



CATECHETICAL LEADER



Encountering a Merciful God

IN THIS ISSUE:

Misericordiae Vultus:
Connecting Mercy with Mission

Ever Ancient, Ever New:
Encounter-Driven Catechesis

Red Ink and Blue Skies: Planning for Renewal
While Managing Decline

Six Amazing Things Every RCIA Inquirer
Has to Learn

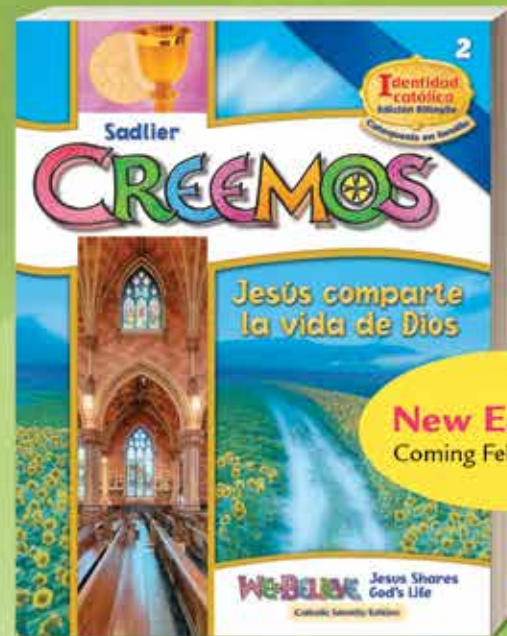


Creemos™ Catholic Identity Edition for Grades K–6

Especially designed for the Latino community, Sadlier's complete bilingual catechetical program inspires, equips, and nourishes the whole family to know, love, and live the faith.

In the new Catholic Identity Edition, you'll find:

- Inspiring **Catholic Identity Retreats** that nurture spiritual growth while helping develop and sustain fruitful relationships with Jesus Christ
- A **Leader's Guide** that provides support to strengthen faith formation throughout your parish's community
- **Latin American Traditions** and **Catechesis at Home** that build and solidify your students' and their families' Catholic faith
- **Catholic Identity Q&A** with grade-specific and age-appropriate responses
- **Home Companion/Family Resources** that increase families' involvement with prayer and devotions correlated to each Catholic Identity Retreat



TO VIEW OR REQUEST A SAMPLE, VISIT
www.Sadlier.com/Creemos

FOR MORE BILINGUAL/SPANISH RESOURCES, VISIT SADLIER'S
BILINGUAL WEBSITE AT www.Sadlier.com/Bilingual
SPANISH BLOG AT www.Creemosycompartimos.com

CATECHETICAL LEADER Table of Contents

January 2016

In Every Issue

- 4 **From the President** Ken Ogorek
Are All Welcome? Depends on Who or What the "All" Is
- 5 **From the Executive Director** Margaret Matijasevic
Merciful Like the Parent
- 24 **Book Review** Reviewed by Dan Thomas
One Nation Under Gods: A New American History
- 26 **PCL Perspectives: At Work in the Vineyard** Brigid Johnson
Frazzled in the Vineyard
- 27 **New Evangelization on a New Continent** Claire M. McManus
Holy Podcast!
- 28 **Transforming, Evangelizing Catechesis** Patrice Spirou
Jesus In Our Homes
- 29 **Diocesan Director's Forum** Michael J. Martocchio
The Consecrated Life: A Gift to God, to the Church, and to the Whole World
- 30 **Adult Faith Formation** Leisa Anslinger
Stages of Faith, Evangelization, and Mercy
- 31 **Notable Resources** Dan Pierson

Features

- 6 **Misericordiae Vultus:** Matthew Halbach
Connecting Mercy with Mission
- 11 **The Shape of a Rite of Reaffirmation** Michael Marchal
- 14 **Ever Ancient, Ever New:** Katie Prejean
Encounter-Driven Catechesis
- 20 **Red Ink and Blue Skies:** Tom Quinlan
Planning for Renewal While Managing Decline
- 23 **Six Amazing Things** Nick Wagner
Every RCIA Inquirer Has to Learn



Misericordiae Vultus: Connecting Mercy with Mission page 6



The Shape of a Rite of Reaffirmation page 11



Ever Ancient, Ever New: Encounter-Driven Catechesis page 14

NCCL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| Ken Ogorek
<i>President</i>
Archdiocese of Indianapolis | Jayne Mondoy
<i>Treasurer</i>
Diocese of Honolulu | Teresa Burns
<i>At-Large</i>
St. Robert of Newminster Church, Ada, MI |
| Libiá Paez Howard
<i>Vice President</i>
Archdiocese of Chicago | José Amaya
<i>At-Large</i>
Archdiocese for the Military Services | Richard Drabik
<i>At-Large</i>
University of Dayton |
| Ellie Nelson
<i>Secretary</i>
Diocese of Rockford | Most Rev. Christopher J. Coyne
<i>NCCL Episcopal Advisor</i>
Diocese of Burlington, Vermont | Bryan Reising
<i>At-Large</i>
Diocese of New Ulm |

NCCL STAFF

- | | |
|---|--|
| Sally Russell, SSJ
<i>At-Large</i>
Archdiocese of Baltimore | Margaret Matijasevic
<i>Executive Director</i> |
| Michael Steier
<i>Ex-Officio</i>
USCCB, Secretariat of Evangelization and Catechesis | Gina Garroway |

ARE ALL WELCOME? DEPENDS ON WHO OR WHAT THE “ALL” IS

Ken Ogorek



National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



“NCCL ought to be a place where everyone feels welcome.” I’ve heard words to this effect expressed many times by several NCCL members.

Just as disciples of Jesus must distinguish between judging people and judging actions, though, you might say that NCCL should welcome all people while being a little leery of a few specific attitudes. An illustration might help explain my proposal.

“YOU THINK *THIS* IS GOING TO RISE FROM THE DEAD?”

Not too long ago I was perusing the speaker list for a well-known regional conference. On it I saw a person who I know for a fact denies both the resurrection of Jesus and your bodily resurrection. How do I know this? Two ways:

- * I’ve heard the person speak and imply that everything in the New Testament might be, in a sense, fiction; and
- * In a follow-up conversation with this person I was told that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead and neither will you. My forearm was grabbed with both gentleness and contempt while I heard the words, “You think *this* is going to rise from the dead?”

This person later celebrated Mass with me. Recited the same creed. Received the same Eucharist — both a sign and a cause of unity.

I want this person to feel welcome at our annual NCCL gathering as a participant, not as a speaker. I would hope that this person’s belief is not affirmed at the conference, and also directly challenged several times by our Risen Lord being proclaimed boldly and unapologetically. Might this person feel unwelcome because a basic doctrinal teaching like the resurrection is front and center throughout our time together? Maybe. But that’s a chance that courageous and compassionate catechetical leaders have to take. Because although all people are welcome in NCCL, I propose that all beliefs and teachings are not.

MERELY AN EXAMPLE

As a catechetical leader, I try to help the faithful understand, by God’s grace, that the basic doctrinal and moral teachings of his holy, Catholic Church are not only true, but also good, beautiful, and helpful. Any notorious public dissenter not only does not help the work that we do but also makes that work even more difficult.

Whether it’s the resurrection, one of the commandments, the value of sacramental confession — whatever — we all need to be reminded of these basic doctrinal and moral teachings regularly and affirmed in our efforts to proclaim them using the best catechetical methodologies and administrative strategies. We should welcome speakers and prayer experiences that build us up as we strive to be faithful and effective by God’s grace. As for conference experiences that cross lines of legitimate diversity in ways that lean toward undermining our confidence that God can neither deceive nor be deceived and the truths proclaimed by his church are trustworthy? Again, those who offer those experiences should always feel welcome, as people, at our gatherings. But perish the thought that our national conference, like the well-known regional conference mentioned earlier, would feature ideas that sow disunity in opposition to the solidarity that Jesus so ardently desires.

COURAGEOUS, COMPASSIONATE, CONFIDENT

Thankfully, NCCL is generally a welcoming group and our resources tend to be free of unclearness in matters of faith. Can we be more welcoming? Always. Should we remain vigilant such that the errors of thinking and teaching that have peeked in the window since the early mothers and fathers of our church engaged in spirited and spirit-filled debate on topics ranging from addressing mortal sin to, yes, even the resurrection? I say yes. I say we should be doctrinally orthodox and devotionally diverse, spreading a beautiful quilt of Catholic faith and practice each time we gather as a professional organization. We should be a place where ideas can be challenged while the sacredness of each human person is honored. NCCL should be an organization where, when it comes to people, all are indeed welcome. ■

415 Michigan Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20017
(202) 756-5512 • FAX (202) 756-5519 • E-mail nccl@nccl.org
Website www.nccl.org

MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER

Margaret Matijasevic



To enter into this Jubilee of Mercy, the logo is the visual invitation to the foundational elements of its essence. The Vatican website states, “The *logo* and the *motto* together provide a fitting summary of what the Jubilee Year is all about. The motto *Merciful Like the Father* (taken from the Gospel of Luke, 6:36)

serves as an invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure (cfr. Lk 6:37-38).”

As a mother, the image resonates. As a catechist, it should as well, as both roles have some similar aspects to them — primarily to echo faith through our living of it. This imagery demonstrates for us what the essential aspect of living the faith should look like, a companion that loves with compassionate embracing.

A MERCIFUL LOVE

Nobody can prepare one for parenthood, as it constantly calls for a stripping away of oneself to get to the heart of communicating Whose you are to those you love the most. This is a glimpse into the Divine unlike any other, but there is great possibility to miss it.

The stages of faith, as well as emotional and mental development, in children can be quite a remarkable catalyst for one’s own understanding of God. In the earliest times of a child’s infancy, a parent cannot help but know an amazing, loving, and merciful God, as one grows into being that loving presence to their child. The selflessness of parenthood is truly a dramatic shift; everything is “interrupted” by God through this infant.

A CUDDLING EMBRACE

As the toddler years strike, the battle of being in a harmonious relationship takes root. The toddler begins to step outside the boundaries of love that the parent has provided — from walking just a few steps away from the parent at the movies to screaming “no” when attempting to do the most mundane of tasks. Yet, the testing of boundaries continues, as it really is

the only way it seems we know how to fully know the “Other.” The shift begins; the child begins to know restlessness and seeks God in the parent. And the parent can respond in one of two ways, as I have been at this two times now. The parent can try to force the child to stay within the boundaries or instead choose to gently allow the child to explore, awaiting their return from their lesson learned with a simple cuddling embrace.

With my first child, I attempted to instill a “fearful” sense of God, hoping fear would instill good behavior.

I thought my child’s resistance to my loving boundaries was essentially sinful. My, how I’ve grown. With my second child, I have offered a “merciful” and “loving” image of God, who is consistent and firm. I have taken an honest look at my image of God and my understanding of how to be in relationship with God, and that has rippled into my parenting. Testing boundaries is not necessarily to deny God, but it is to better understand the meaning of the relationship. When my child wants to begin to break away from me, it is not the nature of the child to necessarily defy, but to come to understand. And in this, I have truly come to recognize that God has made us uniquely in God’s own image, and we yearn to grow into that through our actions. The actions aren’t always the wisest, but God awaits with a cuddling, merciful embrace with the lesson that God just is.

