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# Continuing the Journey

D E N I S E U T T E R

I left NCCL's annual conference overwhelmed, excited, tired, and energized all at the same time. I left grateful for the inspiration, lifted up by the worship and praise offered by our community, encouraged and comforted by the stories of my peers in ministry, and challenged by the tasks that lie ahead. I am not exaggerating when I say the journey through *encounter*, *accompaniment*, and *proclamation* at this conference was transformative. This method of creating an intentionally themed three-day journey (with a fourth day of sending), which NCCL planning committees have used for the last couple of years, models what I believe most of us hope we provide to the people in our ministry settings: a type of pilgrimage, walking together toward Christ, deeply entering a personal and communal experience of our faith and our Lord. If you have not attended the annual conference in the last couple of years, you should consider traveling to beautiful Orange County in California next May 19–23. If you did attend this year, NCCL would love to hear your stories: What moved you? What personal and professional affirmations, challenges, or encounters did you experience?

Over the next few issues of *Catechetical Leader* I'll explore the conference themes through the speakers, workshops, forums, and experiences, starting here with the first day's theme, Encounter. Through multiple options of on- and off-site experiences, attendees had the opportunity "to be immersed in the peripheries of the Archdiocese of Chicago, encountering Christ in meaningful ways to transform our posture throughout the remaining professional development experiences." There was much discussion of this approach; in the end every person I spoke to was moved by the experience.

I participated in the Pilsen community experience: The Untold Stories of Diversity in Community. Having spent most of my ministry years in communities that lack diversity, I wanted to step outside that lens. I wanted to experience a city parish that offers outreach to those touched personally by the immigration issues happening in our country today. We visited a parish, a tortilla company, and the National Museum of Mexican Art. I was impressed by the expressions of suffering, growth, faith, and new life told through images. I was moved by the perspective regarding gentrification shared through the eyes of children, through young people who have only known this community as home, as their experience of "Little Mexico." It was a side of the issue I had never thought about, let alone seen up close.

## Encounter demands listening and dialogue.

Returning from the experience, I spoke with others who had attended encounter moments with St. Paul Street Evangelization (learning how to have a two-minute conversation about Jesus with strangers on the street), Brothers and Sisters of Love (working with victims of gang violence), and Faith and Fellowship (offering a place of belonging to those suffering with mental illness). All participants felt their experiences had opened them up in unexpected ways. Listening to the stories of the people we encountered moved us beyond our own preoccupations and agendas for the conference. This was the purpose: to allow ourselves to be opened up by the stories. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says, "Listening ... is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur" (171).

Encounter demands listening and dialogue. Our executive board slate ran on a vision influenced by the premise that we are called to encounter. We promised a posture of listening, of being open to your vision for this organization, of welcoming, even seeking, a diversity of voices: from a variety of ages and stages of life, of ministry settings, of ethnic and cultural influences, and of abilities. Listening is vital to this organization because collaboration is vital to this organization. As the new president of NCCL, I serve you, and the board serves you, and we again promise to hold that listening posture.

I was challenged this year by Bishop Joseph Perry's words as he spoke of choosing challenge over comfort, from the opening Mass through the commissioning of our new executive board. We need companions on that journey. Author David Benner says ours is a very personal faith, but it was never meant to be private; we were never meant to make it alone. We need community, and I think that's one of the great gifts of NCCL. 

# NCCL: Engaging Members through Storytelling

MARGARET MATIJASEVIC

The 2018 NCCL Annual Conference, Walk with Christ, was modeled on a journey. Each day focused on the steps of evangelization: Encounter, Accompany, Proclaim, and Go Out With Joy! So much occurred in our time together that I would like to unpack the themes over a series of articles in *Catechetical Leader*.

The first day of the conference centered on the theme of Encounter. Attendees explored various communities in Chicago and had an experience of prayer and encounter with Jesus Christ that altered expectations. I attended the Refugee/Migrant experience sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. At this onsite gathering, to challenge our placement in this world, we were encouraged to examine our understanding of movement and the often painful trials migrants endure.


Elias, a Syrian refugee who left behind loved ones to flee persecution, war, violence, and corruption, related the realities of fleeing one's homeland and shared how technology is the modern bridge for families to stay a unit. Migrants seeking the American dream for their families told us how that dream has been passed on to later generations through the study of law and through action in advocacy groups who seek to assist others in retelling their family stories. I prayed amongst a group of strangers who instantly became family through an interactive experience of the refugee's journey that bonded us, challenged us, and caused us to ache as we left memories, personal items, and loved ones behind.

Suddenly I found myself immersed in my own story — recalling my dad's flight from communism and corruption and his experience living in a refugee camp and working in a Coca-Cola factory in Italy to gain a life of dignity for his family back home. I prayed in gratitude for the guidance he received in order to make difficult decisions that often meant loss and for the assistance Catholic Relief Services provided him. The influence of that caring community fostered my dad's innate desire to give all he had gained because he had been loved by strangers. My father was later sponsored by his aunt, and the Croatian Catholic Church, to come to Los Angeles. He worked hard and sponsored many others in his family, including his brothers, their wives, and their children, all while providing food and shelter for them and his own wife and children.

As I listened to Elias's story of being rejected from renting a room because of his immigration status, I remembered the

various people my dad offered shelter to. Because he based his life on caring for immigrants, I learned how beautiful the human spirit is. I experienced my family's ability to preserve, in faith and love, our story and their ongoing desire to not hoard that abundance of grace but to share as deeply as they could out of it.

This was just one of many deeply moving moments for me at NCCL, and I would be remiss if I did not juxtapose that alongside the growth and movement of our members. As I pondered my father's story as a refugee, his love and care for others, and its direct impact on my life, I saw all around me catechetical leaders devoting their lives to the betterment of the human journey for those they encounter. I saw a sincere desire for NCCL members to grow deeply into that vocational call, alongside their professional colleagues, coming back from their encounter experiences alive, filled with joy, gratitude, sorrow, and struggle — embracing the whole journey to better understand *how we do what we do*: how we catechize and share the gospel. Something beautiful was in the sacredness of these encounters — *were our hearts not burning?*

As we came back together that first evening, we heard Chicago priest and social activist Father Michael Pfleger preach. He proclaimed with conviction the essence of what it means to be present to Christ in the world. That kind of presence challenges us to look at our structures, commitments, tendencies, and shortcomings, but it also invites us to embrace the truth that each catechetical leader knows: the potential of God's love at work in the world, should we dare to accept it — and share it. 

## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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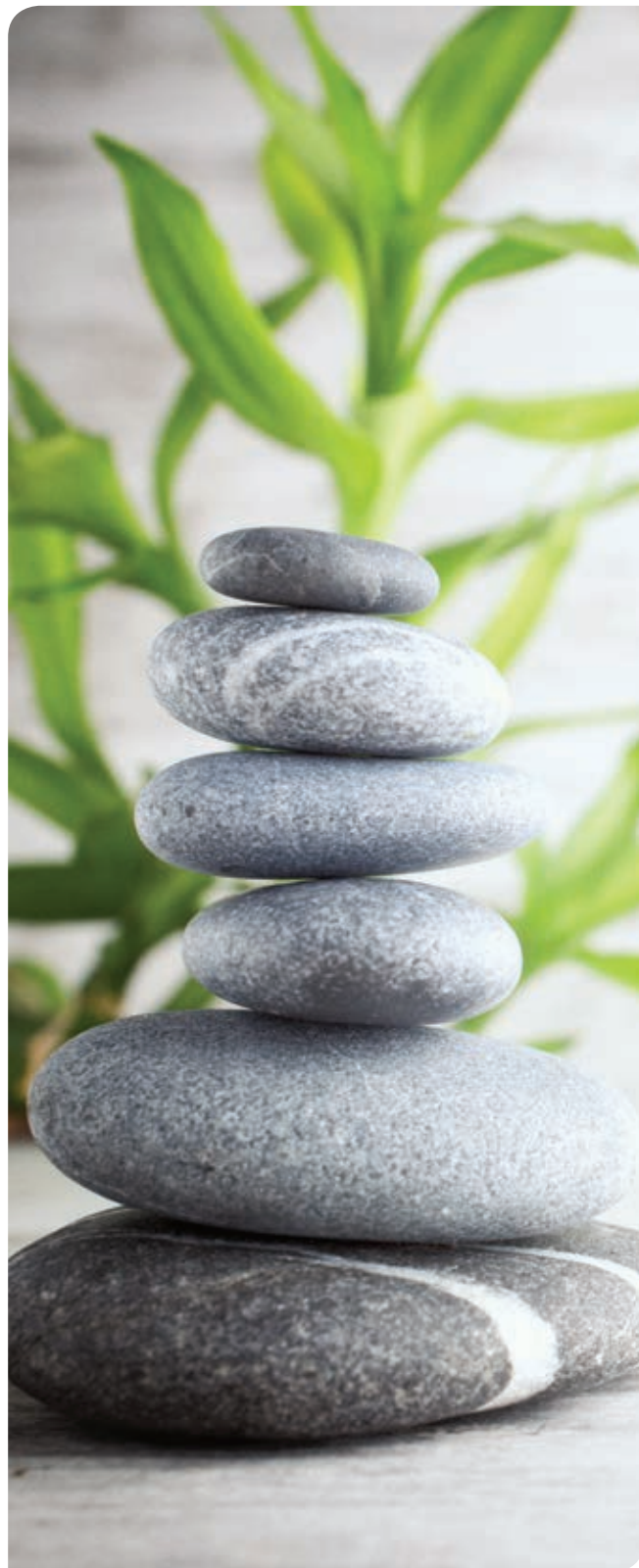
# We Need Witnesses: Forming Young People and Adults through Stories of Grace

LEONARD J. DELORENZO

The light in my parish shifted all at once. The church space was still uninspiring architecturally, scantily adorned artistically, and mostly hollow in general ambiance. It was the same space that really has only one thing going for it: its barren spaciousness makes it easy to see both the altar and everyone else at Mass. Just like most other parishes, though, being able to see each other is not the same as knowing each other, which is what made this night different. We were gathered together for a parish mission in the same pews in the same space, except now several members of our parish community were sharing stories of grace from their own lives. We were seeing each other in a different light.

