

A serene sunset scene over a beach. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. Two small figures are walking along the shoreline in the distance. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

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of Walking  
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# The Myth of Polarization

KEN OGOREK

“Polarization” is a political term that doesn’t belong in church-related conversations. Specifically, it’s a statistical concept that’s descriptive without referencing an objective norm for comparison’s sake.

## Concentric circles

The typical liberal-versus-conservative narrative places these two camps on opposite ends of a spectrum. The problem with this oversimplification is that Jesus occasionally wanted many things to change rapidly (the definition of liberal) while at times expressing hesitancy about doing away with time-tested truths, laws, and wisdom (a pretty conservative point of view).

A better image for church dynamics is that of concentric circles. In the center circle are core doctrinal and moral teachings that provide a basis for related truths. An example is the Most Holy Trinity. In the next circle out are additional teachings—equally true to those at the core yet dependent on them in some way. This image helps us visualize the hierarchy of truths when that concept is taught accurately.

How many rings comprise the concentric circles makes for interesting discussion. The point here is that so long as you are within the outermost circle, you acknowledge each basic doctrinal and moral teaching of the church as true—even those that can be hard sayings at various points in history. Hopefully you also celebrate these core and related teachings—articulated authoritatively in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*—as good, beautiful, and helpful.

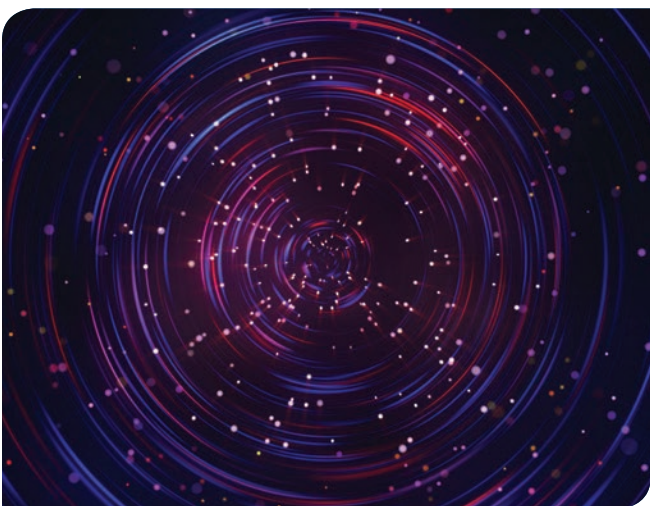
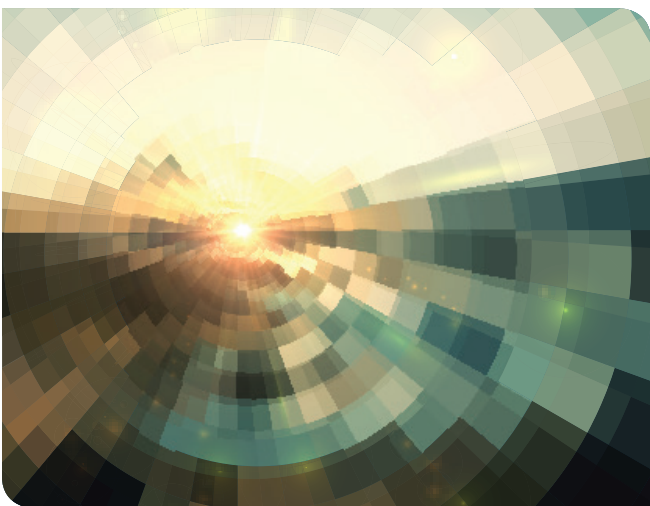
Folks who dissent from one or more basic doctrinal or moral teaching of the church aren’t on an opposite pole as the orthodox (again, hopefully the affirmatively orthodox); rather they are outside the circle of orthodoxy, in the realm of heterodoxy, where the faith is embraced cafeteria-style rather than enjoyed as a full-course feast.

## Related terms: balance and diversity

When polarization is misapplied to faith, then a person can make a statement like “We should have a balanced conference” and mean a few orthodox speakers and a few notorious public dissenters rather than the fuller sense of balance flowing from concentric circles: a rich diversity of authentically







Catholic spiritualities, theological emphases, and pious devotional experiences, all within the unity that marks the holy church.

### What about NCCL?


This is my final column after having been blessed to serve you for three years as president of your NCCL board. When I asked you to vote for our slate of officers, I pointed out that half of all catechetical leaders in the United States (parish and diocesan) are above the age of sixty, with ten percent being over 70 years old. I suggested we should take what we know to be true about younger leaders (generally speaking, based on research and experience) and use that knowledge to guide decisions about NCCL—how we communicate, what we do when we gather, ways we welcome new faces, and so on.

The vast majority of young catechetical leaders I know—and I know many such leaders—do not buy the myth of polarization. They tend to be repelled by a vocabulary of opposing poles and sometimes point out that accusations of being polarizing almost never come from within the circle of orthodoxy. They describe themselves as affirmatively orthodox and, if debating, do so on the basis of whether a point lives within the diversity of what’s good, true, and beautiful among the sure norms of basic doctrinal and moral teaching rather than labeling a point or a person as liberally or conservatively Catholic.

During my time as president, NCCL has made some good progress by God’s grace and our Blessed Mother’s intercession in striving to look like an organization who gets and appreciates young Catholics. Our web presence looks better. Our representative council has spent time looking at research about generational similarities and differences among catechetical leaders. The rosary even shows up occasionally when we gather.

I believe we need to keep this momentum. To the extent that our new officers and our entire hardworking, dedicated board (for whom I pledge my prayers) continue asking and addressing hard questions about NCCL and our most likely new members—younger catechetical leaders—our organization will continue as a significant voice for the prophetic ministry of catechesis. If we were to perpetuate the myth of polarization, we could fall victim to an unintended consequence, becoming a fringe group that looks like it belongs on one or another end of a spectrum.

Let’s avoid the fringe while taking our beautiful Catholic faith to the margins! See you around NCCL. 

**Continue the conversation! Click on the  symbol at the end of each article.**

# Discerning the Future

**MARGARET MATIJASEVIC**

Discernment is aligning oneself with God's will through both listening and responding with intention and then honestly assessing one's choices. In our culture of personal devices with their flag alerts, instantaneous commentaries, and constant access to information, we might think that listening is an easy and obvious exercise. But listening for God's voice is not immediate and automatic; it requires focused dialogue, quiet reflection, and deep exploration of the interior, discovering that which is life giving and rooted in charisms while leaving behind anything that is obstructive to the will of God.

The ancient Christian tradition of discernment provides a strong foundation

for making decisions. Discernment offers opportunities to recognize our charisms and how best they align with a particular decision (or not). Discernment also penetrates to reveal fears that may inhibit one's full commitment. In short, through discernment, we name our gifts and what intimidates us. Then we can better hear God's voice, which typically speaks in surprising and unexpected ways but somehow still resonates as truth.

This is an election year for the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, meaning our members have been discerning their votes for the executive committee to the Board of Directors. This process of entering into thoughtful prayer on behalf of the national voice and work of evangelization and catechesis is deeply significant and fully communal. As a nonvoting member of the organization, I am blessed with the privilege of accompanying others in their discernment processes; listening to their cares and concerns for our community and the ministries in which we serve; hearing their articulation of hopes and

visions for the potential of our work; and holding tenderly the historical voices of past members who built the foundation of who we are today.

In reading Pope Francis's various exhortations, including his most recent, "Rejoice and Be Glad" (Mar. 19, 2018), I find the consistent invitation to accompaniment. As ministers today, we could respond to this invitation by giving all the time we have "left" in the day after completing all our required tasks. This leaves little room for true accompaniment and contradicts the very essence of a people in communion living a prayerful life of discernment. The essential component of all we do is having a relationship with Jesus Christ, our most loving companion, that exposes the truth of our lives, our daily living, and all that entails. If we do not have time for





relationship with and walking alongside others, perhaps we have eliminated the most essential ingredient in our discipleship.

Catechetical leaders across the nation are often tempted to go at this ministry alone. Daily demands and limited time and resources often force people to minimize the value of their membership and full participation in our national community. In my own experience of accompanying catechetical leaders, I see a great hunger to live deeply into their vocations and a desire to prepare their hearts for a bolder approach to their work. Catechetical leaders repeatedly say that more needs to be done—but they struggle to do as much as they hope to in their current circumstances.


This is where discernment of the new NCCL board becomes significant. The most meaningful component of our organization is not a flag alert, a newsletter announcement, or

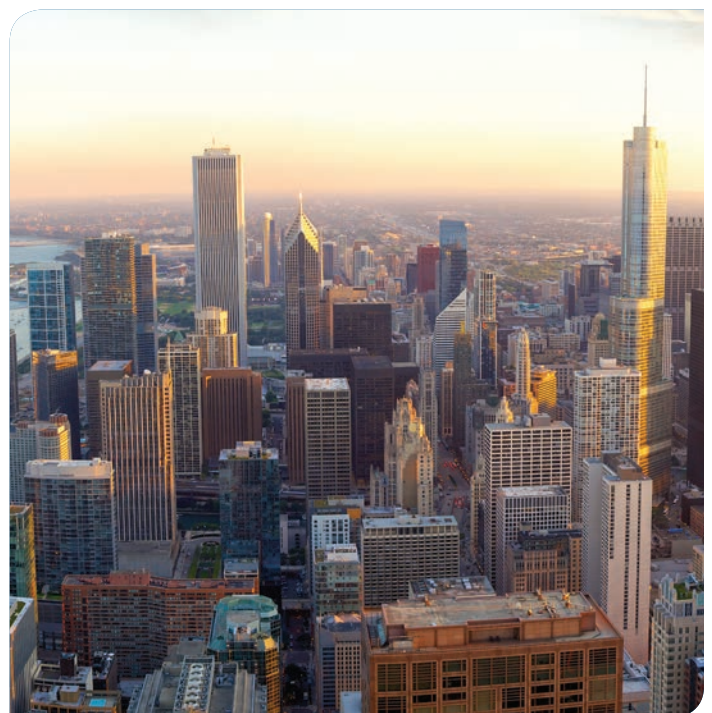
a product; it is the network of people with their varied set of charisms and faith journeys that impact the church every day. The story of the catechist begins with the sending forth of disciples two by two to share the Good News. NCCL honors that and provides you with an accompanying disciple whom you mightn't otherwise encounter. This membership community offers you the gift of a deep gazing into the eyes of Christ, which will renew and inspire you to take on the unimaginable on your journey and in your vocation.

As NCCL members walk with Christ at our annual conference (this year in Chicago), they will explore ways to break down barriers and challenge assumptions and structures—not only with other members but also in the living out of missionary discipleship in the various encounter experiences. This walk with Christ will challenge us to understand more deeply the methods of accompaniment

and proclamation that will reach today's disciples. In addition, our last day together will challenge us to reenter our local churches to serve in bold ways.

NCCL is committed to offering its members time for discernment. My prayer for you is that this experience of walking with Christ will offer clear insight into whom to elect. Who will best lead our organization on its continued journey of growth and intentional discernment? Who will allow us to center ourselves in Christ and challenge us to be bold in all we do?

I pray for each of you that your innermost desires for the ministries of evangelization and catechesis surface, inviting you to see clearly your discerned answer. Vote with a strong affirmation for the slate that will confidently lead NCCL into its future. (For information on the slates of candidates, go to [nccl.org/executive-committee-elections](http://nccl.org/executive-committee-elections)) 



# Sophia's Circle: Comforting the Brokenhearted

EDWINA GATELEY

I handed her a \$20 bill. Maria stared at me, wide-eyed.

"I didn't do nothing," she mumbled — her hands firmly stuck in her jacket pockets.

"It's for the outing," I responded. "We are all going to the fair. You will need some money for games or soda or ice cream or whatever. All the other women have some pocket money."

Maria continued to stand before me looking stunned as I held the bill out to her.

"I didn't do nothing," she repeated.

"You didn't have to do anything," I replied. "The money is a gift for you so you can enjoy yourself and have a good time with the others ... It's part of the retreat."

She took the money and went away — sobbing.

## A lifetime of healing

Maria had been a prostitute and strip dancer for over 25 years. She knocked on my door in Chicago late one night. Covered in blood, her jaw broken and teeth gone, she had been gang raped and beaten up in the nearby alley. It took weeks for Maria to begin the recovery process. But, surrounded by the prayers, care, and love of a small group of others in recovery from abuse and violence, Maria began to heal. It would be a lifetime process.

Like all the other women to whom I ministered and who had spent most of their lives prostituting in bars, brothels, and streets, Maria was also a drug addict.

"Can't do it if you ain't high," the women frequently told me.

Prostitution and drugs simply went together. One could not allow oneself to be so abused and, at the same time, be aware and sober.

Ministering to the women off the streets for over 30 years, I have come to believe that prostitution is not a choice — it is a consequence. There is always a root cause that sets a woman on the path of self-destruction and, inevitably, self-hatred. That root cause, for most of the women I came to know, was incest and child abuse. It happened long before the child even knew what prostitution was. But, after years of abuse, when guilt and self-hatred suppressed any sense of goodness and innocence, there was only one option — prostitution.

