

To the Heart
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“I want a mess. I want to see the Church get closer to the people. I want to get rid of clericalism, the mundane, this closing ourselves off within ourselves, in our parishes, schools, or structures. We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel. It is not enough simply to open the door in welcome, but we must go our through that door to seek and meet the people! Let us courageously look to pastoral needs, beginning on the outskirts, with those who are farthest away. Go and look for them in the nooks and crannies of the streets. “ - Pope Francis in his address at World Youth Day in 2013

Pope Francis wants a mess. He urges us to get out of our parishes and take the Gospel to the streets. While this call to evangelization has rung out from the Church throughout the centuries, it cuts especially to the heart now. This is because, “more Americans today than in the past are not remaining in the faith traditions in which they were raised; are switching religious affiliations . . . are losing their religious faith” (Smith 267-268); furthermore, 16.1% of American adults are unaffiliated with a religion and 24% of 18- to 29-year-olds are unaffiliated as well (Weddell 20). The call is not new, but the current climate makes it all the more urgent. COR at 220 East is an initiative that came about as a renewed vision of evangelization inspired by Pope Francis’ words to get out of our parishes and seek and meet the people. COR is a center for evangelization designed to strengthen parishioners in intentional discipleship, provide a safe environment for inactive parishioners to be reintroduced into the faith community, and reach out to the rest of the community whose hearts are longing for the good news of Jesus Christ.

COR at 220 East is a downtown storefront building located in the heart of Waterloo, Iowa. There are four Catholic parishes in Waterloo that have a longstanding tradition of collaboration. This sharing of resources began in the 1980s with a combined high school religious education program, continued with consolidation of several

programs, creation of new staff positions including a metro Youth Minister and Director of Adult Faith Formation, and most recently a total restructuring of all faith formation staff. With this new staffing model created in 2014, Waterloo seriously considered the guidance from the Church that adult faith formation is the “principal form of catechesis” (John Paul II 43), and created a new fulltime position for Young Adult Ministry in addition to the already established full time Director of Adult Faith Formation. This faith formation team serving four parishes and the two positions dedicated to adult faith formation set the stage for COR.

The concept of COR has evolved. It was originally called 220 East and I stumbled upon it when I, the new young adult minister, was looking for a potential venue to host monthly movie nights for young adults. At the time, the building was in transition; therefore, the cost per event was out of the budget range. The faith formation team decided to rent the building, for a trial period, in order to lay claim on the space and discern whether it could be a long-term rental space to use for young adult programs. The spring of 2015 held much prayer, discernment, and discussion, and the Waterloo Parishes made a commitment to rent the space long-term. The mission of 220 East evolved from being a space for young adult programs to a center for outreach and evangelization for all.

That spring, the faith formation leaders in the Archdiocese of Dubuque were reading the book, *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry Weddell. Weddell identifies conversion as a dynamic process in which every person experiences the Holy Spirit working and moving in their lives even if they are not yet an intentional disciple of Jesus

Christ. This seemingly obvious definition was eye opening, especially when applied to young adult programs.

A defining characteristic of young adulthood is a lack of trust in the institution. This can be seen especially in the dramatic drop in Mass attendance over the last four decades (Smith 265). The connection between young adult ministry and evangelization became all the more clear. Few adults, especially young adults, are intentional disciples; however, many of our programs are geared toward those that are. This is the primary reason for moving 220 East from being a place to do young adult programs to a center for evangelization. It is directed to those that are not yet intentional disciples. The exodus of young adults from the church expresses this great need to build and rebuild trust and foster spiritual curiosity and openness.

A new logo and name was developed: COR at 220 East. COR is Latin for “heart” and is an acronym for the action words, “Come, Observe, Reconnect.” This is descriptive of the conversion process that we hope each person that walks through the door will experience. The logo depicts two hands forming a heart. The logo represents the hands of Jesus and his mystical body, the Church, reaching out and touching the heart of each person. It can also be interpreted as being every individual's hands, as they seek to grasp the desires of their own hearts. Everything at COR strives to point to Christ offering his heart, and offering guidance, when one is ready to offer their heart to him in return.

Sherry Weddell identifies initial trust as the first threshold of conversion. Weddell defines this as “a person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move

closer to God” (Weddell 129). The realization was profound. No matter how great the young adult programs, how sleek the website, or how well we market, if someone does not trust the Church, chances are slim that they will step onto church grounds and come to programs. This is why Pope Francis urges us to get out of our parishes and offices. We need to build trust in an environment that is non-threatening and comfortable to the person and meets them where they are in the process of conversion. COR seeks to do this.

