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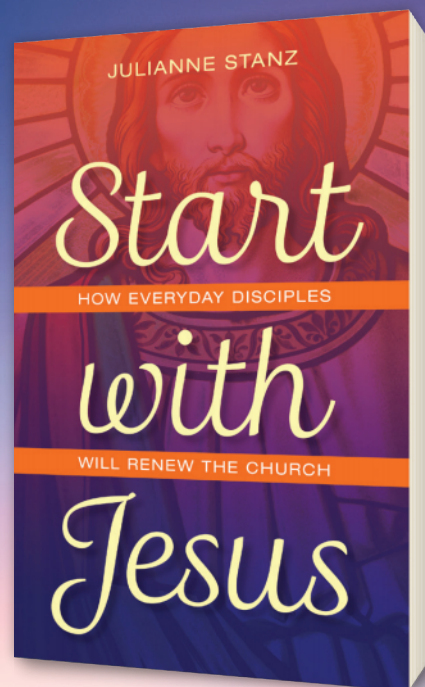
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## FEATURES

6   The Cry of the Earth in Pan-Amazonia	Lucas Briola
10   Catholic Social Teaching: Illusion or Vision?	Anne-Louise Nadeau, SNDdeN
14   Motherless Children: The African American Youth & Young Adult Ministry Struggle	Ansel Augustine
17   Get Started in Social Media with These Simple Steps	John Grosso
20   Dealing with Doubt: What We Can Learn from Famous Doubters	Elizabeth Manneh
22   A Liturgy Lesson Plan	Cari White
24   Bringing Hope to Marriages and Families Initiative	María G. Covarrubias

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## IN EVERY ISSUE

4   From the President <i>Synodality</i>	Denise Utter
5   From the Executive Director <i>Evaluating Programs: The Past vs. the Future</i>	Margaret Matijasevic
26   Evangelization <i>Your Personal Why</i>	Leisa Anslinger
28   Adult Faith Formation <i>At the Center: A Foundation for Adult Faith Formation (Part II)</i>	Janet Schaeffler, OP
30   Catechizing on Campus <i>Engaging the Specter of Racism on a College Campus</i>	Kyle S. Turner

# Synodality

D E N I S E U T T E R

In 2015, at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis committed to a way of synodality that he called “the path . . . which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”<sup>1</sup> The International Theological Commission (ITC) thus began to study synodality and in 2018 presented its findings to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, who, after receiving Pope Francis’s approval, published it as “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church.”<sup>2</sup>

The commission said, “In the wake of Vatican II, following in his predecessors’ footsteps, [Pope Francis] insists that synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerges from the Gospel of Jesus, which is called to become incarnate today in history, in creative fidelity to Tradition.”

## Pastoral orientations

The next section of the document offers some pastoral orientations. After exploring these concepts in the Synod of the Family (2015) and the Synod on Young People (2018), I turned to the most recent Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region and the words of Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego following the synod. McElroy suggests that the synodal path could be important for the church today, and that its process is not foreign to the church in America since the recent fifth Encuentro followed a similar discernment process.


He further states that four hallmarks of this recent synod (to build a missionary church, a participatory church, a welcoming church, and a church of harmony) could renew our church and reanimate our evangelizing efforts. But he also offered cautionary words: that we must not fall victim to a “bunker mentality” that “saps our ability to engage constructively with the world, to find the energy and the hope-filled zeal to undertake new initiatives and our ability to clearly discern where the call of Christ is truly leading us.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he advised that we must not continue the “culture of maintenance” that influences so many of our decisions.

## What can we learn?

Though it may seem somewhat audacious to compare this synodal path to the process of discernment in which we are currently involved as an organization, I would suggest that we can at least learn much from the theology and tradition of synodality that applies to our own process.

When the Board of Directors enlisted the consultation of Meitler, we agreed to a process of listening and dialogue that will occur at every level. Mark Mogilka, our consultant from Meitler, began listening immediately to the Board of Directors, the executive director, and the staff. Then he began listening to the legacy of NCCL, through the documents of the organization and the conversations he had with previous presidents and executive directors. He has since engaged in dialogue with our Representative Council, with our partners, and with other Catholic organizations with similar values and missions.

He set out a path of helping us listen to our entire membership and to former members. We are evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) with the help of our director of mission integration. All of this opens us up to wherever the Holy Spirit is leading us today.

One of the most important components of such a discernment process is prayer. Please pray with us, that we might truly listen and discern the Spirit’s nudges, that we might all accept our co-responsibility for the mission of NCCL and thus the mission of the church. Come, Holy Spirit! 

1 Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,” October 17, 2015, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).  
2 International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html).  
3 Robert McElroy, “US Church Is Adrift, Synodality Can Renew It,” National Catholic Reporter, November 7, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/bishop-mcelroy-us-church-adrift-synodality-can-renew-it>.

# Evaluating Programs: The Past vs. the Future

MARGARET MATIJASEVIC

This is a critical year for the NCCL membership, its stakeholders, and its beneficiaries. By committing to the Meitler process, encouraging consultation from beyond the organization's members, NCCL is able to assess trends and apply learnings from a perspective beyond its own.

Recently, through a certification process in nonprofit management, I was introduced to the Logic Model, a comprehensive process attending to program evaluation. The process encourages a wide-ranging assessment of inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, mid-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes.

One of the most insightful learnings from this experience was identifying the differences among the range of outcomes. Long-standing programs like many outlined in NCCL's structure, including forums, board leadership, and committees, are meant to be measured against *long-term outcomes*.

However, the temptation can be strong, especially in membership organizations, to measure programs like these against the incorrect point in time. How NCCL functions cannot be measured against short-term outcomes at this stage in its history, as the establishment of the structure and its programming is based on the church from more than two decades ago.

## Understanding our diversity

It came as a great "aha" moment in the course when I considered the demographic of our membership. We are filled with great members, many of them long-standing and influential, who offer a great understanding of the long-term outcomes of our ministry. At the same time, we have a great deal of work to do to in moving NCCL into new programs and structures that are relevant for this time in church history and that address new realities, some of which are uncertain, others that are hopeful, and all of which are requiring change.

This means NCCL, through the input of the diverse ministers in the field, has a newly recognized purpose to reevaluate its inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, mid-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes. We are doing so in a way that doesn't assume that the current program structuring is the way to gain the input.

We are bravely assuring that the breadth of diversity, which is not always reflected in our organization's membership, is


heard by considering leaders of diverse cultural communities, less-experienced ministers in the field, and influential partners who contribute to the mission of evangelization and catechesis. What NCCL is doing well is adapting to the changing times.

## Sustaining amazing ministries

We are thinking beyond our successful programs of the past and moving into models of church leadership for the future. NCCL is reassessing where it is allocating its inputs of time, money, staff, and structure, and utilizing you and your networks to rethink how our activities can provide you the sustenance you need to be a vibrant minister in today's church.

NCCL wants to provide the outcomes, short and long, that affect you personally and in a meaningful capacity. The challenge for all of us will be to accept that while the long-term outcomes of past programs have been successful, we run the risk of extinguishing our future if we keep assessing them as the priority. We are a paschal mystery people, and as we journey through Lent, I encourage you to ponder in the desert all that has been great in our organization while trusting God to take hold of our ongoing journey, leading us to let go of the past and enter into the future.

I have hope that by the Easter season NCCL will have undergone tremendously hard work to lead us into a new life beyond what we have known together. At the NCCL Convocation in Dubuque this May, we will hear the potential new models of tomorrow through the Meitler report, and I trust that come Pentecost (the week following the Convocation), we will be just as shaken and inspired as the disciples were. There will be a personal calling to each of us to speak of our shared mission with new zeal and clarity.

You. I. We. Not any alone, but all of us together, are called to be on fire with the Spirit. 

# The Cry of the Earth in Pan-Amazonia

LUCAS BRIOLA

On October 15, 2017, Pope Francis announced that the next synod of bishops would gather to discuss the church's mission in the Pan-Amazon region. The region holds a prominent place in his papal ministry, as evidence by his 2013 World Youth Day visit to Brazil and in his 2018 meeting with Amazonians in Peru. The 2015 promulgation of "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home" (*Laudato si'*) provided further impetus for attending to the "world's lung," the name some have given the Amazon rainforest for the large amounts of carbon dioxide it absorbs and oxygen it releases for the planet.

Official preparations for the synod have been underway since its announcement. Last August, the general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, in consultation with the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM), released a preparatory document to solicit responses from participants for this year's October meeting.

That document, "Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology," offers a telling study in the ongoing reception of *Laudato si'*. It can reveal which elements might "stick" from the most recent iteration of Catholic Social Teaching. As Ormond Rush has stressed, any process of ecclesial reception "includes judgments as to value and importance of some elements over others; it involves selection, that is, decisions to explicitly retrieve and foreground a particular dimension of the tradition and to allow another dimension to recede into the background."<sup>1</sup> Along with the original authorial intentions and actual texts, this process can also capture the ever-evolving meaning of a document like *Laudato si'*. Indeed, the preparatory document uncovers those "judgments" and "selections" actively being made in the reception of *Laudato si'* and designates future paths of reception. Here we will discuss three key features of this reception that deserve mention.

## The cries of the poor and of the earth

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis urges us to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (49). For the pope, as Bruno Latour detects, social concern and environmental concern intersect at these joined cries.<sup>2</sup> References to them fill the pages of the encyclical: "Sister [earth] cries out to us," indicating that "the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (*Laudato si'*, 2, emphasis added). Social fragmentation and environmental degrada-

tion "have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course" (*Laudato si'*, 53, emphasis added).