"Might as well get paid for it now that I'm a teenager ... been doing it for free since I was four," one woman told me. Such experience results in an unconscious and desperate move toward self-destruction, no matter how convincing all external bravado and posturing may appear.

"We're the scum of the earth ... We're sh-t," one woman told me resolutely. And I knew they all believed it. My task, as a lay minister, was clear — to help the women shift from a self-concept of "scum" to an awareness of being daughters of God.

## Learning God's unconditional love

If the women were to come to that kind of consciousness, they first had to believe that there existed a God — a Greater Power — who would never, could never, give up on them — because this God — like a great Mother or Father, loved them intensely and unconditionally. Love and compassion, not sin,





were all that mattered. The women in recovery needed to come to know that they were precious, loved, and honored just as they were — a tall order for those who had only ever known violence, brutality, and abuse.

Every day a small group of residents gathered in the inner-city home that I had opened as a refuge for women leaving a lifestyle of prostitution. We prayed and shared our stories. We grieved and wept for what had been, and we sometimes laughed and giggled at what might be. Through shared pain, anger, and tears, a sense of sisterhood developed. The women began to love one another. They became community. Their bondedness and commitment to one another and to new life was powerful. It is called accompaniment.

But they could not remain in the safe cocoon of a small residential facility forever. Ultimately, sober, somewhat healed in mind, body, and spirit, the women had to move on. They had to reenter the world from which they had escaped in pursuit of recovery. They had to start again — finding somewhere to live, jobs, and a place in society. Externally they were excited, hopeful, and all set to go. But I sensed their fear, their terror of relapsing, failing,

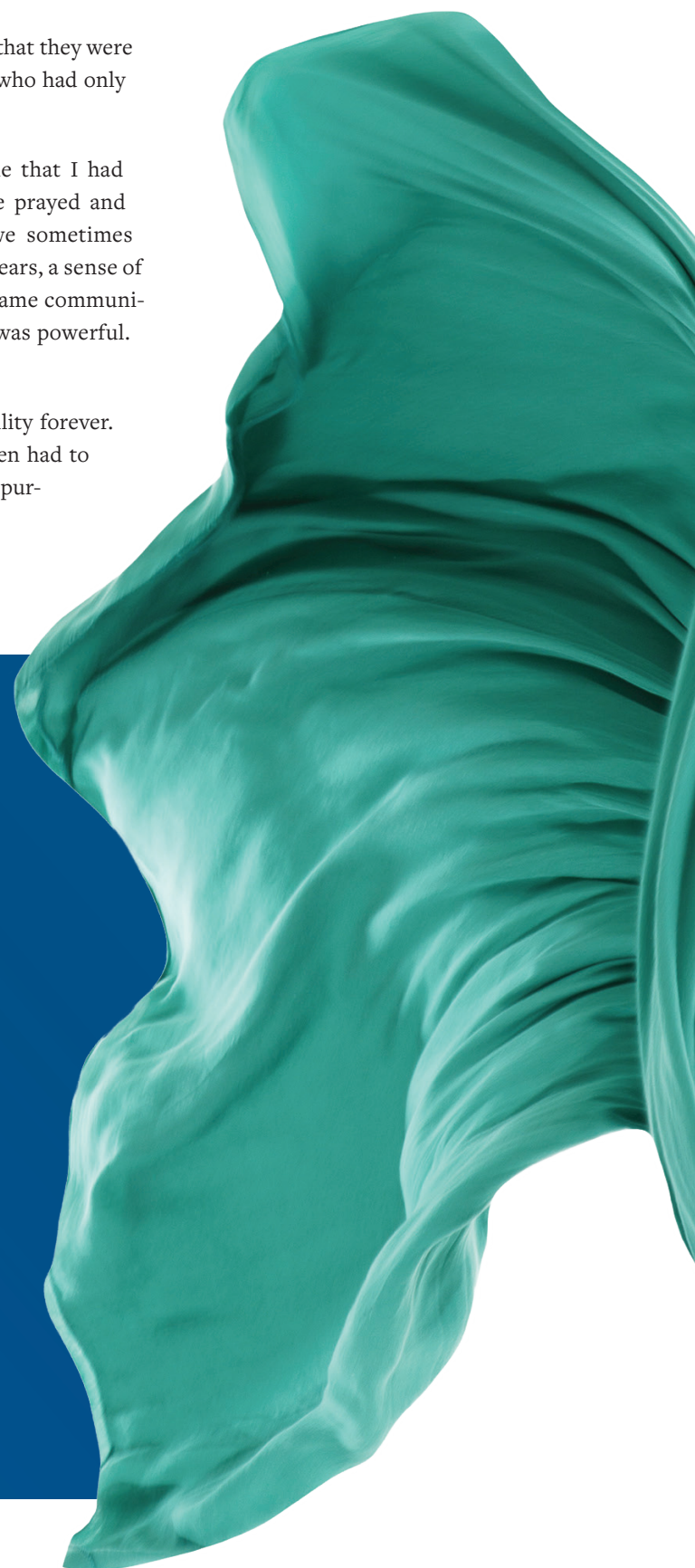
## REFLECTIONS

### Come hide in me

Come,  
Hide in me,  
said God!  
I have this huge,  
huge shawl,  
and, when you are  
still enough  
to let me hold you,  
I will wrap you round  
in warmth  
and you will be  
cocooned in love  
and disappear in me.

Sophia's Circle is God's shawl for women in need of healing and love.

—Edwina Gateley





and falling back into the despair and hopelessness that they had struggled so long and hard to overcome.

### Sophia's Circle

And so began a small foundation that would offer the women an ongoing opportunity to gather, share, and be reaffirmed in their lifelong recovery process. It is called Sophia's Circle and its mission is to offer support to the women in ongoing recovery through retreats, gatherings, counseling, and crisis intervention.

When the women of Sophia's Circle descend on a retreat center, the staff are forewarned! The first hint of the arrivals from the city are loud cries, laughter, and screams of delight that resound in the parking lot and can surely be heard for a few miles around!

"Yo, girl!" ... "Hey, baby — what's up?!" ... "I love you! I love you!"

These and other such sentiments fill the air as the women meet up again to attend their retreat in the countryside. Their delighted and unrestrained declarations of joy disturb the usually tranquil and silent environment of the retreat center. They are definitely not "normal" retreatants! One cannot but imagine the God of love smiling with delight as women who once sat in jails and brothels run with joy into the house of God.

The building is a typical place of prayer and renewal with long, marble corridors carrying the drifting aroma of incense. Religious women fingering rosary beads walk silently by on the immaculately clean floors. But the new retreatants cannot be silent — they are simply ecstatic to be there — in the place they know is "holy." (Maybe, I ponder, it makes them feel holy too?)

The women, many still carrying signs of abuse — ripped ear lobes, missing teeth, facial scars — now know they are in a safe and sacred place — it is the house of God and it is to be their home for these next few days. And for them, it is a lifeline — one which may well be critical in carrying them through the next few months, back into the reality of city life as they struggle to stay safe and sober — and normal. It is as if God had plucked them from their dingy apartments and stressful routines and, holding

## REFLECTIONS

### A place

I dream a place  
for women  
to come apart  
to meet themselves  
in a safe and nurturing space.

A place for women  
who have never been alone,  
or looked upon their deep feminine selves,  
can be free to sink  
into the wombs of  
their grandmothers,  
their mothers,  
themselves

I dream of a place  
where all the cycles of  
a woman's life  
will be acknowledged  
and celebrated  
in tune with nature and  
the rhythms of the earth

I would like a place  
where the weary,  
the battered and the raped  
will find healing  
in herbs and touch and dance

I dream a place  
where women will sing and chant  
beneath the full moon  
and dance around  
the dying embers,

a place  
where the feminine will  
be nurtured  
and born again  
into our world

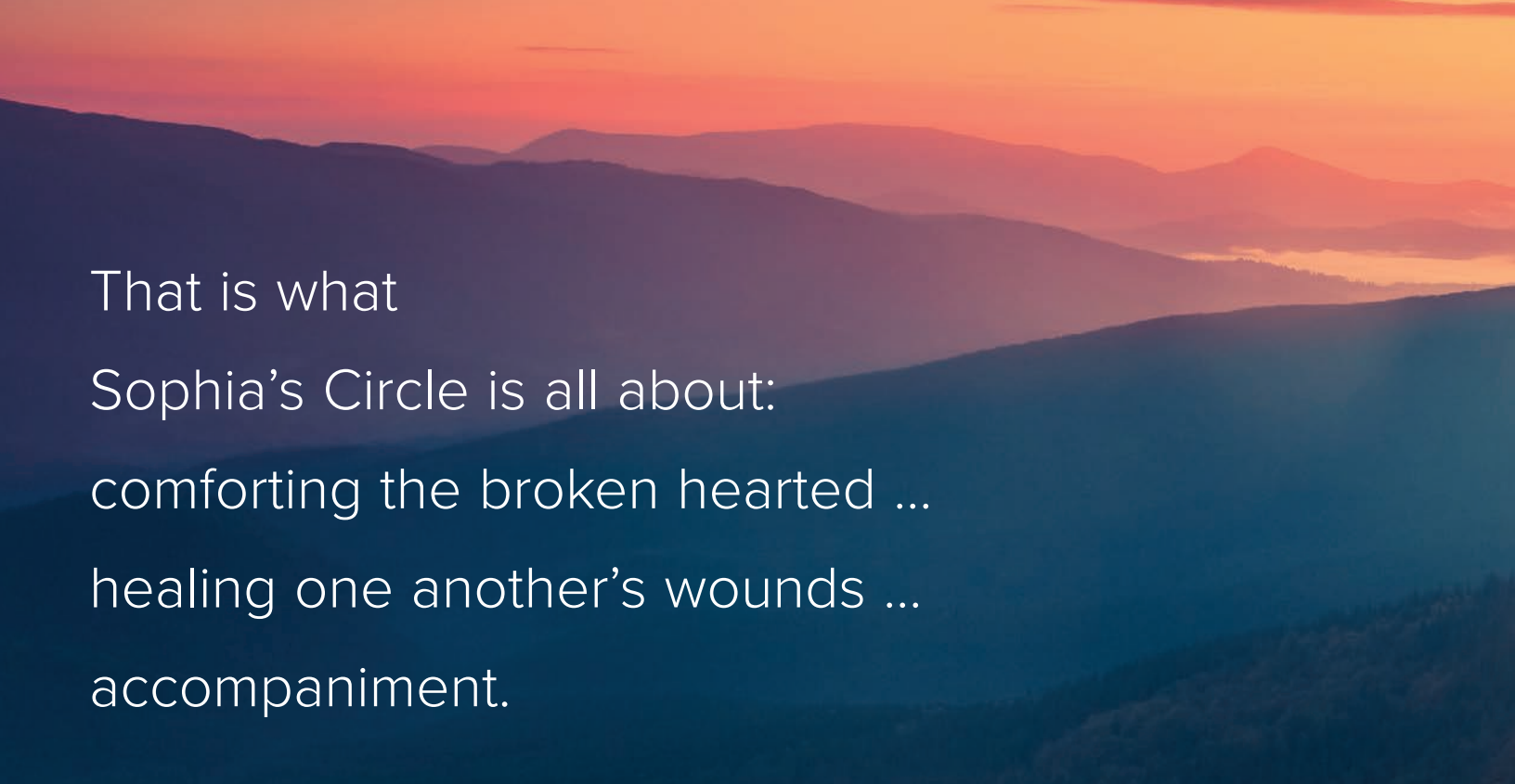
Ah, I dream a place  
for virgin, mother and crone  
to rise again  
in fullness  
with the moon.

—Edwina Gateley





She, who once  
was broken and hopeless,  
now reaches out to her sisters  
in healing touch and hope.  
She has come full circle.



That is what  
Sophia's Circle is all about:  
comforting the broken hearted ...  
healing one another's wounds ...  
accompaniment.

them tightly, plopped them down in paradise. In this paradise they are warmly welcomed by the nuns — hugging them like prodigal daughters come home. The tears are already flowing, and the retreat has not even begun ...

After supper we begin with gathering in a circle. We are here to tell our stories, to listen to one another, and to pray together to the God who gathered us from loneliness, fear, and stress to sisterhood, peace, and beauty.

It is too much.

### **A sacred space**

As we begin to go around the circle, simply saying our names and sharing how we are doing in our daily lives — one of the women, Rachel, begins to sob. She can't even say her name. But we continue round the circle. The meeting begins with a welcome and explanation of the schedule to the background sound of Rachel weeping, inconsolable.

And I remember the biblical phrase: “Rachel — weeping for her children ....”

We are in a sacred space ...

Throughout the night, Rachel continues to cry. But she is also surrounded by the love and comfort of her sisters who sit with her — often in silence — into the late hours. That is what Sophia's Circle is all about: comforting the broken hearted ... healing one another's wounds ... accompaniment.

The next day the psalm we read aloud at prayer speaks powerfully to all of us:

Some had lost their way in the wilds and the desert  
Not knowing how to reach an inhabited town;  
They were hungry and desperately thirsty,  
Their courage was running low.  
Then they called to Yahweh in their trouble  
And Yahweh rescued them from their suffering  
Releasing them from gloom and darkness,  
Shattering their chains ...  
Reducing the storm to a whisper  
Until the waves grew quiet,  
Bringing them safe to their port ...

