

Evangelizing the Catechized
The Indispensable Role of Kerygma in the New Evangelization
and the Development of a Kerygmatic Catechesis

Introduction

In parishes across the country, a casual observer encounters Catholics who are catechized to various degrees, but do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. These parishes are dictated by programs that fulfill immediate needs and ministries that perform Corporal Works of Mercy without a sense of mission. Increasingly, priests are simply providing sacramental maintenance and a few parishioners work to keep the parish functioning. The majority of parishioners remain anonymous; they go to Church and leave without becoming a family or community. Not surprisingly, a recent study found that only 48 percent of Catholics were absolutely certain that the God they believe in is a God with whom they could have a personal relationship (Weddell, 44). The Church fails to create dynamic disciples. This paper presents a model of catechesis that awakens the hearts of the Christian community and introduces Jesus as a person and the only solution to life's challenges.

Pope Francis calls for this renewed vision of catechesis in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment" (*EG*, 164). The pope argues that if we want to renew the Church, we need to proclaim the kerygma at every step of the catechetical process. Without the kerygma, we put "the cart before the horse" and teach doctrine before we introduce the community to the person of Jesus Christ.

It is this argument that forms the motivation for the model discussed in this paper. This model moves a parish from doing Church to being Church. It reclaims our story of a personal God who desires relationship. The model recognizes that knowing about God is different from having a relationship with Him. In other words, it is a catechetical model that is rooted in the kerygma, which is the essence and the foundation of the Gospel. The authentic proclamation of the kerygma changes minds and leads hearts into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A catechetical program that is kerygmatic in nature creates dynamic disciples whose hearts are burning with love for God. It creates people ready for mission.

This paper explores what it means to have an adult catechetical program that is rooted in the kerygma. First, I examine the definition of kerygma and kerygmatic catechesis, particularly in relation to the creation of a dynamic discipleship. Secondly, a process of proclaiming the kerygma is proposed based on the Systematic Integral New Evangelization (SINE) model of Fr. Alfonso Navarro. Finally, this kerygmatic model is reimagined for the entire parish to offer events that invite all people to encounter Jesus Christ that is beautiful. This paper uses examples from St. Catherine Catholic Church in Orange Park, Florida, the parish in which I am the Director of Faith Formation, to provide concrete ways that this model can be implemented.

The Definition of Kerygma

The kerygma is the foundational proclamation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is "the essential nucleus of the Gospel that awakens initial Christian faith" (Weddell, 66). The kerygma leads to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and initiates discipleship. Kerygma is an invitation to become aware of the love of the God who offers himself to us through Christ's death and resurrection. Those who receive the proclamation of the kerygma are invited to

experience a living encounter with the risen Lord. This encounter leads to transformation where God becomes the center of one's life, which is the desire of every human heart. This powerful encounter where one recognizes his relationship to God leads to true discipleship.

The kerygma is the door and foundation to Christian life and cannot be reduced to mere philosophical doctrine that is not evangelizing. Unlike catechesis and theology, the kerygma presents the person of Jesus Christ and the story of our salvation in a direct and simple way. While catechesis and theology are important for the life of the Church, they cannot substitute for the kerygma because God is not a doctrine, concept, or theory, but a person. Catechesis and theology are kerygmatic only when they present the person of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis encourages this kerygmatic catechesis when he states, "We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more 'solid' formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initiation proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma" (*EG*, 165). Catechesis cannot simply exist to impart knowledge for its own sake, but must serve to deepen a relationship with the Lord. When catechesis is kerygmatic, it enables to understand more fully the significance of the initial proclamation. When catechesis and theology become self-serving, they lose their evangelizing potential and become devoid of the life and joy of the Gospel. Therefore, kerygmatic catechesis leads individuals to a deepening of the experience of the Paschal Mystery in their own life.

It is rare for Catholics to hear this proclamation or experience a catechesis that is truly kerygmatic. Many Catholics do not know the basic facts of the Gospel or do not know how the different parts of the Gospel fit together into a cohesive whole. Often, they experience a catechesis that is memorization without application or that is experiential without connection to

Jesus Christ. A Catholic cannot become a dynamic disciple if he does not here the proclamation applied to daily life or is not introduced to the person of Christ. Evangelization does not occur without an experience of the living God.