Such rhetoric evokes *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, the seminal work of Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff.<sup>3</sup> By incorporating this voice, *Laudato si'* innovates in two ways. On the one hand, "cry" language signals a predominantly inductive approach. In a way characteristic of liberation theology, the earth and the poor both possess a hermeneutical priority in ascertaining what is happening to our common home and how to care for it.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, while the "cry of the poor" found magisterial expression prior to *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis's reference to a "cry of the earth" introduced a novelty within Catholic Social Teaching. In addition to the plight of the poor, so too must the travails of creation determine the shape of the church's mission. Cardinal Peter Turkson, a chief architect of *Laudato si'*, has since coined the term "preferential option for the earth" (along with the more traditional preferential option for the poor) to crystalize this insight and secure its place in ecclesial discourse.

The preparatory document on the Amazon region confirms this prominence of the twin cries within Catholic social teaching. Like *Laudato si'*, it takes an inductive approach by dividing its sections through "see, judge, act." The title of the document's first section, focused on "seeing," refers to the "cries of the Pan-Amazonia." The authors intend their inductive approach to foster an "attentive listening to the twin cry of the poor and of the earth" ("Amazonia," 8). They continue:

Today the cry of the Amazonia to the Creator is similar to the cry of God's People in Egypt (cf. Ex 3:7). It is a cry of slavery and abandonment, which clamors for freedom and God's care. It is a cry that yearns for the presence of God, especially when the Amazonian peoples, in order to defend their lands, stumble upon the criminalization of protest—both by the authorities and public opinion—or when they witness the destruction of the rainforest, which serves as their ancient habitat; or when the waters of their rivers are filled with deadly substances instead of life. ("Amazonia," 8)

Akin to the "technocratic paradigm" denounced in *Laudato si'* (101-114), what the authors christen a "neo-extractivism" and a "model of development [that is] faceless, suffocating,



and motherless, and [is] obsessed only with material goods and the idols of money and power,” endanger the earth and the poor equally in the region (“Amazonia,” 5). The document emphasizes how the cries bellow most loudly from indigenous Amazonian communities, who risk losing both their livelihood—the land—and their cultural heritage through these “new ideological colonialisms” (“Amazonia,” 5). Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, president of REPAM and recently named relator general of the Synod, famously whispered in Jorge Bergoglio’s ear as he was elected pope, “Don’t forget the poor.” The continued linking of these cries ensures that we will not.

## Integral ecology

These intertwined cries demand a comprehensive response; attempting to answer one of these cries necessarily entails addressing both cries. As Celia Deane-Drummond notes, Catholic Social Teaching takes a distinctly social approach to the environmental crisis.<sup>5</sup> In *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis urges what he referred to as an “integral ecology,” a neologism in papal vocabulary (*Laudato si’*, 137–162). Kevin Irwin captures the importance of the term by labeling it “the most distinctive contribution of the encyclical” and “the most important theological insight about ecology in the document.”<sup>6</sup> For the pope, integral ecology conveys the need both to see the current ecological crisis within a broader web of other social crises and to resolve that multifaceted crisis in a holistic fashion. The term also expresses a shift in the Catholic Social Teaching. Previously, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI highlighted the need to preserve a “human ecology” alongside a “natural ecology.”<sup>7</sup> While aligned with both popes’ intentions, Pope Francis’s use of integral ecology precludes the possibility of one ecology overshadowing the other and better captures the seamless connection between both ecologies.

With *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis has seemingly enshrined integral ecology as a new foundational category for Catholic Social Teaching. As Donal Dorr comments on the encyclical, “I am inclined to say that what [Pope Francis] offers us is not just an integral ecology but a framework for an *integral Catholic social teaching*, which includes not just the items that Francis emphasizes but also all the other significant elements in the Catholic social tradition.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, integral ecology appears poised to play a framing role similar to the “integral human development” of *Populorum progressio*, perhaps broadening or at least complementing it.

As an instance within the reception of *Laudato si’*, the preparatory document furthers this development. The very title of the document, “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an *Integral*

*Ecology*,” indicates the central place that integral ecology holds for articulating the church’s social mission today. While “integral ecology” receives nine mentions in the document, “human ecology” receives only one. The writers speak, for instance, of the following:

a relational paradigm called *integral ecology*, which articulates the fundamental links that make true development possible. . . . Since human beings are part of the ecosystems which facilitate the relationships that give life to our planet, caring for them—given that everything is interconnected—is fundamental to promoting the dignity of each individual, the common good of society, social progress, and care for the environment” (“Amazonia,” 9, emphasis original).

So also, following *Laudato si’*, does integral ecology remain a call. As the writers of the preparatory document remind us, “integral ecology is more than just the connection between the social and the environmental spheres. It also encompasses the need to promote personal, social, and ecological harmony, for which all are called to a personal, social, and ecological conversion. Integral ecology, then, invites us to an integral conversion” (“Amazonia,” 9). That is, it directs the church to “care for the environment and for the lives of the most vulnerable,” to answer those twin cries (“Amazonia,” 13). Genuine evangelization must include this integral component:

Accordingly, the task of evangelization invites us to strive against social inequalities and the lack of solidarity through the promotion of charity, justice, compassion, and care amongst ourselves and with animals, plants, and all creation. . . . This social—and even cosmic—dimension of the mission of evangelization is particularly relevant in the Amazon region, where the interconnectivity between human life, ecosystems, and spiritual life was, and continues to be, apparent to the vast majority of its inhabitants (“Amazonia,” 8).

The writers note here how the deeply communal spirituality of indigenous Amazonian traditions strengthens this relational paradigm in the church’s own life (see also “Amazonia,” 6). In other words, the cries of those communities signify not simply victims that require assistance, but sources of the *sensus fidei* that require attentive listening (“Amazonia,” 11).

## Doxology, sacramentality, and liturgy

*Laudato si’* is a social encyclical *sui generis*. Taken from a prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, the very title of *Laudato si’*—“Praised be!”—signals the encyclical’s distinctly doxological, prayerful character.



As Cardinal Peter Turkson recounted in his official presentation of *Laudato si'*, “The reference to St. Francis also indicates the attitude upon which the entire Encyclical is based, that of prayerful contemplation,” and the two prayers at the encyclical’s end illustrate that *Laudato si'* “concludes, as it opened, in a spirit of prayerful contemplation.” Admonishing us to read *Laudato si'* “on our knees,” Mary Taylor thus correctly suggests that this doxological spirit provides a hermeneutical guide for the encyclical.<sup>9</sup>

References to doxology dot the encyclical since, “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise” (*Laudato si'*, 12). Pope Francis, for instance, roots the intrinsic value of creatures in their ability to “give [God] glory” (*Laudato si'*, 69; see also 33). Moreover, precisely through this praise, creation reveals God’s presence (*Laudato si'*, 87). The “sacramental principle” saturates *Laudato si'*: “there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dew drop, in a poor person’s face” (*Laudato si'*, 233).<sup>10</sup>

This doxological lens and sacramental worldview quite naturally foreground Pope Francis’s extended reflections on the liturgy in the encyclical. He speaks of how, generally, “Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. . . . Water, oil, fire and colors are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise” (*Laudato si'*, 235). In the final chapter of *Laudato si'*, he provides an extended and particularly moving reflection on how “in the Eucharist . . . all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation” (*Laudato si'*, 236) and how “the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor” (*Laudato si'*, 237). This liturgical-Eucharistic focus affords yet another unique feature of the encyclical. Besides John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no other social encyclical mentions the Eucharist, let alone dedicates substantial attention to it in the way that Francis does in *Laudato si'*.

The preparatory document on the Pan-Amazon region demonstrates that this doxological, sacramental, and Eucharistic tenor

of *Laudato si'* is, despite its distinctiveness, not an anomaly. Citing *Laudato si'* and John Paul II, the authors stress that “‘Soil, water . . . everything is a caress of God,’ a divine song, whose lyrics are made up of ‘the multitude of creatures present in the universe’” (“Amazonia,” 7). That is, the relational paradigm of the integral ecology of *Laudato si'* rests upon the one chorus of praise that joins creation (cf. Ps 148). Nevertheless, today, the staccato rhythm of the song sounds an alarm: “When the life of any of these creatures is snuffed out by human causes, they can no longer sing praise to the Creator” (“Amazonia,” 7). An integral ecology, as task, simultaneously charges the church to restore creation’s doxological end, to transform the twin cries of the earth and the poor into a joined channel of praise to the Creator.

It is for this reason that, like Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*, the authors of the preparatory document view the church’s sacramental-liturgical life as integral to this mission. As in *Laudato si'*, this theme plays a surprisingly prominent role in the document and accordingly sanctions its essential place within an integral ecology. The 10th section of the preparatory document highlights the “sacramental dimension” of the church’s mission in the Pan-Amazon region. As it states, “A contemplative ecclesial gaze and sacramental practice are the keys to evangelization in the Amazonia” (“Amazonia,” 10). In order to reverse the neo-extractivist lens that causes the earth and the poor to cry out, “the Christian community, especially in the Amazon region, is invited to see reality with a contemplative gaze, through which it can grasp the presence and action of God in all creation and in all history” (“Amazonia,” 10). In the words of *Laudato si'*, the sacramental life invites us “to embrace the world on a different plane” (*Laudato si'*, 235).

The authors’ reflections on specific sacramental practices show how it in fact does. Regarding baptism, they write how

the celebration of Baptism invites us to consider the importance of “water” as a source of life, not only as a tool or material resource, and it makes the community of believers responsible for guarding this element as a gift of God for the whole planet.



Furthermore, since the water of Baptism purifies the baptized of all sins, its celebration allows the Christian community to adopt the value of water and “the river” as a source of purification, thus facilitating the inculturation of the water-related rites that come from the ancient wisdom of the Amazonian peoples (“Amazonia,” 10).