So, as catechists across the nation, it would seem that the Jubilee of Mercy is inviting each one of us to explore our own prayer life with our God, our images of God, and to dig deeper into the compassionate merciful image, found in the logo, “Merciful like the Father.” Where can you discover this merciful image of God in your own life story? And how can you share that story more effectively with those whom you catechize? For me, the beginning of the discovery is in motherhood. But its growth is in prayer and in trust of God’s mercy. ■



Misericordiae Vultus: Connecting Mercy with Mission

Matthew Halbach



“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” This opening line of the Papal Bull, *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV), sets the tone for the entire document, which casts a challenging vision: to become a more merciful church.

A PERSONAL NOTE

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy” (MV, no. 1). I would like to begin by sharing what this statement means to me, personally. Time and again — in good times and in bad — the face of Christ comes to my mind. This face, as I see it, is worn and bruised; and, yet, it is also determined, vibrant, and hopeful. Jesus’s face is evoked daily through music, prayer, or when I am out in nature. However, I especially see the face of Jesus in others; and with it, the Father’s mercy, which never ceases to draw me in, pull me back from the brink, and lift me higher.

It is especially through my relationships with others that I have come to know Jesus most intimately. I guess you could say that I have been blessed to have many positive influences in my life. Though my father left when I was nine years old, God has since provided me with “surrogate fathers.” These are men I admire, who are full of wisdom and whose character I try to imitate. You could say that they have been important companions, accompanying me through life’s ups and downs, and through faith’s ins and outs: I was born a Catholic, but I wasn’t always one. I have been in and out of the church a few times. These surrogate fathers have been like open doors, sometimes propped open, patiently awaiting my return, much like I imagine the father’s door to be in the home of the Prodigal Son.

There is one father, in particular, I must mention here. When I was an undergraduate at the University of Iowa, I found it difficult to make friends and fit in. An unfortunate but typical case, I became isolated, which led me to feel unimportant and unloved. At my lowest, I found myself contemplating suicide as I stood on the rail of a bridge, overlooking the Iowa River. In the midst of that darkness, God reached out his divine hand and tenderly touched my life, setting it on a new path. He did so by introducing me to a young man who worked at the cash register next to me at Barnes and Noble. Joshua was his name. No, the Jesus (Yeshua) connection was not lost on me, either!

After weeks of telling me how great it was to be Catholic (he had recently converted, I had recently lapsed), Joshua asked me to go to Mass with him. I had not been in a church, much less Mass, in quite some time. After he threw breakfast into the deal, I agreed to go — the reasoning of a college student at work.

At Mass, I met a priest whose face, for me, eventually became synonymous with God’s mercy. And I wasn’t the only one who felt this way. There was something about the way this priest looked at people, the way he spoke to them with such sincerity and gentleness. When you were around him, you knew you mattered and your goodness was somehow affirmed. He was an artist and companionship was his art. This priest’s patience, tenderness, and his willingness to accompany me on my journey of faith over the last 14 years has revealed to me, in no uncertain terms, the Heavenly Father’s mercy. His door was always open to me, and I will always try to keep my door open to others.

Question: Doors are neutral: they can be open, shut, locked, unlocked, entrances, or exits. What kind of door are you? (Cf. Joy of the Gospel, no. 46).

Since my time at the University of Iowa, I have been a face of the Father’s mercy in many different ways: as a single person, a seminarian, a husband and father, a lay minister, a professor and, now, as a deacon candidate. Through each calling, I have tried to reach out and touch others’ lives as tenderly as God has touched mine. Most of all, I have tried to be a companion to others, going out of my way to build relationships with total strangers — relationships which are based on trust, respect, and love. Forging friendships can be difficult and frustrating. Sometimes, it is downright exhausting! However, when I am down or weary, hurt or disappointed, feeling like I am not getting the return on my investment, so to speak, I remember my experience on the bridge and the fatherly help that soon came to me, and I am reinvigorated. To be honest, I found myself tearing up while reading MV because Pope Francis uses the image of a bridge to describe the nature of mercy:





Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. (no. 2)

Indeed, Christ's mercy is the bridge that connects us all, in our joy, hope, pain, suffering, and loss. Don't ever jump off. Cling to that bridge! And ask God to help you become a bridge, connecting others to God.

Question: Who has been an image of the Father's mercy for you?

A BIBLICAL VISION OF MERCY

The foundation of MV is informed by a biblical vision of mercy, aptly summarized by the Psalmist who exhorts Israel to "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His Mercy endures forever" (Ps 136:1). Francis notes that the words *patience and mercy*, "often go together in the Old Testament to describe God's nature" (MV, no. 6). Though, to be fair, the Old Testament also reveals God's capacity for punitive justice (Mal 3:5) and vengeance (Dt 32:35). Yet, God is depicted most often in terms of *hesed* or "faithfulness" — a word which can connote the act of being patient, merciful, kind, or upright. In fact, the word *hesed* appears 248 times in the Old Testament, the vast majority of which are references to God. In MV, Francis chooses to draw on the virtue of faithfulness to point out that, from the beginning of the Bible, God is portrayed as a merciful and constant companion:

After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil... When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. (MV, no. 3)

God never abandons us (Rom 8:35-37). Instead, he accompanies us throughout our lives, our faith journeys. He is the best companion one could have.

Moving from Old to New, mercy is also the heart of the gospel message; it is the reason why the gospel news is *good news*. Some of the parables of Jesus, in particular, focus on God's mercy. For instance, the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) points out the lavish mercy of the father who, as Francis notes, symbolizes God the Father, who "never gives up until he has forgiven the [son's] wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy" (MV, no. 9). Isn't it interesting that the word "prodigal" can mean "reckless" and "wasteful" and it can also mean "lavish" and "generous?" With this double meaning in mind, both the son and the father are prodigal, but the father is prodigal in a good way: lavishing mercy on his son, much like the Sower who scatters the seed everywhere, on good and bad soil (Mt 13:1-9). *Mercy assures that hope is still possible in the most impossible circumstances.*

The ministry of Jesus reveals that God is not only with us (Mt 1:23), he is also for us (Rom 8:31). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son . . ." (Jn 3:16). Commenting on the centrality of God's mercy in the gospels, Pope Francis notes the following:

[Jesus'] person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favor of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion (MV, no. 8).

Unconditionality is a key aspect of the biblical vision of mercy underpinning MV, which can be problematic for those who witness others, believed to be unworthy, receiving such favor. The parable of the workers in the vineyard is a great example of the kind of envy and anger that mercy and generosity can arouse. Some of the workers who had worked a full day complained that those who had only worked a couple of hours were being paid the same day's wage (a *denarius*). The vineyard owner's response was simple and direct, yet confounding: it's my money and I can do with it what I wish (v. 15). Similarly, the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son also symbolizes the lavish mercy of God. He embraces his wayward son and celebrates his return with a feast. The older brother, who appears to be the dutiful and obedient son, takes issue with his father's generosity toward his younger brother, because he has deemed him unworthy of such a celebration. Can we blame the older brother? As we have seen, mercy can be divisive. However, Jesus did say, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword . . ." (Mt 10:34). Who knew that he was talking about the Father's mercy?

Question: Has mercy become a source of frustration or division in your life?

JUSTICE AND MERCY

A while ago, some friends of mine got together to discuss MV over a cup of coffee. I have to say that we spent most of our time discussing, debating, what I will call the "problem of mercy." The "problem of mercy" is that to those who want justice, mercy seems unfair or, at least, dissatisfying. Another potential problem is that being merciful may translate into enabling a person to continue in their unhealthy or immoral behavior or choices. But, as the Pope says, it is not as if mercy and justice are at odds with each other (no. 20). In fact, I think the whole "problem of mercy" is predicated on a profound misunderstanding of justice.

From a biblical perspective MV notes, "justice is conceived essentially as the faithful abandonment of oneself to God's will." The Pope's words remind us that faith plays a critical role in our moral lives. Sometimes, straining to keep the law leads us to "strain at a gnat but swallow the camel" (Mt 23:34). In other words, pure legalism. Sometimes, what is needed is trust



in God who will show us what we ought to do in any given situation, especially when things are not so black and white, morally-speaking.

If we take Jesus as our model, we at least have a sense of direction when confronted with difficult, moral decisions. Jesus came to call the sinners to repentance, not the righteous (Lk 5:32). Repentance is a process, isn't it? It not only requires the admission of guilt and the desire to avoid future sin; it also requires — and this is of primary importance — that the individual recognize his or her own goodness. And how will this happen? Will a person become aware of his or her own dignity through accusation or condemnation? It is Satan who is the “great accuser” (Rev 12:10), and he is as far from Christ as is devilishly possible. No. We must start with the medicine of mercy. As Francis notes, “The appeal to a faithful observance of the law must not prevent attention from being given to matters that touch upon the dignity of the person” (MV, no. 20). Mercy does not mean that justice is unimportant. Discipline and admonition have their place. After all, to admonish the sinner is a spiritual work of mercy. Yet, such things must lead a person to understand better their great personal worth, rather than devalue it. Justice must begin and end in love.

NEW EVANGELIZATION AS SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

As Francis notes, “[God] does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible” (MV, no. 9). Mercy is love put into action. For its part, the Church is called to reflect the compassionate face of Jesus in its teachings, sacraments, and especially its people. It is the *People of God* (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 1) who perform the sacred actions and words of the liturgy, who hand on the teachings of Jesus, and who reach out to serve others in his name. In doing these things, the Church, in its own flesh (Col 1:24; 1 Cor 12:27), re-presents Jesus to the world so that he may be heard, seen, touched, eaten (cf. “trogon”: τρώγω, Jn 6:54) and drunk deeply (Song 5:1). In this way, MV reinforces the connection between mercy and evangelization. (MV, no. 3).

But what exactly does mercy have to do with the new evangelization? We have heard that new evangelization is characterized by “new ardor, methods, and expression” (John Paul II, Address to CELAM). But what are these, exactly? What, for instance, does *new ardor* look like? What are the *methods* to be used, and how will they be adopted in pastoral practice? These are the questions I kept asking myself, which led me to think that new evangelization was a vision in search of traction; that

is, until the publication of the post-synodal document, *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013). There, for the first time, Francis used and defined the term *spiritual accompaniment*.

The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life. Although it sounds obvious, spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God, in whom we attain true freedom. (nos. 169 and 170)

Spiritual accompaniment gives traction to the vision of new evangelization: It is evangelization at ground level. Accompaniment is how we witness to others, how we re-present Jesus: the face of the Father’s mercy. Accompaniment focuses on building relationships based on respect, trust, and love, which form the foundation for evangelization. It champions an ongoing presence of (and witness to) God’s mercy as a necessary precursor to verbal proclamation and the teaching of the faith. Accompaniment is also characterized by specific actions and attitudes such as *going out, inviting, welcoming, listening, healing, forgiving, praying, patience, open-mindedness, and empathy*. Such actions and attitudes are repeated in many of the Holy Father’s writings and homilies on evangelization and/or mercy.

To be sure, the new evangelization does not mean new doctrine. It means a new approach to people. People are first; and they need to be met where they are, as they are. Before they can be moved to repentance, they must be accompanied — their divine dignity gently and patiently reaffirmed over time.

Mercy is at the heart of discipleship. Mercy seeks to heal and to liberate. With this in mind, I think I will let the Gospel of Luke close out this section: “The spirit of the lord is upon me,

because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:19).

Question: How would becoming a “disciple of mercy” be difficult or challenging for you? What is one step you might take to meet that challenge?