A visitor to COR expressed the unique environment of COR well, “You would never guess when you walk through the front door what is waiting for you on the other side.” COR’s surprises include radical hospitality, complimentary tea and refreshments, access to alcoves for small group discussions, personal reflection, and spiritual reading. The laid-back environment leaves room for the Holy Spirit to work. COR will also be an event venue for meetings, fundraisers, art shows, music concerts, poetry readings, etc. Beauty through art and music is valued as a means to open the heart of those in the broader community. COR will also be open and participating, as much as possible, in downtown events and festivals. COR recently was open for people to stop in and enjoy Burmese delicacies from our refugee community, listen to local musicians, play board games, and just hang out during an event that the city hosted called Taste of Waterloo. Taste of Waterloo invited ticket holders to go downtown to participating restaurants to sample local specialties, but it provided a great opportunity for evangelization. Community events are the first prong of how COR will evangelize.

The second prong is to foster spiritual curiosity and openness through faith formation programming. We want to reach out to those that are skeptical of religion or

institutions. We want to welcome those that are seeking answers to their questions; furthermore, we want to be present for those that are looking for faith formation programming that is geared to them. At COR this takes the form of listening sessions, open question and answer forums, monthly discussion nights, and street evangelization initiatives.

Each event at COR is staffed with trained evangelization ministers that can engage in conversation with the attendees. The evangelist will be looking to see if the person has initial trust and if not, discern how to build that bridge. It might happen in that conversation, it might not. The evangelist is constantly called to let go of their agenda to push people through the conversion process and allow the Holy Spirit to work and move. If the evangelization minister discerns spiritual curiosity, the second threshold of conversion, they will consider inviting the person to one of the faith formation programs at COR. A person is spiritually curious when they are at a point when they find themselves “intrigued by or desiring to know more about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some aspect of the Christian faith...Curiosity is still essentially passive, but it is more than mere trust” (Weddell 129). Fostering curiosity and spiritual openness is the primary goal of the faith formation programs held at COR. Spiritual openness is the third threshold of conversion. This is when a person “acknowledges to himself or herself and to God that he or she is open to the possibility of personal and spiritual change” (Weddell 130). When someone is spiritually open, they are on the cusp of being ready to be introduced or reintroduced to parish life and community.

One critical development in COR was discovering how it fits into the RCIA process. The faith formation events at COR function as an ongoing inquiry process. The

RCIA states that the period of evangelization and pre-catechumenate is “a time of no fixed duration or structure, for inquiry and introduction to Gospel values, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith” (International 14). In the past the well-intentioned Waterloo parishes have skipped the inquiry process almost entirely, calling part of the catechumenate “inquiry.” This took the shape of formal catechetical sessions in the parish basements – something of which someone who lacks trust or any spiritual curiosity would never be drawn to. To summarize, COR will seek to build trust through community events. Once this trust has been built or if it exists already, the evangelization minister will discern how to start fostering spiritual curiosity. With inquirers, as they begin to be more spiritually open, the proclamation of the Gospel and invitation to conversion to Jesus Christ will become the focus. Once they are spiritually seeking, they are ready for Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

Spiritual seeking and intentional discipleship are the fourth and fifth thresholds as identified by Weddell. Spiritual seeking is the point in which “the person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know the God who is calling him or her. . . . At this stage, the seeker is engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he or she can commit to Christ in his Church” (Weddell 130). Once someone is at a point of spiritual seeking, the focus will shift away from COR and more into the life of the parish.

COR is dependent on the intentional disciples in our parishes. Intentional discipleship, the fifth threshold of conversion, involves those that have decided to ““drop one’s nets” to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder one’s life accordingly” (Weddell 130). Our

intentional disciples are those that accompany their friends and family members to events at COR. They are those that will be the evangelization ministers, living out COR's mission to bring the Church and the community in closer contact with each other. They will be willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit in discerning how to best build trust, foster curiosity, proclaim the Good News, and lead people to the heart of Christ and the Church. In order to do this, our intentional disciples will be guided by Pope Francis to "have the courage to strike out along the new paths that God's newness sets before us" and to resist being "barricaded in transient structures that have lost their capacity for openness to what is new." (Francis, Solemnity of Pentecost 47).

Evangelization is a mess and it can be incredibly challenging. It does not fit into neat and tidy compartments, but rather is a dynamic process in which the Good News of Jesus Christ is shared and integrated into the unique context of every person's life. Before the initial proclamation of the Gospel, each individual's story must be heard and listened to. In this listening and trust-building phase, spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs inevitably come to the surface. *Pre-evangelization* builds on these basic human needs, and shows how these needs include a desire for God (United 49). We want to be prepared to meet the needs of every person as best as we can at COR.