Delivery is as essential to the proclamation of the kerygma as the message itself. When effective, the proclamation is delivered in such a way that people feel the contagious power of the Holy Spirit and recognize Jesus as the one who gives meaning to life. Therefore, the proclamation must be done with joyful testimony like the women who discover the empty tomb. It expresses God's saving love and is marked by liveliness, encouragement, and joy. The evangelizer fosters the openness of the hearer to the proclamation. The goal of the proclamation is to bring people to an encounter with Jesus. While personal witness illuminates the Paschal Mystery and makes it real, it is not a substitute to the Gospel. In the kerygmatic model, the Gospel is announced and proclaimed boldly and clearly with the goal of evangelizing the heart of the recipient.

St. Catherine developed an adult Kerygma Evangelization retreat that was first implemented in September 2015. The Kerygma retreat invites participants to deepen their faith, open their heart, and have a real and personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The kerygma is proclaimed with great spiritual power and brings about conversion and a strong decision of faith. The kerygma process seeks to transform the parish into a missionary parish: an evangelizing community. This proclamation is enthusiastic and seeks to lead participants to life changing and lasting conversion. The Kerygma process encourages participants to be captivated and to be totally immersed by the love of Christ and to be in touch with the person and presence of Jesus Christ, especially in the Eucharist. It invites participants to experience their faith in a direct and life-changing way. The retreat focuses on the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2 and the real

presence of Jesus with us in the sacraments. The retreat prepares participants for meaningful discipleship and a lifelong personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This discipleship is rooted in the shared experience of the Christian community.

Systematic Integral New Evangelization

The retreat is based on the Kerygmatic Evangelization Retreat designed by Fr. Alfonso Navarro in Mexico City in 1978. This retreat is the centerpiece of the Systemic Integral New Evangelization (SINE) model. “SINE is a basic, organic and holistic pastoral model which seeks to transform the parish.... [into] a missionary parish: an evangelizing community.”¹ Its advantages is that it stresses the fundamental nature of a parish and is intended for all parishioners, no matter their catechetical experience. The SINE model forms Small Christian Communities of those who participated in the kerygma retreat. Through these evangelized communities, the parish becomes a community of communities, which Pope Francis calls for in *Evangelii Gaudium* (28).

The retreat is divided into three blocks which correspond to the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. Similarly, each block has its own goal. The first block focuses on the initial proclamation of the love of God. It invites the participants to convert to God. This block includes reflections on the cross as God’s solution to the sin of the world and the need for conversion and a new life in Christ. It concludes with a penitential liturgy and the renewal of one’s baptismal promises. This liturgy invites the participant to recognize Jesus as Savior.

The second block proclaims the work of the Holy Spirit in the past, present, and in the future. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the participant is invited to commit to Christ as

¹ SINE Team, *What Does SINE Really Mean?*, 1.

Lord of their life. When the participants truly make Jesus the Lord of their life, all aspects of their life are entrusted to Him. This commitment leads to dynamic discipleship. The second block concludes with a liturgy of consecration to allow the participants to declare Jesus Lord of their life.

The third block provides testimony of the four essential elements of Christian life. The participants are invited to persevere in their faith by remaining close to prayer, the Christian community, the Word of God and catechesis, and the Eucharist. All of these elements are essential to the life of the individual Christian as well as the Christian community as evidenced in Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” These four pillars are described as essential in *Gravissimum Educationis* (4), the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (75), and the National Directory for Catechesis (29). This block invites the participant to commit to being involved in the community of believers, the Church. This block concludes with the Eucharistic celebration which invites the participants to be witnesses of the Risen Jesus.