MERCY AS THE CHARACTER OF EVANGELIZATION

MV is a visionary document which challenges us to remember (to believe!) that mercy is the true character of evangelization, as well as its object. It reminds us that being merciful is at the heart of what it means to be Catholic. Mercy as the character of evangelization also means that accompaniment is essential. We must learn this art, as Jesus did, if we are to inspire others to return to God and to the church.

My forthcoming book, *Becoming a Parish of Mercy*, published by Twenty-Third Publications, will explore more in-depth the actions and attitudes of spiritual accompaniment and how they might be adopted in the many facets of parish life. The book is due out in Summer 2016. |

Matthew Halbach, PhD, is the director of the St. Joseph Educational Center in Des Moines, Iowa (www.sjeciowa.org).



Correction: In the November 2015 issue, I ran an incorrect photo for Laura Weatherington. This is the correct photo. I am sorry for the error. -NW

The Shape of a Rite of Reaffirmation

Michael Marchal



For a long time I have been advocating that the confirmation of Roman Catholic children baptized in infancy should be moved back out of adolescence to before first Communion. Such a restoration of the traditional sequence of the three sacraments of initiation would make sense historically,

theologically, and psychologically and would open up new possibilities both for subsequent reaffirmations of initiation and for pastoral care.

USE LITURGY AND CATECHESIS TO STRENGTHEN DISCIPLESHIP

I am very concerned, though, that restoring the traditional sequence should not lead to abandoning adolescents as the phases of their life and faith development unfold. One of the reasons why this point needs to be stressed became clear to me in the many personal conversations that I had with pastoral ministers after my article advocating the restored order appeared last April. The most consistent remark made was that the strongest opponents of such a restoration would be youth ministers because it would destroy the showcase of their programming.

Yet, I am hopeful that we could find through such reaffirmations of faith a way to support adolescents and also adults at significant turning points in their life journeys. I am convinced that we need to dream again of how we can use not just catechesis, but liturgy to facilitate believers of any age becoming more intentional disciples.

What would such a rite of reaffirmation look like? Theoretical discussion needs something concrete to react to if we are to do that kind of dreaming.

In a way, we do not need any new rite of reaffirmation because the Eucharist is *the* repeatable sacrament of initiation. Sunday after Sunday it brings us back to our roots, to our most fundamental identity, and empowers us to live that identity in our daily lives. Every time we join in its celebration we are reaffirming our baptism and confirmation.

TWO MOMENTS OF REAFFIRMATION

There are two moments within the Eucharistic liturgy when such reaffirmation especially occurs: the Eucharistic Prayer and the Profession of Faith.

The older and by far more important of the two is the Eucharistic Prayer. I am old enough to recall how popular devotion and the ritual of the Tridentine Mass could create the impression that the Eucharistic Prayer was a sort of transubstantiation machine. Yet, theologically that impression is naïve. In 2003, Robert J. Daly succinctly described the vision of the Eucharist which Vatican II reclaimed for the church: “The presider, speaking solemnly in the name of the assembly, prays that the Holy Spirit consecrate the gifts and also consecrate us, the assembly, so that we may become the true Body of Christ offering ourselves with Jesus...to the Father.”

Now in the post-Vatican II Mass, it is much clearer that all are called to join together: priest, deacon, and faithful, in order to be reunited once again in Jesus’s surrender. The universal acclamation of amen at the end of the prayer is the ultimate verbal reaffirmation of faith that baptized Christians can make, and our lives of love are the ultimate nonverbal reaffirmation.

One of the most important aspects of that verbal affirmation is its communal emphasis: everyone gives assent to a prayer written in the first person *plural*. The other moment of ritual reaffirmation, the Profession of Faith, is at least potentially more individual and personal since those of us who worship in the Roman Rite in this country now profess it in the first person *singular* and experience it as a reaffirmation of faith stirred up anew by the Word proclaimed and preached. Yet the assembly still says it together in unison.

RENEWING OUR PROMISES

The most personal version of liturgical reaffirmation occurs annually during the Renewal of Baptismal Promises at Easter Vigil when everyone answers individually to the questions posed to all. This question-and-answer format (instead of reciting or singing the Creed) entered the Eucharist as a way of professing our faith in the early 1950s when Pius XII’s reform of the Holy Week liturgies added to Easter Vigil this renewal of baptismal promises by the congregation followed by a water-sprinkling. (Yes, there were official uses of the vernacular in the Roman liturgy before Vatican II!)

The use of this format was expanded when the American bishops in the early 1970s replaced the Creed on Easter Day with the same renewal of promises and sprinkling. Then in 1971, an adapted set of questions became a part of the confirmation of Roman Catholic children as well.



The mainline Protestant churches in North America in their own liturgical reforms have been more expansive; they have added this renewal — which they call more formally the Baptismal Covenant — to celebrations other than Easter. Services on the Baptism of the Lord, Pentecost, and All Saints can replace the Creed with the Covenant — sometimes as at Catholic confirmation, with questions adapted to reflect more clearly the mystery of that day's celebration.

I can see how a similar Roman Catholic adoption of a more frequent use of the renewal of promises and sprinkling would expand for all the assembly our awareness not only of our personal baptismal commitment but also of the initiation significance of such key celebrations of the liturgical year, a significance which I feel often passes unnoticed.

Adopting a more frequent use of the question-and-answer format would also create more occasions when believers might reaffirm their faith in public. And I have written elsewhere about seven categories of adult Roman Catholics, ranging from the alienated to the spiritually awakened, for whom some public ritual of reaffirmation would be beneficial.

A CHANCE FOR MORE EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

The most noticeable group of potential reaffirmers, though, is Roman Catholic adolescents. If we restore the traditional

order, by moving confirmation back to before first Communion, we are not abandoning our young people but opening up the possibility for the development of truly effective programming for them; programming that invites them to growth rather than an ill-timed request for commitment.

In his 2015 letter, "Saints Among Us," Archbishop Aquila of Denver restored the traditional order stating, "The focus of middle school and high school youth groups must shift from sacramental preparation to building community, fostering deeper relationships with each person of the Trinity, and preparing (young people) to be witnesses to the poor, those in need, and those who do not know Jesus Christ" (8).

I do not consider the archbishop's hope for such a rearrangement of priorities to be ill-founded. Over the years, I have known many adolescents whose experience of high school or youth group retreats has grounded them much more deeply in their faith and called them to service. Some communal recognition of that fact would have been reaffirming for them and their community; it would have helped integrate their faith development through the retreat experience into their ongoing life in the Christian community.

Still, what form should such a ritual take for reaffirmers of any age? I believe that it should be quite simple in both gesture and word and integrated into the Renewal of Bap-

tismal Promises on one of the feasts mentioned before. The reaffirmers could be called forward and briefly presented to the assembly before the presider begins the invitation to the renewal. Then, after the sprinkling of the community, there should be some gesture of blessing and encouragement for the reaffirmers — either during the service or later in private if there are issues of confidentiality.

The richest and most obvious gesture from our tradition that would be appropriate for such a moment is some form of hand-laying. The objection that the gesture might be confused with confirmation takes too narrow a view of Roman Catholic liturgical practice. The RCIA elect have hands laid on them publicly three times during the Lenten scrutinies. Those infirm have hands laid on them in every celebration of the anointing of the sick. The clergy have hands laid on them in every ordination. Some gestures are so primal that they can mean many things depending on the words that accompany them.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORDS

These words of blessing and encouragement for reaffirmers must be very carefully chosen because they must address the needs of a diverse group of individuals. After investigating the attempts on the part of many Protestant churches to find the best words for blessing reaffirmers, I have come to feel that the Evangelical Lutherans in America have gotten it right. The only adaptation that I would make in their formula is in addressing Jesus rather than generic God and altering the concluding phrase — both changes made in order to emphasize the Eucharistic orientation of both baptism and confirmation which needs to be reinforced whenever baptized disciples reaffirm their faith.

And so I would suggest that after the sprinkling the presider would lay a hand on the head of each reaffirmer individually and say: “Lord Jesus, stir up in *N.* the gift of your Holy Spirit!”

Then he would say to them all: “Strengthen their faith, guide their lives, empower their service. Give them patience in difficulties and joy as living members of your Body, for you are Lord forever and ever!”

And the assembly would respond: “Amen!” (with perhaps some applause?)

I have come to like this formula so much because these words express a comprehensive view of what is involved in ongoing Christian conversion. Whatever growth has occurred within the reaffirmers, these words name a process which could be intellectual or moral or emotional or spiritual. They also acknowledge that ongoing conformity to Christ brings us to both the cross and the resurrection. And it is all the work of the Spirit!

What role might the local bishop play in such a service of reaffirmation? I respect the episcopal desire to remain in touch with the parishes and especially with young people, and I see two ways that contact could easily be maintained.

First, in this archdiocese for years the deans as well as the bishops have confirmed adolescents so that people no longer presume that someone wearing a miter will show up for the service. About every third time our parish seems to get a bishop.

Since reaffirmation is a “nonsacramental” rite in the technical sense of that term, pastors could easily lead the rite, especially if it is celebrated several times a year. Yet with some regularity the bishop could come to lead the service.

Second, just as the RCIA suggests an annual Eastertime Mass with the bishop for all the neophytes of the diocese, so there could be an annual Mass for the reaffirmers. However bishops might choose to be involved with reaffirmers, I believe that the long-term result of restoring the canonical order *and* taking seriously the need to create opportunities for individual believers to reaffirm publicly their Christian commitment will bring a deeper and more authentic religious development for Roman Catholics of all ages in this country. |

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

CATECHETICAL LEADER

PUBLISHER: National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

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

Authors' views do not necessarily reflect those of NCCL. Letters to the editor and submissions of news items are encouraged. Send to *Catechetical Leader* at the address above or e-mail nccl@nccl.org. Phone: (202) 756-5512.

Fax: (202) 756-5519. Contact NCCL for reprints.

Copyright © 2016 by NCCL.

Subscription rates: (U.S. addresses): One year, \$24; two years, \$42; three years, \$54. (Foreign addresses): One year, \$48; two years, \$86; three years, \$114. NCCL members receive *Catechetical Leader* as a part of membership. To subscribe, send name and address with check or credit card number to NCCL at address above.

Bulk rate subscriptions: 2–5 subscriptions, \$22 each; 6–10 subscriptions, \$20; 11–20, \$18; 21 or more, \$16.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NCCL, 415 Michigan Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20017

Please recycle CL.



Ever Ancient, Ever New: Encounter-Driven Catechesis

Katie Prejean



I was seven years old when I came home from school one day and told my dad that I thought religion class was silly. All we'd done in class that day was color a picture of Jesus walking on water, and after I decided to give Jesus a streak of neon green highlighter in his hair, I'd been fussed at for being disrespectful to our Lord. In that moment I was convinced that religion class was a waste of my time.

That attitude continued well into high school, when year after year, I felt as if the same concepts were being repeatedly drilled into my head: There are seven sacraments, the Holy Spirit inspired Sacred Scripture, the pope is infallible, and Catholicism was started by Jesus himself and is therefore the arbiter of all truth and everyone else who believes in other "flavors" of Christianity is wrong.

Sadly, "this Catholic stuff is silly and repetitive" attitude isn't unique among the average 12 to 18-year-old students that sit in our classrooms, participate in our youth group events, and attend the mandatory parish religious education programs we so diligently and faithfully run. Many, if not most, of the students who sit at their desks listening to the lecture, eating the free pizza at the weekly youth night, and completing the workbook pages in the parish hall are made to do so by their well-intentioned parents who are as equally stymied by the true necessity of life-long, intentional spiritual education and formation.