From among the very same people whom we saw week in and week out, one talked about his ongoing recovery from alcoholism and testified to the many ways in which God's grace has powered that journey. Another shared the story of his and his family's trials after he was diagnosed with cancer, when everything became more meaningful, including the laughs they shared. Yet another parishioner, who always appeared to be a model of joy and confidence, opened up about her lifelong struggle with low self-esteem, from adolescence right through motherhood. I remember sitting in my usual pew and seeing the whole place in a way I hadn't seen it before. Gathered around the altar where Christ is made present, my fellow parishioners allowed themselves to be seen and known in Christ's merciful light.

We need more of this sort of thing in the church. We need witnesses who allow us to see the light of Christ shining through their lives. Stories of grace turn disciples into witnesses. For those of us who see each other every week in our parishes, sharing our stories of grace leads us to recognize that the Lord is far more beautiful, far more personal, and far more particular than we often suspect. He works in and through our lives, in good times and in bad, but typically we do not know how to bear witness to his work. And learning how to recognize the personal presence of God in our lives is more than a project of faith enrichment for individual disciples; indeed, it bears upon the future health and vitality of the church in the United States.



## Between those who leave the church and those who stay

It is not surprising that the biggest difference between those young adults who identify as Catholics and those who identify as former Catholics is whether they believe in God (88 percent to 57 percent, with 24 percent of former Catholics “unsure” about God’s existence\*). But two things are surprising. First, among those former Catholics who are between the ages of 23 and 28, the majority of them still do believe in God (again, close to 60 percent, with only 19 percent saying they do not believe in God). This leads to the second surprising fact: the real line separating practicing and former Catholics isn’t belief in God per se, but who they believe God to be. Nearly 59 percent of those who still identify as Catholic say that “God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today,” while only 33 percent of former Catholics agree. What matters most is not whether there is a God “out there somewhere” but whether God draws near and is personally present. In other words, Jesus’s question to his disciples is the key question: “Who do you say that I am?” If he is God drawn near — the Word made flesh — then that makes all the difference. If not, then that makes all the difference too.

That God has drawn near throughout salvation history and finally in Jesus Christ is of course the core of the Christian proclamation. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension form the definitive point about the question of God’s presence in the world, but as we know from those two disciples on their way to Emmaus, Jesus’s drawing near does not guarantee recognition. Instead, those unformed disciples must be transformed through his work on them, leading them to become his witnesses who see and proclaim. The difference for those whose lives testify to Jesus as God-with-us often comes down to the gift of seeing him as he is and proclaiming “how he [has been] made known them” (Lk 24:35, NAB).

A distant and uninvolved god is the same as no god at all. What matters is the God who hastens toward us in mercy, who shares everything with us, whose presence is light itself, and in whom we live and move and have our being.

### Storytelling as remedy for loneliness

The regular practice of sharing stories of grace is a targeted re-

sponse to the prevalent lack of belief in “God as a personal being involved in the lives of people today.” These stories are testimonies to more than the existence of God; these stories testify to who God is. Moreover, the commitment to incorporating stories of grace into faith formation efforts for teenagers, young adults, and mature adults contributes to a stable environment where testimonies to the action of grace shape how disciples learn to see themselves, each other, and the world around them. These stories counter the prevalent sense of the absence of God while also giving us a way to draw close to one another.

Loneliness is the most serious hidden ailment in modern life. By now, it almost goes without saying that the more we are connected technologically and commercially, the less we know each other. As social media delivers the curated summaries of each individual life — often manicured to please and elicit envy — the incentive to patiently listen to one another diminishes. We know so many things about each other without really knowing each other well. On the flip side, we say so much without going through the hard work of honestly sharing ourselves through what we say and how we say it. As the capacity to share ourselves with each other wanes, our gatherings in both virtual and actual space become more the coincidence of mutual loneliness than of authentic community. God, it seems, is absent from us and, in like fashion, we drift away from one another. The good news within the bad, though, is that the desire for community and for a sense of belonging endures even when the means for fulfilling these desires are misdirected or faulty. As balm for the wound of loneliness, the arduous and liberating practice of sharing and receiving stories of grace teaches us, little by little, how to become fully human together.

Better than my own words, a story of grace will show how these stories heal loneliness, revealing God’s abiding presence and drawing the one who feels cut off closer to others. Geoff is a young adult with whom I worked to craft a story of grace. What follows is part of his story.

### The casings of the heart: A story of grace

As if being labeled a “good kid” wasn’t pressure enough, Geoff was labeled the “good Catholic boy,” bringing the expectations for moral flawlessness to a whole new level. In many respects, his behav-

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\* Nicolette Manglos-Weber and Christian Smith, *Understanding Former Young Catholics: Findings from a National Study of American Emerging Adults*, National Survey of Youth and Religion (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Institute for Church Life & Center for Study of Religion and Society, 2015).

# Loneliness is the most serious hidden ailment in modern life.

ior matched the expectations others had of him, and for the most part he thrived. When the problem of an unhealthy desire emerged and intensified, however, the dissonance between how he felt about his own struggle and how he perceived other people's expectations of him left him trapped, with seemingly nowhere to turn. "Good Catholic boys" don't get hooked on pornography, or so we might assume. Hemmed in with nowhere to turn outside of himself for fear of disappointing, Geoff struggled interiorly, where shame flourished under its ideal conditions:

My struggle was something hidden very deep within me, something that I wrestled with in the crevices of my heart ... For so long I had wanted to bury my sin and shame within myself, hiding in that isolation forever. But as grace would have it, that all began to change at the end of my sophomore year of college.

My dorm community was hosting a retreat. At that time, my frustration was weighing especially heavy on my heart and mind since I had been struggling mightily with my problem for the entire year. I felt that the silent burden of my shame, and the lack of control I had over my own thoughts and will, were becoming increasingly unbearable and discouraging, and I prayed that God would somehow alleviate my pain with this retreat.

As it turns out, the weekend was filled with deep conversations and expressions of solidarity with other men my age, many of whom were struggling in the same way I was. To my great shock and relief, I was *not* the only one fighting this battle. The openness we fostered on this retreat was new to me, and the way that so many of these men humbly admitted their own imperfections and turned in trust to God's mercy for healing was unprecedented in my life. This grace-filled communication pierced me, and I sensed that through this shared encounter, perhaps God was priming my heart for a renewed openness to his loving compassion, even and especially in that bleak area of my life that I had considered exempt from him for so

long. The faith-filled witness of several other men inspired me to believe that if others could deal with this problem, trusting in God, then perhaps it was possible for me to do the same.


At a time when Geoff was without courage, he drew courage from the humility of those who made themselves vulnerable. The fact that someone else sharing his pain with you can become the beginning of your own healing is a confounding concept when considered in simply rational terms. Putting your broken leg next to my broken leg doesn't incite the healing process, and the same goes, we might reasonably assume, for other forms of affliction. But since Geoff's suffering wasn't just what he perceived to be his lack of control and the sadness of his habit but also his feelings of isolation, peculiarity, and most of all shame, the gift of others sharing their own hidden sorrows with him was precisely the balm for his interior wound.

The grace of that encounter, where solidarity was formed around shared pain, is so persuasive, so efficacious, that in now sharing his story for the sake of others, Geoff is offering himself in the likeness of the very gift that he received. Thomas Aquinas describes this as "free grace," by which God makes us capable of leading each other into what is good, whole, and healthy. The depth of the mystery of grace to which Geoff testifies is of the merciful Lord, who empowers those he heals to become agents in the healing of others and then for those, in turn, to become agents of healing for others still. In this manner the Lord proclaims himself as "gracious and merciful ... continuing his love for a thousand generations" (Ex 34:6-7).

## How to craft stories of grace — and how not to

Inarticulacy undermines belief, while articulacy buttresses it. Geoff desired God, but without being able first to hear from others how they offered their struggles in trust to God and then to begin to articulate his own trust, his desire for God felt unrequited. The beautiful gift of receiving stories from others and then the hard work of crafting his own story of grace changed the way Geoff saw everything. Rather than looking for God to pull him out of his isolation, he began to see that God entered into that lonely place with him,





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this shift of light, but great discipline  
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of storytellers and those who mentor them.



and so he wasn't alone anymore. Communion was forged inside a wound, and solidarity emerged under the most unlikely conditions. He saw everything differently — the light shifted.

Crafting and sharing stories of grace invite this shift of light, but great discipline and great creativity are necessary on behalf of storytellers and those who mentor them. Otherwise, the stories may be about something other than grace, or may-

be the story itself will be deficient as a story (and typically only good stories are