Citing *Laudato si'* extensively, the document includes a similar reflection on the ecological significance of the Eucharistic celebration:

The celebration of the Eucharist invites us to rediscover how the “Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter” (LS 236). In the Eucharist, the community celebrates an act of cosmic love, in which human beings, together with the incarnate Son of God and all creation, give thanks to God for new life in the risen Christ (cf. LS 236). . . . At the same time, the blood of so many men and women that has been shed—bathing the Amazonian lands for the good of its inhabitants and of the territory—is joined to the Blood of Christ, which was poured out for all and for all creation. (“Amazonia,” 10)


In an emphasis not found in *Laudato si'*, the authors here remind us of how participants in the Eucharist “dangerously remember” each and every forcibly stifled cry of protest in the Amazon region, such as that of Sister Dorothy Stang.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the preparatory document, the authors repeatedly underscore the need for an “intercultural spirituality” (“Amazonia,” 15). By incorporating particularities of the Pan-Amazon region in the above reflections, along with their stated appreciation for the inherently mystical character of Amazonian indigenous communities (e.g., “Amazonia,” 6), the authors begin to show how the church’s sacramental-liturgical life might foster such a spirituality.

So too do the writers begin to answer their own plea that the “praise of God needs to be accompanied by the practice of justice on behalf of the poor” (“Amazonia,” 11). *Laudato si'* invites the church to holiness in a way that befits our common home. As the preparatory document confirms, the holiness that enlivens an integral ecology is radically doxological, sacramental, and, ultimately, eucharistic.

## The ongoing reception of *Laudato si'*

The soon forthcoming *instrumentum laboris*, the deliberations of the Synod, and the final post-synodal apostolic exhortation will continue to detail the ongoing reception of *Laudato si'*. Since they represent distinctive features of *Laudato si'*, the three themes discussed above warrant particular attention throughout this process.

At the same time, the preparations for the upcoming Synod—on the Pan-Amazon region—illustrate the importance of receiving *Laudato si'* in particular contexts. Ecclesial reception occurs most concretely in the local church, and the implementation of the integral ecology of *Laudato si'* must attend to the particularities of place. In the United States at least, already efforts are underway to discern how the church might enact an integral ecology in places like Northern

Appalachia, Minnesota, or the Archdiocese of Atlanta. The Synod teaches us that, propelled by a worship that does justice, such creative labors must continue so as to answer the cries of the earth and the poor echoing across our common home. 

**Lucas Briola** is an assistant professor of theology at Saint Vincent College (Latrobe, Pennsylvania). He has edited a collection of essays, *Everything Is Interconnected: Towards a Globalization with a Human Face and an Integral Ecology*.

## Notes

1. Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 3. See also 52–68. While Rush focuses his study on the Second Vatican Council, his proposals quite readily apply to other events of the church’s life.
2. Bruno Latour, “La grande clameur relayée par le pape François,” in *Laudato si’: Encyclique, édition commentée: Texte intégral, réactions et commentaires*, eds. F. Louzeau and B. Toger (Paris: Parole et silence, 2015), 222–223.
3. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).
4. See, e.g., Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Theology from the Underside of History,” in *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 169–221.
5. Celia Deane-Drummond, “Joining in the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology,” *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1044 (2012): 193–212, at 197.
6. Kevin W. Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si’: Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and Future of Pope Francis’s Encyclical* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 102, 117.
7. See, e.g., John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* [Encyclical on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*], May 1, 1991, 38; and Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Encyclical on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth], June 29, 2009, 51.
8. Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 467. Emphasis original.
9. Mary Taylor, “Ecology on One’s Knees: Reading *Laudato Si’*,” *Communio* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 618–651.
10. On the “sacramental principle,” see Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 123–186.
11. See Bruce T. Morill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000).



# Catholic Social Teaching: Illusion or Vision?

**ANNE-LOUISE NADEAU, SNDdeN**

Somewhere along your educational journey of becoming a catechist, you had a course called Catholic Social Teaching. Was it taught with relevancy and excitement, or were you painfully bored? At the end, were you relieved that it was over but glad you got the credit for taking it?

I offer the following example of what could happen if these 128-year-old principles were alive and active in our parishes today:

Every week there is standing room only in our parish church. People are coming in droves to celebrate the Eucharist as part of a vibrant worshipping community. The pews are filled with people from every racial and ethnic background, reflecting the population of the city in which we live. The ambiance and statues welcome and celebrate that diversity. The many young people actively involved in parish activities are the envy of many for their energy, passion, and questions.

Justice is not just an abstract idea but a vital component of our parish life. Every week there are countless opportunities to sign petitions for our outcast immigrant and refugee sisters and brothers, invitations to attend a local Black Lives Matter rally, a parish council resolution looking for support to diminish the carbon footprint of the parish property, and a request to call or write our elected officials to demand an end to our state's death penalty. There are opportunities for everyone to be involved.

In a prominent place in each of the parish buildings, there is an attractive and framed copy of our Catholic Social Teachings. No one needs to ask what they mean since they are regularly explained and proclaimed in homilies, discussions, and formation classes at all levels. Along with the Gospel of Jesus, these teachings are the living stones of all aspects of our parish life.

What follows are some practical strategies that can be found in all our formation catechetical programs.

**Teaching respect for the dignity of all human life:** This parish is a strong advocate for nonviolent approaches addressing discord and disputes; there are frequent workshops available to teach the skills of nonviolent conflict resolution. We are staunch advocates for all of life, from womb to tomb, thereby rejecting war and the preparations for war with the

same intensity as we devote to the rights of the unborn. In all stages of formation there are age-appropriate experiences for our children to fully understand that making fun of people and calling them names, bullying, talking behind their backs, laughing when someone makes a mistake, and joining a crowd to cheer on a fight is not respecting the dignity of all human life. They are not too young to learn that people suffering from mental illness and those who are different from us must be met with compassion and not laughter or derision. Ours is a parish where no one is excluded for any real or imagined reason, and where we can sing "All are welcome here" with integrity and marvel at the truthfulness of the words.

**Teaching that because we are social beings, we must foster the growth and safety of all people:** All members of the parish, from youngest to oldest, including the leadership, are the first to join with other faith traditions in the city advocating for better schools for all children, more job training and retraining, care for the homeless and the hungry, parity in wages for all workers, and holding elected officials accountable to their campaign promises. Affordable health care should not be a fringe benefit that only some can afford but a human right that all are deserving and entitled to. Our parish is a great example of just wages along with benefits paid to all parish employees, especially the teachers in the school.

**Teaching that we all have a right and responsibility to participate in society and that no one has a right to shut out people from participating:** Our parish members are the most vocal ones at town halls, city council meetings, and other participatory mechanisms in our city. Our parishioners speak from their hearts to decry any proposed legislation to limit voting rights of people of color and ex-felons. We speak out loudly and clearly against gerrymandering, redlining, and any practice that keeps us segregated, isolated, and discriminated against. Our parish continues to study systemic and institutional racism, clearly sees how racism has so crippled all of us, and believes that no child is too young to know these truths.

**Teaching that protection for poor and vulnerable people is our top priority as Catholic Christians:** At all levels of our parish formation program we are teaching the social dynamics of why people are made poor and how the economic, religious, social, and political systems in this country were built and are maintained to *not* protect poor and vulnerable



people. Our formation programs are teaching how historically and currently our church is complicit in keeping certain people powerless, if not invisible.

**Teaching about solidarity:** Our parish clearly understands the moral responsibility it has toward sisters and brothers in need. We have a system in place in which every member of our parish, from oldest to youngest, has an opportunity and a responsibility to volunteer at the homeless shelter, to serve the daily hot meals for people who live on the streets, or to visit and send cards on a regular basis to the shut-ins and those in nursing care facilities. We all have a warm and grace-filled relationship with members of the Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities; we carry out projects together, are present when tragedies happen, and support one another's communities. No one feels isolated from each other.

**Teaching about stewardship:** Our parish understands that all that we have is "on loan" and that the earth and all creation need to be passed on to future generations. On the unused land in the parish, we have a community garden open to anyone who wishes to use it and has a commitment to caring for it. Food that is grown there is used by the families or taken to a local food pantry for distribution. There are also strong groups that support abolishing nuclear weapons and that address the current state of our climate. Our Parish Council regularly reviews the investment policies, making sure that they are aligned with socially responsible stewardship.

**Teaching about subsidiarity:** Through many hard lessons learned over the years, our parish continues to learn more and more about

the principle of subsidiarity. Briefly it means that problems are solved and issues are resolved at the level at which they happen. It took a while for parishioners to learn that there is "no running to Father ... or Sister ... or the Principal ... or the head of the Parish Council ... or the classroom teacher" to solve their problems. Learning the skills of advocating for oneself, of assuming our responsibility for our part in conflicts that exist in our families, classrooms, workplaces, among friends, and so on is both a mature and a Christian way of acting. Our formation programs encourage young learners to deal with issues for themselves and not appeal automatically to parents to solve the issues for them. It takes maturity on the part of parents to know when to step in after their children have done their part in addressing what they are struggling with.

**Teaching about the common good:** Our parish is getting so much better at answering the annual questions posed by our pastor, "What does our parish need to be a more authentic witness to all that Jesus lived and died for?" and "What can we give up so that others may more fully live in our city/town?" Our parish community knows the difference between surviving and thriving and that Jesus came to ensure that all people would thrive and not merely survive. We also understand the difference between fairness and justice, and we know they are not synonymous. Fairness reduces everyone to the least common denominator so that everyone has the same things, needed or not. Justice, by contrast, is based on need. People have what they need to live fully, no more and no less. The common good is not based on merit, privilege, or gained or acquired status; it is based on what is best for the community



and enables everyone to thrive. This is a very difficult lesson to teach our children, who often announce “it’s not fair” when they do not get what they want.

Catechetical readers and leaders, at this point in the article you want to know the address of this parish and declare your intention to join it. Be consoled that it does exist in seed form in the parishes across the United States who are trying to live by the Gospel and our Catholic Social Teaching. It is located and lives on a continuum where some days, weeks, months and years the parish moves a little closer to the Beloved Community envisioned by Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Our person and our role as catechist is critically important to the formation we are providing week after week. Who we are as human beings, along with our ability to listen to learners’ questions without judgment, no matter what the age of the learner, are fundamental to the learning process. This listening provides the suitable atmosphere for the role we play in imparting certain beliefs, tenets, and faith knowledge. In other words, we should be learning from our students and teaching them at the same time. It is a relationship based on mutuality and respect.