*(Ps 107, Jerusalem Bible)*

After her night of tears, Rachel had grown quiet. Her sobs had become a whisper: “Thank you — I'm OK.” Trancelike, she began to absorb her peaceful surroundings and interact with her sisters who frequently embraced her, smiling their welcomes and understanding. One way or another, they had all been there before. The difference now was they were not going back. These prodigal daughters — these daughters of God — now knew that there were alternatives. They had discovered the God of love, who knows only love. They had discovered their sisters and the meaning of sisterhood. Their lives would never be the same.

No need to recall the past  
No need to think about what was done before.  
See, I am doing a new deed,






Even now it comes to light — can you not see it?

Yes — I am making a road in the wilderness.

A path in the wild ...

(Is 43:16–18)

During the retreat we spent a field day in the nearby park. That was when I gave Maria the \$20 bill. Maria spent the \$20 on games, ice cream, and soda. She played all afternoon like the child she had never been.

As the years passed and she continued to attend our retreats, Maria went back to school and trained as a therapist for women in recovery. She, who once was broken and hopeless, now reaches out to her sisters in healing touch and hope. She has come full circle. Maria now knows who she is — a daughter of God — the God who knows only love, which can begin with such simple things as games and ice cream and soda — and accompaniment. 

**Edwina Gateley** is a poet, advocate, author, and public speaker. She is the founder of the Voluntary Missionary Movement in her native Britain, Genesis House in Chicago, and Sophia's Circle in Erie, Pennsylvania. Her books include *Christ in the Margins* and *In God's Womb: A Spiritual Memoir*. Learn more at [edwinagateley.com](http://edwinagateley.com).

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# Setting the World on Fire: Catechesis through an Evangelizing Lens

JULIANNE STANZ

I love the smell and sound of an open fire. Having lived in Ireland for many years, I became adept at building fires, as many homes have large, open fireplaces around which families gather. One of the first lessons my mother taught me was to always build a fire in layers, placing a couple of pieces of coal on the bottom, adding some light kindling on top, and then stuffing paper in between. Putting on a big log or dumping in too much coal right away would cause a fire to smother and eventually die out. The fire had to be tended regularly so that heat could build up slowly rather than burn out too fast. I believe that in our ministries we can overload our ministerial fires to the point that they smolder, fizzle, and burn out.

Much as a fire will die or a circuit will short when it has been overloaded, we as a church have reached what Pope Francis calls a “diagnostic overload” (“*Evangelii Gaudium*,” 50). This overload, caused by a flurry of activity coupled with dwindling personnel and financial resources, can have the effect of smothering the fire of parish life.

If we put more and more activities, events, programs, and stresses on ourselves as ministers, we run the risk of allowing our fires to dwindle down to the bare embers. This danger can be avoided, Francis reminds us, only by an evangelical discernment that prioritizes missionary discipleship. This means a change from a more administrative model of ministry to an evangelical missionary model that emphasizes relationship building.

The Catholic Church is being shaped by these changes, particularly since the Second Vatican Council. Cardinal Avery Dulles remarked that “a simple word count indicates the profound shift in focus. Vatican I, which met from 1869–1870, used the term gospel (*evangelium*) only once and never used the terms evangelize and evangelization. Less than a century later, Vatican II mentioned the gospel 157 times and used the verb evangelize eighteen times and the noun evangelization thirty-one times” (“John Paul II and the New Evangelization: What Does It Mean?” in Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, eds., *John Paul II and the New Evangelization* [Cincinnati: Servant/St. Anthony, 2006], 4).

While we can look to the lessons of the past, we must also recognize that we are living in a new age, one characterized by the rapid rise of those who profess no religious identity, those who are formal members of communities but do not practice their

faith, and those who have some connection to their faith but one that is tenuous. Too often, our approach to faith formation lacks the fire or energy it deserves. Saint Ignatius of Loyola urged his followers to “go set the world on fire!” In this article, we will identify opportunities for the catechetical leader to ensure that every aspect of faith formation communicates a sense of passion, energy, inspiration, and mission.

## Jesus came to bring fire: fire-building essentials

Fire has played one of the most significant roles in the advancement of civilization. The world depends on the warmth and energy of the biggest fire near Earth, the sun. Without fire, there would be no life. Fire and life go hand in hand.

This is also true of our spiritual lives. The metaphor of fire is used throughout the Bible to indicate the presence of God directly and the presence of God in others. God is described as a “consuming fire” (Heb 12:29 NRSV); Jesus says, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lk 12:49); and we are told that we will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11). Without the fire of our faith, we would be lifeless Christians, lacking fervor and energy. We would have no “get up and go”! As ministers at a critical time in the history of the Catholic Church, we need to recover a sense of evangelistic zeal and missionary fervor. So how can we recover a sense of purpose and passion in our ministries?

Let’s start with the fire-building essentials—preparation and planning.

## Preparation and planning

The principal of the all-girls school that I attended in Ireland used to wisely remark that “if you fail to plan, you’re planning to fail.” In ministry, planning for events becomes paramount, and visioning and goal setting for the long range take a back seat. During the “Address of Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization” (Oct. 14, 2013), Francis called for “a shared commitment to a pastoral plan which brings us back to the essential and which is *solidly focused on the essential; that is, on Jesus Christ*. To get diverted by many secondary or superfluous things does not help; what helps is to focus on the fundamental reality, which is the encounter with Christ, with his mercy and with his love, and to love our brothers and sister as he has loved us.”





A well-thought-out process and vision are necessary for disciple making, and yet many in ministry have little experience in articulating a long-range pastoral plan. But it is useful to consider a pastoral plan as kindling for the fire, as without it we lack direction and accountability.

One method for building a healthy pastoral plan is to use what I call “the rule of three and three.” This methodology employs three pathways to becoming a disciple-making ministry coupled with three focusing questions, as follows:

**Discernment.** Before you undertake any evaluation of the parish or your ministry, view the process in terms of discernment, and permeate the entire process with ample prayer. Objectively assess your ministry, taking time to pray about where the Lord is leading you, while reflecting on the needs of the people you are serving.

**Purification.** Identify successes, weaknesses, and opportunities in your ministry. Identify areas for pruning so that new life can occur. Not everything that we do bears fruit, so we must take the time to distill the essential elements of our ministry. Examine what is out-

dated or no longer working. Take the time to grieve, give thanks for all that was, and look at options for the future.

**Reform.** Simplify and streamline your ministry to focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ. Abandon or reform programs and processes that are not in total alignment with this goal.

With these three principles in mind, ask the following questions: In order to form disciples in my personal life and in my ministry, what do I need to ...

- \* Start doing?
- \* Stop doing?
- \* Keep doing?

Through the years, these questions have been invaluable in helping me to distill the essential elements of my ministry. From experience, I can tell you that it is far easier to figure out what we should keep doing and start doing than what we should stop doing. Parishes are unwilling to prune ministries that are no longer bearing fruit



They began  
with the Good News  
that, through Jesus, God had  
drawn near to his people.

and feel more comfortable keeping the existing struggling ministry going while adding new programs or events. As a result, all the ministries struggle because of the constant activity; every new ministry is placed in jeopardy before any momentum and fire can be generated. Over time this causes our ministerial fire to die down.

As catechetical leaders, we are asked to bear fruit in our lives and in our ministries. Throughout the Bible, we find many earthy metaphors that help us to connect the eternal with the earthly so that we can grow as disciples, such as “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (Jn 15:8).

Fruit is visible. If you have a fruit tree that is barren, very often it will wither and die. It can no longer claim to be a healthy and growing tree. There are times when plants and trees need to be pruned so that they can produce more. But pruning a dead tree is pointless. The best time to prune is when there are several buds to choose from; removing one or two of them helps the tree become healthier.

Every activity should have the goal of leading people to encounter Christ. If you are spending time on activities that do not introduce people to Christ, then stop doing it. While this may sound harsh, it will ultimately free you to put your time and effort into building a fire capable of sustaining itself beyond your wildest dreams.

### “Softwood” opportunities

Getting a fire going is much easier if you use softwood first rather than hardwood. Softwoods are frequently used in building materials and should always be your first choice when building a fire, because they burn easier and faster. In catechetical ministry, building a fire with softwood means reaching out to those in the pre-evangelization stage and building trust through creative and interesting opportunities. These opportunities provide the fuel for building your program more easily, beginning with those closest to you. Hardwood can be added later.

### PARENT NIGHTS: CATECHIZE BY STEALTH

When I was working in faith formation and youth ministry, many young people shared that they never discussed matters of faith with their parents. Those same parents admitted that their faith illiteracy contributed to feelings of insecurity in discussing issues, particularly moral issues, with their children. If my religious education program was to thrive, I knew that I had to strengthen opportunities for parents to not only connect with their children but also engage with their peers. I decided to revamp Parent Night. Instead of discussing matters such as the parish handbook, the cancellation of classes, and so on, I began addressing the Catholic faith in a real, fresh, and simple way. At the time, I often referred to this approach as “CBS”—catechesis by stealth!



Parent nights became a tool for stealthily evangelizing parents who were hungry for community but didn't know how to connect. Usually I titled the program something "catchy" and uplifting. After several parent nights of moderate attendance, parents began stepping forward and asking for more opportunities to learn about their faith. They invited their friends; they requested certain speakers; and they asked for a series of gatherings on topics that interested them.

Through this experience, I learned an important point: we are all ministers *of* and *to* adults. If you work in the area of faith formation, this is an important paradigm shift to make. Youth-centered catechesis cannot happen in a vacuum. We must engage the families and the adults of the community in order to evangelize and catechize our children. Offering parents practical support can help build trust and forge relationships that will make it ultimately possible to share the heart of the gospel message with them.

## DISCIPLE YOUR CATECHISTS: INVEST AND EQUIP

In the parish, the closest sphere of influence for catechetical leaders is our catechetical team. Taking the time to invest in our catechists and equipping them with disciple-building skills (proclaiming the kerygma, praying with others, recognizing the signs of discipleship "readiness") means that they can disciple their learners more effectively. We must continually evangelize and catechize our catechists.

Catechesis, which unfolds the beauty and treasures of church teaching, presupposes that evangelization has already taken place. Catechesis is the "cart" behind the evangelization "horse." Evangelization aims to put people in touch with Jesus Christ, and catechesis builds on this relationship and "formalizes" it. There is a reason that Pope Saint John Paul II called for a "new evangelization" and not a "new catechesis." We have more catechetical programs, materials, and resources than ever before in the history of the church. While we must always strive to have strong, faithful, and dynamic catechesis, catechesis will not be fruitful in the life of a person unless he or she has been evangelized—that is, transformed by a relationship with Christ. Our catechists can dialogue with, challenge, and transform others in Christ only if they have dialogued with and been challenged and transformed in Christ themselves.

## KERYGMA: PROCLAIM AND REPEAT

The kerygma—meaning "proclamation," from the Greek word *kerusso*, meaning "herald" or one who proclaims—is essential to the work of making disciples. It is not a onetime proclamation but one that must be heard "again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment" (Pope Francis, "Evangelii Gaudium," 164). All formation processes consist of entering more and more deeply into the kerygma.

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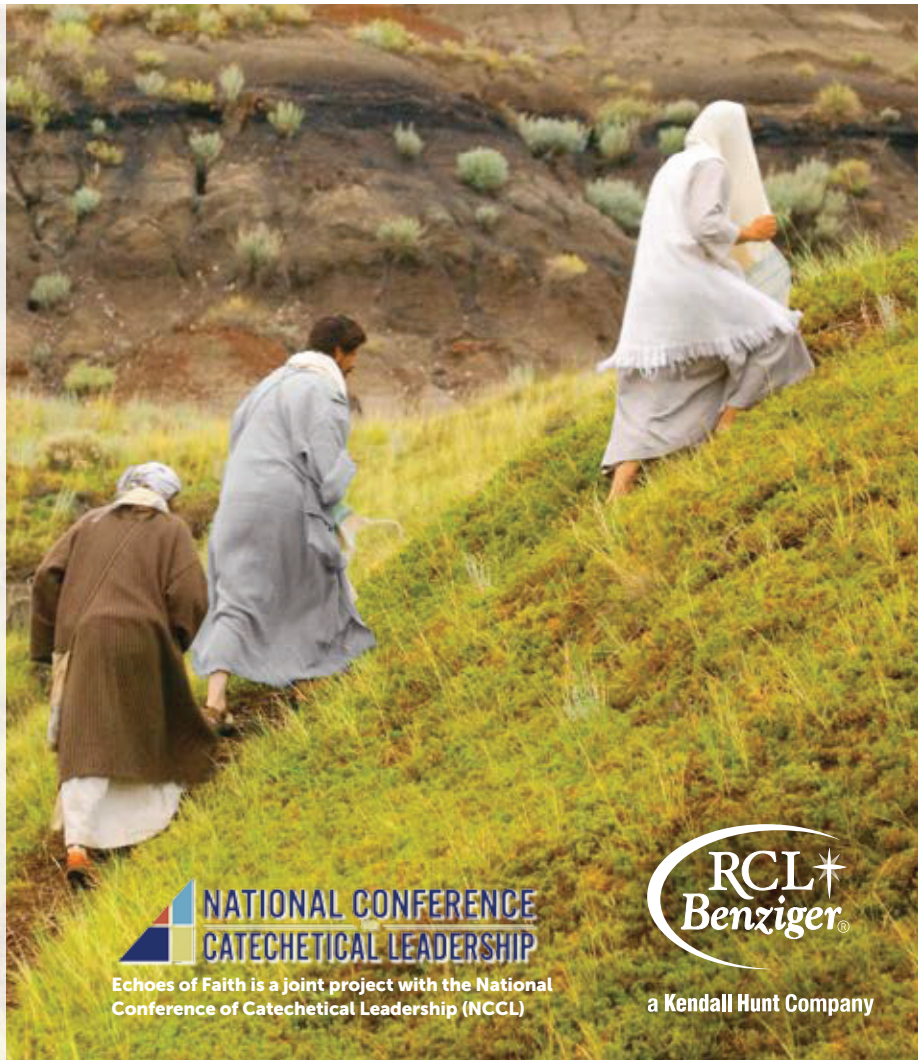
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As the apostles began sharing their experience of Jesus Christ, they started with the basics of his life, death, and resurrection. They began with the Good News that, through Jesus, God had drawn near to his people. Only after people understood and accepted the basic message did they gradually progress to a much fuller instruction or teaching (*didache*) in the faith. In the early church, quite a bit of time was devoted to initial proclamation and helping people to develop a relationship with the person of the Good News. In this way, Jesus is both the message and the messenger, and in the parable of the sower, he is both the sower and the seed.