persuasive). Stories of grace exist

within a dialogue of faith, and

in such a dialogue each of us

must first listen to God's

word; those of us called to

teach others how to speak

in this dialogue must

therefore also teach them

how to listen attentively

or, to switch metaphors,

to see clearly. Seeking to

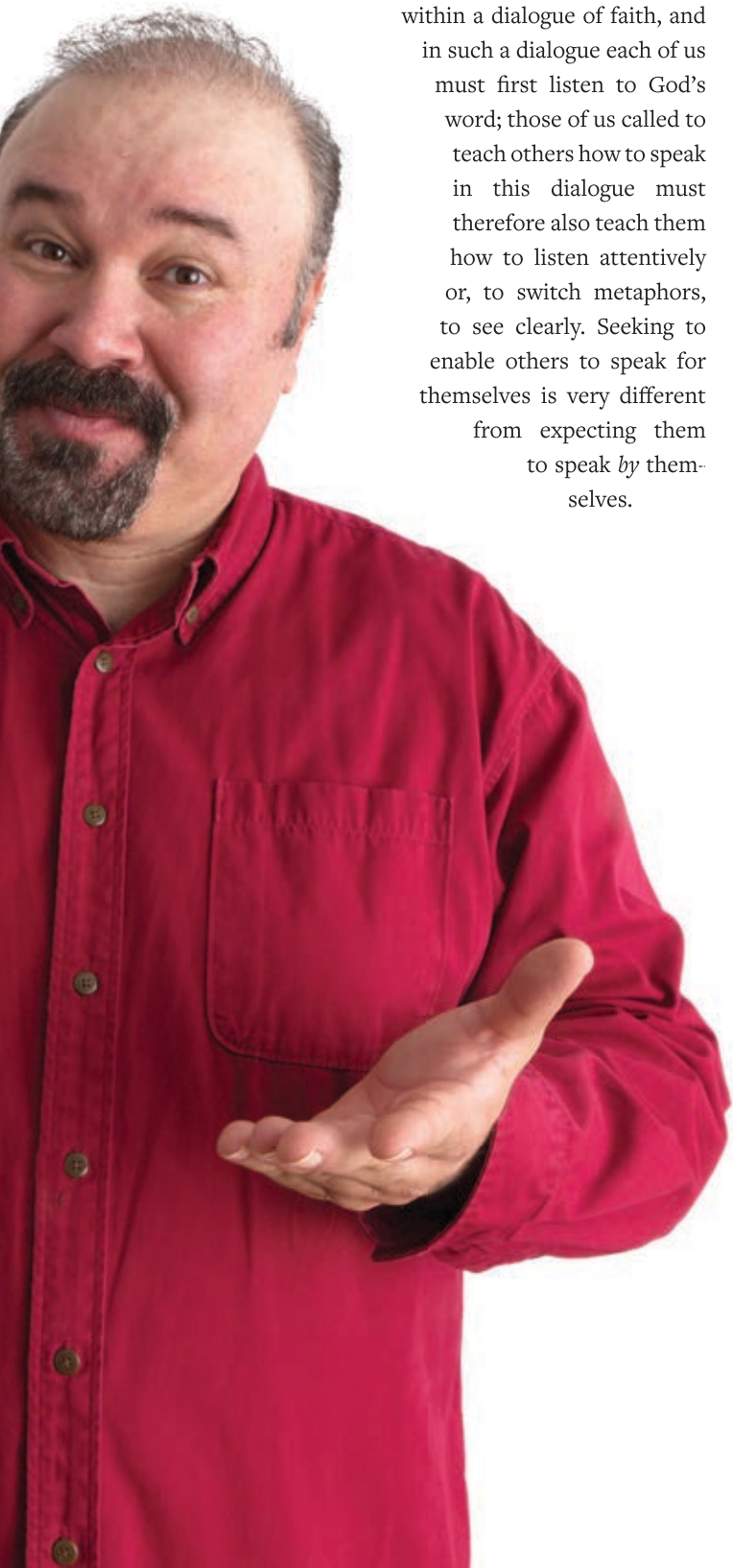
enable others to speak for

themselves is very different

from expecting them

to speak *by* them-

selves.



## SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR STORYTELLING

Over a couple of decades working with teenagers, young adults, and mature adults in crafting stories, I have discerned seven principles that, if followed, guide us through the middle ground of disciplined creativity, where we learn to speak of grace as grace in and through our own voice:

### 1. Tell it as a story.

When attempting to craft a story of grace, don't try to deliver a sermon, get a message across, or write a lecture. Tell a story.

### 2. Begin with what happened.

We all have a tendency to gloss over the concrete stuff of life, opting instead to "skip to the point." The disciples returning from Emmaus "told what happened to them"; they didn't just say what it all meant. Stuff matters.

### 3. Express it in style.

Stories of grace are not just about stuff; they are about the storytellers themselves. A story of grace offers to someone else both what the storyteller has witnessed and how she came to witness it.

### 4. Modify for your audience.

A story is a gift you give to someone else. It is not primarily something you craft and tell for yourself. Therefore, a good storyteller always considers the needs and capacities of his listeners.

### 5. Ensure there has been sufficient closure.

Even though a story of grace is a gift given to others, there are some gifts that we may not yet be ready to share now, if ever. If a wound is still raw, it is not time to share a story about it. Good mentoring helps with the whole process, but perhaps especially here.

### 6. Embrace natural emotions.

Some stories have real emotional depth; others less so. Sharing a story of grace is not a competition in eliciting emotional responses — yet, hiding emotions also does a disservice. Go with the emotions natural to the story.

### 7. Pray and practice.

To pray about a story from beginning to end is an act of humility, recognizing that the grace encountered is a gift and not one's own creation. And yet, storytellers have work to do, and practicing the craft of storytelling makes us better storytellers.

The problem with an approach  
to telling stories of grace that leaves  
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the Christian faith.



The problem with an approach to telling stories of grace that leaves young people (or any of us) with minimal guidance is that the stories may end up only vaguely resembling the Christian faith. They're not about God, in other words. Such stories are typically more about "making sense for oneself" than about responding to God's address. Clichés, generally accepted principles, and premature explanations can cover up the specific points where the thick reality of grace is present: the precise ways in which God speaks the Word who is Christ. "Everything happens for a reason" becomes the easy answer to disappointment and failure. "God just wanted her in heaven" is cheap balm in the face of death. "I just need to let go and let God" turns a potentially meaningful insight into an act of separating one's own efforts from the action of grace. Without being challenged and guided, most young people (and adults) will land on one or another of these ways of expressing their experience of grace, because learning to speak of grace as grace is hard work.

Yes, we need witnesses ... but we also need mentors to form these witnesses.

If we settle for disciples telling their own stories with an emphasis on the uniqueness of their style but not the character of their content, then a peculiarly modern axiom has been assumed: all perspectives are equally valid so long as one claims a perspective of one's own. Faith thus becomes an issue of the strength of one's commitment without accounting for that to which one makes a commitment. With an imbalanced emphasis on individual expression, a theological educator or pastoral minister might come to confirm just about any "faith story" that someone tells so long as that person has claimed the story as his or her own. Stories conforming to this expectation are often deemed unimpeachable because, it is assumed, no one has the right to question another person's "experience" or faith. The approach appropriate to Christian formation for helping disciples enter into the dialogue of faith is different because the content of the faith matters.

All the same, the focus on content brings its own dangerous temptation. Most if not all theological educators and pastoral ministers — along with parents — have faced this temptation at one time or another: the urge to control. Sometimes this urge is made manifest in a desire for doctrinal inerrancy, by which we expect

growing disciples to speak with unfailing theological precision at all times. It is unrealistic to expect those who are learning the language of faith to speak with perfect fluency while engaged in one of the very exercises that is helping them to develop fluency. Just as with learning a new language or musical instrument, expertise is acquired with practice; it is not given in advance. While this practice must certainly be disciplined, it cannot become overly formulaic, for then the personality of the storyteller is drained out of the process. Oftentimes, an exaggerated concern for the proper formula for a story of grace leads to something like a Mad Libs template, in which the craft of storytelling is reduced to inserting various details into blank spaces of a preordained framework. This would be like concerning ourselves only with the transmission of data rather than with personal communication. Style matters because the person matters.




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We need to re-create the conditions where stories of grace are more common, where we have the opportunities and the challenge to share these testimonies to God's work with each other more regularly.

### **Apply liberally: Re-creating cultures of grace**

What happened at my parish during our mission was out of the ordinary. That's a problem. We need to re-create the conditions where stories of grace are more common, where we have the opportunities and the challenge to share these testimonies to God's work with each other more regularly. We are surrounded by all kinds of stories all the time — some of these stories are ones that are told to us, and some of these stories are the stories we tell ourselves. To build up a culture within and from the church that enriches the faith of disciples and invites would-be disciples into this new way of seeing in the light of Christ, we need to surround each other with these healing, true, and beautiful images. Like iconography in a sanctuary or stained glass running along the nave of a church, these stories of grace bathe us in color, symbolism, and light. They help us learn how to see the presence of Christ as God made personally present in our lives.

Storytelling is hard. Grace is difficult to see and even harder to speak about. We need witnesses who testify to Christ's presence in their

lives, however and whenever he makes himself present. Recognizing his presence makes it possible for us to become more present to one another, teaching us how to see all things in his light. 

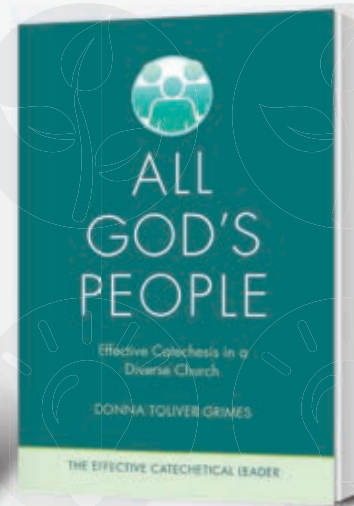
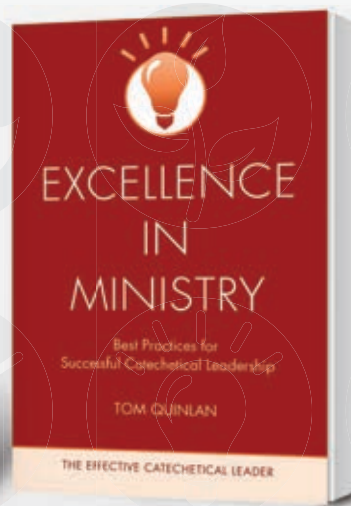
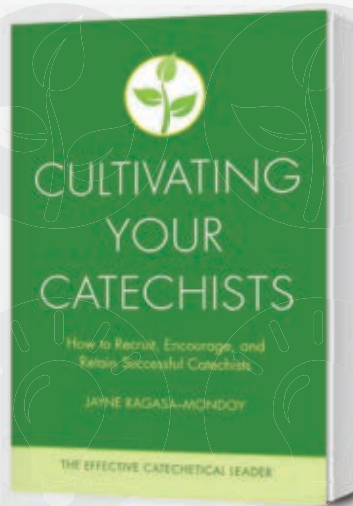
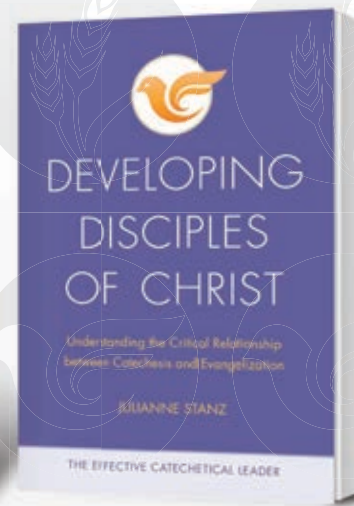
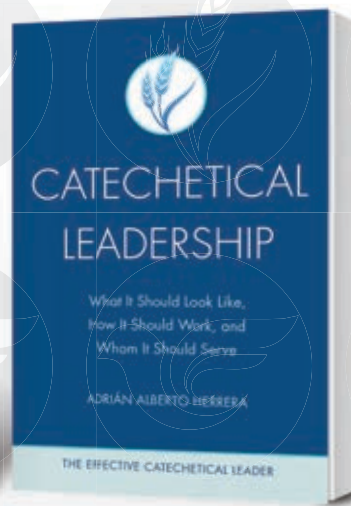
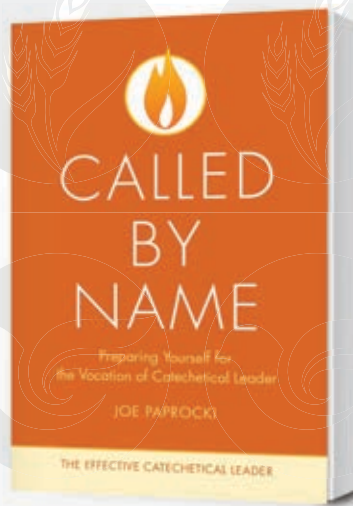
*Portions of this article are taken from Leonard J. DeLorenzo's book Witness: Learning to Tell the Stories of Grace That Illuminate Our Lives (Ave Maria, 2016) and are used with the permission of the publisher.*