It's obvious that there is a grave crisis in the church of today: many of us, youth and adults alike, are merely jumping through hoops constructed by well-meaning, although sometimes clueless, priests and lay ministers to "punch our cards" and earn the title of "good Catholic." Or, in perhaps an even worse way, people ignore the hoops altogether and walk away, convincing themselves the church is not necessary and faith is a luxury you can choose to have or ignore. We have shifted from the ideal church of vibrant, active, full participatory, faith-filled believers to one of box-checking, list-making, "I have to do this because someone told me to," in-name-only Catholics or, worse yet, non-believers entirely.

MAKING FAITH RELEVANT

Blame for this falls not merely on the person with the attitude. Fault also lies with the practitioners of catechesis who have been charged with the immensely important duty of teaching an ever-ancient faith in an ever-changing world. If we truly

want to answer the critically important call to teach the faith, we have to do it in such a way that goes beyond color sheets, workbook pages, hour-long lectures, painfully uncomfortable small group discussions, and over-the-top gimmicks. We have to teach the truth in a clear, bold, vibrant, relevant, and approachable way, and we must do so ultimately remembering that the truth is not merely a series of ideas and concepts collected into dusty books carried around by old men in Rome. As teachers, youth ministers, parish volunteers, DREs, pastors, and even everyday people who want to live the faith, we must remember that teaching an ever ancient faith in an ever-changing world first requires recognizing that the truth is a person that came to dwell among us 2,000 ago and will be with us always, until the end of the age.

ENCOUNTER-DRIVEN CATECHESIS

In 2012, St. Louis Catholic High School, both my alma mater and the place where I teach freshman theology, became a "1:1 laptop based school." Every student and teacher has a laptop or tablet that is used for everything from taking notes to grading assignments to accessing digital textbooks. While the technology is certainly useful for academic purposes (if for no other reason than I know my students are able to access my reminder e-mails about upcoming tests), at times it proves to be a hindrance — more of a distraction than an educational tool as Google and Wikipedia are the only two sites accessed during research for example.

About three months into the 2012 school year, I began to notice a disturbing habit among my students. As soon as they came into the classroom and sat down at their desk, they'd immediately pull their computer out of its carrying case, open it up, and return to whatever website they were on, e-mail they were reading, or (if I didn't catch them quick enough) game they were playing. The boisterous, loud classroom I remembered as a student was largely gone, replaced with the dulcet tones of the click-clacking of keys or the occasional, "Hey, did you see this?" followed by smirks and quiet giggles among students. I didn't have to say, "Settle down" or, "Please give me your attention" because of volume. Instead, I was competing for my students to even look me in the eye when they came through the door and class began. They were enamored with the 13-inch computer screen in front of them, much like their eyes were glued to their 5-inch phones all other hours of the day.

We're living in a world with far more access to instant connection than any other era, but we are far less connected. We have



social media, but fewer occasions to be social. We can communicate with anyone, anywhere, at anytime, and because of this, we are distracted from the importance of the ones we share time and space with. As I watched my students come in day after day and immediately stare at screens of the computers, it began to dawn on me that this generation — perhaps more than any other — was quickly forgetting how to have authentic, genuine, personable, fruitful encounters with their family members, peers, authority figures, or even complete strangers. And, if they cannot encounter one another, then they are certainly going to struggle with encountering Jesus Christ. Whether we are in the traditional classroom, within youth ministry or parish religious education programs, in RCIA formation, or sacramental preparation, the greatest challenge we face as catechizers is fostering a culture of intentional encounter, with both others and Christ, in an encounter-less world.

“COME AND SEE”

In the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel, there is a beautiful and poignant moment between Jesus and two of his soon-to-be followers. As Jesus is walking by, John the Baptist boldly announces him as the “Lamb of God.” This title piques the interest of Andrew and another unnamed man whom we can assume is John, the author of the gospel. The two men approach Jesus. He asks them what they are looking for. Hoping to find out where Jesus is staying, they are quite surprised with his answer. “Come and see,” Jesus tells them, and so they

go and spend the day with him. This moment when Jesus says these three simple words is so profound and powerful that Andrew and John even remember what time it was. Rather than outline his agenda for the next three years or give them an address of the place he would be spending the night, Jesus instead extended an invitation for Andrew and John to come and simply be with him. He is giving them an opportunity to personally encounter him, an encounter which changes both their lives and the lives of countless others forever. That day, Andrew and John saw and spoke with Jesus. They spent time and shared space with Jesus. They personally met the Lord, and as Andrew would later tell his fisherman brother, Simon, they had found the Messiah. This encounter with the Christ so profoundly changed Andrew that he told his brother, who is eventually named Peter and given the keys to the kingdom. The simple invitation to “come and see” became the most profound, life-changing encounter of Andrew and John’s lives.

It is an encounter with Jesus, just like this one, that deeply transforms a person. Meeting Jesus face to face in the Eucharist, in the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture, in the confessional receiving forgiveness, or in the people surrounding us daily, more fully forms us in his image and likeness. This personal encounter with Jesus Christ is at the heart of our very existence, and the foundation upon which we minister and serve. This encounter is the root of all we do as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, because it is in personally meeting



Jesus that we begin to understand not just what we profess or why we do so, but *in whom* we truly believe. If we are going to change the tide of the frequent “this is silly” attitude, we must do so because we are fostering occasions of encounter that make our catechetical efforts effective, meaningful, transformative, and relevant.

THE SEVEN STEP PROCESS

I like making lists, especially if they tell me what I need to do next. As a person juggling full-time teaching with part-time youth ministry and traveling for speaking engagements, lists are the only thing that keep me grounded and sane. As I came to realize how little my students interacted with and encountered both each other and Jesus Christ, I began to write down the things I was doing to help end the trend. Over time, I noticed I was repeating the same seven steps over and over

again, which has since become a listing of a method of education and catechesis I use in my classroom, with my youth group teens, and at conferences and retreats across the country.

Step 1: Extend the invitation

Once upon a time, I called an atheist student of mine insane because he didn't believe in God and wouldn't believe me after I explained Aquinas' proofs of God's existence. Needless to say, calling him insane was a surefire way of assuring he would be turned off to anything else I said or did for the rest of the school year. Rather than humbly engaging my student and inviting him to explore a different way of thinking, I forced the truth upon him. Shoving something down someone's throat does no one any good, least of all the person doing the shoving. Instead, it locks us into the dangerous mentality of “I'm right, you're wrong, deal with it.”



As catechizers and evangelizers, it is our duty to invite our students, friends, co-workers, and complete strangers to an encounter with Jesus Christ. It is never our job to force them to meet him, demand they listen, and insist they believe what we say. First and foremost, our task is to invite them to experience, hear about, learn, and perhaps come to believe the truth that we know has transformed our own lives and can influence their own.

Step 2: Teach Jesus

Too often we end up spending our precious time teaching *about* Jesus, forgetting that it is our primary duty to help people personally *encounter* Jesus. If the students we work with memorize the Ten Commandments and can recite the beatitudes, then we have done nothing more than teach them a great party trick for college. If they are not following those commandments and living those beatitudes, then we have failed them. I have slowly learned that my job in the classroom is ultimately to introduce my students to Jesus Christ and help them get to know him, which will naturally lead to falling in

love with him. The best antidote to any problem our students struggle with and the best answer to any question they may have is to point them in the direction of the truth, which is not an idea, but a person.

While there is a need to teach the technicalities of the faith, it should be our primary focus to introduce the people we catechize to the person of Jesus Christ. And what do they find when they meet him? They meet the Jesus that calmed the storm, mastering the wind and storm. They meet the Jesus that heals the woman with a 12-year hemorrhage. They meet the Jesus that fed over 5,000 people and raised Lazarus from the dead. And as they meet the Jesus of miracles, they also see that Jesus took naps, and asked questions. They see that Jesus was hungry and that he wept for his friend. The sooner we realize that people are not transformed by ideas and concepts alone, the quicker we will do the most important thing we could ever hope to do as catechists: help people meet the Savior of the world and discover their identity within him, the very person who gives meaning to their existence.

Step 3: Be joyfully real

When our students, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and total strangers meet us, they should see a person radiating the joy and love of Jesus Christ. This does not mean we are constantly giggling or always have a toothy grin plastered across our face, but it does mean that when anyone sees us, they should realize that we have an internal disposition that rises above the fray of the world and allows us to constantly delight and rest in the love of the Son while we pursue the will of the Father.

Our joy for the love of the Lord, and for the great task of catechizing to which we have been called, should be the animating principle of our lives. This should be evident to anyone we meet, student or stranger. This joy deeply rooted in our hearts isn't merely a marketing tactic to get people "to the pews" or "sitting up straight in the desks." It's a disposition which points to Jesus Christ, encouraging encounter with him. If we are the only face of Christ someone sees, and possibly the only gospel someone "reads" that day, then the Christ they meet and the gospel we share needs to be one of unceasing love, merciful welcome, and deep, brimming joy.

Step 4: Recognize our shortcomings

For a long time I avoided the phrase "I don't know." It wasn't until I caught myself making up an answer to a student's question that I realized I was being unjust to both them and myself. If, in the course of our catechizing efforts, we find ourselves unaware of something, there is no harm in admitting we do not know the answer to a question. If nothing else, this alerts us to holes in our own knowledge and encourages us to grow and learn more for ourselves. It also humanizes the catechizing process. We are not the arbiters of all truth, nor do we have all the answers for everyone. God cannot be placed in a box, and our faith is filled with holy mystery. The sooner we recognize, and reflect, that the sooner the evangelization efforts of our catechesis will be successful. Recognizing our shortcomings does not harm our teaching: it enhances it as it forces us to seek new knowledge and humanizes us as fellow pilgrims on the journey to the truth.

Step 5: Frame the greater story

Jesus Christ is not a fairytale character, and the Bible is not a collection of mythical stories. Jesus Christ is our Savior, Word made flesh dwelling among us, and the Bible is God's inspired Word, given to us to study, reflect upon, and live out. When we teach Jesus as a distant figure and place the Bible in a "once

upon a time" context, the story becomes cold and aloof. The greatest thing we can do for the people we catechize is frame the story of salvation in a personal context, showing them that they are a unique part of salvation history.

When Moses was told God's name at the burning bush, this is not simply a cool moment defying the laws of physics. It is a moment showing us the great personal love of God who wants his chosen people to *know* his very identity, existence itself. When Job is struggling with the death of his family, illness, sudden poverty, and judgmental friends, we can see that suffering

is ultimately a redemptive experience drawing us closer to the Lord. As the resurrected Christ walks on the road to Emmaus with two disciples, we see that he is truly "remaining with us to the end of the age."

Every moment in the Scriptures is a moment that can be personally applied to the spiritual journey, and when it is taught as such, the written Word of God is as alive as the Incarnate Word in Israel in 30 A.D. Furthermore, when we teach and illustrate how this great story of salvation is directly applicable to our spiritual journey in this moment, we see that we are characters within the story, not merely spectators watching from afar.

Not only is Jesus taught and met, but we also can meet ourselves and others in a more intimate and profound way.