Do not take it for granted that your catechists understand or can articulate the kerygma. The vast majority of Catholics have some basic idea of the gospel but need to hear the kerygma many times for it to take root. Some might be familiar with one of the movements but not all of them. Some people will need a slightly different or longer version of the kerygma depending on their spiritual growth. As a catechetical leader, helping your catechists to assimilate and proclaim the kerygma is critical to the foundation of your catechetical program.

### **Adding “hardwood”: generating lasting heat**

Once a fire has been lit, it is essential to add hardwood. Hardwood is slower burning and produces a more sustained and lasting heat.

In your faith-formation program, incorporating ideas or models that are more time intensive and bring about lasting change needs careful discernment and the support of the parish team. These changes can be difficult to navigate and may “rock the boat,” so be sure to consider what layers of change are best to keep the fire burning. Sometimes in ministry we get unpleasant “heat” for various decisions, but adding hardwood is about generating the good kind of heat — lasting change in your faith-formation program for the good of all those whom you serve. Some ideas include beefing up your retreat ministries or even revising models of faith formation that might be outdated. Many parishes are taking another look at the traditional classroom model of faith formation and re-designing it or enhancing it.

### **RETREAT MINISTRY: ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST**

One of the challenges in our faith-formation programs is one that remains fixed: time. The challenge of having limited time with students and parents can be an obstacle to relationship building, but it can also help us strive for quality rather than quantity. Plan and design opportunities for children and their parents to encounter Christ, whether in weekly prayer or eucharistic adoration or by introducing and reintroducing children and parents to Christ over a longer period.

Danielle Ehlenbeck from Kiel, Wisconsin, shared this in an email to me:

One of the challenges in our faith-formation programs is one that remains fixed: time. The challenge of having limited time with students and parents can be an obstacle to relationship building, but it can also help us strive for quality rather than quantity.






While our parishes may have weaknesses, they are still the best places to form people in faith for the service of the world.

One of the best things I've incorporated into my program are grade-level retreats. Every single student attends a retreat every year. I break it into grade groups, K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and high school. These retreats are for the students and their parents. I make sure the parents know that if they don't attend the retreat, their student shouldn't either, since the majority of the retreat is about working together. At the retreats, I give parents tips and tools on how to pass our faith on to the student at that child's level. I always allow time for the parents and students to have one-on-one conversations about varying topics. Every year I have a theme that all the retreats follow, which allows those families with multiple children to learn about the same topic at different levels. I've been doing this for four years and have 80% or higher attendance at each retreat.

### Reclaiming the fire of parish life

If we want to move our people from minimal commitment to being on fire for their faith, then we must be bold, we must be creative, and we must take risks! A renewed emphasis on the church's evangelizing mission is necessary to adapt the message to the people. Using the expression "new ardor, methods and expression" coined by Pope Saint John Paul II, the church seeks to engage and reengage the culture using all the means at our disposal, including relationship building, formation, retreats, classes, and new and emerging technologies such as social media and digital-ministry strategies.

While our parishes may have weaknesses, they are still the best places to form people in faith for the service of the world. The parish is the people, not just a building or district. The parish is where the people of God come together to become enflamed and from which they go out to share the flame of faith with others. Evangelization and catechesis must continue to be rooted in the parish. The parish is the first point of contact for most Catholics, particularly those who have been away from the church and are seeking to return home to the regular practice of their Catholic faith. It is in the parish that we become engaged with the wider church community, are nourished by Scripture and the sacraments, and have the opportunity for initial and ongoing formation in faith. Parishes must be equipped to see how every aspect of its life and ministry are opportunities to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing the world by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The time is now to be pyromaniacs for our faith and set the world on fire! 

**Julianne Stanz** is the director of new evangelization for the Diocese of Green Bay and the author of *Developing Disciples of Christ* (Loyola Press). Contact her at [jstanz@gbdioc.org](mailto:jstanz@gbdioc.org).

# Seeking Spiritual Balance in an Off-Kilter World

KATHY HENDRICKS

What throws you off-balance? Perhaps it's time — or the lack of it — and the feeling of continually running behind schedule. It might be responsibilities at home or work or in the parish, diocese, or civic community. Then there is the upheaval accompanying the unexpected — a sudden illness or disability, the death of a loved one or loss of a job, an unanticipated move, a dip in income, or the breakdown of a major appliance. For catechetical leaders additional issues come into play — a change of pastor or bishop, unexpected events, and job descriptions that are way out of whack with the day-to-day demands of ministry. Even the positive changes in life can have an unsettling effect, requiring us to switch gears, adjust to new rhythms and routines, and regain our footing. Beyond our personal experiences lies a world set off-kilter by unstable markets, perpetual wars, and political polarization.

## It's like living in a three-ring circus

What better metaphor for the off-kilter life — particularly that of the catechetical leader — than that of a circus? Simultaneous performances vie for the audience's attention, which, in turn, bounces back and forth from center ring to the rafters and then to the sidelines. It's not much different from the demands that come from overstuffed schedules, surly parishioners, fractious parents, planning snafus, and unreliable volunteers. Each one might merit attention or insist on it. Either way, the attempt to keep everything functioning is exhausting and overwhelming.

Embedded within the circus metaphor are the performers, each having a specific role to play. There is the juggler who manages multiple responsibilities with ease and the tightrope walker treading a fine line in order to stay perched on the high wire. The lion tamer keeps him- or herself from being devoured by wild beasts, and the trapeze artist swings from one task to the next. The strongman or -woman shoulders most of the weight while the clown keeps everyone else happy. And then there is the ringmaster, who must keep all the acts in sync and the onlookers informed and engaged. Each performer in the circus contains a parallel to the kind of performer we are expected to be by those with whom we live, work, and minister. We might, in turn, hold even stricter expectations of the performer we think we *should* be. And then there is the performer we would choose to be if only we had the opportunity. When all three of those expectations collide, it leaves us even more off-kilter.

Each circus performance has the potential to be either manic or artistic. It's a matter of finding a bit of balance so that we don't topple over, drop all of the balls, or get crushed under the load we carry. Finding the kind of balance that allows us to live out our roles and align our expectations will not happen overnight. What does it take, then, to get our act together so that we temper the expectations of others and ourselves? How do we stay realistic about our limitations while still holding on to our dreams and tapping into our best selves? We cannot expect life to fall into balance overnight. We can, however, take some steps in that direction. The first one involves a move out of center ring.

## Reclaiming Sabbath time

The circus is an itinerant life. It moves from place to place, pitching a tent for a temporary series of engagements before moving on. Traveling circuses often take place outside of the town limits, making them peripheral to the main center of activity. In order to attend, people move toward the outskirts and gather under the Big Top. The circus draws both performers and audience away from life as usual.

“Running away to join the circus” was once a popular idiom for those wishing to escape the humdrum and tedious routine of life. It embraced that itinerant life as an antidote to boredom and the mundane. Turn the idiom around, and we find the need to escape the frenetic pace of a three-ring circus. This doesn't mean shirking all responsibility or retreating into a self-constructed bubble. In order to find true *spiritual* balance we must reclaim Sabbath time. In order to do so, it helps to reacquaint ourselves with the concept.

In his book *Sabbath*, Wayne Mueller notes that “keeping the Sabbath holy” is the only one of the Ten Commandments starting with the word “remember.” Sabbath, he writes, is “a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity.” Thus, to keep the Sabbath is to step away from the regular routine and lay aside work and worry in order to find a place of rest and rejuvenation. In doing so, we find and remember our true center once again. As an ongoing practice it increases our ability to strike a balance between work and rest, between routines and recreation, between immersion in an active, busy life and withdrawal to its passive edges. Like the trapeze artist, flying through the air with “the greatest of ease,” we find





that Sabbath keeping doesn't make one part of our lives worthwhile and the rest of it a waste. Instead it affirms the importance of being both participant and onlooker, of valuing the multiplicity of our responsibilities, and of setting boundaries around them. As we grow more adept at striking a balance between activity and passivity, it becomes habitual to exit center ring on a regular basis.

Jesus was a model Sabbath keeper. He withdrew on a regular basis for refreshment and renewal through prayer and time with family and friends. He knew when it was time to exit the center ring of movement and activity. "He didn't ask permission, nor did he leave anyone behind 'on call,' or even let his disciples know where he was going. Jesus obeyed a deeper rhythm. When the moment for rest had come, the time for healing was over. He would simply stop, retire to a quiet place, and pray" (Mueller). His example should serve as a particular source of inspiration and intention for catechetical leaders.

All of this makes sense on an intuitive level. What, then, makes Sabbath so difficult to *remember*? For one thing, keeping the Sab-

bath appears to be an outdated and unrealistic practice in a fast-paced world. Even for those involved in parish or diocesan ministry, it is easy to fudge on the concept by letting the demands of the job overshadow the need for regular prayer, meaningful worship, and opportunities to feed the soul. In my travels around the country as a speaker and retreat director, I encounter a tragic number of diocesan and catechetical leaders, catechists, Catholic schoolteachers, and other pastoral ministers on the edge of burnout. All too often it is due to spending too much time in center ring with precious little space for rest, reflection, and rejuvenation of body, heart, mind, and soul.

It is significant that the concept of Sabbath is rooted in a journey. In the Book of Exodus, Moses is given the Ten Commandments during the 40-year trek that took the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. This linked the memory of Sabbath keeping to that of liberation. The longer the road, however, the more prone the Israelites were to forgetting what their enslaved lives entailed. In order to remember, they had to step out anew each day. "Sabbath is the true God's gift to those who wish to rest and be free — and who

are willing to guard those same gifts for every living thing in their vicinity as well” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*).

It takes intention to find spiritual balance. We must be willing to take the first step and then another ... and another. No one wants to be enslaved by the clock, by overload, by stress, or by the crushing aftermath of pain, loss, and heartache. Nevertheless, it is only human to hold back, opting for the seen over the unseen, the known over the unknown. It’s like venturing onto a high wire, where the fear of falling is matched only by the trepidation of learning what may lie on the other side. The only way forward is one careful step at a time. This is what the ancient Israelites did. It’s also what every traveler and circus performer must do, mile after mile, performance after performance. The only way to proceed is with trust that the day’s needs will be met. Over time, the road widens, opening up to more practical ways of finding and maintaining balance.

### Stepping away from anxiety

Sabbath time liberates us not only from unrelenting activity but also from the demon of anxiety that often accompanies it. Taking that first step away from the day-to-day roles and responsibilities can be a challenge, particularly for those hooked on order, control, and schedule keeping. Consider the juggler overly worried about dropping the balls or the ringmaster ever mindful of the need to keep everything and everyone in check. In his book *Making All Things New*, Henri Nouwen connects the scourge of anxiety to an imbalanced spiritual life. “One way to express the spiritual crisis of our time is to say that most of us have an address but cannot be found there.

We know where we belong, but we keep being pulled away in many directions, as if we were homeless.” Worrying not only fragments our lives but also keeps us from finding our true center.

One of the great themes in the Bible is how people were called away from their homes — their places of security and stability — in order to walk the high wire of faith. The call to Abraham and Sarah is a great example. At a time when they might have kicked back and enjoyed the time that remained in their lives, God called them to travel to an unknown land. “Go forth,” he told them and then provided no map or description of their final destination. They obeyed with a bit of trepidation but also with trust that outweighed anxiety.