It is unfortunate that our Catholic Social Teachings have been such a well-kept secret within our Catholic Christian community. It could be that they were perceived as too dangerous! What would our parishes look like today if they had been preached, taught, and implemented by our laypeople and clergy alike? This is a great exercise for our creative imaginations.

It is time to get Catholic Social Teaching pulled off the shelves of libraries and dusted off, and, with new language and contemporary insights, make these teachings key elements at all levels of our religious formation programs. Now is the time to reclaim our social justice heritage, long dormant since Pope Leo XIII wrote the encyclical in 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, that laid out these principles. They have waited 128 years to be made known and actualized, and the time is now.

Right now, our beloved church desperately needs transformation, not change. It needs to move forward by admitting the complicity it has sold its soul to and the privilege it has held, which has kept truth at bay. Putting our Catholic Social Teachings front and center in formation programs would be a giant first step.


I end by sharing a favorite tale taken from the Hasidic tradition. It is the tale of a sparrow.

This small sparrow was lying on her back in the middle of a busy road.

A person mounted on a horse stops abruptly and asks the sparrow, “What are you doing?”

The sparrow responds, “I heard the sky was falling and I’m going to hold it up when it does.”

“You,” responds the rider, “with your skinny, spindly, scrawny little legs, are going to hold up the sky when it falls!”

The sparrow looks at the rider squarely in the eyes and with great confidence says, “One does what one can, one does what one can.” 

**Sister Anne-Louise** is currently in ministry in Washington, DC, at Pax Christi, USA, as director of programs.

## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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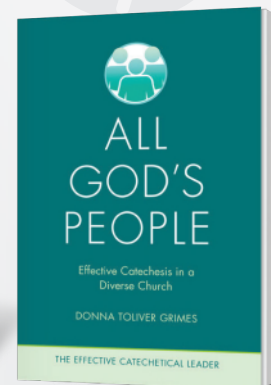
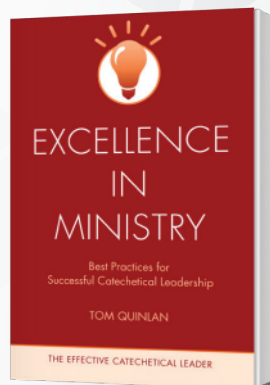
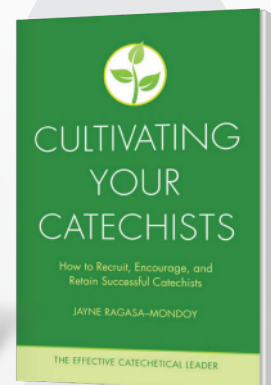
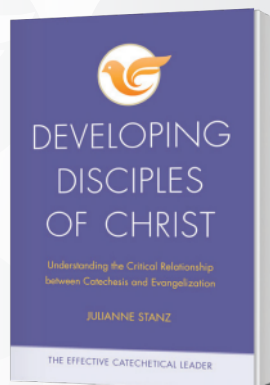
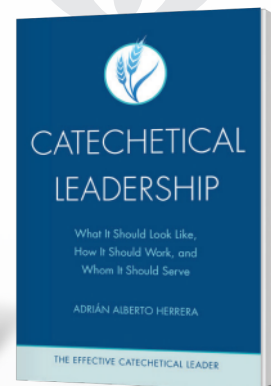
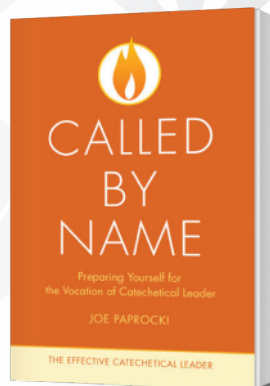
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# Motherless Children: The African American Youth & Young Adult Ministry Struggle

**ANSEL AUGUSTINE**

In 1989, Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, addressed the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at its annual June meeting. Here she explained what it meant to be Black (specifically African American) and Catholic. She said, “That means I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn’t frighten you, does it? I bring myself, my black self. All that I am. All that I have. All that I hope to become. I bring my whole experience, my history, my culture. I bring my African American song and dance, gesture and movement, teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility, *as a gift* to the church.” She ended her moving presentation with the bishops standing hand in hand singing the Negro spiritual “We Shall Overcome.”

Here we are almost 30 years later, and we—as African American Catholics, a distinct group from our African, Caribbean, or Hispanic brothers and sisters who identify as Black (many times all lumped together as Black)—are still asking for the church to see us as a “gift” and not a burden. Looking at our history as African American Catholics, we have always had to fend for ourselves in various ways.

Our history, which is as old as the church itself and certainly the church here in America, is constantly overlooked and not shared. Our ministries are constantly under-resourced or ignored. Our spirituality is constantly having to be defended as being “authentically Catholic” by those who administer the litmus test.

We are a people of great faith and achievements, but being a youth, young adult, or campus minister in the African American Catholic community is difficult. We constantly have to fight to fit in, in a church that sometimes treats us like we do not belong. Here I would like to focus on two factors that create this dynamic of marginalization: racism and proximity.

## Racism

Racism is commonly referred to as America’s original sin. Out of that came the institution of slavery, whose effects are still felt today. It is this sin that makes it difficult to conduct youth ministry within the African American community. The USCCB just released a pastoral letter entitled “Open Wide Our Hearts” to address this sin and what the church should do about it, following up other pastorals about racism they have written in the past. Father Bryan Massingale’s book *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* powerfully illustrates the issues that divide the church today. Bishop Edward Braxton from the Diocese of Bell-

ville wrote two strong pastoral letters about racism that many of his brother bishops have shared widely as well.

It is through these documents that we—especially those of us who do not have to deal with this issue on a regular basis—are reminded that racism does not occur only outside of the church but is a sin within the church itself, which we must address. When we look at the history of our church in the United States, a Eurocentric model of worship styles, images, and languages is upheld as what should be the norm, and as the church undergoes its “browning,” whether through immigration or births, there seems to be a backlash to anything that is not part of this norm.

Look at the leadership of our chanceries around the country. Are the decision makers representative of the people they are called to serve? When people are called to the table to address racist actions, are all called, or does leadership only “welcome” those folks of color who maintain the status quo and are seen as safe? Does our church blackball those who challenge these norms or label them as “troublemakers”? When we have large diocesan or national gatherings of youth and young adults, is the music that is played, the sacred images that are shown, and the speakers who are invited representative of the diversity of the church?

Most of the times the answer is no. And, to add insult to injury, many times faces of color are used as tokens to show diversity on brochures or marketing but not as participants in the actual programming or decision-making process. It is through these often-institutionalized, racist occurrences that the African American youth and young adult community comes to feel excluded, and we are called to do our own thing with little to no support from the wider church.

## Proximity

In April 2018, at its spring meeting, the USCCB invited Bryan Stevenson, a criminal justice lawyer who gained recognition for leading the creating of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice—more commonly referred to as the Lynching Memorial—in Montgomery, Alabama, to address the body about racism as they were writing their pastoral letter. During his address, Mr. Stevenson talked about several factors that cause racism to exist. One factor was proximity. Proximity refers to how close things are to each other.



Mr. Stevenson pointed out that issues of racism persist in this country because people are not within proximity of each other. We still live in a segregated society. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it best when he said the most segregated time in America is Sunday morning. This is very true of our Catholic parishes around the country. Despite the rise of many “multicultural” parishes around the country, and despite the existence of many distinct cultural parishes, we are still divided as a church when it comes to realizing that no one expression of our faith is “more Catholic” than another.

Mr. Stevenson said that one way to combat racism is for those in leadership (such as bishops, diocesan leaders, Catholic event organizers, and liturgists) to be in the authentic presence of others. When we were trying to rebuild our archdiocese following Hurricane Katrina, many Catholic groups visited my home parish, St. Peter Claver. These groups, most of whom were white and made up of various age groups, were in awe at our gospel choir and the sacred art that reflected the people in the pews. They were struck by preaching that touched on the social justice issues that our communities faced.

Many were very appreciative of being able to sit and interact with youth from the African American Catholic experience. When they learned about the specific “right to life” issues that affect our communities, such as mass incarceration, poverty, racism, poor education, and a lack of other resources, they understood that basic survival was something that many of our families struggle with.

Just as Mr. Stevenson suggested to the USCCB, it is when we are in proximity with one another that we can truly see each other’s human dignity despite our differences. It is in this “sharing of space” that we share our souls and live as one body of Christ.

When Sister Thea began her talk with the bishops in 1989, she sang the Negro spiritual “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” In her presentation she continued to share the gifts that we, as African American Catholics, bring to the church, while also pointing out how the church sometimes treats us as second-class Catholics because we tend to express our Catholicism differently. As stated earlier, here we are 30 years later, and we, as African American Catholics, are asking the church that we love to show us that it loves us

back—not only when it is comfortable and when we affirm Eurocentric norms, but whenever the church is challenged to truly be a welcoming church for all.

Those of us who have worked in youth and young adult ministry within the African American Catholic community know all too well how we must tweak certain resources to be relevant to our youth and young adults' experiences. We know how sometimes we have to “fight” certain diocesan officials to help them understand that we are just as Catholic as other parishes.