COR is not equipped, or designed, to be a social outreach center. It is primarily a center for evangelization; however, the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching have played a large role in developing the mission, values, and goals of COR. COR seeks to affirm the *dignity of the individual* as the beloved child of God. Many events held at COR are open to all but targeted to people that are marginalized. Examples include community meals on Friday evenings, programs for Burmese refugees,

discussion sessions for divorced Catholics, and listening sessions for Gay & Lesbian and inactive Catholics etc. We have also worked loosely with Catholic Charities in providing community service opportunities. One of our core values is community presence. In offering hospitality and programs during community events such as Irish Fest, Downtown Trick-or-Treating, Winter Wonderloo etc., we are taking the *call to family, community, and participation* seriously through a ministry of presence. We strengthening community by collaborating with local businesses and restaurants to provide food and plan events.

In the few short months of being open and offering minimal programming thus far, we have already been serving an average of fifty people a week in different capacities. Our programs bring out vulnerability as we seek to get to know every person's story and respond with compassion to their questions and concerns. We have made many referrals to social ministries in the community taking a preferential *option for the poor and vulnerable*. The Catholic social tradition also places critical emphasis on our duty to *care for God's creation*. COR strives to be as environmentally-friendly as possible through use of environmentally-friendly cleaning products, reduction of paper products completely or as much as possible and purchasing local and organic food for events.

Evangelization is not divorced from the social and catechetical ministry of the church. A goal of COR is to adequately train our evangelization ministers due to the various complexities of the position coupled with the unique situation of every individual. The first component of this training focuses on the evangelist's personal discipleship. This will begin with reflecting on their personal faith story. Next they will explore the *kerygma*, or "the great story of Jesus," (Weddell 201) the concise and simple

explanation of Jesus as Savior of the world. This “initial announcement of the Gospel” (United 49) introduces people to Jesus and lays a foundation for a personal relationship with him. After this exploration, the evangelist will discover how to connect their personal faith story with the great story of Jesus. They will then work on reducing their story into a one-paragraph elevator speech that they can use as an initial proclamation when the door opens with those they meet.

The second component of training evangelists will focus on how to form others in discipleship. This component will explore the thresholds of conversion from *Forming Intentional Disciples*. This will be used as a tool for the evangelist to determine where each person is at in their faith journey and what their needs might be. The training will conclude with practical tips on how to begin conversations with random people in a crowd at one of the events at COR, how to build trust, when to give an initial proclamation of the Gospel, and the appropriate times to invite into further discussion and relationship.

COR at 220 East is a place to intentionally encounter people that are not in the pews of our parishes on Sundays. COR will honor the slow process of conversion, that is unique to each individual, through empowering our intentional disciples to build bridges of initial trust through community events; furthermore it will foster spiritual curiosity and openness through faith formation programming. An important variable to consider in planning a project like this is the percentage of salaries and parish budgets that can be allocated towards the overwhelming number of parishioners that are not in our pews. The question must then be asked, how does that percentage compare to the percentage that is dedicated to regular Mass attendees?

Conversion is hard to measure and should not be agenda-driven. There is no greater turn-off than an agenda driven form of evangelization, because it comes off as insincere. Often the fruits of the labor of the evangelist cannot be perceived immediately, so how can we truly know that what we are dedicating our time and effort to is resulting in success? It depends upon what a parish defines success as. This is why it can be a messy process that takes a parish outside of its comfort zone. It can at times feel that the parish is leaving the flock to retrieve one stray sheep, but did not the father rejoice at the return of his prodigle son? What are metrics that adequately measure conversion yet ultimately surrender to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit?

If we do not focus on evangelization, on taking the Gospel to the nooks and crannies of the streets, we risk becoming a church that is closed in on itself. Pope Francis states, “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). Evangelization is dirty work. It is trusting in the slow work of God. “God is always waiting for us; he never grows tired...God responds to our weakness by his patience and this is a reason for our confidence, our hope. It is like a dialogue between our weakness and the patience of God; it is a dialogue, that if we have it, will grant us hope” (Francis, *Possession of Chair*, 5). The COR evangelist is called to reflect this patience and mercy of God in every encounter.

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Annotated Bibliography

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, and Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Study ed. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988. Print.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults Study Edition is a guide for faith formation leaders explaining the preparation process and rites for those who are interested in entering into a personal relationship with Christ and his Church. The book outlines the four periods or phases that are designed to form believers into the Catholic habit of prayer with Scripture and liturgy. The transitional rites that punctuate the four periods are laid out in full detail with sections at the end of the manual for combined rites and special circumstances. The study manual is a thorough guide and though can be complex and challenging to coordinate, it is a beautiful and transformational experience for candidates and catechumens if followed and done well.

John Paul II. *Catechesi Tradendae*. *The Vatican*. The Holy See, 1979. 13 March 2016.