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# How to Put Adults at the Center of Formation

DOUGLAS LEAL

Congratulations! You've just been appointed to the pastoral leadership team of St. Cunigunde Parish, a brand-new community in your diocese. You and your team strongly believe that "adult catechesis [is] the chief form of catechesis" (*Sharing the Light of Faith*, 188). You're well aware that "while most Catholic parishes place a high priority on the faith formation of children and youth, far fewer treat adult faith formation as a priority" (*Our Hearts Were Burning*, 43). But your team is determined that this will not be the case at St. Cunigunde! For one thing, as the new community comes together, there's no one to say "we've never done it that way." Hope and opportunity abound!

## So, what will you do?

Before developing any program of faith formation, it might be helpful to ask, why do we do formation anyway? What's our purpose? John Paul II stated it simply: "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus" ("Catechesi Tradendae," 5). Thus, the first task of formation is *encounter*, wherein the person of Jesus becomes a reality in our lives — not a concept or a tenet of faith, but a real person-in-relationship with us. Until this encounter has occurred, no real spiritual growth can take place.

The second task of formation is *catechesis* — helping people understand their relationship with Christ. This is undoubtedly the task catechists are most familiar and most comfortable with, so a lot of faith formation work is taken up with catechesis. And yet, as many have pointed out (including Pope Francis), we often end up catechizing those who have not yet been evangelized. Catechesis only makes sense to those who have experienced an encounter with Jesus.

The third task of adult faith formation (AFF) is to help people *grow* and *deepen* their relationship with Christ. This may seem self-evident, but in practice, we often set low expectations for adult faith development. But faith development doesn't end with confirmation; spiritual growth continues into adulthood, as attested to by a long tradition of spiritual writers, beginning with Paul (1 Cor 2:1 — 3:2; 1 Cor 13:11–12). Consider your own faith life as an adult. What was your relationship to God like 10, 15, or 20 years ago? Hasn't it grown and changed in that time? It might be helpful to reflect on those changes. What precipitated that growth? What were the supports and challenges? How might those elements be important to an AFF program?

Admittedly, facilitating spiritual growth in adults can be messy. Development in adults doesn't occur according to a fixed schedule, as with children. Rather, moments of growth are often moments of crisis or transition; such moments may feel like a loss of identity or even a loss of faith — and, in a sense, they are. My favorite image of an adult growing in faith is a trapeze artist flying through the air. The trapeze artist must let go of one bar and trust that the other bar will be there when it's needed. For a few seconds the artist is flying in mid-air, unsupported, risking a fall. Likewise, faith development demands taking a risk: it requires letting go of a way of being that no longer serves our relationship with Christ while not yet fully understanding or being comfortable with the way of being that beckons.

## How will you set expectations in this new community?

Our expectations around what adult faith formation is will determine what we develop at St. Cunigunde. The first work, then, of our leadership team might be to draft a manifesto of AFF to lay out how we want to think about faith formation:

1. As a community committed to adult faith formation, we expect adults to grow in faith. We challenge for growth rather than settle for a childlike faith. We encourage adults to "let go" of their comfortable faith when it no longer nourishes and to move to something deeper, and we support them in these transitional moments. We also talk a lot about adult formation, our call to grow, and what that looks like. In the homily, parish media, small groups, and one-on-one encounters, we're constantly discussing how we grow and deepen our faith.
2. We welcome doubt and inquiry. As Pope Francis said, "If one has the answers to all the questions — that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt" (in Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God"). We admit that we don't have all the answers, but we wrestle with the questions together. And all questions are okay, even ones with no answers.
3. We welcome diverse spiritualities. We don't expect everyone to look alike, grow alike, or pray alike. We provide



a lot of different formation opportunities to support adults at different points on their faith journeys and with different needs. We also encourage self-directed formation.

4. We support those in “crises of faith,” recognizing that this is, in fact, how adults grow in faith. We don’t shut down potential growth, trivializing a crisis with “bumper sticker” responses: “If God brings you to it, God will bring you through it.” “God must have a plan; you just can’t see it.” “Just pray harder!” Rather, we support growth by providing a holding environment: We affirm that the crisis being faced is indeed a challenge. We affirm that God is present nonetheless, as is the community. Ultimately, we recognize that the “dark night” is part of spiritual growth.
5. We practice the art of accompaniment. We trust in the slow work of God and know that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate director of adult faith formation. “One who accompanies others has to realize that each person’s situation before God and their

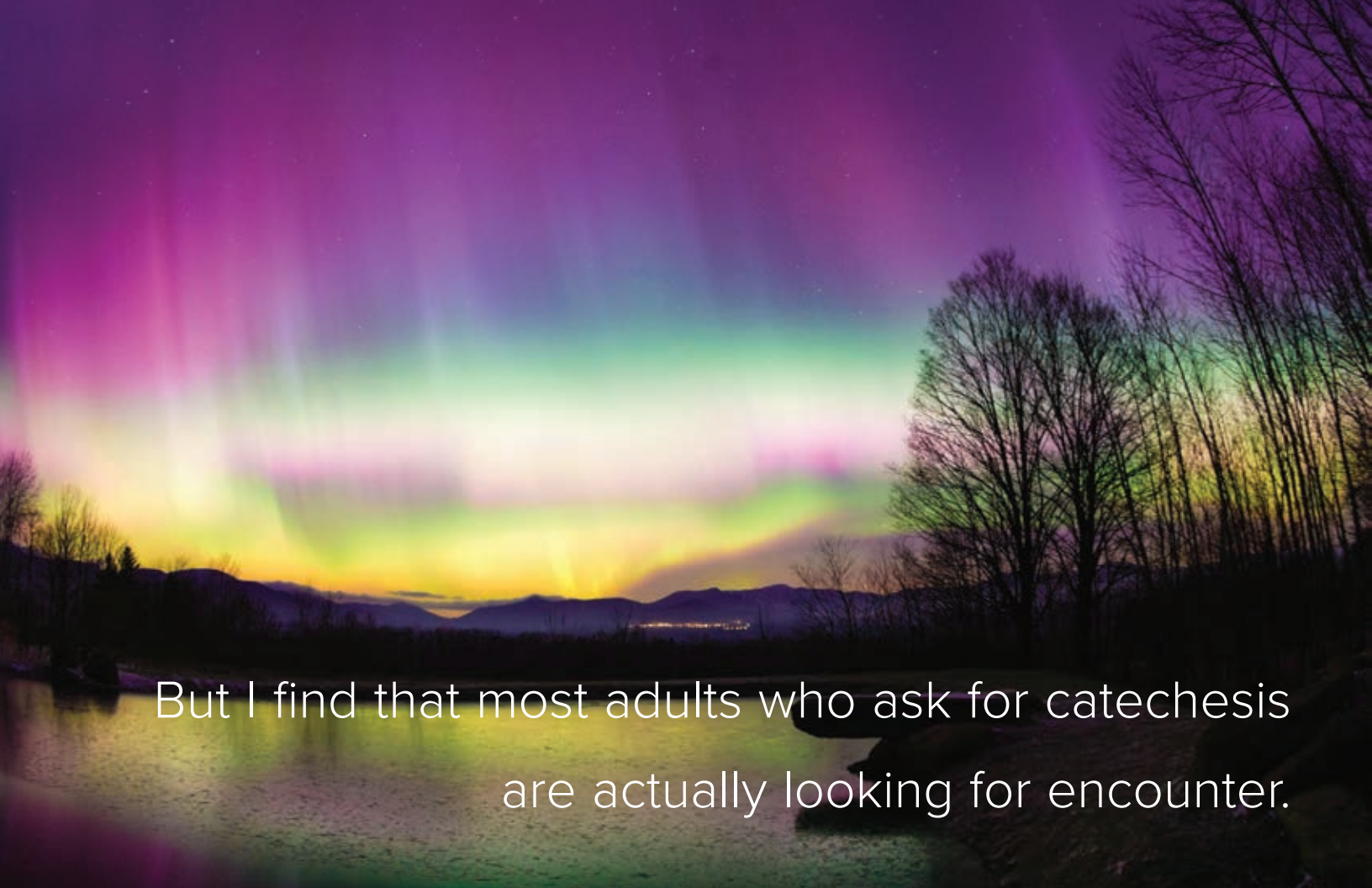
life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*,” 172).