We also have the challenge of helping our non-Catholic brothers and sisters understand why we remain Catholic. In 2019, we are seeing various African American Catholic schools, parishes, and institutions closing. We are seeing our youth ministries dwindling. In conversations presently taking place between the USCCB and various HBCU (historically Black college and university) Catholic campus ministers, we are seeing a disconnect between many of our young adults and their Catholic faith. It was during a conversation with one of these campus ministers where the following questions were brought up:

- \* What would it look like for national Catholic leaders and conference coordinators to attend our conferences (the Archbishop Lyke Conference, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, the National Black Catholic Congress) so they can meet the speakers and learn about the topics that are important to our communities?
- \* Why can't these leaders attend a Black Catholic Gospel Mass near them to see how to better integrate our worship styles and environment into their diocesan and national events and not just use Black people as “tokens”?
- \* How can these leaders better connect with the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the Black Catholic Sisters Conference, the Black Catholic Seminarians Association, the Knights

and Ladies of Peter Claver, Inc., and the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, and learn about the histories of these organizations?

- \* How can we create more opportunities for diocesan and national leaders to come into “our” spaces so that they can understand our realities and needs?

These issues, and the pain caused by having these discussions repeatedly, cause many of those doing this work to burn out or give up, but the hope is in the fact that our ancestors sacrificed much more so that we could be here. We have historical records, as well as stories passed down via word of mouth, detailing the disrespect they endured by the church to keep the faith. So who are we not to do the same?

Yes, it is a challenge to lift up the next generation of African American Catholic youth and young adult leadership, but it is a must. Our church has benefited from our gifts and continues to do so, but more work needs to be done so that our realities, needs, and worship experiences are seen as just as valid, and Catholic, as anyone else's. To truly be *one* means not to be the same but to be welcoming of all experiences and expressions of our Catholic faith. 

**Dr. Ansel Augustine** is the former director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. He is on the faculty of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana. Ansel has served on the board of directors for the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA) and the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM). He is a highly sought-after speaker and has written numerous works related to ministry.





# Get Started in Social Media with These Simple Steps

JOHN GROSSO

Social media is the frontier of new evangelization. It is the digital “watering hole” where people of all ages gather to hear the latest news, argue about politics, and check in with their friends and family. Social media is in its infancy, but it’s not new—Facebook is about 15 years old now—so church leaders are rightfully concerned about using social media as a means to evangelize and catechize the Catholic faith.

Working for the church is not easy. Often, our parish staff members are stretched thin, working two, three, or even four different jobs. There’s rarely a communications person on staff because paid staff itself is a rarity. Social media is not often prioritized, so it is either ignored or done poorly.

Parish leaders know they need to engage in social media. But they either don’t know how or don’t have time. I empathize; given the multitude of platforms, overabundance of features, and rapid-fire updates, social media can be extremely overwhelming. There is a reason that corporations have entire departments focusing on social media, because that kind of staffing and energy is necessary to do the job well.

So how do you break into this digital world to share the Gospel effectively when you are short on time and energy? While I would always advocate that a parish invest strongly in communications, there are many strategies that I can suggest for beginners.

## Pick your platform

Let’s say you are a parish catechetical leader recently tasked with creating a social media account for your parish or ministry. How should you begin? The biggest mistake people make is by starting too broad. In an effort to cast the net wide, parishes will launch accounts on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, and more—all at the same time. This will rapidly lead to burnout, as those ministering in additional capacities won’t have the time or energy to manage these many accounts in a way that they will grow and bear fruit.

Instead, start small and targeted. Pick one or two platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are all different platform options) that make sense for your parish or ministry, and stick to them. You can always introduce new platforms as you get more comfortable.

There are two questions to consider before choosing a plat-

form. First: who are you trying to reach? Assuming the answer is your parish community and the people surrounding them, begin by asking them which social media outlets they use. Are they primarily on Facebook? Then you should launch a Facebook page.

Second: what do you have time to manage? Twitter, for instance, is a moment-to-moment social media outlet that requires constant posting and vigilance. Facebook usually requires daily monitoring, but it actually discourages more than two posts a day from organizations.

My suggestion is to start with Facebook, as a huge majority of the adult population of the United States has a profile. You will get the quickest growth and most return on investment here. Facebook has shifted toward an “older” demographic, with a heavy population of men and women from Generation X and older. Youth and young adults are certainly on Facebook, but they treat it more like a website and are more likely to spend time on their own profile than their newsfeed. That said, Facebook is by far the most active medium and the easiest to grow on. Facebook ads are also the least expensive and the most effective.

It is imperative that you spend some time discerning what platform works best for your ministry. It may seem intimidating, but if you start small and are targeted in your approach, there will be benefits to reap.

## Post meaningful content

After you have chosen a platform, it is time to create and post meaningful content. When it comes to communications and marketing, for any organization, content is king. Social media is no exception. If you want your parishioners to follow your account and spread your message, you have to produce meaningful content.

Meaningful content is two things: authentic and vulnerable. In a world where people are bombarded with advertisements, announcements, and other digital “noise,” they crave authenticity. They desire something stable and comforting—something that helps them make sense of their crazy lives. That something is actually someone, and his name is Jesus Christ.

Social media affords us opportunities to bring people to an encounter with Jesus Christ. As far as practical recommenda-

tions go, short videos, authentic reflections, and spiritual graphics are usually very well received by the faithful on social media. Parish leaders who use their social media to highlight their parishioners, share words of wisdom from their pastor, and provide prayer and reflection resources to the faithful are all authentically using social media for the betterment of their parishioners.

If you have opted to create a Facebook or Instagram account, generally you should post once a day. (You can post twice on Facebook daily if you space the posts out by six to eight hours or more.) For Twitter, you should be posting five to seven times a day at a minimum. Keep your posts relevant to your organization only. A good rule of thumb is that 70 percent of your content should be unique to your parish or ministry. You can supplement the rest of your content with news from the pope, your bishop, your diocese, or prominent Catholic speakers.

A good social media content strategy features a mix of graphics, pictures, and videos with captivating and interactive captions. Though this may sound intimidating, videos and graphics are fairly easy to create with software like Canva (a free, web-based graphic creation tool) and iMovie (free Mac-based software for videos). Plan your content in advance for the week, and do your best to stick to specific days for specific types of posts. For example, you might post a weekly blog every Thursday. That way you will know what type of content you'll need every Thursday, and your followers will know to expect it. You can even schedule posts to launch automatically on certain platforms. If you sit down on a Monday morning and plan out your week, you'll take the pressure off yourself.

Refrain from politics and your own content (your thoughts, your feelings, and so on) when managing an organization's account. You'll also want to refrain from posting redundant material, material that is not Catholic, or a high proportion of event announcements (which don't allow for conversation).

While our goal is to invite people into our churches for Mass and the sacraments, we need to understand that the people on Facebook (or Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms) are looking to be spiritually fulfilled right then, as they scroll through their timeline at 11 o'clock on a Tuesday morning.

To put it simply: social media lets you engage with people about their faith and their Catholic community in between Sundays. That is an awesome opportunity.

## Engage your followers

After you've built a strong content strategy, it is important to engage your followers. Social media is a forum, not a podium, and you should always encourage conversation on your posts. Through the use of inviting language, encouraging comments, and positive feedback, you can invite people to be a part of your online community. Take suggestions from followers, and then actually implement them. It can be difficult, but try even to respond to negative

comments and challenges. If you stay positive and genuine, you'll be surprised at how you can diffuse a potentially negative situation.

Effectively engaging on social media means being vulnerable. Many people spend several hours a day on various social media outlets, opening themselves up to the inherent and constant vulnerability that comes from putting their dreams, emotions, opinions, and day-to-day experiences out on display for all to see.


Those who live their lives this way expect the institutions they follow to live this way too. That's why it is so important that our parishes and ministries have fun on social media, use informal language, and show people the "behind the scenes" of the institution. This allows us to show that the church is made up of people, with all of their triumphs and tribulations, all trying to serve God as best they can. In this way, we are both authentic and vulnerable.

Some practical advice as you look to engage your flock: spend a few minutes, no more than half an hour, each day responding to comments on your posts. Pick one day a month and ask people to post their prayer intentions so that the community might pray for them. Attach a question or an action item to each post. These small steps don't require much effort, and they will go a long way.

## You get what you give

Social media can be as simple or as complicated as you make it. If you choose the right platform, plan out your content in advance, and engage your followers with love and attention, you will build a digital community that reflects the community of believers in your parish. With just a few deliberate hours a week spent on social media, you can help people connect with their faith—whether they are in the pews every weekend or haven't been for some time.

If we bring a spirit of love and joy, rooted in Christ, to everything we do on social media, we can provide an incredibly compelling example to a searching world.

There is nothing more authentic, no narrative more powerful, and no message more challenging than the Gospel. Let us strive to share it through our example of loving witness on social media. 

**John Grosso** is a communications and social media professional in Stamford, Connecticut. He is the director of digital media for the Diocese of Bridgeport.



There is nothing more authentic,  
no narrative more powerful,  
and no message more challenging  
than the Gospel.

# Dealing with Doubt: What We Can Learn from Famous Doubters

## ELIZABETH MANNEH

I'd love to say that I never doubt, but that wouldn't be true. All too often, I find myself questioning aspects of my faith and doubting that God could ever truly love me just as I am. When I feel like I've let God down by being impatient with my family, acting selfishly, or thinking negatively about others, I feel guilty and wonder how God could still care for me when I fail so many times.

When we look to the so-called giants of Christianity for reassurance, it's easy to think that they must have superhuman powers of trust and confidence. Yet perhaps unsurprisingly, even those we admire for their holiness have had their own struggles.

Here are some holy people who have battled their way through doubts, and the lessons we can learn from them.

### Saint Thomas

The first time Jesus appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection, Thomas wasn't present and definitely wasn't convinced by the other disciples' assurances that they really *had* seen Jesus. He declared that unless he saw with his own eyes and even put his hand into the wound on Jesus's side, he wouldn't believe.

I must admit, I've always had sympathy for Saint Thomas. I have a hard time taking things totally on trust without seeing the evidence. Maybe you do, too. But I'm comforted that Jesus didn't condemn Thomas for his attitude and allowed him to touch his wounds as he'd wanted. Rather than condemning us for our need to see before we believe, Jesus seeks to engage us and draw us closer.

### Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the most revered saints, and her writings on faith are renowned worldwide. And yet she didn't have an easy life. Her mother died when Thérèse was just four years old, and her much-loved older sister entered a convent, leaving Thérèse lonely and without the love and spiritual support of her family. She suffered from depression and anxiety, especially in her later years when tuberculosis began to take a serious toll on her health.

Nevertheless, Saint Thérèse continued to practice a routine of prayer, study, and receiving the sacraments, trusting in

God's faithfulness rather than her own convictions. When I'm doubting and feeling far from God, keeping a routine of worship and prayer acts as a framework for my faith. Even though I might not feel like spending time in prayer or worship, trying to stick to a daily practice reminds me of God's love, and I often find myself inspired and refreshed afterward.

### Saint Teresa of Ávila

Another saint who suffered from feelings of doubt was Saint Teresa of Ávila. Following her mother's death when Teresa was 11 years old, she began to drift away from her faith and her childhood dream of becoming a nun. She loved socializing, and she wrestled with her doubts about the idea of a religious vocation. In time, she rediscovered her vocation and entered a convent. Like many Christians, Saint Teresa had a spiritual adviser, Saint Peter of Alcantara, who guided her walk of faith and supported her.

Similarly, I've found the support of my church pastors invaluable when I've been facing big decisions such as whether to relocate to a totally new city. They listen to my thoughts and feelings, offer me wise advice, pray with me, and support me as I reach my decision.

### Thomas Merton

Monk and theologian Thomas Merton firmly believed that you couldn't really have faith without first experiencing doubt: "We too often forget that faith is a matter of questioning and struggle before it becomes one of certitude and peace," he said.

Merton believed that we have to "doubt and reject everything" before beginning to believe, and that after we've come to faith, our faith continues to be tested and purified throughout our lives.

I've found this a great comfort when I find myself questioning and doubting. Merton's words remind me that I'm not alone in my doubting, and his writings, along with those of other devout Christians who've struggled with doubt, help me to clarify my own thinking and work through my own doubts. I used to feel guilty when I doubted, thinking that I was falling away from God and sinning by not having enough faith. That guilt was lifted by Merton's view that questioning


what we believe is an essential step in coming to a stronger and deeper faith.

## Pope Francis

Even Pope Francis has admitted to having doubts, but he believes that seeing them as a path to deepening our faith is the best way to overcome them. At his general audience on November 23, 2016, Pope Francis said:

We do not need to be afraid of questions and doubts because they are the beginning of a path of knowledge and going deeper. One who does not ask questions cannot progress either in knowledge or in faith.

So, when I begin to have doubts and questions, rather than try to ignore them or view them as a weakness, I'm now working to use them to get closer to God and deepen my faith. I bring my doubts to God in prayer, read books or listen to podcasts about faith, and strive to be open to different ways of thinking that challenge my past certainties.

Everyone experiences doubts, and my own doubting isn't necessarily a sign that my faith is failing or that I'm being sinful by not trusting God. It's what I do with my doubts that matters. 

**Elizabeth Manneh** is a freelance writer, sharing her time between the UK and The Gambia. She has written for many publications, including *Huffington Post*, *ReadersDigest.com*, and *The Good Men Project*. She is on a lifelong exploration to find ways of bringing God into all aspects of her everyday life.

This article was originally published on [Bustedhalo.com](http://Bustedhalo.com) on October 23, 2019.

## IF ENCOUNTERING GOD IS A JOURNEY, THEN WE CAN MAKE MISTAKES

If one has the answers to all the questions—that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble. —Pope Francis, September 30, 2013

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# A Liturgy Lesson Plan

CARI WHITE

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis calls for new styles and strategies in providing youth with pastoral care.<sup>1</sup> In Catholic education, especially in high schools where there is a high concentration of Catholic youth, this call from Pope Francis could not be more timely. I propose that one of the new styles should be a new way of helping youth to understand and appreciate the celebration of the Mass.

As a campus minister in a Catholic high school, I am responsible for planning and executing all liturgical celebrations for our community. This includes smaller group liturgies with our various sports teams, liturgies that are part of events such as reunion weekends or parent club meetings, and our monthly all-school liturgies.

Simply put, I should devote a large part of my time to thinking about how liturgies can inspire our students. As the liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life, one could (and should) make the argument that a school's liturgical celebrations are the most important things the community can do.

## Accepting the invitation of the liturgy

David Fagerberg writes in his book *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology* that “the true subject matter of liturgical theology is not simply what happens in the sanctuary but its encounter with the mundane street.”<sup>2</sup> The liturgy should inspire those in attendance to leave the church inspired and ready to change the world. “Liturgy is the perichoresis of the Trinity kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification.”<sup>3</sup>

More simply put, liturgy is the divine dance pouring out in invitation for a synergistic relationship where the divine energy moves in us and we respond by allowing God to move us. This divine dance results in our becoming partakers of the divine nature.

This is further evidenced in the Second Letter of Peter, where we read: “Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.”<sup>4</sup> We are adopted as God's own children, which results in our reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a particular way; ultimately, we become deified when we are sanctified and are infused with God's grace.

This is particularly important to me as I become more and more aware of how our students and faculty members often miss the point on just how significant their time at Mass is. A few weeks ago, we had a significant prayer service for a longtime teacher who was recently diagnosed with very aggressive and advanced cancer. The students created and led this prayer service (with some guidance from some adults), and after this prayer service a theology teacher (and graduate) remarked that the prayer service was the most moving prayer experience he had ever had here at St. Edward.

His comment struck me because I would have hoped that, as a theology teacher, he would think the same about all our school liturgies. If this teacher fails to recognize the importance of the liturgy, it's no wonder the students struggle with it even more. I often see students (and faculty members) sleeping through Mass or actively not participating.

Even though the theology teachers try to instill the importance of Mass to our students and work with them in a variety of ways to prepare for our liturgies (such as *lectio divina* with the readings, practicing the music ahead of time, and so on), our students still feel that active participation is largely unnecessary.

I keep thinking that if I could just help these students to understand and embrace what Fagerberg means when he talks about the liturgy, it could have a transformational effect not only on our students and faculty but on the culture of our entire community.

## Designing an engaging experience for students

The most important question then becomes: how will I take these ideas of liturgical mysticism and translate them into a lesson that will help all of our students understand the importance and significance of the actions, prayers, and events of the liturgy? I concluded that the most effective way to help students get excited about and remember what they are learning would be in a gamified contest.

Modeled on the popular break-out game model, I will set up a series of activities that students have to complete. Our students love competition, and this competitive element will help to keep students focused and motivated. First, one must have a theme for the game/lesson. What point are you trying to get across? How will this be accomplished through the various activities?

1 Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, March 25, 2019, #204.

2 David Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016), 76.

3 Fagerberg, 6.

4 2 Peter 1:4 (NABRE).

For my lesson, the goal is that students will recognize the importance and significance of liturgy. Arguably, there are many ways this could be done, and I admit I've tried many of them. What I haven't tried yet is combining the spirituality and wisdom of the mystics with the newest innovative teaching techniques.

My lesson will use the approach of a QRBreakIN, a format described by John Meehan, an English teacher and instructional coach at Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington, Virginia.<sup>5</sup> Using a Harry Potter theme as a focus for the various games, students will have an opportunity to complete up to six different learning stations.

These learning stations will consist of a Google survey,<sup>6</sup> a review on Quizizz.com<sup>7</sup> (which uses fun memes after each question), a video on the significance of the liturgy by Father Mike Schmitz, a mirco-lab discussion based on excerpts from the fourth chapter of David Fagerberg's *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology*;<sup>8</sup> a Flipgrid video<sup>9</sup> creation that helps students teach classmates about prayer, an Edpuzzle<sup>10</sup> video featuring Bishop Barron on prayer (Edpuzzle allows you to create pauses and other breaks in the video for students to complete various questions or tasks), and a sketchnote<sup>11</sup> to depict what engagement will look like at Mass and at prayer.

These various activities will allow the students to engage important theological questions from many different sources and points of view. Having a timed discussion around the question "How do you see the connection between the work of the liturgy and the mundane street?" ties in Fagerberg's idea of liturgy that inspires us to go out into the world, and this process allows students to demonstrate their understanding of this important theological idea. The Google survey offers a quick way to assess the students' current experience of liturgy, their impressions on why going to Mass is or isn't important, and their suggestions for things that could potentially be improved.


The Quizizz allows for a fun way to review details about the liturgy and prayer in general, including some basic facts about mystical spirituality and prayer, which will help students connect to the understanding of the significance of the liturgy. The video by Father Mike Schmitz provides the students another perspective, and making a list of five things about the video that stood out to the group forces students to listen for key ideas that matter to them.

The Flipgrid video gives students an opportunity to be creative and synthesize what they have learned and discussed. They then create something new for their classmates to see, as Flipgrid has a peer-viewing component that allows students to see each other's videos. The Ed-

puzzle allows for the video content to be paused and questions or even quizzes inserted. This encourages students to engage in the content instead of just letting it play in the background to get it done.

The sketchnote gives students the opportunity to creatively map out visually what they think engagement looks like. They can even go a step further and visually represent what liturgical engagement might look like when someone has successfully crossed from the world into the nave of the church to absorb the energy of the altar in the sanctuary, and then cross the narthex from the nave back to the world, to release the light into the world.<sup>12</sup>

## The liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life.

Providing these various activities in a format that encourages students to engage in the content creatively may inspire new ways of thinking and experiencing the liturgy. This approach to teaching the liturgy will help to provide an effective way to evangelize the students at Catholic schools with a fresh experience of the kerygma, wide-ranging dialogue, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches, and a culture of encounter.<sup>13</sup> When students have navigated all of these learning centers, they will feel empowered and able to take the energy of the altar and go and encounter the mundane street. 