Taking the first step on any journey requires *courage*. The word itself comes from a root meaning “heart.” It took a great deal of courage for Abraham and Sarah to set out on such an uncertain journey at their advanced ages. Even so, perhaps they were drawn to it by a deep and unconscious longing to grow closer to God, whose plans were both intriguing and mystifying. This same longing must have also stirred Moses and the enslaved Israelites as well as the disciples who jumped out of their boat in order to follow Jesus. As a spiritual director, I often repeat back to my directees the longings that seem to lie beneath their stories and questions. In doing so, I simply remind them to look into their own hearts. This takes the quest for spiritual balance beyond the functional. It cannot be just another item on a to-do list but a yearning that comes from and leads out of the heart. This, in turn, leads us to some interesting places.

This same longing must have also stirred Moses and the enslaved Israelites as well as the disciples who jumped out of their boat in order to follow Jesus. As a spiritual director, I often repeat back to my directees the longings that seem to lie beneath their stories and questions. In doing so, I simply remind them to look into their own hearts.





It's a striking description of the way Jesus  
“walked the tightrope” between engagement  
and withdrawal, community and solitude,  
talking and listening, work and play.

### Moving to the periphery

One of the greatest benefits of exiting center ring is discovering the value of peripheral living. This is an intentional practice in which we detach from frenetic pursuits, from noise and negativity, from toxic relationships, and from commitments we no longer need or care about. Once we reach the periphery through regular periods of Sabbath rest and reflection, we begin to recognize the center rings we no longer need or want to enter again.


Peripheral living draws us toward the liberation of simplicity. Dragging along our “stuff” — be it physical, mental, or emotional — is hardly the way to exit center ring. As the comedian George Carlin put it, “Just 'cause you got the monkey off your back doesn't mean the circus has left town.” There has to be an intentional effort to leave behind the physical or emotional baggage that weighs us down or keeps us anchored to anxiety and fear. Off-loading it gives way to a wider mind-set, one that makes the first step exhilarating.

Moving to the periphery isn't a complete withdrawal from life's activities but a practice in which we become mindful of the moment. It requires walking a tightrope between two time-honored spiritual states of the heart — contemplation and action. Holding the two together requires a delicate balance, something we learn from circus performers who do so with grace and ease.

But Jesus is *the* model for such movement. The late John Mogabgab, editor of *Weavings* magazine, once described Jesus as a “denizen of the edges.” It's a striking description of the way Jesus “walked the tightrope” between engagement and withdrawal, community and solitude, talking and listening, work and play. “Jesus can live on the

edge because he lives from a center radiant with God's love for him and for all creation. There his treasure lies, there his heart abides, from there the boundaries of his heart expand to transform every edge into a potential center of God's untamed grace. As the Spirit of God gradually conforms our hearts to the heart of Jesus, we begin to move away from the centers of world and self to edges where God is doing a new thing.”

### Reentering center ring

When talking to catechetical leaders about the decision to exit center ring, I joke that this isn't exactly the kind of announcement one might make to a pastor or bishop. Sabbath is not an escape from reality or an excuse to shirk responsibilities. After the time concludes, it is important to reenter center ring, to resume our roles and take up our responsibilities. The time we have taken for rest and reflection draws us back to the center of activity with renewed enthusiasm, grace, and attentiveness to the most important aspects of our ministry. And, over time, we learn to integrate the varying expectations that we (and others) place on ourselves with that performer of our dreams. In doing so, we will find the kind of balance that allows us to respond to every off-kilter moment with grace, gratitude, and a spirit of adventure. 

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# Moving from Disability Ministry to Disability Integration

L I N D S E Y   W E S T

I used to feel like I was a very welcoming and accepting faith formation leader to individuals with disabilities and their families. Parents would tell me about their child's special need — whether a physical, learning, or developmental disability — and I would always respond, “No problem, just let me know what I can do.” Most often, that was the extent of the conversation. Occasionally, parents would offer some tips or ask for an accommodation, which I would try to make. This, I thought, was welcome and inclusion in ministry. Experience is the best teacher, though, and my understanding of disability and ministry was rocked when my teacher became my two-year-old in 2015.

Just before he turned two, my son was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As any parent would, I dove headfirst into research and conversations with other parents within the autism community. Adults on the autism spectrum provided new perspectives through their writings and videos. I wondered what faith formation at our parish would be like for my son. I was relieved that our parish has a special-needs sacramental preparation program, but I wondered what his formation outside of immediate sacramental preparation would look like or what would happen if he needed accommodations but not an entirely different curriculum. This was the seed that took root on Easter 2016.

We were in the “overflow” Mass in the parish hall. Our son was acting out in ways we hadn't seen before and didn't understand. I took him outside, helped him calm down, and then tried to take him back into Mass. He immediately protested. I knelt down and asked, with frustration in my voice, “What is wrong?! Why don't you want to go back inside?!” His big, sweet, toddler eyes looked at me (a significant action in itself) and he quietly responded, “Hurts.” Despite all of my autism research, knowledge, and love of my son, it hadn't even occurred to me that the poor acoustics, loud sound system, fluorescent lights, scratchy suit, and possibly other sensory triggers were making his experience of Mass so overwhelming, it felt painful. That heart-piercing moment made me realize several things: disability, especially developmental disabilities like autism, affect all aspects of a person's experience of parish life, not just faith formation; inclusion is more than just adjusting curriculum; inclusion is more than a willingness to make accommodations that are asked of us; inclusion means proactively creating an environment in which individuals with various disabilities can thrive; and we will struggle with inclusion until we recognize our responsibility to see through our children's eyes to better understand them.

What my son taught me is that our parishes need to move beyond disability ministry to disability integration. To better understand what I mean, let's jump into a quick crash course on the difference between ministry and integration as well as some of the basic foundational principles of integration. Then, we can look at how we, as catechetical leaders, can lead the way for disability integration in our parishes.

## More than ministry

When I talk with catechetical leaders about disability integration, they tend to share earnestly, “I wish we could do that, but we just don't have the time, people, or resources to start a disability ministry.” Or they ask, “What resources or programs are out there for special needs faith formation? I don't know what to do with the increasing number of students in our program who have special needs.” I try to explain that disability integration does not necessarily require disability ministry to get started and that programs and resources are not always useful unless you understand and implement disability integration. Programs or resources are the tools we use to support ministry efforts. You can have all the programs and resources in the world and still not have disability integration. In fact, having programs and resources without engaging disability integration is like having an art studio full of tools you might not even know how to use to create your masterpiece.

In practical terms, ministries are the efforts or work of a parish directed toward serving specific demographics or specific goals. Youth ministry, for example, is all the ways a parish tries to meet the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of teens. Faith formation includes all the efforts to form the faith of parishioners, prepare them for the sacraments, and encourage lifelong discipleship. A comprehensive disability ministry might have faith formation, social programs, and perhaps even liturgies offered specifically and uniquely for individuals with disabilities who “can't blend in with the mainstream,” yet a person can participate in all of these without ever touching the lives of the majority of parishioners in the broader parish; there is still a separation between the “mainstream” members of the church and those with differences. So, while disability ministry has an important time, place, and role, it is *not* the same as integration.

Disability integration is a process. As a process, it is a journey, guided by the Holy Spirit, with intentional thought and prayer, that assists us toward our end; the end, of course, is always



relationship with God and his people, the promise of salvation. We can't pick and choose which parts of disability integration to do — that wouldn't be true or full integration. In both ministry and programs, we focus on what we have to offer others. Disability integration is not just about serving a group of people; it's about bringing a diverse body of brothers and sisters in Christ together to be one, shared community. Individuals with disabilities are already members of the body of Christ; without them, we are incomplete. Integration is also about receiving what they have to offer the parish.

### Picture it

As a dynamic and unique process, the journey toward disability integration will look a little different in each parish. Ultimately, though, the parish culture shifts to create an environment that helps individuals with disabilities and their loved ones feel welcome, like they belong and have a sense of ownership over their faith, parish, and the mission of the church.

Highly integrated parishes will have blended faith formation ministries: students with and without disabilities learning about Jesus and being formed as disciples together, with appropriate supports. Adults with and without disabilities will grow in faith together through blended adult formation programs. Individuals with disabilities and their loved ones will serve as catechists or aides, participate in liturgical ministries, and sit on advisory councils in the parish. All parish buildings — church, hall, classrooms — will be modified to accommodate the physical and sensory needs of parishioners with disabilities. Liturgies and social events will provide appropriate environments where individuals with and without disabilities come together to worship, break bread, and grow in shared community. Parishes and dioceses will have support teams to ensure that individuals with disabilities are regularly and easily able to share in the life of the parish. Individuals with disabilities will be seen as parishioners rather than “others” allowed into the parish.

### How we get there

The vision I described above might seem daunting or sound overwhelming, but, if you're still with me, here's the simple yet profound way we pursue it:

1. Shift our perspective from a deficit mentality to a cultural mentality when it comes to disability.
2. Immerse ourselves in the disability culture and communities in our parish.

3. Form a disability integration team to help plan, implement, and support the process of integration.
4. Develop the three intercultural competencies identified by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: attitude, knowledge, and skills.
5. Create a process and space within our faith formation ministries for Individual Formation Plans (IFPs).

### 1. TAKE A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Faith leaders are not immune to society's tendency to view disability from a deficit mentality, in which disabilities tend to be defined by what an individual *can't* do or *struggles* to do. Looking at individuals from this perspective can lead us in faith formation to ask questions like “How do I get a student who *can't* sit still to pay attention? How do I connect with a student who *struggles* with social interactions? How do I teach a student who *can't* talk?”

Since at least the 1970s, disability rights advocates have tried to help the world understand that it's more helpful to speak of disability in terms of culture and cultural experiences. Taking this cultural perspective helps us to humanize disability and empathize better with individuals with disabilities, which is ultimately a very Catholic approach that honors the dignity of all persons. With this perspective, we begin to ask questions such as “How does this student's experience of their disability shape their experience of the world and of God? How can I relate our faith to their unique experiences, and what can I learn about my own faith from their experiences?”

The other aspect of taking a cultural approach is that we stop seeing “behaviors” as bad and as something to overcome. Instead, we're better able to recognize that *all* behaviors serve a purpose and communicate something to us. For example, a student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) might be doodling instead of paying attention during a faith formation session. Rather than seeing this as inattentiveness, boredom, or disrespectfulness, you might come to recognize that doodling is a way for the student to organize his thoughts and senses so he can better process what is happening in the class. A student with autism might be tapping her pen, chewing on her shirt sleeve, or fidgeting with something during a discussion. Rather than viewing her behavior as a disruption or indication of apathy, you'd likely come to see that any of these behaviors is a coping tool for her. This might lead you to realize that she is utilizing coping tools because she is feeling very anxious about the discussion or she's overwhelmed because of sensory dysregulation.

## 2. TEACH THE TEACHER

Our best knowledge about disability comes first from the individuals with disabilities whom we serve, second from the broader community (e.g., other individuals with the same disability or the individuals' family members), and last from books and articles and professionals who work with individuals with disabilities. This order is very specific and important because there is a dark history within disability culture of people who are not disabled themselves, even professionals, not truly understanding the disability or the experience of the individual with the disability.

The people with disabilities whom we serve are our best sources of knowledge and understanding of their disabilities because, as I mentioned in the beginning, nothing teaches better than experience. If you have a child with Down syndrome in your faith formation ministry, first spend time with that child and his or her family. Then listen to what self-advocates from the Down syndrome community have to share about their experiences; this might be through videos, books, articles, or other outlets. The same advice applies to any other disability or diagnosis. Parents and other loved ones are part of this cultural experience, but in a different way than the individual him- or herself. A family's unique insight into the experience of disability for their loved one can complement what you learn first from the individual with a disability.

## 3. FORM THE TEAM

Within a parish community, we have a continually fluctuating group of people we come into contact with at Mass, Bible study, faith formation classes, RCIA, parish picnics, coffee and donuts, and so on. There are new parishioners and students every year. Volunteers that run these ministries usually change at least a little bit from year to year. How do we start, continue, and thrive in the disability integration process when there is so much fluctuation in leadership, participation, and relationships? We form a team.

This team will be part of creating and implementing your integration plan. They will help you troubleshoot, adapt, and follow the natural progression of your integration process as it unfolds. Who should be on this team? First and foremost, individuals with various disabilities and diagnoses — these parishioners are the best source of first-person witness to their needs and those of others with various diagnoses. Second, parents and other loved ones of individuals with various disabilities. Of course, the pastor, clergy, lay staff, and other parish or ministry leaders should be present as well. Finally, people from various therapeutic disciplines, such as speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and psychologists.

## 4. DEVELOP ATTITUDE, KNOWLEDGE, AND SKILLS

In their book *So That All May Be One: Best Practices in Shared Parishes*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops developed a phenomenal framework for helping parishes achieve a high level of integration where more than one culture exists. Their framework focuses primarily on ethnic or racial interculturality, so not everything will be directly translatable into a disability context. However,


they laid out three competencies that every leader needs to develop if they are to achieve a high level of integration, which are very applicable to disability culture.