Step 6: Love them to heaven

We put in a lot of effort to do what we do. There are endless hours of time dedicated to what seems like a small drop in the bucket in the lives of the people we catechize. Our time, energy, talent, and treasure is poured into the formation of the hearts, minds, and souls of the people we teach, and the likelihood of us ever seeing the effects of our efforts are slim to none. We will be forgotten and perhaps even misremembered, and the concepts we teach may become fuzzy. But, in the end, that's okay. If we successfully introduced them to Jesus Christ, and if we helped them encounter him and begin building a relationship with him, then we have done our duty.

Leon Bloy, a French novelist who converted to Catholicism as a young man after encountering a few holy men and women while working in Paris, wrote the following: "The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life is to not become a saint." This is our job as catechists: to get our students, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and complete strangers to heaven. We do this by joyfully and humbly teaching them

*While there is a need
to teach the technicalities of the faith,
it should be our primary focus
to introduce the people we catechize
to the person of Jesus Christ.
when we know our story —
when we know whose we are —
and how we came to be.
There is something remarkable
when we know our story —
when we know .*

and providing chances for them to meet Jesus Christ, and in the end, we will hopefully one day see them in heaven.

Step 7: Rinse and repeat

The time we have with the people we catechize is often brief. A year in the classroom, a semester in the RCIA program, a few weeks of confirmation preparation, and then it's on to a new group of people to teach. We repeat this cycle over and over again, developing our own style and methods along the way. We nuance what we do, learn what to say, and how to say it. We acknowledge our moments of failure and correct our mistakes, and then we start the process over, ultimately recognizing that we ourselves are changed year after year.

Our world is overrun with mediocrity. Many people, myself included, sometimes only put in the least amount of effort required. But what we do as catechists must always go beyond the bare minimum. Catechizing, the work of evangelization, is the proclamation of the truth. It is the sharing of the gospel. Teaching Jesus to a student, neighbor, coworker, friend, or complete stranger is the most important thing any of us could ever hope to do, and as such, evangelization deserves our very best efforts. Evangelization demands excellence. This requires

us to provide opportunities to encounter Christ in a world filled with so few authentic encounters with each other. This means we have to teach Jesus and introduce him as the Word made flesh dwelling among us before we require the memorization of concepts. This means we have to be joyfully honest and openly humble, showing the love of the Lord and our own occasional shortcomings in our knowledge. This means we must frame things in the context of the greater story, illustrating how we are a part of salvation history. This means we love people deeply and work fervently to show them heaven. There is no better task, no higher calling, no greater purpose in life than to help someone avoid the great tragedy of not becoming a saint. This is why we catechize. This is why we go beyond ourselves and invite people to meet and fall in love with Christ, and if we do it well, then we won't fail. We will have fostered a culture of encounter with Jesus, and if we're lucky, we'll meet and fall in love with him ourselves as well. |

Katie Prejean has her BA in Theology from the University of Dallas and is currently working on her Masters in Theological Studies from the Augustine Institute. She lives and works in Lake Charles, Louisiana with her dog, Barney, where they can be found playing fetch in the backyard and posting selfies to Instagram.



A new resource for Catholic families!

OUR FAMILY Prays

Our Family Prays is a collection of rituals, blessings, prayers, and traditions meant to encourage and inspire Catholic families to keep prayer at the heart of their home. It is organized by the seasons of the liturgical year and includes religious traditions and celebrations from around the world.

English item 20863
Spanish item 20873.

Available Now!



20863

Available in English or Spanish

Contact your local sales representative for a FREE GIFT!



8805 Governor's Hill Drive, Suite 400
Cincinnati, OH 45249
1-877-275-4725 | RCLBenziger.com
 /RCLBenziger @RCLBenziger

For a free sample, visit

RCLBSAMPLES.com

Red Ink and Blue Skies: Planning For Renewal While Managing Decline

Tom Quinlan



It's the elephant in the room. We're managing decline.

Let me clarify. We're managing declining resources, in particular, budgets. This does not mean we are managing decline of the church. Such a mindset would be anathema to The Joy of the Gospel, to say nothing of the gospel itself! The new evangelization, or simply, evangelization calls for the opposite of managing decline. The church's mission to go and proclaim a saving message of Jesus's Good News is grounded in an unconquerable confidence that the Holy Spirit is surely hastening the onset of God's reign.

That being said, finances are clearly in decline. And this can foster a debilitating "managing decline" culture in our operations. Does this sound familiar to you? Are you currently fighting this dynamic in your ministry setting? Or worse, have you perhaps succumbed to it on some level?

If we think the finances of our diocese or parish are in bad shape now, just wait another five years. My sense is that things will be much worse. Three percent trimmed here. Ten percent slashed there. Another lost position coming soon. No matter how well we begin to execute an inspired plan for renewal, a sustained trend-reversal in contributions will be slow to achieve. There is more bleeding to come.

This is a daunting prospect for me as I try to manage not for decline but for renewal. I'm sure this is the case for each catechetical leader determined to participate in a fresh evangelization and sow seeds for a second Pentecost. Who among us has committed the best years of their lives and their fullest commitment to the church only to acquiesce to *decline management*, to functioning as if the church were in hospice?

STRATEGIZE TO STAY FOCUSED ON RENEWAL

I've learned a few things over the years about living in the tension of shrinking budgets versus increasing need, passion-for-mission versus institutional impediments to mission fulfillment. Here are some brief thoughts:

Resist falling prey to psychic or spiritual paralysis. We can do something each day, each hour, that furthers the agenda of mission...no matter the circumstances. That helps me to shift the virtue of hope from theory into action. And joy crowds out my anxiety.

*Resist falling prey
to psychic or spiritual paralysis.
We can do something each day,
each hour, that furthers
the agenda of mission...
no matter the circumstances.*

Pray. This may seem painfully obvious, but leaders can fall into the trap of operating as though they are really in charge. Prayer opens us to that infinite sea of God's love and wisdom that puts everything into its right context. Jesus sends us an "advocate" who is with us always and only requires us to cooperate with grace, not create it.

Keep your focus on the big picture. Even if you are often overwhelmed with the operational minutia of administration, do not allow it to define your ministry. Somehow we must remain fixated on the horizon, where we can see what evangelizing renewal looks like. And stubbornly, even prophetically, we must point to that horizon and invite others to see it. (I suggest our greatest resource deficit today is actually of imagination, not finances.)

Be open to...indeed, seek and embrace new ways of operating. There are always possibilities for being more efficient (*and effective*) in ministry. One example for me has been the use of gifted consultants to take on targeted roles at a much-reduced cost than full-time staff. Another is applying subsidiarity where possible, such as in the empowerment of parish leaders to function well in deanery groupings, with engagement from my diocesan office but not a controlling paternalism. And technology offers great promise for increased operational efficiencies.

Show your business and finance people that you and your ministry are valuable and that you understand the fiscal realities of your parish or diocese. In meeting these people on their terms, you show them that you are reasonable and responsible. In essence, you are building up good will that you will be able to draw upon when there is something for which you must defend or advocate. Mutuality must be the goal in the ministry-finance relationship.

Find ways to form your business or finance people in the vision of evangelization and renewal. We should not be frustrated that they don't naturally gravitate to our perspectives. Provide them articles and books that speak to the church's evangelizing vision. Invite their participation in formation experiences (parish gatherings, webinars) that will enhance their understanding of evangelization as the great hope for renewal and growth. Tell of the ministry successes going on, the lives being transformed, and need for continued investment toward the church's bright future.

Over the years my intentional engagement with the finance office here has yielded both warm relationships and a sense of trust. We are "in this together." We communicate honestly.

Sometimes my advocacy has a challenging dimension. But I know that my finance colleagues understand that the mission of the church must drive our fiscal decisions, and not the other way around. (They have, in fact, engaged in formation about evangelization and renewal.) Together, we hold a shared vision that the only path out of our current vicious cycle and into a virtuous financial cycle requires staying focused on the gospel, trusting in God's providence, and prudently making strategic investments for renewal.

Are we in decline? Using any number of metrics, certainly. Should we be managing decline? Well, to some degree, this is our fate today. But we should do so with one eye squarely on renewal, and trusting when we pray...

...*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.*

BEWARE OF LOW TIDES: THE NEW NORMAL SHOULD NOT BE NORMATIVE

Every diocese is different, but I suspect your diocese has sound practices regarding oversight of parish fiscal operations in place. Mine certainly does. Parishes are audited whenever there is a pastor change and for other reasons.



St. John Bosco Conference

For Catechists & Religious Educators

July 18-21, 2016

Receive the Father's Mercy
"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:36

Join hundreds of catechists as we celebrate the Father's love and find renewed strength to live and proclaim his mercy.

Certification tracks for Youth Ministers, Catechists, Directors of Religious Education, Campus Ministers, RCIA Leaders as well as non-certification tracks for the dynamic new "Come, Follow Me" program and Catholic Schools.

Speakers include: Most Reverend Joseph Edward Kurtz, DD, archbishop of Louisville, KY, and president of the USCCB; Mark Hart; Dr. Janet Smith; Scott Sollom; and many more.

For more information and registration
steubenvilleconferences.com or call us at 740-283-6315.





This is an important practice, one that can help lessen the risk of financial irregularities and can help a parish stay (or get) on track for a sound future financially. However, I've learned of one notable danger for the ministry side of the parish equation worth sharing here.

Fifteen years ago, when I started in my role as diocesan catechetical director, I saw that our staffing levels and budgets in parish faith formation were inadequate to meet the challenges to break out of maintenance operations (with heavy-lifting already needed in areas such as family formation and evangelization). In the ensuing years, we have seen only continued erosion in staffing and budgets, all while the need for the heavy-lifting for evangelizing, mission-driven ministry has increased.

Over time, I started noticing that our audit process of parishes was drawing upon comparative data, showing a parish where it stood in terms of financial commitment to catechesis in relation to similar parishes in the diocese. On one level, this approach makes perfect sense and provides helpful information to tell a pastor where the parish stands in a normative (relative) sense.

The flaw, however, is that this approach gives no attention to whether the norm itself is healthy and should be recommended as an objective benchmark for parish investment in catechesis and evangelization. The resultant danger is that an understaffed or under-investing parish (for mission and growth) can seem bloated when compared to a normative landscape of *even more greatly* understaffed or under-investing parishes. And the rare parish that is, in real (not relative)

*Over the year
my intentional engagement
with the finance office here
has yielded both
warm relationships
and a sense of trust.
We are "in this together."
We communicate honestly.*

terms, adequately staffed for mission and growth? Well, it stands out like a sore thumb.

I feel so grateful to work with an outstanding financial office in my diocese. They heard my concern on this topic. I even had the opportunity to meet with the auditors to directly discuss how dangers of using strictly comparative data will only take us from *low-tide* to *lower-tide* when it comes to our parishes' commitment to evangelizing faith formation. Happily, I am frequently engaged by our finance office to bring a ministry perspective

to a particular parish's audit process.

Consider this a cautionary tale if two things exist in your diocese: 1.) under-investment in parishes for mission and growth, and 2.) a use of comparative data to drive decision-making about future ministry investment at the parish level. I suspect both exist in many dioceses. If so for you, ponder how you can insert yourself into the conversation and engage the right people. Explore together how we are facing a steep uphill climb in terms of executing a new evangelization game plan, which will take considerable heavy-lifting. And show how our current normative level of investment in catechesis and evangelization is barely adequate for even a merely sacramentalizing, maintenance church.

The primary question that both finance offices and ministry offices need to be asking is: *What level of staffing and investment is needed to fulfill our mission and mandate from Christ Jesus?* All other considerations have their place after that. |

Tom Quinlan is catechetical director for the Diocese of Joliet and was the founding chair of the NCCL Evangelization Committee in 2010.