**Cari White** is the director of campus ministry at St. Edward High School in Lakewood, MN. She holds a degree in theology and secondary education from the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University, an MA in theology from St. John's University in Collegeville, MN, and has completed a master of divinity equivalency from St. Mary's Seminary and Graduate School in the Diocese of Cleveland. Cari is currently in the second semester of the doctor of ministry program at St. Mary's Seminary in Wickliffe. She can be reached at [cwhite@sehs.net](mailto:cwhite@sehs.net).

5 John Meehan, "QRBreakIN," *Edrenaline Rush* (blog), accessed March 24, 2019, <https://edrenalinerush.com/resources/qrbreakin/>.

6 Cari White, "Liturgy Engagement Survey" (Google form), created March 25, 2019, [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdyJA4pLvLoWGIDqCVzxyoCHaT-mD1zTnwG\\_EWokqKR2lsEPrw/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdyJA4pLvLoWGIDqCVzxyoCHaT-mD1zTnwG_EWokqKR2lsEPrw/viewform?usp=sf_link).

7 Cari White, Quizizz.com (website), accessed March 25, 2019, <https://quizizz.com/quiz/5c995b5fd5d23001c5831cf/edit?source=admin&trigger=navigation>.

8 Fagerberg, 73–79, 90–91.

9 Flipgrid (website), accessed March 25, 2019, <https://admin.flipgrid.com/manage/grids/1275419>.

10 Edpuzzle (website), accessed March 25, 2019, <https://edpuzzle.com/>.

11 Craighton Berman, "Sketchnotes 101: Visual Thinking," *Core77* (blog), June 6, 2011, <https://www.core77.com/posts/19518/sketchnotes-101-visual-thinking-19518>.

12 Fagerberg, 91.

13 Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, #222.

# Bringing Hope to Marriages and Families Initiative

MARÍA G. COVARRUBIAS

“New initiative broadens marriage education” was the headline of the diocesan article published after Bishop Gerald R. Barnes of the Diocese of San Bernardino announced the launch of a five-year, diocesan-wide marriage initiative on February 14, 2010. This initiative, lasting from 2010 to 2015, was the result of a three-year study conducted by the diocesan Office of Catechetical Ministry.

By launching this initiative, titled “Becoming a Marriage-Building Church, So That People’s Lives Are Filled with Hope,” Bishop Barnes said he hoped to foster “a marriage-building Church by promoting a comprehensive approach to ongoing education for the vocation to the sacrament of marriage at all stages of life.”

## Fundamental goals

This initiative has three essential objectives: to protect and advocate for marriage and family life; to promote a comprehensive approach to ongoing education for the vocation of marriage at all stages of life; and to create a culture in which Christian marriage education is seen as an integral part of people’s lives in becoming the domestic church.

Fundamental to the initiative is the conviction that preparation for marriage actually begins long before a prospective husband and wife meet each other. This remote marriage preparation happens by watching and experiencing the relationships between parents and others close to us, in addition to listening to their comments and convictions about how they view and experience marriage.

Prior to the initiative, most of the diocesan marriage catechesis was focused on the immediate preparation for those seeking to be married. This marriage initiative greatly expands the scope of “education and formation on marriage” to include three areas: youth and young adults, couples seeking the immediate preparation for the sacrament of matrimony, and pastoral care for couples already married.

A strength of this initiative is that in addition to the immediate preparation for engaged couples, there is an emphasis on forming youth and young adults in the meaning of Catholic sacramental marriage, helping them to discern God’s plan for them in regards to a marriage vocation prior to meeting their future husband or wife, and providing communication skills, among other services, that are so important for effective and

healthy relationships, in partnership with parish youth ministries, youth confirmation programs, and campus ministries.

Equally crucial is to provide education, pastoral care, and spiritual support to those who are already married or living together. The emphasis on accompaniment and ongoing formation for marriage and family life must continue long after a couple’s wedding day, and the church has an important role in promoting and strengthening marriages and families. Our goal is that couples understand the importance of the sacrament of marriage and seek further education to continue to develop their loving relationship, especially in the most crucial moments of their lives.

## Creating a comprehensive and integral approach

By bringing together the resources available in the Catholic faith tradition and from pastoral practices, social sciences, and experienced married couples, this initiative aims to promote a comprehensive and integral approach to ongoing education at all stages of life that will strengthen and sustain healthy relationships and restore the understanding of the sacrament of marriage as a life-giving source.

An essential point is that the methodology chosen for this process is rooted in the catechumenal model based in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults:

- ✦ Marriage education and formation, like adult initiation, is a *gradual process*. It is a journey that begins in our family of origin and continues in our spiritual, intellectual, and psychological growth and development throughout our lives.
- ✦ The entire local church and *parish community* are to become more intentional in promoting vocations, in particular the vocation of marriage, and accompany those who are preparing for this sacrament and those already married.
- ✦ A *sponsor couple* is an accompaniment approach that allows interaction and provides a high level of intimacy and flexibility. The sponsor couple is able to focus on the particular needs and issues of each engaged or cohabitating couple looking for the sacrament of marriage and continue after the wedding day.





- \* *Mystagogy* is used in reflecting on the mysteries of our faith that permeate daily life experiences; connecting liturgy and its symbols and grace-filled celebrations; and responding to the varied spiritual needs of singles and engaged and married couples in light of a personal and intimate encounter with Jesus Christ.

Another important consideration is the collaboration among diocesan offices to support and promote this initiative from their own specific ministries. This collaboration has resulted in a common vision and a sense of responsibility to intentionally impact family life within specific ministries.

Equally important is the intentional relationships with apostolic movements such as Engaged Encounter, Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille, Christian Family Movement, Charismatic Renewal, and other parish ministries that have realized the importance of collaboration and support to advance the core values of this initiative. We believe that the inclusion of all resources available in the diocese creates a strong force in reaching out to marriages and families.

To deliver the vision of the initiative, we offer the Marriage Specialization Course once a year. This four-day course is intended to provide a profound catechetical, theological, and doctrinal foundation on the sacrament of marriage and family life. The content of the course is reviewed and updated every year to make sure we provide the most current information available. The course is geared to those who minister in any area of marriage formation, including apostolic movements, marriage preparation, and family life. Since the launching of this course in March 2010, there have been 912 participants.

## How the marriage initiative has grown and flourished


The marriage initiative has expanded significantly in the last nine years, offering various formation opportunities and resources in English and Spanish in the following areas: marriage preparation, marriage and family enrichment, relationship and communication skills, behavior health awareness, divorced and separated Catholics, parent, youth and young adult formation, and ongoing parish consultations. We founded 20 new parish marriage ministry groups and reached out to 26 existing groups that are now implementing the vision of the marriage initiative.

For the last nine years I have directed the initiative as its author and director of the Office of Catechetical Ministry. Initially the initiative was launched as a five-year program, but because it has become cen-

tral to the life of the diocese, creating a wide impact, Bishop Barnes has established a new home for it by founding the first diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life Ministry on July 1, 2019.

Marriage education  
and formation,  
like adult initiation,  
is a gradual process.

In conclusion, these efforts are crucial in this time in history, when marriage and family life are suffering from an identity crisis. Today, many societal forces threaten the sanctity of marriage and family life. Divorce rates remain high, and the number of cohabitating couples is rapidly increasing. Thousands of young people are leaving the church, claiming disaffection with its traditions. As these crucial foundations are crumbling, it is urgent to think outside the box and find new ways to bring hope to marriages and families.

The Catholic Church offers beautiful insights and teachings that must be transmitted intentionally to help us know and understand the sacredness and holiness of marriage and family life. Developing new structures within a marriage helps deepen our understanding of the family and our responsibility to strengthen this important foundation for the future of the church and society. We want to give future generations the opportunity to experience an abundant life rooted in the beautiful values of the Gospel. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us! 

**María G. Covarrubias** is the director of the Office of Catechetical Ministry in the Diocese of San Bernardino, California. She has more than 20 years of catechetical experience and is the author of the Diocesan Marriage Initiative in her diocese. She is a speaker at the local, regional, and national level on catechesis, catechist formation, family, and marriage. She holds a master of arts degree in religious studies from Mount St. Mary's University.



# Your Personal Why

LEISA ANSLINGER

In the previous issue of *Catechetical Leader*, we explored the importance of knowing our “why”—why we do the things we do.<sup>1</sup> This “why” is essential for all our ministries. Without the why, the things we do are essentially disconnected elements with no clear objectives or reasons for being.

My colleague and friend Stephanie Moore uses the analogy of a bunch of hangers without a closet, useless and without purpose, sitting in a pile on the floor. With the closet, however—the why—the hangers function as intended, each hanger fulfilling its purpose. So too the many events and activities that fill our days, months, and years. With a clear sense of why, the elements contribute to the whole, each fulfilling its purpose.

As important as it is for our parishes and dioceses to have a clear sense of mission, it is equally important for each of us to have clarity of mission, of why, in our personal lives as people of ministry. Why do we devote our time, attention, and energy to catechetical ministry? Why do we adopt certain practices or consider one program, then another, and another, until we discern the best fit for our community? Why do we continue to draw others into ministry with us, even when we know the challenges, fatigue, and frustration that it inevitably includes?

## Guided on our way

Our answers to these questions are likely to vary, each of us having a unique perspective or reason for doing what we do.

There are no doubt times when we ask ourselves why we continue to serve in this way. With a clear sense of why, we are more likely to weather the difficult moments, even finding meaning and purpose in them rather than in spite of them.

Simon Sinek’s TED talk “How Great Leaders Inspire Action” drives home the importance of knowing our why and explains that the part of the brain that makes decisions and drives action functions in a pre-language state. The why operates at a level of feeling rather than thinking. The why is where our heart is rather than where our head is.

