CATHOLIC MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

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Philosophy / Guiding Principles for:

Parish Evangelization + Outreach + Planning

St. Therese of Lisieux Parish, MTK

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V1.0

In 1974, Archbishop Fulton Sheen said in a conference,

> **"We are at the end of Christendom. Not of Christianity, not of the Church, but of Christendom. Now what is meant by Christendom? Christendom is economic, political, social life as inspired by Christian principles. That is ending — we've seen it die."**

But he went on to say,

> **"These are great and wonderful days in which to be alive. … It is not a gloomy picture — it is a picture of the Church in the midst of increasing opposition from the world. And therefore live your lives in the full consciousness of this hour of testing, and rally close to the heart of Christ."**

This hour of testing calls us to recover for our age the apostolic mindset and the bright hope of those first Christians of the Cenacle.

CF. MARY, UNIVERSITY OF; PRIME MATTERS; SHEA, MONSIGNOR JAMES P.. FROM CHRISTENDOM TO APOSTOLIC MISSION: PASTORAL STRATEGIES FOR AN APOSTOLIC AGE (P. 6). UNIVERSITY OF MARY PRESS. KINDLE EDITION.

Parish Mission Statement:

Isaiah 61 | Luke 4:16 | John 14:12

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us and He has anointed us:

- to preach good news to the poor
- heal the sick
- raise the dead
- bring light to those in darkness
- heal the brokenhearted
- proclaim liberty to captives
- sight to the blind
- freedom to prisoners
- comfort to those who mourn
- to rebuild ancient ruins and restore places long devastated
- to be a parish providing refuge to the storm-beaten and un-consoled (our corporate charism)

"I tell you the truth, **anyone** who believes in Me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father."

- Jesus Christ, John 14:12

The Evangelization Skill Every Catholic Disciple Needs

by Marcel LeJeune

Most Catholics rarely evangelize and when they do, it may not be in the most effective manner. If you are a Catholic disciple and would like to become a better evangelist, then hang on to your hats, because I fully believe in the tactic I want to explore with you below. Is it foolproof? Of course not. But, it is effective, impactful, and anybody can use it. I have many stories of how it has helped me be a better evangelist. But, before we get into the weeds, we have to lay some groundwork.

Most Catholic disciples fall into one of several buckets on living out the call to evangelize, which include:

1. **Those who believe acts of service do all the talking and we don't need to use words**. We can call these the "St Francis never said it Catholics", who operate by the phrase which is (incorrectly) attributed to St. Francis - "share the Gospel always, and when necessary, use words." If we are honest, most who operate in this manner never use words. At least not in 99.9% of the opportunities they have to share their faith.

2. **Those who would rather walk on lava than talk about Jesus with others**. In other words, it is impolite, bad, or (as a large percent of millennials and other young people believe) immoral to do so.

3. **Those who want to prove all the Protestants, non-Christians, and atheists wrong by arguing them into submission**. These are the ones who use words, but only as a hammer, to bludgeon their opponents with arguments to show they are right and others are wrong.

4. **Those who put their heads down and mostly**, if not fully, ignore the call to evangelize. No words, no deeds, and little (or no) faith.

5. **Those who try their best to evangelize**, using their gifts and circumstances, whatever God calls them to. They might fail, mess up, skip some chances to respond, or do it badly, but still they understand that they must share their faith in order to continue to follow Jesus faithfully.

Of course, this isn't an exhaustive list, but it gets to the heart of the matter - most Catholics don't evangelize. Most who read this blog are most likely in the 5th category. I hope that is the case with you. If so, I hope you will find this strategy helpful.

ALAR PROCESS

I use the acronym ALAR for the process I am proposing. It stands for:

> **A**sk / **L**isten / **A**ssess / **R**espond

It is a process that we have probably used throughout our lives in various situations and relationships. Still, if we deeply understand each step as a part of a strategy to evangelize others, we can intentionally find more opportunities to evangelize.

I will first go through each step of the process and then spell out ways to apply it.

Ask

When we evangelize, we ought to ask more questions than the other person. In some ways, this is counter to the way in which many Catholics operate when they attempt to evangelize. I certainly had to relearn how to do this (and am still working on it). As someone who is been asked questions frequently about Catholicism, sometimes I assume I know what someone needs to know. This isn't always the case. In fact, we can't assume we know what someone believes, where they are spiritually, or what questions they have - until we ask them about these things. Notice that Jesus frequently used this tactic. What others thought would be a Q&A session was suddenly changed, when Jesus turned it into a Q&Q session.

Most people of the 21st Century aren't asking particular questions about Catholicism. They are asking big existential questions about meaning, purpose, identity, truth, goodness, etc. If you want some sample questions - I have some at the end of this post as an additional resource.