Once our shared expectations are established, we might start to craft an adult faith formation “program.” I use the word *program* tentatively because while we are quite fond of AFF programs and they certainly have their value, we must keep in mind that

the success of such efforts rests very much on the quality and total fabric of parish life. This includes, for example, “the quality of the liturgies, the extent of shared decision making, the priorities in the parish budget, the degree of commitment to social justice, the quality of the other catechetical programs” (“National Catechetical Directory,” no. 189). ... Thus, while the parish may have an adult faith formation program, it is no less true that the parish is an adult faith formation program. (*Our Hearts Were Burning*, 118, 121)

“Programs” of adult formation should serve the three tasks of formation: encounter, catechesis, and deepening. It’s important to

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note that any single program will likely not serve all three tasks! A variety of options is needed for a fully responsive AFF program. Such variety might be beyond a single community's resources to provide, so consider joining with neighboring communities or other places like retreat centers.

### What might some of our programs include?

- \* Prayer experiences. Adults, and especially young adults, constantly echo the request of the disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). Offering a diversity of prayer opportunities — Liturgy of the Hours, the rosary, lectio divina, centering prayer, meditation, sung prayer, movement prayer, and so on — gives adults a place to try on different approaches and find what works for them.
- \* Retreats and days of reflection. Note that “encounter” retreats — which could include preached sessions, witness talks, or a call to conversion — will be different from “deepening” retreats — which might be more silent and individually directed.
- \* Small faith communities. “[Adult faith formation] is primarily about providing opportunities, within a faith context, for adults to talk with other adults about things that matter” (Regan).

- \* A fully implemented and integrated RCIA program.
- \* Spiritual direction. From the window of her anchorage, the mystic Julian of Norwich served as a director-in-residence for her community and beyond. A community serious about AFF might hire one or more spiritual directors to serve the community, or identify community members to be trained in this ministry, or, at the very least, have a list of local directors to refer people to.
- \* Thoughtful, engaging homilies. See “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” 135–159.

In designing programs for adults, it makes some sense to ask adults themselves what they want. But results of such a survey must be interpreted carefully. Adults may intuitively sense a longing for something more in their faith lives (their “hearts are restless”), but they may not know how to express what they need. They might ask for catechesis, thinking, “If only I had more *knowledge* about my faith, I’d have a better relationship with God.” But I find that most adults who ask for catechesis are actually looking for *encounter*. The Gospels are full of people who seek out Jesus for his knowledge, and he is indeed called “teacher,” but those who follow him tend to be those who have an encounter with him; the teaching comes later (Mt 20:34; Lk 9:11; Jn 9:36).

## How to implement this in your community

At this point you might think, “This is all well and good for St. Cunigunde, but what about my community?” If AFF is at the periphery or nonexistent in your parish, how do you move it to the center of parish life? Here are some thoughts:

- \* Committed leaders — ordained and lay — are essential. “[Leaders of successful churches] share one key attribute: an unrelenting, uncompromising focus and drive to help people grow into disciples of Christ” (Hawkins and Parkinson, 20).
- \* Help people understand the need to change and why the status quo is unacceptable. Give specific examples of ways that a community without AFF at its center is not as life-giving or engaging as it could be.
- \* Paint a picture of the future. Explain how robust adult formation will enrich all aspects of the parish, including the formation of children. Describe the type of community that will result from a focus on AFF. What will be the benefits to the community and to individuals?
- \* Make investments in change. People respond far more to what they see than what you say. Look at calendars — how many events are designed to form adults? Look at staffing — how many people are dedicated to adult formation? And, of course, look at budgets — how much money is spent on AFF, especially when compared to the formation of children and youth?
- \* Recognize that the change will not likely please everyone. You must make the choice to “go with those who want to grow, and bless the rest.”
- \* Although counterintuitive, radical change can be more successful than incremental change. Making bold moves captures people’s attention and says that something big and important is happening. I know a parish that put their entire youth-focused faith formation program on hold for

one year while they built up an AFF program. You can bet the community took notice!

The emphasis on adults at the center of formation isn’t new, of course. Jesus welcomed and blessed children, but he formed adults. Getting this emphasis right again won’t be easy, but it will be worthwhile. And consider this: the more adults we help to form, the more adults we have to help form other adults — and ultimately to transform the world. If we are serious about fulfilling the great commission (Mt 28:19–20) and working toward the fullness of the reign of God, then we have no choice but to put adults at the center of formation.


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# Walking with Youth: Preparing for the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment

T O M E A S T

In October 2018, the church will gather as a synod of bishops to consider young people, faith, and discernment. The intended outcome of this gathering is a process for transforming the way the church engages with young people so that youth and young adults will receive more guidance as they hear and respond to God's call and join with adults in sharing the Good News: "The Church has decided to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to the fullness of life and love, and to ask young people to help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today" (Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly, "[Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Preparatory Document](#)," Introduction). See page 23 for a link and suggestions for reading and discussion.

Some of us in youth ministry might think that this is just another theme to acknowledge or that the synod is just another meeting of church leaders. I don't think so. I think this is a radical challenge to take a step back and really look at our stance and everything we do in ministry with youth. This is how I summarize the preparatory document: God has begun a conversation with young people; our job is to pay attention to what God is doing and walk with youth as they grow in discipleship. We are called to accompany them as they discern their response to God's plans for their lives.

How is this different? It's all about stance. A typical story of youth ministry goes something like this: "I have an experience of faith that leads me to become a youth minister. I work to create programs in which young people can experience faith, and I try to get youth to join in those programs." This process relies on the personality of the ministry leader and the convergence of young people's interests with the programs that are created. In this model, we have to initiate a relationship with a young person, help them trust us, and sell them on joining a program. We lose a lot of youth in the process, not necessarily because youth aren't interested in faith or God but maybe because they don't relate to our particular faith journeys and the programs we have created.

The process suggested in the "Young People" is different. It tells us that accompaniment is our model for ministry with youth and their families, which means we need to *start by*

*paying attention to the conversation that God initiated with each young person.*

It all starts with listening. Because we love young people and we long for them to experience the embrace of Christ as disciples, we focus our attention on helping youth listen to God with their "inner selves." We help them notice what God is doing and notice their choices to see the possibilities for their lives and for their lives in Christ, "understanding that the vocational experience is a gradual process of inner discernment and growth in the faith, which leads to discovering the fullness of the joy of life and love, making a gift of oneself and participating in the proclamation of the Good News" ("Young People," *In the Footsteps of the Beloved Disciple*).


As a church, we must pay attention; we must want to listen to young people. In November 2016, Papal Nuncio Christophe Pierre gave an address to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops that previewed the upcoming synod:

We have been describing young people and their relationship to the Church. If we are to help young people discern God's plan for their lives, we might ask: what are they looking for?

They are looking to be heard. Earlier I mentioned the idea of accompaniment, which implies going to them and being with them. To this, we add listening to them. Listening is an important element of discernment. Pope Francis said:

I think that in the pastoral ministry of the Church many beautiful things are being done, many beautiful things ... But there is one thing that we must do more, even the priests, even the lay people, but above all the priests must do more: the apostolate of listening: to listen! (*Incontro del Santo Padre con i partecipanti al convegno per persone disabili*, 11 giugno 2016)

We are called to listen. Listening is the starting point for all ministry. But what does it mean to really listen to young people? We need to pause in our quest to share with them all the



things that they need to know and take some time to really hear their stories. Where do they see God? How do they experience our parish? What is their experience of youth ministry? Let the conversation go where it will. As you discern and plan for your ministry with youth this year, take some time to truly listen to the young people and their families. I believe that if we do, we will see our ministries with youth transformed.

### Young people in today's world

Part of listening to youth is paying attention to their experience of the world, to see the change, the diversity, and the complexity. We are guided to really look at the world of youth today, to see the gifts of this generation and their willingness to participate and help change things for the better. We are also challenged to see the youth on the margins and those facing challenges that can lead to despair and discouragement. See the sidebar for some of the challenges highlighted by the “Young People.”

### Faith and discernment

Vocational discernment is “the process by which a person makes fundamental choices, in dialogue with the Lord and listening to the voice of the Spirit, starting with the choice of one’s state in life” (“Young People”; II. Faith, Discernment, Vocation; 2. The Gift of Discernment). In our ministries we often narrowly think of vocations as recruiting young people to consider priesthood or religious life. The synod document writers offer great insight into what it means to consider our responses to God’s invitation to joy-filled and rich lives.

For each person, the vocation to love takes concrete form in everyday life through a series of choices, which find expression in the states of life (marriage, ordained ministry, consecrated life, etc.), professions, forms of social and civil commitment, lifestyle, the management of time and money, etc. Whether these choices are willfully made or simply accepted, either consciously or unconsciously, no one is excluded from making these choices. The purpose of vocational discernment is to find out how to transform them, in the light of faith, into steps towards the fullness of joy to which everyone is called. (“Young People,” Introduction)

A vocation, then, is not something new to be added to the ministry

or faith life of an individual. It is a process of paying attention to one’s dialogue with God, to hear his invitation, and to see the pattern of loving and life-giving choices. At certain states in our lives, we look at our choices and make a decision: What state will help me make the most life-giving, loving choices? Vocational discernment is about listening, paying attention, and ultimately taking a risk.

### Pastoral activity: Walking with young people

“Accompanying young people requires going beyond a preconceived framework, encountering young people where they are, adapting to their times and pace of life and taking them seriously.”

The “Young People” proposes accompaniment as the model for our ministry with youth. This is really a perspective, not another program. We already provide communities, programs, and opportunities for involvement that create the possibility for developing relationships of accompaniment. Relationships with youth must be built on respect for each young person and his or her freedom to respond. There is no coercion in the love of God, though there is persistence!

The root of the word *accompany* is “to share bread with.” It means to walk alongside, not pulling or pushing. When Jesus accompanied the disciples on their journey to Emmaus, he listened to their questions. When we walk with youth, we pay attention to what God is doing and then try to lead them to the holy, where they can experience the encounter and the mission.