Steps one through three described above roughly correlate to the three competencies identified by the USCCB: attitude, knowledge, and skills. Attitude begins with taking that cultural perspective that humanizes and promotes greater empathy, acceptance, appreciation, and support and encouragement as opposed to the “fixing” or “saving” of the individual. Knowledge is best learned through doing, experience, immersion, and being with individuals with disabilities. Skills come from shifting our perspective, knowing our students, and collaborating with our team of experts (i.e., the individuals with disabilities), family members, and professionals. Specific skills are numerous and will vary depending on each unique student's experience of disability.

## 5. BORROW FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In public schools, students with disabilities and special circumstances can qualify for an Individual Education Plan, or IEP. We can borrow this idea to develop one of the most helpful tools in faith formation: an Individual Formation Plan (IFP). Have your integration team help you create a form and process for creating and implementing IFPs for students with disabilities. At the beginning of the year, the faith formation director, a member from the integration team with IEP experience, and perhaps even the student's catechists will gather to meet with each family, including the student if he or she is old enough. During the meeting, you will discuss and document the student's strengths, interests, classroom, and environmental supports that have proved helpful in other settings; specific faith formation goals or targets; and how the parish catechetical leadership, partnered with the student and his or her loved ones, will achieve these goals. This IFP will be reviewed annually or any time you, the student, or the family feels it needs updating.

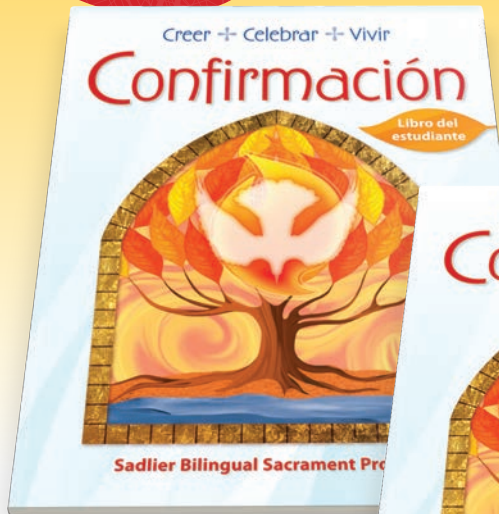
## Final thoughts

There is so much more we could cover! While I don't have the space to delve deeper into the integration framework, training about various disabilities, or other concepts from disability culture, you now have the foundation to begin moving from disability ministry to disability integration. Seeking out further training is an important next step. You can visit the websites of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability and National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion (for Catholic schools) and learn more about disability integration at my website, [uniquelycatholic.org](http://uniquelycatholic.org), or by contacting me at my website below. 

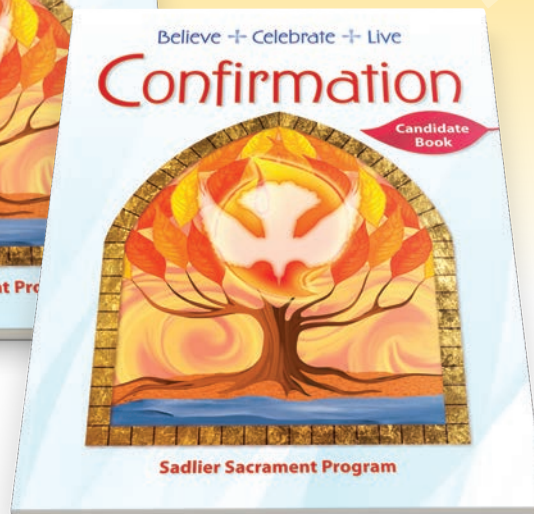
**Lindsey West** is the regional coordinator in the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Sacramento. She has a Master of Theological Studies degree from the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley, California. Contact her through her website, [uniquelycatholic.org](http://uniquelycatholic.org).



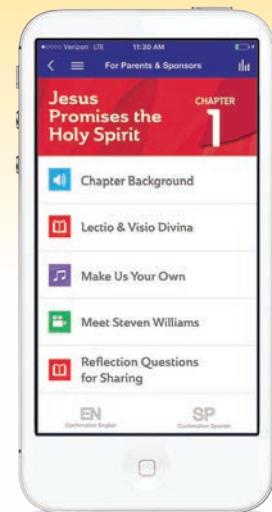
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# The Art of Accompaniment

JOSHUA DANIS

Last July in Orlando, I had the pleasure of being part of the incredible experience of the bishops' convocation on the Joy of the Gospel. For several days we gathered, prayed, and shared insights. Four thousand people wrestled with the question of how best to invite the world into an initial or a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ. Perhaps the most prominent expression that came out of our dialogue was the need to begin practicing the *art of accompaniment*. As the national director for Alpha in a Catholic Context, I was thrilled to see accompaniment receive such attention and focus. At Alpha, we believe that the only way most people will come to encounter Jesus Christ is by someone else taking the time to walk them through life, sometimes for a number of years.

Sharing this level of enthusiasm for accompaniment with church leaders from across the country excited me immensely, but it also made me a little nervous. It excited me because I believe we are heading in the right direction by reaching out to people where they are rather than where we want them to be. It made me nervous, however, because I know too well the danger of talking about an idea for so long that we strip it of its meaning. We master it as academic theory, but we never get around to actually practicing it. I too have made this error in the past, and so the last thing I want is for the *art of accompaniment* to be reduced to a simple, vague Catholic buzz phrase.

I want to see us change the world, transform the culture, and lead even more souls of all backgrounds to a joyful experience of intimacy with Jesus. I want to see us do that by focusing as catechetical leaders on both accompanying the people around us and teaching those with whom we minister to practice accompaniment on their own. If we seize this moment and allow it to stretch us, I believe our ministries can become even more effective. We will see more young people coming to church, discovering their vocations, and encountering God in a way that radically shifts the course of their lives. We will see families overcoming the many struggles and discouragements that life throws at them. We will see them begin to live lives of hope. We will see our parishes become centers of renewal both for the people within them and even more for the unchurched outside of them — if we both learn and practice the art of accompaniment. Learning is probably the easier task; practicing may be the extreme challenge for us.

## Who is accompaniment for?

So what is the art of accompaniment? How can we understand it and begin practicing it in our own lives? In its simplest form, accompaniment is about coming alongside others in the midst of their real-life struggles and challenges, encouraging and supporting them, and also loving them as Christ would. It is important to understand that some of the people we are called to accompany are other Christian disciples who are already trying to live a lifestyle in accord with the gospel. That being said, many of the people God wants us to accompany are not yet committed disciples. Perhaps they are not even baptized Christians; perhaps they live a life that is both contrary and hostile to the gospel.

When this is the case, we have to live in the margin between disagreeing with the person's lifestyle and choices while also intentionally and actively loving the person. This has to be more than lip service. We can say we love our cousin Jenny, who voted for that politician we don't like and takes every chance she can to bash the church. Do we love her enough to drive 90 minutes to bail her out of a broken-down car in the rain at night? Or perhaps harder still, do we take time to meet with her for coffee each week just to get to know her better, share her triumphs, and mourn with her in her sorrows?

I had a friend several years ago who passed by a poor neighbor every day on his way to work. The poor man was scruffy, a little dirty, and he had a sour look on his face. In truth, my friend was somewhat scared of him. Then, one day, God told my friend to stop his car and introduce himself to the poor man on the side of the road. My friend naturally did exactly the logical thing—he ignored God. For weeks, God worked on him each day, but he continuously ignored the call to stop. Finally, the stirring in his soul became too much for him, and he gave in. In terror, he slowed his car, and with a trembling in his voice and in his hand, he stopped to introduce himself.

Much to his shock, the terrifyingly scruffy fellow on the side of the road was actually a quiet, reserved, and friendly young man. They became fast friends, meeting every week for coffee. A year later, I got to be there when the scruffy neighbor entered the church at Easter. Whom should be the recipient of our accompaniment? It should be everyone, but especially those who appear to be farthest from God.





## What is the goal of accompaniment?

Not every story I have experienced about accompaniment is a nice, clean-cut story of conversion leading to happily ever after. Some stories go on for years. Some don't even have happy endings, but you know what? That is okay. Our goal in accompanying the people around us is not primarily their conversion or their growth in Jesus Christ. That is a wonderful fruit that we want to see, but if it were our primary goal, then our relationship with others would only be transactional. We would be serving them for the sole purpose of getting what we want out of them, the ability to say, "Hah! I got another conversion!" This would be nothing short of using other people and ignoring their dignity as unique and unrepeatable souls. We of course want to see their conversion, but our primary goal must simply be to love them with the love of Jesus Christ.

Some might be tempted to hearken to Jesus's pronouncement to his disciples, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town" (Mt 10:14 NRSV). When I was a younger man, I probably fantasized about shaking my feet in righteous indignation as I turned from someone who was too foolish to embrace the fullness of the gospel. Now, I think of the rich young man who turned away from Jesus, yet still Jesus loved him. Perhaps it was appropriate for the disciples to turn quickly away from someone who rejected the gospel simply so that they could keep going. There were so many who had not even heard the message yet. In accompaniment, we are not rushing off to the next town urgently trying to share the message; we are instead taking the time to pour out the love of Jesus on others, day in and day out. Our reward for this is not getting to brag about the conversions we "cause"; our reward is getting to be like the Jesus we so love and admire.

We pour out our time getting to know the people around us, especially those we are not instinctively inclined to want to be around. We let this affect not only how we act but also how we plan our schedules. We make time just to be with people and to "love on" them. We even make sure we are stepping out of our comfort zone in order to meet them in theirs. This might include going to places the other person wants to or doing the things they want to do. I remember being a very immature Christian as a teenager and disliking malls because they were bastions of materialism. Nowadays, I love malls because the people God loves are in them, and he wants me to love them too! But again, our goal is not conversion. Conversion is a fruit we hope for, but our goal is to be Christ to people by loving them and accompanying them through the struggles of life, regardless of what decisions they are making.

## What does accompaniment look like?

A few years ago, a girl came up to me and told me, "I don't believe in hell. It's a stupid idea, so I don't believe there is a hell." I was just about to give her my oh-so-articulate theological explanation of how a good God could allow people to reject him when, by the grace of God, I was led to *shut my mouth!* Instead of trying to wow her with my profound theological knowledge, I was inspired to ask her, "Why don't you believe in hell?"

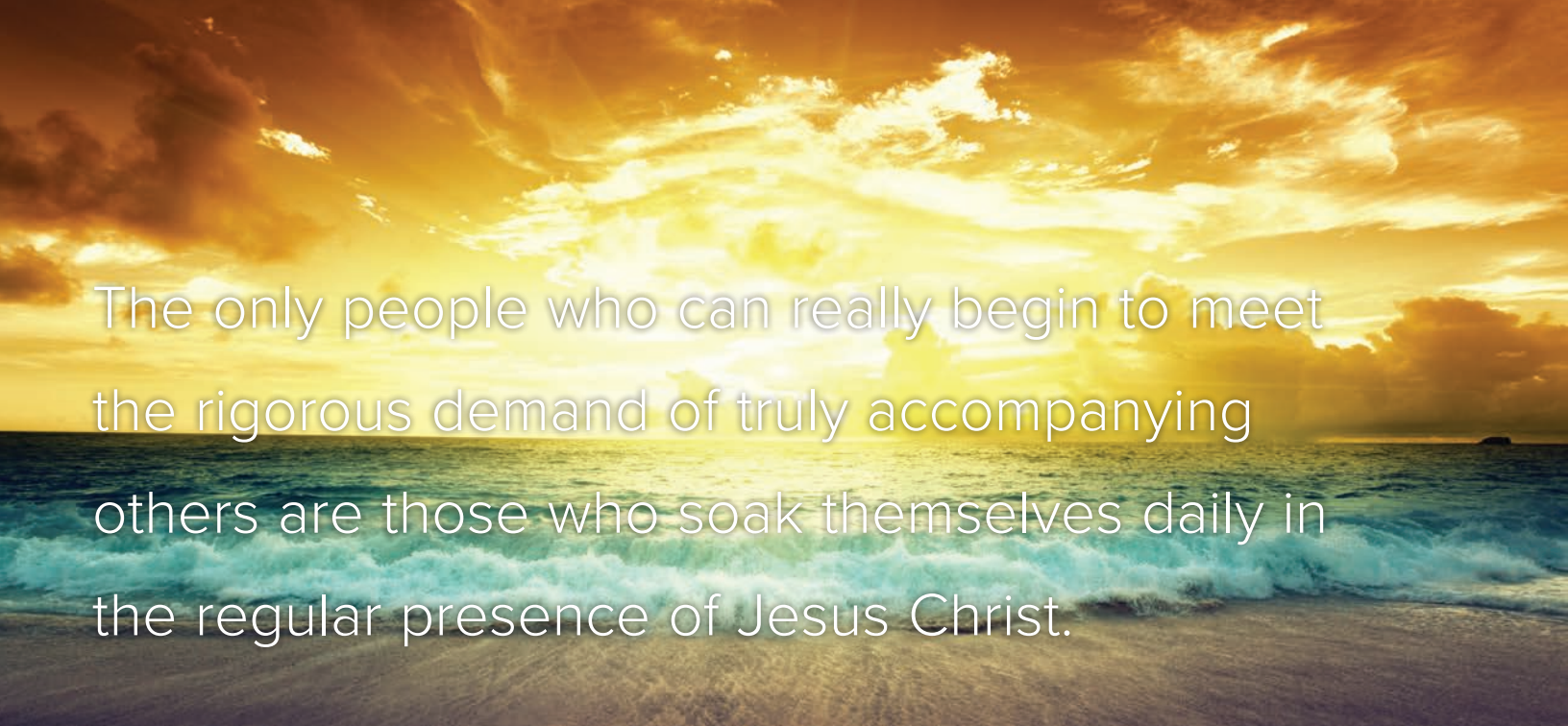
I thought she would give some logical argument. Instead, she told me about a time when she was very young and her grandfather had passed away. All the people at her church told this very young, grieving girl that her grandfather had to be in hell because he had never accepted Jesus as his Lord and savior. Now, aside from the theological problems I have with the assertion of certitude about whether or not someone might have had a last-breath conversion, I was mortified to discover that anyone could say anything so callous to a grieving girl.