Six Amazing Things Every RCIA Inquirer Has to Learn

Nick Wagner



Pope Paul VI said that by the way we act and talk, people get drawn into our story — which is actually the story of God’s reign. They get curious, and they ask us a question. In situations like that, we have about two minutes, maybe less, to tell them the core of the story in a way that fans the flame of their interest.

SO WHAT IS THE CORE STORY?

The General Directory for Catechesis lays it out pretty clearly, but we have to take the outline we find there and make it real. We have to use the outline of the core story of God’s reign and learn how to tell it through the story of our own lives.

The GDC starts out by saying this: “The message of Jesus about God is Good News for humanity” (101). So our story has to sound like good news. The GDC goes on to say: “Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, a new and definitive intervention by God, with a transforming power equal and even superior to his creation of the world” (101).

Jesus said and did six things to underline just how amazing this new intervention by God is in our lives (see GDC 102).

1. GOD IS NOT AN ABSENT FATHER

When we tell this part of the story, we have to talk about our close and intimate relationship with God. We don’t talk about “hoping to meet God someday.” We talk about how God is completely and constantly present in every breath we take.

2. THERE’S NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF

Jesus said that in the reign of God, we are completely safe and completely free. We don’t have to be controlled by addictions, impulses, anger, or fear. We are not even subject to death. We are divine children of God. Imagine what you would do to protect your own children. Now imagine you had divine powers. How much more would you do? Practice telling stories about all the ways in which God has saved you from harm.

3. JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jesus said that in the reign of God, there is complete justice. Those of us raised in the United States sometimes confuse this promise with the promise of equality guaranteed in our

constitution. God’s justice and American justice are not the same thing. Think of your children again. You try to be fair with your children, but you don’t always treat them equally. One might need more attention. One might need more money. One might need more medical care. God’s justice is about doing what is right. When you’re telling your story, talk about how God has made things right for you and made things right for the people you love.

4. JESUS IS A BIG DEAL

God sent Jesus to say and do all these things so we would know the Good News. Jesus is so completely one with God’s reign that Jesus himself is the complete realization of the reign of God. By knowing Jesus, we know everything there is to know about God’s amazing new intervention in the world. Our job is to tell the story of how we came to know Jesus and how knowing Jesus has changed our lives.

5. WE ARE A BIG DEAL, TOO

Everything that Jesus said about how he is the realization and revelation of God’s reign Jesus also said about his community of disciples. We aren’t perfect at it, and sometimes we aren’t even good at it. But we get better, bit by bit, at carrying on Jesus’ mission to announce the Good News of God’s amazing new intervention in the world.

6. IT ONLY GETS BETTER FROM HERE

Jesus said that while all these things are true, we are still going to experience pain, sadness, and disappointment. The whole world hasn’t yet heard or taken seriously the Good News and so there is still work to do. Even within ourselves, the divine children of God, we forget or slip up. All of us still have work to do within ourselves as well. But on the whole, we are on the right path. We are moving toward perfection. And when that happens...wow! Life will be even more amazing! If you believe that, it’s almost a sin not to go out and tell other people about it.

These six elements are the way that Jesus communicated the core story of God’s Good News. How are you continuing to tell the story to inquirers who become curious about Christianity? How will you use your “two minutes”? |

Nick Wagner is the editor of Catechetical Leader and the director of TeamRCIA.com — a free online resource to help parishes form Christians for life. Contact him at nick@teamrcia.com.

One Nation, Under Gods: A New American History

by Peter Manseau

Reviewed by Dan Thomas



One Nation, Under Gods: A New American History presents an insightful and intriguing picture of America's religious history, and raises new questions for us as we consider the future of the religiously pluralistic

society in which we live. By exploring a past with which most of us are unfamiliar, Peter Manseau puts us in touch with the prejudices that existed and suggests by implication a better response in the future. As he states: "The United States is

a land shaped and informed by internal religious diversity — some of it obvious, some of it hidden — and yet the history we have all been taught has mostly failed to convey this" (4).

Columbus believed they had no religion and thus, were not truly human.

Manseau begins by telling the story of the first encounter between the Spanish discoverers of the New World and the religion and culture of the Taino Indians. Columbus believed they had no religion and thus, were not truly human. One of the Spanish means of interpreting Indian religious practice was by using Muslim concepts and terms for what they saw



Echoes of Faith 3.0



A Project of the
National Conference for
Catechetical Leadership

CATECHIST FORMATION FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

**COMING
SOON! NEW
ECCLESIOLOGY
MODULE,
"THE CHURCH"**

A Completely New Module:

Six Segment and Article Topics:

1. The Origin of the Church
2. Evangelization & the Mission of the Church
3. The Nature of the Church
4. The Church's Hierarchy
5. Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue
6. Mary, Mother of the Church

AND Two New Bonus Interviews:

- The Latin American Church
- Understanding Islam



**Sign up for a FREE
30 day trial at
Demo.Echoes3.com!**

Echoes of Faith.com



8805 Governor's Hill Drive, Suite 400
Cincinnati, OH 45249

1-877-275-4725 | RCLBenziger.com

[f /RCLBenziger](https://www.facebook.com/RCLBenziger) [@RCLBenziger](https://twitter.com/RCLBenziger)

the Indians doing, resulting in misunderstanding of their religion and culture.

EVANGELIZATION THROUGH STRUGGLE

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded to escape the persecution of the English church and government. Even they had to deal with the diversity brought by Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson whose views clashed with their religious establishment.

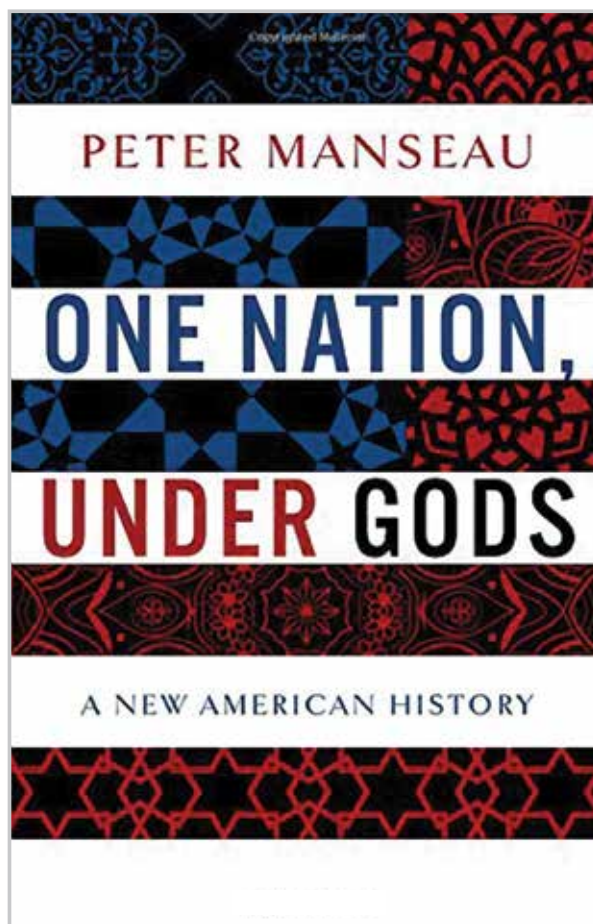
One of the especially intriguing stories was the experience of Cotton Mather whose wife and daughter died of smallpox. When Mather learned from his family slave of the efficacy of vaccination, he had to fight with his fellow preachers, who considered vaccinating as thwarting the will of God, punishing the people by sending the disease.

When Thomas Jefferson donated his own library to Congress to replace the books lost because the British had burned Washington, a fierce debate arose about whether to accept the approximately 300 religious books included. This was the cultural war of its day and included vicious attacks from both sides.

Omar ibn Said was a Muslim who became a slave brought from Africa who continued to practice his faith in captivity. After being captured when he escaped from his master, he filled the walls of his jail cell with Arabic script. He wrote a short autobiography that was published in 1848. He was one of the approximately 20 percent of Southern slaves who were Muslim.

In the 19th century, Hindu and Buddhist thought influenced the development of transcendentalism. Hinduism and Indian thought also impacted some of the early feminists, such as Matilda Gage and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Shortly before World War I, the Sikhs began to move into Washington state. They were often harassed because of their strange looks, dress, and their “stealing” of jobs from the white men of the area. The headline of the *Puget Sound American* read “Hindu Hordes Invading the State.” Manseau tells the story of Bhagat Singh Thind who wore the traditional whiskers and turban of the Sikh. He became a lecturer, a plaintiff in the reli-



gious freedom challenge, and a soldier in the American army.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

These and several other stories demonstrate the incredible amount of diversity that is a part of the history of the United States. One common theme of these stories is the difficulty that each of these various religious ideas or groups faced from the established ways. Eventually, some sort of understanding came about and even some learning and acceptance happened. One of the key themes in the book is that diversity is something that needs to be embraced because we teach each other important truths about faith, God, and religious practice.

In the final chapter, Manseau contrasts the City on the Hill image preached by Governor John Winthrop aboard the ship *Arabella*, with our contemporary reality of a plu-

ralistic community of many faiths. He writes:

Does the city upon a hill, that stubborn Puritan metaphor, carry with it the very images of walls and exclusion that contribute to attacks against those on the margins of the dominant faith? So long as the call to build Winthrop's city endures, will we continue to imagine ourselves under spiritual siege and in need of a 'bulwark' against whichever current peril must be kept at bay?

This book is a thoughtful discussion of some important ideas for our understanding of how evangelization could be done today in America. It is a significant contribution to a thoughtful understanding of the meaning of religious freedom as well. The reader learns interesting history and meets some intriguing characters. |

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

Frazzled in the Vineyard

Brigid Johnson



When I began my career as a Parish Catechetical Leader in the Diocese of Knoxville in 2001, a friend, Fr. Evan, made me promise to go to at least one conference or one retreat each year. He impressed upon me the need to take care of myself or I would not be able to take care of others. It was good advice. How-

ever, when the diocesan director called me that first spring and offered me the opportunity to go to the East Coast Conference, I said that I just didn't have the time. She told me that was the dumbest thing and that I'd better plan to go.

My first experience of the East Coast Conference was well worth the time and expense. It was an opportunity I might have easily lost due to my lack of foresight.

PCLs work hard. We focus on our programs and our students and often forget to care for our own selves. We are the co-workers in the vineyard, but because of our busy-ness, we are often *frazzled in the vineyard*.

THE NEED TO RETREAT

Our diocese sponsors a retreat every February for catechetical leaders called Frazzled in the Vineyard. By February, we are all pretty frazzled. These retreats have always been calm and soothing. They aren't for problem solving. Rather, they offer us time to relax and reflect. We have reflected on Scripture, with colors, with national catechetical leaders, and local speakers. We have walked with saints and have heard stories of finding God in the Everglades and raising a family in a challenging world.

A retreat provides time for reflection and renewing our relationship with God. We leave behind the usual distractions for a period long enough to allow an inner change to occur: the ongoing conversion of heart that is critical to deepening faith. People who have attended our February retreats have shared that they enjoy the wine, the opportunity to get away and relax, sharing meals, and talking at table about church, parish, and diocesan matters. I also value the chance to quietly walk and feel the brisk wind or warm breeze with a companion who shares my trials and tribulations.