Following the retreat, participants are invited to participate in a mystagogical experience for five weeks to unpack all that they experienced on the retreat. This post-evangelization process invites participants into a renewed appreciation of their Christian initiation, since the retreat’s blocks are built around the initiation sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. It leads them to the mysteries. As Pope Francis encourages, mystagogy inserts the kerygmatic experience “into a broader growth process and the integration of every dimension of the persons within a communal journey of hearing and response” (*EG*, 166). In many ways, the proclamation of the kerygma and the mystagogical initiation are two sides of the same coin. One cannot proclaim Jesus Christ completely without also inviting the hearer to a “progressive experience of

formation involving the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation” (ibid.). One who has been evangelized must experience the whole Christ, head and body.

After the mystagogical period, the evangelized form Small Christian Communities and begin a process of monthly kerygmatic catechesis. These gatherings take place in homes and focus on a particular aspect of the kerygma. Through the support of their Small Christian Community, participants are able to evangelize others by their actions. This purposefully mimics the early Church.

The early Church attracted people without complex evangelization efforts. Outsiders saw early Christians as a group of people who shared the teachings of Jesus with one another, prayed together, and helped one another. The way an early Christian behaved gave off a scent of love that attracted onlookers like a bees to a flower. The early Christians were dynamic disciples who flowered because of their familiarity with the kerygma. A modern church of dynamic disciples follows this same principle. It regains that same familiarity with the kerygma and embodies it through actions. To create dynamic disciples, the Church becomes the embodiment of the Gospel, because to be evangelized means to be made into the Gospel.

While St. Catherine is in the infancy stages of the SINE model, it already experienced tremendous conversions. Though most of our participants were previously catechized, few experienced evangelized prior to participating in the retreat. Through the Kerygma Evangelization Retreat, the number intentional disciples who care about their parish and one another increased. Since that first retreat, adult catechesis programs an average of ten people per program to over 300. We attribute this growth entirely to the successful implantation of the kerygma retreat and the efforts of the evangelized participants. Throughout our parish planning,

we continue to seek ways to be intentionally kerygmatic in our proclamation and this attracts a larger audience.

A Kerygmatic Model

Following the success of the Kerygma retreat, a renewed vision incorporates the kerygma into all aspects of the parish catechetical programs. The kerygmatic model does not change the material being taught, but establishes a Christocentric focus to the curriculum. The main adjustment to our current model is not what we do and say, but the how we say and do it. Catechists are strongly encouraged to participate in the Kerygma Retreat to inspire a deeper relationship with the Lord. Once the catechists are evangelized, they proclaim the Gospel with conviction. Catechists are no longer volunteers, but become joyful evangelizers who witness the Gospel to our students. Only a formed catechist is able to form others. Only a person who continues her own faith journey can encourage the growth of others in faith. Through a deeper experience with the kerygma, catechists are more able “to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5).

The General Directory for Catechesis directs the kerygmatic catechesis to have the following aspects: 1) God is not a distant being, but a loving Father; 2) Jesus offers us salvation and an invitation to participate in the life of the Trinity; 3) Jesus preaches a mission of repentance and forgiveness because the Cross of Christ is God’s solution to sin; 4) Jesus is Lord of all, who calls us to discipleship; 5) The Church is the beginning and foretaste of the Kingdom of God; and 6) humanity is called to transformation so as to enjoy eternal life in the Father’s house (cf. GDC, 102). All of these truths are the essential proclamation of the Gospel and is the root of all catechesis. Without this kerygmatic proclamation, catechesis is sterile, leaving hearts

not truly converted to the Lord. Only through this kerygmatic proclamation, true Christian initiation occurs. A missionary Church has these basic themes present throughout all catechesis.

Catechetical leaders reclaim their own personal discipleship through the proclamation of the Kerygma. Despite a Masters degree in theology, the first time that I heard the Kerygma proclaimed was on a Kerygma Evangelization retreat in Smyrna, GA. It was a powerful experience that personally changed me and changed the way that I proclaim the Gospel. Likewise, the authentic proclamation of the Kerygma changes the hearts of even the most active parishioners inspiring them to become disciples. My experience, and the experience of parishioners at St. Catherine lead me to conclude that burnout of catechetical leaders is avoided and spiritual growth is enabled through the reception of the kerygmatic proclamation.