No doubt the folks who told her this thought they were doing her a favor by instilling a great fear of God in her. Their plan had unfortunately backfired. They had instead portrayed God to her as a cruel and vindictive master who would punish unbelievers even if they were good people. More importantly, I discovered that no amount of "catechizing" on my part would get through to this girl. Passing on the teachings of the faith is a noble calling, but it is important to understand when we are being heard and when we are being politely ignored. It is important to realize when people are asking questions and when they might just want to be listened to.

So what does accompaniment look like? For the most part, it is a lot of listening and only talking when people want us to. Few people come to us today because they are seeking answers, even fewer because they are seeking theological explanations. They will, however, come to us if they feel the love of Christ reaching out to them through us. The best youth minister I know is a young woman who has transformed her ministry from one that was event focused to one that is people focused. She does not ask, "What activities or curriculums do I want to offer this year?" She asks, "Who are the people I need to be serving, and what particular needs do they have to grow as committed disciples?"

## Who is capable of practicing the art of accompaniment?

This is an interesting question. As we wrestle with the scope of just how many people need to be accompanied out there, couldn't we



The only people who can really begin to meet the rigorous demand of truly accompanying others are those who soak themselves daily in the regular presence of Jesus Christ.

ask every person alive to try to accompany others? We could, but I think we would be sentencing them to torture. Accompaniment is about sacrificing your time, your energy, and sometimes your money or even your dreams. It is about pouring yourself out to get to know the needs and desires of another person. It is, in effect, acting as Christ for them. Human beings were not made by nature to accomplish this. We cannot go on endlessly pouring ourselves out. We cannot give what we do not have. An empty and disconnected hose cannot provide water to the thirsty.

The only people who can really begin to meet the rigorous demand of truly accompanying others are those who soak themselves daily in the regular presence of Jesus Christ. He is the source of our joy and hope, so if we do not constantly take the time to reconnect to him, we cannot expect to be able to share that joy and hope with others. We must learn to pray constantly, asking Jesus to walk with us in every step we take, to smile with us every time we smile at another person. We also must take time regularly for deep prayer to refresh ourselves. We should take holy hours and retreat weekends, just to be alone and refreshed in the grace of Jesus. We should frequently take advantage of the sacraments.


I know this from personal experience. When I first came across the work of accompaniment, I treated it too much as a philosophical theory to be practiced and not enough as a relationship with God to be lived. I got burned out, discouraged, and disoriented in my tasks and goals. Of course, even a person who is really good at prayer and accompaniment will inevitably get discouraged and disoriented at times, but the solution remains the same. Go back to God, that he might refresh you!

### Where do we begin?

The art of accompaniment is simply that, an art. It is much more an art than a science. If a mother comes to me and says that her twen-

ty-year-old daughter is planning to move in with her boyfriend and she wants to know what words to say, I cannot help her. If accompaniment were a science, we could easily craft the perfect response to any situation in a laboratory. We could say, “Of course, Ma’am, the answer to a daughter who wants to move in with her boyfriend is *dot, dot, dot, etc.*” If it were a science, we could input a query and get the same result every time. Sadly, it does not work that way because there are so many factors to consider. Who is this girl and how independent has she been in the past? What is her relationship with God? What is her relationship with her mother?

If accompaniment were a science, you could probably master it just by reading books and memorizing the appropriate responses. Because it is an art, the only way to develop your skills is to practice them, like a young Michelangelo chiseling away at a piece of rock. I encourage you to start by praying to God for inspiration. Then, with God’s help, identify three to five people whom you can begin to accompany. At least one of them should be a person who is far from God and the church. Get to know them; get interested in them! Do not come with any agenda to get anything from them. Come only with the intent to love them. Take your time and be a true friend to them. Ground your relationship daily with Christ and pray that he might empower you to love them with his love.

And finally, if you haven’t yet, consider giving Alpha in a Catholic Context a try. It’s a great way to practice listening and being truly Christlike to others. 

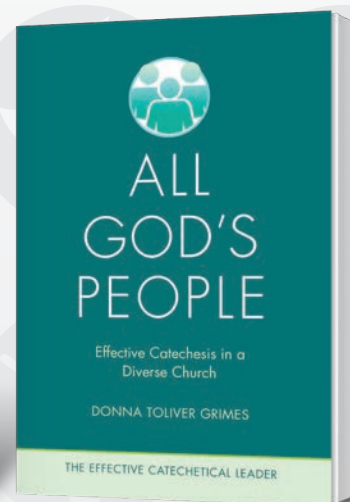
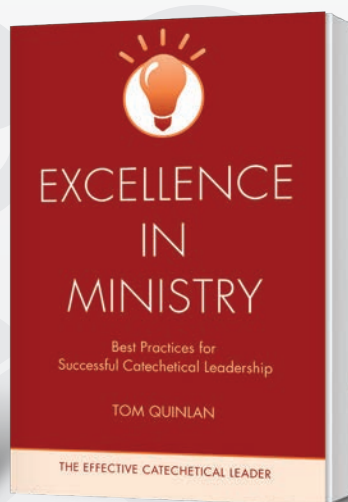
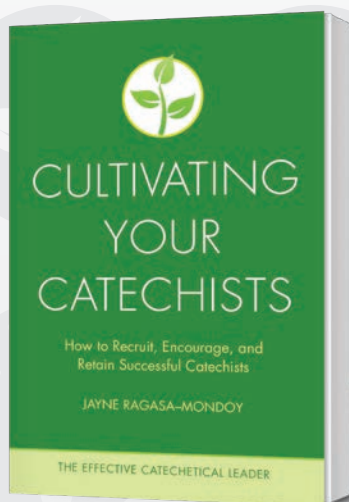
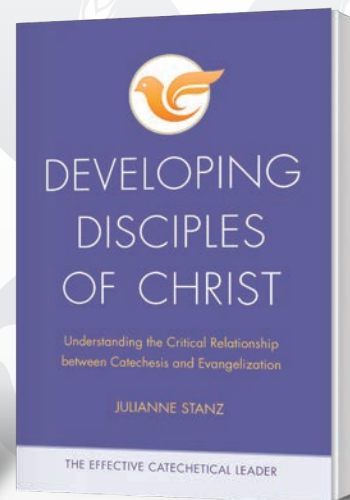
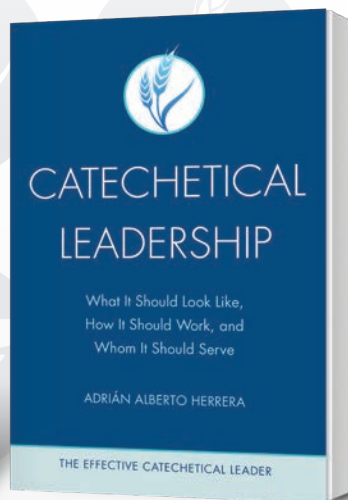
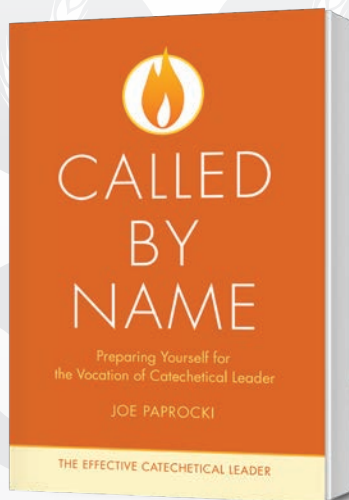
**Joshua Danis** is the national director of Alpha in a Catholic Context (<https://alpha.org/catholic-context/home/>). He holds degrees in theology and philosophy from Franciscan University of Steubenville and lives with his wife, daughter, son, and puppy in Dayton, Ohio.



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# Real Joy

KYLE TURNER

“What would you say to the people of my generation with regard to how they may find *real joy* in their lives?” This was the question raised by a first-year undergraduate student at an evening forum hosted by the Institute on the Common Good at Regis University, a Jesuit Catholic university in Denver. It was the final question posed at the end of a Q&A session following a presentation by the Interfaith Amigos, in which the Amigos (a trio comprised of a rabbi, an imam, and a pastor) shared their experience of working in interfaith dialogue in the years since 9/11.


## A restless faith

The evening’s session was attended by about 100 people from across the Regis community, about a third of whom were undergraduate college students. The young student’s question prompted the speakers, as well as many in the crowd, to pause in recognition of the profound seriousness of the question. It elicited a deep breath within myself, a campus minister who was relatively new to this particular school (having returned to work in campus ministry at Regis in August 2017 after a decade and a half of serving communities in parish ministry). The question had a depth to it that speaks to the heart of what I feel many college students are wrestling with in today’s fast-paced, technologically ingrained experience of attending college. Bombarded with demands and distractions from school, work, and social media, many of the college students with whom I minister appear to have a certain restlessness. Perhaps it is the same human restlessness of the heart that St. Augustine identified so many centuries ago when writing his *Confessions*. The student’s question about finding joy certainly started eliciting thoughts within me as to how I could and should best respond through the ministry in which I am engaged on campus.

It was the first week of the second semester; students were freshly back from their Christmas break. Amidst the busyness of the campus surrounding the University Ministry suite in the Student Center, our office was surprisingly quiet for a Wednesday afternoon. I had just happened to walk out to our reception area when a young woman strolled into the office. After our greetings, she shared with me that she wanted to talk with someone about Jesus. She had stopped by the religious studies department and, on the basis of the questions she had asked them, they referred her to us. I was happy to chat with her and soon found out that she was a third-year nursing student, born and raised Catholic, originally from Chicago. The Cath-

olic Church of her childhood was what she had always known with regard to religion and a life of faith. For the first time in her life, however, she was wanting to know what being a Catholic Christian really means. She wanted to explore how being Catholic impacted her relationship with God and, subsequently, her relationships with others. She did not have much time right then, as she had to run off to class, but we agreed to continue the discussion at a later date. As she departed, I realized that I sensed a restlessness within her, similar to that which the other student had identified through his question on joy. In subsequent conversations, I have found that this is certainly the case.

## Global shifts, signs of the times

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). I feel that these words speak directly to anyone who is engaged in college campus ministry in the United States today. For a generation of traditional undergraduate students who have grown up in a world in which shoes need to be removed before boarding an airplane, gun violence in communities has become commonplace, and global connectivity is almost taken for granted, reading the signs of the times is a necessary endeavor to accompanying college students on their journeys of faith. In the two decades since I myself was an undergraduate student, there have been global shifts within our society. Ministers entrusted with assisting the sower in tending to the seeds of sharing the gospel on college campuses need to be attuned to these signs of the times, particularly with regard for their students. I hope to explore this need in more depth in future installations of this column to better help students find that true joy in their lives for which they long. 

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# Reaching the Disengaged

EMILY BURT

What would happen if the question shifted from “How does the church attract postcollege young adults to come to parishes?” to “How can parishes attract themselves to the young adults in the local community?” You see, throwing the classic beer and pizza social at the church hall is only going to attract a certain group of young adults. Some, and I would argue most, will already have a level of engagement with the institutional church and jump at the opportunity to meet other Catholic young adults. Others who attend these socials will have little engagement but have an openness to the idea of church and faith. To reach completely disengaged young adults, our parishioners must interact with them in their daily lives before inviting them to the physical church. In this article, I want to propose three principles that parishioners should adopt to eventually lead young adults to participation in parish life.

## Foster real relationships

The first principle is authenticity. Young adults have developed an insanely acute awareness for disingenuity and are skeptical by nature. The “church people” that young adults encounter in their lives need to be fully themselves. If the people who invite them to church present themselves with a fabricated persona of piety and perfection, the young adult will disengage. Young adults need real relationships with Catholic Christians who are honest about their humanity and struggles but can also attest to the graces they receive through living their Catholic faith. We cannot be afraid to be authentically Catholic, but we must also be authentically human. Young adults can forgive the mistakes and hypocrisies if they are given the same graced leniency in their own journeys.

## Welcome questions


This leads to the next principle: acceptance. It must be clear to young adults that who they are when they are outside of church is welcome inside church, however messy or dysfunctional. They do not have to “fake it” when they are in church, yet they will be supported to grow in their character. This is why beer at an event can be an automatic “attractor” for some young adults. The beer in and of itself is not the reason they come; after all, they can get cheap beer almost anywhere. But the beer indicates a level of acceptance of the “real” life of young adults. It says, “Hey look, you, *just as you are*, are welcome in our community.” Young adults need to know that they are welcome to participate in the life of the community even if they do not understand, agree with, or

practice the entirety of the Catholic faith. They need to trust that their questions are welcomed without being bombarded with immediate catechesis. The faith formation should come organically as a young adult is accompanied by the community over time.