There are many reasons for going on a retreat, but the best one may be that Jesus retreated. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert before he began his public ministry. He often "departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God" (Lk 6:12). He knew there were many matters that needed his attention, but he also knew that it was essential to make time for prayer and to focus on his relationship with the Father.

He called his apostles to retreat, as well. When they returned from being sent out, "He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place" (Mk 6:30-32).

CONNECTING WITH FELLOW PCLs

After retreats, local and national conferences are the next best opportunity to get away and unwind. While we go to learn, hear new ideas, and see new resources from the publishers, the best part is connecting with other frazzled co-workers in the vineyard. Talking with other PCLs who are coping with similar issues can greatly improve your outlook on life. And you never know who you might meet who can share insight on an issue or provide a service that you need.

Budget woes in all of our dioceses and parishes are cutting into our ability to attend retreats and conferences. We need to find creative ways to finance such events. Many dioceses have retreat houses that offer very reasonable prices for an individual retreat experience. For that important facet of networking,

- ✱ Ask your diocesan director to sponsor a day of reflection for PCLs.
- ✱ Ask one of the publishers to sponsor a speaker.
- ✱ Share the responsibilities of location and refreshments among other PCLs.

If you absolutely can't get away, there are online retreat resources. Loyola Press has a daily three-minute retreat you can receive in your inbox. St. Monica's in Indianapolis offers an inspiring daily reflection. The USCCB provides video reflections on the daily Scriptures. The App Store has some gems, too; type "Catholic" in the search box and discover apps to entice you. Sometimes three to five minutes can make all the difference in your day.

You need to make time to get away, take deep breaths, and refresh your mind. You need to take care of yourself. Otherwise, you will become frazzled in the vineyard. ■

Brigid Johnson is a cradle Catholic who fully embraces Vatican II and all it taught. She has been a PCL for 20 of the last 40 years in large and small parishes, rural and urban; currently serving with the Paulist Fathers in Knoxville, Tennessee. Brigid has a Master's Degree in Pastoral Studies from Loyola University in New Orleans and a Master Catechist Certificate from the Diocese of Knoxville.

Frazzled in the Vineyard



9th Annual Catechetical Leadership Retreat
Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville
February 11 - 12, 2011

Holy Podcast!

Claire M. McManus



As the world turns away from print media to digital, from traditional television to streaming, one wonders what new innovation is about to change the way we learn and are entertained. Listening to the transistor radio may be a thing of the past, but as long as there are automobiles and long commutes, radio broadcasts are here to stay. There is a twist, however, as the latest innovation in audio broadcast has given rise to the age of the podcast.

Podcasting comes when the radio and computer are morphed into a self-produced program. Podcasts are radio programs that are streamed across the Internet. They can be produced by anyone, anywhere. Subscribing to podcasts allows users to collect individual programs from a variety of sources, and receive the latest episodes automatically. Unlike traditional radio broadcasts that depend on the schedule of the station, podcasts can be accessed and listened to at the user's convenience.

POPULAR CATHOLIC PODCASTS

There are many podcasts with content relevant to the Catholic faith. Catholicretreats.net, a curated website/blog that has reviewed many of these podcasts, offers its opinion on what it considers to be the best. This is a helpful service since podcasts can come from anyone who can buy some basic equipment, record a show, and make it available online. There are many podcasts that are good if you are looking for Catholic apologetics, or spirituality, and several that are reflections on living life as a Catholic. Some of the top five podcasts include two produced by Fr. Roderick Vonhagen, a priest from the Netherlands who travels the world reflecting on the intersection of Church and society. He is a podcast pioneer and his two shows, "The Break" and "Catholic Insider," are worth following. Another interesting podcast comes from Lino Rulli, a radio host on Sirius XM and former television producer. His podcasts, recorded from his radio program "The Catholic Guy," offer a humorous perspective on being Catholic. He also has a podcast called "Lino at Large."

Other podcasts are produced by everyday Catholics that want to share what it is like to live their faith in the context of American life. Mac and Katherine Barron produce a podcast called "Catholic in a Small Town." They go out of their way to be funny, but they are sincere about Catholic life in a small southern town. Another podcast that offers a folksy reflection

on raising a Catholic family amidst the chaos of everyday life is "The Catholics Next Door: Adventures in Imperfect Living." This podcast is produced by Greg and Jennifer Willits who have been married since 1995 and podcasting since 2005. Their first effort was the "Rosary Army" podcast that was followed regularly until 2008 when Greg and Jennifer were offered a daily radio broadcast on The Catholic Channel on Sirius XM. When that show was ended, they launched "The Catholics Next Door."

The Willits have five children and are in the middle of life and all of the complexities it brings. Together and individually they have written about their faith and how it has strengthened their marriage and family life. They are entertaining and able to weave together the mundane with the profound. They have a child on the autism spectrum, teens with hectic schedules, parents that are ill, experience grief and loss, and discuss financial challenges. The insight into how they manage to keep it all together always comes back to their faith.

Listening to audio programs is really nothing new; our great-grandparents were glued to their radio sets 100 years ago. But podcasts are teaching us something about this generation; we live in a time when people want to have control over their schedules, which is why we see so many recorded podcast versions of popular favorite radio programs. More important, people today want to have a voice in society's conversations.

EVANGELIZATION THROUGH LIFE EXPERIENCE

The Willetts and Barrons put into practice the best of what we ask evangelizers to do. They tell their story of why they love their faith, without proselytizing or preaching. They have a great sense of humor and an obvious rapport that exemplifies Pope Francis's advice that "an evangelizer must never look like someone who has come back from a funeral." Their family life mirrors the experience of many of our families today.

Beneath the folksy banter of these podcasting couples is a very important lesson; they model the goal of the new evangelization: share your faith from the depth of your own life experience. While we bend over backward to teach people to share faith, these couples are teaching us that our lives do not have to be spectacular in order to be interesting to others. What makes us interesting is that God is in our lives. ■

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

*Podcasts are radio programs
that are streamed across the Internet.*

Jesus in Our Homes

Patrice Spirou



Today, the church is placing an unprecedented amount of emphasis on the need to evangelize families. The Holy Father knows the important role that catechists play in ministering to families. One of the first things Pope Francis did as a new pontiff was to meet with catechists from around the world and explain that to be a good catechist, “one cannot be afraid of going beyond one’s comfort zone.” At this moment in our history, we, as catechists, are being called to change our focus from catechizing the child to evangelizing the family. For many, these changes may require giving up what has become comfortable.

STEPPING OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE

The Holy Father is not asking anything of us which he himself is not already doing. Right from the start of his pontificate, Pope Francis pushed the boundaries of charity and mercy, thus modeling for us the demands of Christianity, the demands of love. We have read the stories of his Holy Thursday foot washing of young prisoners — male, female, Christian, and non-Christian; his alleged sneaking out of the Vatican at night to minister to the homeless. We have seen his embrace of the handicapped, the sick, and the elderly. The Holy Father understands that if he is to challenge us to go beyond our comfort zone, he must first show us how to do that by going beyond his. He has brought to life St. Paul’s exhortation, *Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ* (1Cor 11:1). Thus, as catechists we also must go beyond our own comfort zones to model a way for Catholic families to go beyond theirs.

Jesus never worried about his own comfort. His sole concern was to do the will of his father. For example, did Jesus just stay in Nazareth and expect the people to come to Him? That would have been more comfortable than traveling by foot throughout Israel. No, he went out to the people, into their towns and inside their homes. The gospels are filled with stories of Jesus spending time with families and the miracles that came from his presence among them. What came from those visits were conversions and healings — spiritual, emotional, and physical. People were even raised from the dead. Miracles happened when Jesus was in their homes. In fact, for the first

200 years of the church, Mass was celebrated in the houses of the early Christians because they lived under the threat of persecution. It was from those Masses that they drew the strength to live and sometimes die for their faith.

CHRIST IN OUR HOMES

Into people’s homes and hearts is where Jesus went 2,000+ years ago and that is where he still is today! Christ as the center of our family life is as natural and as essential as oxygen in our bodies. The world would make the notion of the domestic church or a Catholic home with living faith to be either an oddity or an extraordinary feat. Yet, the simple truth is that without God as its center, family life cannot thrive. And without families at the heart of the church, she cannot thrive. Thriving and flourishing are exactly what Jesus wants for us. There is an abundance of blessings that God longs to give to families.

So each of us needs to pause and consider what new approaches we can use to make families in our communities aware that Christ is truly dwelling with them. There are multitudes of ways to do just that. For

example, catechists are partnering with parents using a variety of simple methods, such as inviting students’ families to participate in service opportunities and seasonal liturgical events. Parish leaders are doing everything from incorporating an adult formation component within their vacation bible school formats to completely changing their programs over to monthly family faith formation models. Parent Advisory Boards are created to brainstorm ideas about how to initiate campaigns to effectively communicate concepts such as the four components of the domestic church and parents as primary educators of the faith. The options are endless and there is no one right way to do it. But we must have the courage to do something and in love, take action to support and minister to our families. It is within their midst that we will find Jesus waiting for us to evangelize. |

Patrice Spirou is Assistant Director of Religious Education in the Office of Formation & Discipleship at the Archdiocese of Atlanta. She has more than twenty-five years of experience serving and teaching in Catholic schools and parishes. Patrice is a passionate advocate of family centered faith formation.

*Thus, as catechists we also
must go beyond
our own comfort zones
to model a way for Catholic families
to go beyond theirs.*

The Consecrated Life: A Gift to God, to the Church, and to the Whole World

Michael J. Martocchio



During the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis, who is himself a member of the Society of Jesus, urged all of the faithful to celebrate the consecrated life: “I ask the *whole Christian people* to be increasingly aware of the gift which is the presence of our many consecrated men and women, heirs of the great saints who have written the history of Christianity” (Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, III, 2).

FOSTERING AN OPENNESS TO GOD’S CALL

Often when we reflect on vocations to the consecrated life and holy orders, the question is: how do we get more people to pursue this beautiful way of life? The simple answer is that *we* do not; God does. I was recently speaking with a mother of several adult children. Of her five children, one is a priest, one is a religious sister, and one is a monk. The secret she shared on the matter was not coercing her children into these lifestyles, but rather fostering a spirituality of openness to God’s will in the home. This enabled her children to be attuned to God’s call. Each of the five children listened to God’s call for their lives. And because of their openness, three of them realized that this call was to either the consecrated life or priesthood. This attitude of vocational openness is one that we must work to foster in our homes and in our catechetical programs.

The main question of discernment of one’s lifelong vocation is the same question that we *all* need to ask ourselves, namely, “In what way is God calling me to give myself? St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body is a great resource for understanding the consecrated life. It is often thought of as a text about sex, but it is more accurate to call it a text about humanity. Simply put, John Paul II’s point is that the fact that we are embodied and sexual beings points to the fact that each and every human person is meant to be a gift. To be human is to be capable of giving oneself to another. With that in mind, John Paul II includes a somewhat lengthy section in the Theology of the Body about Continence for the Kingdom of Heaven, a main

feature of consecrated life. In this essential section of Theology of the Body, John Paul II emphasizes that those who live a life of celibacy are not denying or repressing their sexuality or their humanity. Rather, they are *giving themselves completely* to God, to the church, and to the world, showing what it means to be human in an exemplary way.