We are guided to minister to youth by going where they are and taking them seriously. We engage in creative, personal responses and go beyond our ordinary methods of ministry. This will mean avoiding anything that makes the church look outdated or makes people feel hemmed in. It also means empowering youth as agents of their own salvation. We go out, beyond our usual activities, and minister *with* youth.

In these relationships of trust, we spend time with them. We listen to them and respond to their experiences and their stories. We empathize — that is, we try to *feel with* the young people and demonstrate that we care about what they are experiencing and about their perspectives on their experiences. Walking with youth, we can help awaken their responses to God’s loving voice. We can ask questions without predetermining the answers.

## THREE CHALLENGES FOR TODAY'S YOUTH

1. *A rapidly changing world:* The pace of change in today's world is astounding. Though young people are adept at change and embrace things that are new, they are also particularly vulnerable to changes that increase "social unease and economic difficulties." Some of the changes that young people are experiencing relate to discoveries and attitudes toward science. For many youth, there is a tension between awareness of scientific truths and engagement in faith. We will have to address this pastoral challenge.
2. *New generations:* This generation of youth is growing up in an amazingly diverse and complex world. Young people are culturally diverse, and within that diversity, there are "special features" for youth of the second generation. Children of immigrants may share the same cultural background as their parents, but because they were born in a new country, they are growing up in a culture different from their parents'.

There are many wonderful attributes to this generation of youth, including their openness to learning, their embrace of technology, and their desire to make a difference and change the world. But there are also many youth living on the peripheries and facing economic and educational challenges.

This section of the "Young People" identifies features that are characteristic of today's young people, including the following:

- \* *Belonging and participation:* Young people want to belong and take an active role in making a difference, but some become discouraged. "The discrepancy between young people who are passive and discouraged and those enterprising and energetic comes from the concrete opportunities offered to each one in society and the family in which one develops, in addition to the experiences of a sense of meaning, relationships and values which are formed even before the onset of youth."
  - \* *Personal and institutional points of reference:* Young people are clearly ready to jump in and participate in faith and in the world, but they need a hand.
3. *Young people and choices:* Young people continue to be fascinated by the person of Jesus and the Good News that he proclaimed, but this message is often obscured by the distractions of the culture and the real challenges that young people face. One way to awaken the idealism of young people and reignite their faith is to engage them in solving the problems of the world, in particular by using the tools of social innovation.

## WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE DO WE ACCOMPANY?

We are guided to accompany "all young people, without exception." We recognize that youth don't need to "join" our ministries — many of them already joined by baptism. The church is geographic, which means that we stand with our bishop as responsible for the salvation of the souls of all those within the boundaries of our local church, paying special attention to the youth who are on the margins.

## WHO ACCOMPANIES?

The whole faith community walks with their young members. Families have a particular role, as do "shepherds of souls," pastors, bishops, and vocations ministers. Teachers also have an opportunity to accompany students.

Young people need "persons of reference": adults and peers who are "close-by, credible, consistent and honest" ("Young People"; I. Young People in Today's World; 2. New Generations; Personal and Institutional Points of Reference).

"The role of credible adults and their cooperation is basic in the course of human development and vocational discernment. This requires authoritative believers, with a clear human identity, a strong sense of belonging to the Church, a visible spiritual character, a strong passion for education and a great capacity for discernment" ("Young People"; III. Pastoral Activity; 2. Agents; People of Reference). This description of a person of reference is a tall order. People who accompany youth will need support, guidance, and training to stand in this important role and avoid manipulation or coercion.

## What does all of this mean?

This was the question asked by those who witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost in Acts 2. That's what we need: a new Pentecost. To head in the direction suggested by the "Young People" and transform our ministries, we will need to embrace the Spirit that calls us to do something new and to do "old" things in a new way: "No seed for vocations can be fruitful if approached with a closed and 'complacent pastoral attitude that says: "We have always done it this way"' and without people being "bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities (*Evangelii gaudium*, 33)" ("Young People"; III. Pastoral Activity; 1. Walking with Young People).

Part of doing something new is recognizing that programs and pastoral activities are intended to initiate the process of accompaniment: "Pastoral activity with young people, which is called upon to start processes more than to dominate spaces, shows, above all, the importance of service to the human growth of each individual and the educational and formative resources that can support it" ("Young People"; III. Pastoral Activity; 4. Resources; Educative Care and the Path of Evangelization).

# IDEAS FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM TO PREPARE FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON YOUNG PEOPLE, THE FAITH, AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Read the “Young People” in sections and have a discussion. It can be found at [vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20170113\\_documento-preparatorio-xv\\_en.html](http://vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20170113_documento-preparatorio-xv_en.html).

## Discussion 1: Introduction

- \* How would you describe the purpose of the synod to someone who was not familiar with the church?
- \* How would you describe it to youth?
- \* What do you think the church needs to pay attention to?

## Discussion 2: In the Footsteps of the Beloved Disciple

- \* What do you notice about the vocational journey of the beloved disciple?
- \* How does his journey compare with your personal journey?
- \* What does this tell you about ministry with young people?

## Discussion 3: I. Young People in Today’s World

- \* How do your experiences with youth match with the descriptions in the document?
- \* What are the gifts you notice in youth today?
- \* What are the challenges they face?

Exercise: Create a mind map entitled “The World of Young People Today.” For information on how to use this tool, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind\\_map](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map). After you complete the mind map, discuss the following:

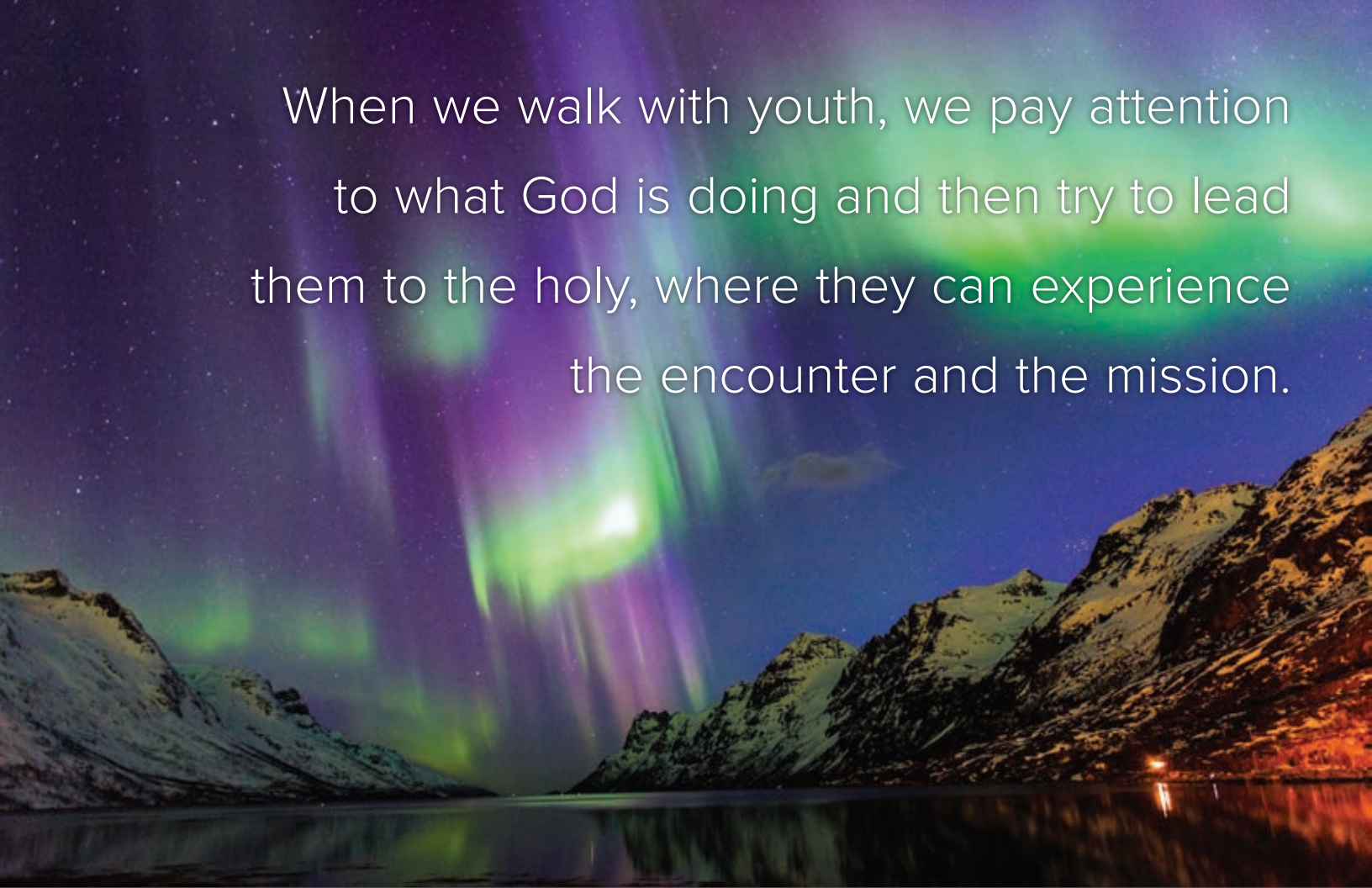
- \* What do you notice?
- \* What do you feel?
- \* What does this tell us about ministry with youth?

## Discussion 4: II. Faith, Discernment, Vocation

- \* What is vocation? What is your experience of the path of vocational discernment?
- \* What is the difference between deciding and discerning?
- \* What is your experience of being accompanied?
- \* What is your experience of accompanying youth?

## Discussion 5: III. Pastoral Activity

- \* To walk with youth, we are told we need to go where youth are. Where are young people today?
- \* What does it mean to be a person of reference?
- \* What are some ways to engage the faith community in walking with youth?