## Honor gifts

The third principle is servant leadership. This generation is characterized by a desire to make a positive impact on the world. Young adults are idealistic and want to make a difference, but society overwhelms them with a myriad of choices, opportunities, injustices, and organizations. This can make them feel lost or not appreciated as individuals. If they are given an opportunity that allows them to lead in ways that are unique to their set of skills and gifts, they will be more inclined to add to their already busy schedules and step out of their comfort zones because they desire to make a difference. This does not mean plugging them into any volunteer role that the parish needs at that time. It must be something to which they feel they can sincerely contribute. If parishioners recognize young adults in their local communities who have certain gifts (not necessarily spiritual gifts but also hobbies and talents.) and invite them to use these in the parish for the good of the community, a great inroad to a deeper encounter with Christ can present itself.



Certainly this list of principles is nonexhaustive. However, I believe if our parish communities embody the principles of authenticity, servant leadership, and acceptance, young adults will become much more attracted to Catholic parishes. These three principles must be coupled with an outwardly thinking perspective. Young adult outreach will not succeed solely by “young adult events” within the parish. Our parishioners must constantly seek the young adults they know in the community and be creative in inviting young adults to participate in ways that honor their individual gifts. The Spirit is at work in this generation, and there is much hope for the future of our beloved Catholic Church. 

**Emily Burt** is the adult formation coordinator for St. Mary Immaculate Parish in Plainfield, Illinois. As a graduate of John Carroll University, she strives to embody the value of Cura Personalis in her daily interactions with others. Contact her at [eburt@smip.org](mailto:eburt@smip.org).

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

JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP

There's a church in our area that has a one-way driveway for entry and exit to its property. The posted signs say: "Enter to Worship" and "Exit to Serve."

That is our baptismal call. One of the results of our increased concentration on adult faith formation is, hopefully, the deepening of people's awareness, desire, abilities, and skills to be missioned for their role in the world.

## Best practices

When I was director of adult faith formation for the Archdiocese of Detroit, we formed a committee to research the best adult faith formation practices in our parishes. When asked to describe the effects of their adult faith formation initiatives, pastoral leaders had difficulty responding. One person asked: "How does one evaluate this?"

The majority of responses centered on

- \* more involvement in the parish/new leadership;
- \* enhancement of personal prayer life;
- \* increased awareness of Scripture during liturgy;
- \* acknowledgment of the value of faith sharing;
- \* hunger for more formation; and
- \* awareness of the connection between faith and everyday living.

The committee discovered that of the 105 responses to this question, only three said

- \* greater consciousness of social justice issues;
- \* increased outreach to those in need within and beyond parish boundaries; and
- \* many are looking for concrete ways to encounter the poor.

No one indicated responses such as


- \* getting involved in/making a difference in the community [even though they mentioned getting involved in the parish]; or
- \* empowering people to seek solutions to poverty, racism, violence, and pollution.

It is very possible that the above things did happen, but the survey responders were unaware of it.

## Living what we celebrate

Adult faith formation calls us to live what we celebrate. We need to call each other to community and mission, to be the body of Christ. When we celebrate Eucharist each week, it is not just the bread and wine that are changed. We are changed into the body of Christ, commissioned to leave the eucharistic assembly and be Christ's body throughout the week.

Let's explore some possible ways that we might ensure that adult faith formation leads today's adults to live as disciples in mission to the world. (We'll look at four ideas now and continue with nine more in the next issue.)

1. Whatever we do, whatever the program/process, include the "so what?" question. What does this (what we've just learned) have to do with our everyday lives? And not just our lives, but how will this new learning and our new actions impact the common good?
2. Encourage people to tell their stories. As we respectfully and openly listen to the experiences of others, we become aware of the various needs of our larger world.
3. Pay attention to the signs of the times. Are our parish faith environments and our programs/processes filled with the signs of the times? Do we listen to what people are talking about? What are their questions, needs, concerns? Do the general intercessions at Mass reflect today's needs? Are the programs that are offered a result of what the learners have asked for?
4. Use all opportunities (speaker series, parent meetings, church bulletins, blogs, websites, e-newsletters, public service announcements on television) to raise questions about realities and events in the world that aren't proceeding according to gospel values. 

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# Taming the Pharisee Within

CLAIRE M. MCMANUS

The Gospel of Mark recounts many instances in which Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees about his lack of adherence to Jewish laws, particularly the purity laws. The purity laws were deeply ingrained in Jewish DNA, and abandoning them was tantamount to heresy. Despite this, Jesus saw in these laws a hypocrisy that ran counter to his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God. “How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to hold up your tradition!” This was a loud callout to the religious leaders of his age to reorder their priorities. Before we congratulate ourselves for not being like those Pharisees, we might need to do a thorough review of our own priorities.

## Evangelization and catechesis

Evangelization is at the heart of all that we do within our ministry and is encoded in the formation of leaders outlined in the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’s *Certification Handbook*, 4.2: “Ecclesial ministry builds upon the evangelical mission to which all the baptized are called, ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel’ (Mark 16:15).” We know that evangelization and catechesis are not isolated moments that exist in parallel universes but go hand in hand on a continuous journey until completed, when we are united with Christ. Why then is there so often a perceived competition between catechesis and evangelization? In our deepest gaze into our ministry, will we find ways in which our priorities have become obstacles to evangelization?

The role of the catechetical leader often requires hard-core administrative skills that resonate better within an institutional structure than in an evangelical tent revival. This was essentially what Pope Francis stressed in his apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel),” 63:

We must recognize that if part of our baptized people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people. In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach, as does a concentration on administering the sacraments apart from other forms of evangelization.


The message that Francis sent to church leadership came without sugar coating. Like the exchanges between Jesus and

the Pharisees, we are being asked to look into how we interact with the people to whom we minister and change the structures and attitudes that may be obstacles to spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## Breaking the institutional mind-set

Catechetical leaders often experience the tension that exists between the Sunday school models of faith formation and a more generationally expansive approach. Try as we might to change the vocabulary from “CCD” to “faith formation,” “teacher” to “catechist,” “child-centered” to “lifelong,” it is very difficult to get out of an institutional mind-set. Many of us are ministering in situations in which the church is one of many demands placed on busy families. How do we accommodate families with busy schedules? How do we deal with the child whose attendance is impacted by the rhythm of a court-ordered custody schedule? How do we adapt our catechetical program for a child whose life is arranged on an IEP and Behavior Plan? These are real challenges that test the mettle of the most pastoral leaders.

Pope Francis made it clear that evangelization is a joyful and enthusiastic encounter with people who are anxious to hear the Good News. If we build our catechetical programs on the presumption that we are bringing the Good News to a family anxious to hear it, then the door will be opened to allow Christ to do the work. Francis reminds us that Jesus will break through our stodgy structures with divine creativity. “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always ‘new’” (11).

We are desperately in need of hearing the gospel. Evangelization requires an encounter with Christ that often begins with an interaction with a person who exudes joy. Our catechetical programs are fertile ground for this encounter to take place. Jesus challenged the Pharisees, and us, to examine our structures and tear down that which blocks out the Good News that Jesus loves us and forgives us and wants to be in relationship with us. 

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# Offering Hope, Healing, and Meaning

LEISA ANSLINGER

Recently, my son fell while skiing. He heard and felt a pronounced pop in his knee and knew immediately that he had torn his ACL. Within a brief time, the ski patrol had located him, took him down on a sled (which even our adventurous son described as one of the most uncomfortable rides of his life), and delivered him to the ER, where the experienced doctor confirmed his suspicion. Friends who had been through the procedure gave him the name of a good orthopedic surgeon; others shared tips for maintaining strength while recovering from surgery; still others promised meals, visits, and good books to keep him company in the weeks to come.

## The good news of healing

How easy it was for my son's friends to promise companionship, share their experiences, and assure him of their care. They understood his uncertainty, frustration, and concern: What does the surgery entail? How long would he be out of commission? Would he be able to cycle, hike, and ski as before? His friends were ready to walk with him as he prepared for and recovered from surgery, knowing the difference this would make for him. They were eager to share the good news of healing and hope for the future.


I have been reflecting on my son's experience in relationship to our call to evangelize. After all, evangelization is about sharing something that truly makes a difference in the lives of others: "to evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to bear witness that in His Son God has loved the world — that in His Incarnate Word He has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life" ("Evangelii Nuntiandi," 26). My son's friends knew they had good news to share and were anxious to do so. How much more must we be ready to share the Good News of God's love as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## More than human

Sometimes, I think we make evangelization more complicated than it needs to be. There is no doubt that sharing the Good News is not always easy in today's world. We recognize that evangelization does not simply happen. We must look at our diocesan and parish structures, ensuring that, as often and in as many ways as possible, people will be drawn deeply to God's love through the very life of the faith community and its members — and we will do that often in this column. Yet, as important as structure and programming can be, our church

documents on evangelization have pointed out throughout the past six decades that the first and most essential consideration is a profound encounter with the love of Jesus Christ. Like my son's friends who naturally shared their experiences and held him up as he prepared for surgery, we who know the love of God will be compelled to share the impact of faith and hold others up as they seek meaning, truth, and salvation. As Pope Francis notes in his apostolic exhortation "Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium*)" 8,

Thanks solely to this encounter — or renewed encounter — with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

In 1975, Pope Paul VI asked, "Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching. Precisely because of this we are, to a certain extent, responsible for the progress of the Gospel that we proclaim" (EN, 76). My son's friends met him in his need and offered their companionship and message of hope. What needs do we sense in the people with whom we interact, personally and within our diocese or parish? What key questions of faith, life, and meaning are they asking? How will we announce the Good News of Jesus Christ through our companionship, witness, and sharing? 

**Leisa Anslinger** is the director of Catholic Life and Faith, a formation and resource center for evangelization, stewardship, and servant leadership development. Learn more at [CatholicLifeandFaith.net](http://CatholicLifeandFaith.net).



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

DAN PIERSON

The Effective Catechetical Leader series (Loyola Press), developed in conjunction with the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, provides practical skills, strategies, and approaches that ensure successful parish faith formation.

## **Called by Name: Preparing Yourself for the Vocation of Catechetical Leader**

Joe Paprocki

## **Cultivating Your Catechists: How to Recruit, Encourage, and Sustain Successful Catechists**

Jayne Ragasa-Mondoy

## **All God's People: Effective Catechesis in a Diverse Church**

Donna Tolliver Grimes

## **Catechetical Leadership: What It Should Look Like, How It Should Work, and Whom It Should Serve**

Adrián Alberto Herrera

## **Developing Disciples of Christ: Understanding the Critical Relationship Between Catechesis and Evangelization**

Julianne Stanz

## **Excellence in Ministry: Best Practices for Successful Catechetical Leadership**

Tom Quinlan

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## **Finding Your Spiritual Direction as a Catechist: Helpful Skills and Reflections for Personal Growth**

William Miller

Twenty-Third Publications

Filled with excellent tips and wonderful reflections, this book will help the catechist of any and every level reengage and reenergize their spirituality so that shar-

ing the Good News will be fulfilling and life-changing for catechist and student alike.

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## **The Transformed Heart: Spirituality, Religion, and the Struggle for Integrity**

Tom Zanzig

Orbis Books

What does a mature religious faith really look like? What does it mean to embrace and follow a spiritual path and live it with personal integrity? What are the characteristics of healthy religion?

In this intensely focused exploration of the complex relationship between personal spirituality and religious belonging and practice, Zanzig proposes that the natural outcome of a lifelong process of spiritual transformation, lived with integrity, is an attraction to a mystic, contemplative spiritual path. We are all in this sense “spiritual seekers,” and both the goal and the reward of our commitment to our faith is a continual and growing pull toward a contemplative experience of faith.

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Paulist Evangelization Ministries has recently updated their webinar archive on their website! You will now find three main webinar topics: Evangelization, Faith Formation, and Parish Planning. All webinars are now on YouTube for easy viewing and sharing. Visit the complete archives at <http://www.pemdc.org/webinars/> and take some time to explore, or watch some of the most popular ones below.

## **Pope Francis and Reaching Inactive Catholics**

## **Becoming an Inviting Church**

## **The Evangelizing Liturgy**


## **Reaching Inactive Catholics: Awakening Faith**

## **The Evangelizing Pastor**

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## **Evangelization and Catechesis: Echoing the Good News Through the Documents of the Church**

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, PhD  
Twenty-Third Publications

Papal documents can be a wellspring of inspiration and wisdom for catechists. Many of them hold the key to understanding catechists' roles in proclaiming the Good News in our modern era. Here, with the help of works from Pope Paul VI to Pope Francis, Professor Zsupan-Jerome guides catechists in taking a step back and pondering the “big picture” of their ministry and their role in the church's deepest identity: sharing the gospel message of Jesus. This inspiring and energizing book reveals much about the life-giving spirit of catechesis: from the moment catechists are called to witness to each glimmer of God's saving love that they reveal to others. 

**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)).

