflection.

First, the campus ministry presence on campus has the opportunity to become a "home away from home" where students can be known, loved, and formed. This was certainly true for my own experience during my undergraduate years. This aspect of the campus ministry's presence in the lives of students requires a certain emphasis placed on hospitality. Students need to feel as though they are authentically welcomed and truly valued for who they are as well as a part of a community of faith. This requires some old-fashioned table fellowship as a part of the regular gatherings hosted by the campus ministry; get your food budgets ready!

Second, we need to "create a 'God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord'" ("Gaudete et Ex-

sultate,"¹⁴², quoting Pope John Paul II, "Vita Consecrata" [Mar. 25, 1996], 42). This space can be created through their experience of liturgy and prayer, sharing of faith, exploring what it means to be Catholic (through catechetical offerings), and responding to the call to work for justice and in service of others. Part of providing this space involves listening to the students to hear what they desire—meeting each one squarely, right there, where he or she is in the journey.

Third, helping students to hear and heed their vocational calls is extremely important while we have the chance to assist them in this. "We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves" (14). Any opportunity that we can help students be open to vocational discernment is a worthwhile endeavor.

This is only scratching the surface. In gearing up for another academic year, we would be well served to spend some time with Francis's writing and allow it to inform how we approach our ministry on campus in helping students to respond to their own calls to holiness. 

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