When we walk with youth, we pay attention  
to what God is doing and then try to lead  
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In other words, we put young people at the heart of the ministry, we pay attention to God's journey with them, and we walk. It's all about creating the possibilities for youth to encounter God's love and to experience it with companions as they seek their responses to God's invitation. Young people will be formed in the joy of the gospel and they will be formed as missionary disciples when they have encounters with Christ, when they have relationships with disciples who witness and care and pay attention, when they are formed in the practices of discipleship — when they learn what disciples do and when they are charged up for their mission, for the way God will work through them when they discern and follow God's path for them.



Many parishes have relegated youth ministry to one or two programs and delegated it to a few people with activities that appeal to some youth. We catechize out of fear — we're afraid of what young people don't know, what they aren't doing, and what's not happening at home. We are catechizing youth who haven't been evangelized — we're giving answers to questions they haven't asked yet. For too long we have waited for youth to participate, to come to us, to be part of our preselected activities and communities. To address the challenges in the way we are currently forming young people, the process of engaging and forming the

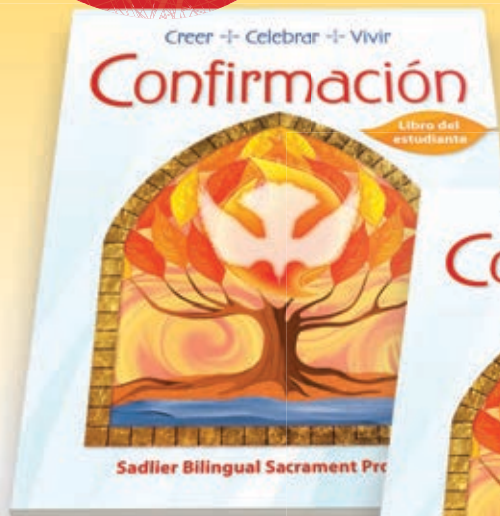
next generation of disciples must be among our highest priorities and among the most significant ways we celebrate who we are as a community of disciples.

Use the Emmaus model. Provide lots of opportunities for youth to seek and ask questions, to be companioned and formed, to be led to encounter and Eucharist, and to be sent in mission. Engage the whole community of active disciples to walk with youth in their holy questions, pay attention to their lives, mentor them in the faith, pray with them, serve the poor with them, and spend time with them in adoration and in the sacraments. There is no need to wait for the October synod: you can start moving beyond the program and walking with youth today. 

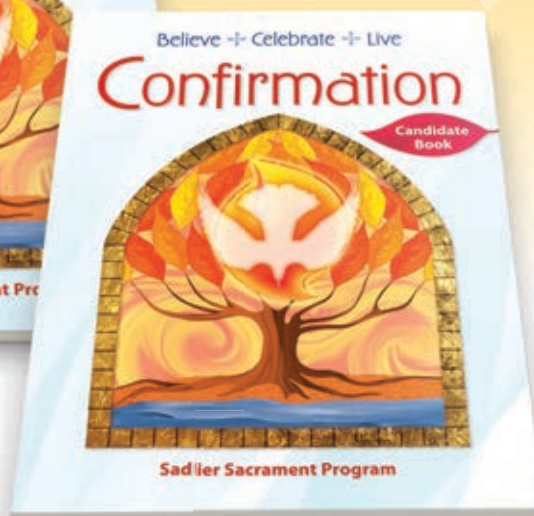
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# New avenues for connecting with students

KYLE TURNER

How rich is the soil for the sowing of seeds? How might we best assist in tilling the soil so that it remains ripe for the growing of abundant fruit on today's college campuses? The *General Directory for Catechesis* states, "Having tested the ground, the sower sends out his workers to proclaim the Gospel through all the world and to that end shares with them the power of his Spirit. At the same time he shows them how to read the signs of the times and asks of them that special preparation which is necessary to carry out the sowing" (31). This reading of the signs of the times is critical in order to accompany today's traditional undergraduate college students, for there have been immense shifts within our society in recent years. These shifts have impacted how college students view the world today, as well as their place within it.

## Finding joy in our lives

A reading of the signs of the times in the religious landscape across the United States today shows the shrinking percentage of people who identify themselves as religiously affiliated, while the religious "nones" (those who identify themselves as having no religious affiliation) have skyrocketed in recent years. One only needs to look at a recent Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study to know that this is a reality, a reality I assume is palpable on the majority of college campuses today. Regis University, a Jesuit Catholic academic institution, is not immune to this trend. As a result of this new reality, the University Ministry team is faced with the question of how best to engage with today's undergraduate students in order to accompany them. Many college students today are searching to find meaning in their lives, as evidenced by a first-year student's question, "What would you say to people of my generation who are desperately trying to find true joy in our lives?" What is the role of campus ministers and religious educators in helping students to explore this question?


About 40 percent of traditional students at Regis have identified themselves as Catholic. That is about 5 percent higher than the approximate percentage of Catholic students on public campuses, according to Catholic Campus Ministry Association (ccmanetwork.org). The reality at our school is that while there is a plurality of students who identify as Catholic, the majority of students are not Catholic. Of those who profess Catholicism as their religion, many are not currently practicing. While a number of students are actively involved in University Ministry offerings on campus, we as a team feel we

could connect better with many more. So how might we share the Good News of the gospel with these students — the Good News that very well may be the meaning they are searching for in their lives? Past practices and mentalities of "they will come to us" do not seem to work anymore. Although there is ripe opportunity to connect with the students on campus, we have to explore new avenues in order to do so.

## Ministry of presence

One initial response is to recognize the impact that a ministry of presence and encounter can have in the lives of the young adults who make up the student body. This ministry of presence can be realized in a number different ways; the following are a few examples from our experience at Regis.

- ★ We are blessed to have a handful of student peer ministers who live and serve in the residence halls on campus. These men and women are on the front lines of engaging with their fellow students and the realities that come with being college students in the early 21st century. In partnering with these peer ministers, we have the opportunity to connect with students who are facing some real-life struggles as well as their joys.
- ★ The location of our University Ministry offices is in the Student Center, so we have the opportunity to engage with students as they pass through our building on a daily basis.
- ★ We are also lucky to have 30 work-study students partnering with our professional ministry staff throughout the academic year. Working with them on a weekly basis allows our team to connect with students in a way that we would not be able to do on our own.

Our hope is that through a truly intentional ministry of presence, we may be able to share the joy of the gospel with those whom we are called to serve. "For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?" (Pope Francis, "Evangelii Gaudium," 8). 

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# “Gaudete et Exsultate”

CLAIRE MCMANUS

The catechumenate is the preeminent model for catechesis in the church. While most RCIA programs are visible in the parish during the Lenten rites and at the Easter Vigil, the period after the sacraments are celebrated is equally important.

Mystagogy is a time to derive a new perception of the faith, the church, and the world. It is also a time to be formed in what it means to be a Catholic, a lesson we should reexamine on a regular basis. Pope Francis delivered a simple refresher course on the essentials of Christian holiness in his recently promulgated exhortation, “Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)” (GE).

GE is a call to holiness for all people and is firmly rooted in the lessons Jesus gave us in the Gospels. Francis explains that the path to holiness is guided by two important and complementary texts from the Gospel of Matthew: the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) and the final judgment (Mt 25). The Beatitudes are the platform on which Jesus built the road to the kingdom of heaven. The final judgment, or as Francis calls it, “The Great Criterion,” is the only place in Scripture that gives us a clear criterion for how we will be judged by God. Mercy and care for the vulnerable define our mission; failure is not an option.


Living the Beatitudes is how we are identified as Christians; thus Francis cleverly calls them “Christian identity cards” (63). Whether our ID cards are brand-new or well-worn, they should be on display as we journey on our paths to holiness. Francis reminds us that the path to holiness flows through the Beatitudes, not through anything we deem important. “Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands, for mercy is ‘the beating heart of the Gospel’” (97).

Francis places each Beatitude into a contemporary context to help us understand how we can derive spiritual gifts.

- \* The poor in spirit gain the kingdom of heaven because they are free from attachments to created things. Francis draws on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius when he describes spiritual poverty as having an attitude of indifference to the things of the world. This frees us from that “need to have it” attitude that distorts our decisions.
- \* The meek will inherit the earth by their humility. Nobody in our society wants to be meek, but humility is

one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

- \* Francis reminds us that mourning is both personal and global. Those who are on a path to holiness will see the struggles of others and sincerely mourn for them, whether they are friends or strangers. Those who “weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15)” are given special insight into their needs and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, will find a way to bring relief.
- \* Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. They seek justice with an urgency that won’t be satisfied until the vulnerable and marginalized are protected. Seeking justice for the least among us is a nonnegotiable of Christian faith.
- \* The merciful will receive mercy because it is the lens through which we see God at work in our own lives. “Giving and forgiving means reproducing in our lives some small measure of God’s perfection, which gives and forgives superabundantly” (81).
- \* The pure in heart will see God because they act with sincerity and are genuine in their pursuit of love for neighbor.
- \* The peacemakers will be called children of God, but we have to begin by making peace within our smallest circles. If we begin with the little conflicts that plague our lives, then we order our small corner of the world toward peace.
- \* “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:10). When Jesus gave us the Beatitudes, he knew they ran counter to the way the world operates. Francis assures us: “Accepting the daily path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness” (94).

Being a Christian in this world is not meant to be easy, but we have been given what we need from the Holy Spirit. Together with the new members of the church we can renew our commitment to finishing the journey. 

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# Pastoral Culture: Hidden in Plain Sight

LEISA ANSLINGER

“It was hidden in plain sight.” How many times have we had this experience? We are missing a needed object and have searched to no avail. We probably retraced our steps, went back in our memory to the last time we can remember having the item, and yet, we simply could not find it. Finally, we paused, perhaps said a brief prayer to St. Anthony, and suddenly it was there, hidden in plain sight. There are surely things that are hidden in plain sight in our pastoral life as well — elements of parish or diocesan practice that are so familiar, we fail to see them, whether they contribute positively or prevent us from becoming the evangelizing community of faith we are called to be.