While a retreat model may not work in all locations, the kerygma can be proclaimed in catechetical programs and catechist certification programs for those who are sharing the Gospel with others. St. Catherine is attempting to introduce multiple modalities in which the Kerygma is proclaimed in ways other than the full retreat model described in the previous section. For example, the parish welcomed a Broadway caliber musical entitled *The Cross and the Light* to proclaim the Kerygma using art and music.² This performance is the embodiment of *Evangelii Gaudium*, “Each particular Church should encourage the use of the arts in evangelization... drawing upon the wide variety of contemporary expressions so as to transmit the faith in a new ‘language of parables’” (EG, 167). St. Catherine’s Parish Mission also focused on the proclamation of the kerygma, so parishioners unable to attend a retreat understand the process and the necessity of its proclamation. These efforts set the tone for a new form of catechesis throughout the parish. The proclamation is kerygmatic in tone and flavor in adult formation

² For more information, visit www.crossandlight.com.

programs and avoids the presupposition that those gathered have already had a personal encounter with Christ. The intent of the kerygma is to present the Gospel message as living – ever fresh, ever new.

Conclusion

The kerygmatic model of catechesis awakens the hearts of the Christian community and introduces Jesus as a person and the only solution to life's challenges. The challenges of such a major shift are evident. The average parishioner is not familiar with the terminology and often mistake kerygma for charismatic. They see it as a fad rather than as the essential mission of the Church. Many priests do not know what the kerygma is, as many have not heard about the kerygma. There needs to be a promotion of the kerygma as described by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. If space allowed, further development of the relationship between kerygma and catechesis could be made throughout the catechetical documents since the Second Vatican Council.

If parishes throughout the country embrace kerygmatic catechesis, more people will become dynamic disciples. It will create a renewal in faith and an increase in evangelization. A person cannot evangelize if one has not already been evangelized. A person cannot proclaim the kerygma without becoming a disciple.

Works Cited

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- Weddell, Sherry A. *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2012. Print.

Annotated Bibliography

Congregation for the Clergy. *General Directory for Catechesis*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. Print.

The General Directory for Catechesis provides a contextualization of catechesis and the appropriation of the content of the faith. The section on the kerygma provides a summary of the essential proclamation. These six truths form a basis for kerygmatic proclamations that can be made in any catechetical model.

Pope Francis. "The Joy of the Gospel." Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014. Print.

The Joy of the Gospel is Pope Francis' first Apostolic Exhortation to give a renewed vision of evangelization and catechesis. Particularly of interest is the pope's development of a kerygmatic catechesis, in which he states the kerygma must be proclaimed at all levels of catechesis.

Pope John Paul II. "On Catechesis in Our Time." Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979. Print.

On Catechesis in Our Time provides a catechetical perspective from the late 1970s in response to a universal synod of bishops. In this document catechesis is seen as a component of evangelization. In this document, the term systematic catechesis serves as a way to describe the kerygma. Paragraph 21 of the document provides four characteristics of the kerygmatic proclamation.

SINE Team. "What Does SINE Really Mean?" Rockford, IL: SINE National Office, n.d.. Print.

This short brochure provides a summary of the SINE process and a description of Systematic Intergal New Evangelization, particularly how the Small Christian Communitiies relate with the whole parish.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005. Print.

The National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) is a response of the United States Bishops to the General Directory for Catechesis. This response reflects the many documents issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on catechesis that have been published on a regular basis. The National Directory includes a section that provides the fundamental teachings of the Church with guidelines for their application. The NDC avoids the use of the word kerygma, preferring the phrase missionary preaching.

Vandenakker, John Paul. *Small Christian Communities and the Parish*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994. Print.

This book provides a basic comparison of the various Small Christian Community programs that have developed throughout the country. The author offers the history of each particular model, its main characteristics, and its understanding of the Church. This book can assist a parish in deciding which Small Christian Community model to implement.

Weddell, Sherry A. *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*.
Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2012. Print.

Forming Intentional Disciples' thesis is that the Church has not prepared its members properly for dynamic discipleship. The book contains many statistics regarding the present landscape of discipleship in the Church and proposes a kerygmatic model to create disciples. The book contains a chapter which proclaims the kerygma in nine simple acts, as well as practical advice for parishes interested in kerygmatic catechesis.

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