Pope John Paul II in this apostolic exhortation picks up where his predecessor, Pope Paul VI left off in his vision for catechesis and work with the synod of bishops in 1977. John Paul II situates our catechetical tradition within its Christological roots of catechesis and the divine pedagogy of Jesus.

John Paul reminds us, that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit that is guiding all catechetical ministry.

Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*. *The Vatican*. The Holy See, 2013. 13 March 2016.

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* situates evangelization within the immense joy that comes with a personal encounter with Jesus Christ that simply cannot be contained within ourselves and must be shared. Pope Francis calls out pastoral ministers to remain strong in the many challenges that they face such as acedia, spiritual worldliness, gossip, etc. This is possible if we receive the gift that Jesus has given us in the Holy Spirit and through his mother Mary. Mary is the star of the new evangelization and such a model for us because constantly contemplates the mystery of God's love and remains open to the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction in her life. She is a powerful intercessor for all evangelists.

Francis. "Homily for the Mass for the Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome."

The Church of Mercy. Pope Francis. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014. 3-6. Print.

This homily is focused on two main themes: God's patience and our courage to turn to him in our failings over and over again. Pope Francis breaks open three Scripture passages in which the patience of God is evident. This patience is critical in evangelization ministry as well. The evangelist reflects God's patience as they walk with people in their conversion journeys, slowly planting and watering seeds, relying on the Lord to make them grow, in his own time and own ways.

Francis. "Homily on the Solemnity of Pentecost." The Church of Mercy. Pope Francis.

Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014. 46-49. Print.

In his homily on Pentecost, Pope Francis identifies three ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives. *Newness, harmony, and mission.* He challenges us as believers to remain open to the working of the Holy Spirit in our life. Our human

tendency is self-preservation, wanting to close ourselves off to that which makes us uncomfortable. This homily offers excellent advice to the evangelist at COR at 220 East. Whenever the evangelist feels frustrated or tired or burnt out, a review of this homily will be helpful to keep in mind that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that is opening the evangelist up for mission, empowering them to build harmony amidst great diversity.

Smith, Christian, and Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen. *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Print.

Young Catholic America frames the religious and spiritual lives of emerging young adults. This book does a fabulous job at looking at this question in terms of the historical context over the last seven decades recognizing that how our American teenagers and young adults are today in the Catholic Church is a direct result of what was happening in the Church and in family life 50 years ago. The authors claim that parents are the most important influence in whether their children will continue to practice the faith as adults. Young Catholic America offers powerful data that can be both jarring and exciting as we continue to address the challenges in the Church.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *National Directory for Catechesis*.

Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005. Print.

It is imperative that every professional in catechetical ministry read the National Directory of Catechesis. It is a beautiful and inspiring vision of the renewal of catechesis in the United States within the context of evangelization and

inculturation, two of the most critical concepts to form catechetical leaders in. The National Directory situates catechesis and evangelization within the U.S. cultural climate and gives practical tips for catechizing in diverse settings, forming catechists, and coordinating catechetical ministry and resources.

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

Forming Intentional Disciples is one of the most enlightening books for ministers of this decade. It begins with setting the stage with statistics indicating the reality of religious identity in the American Catholic Church. It identifies the ‘nones’ that do not identify with any religion. Weddell recognizes that a large part of the crisis is that Catholics at large do not believe that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is possible. She identifies five thresholds of conversion to use as a tool to help understand where one is with their relationship with Jesus and the Church. Weddell demonstrates that conversion can be a slow process but is nevertheless, something we should expect, because we don’t give God who can and does work in dramatic ways enough credit. Weddell inspires all to know the Great Story of Jesus, be able to confidently proclaim it at the right time, and discover one’s own story as part of The Story.

About the Author

Ellen Voegele is the Associate Director of Young Adult Ministry for the Waterloo Catholic Parishes in Waterloo, Iowa. She earned a Bachelor's in Religious Education and a Bachelor's in Music Performance from Marian University in 2008 before pursuing a Master of Arts in Theology with the Echo Faith Formation Leadership Program at University of Notre Dame. Ellen worked at Blessed Trinity Catholic Church as the Director of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry in St. Petersburg, Florida for four years, before moving to Waterloo. She began working at St. Edward Catholic Church as Director of Faith Formation in 2012. Two years later the Waterloo Catholic Parishes restructured parish faith formation leadership into one team to serve all four parishes and she transitioned into working in young adult ministry full time. Ellen began from square one with determination to not fall into the comfortable box of producing self-dependent programs for the select few engaged young adult Catholics. She recognized the need to empower intentional disciples to lead ministry. From this, she developed a vision of young adult ministry within the overarching umbrella of evangelization. She piloted the COR initiative in Waterloo and has presented at University of Notre Dame on Evangelization and Young Adult Ministry.