ENRICHING THE CHURCH

Even though the Year of Consecrated Life has ended, it is not too late to think of the many ways that the many charisms of the many orders of religious enrich the church. Some are educators, some are health care providers, some are contemplatives, and some are providers of love and support to the impoverished throughout the world — yet *all are gifts*. The joy and love that shines through in the interactions of these women and men reflect the joy of the gospel that Pope Francis wants us all to exude.

It is worth noting that for several months, we had a confluence of the Year of Consecrated Life with the Jubilee Year of Mercy. This is not mere coincidence. There are few places where we see the mercy of God shining more clearly than in the ministry of women and men who have given themselves to Christ, his church, and the world in consecrated life. Their many charisms enrich the church and strengthen her mission. They do so by shining the light of God’s love on those they encounter. Their example shows us the heart of the Christian life and gives us a glimpse of the kingdom of God. ■

Michael J. Martocchio, PhD, is the Director of Catechesis and Christian Initiation for the Diocese of Charleston.

*Often when we reflect
on vocations to the consecrated life
and holy orders, the question is:
how do we get more people
to pursue this beautiful way of life?
The simple answer
is that we do not; God does.*

Stages of Faith, Evangelization, and Mercy

Leisa Anslinger



“An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the cross-roads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy” (EG, 24).

In presenting parish leadership retreat days focused on forming evangelizing communities, I often invite participants to reflect on paragraph 24 of the Joy of the Gospel, including the segment quoted above. Since Pope Francis’s announcement of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, I have stopped at this point in the paragraph, noting what a wonderful opportunity this Jubilee Year will be for all of us, focusing on Christ’s mission of mercy, and how, as people created to bear the living image of God in our world, we are called to bring mercy to others.

I have been attentive to the response of participants, and have been stunned at the warmth of recognition of our need for mercy, and our call to share mercy with others. How might the Year of Mercy prompt spiritual renewal and reflection for the members of our faith communities? How is the community to call people to be “mercying?” How might we spread this call to mercy to people of all ages and stages of life and faith, evangelizing them, for lasting transformation?

A CALL OF MERCY FOR DIFFERENT STAGES OF FAITH

In *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, three stages of mature faith are described (45-63). I would like to add a fourth stage of faith of which we must be aware, noting the presence in our parishes of those who are pre-evangelized or pre-catechized — those who have not had a transformative encounter with Christ, or those who are in the early stages of the catechuminate. Let us think together about how we might reach people of each stage of faith with the message and call of mercy.

Those with fruitful faith — whose faith already calls them to bear the “fruit of justice and compassion through active outreach to those in need” (OHWB, 60) — will no doubt warmly welcome the Year of Mercy. Draw those who coordinate outreach to those most in need. Ask them to write brief testimonials for the parish newsletter or bulletin; invite them to facilitate small group sharing, or to offer a brief lay witness prior to or at the end of Mass. Invite them to share the impact on such service, on the recipients and on themselves as givers. This invitation acknowledges their mercy, and may prompt further reflection and spiritual growth.

Those whose faith is “clearly and explicitly rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus lived in the Christian community” (OHWB, 55) may benefit from a personal invitation to a special small group discussion of *Misericordiae Vultus*. This small group experience could include prayer, sharing of personal experiences of receiving and showing mercy, and a call to participation in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy throughout the year. Participants could be encouraged to invite family and friends to join them, and might share the impact of their experience in bulletin or newsletter articles later in the year.

Those with living “searching” faith, who “seek understanding” (OHWB, 51) may be drawn to a deeper relationship with Christ in this special year. Open facilitated conversations, invitations to service and spiritual mentoring or companionship could be of particular benefit to people in this stage of life and faith.

A TIME OF GRACE

The Year of Mercy could be an occasion of great grace for those who do not yet have a living relationship with God in Christ: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy...Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 2). How many of our brothers and sisters need to know that such hope awaits them, that God seeks them out like the father who runs to greet the prodigal son? Invite reflection through homilies, lay witnesses, and quiet conversations whenever the opportunity avails itself. Help active and engaged parishioners to learn to be attentive to the spiritual, emotional, and material needs of those around them, evangelizing through the sharing of God’s patient and enduring mercy.

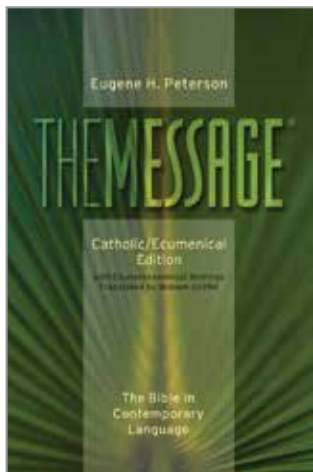
By its nature, adult faith formation is multifaceted. The Jubilee Year of Mercy provides a special lens through which all in our communities may be evangelized, drawn to Christ through “an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 3). ■

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

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

Compiled by Dan Pierson

For additional information and links to publishers, visit faithAlivebooks.com and link to the NCCL category.

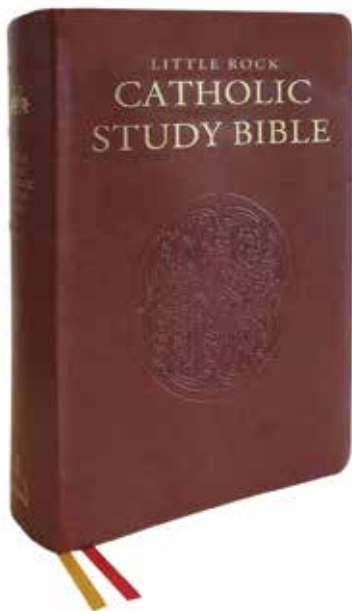


The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition: The Bible in Contemporary Language. ACTA Publications.

The CEB Study Bible with Apocrypha (Common English Bible Translation). Common English Bible.

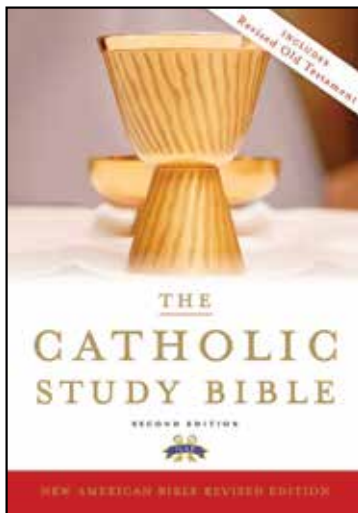


Little Rock Catholic Study Bible (New American Bible Revised Edition). Liturgical Press.



The Catholic Prayer Bible: Lectio Divina Edition (New Revised Standard Version). Paulist Press.

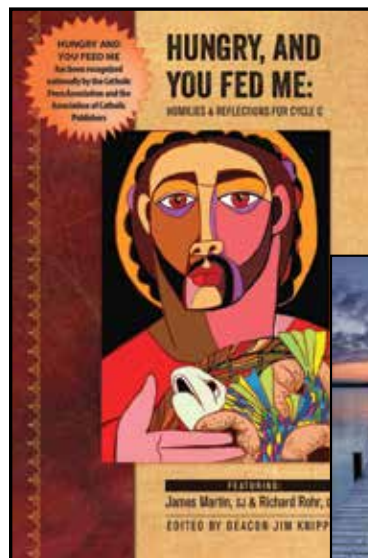
Catholic Study Bible: Second Edition (New American Bible Revised Edition). Oxford University Press.



This Transforming Word Cycle C: Commentary on the Readings for Sundays and Feast Days by Alice Camille. Includes full Scripture passages from *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*. ACTA Publications.



Bible Stories Revisited: Discover Your Story in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles by Macrina Scott, OSF. Tau Publishing.



Hungry and You Fed Me: Homilies and Reflections for Cycle C edited by Deacon Jim Knipper. Clear Faith Publishing.

Luke for Everyone by N.T. Wright. Westminster John Knox Press.



Who Do You Say I Am? The Catechist's Guide to Jesus in the Gospels by Steve Mueller. Faith Alive Books Publishing. |

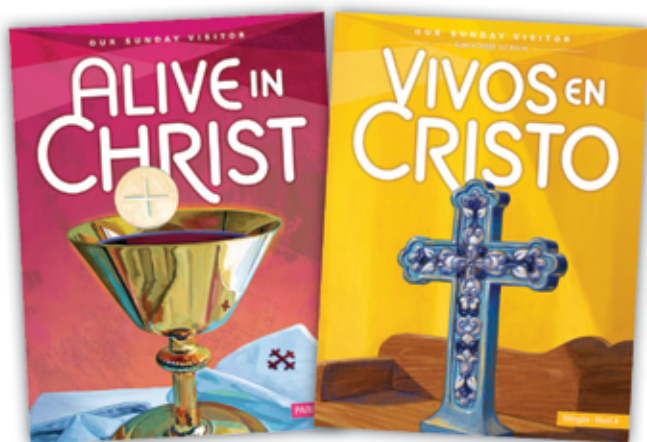
Dan Pierson has served as a diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of eCatechist.com, faithAlivebooks.com and Faith Alive Books Publishing. He is co-author with Susan Stark of Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Reflection. Tarcher/Penguin, 2015.

Children listening for God's voice.
Catechists excited to return year after year.
Parents making faith the heart of their homes.

You can make it happen. We made it easy!

Our Sunday Visitor combined the best educational methods and research available today with advice from catechetical leaders, pastors, catechists, and parents to create curricula and resources that will transform your parish faith formation program.

Parish • School • Bilingual • Home • eBook



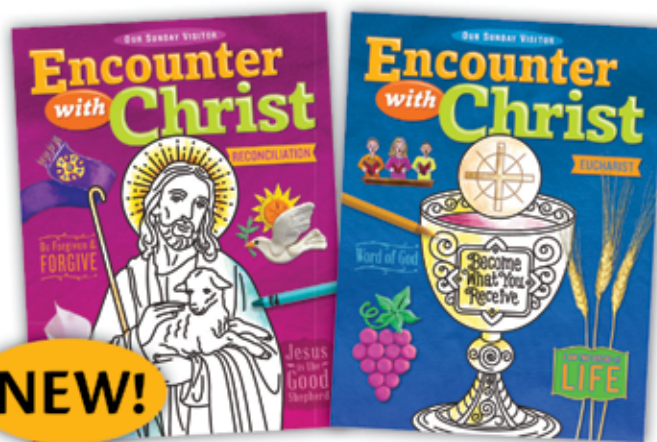
Aligned with the divine pedagogy—God's own way of teaching us, *Alive in Christ* Curriculum for grades 1-8 presents the faith in developmentally appropriate ways while equipping families with the tools necessary to communicate the truths of the faith to their children.

“We need resources such as these for the New Evangelization to be truly vibrant in the 21st century.”

—HOSFFMAN OSPINO, PH.D., Assistant Professor of Hispanic Ministry and Religious Education at Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry

Call 800.348.2440 ext. 2173 to order your **FREE** samples of *Alive in Christ* and *Encounter with Christ* or discuss a specific catechetical need with one of our product specialists.

Sacrament Preparation for
Reconciliation and Eucharist



Encounter with Christ for Reconciliation and Eucharist will transform the way you prepare children and their families to celebrate the Sacraments. Catechist- or parent-led sessions focus on the role of the Holy Spirit, and intentionally call families to active participation in the Sunday liturgy and parish life. **Available fall, 2016**

Our Sunday Visitor provides the best curriculum and faith formation tools on the market today for preschool through grade 8 with *Allelu!*, *Faith Fusion*, *Alive in Christ*, *Vivos en Cristo*, and *Encounter with Christ*.

OurSundayVisitor