As I have reflected on this and have spoken with other people of ministry about this, I have been reminded of the reflection attributed to Father Pedro Arrupe, SJ, which to me speaks of the deep heart of knowing our why:

Nothing is more practical than  
finding God, than  
falling in Love  
in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.  
It will decide  
what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekends,

<sup>1</sup> The article was inspired by Simon Sinek’s TED talk “How Great Leaders Inspire Action,” September 2009, available online: [https://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en). Sinek treats this topic in greater detail in his book *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Portfolio), 2009.




what you read, whom you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in Love, stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.

## A Lenten discernment

This month, we begin the season of Lent, which invites us to journey with the Lord toward Jerusalem, toward his passion, death, and resurrection. Jesus certainly knew his “why,” and he remained faithful to it to the very end. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to remain faithful as well.

This, of course, is our ultimate why, our reason for being, our clear and compelling mission: to follow Jesus with our lives and to become more Christ-like with each passing day. What is your why? What gets you out of bed in the morning? What breaks your heart or amazes you with joy and gratitude? How is this why an expression of discipleship in your life? How do others know your why, not only through your words but especially through your actions?

Perhaps this Lent is a time for us to discern our why. It will decide everything. 

**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](http://catholiclifeandfaith.net/everyday-impact)).

## THE CHURCH’S “WHY”

Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ...

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty  
because it has been out on the streets,  
rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined  
and from clinging to its own security.

I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center  
and which then ends by being caught up in a web  
of obsessions and procedures.

If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences,  
it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters  
are living without the  
strength,  
light  
and consolation  
born of friendship with Jesus Christ,  
without a community of faith to support them,  
without meaning and a goal in life.

More than by fear of going astray,  
my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures  
which give us a false sense of security,  
within rules which make us harsh judges,  
within habits which make us feel safe,  
while at our door people are starving

and Jesus does not tire of saying to us:  
“Give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37).

—Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 49



# At the Center: A Foundation for Adult Faith Formation (Part II)

JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP

Where to begin? This question challenges us in many endeavors throughout life. It certainly is a question asked by parish staffs and adult faith formation teams.

Often we start with program, but that's like balancing a triangle on its point. It's upside down; it doesn't work! When we start with our imaginary triangle resting on its foundation, we have a firm base. The firm base of adult faith formation (as Jane Regan tells us in her book *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation*) includes

- \* a strong vision,
- \* naming our presumptions, and
- \* evaluating the structures already present in the parish that support adult formation.

This foundation has to come before we can begin to discern and plan programs. In many ways, this behind-the-scenes work will become the most important activity of your committee. It will bear much fruit!

In the last issue, we determined that adult faith formation lies at the center of the church's educational mission. Here we will explore the first two parts of the foundation for adult faith formation, and in our next issue we will look at the third, evaluating structures.

## Vision

Vision is a statement of direction and inspiration. In creating a vision for the work of our adult faith formation teams, we need to ask several questions:

- \* Why is our parish committed to adult faith formation?
- \* How is adult faith formation connected to the pastoral life and pastoral planning of the parish?
- \* As a parish and learning community, where are we headed? How do we want to bring about the reign of God in our part of the world? What do we believe? What do we want to be as a parish?

When we vision, it is important that many people be involved in the discussion. If it's only one staff person, it will never work. Even if it's your committee or team, it's not broad enough. It can begin there, but others who have insights and leadership roles in the parish need to be involved. And the vision continually needs to be revisited. Your parish will change; times change; the needs of the people change.

## Presumptions

Presumptions are statements about:



- \* who is involved,
- \* how they are involved, and
- \* how all the elements of the endeavor are in relationship with one another.

These presumptions are reflected in our allocation of time, energy, space, personnel, and finances.

Often we take our presumptions for granted; we don't really think about them. Because we have been living with them for so long, we are used to them. Frequently, when we do stop and think about them, we realize they are limited. We find that although they served us well at one time, we may have grown beyond them.

We have learned much about passing on the faith, about catechetics, about adult faith formation. As we've learned, we have asked, "Have our presumptions grown, or are some of the ones we've lived with for a long time still operative?"

- \* Do our actions show that we presume that the primary way of doing adult faith formation is related to the role of parent?
- \* Do our actions show that we presume that children and youth learn best about their faith in peer groups with complementary work done at home with families?
- \* Do our actions show that we presume that all resources, spaces, and scheduling should be done first for children and youth, with whatever is left over going to adults?

What are our unspoken—or more important, our unexamined—presumptions? As we build a vision of adult faith formation that calls people to discipleship, we need to consciously decide on our fundamental presumptions. What do we want our undergirding presumptions to be?


One example of a chosen presumption might be this one: Adult formation is geared not only to help people be involved in specific

parish ministries but to support them in living their faith in their everyday world. This presumption will direct the variety of topics, the types of support groups, and the resources that we strive to make available.

A second example of a presumption on which we want to build our programs is that adults learn best when they are in conversation with other adults about things that matter. To make this presumption come alive, we may consider the following:

- \* Are we always looking for opportunities for faith conversations whenever adults gather?
- \* Are programs more than only lectures?
- \* Can we make use of events like Coffee and Donuts? A well-written question or series of questions on a paper tent placed on the tables may provide the spark for conversations about things that matter, such as faith issues in real life, as well as for hospitality, inviting people to talk together.

As we move, then, toward planning and implementing programs, we

- \* name the presumptions that are alive in our parish regarding faith formation;
- \* decide whether we want to retain them; and
- \* establish the conscious presumptions around which we want our processes and programs to be created and evaluated. 

**Janet Schaeffler, OP**, former director of adult faith formation for the archdiocese of Detroit, leads days of reflection and retreats, parish missions, and workshops, and facilitates online courses. An author of several books and hundreds of articles, she also created and publishes *GEMS*, a monthly newsletter from an ongoing international best practices study on adult formation.





# Engaging the Specter of Racism on a College Campus

KYLE S. TURNER

On the wall along the western edge of our campus, there is a plaque affixed to the Colorado stone that makes up the wall. The marker commemorates an event that occurred on the Jesuit campus nearly a century ago. The sign reads:

## A MOMENT IN REGIS UNIVERSITY HISTORY

This portion of the old perimeter wall has been preserved in remembrance of a student stand against the Ku Klux Klan. In the mid-1920's, according to Jesuits here at the time, word filtered to the priests that the KKK was planning a march on Regis with the intent to burn a cross on the lawn. The Jesuits put out a call to students—both boarders and day students—to protect the campus and bring baseball bats. The call was heeded and Regis students were posted every five feet armed with bats. The KKK, which was organizing a few blocks from campus, received word of the student buildup and disbanded without marching on the campus. Later, the Jesuits found that some of the students were armed with more than baseball bats. Some had brought along pistols.

## Ministry in the shadow of our past

We have certainly made strides from some of the errors of our past, but the shadow of our country's original sin of racism still hovers throughout the land. Just this past fall, for the second year in a row, a flyer with a swastika addressed to a faculty member was found inside their office. Regis is certainly not the only institution of higher education in the country that has experienced the reality and rise of racism and hate crimes.

When hate-filled events such as this flyer being sent to a professor or various other racist hate crimes take place on college campuses, how can campus ministers respond? What steps can we take to tend to our campus communities? I think that first and foremost is the need to be pastorally present to the needs of our students, faculty, and staff. We supported our stu-

dents, for example, when they organized a rally in opposition to the presence of the flyer.

We make it well known that our office is always open for anyone who just needs to talk. We have also organized prayer vigils a number of times in response to racist events that have happened on our campus and across the country. One proactive idea would be to facilitate some catechetical dialogue and study with students centered on the issue of the prevalence of racism in the world today. A place to start would be to conduct a study with college students related to a recent pastoral letter from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## The enduring call to love

In November 2018, the US Bishops approved “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism.” It is an important pastoral at this point in our nation's history, and it is a letter that all Catholics should read. The message contained in the letter speaks well to a key issue within the Catholic social teaching pillar focused on the life and dignity of the human person.


Within the letter, the bishops invite all the faithful to conversion with regard to racism. It is a letter that contains a critical message for today's college students, who will soon become key leaders in our society, and provides an opportunity for engaging students on this significant and timely issue.

This spring semester, our office at Regis University will be facilitating a study of “Open Wide Our Hearts.” The study guide can be found at this address on the US Bishops' website: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/index.cfm>. It provides a great roadmap for conducting a catechetical exploration of the document within a group. At our school, we have a very socially conscious student body that is actively engaged with the justice issues of their day.



Our hope is that students will demonstrate a good response to the study of the document, becoming further educated on the history of racism within the US and formed well in what the Catholic Christian response should be to this dark veil that pervades our society. Our end goal is that as a community, we can become more grounded in this central message of the pastoral and work for change within our society:

The Christian community should draw from this central, ongoing encounter with Christ and seek to combat racism with love, recalling the insight of Pope Francis that “if we have received the

love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 8). With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this wellspring of strength and courage must move us to act. Consequently, we all need to take responsibility for correcting the injustices of racism and healing the harms it has caused. (“Open Wide Our Hearts,” p. 23) 

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## TOP FIVE LESSONS FROM THE 2018 PASTORAL LETTER AGAINST RACISM



1. Catholics have been complicit in the evil of racism
  - a. Many American religious leaders, including Catholic bishops, failed to formally oppose slavery; some even owned slaves
  - b. In many Catholic parishes, people of color were relegated to segregated seating, and required to receive the Holy Eucharist after white parishioners
2. Racism often takes the form of a sin of omission
  - a. Too often, we remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice
3. Racism is a life issue
  - a. Racism directly places brother and sister against each other, violating the dignity inherent in each person
4. We are all called to combat racism
  - a. Too many of us remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the erosion of the sanctity of life
5. Justice requires restoring of right relationships between us
  - a. All of us, including our churches and social institutions, are in need of ongoing conversion and reform