Our pastoral culture has much to do with the way in which people will hear and receive the Good News of Jesus Christ in our midst. Culture is about shared values — what is important and why — and norms of behavior — how people live the values day in and day out, in good times and in difficult ones. Culture is comprised of many factors, often hidden in plain sight, which result in the way the parish or diocese is perceived, the manner in which it carries out its mission, and how effectively it bears witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

How do we shape pastoral culture in order to grow as evangelizing communities?

- ★ The first step in shaping pastoral culture is to have a compelling vision for the parish or diocese. Everyone must be headed in the same direction, toward the same vision.
- ★ The second step is to be clear about how people will behave in order to move toward the vision. Let us say that the parish leaders have discerned a call to be more welcoming. This will not only require friendly and caring ministers of hospitality at Masses; it will also be necessary to establish expectations for the way the phone is answered, parish registrations are facilitated, religious education or school families are greeted, and much more.
- ★ The third step is to align behavior with the shared values of the community. Unfortunately, this is where a breakdown often happens. We may have a clearly identified and articulated mission statement, and yet the culture of the parish or diocese may run counter to the stated mission because the behavior of

some or all in the community fails to be aligned with it. Take, for example, the parish that urges people to become involved, yet when people sign up for ministry, many do not receive a follow-up phone call.

- ★ Once we have a clear vision, know the sort of behaviors that contribute to or detract from the vision, and are aligning behaviors with our shared values, it is time to be attentive. We must pay attention not only when people fail to act according to the vision we have set out before ourselves but also, especially, when they contribute positively. We must be attentive to the positive contributors because we might otherwise take them for granted. Such positive contributions toward the pastoral culture are the things that are often hidden in plain sight. With intentional attentiveness, we can acknowledge the ways people are living our shared values, thank them, and invite them to draw others into Christ’s life with us.


In “Rejoice and Be Glad,” Pope Francis speaks about the impact of such attentiveness:

144. Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details.

The little detail that wine was running out at a party.

The little detail that one sheep was missing.

The little deal of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins....

145. A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father’s plan. There are times when, by a gift of the Lord’s love, we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God... 

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

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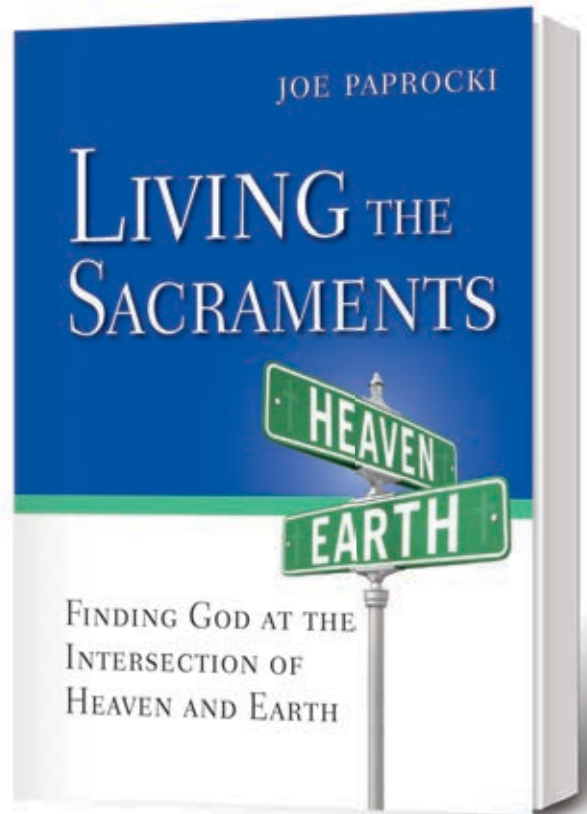
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# 14 Ideas for Adult Faith Formation: LEADING THE FAITHFUL TO MISSION IN OUR WORLD (PART 2)

JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP

In part 1 we explored four possible ways to ensure that adult faith formation leads today's adults to be disciples in mission to the world. We continue with ten more.

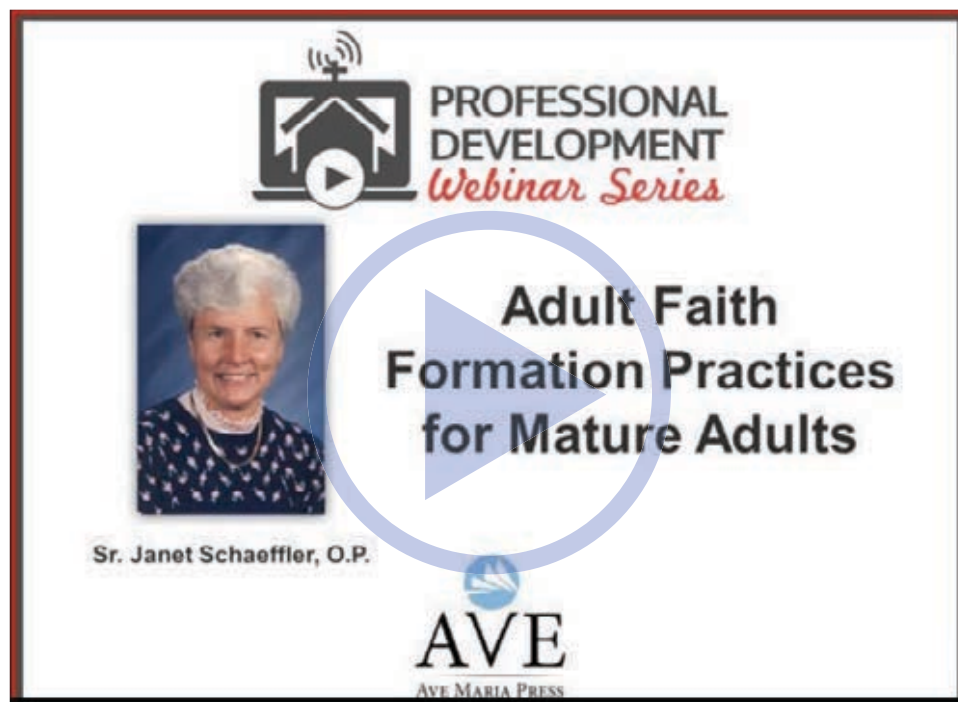
5. Offer a place where people can gather to talk about their questions exploring how faith relates to today's challenges. When something happens in the life of the parish, the community, the church, the nation, or the international community, do people first look to the parish as a hospitable place to gather to explore with others their wonderings, their questions, and their range of emotions? As terrorist strikes, racial tensions, sex abuse scandals, and tragedies such as those in Charlottesville and Sandy Hook dominate the news, do we respond by inviting people for coffee and brownies, wine and cheese, soup and bread (whatever is comforting food) and providing a chance to talk about their feelings, their fears, their questions?

Perhaps a workshop is not what is initially needed. People need less formal opportunities to talk about their concerns too. Then we can ask: What is there in Scripture and Tradition that will help us live through these events, these challenges? Of course, it does not stop there: What does this mean for the way we're called to live as disciples? What can I do? What can we do together?

6. In addition to inviting people together when a significant event occurs (as described above), consider offering a hospitable gathering every week (or twice a month) for prayer and reflective discussion of what is in the news and on people's minds. Depending on the topic, the facilitator (or any participant) could mention needs in the community and world and ways people might be able to respond.

Some people might come all the time; others might come whenever they feel a need. When an extreme need surfaces in the community or world, a welcoming place would already be there.

7. In homilies, continually connect the call to serve, the call to be a person-for-others, to our baptismal call and the Sunday readings.
8. Stress the call and responsibility of the laity found in Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation following the 1987 Synod of Bishops, "On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World," and in the US bishops' documents *Called and Gifted* (1980) and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (1995).
9. Use "convoy learning" (field trips!). Go to where the people are, where the needs are. We learn best by experience. Invite



adult learners into vans and visit, be with, and experience various needs and situations that are different from what people's daily lives usually hold.


10. Invite people to the do-able. When we talk about being missioned to the world and/or begin to study some of today's justice challenges, people can feel daunted and may easily respond, "What can one person do?"

Assure those who care for their elderly parent(s) and advocate for elder rights that their lived reality is already responding to human need and revealing God's presence.

Those who are homebound might feel they can't be involved in touching the world beyond their home. But my mom was very involved in a telephone ministry of calling people weekly — people she did not know (at the beginning) but whose names were given to her to check in on once a week. Writing letters to the editor or to local policy makers about today's important issues is another way that people with less mobility can make a difference — with a little encouragement and suggestions from the parish.

11. Hold an Outreach Fair. Similar to Ministry Fairs highlighting parish ministries, Service and Outreach Fairs help introduce people to ways to respond to the call to be missioned to the world, to make a difference in life beyond our parish. Various groups and agencies (both within and outside the parish) that provide avenues for com-

munity awareness and involvement can be invited to exhibit.

12. Acknowledge service. Similar to commissioning and thanking those involved in parish ministerial life, can we acknowledge those who respond to their call to be of service in the world? Doing so before or after liturgy or at other events increases parishioners' awareness that people can respond in service in many and diverse ways.
13. Offer ongoing learning. Adult formation is about much more than imparting knowledge; it's about transformation. Enable each person to develop skills for service and outreach by offering practical sessions and other learning opportunities within your programs.
14. Network. Beyond keeping your own programs and processes going (no matter the kind or format), continually share with participants (and all parishioners) ways to be involved in service to others, including linking with other parish, diocesan, or national groups who have like interests. 

**Janet Schaeffler, OP**, was for many years the director of adult faith formation for the Archdiocese of Detroit. She facilitates retreats and parish missions and teaches online courses for the University of Dayton, Boston College, and the Vibrant Faith Institute. She also publishes GEMS, a monthly newsletter from an ongoing international best practices study on adult faith formation. Learn more at [janetschaeffler.com](http://janetschaeffler.com).

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**Dan Pierson** has served as a catechist, Catholic school teacher, and parish and diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of [www.eCatechist.com](http://www.eCatechist.com) and Faith Alive Books, which publishes *The Catechist's Guide to Reading the Bible Series* ([www.faitHALivebooks.com](http://www.faitHALivebooks.com)).