The principle that best supports this step in the ALAR process is:

***Fruitfulness is named more than numbered*.** Jesus never thought it was a waste of time to invest in a person who was honestly seeking truth, goodness, or beauty. If someone had even a basic desire to dialogue, then Jesus would talk to them. We need to as well. It isn't about big events, classes, or programs. It is about each person. Jesus spent 75% of his recorded time in the four gospels with 12 men. That is naming his fruit! Peter, Andrew, James, John, etc.

ALAR PROCESS
Ask / **L**isten / **A**ssess / **R**espond

Listen

What I have found works well when evangelizing others is to truly listen to where they are coming from. Not in order to prove them wrong, but rather to accept the person who is in front of you as a human, made in God's image and likeness, and uniquely made to glorify His name. When we are able to do this, we can marvel in their creation and truly love them where they are at, and then (possibly) help them grow closer to God. Conversion is done with free will and thus it takes the other person's consent to God's grace. To put it bluntly, the one doing the evangelization is the least important party in the drama. The one being evangelized and God are much more important! Furthermore, it isn't our job to convert anyone – we can't! Only God's grace, chosen through a free act of the other person's will, can elicit faith. Thus, I am a limited instrument in the hand of God, who is called to love the other person and help them grow closer to God.

True love for another person means I will always seek their good, and asking good probing questions can help me understand how best to help them grow, but only if I listen to understand. Furthermore, we have to slow down and work on relationships more than just having the right answer. Over-talking is a real problem with many evangelists, myself included.

Still some believe that our faith is something very private that shouldn't be shared, in order not to offend or seem too pushy. It is the Catholic version of "don't ask, don't tell". This attitude comes from a culture that believes faith is something we do part-time or compartmentalize. Unfortunately, this attitude creates a culture of silence, where we don't talk about our faith at all. As many others have responded to this – our faith is always personal but never private. Imagine if the Apostles had never talked about their faith. We wouldn't have any Christians today.

The principle that best supports this step in the ALAR process is:

❗ ***Understanding does not necessitate acceptance***. You are listening to understand the other person, not necessarily accept what they believe, do, or think!

ALAR PROCESS
Ask / **L**isten / **A**ssess / **R**espond

Assess

After we ask questions and listen, we need to start to assess where a person is on their spiritual journey. This is the hardest part for many people who are just starting to work on sharpening their evangelization skills. But, it might be one of the most important steps. If we don't know where they currently are, we don't know what they need or how we ought to respond.

I highly recommend you study the different thresholds of conversion, discussed in the amazing book "*Forming Intentional Disciples" by Sherry Weddell. These thresholds (trust, curiosity, openness, seeking, and intentional discipleship) can help you determine which questions are appropriate for individuals who are in different places and with different needs. Furthermore, you can look at our Stages of Discipleship for those who are already disciples. The video in this link will also walk you through a basic guide for how to apply this principle.*

But, don't stop merely with knowing where someone is spiritually. Now you need to respond appropriately.

The principle that best supports this step in the ALAR process is:

***Never accept a label in place of a story*.** Just because someone says they are an atheist, doesn't mean they don't believe in a higher power. While that seems inconsistent, many self-identified atheists believe in some kind of god, gods, or the one true God. This goes for any label. A "devout Catholic" might not believe in the Eucharist or go to Mass. Ask, Listen, and Assess - but don't assume.

ALAR PROCESS
Ask / **L**isten / **A**ssess / **R**espond

Respond
A response is where you tailor evangelization to the individual. Some appropriate responses include:

- taking the time to build a long-term relationship, in order to build trust and earn the right to be heard.
- proclaiming the kerygma and inviting a response.
- radical hospitality and friendship.
- giving your testimony.
- casting a long-term vision of what it means to follow Jesus and helping them to "count the cost" of being a disciple.
- serving others, without expecting repayment.
- allowing them to walk away (at least for a time).

All of these (and more) are appropriate responses for different people. We won't know what another needs until we have asked questions, listened, and assessed where they are and what they need.

Response is a weak-point in many Catholic evangelists' lives. We tend to stop short and think that living a good life or being externally disciplined is enough to attract others to Jesus. While living a virtuous life is indispensable, we cannot avoid going to the next step, even if it pushes us to be a bit uncomfortable.

The principle that best supports this step in the ALAR process is:

Success in evangelization is faithfulness to the mission, not just making converts. You aren't in control of anything but your own "yes" to the call Jesus has made for you to go and make disciples. Do that. Do it to the best of your ability. Do it faithfully. Then leave the rest in the hands of a sovereign God who wants conversion more than you ever could imagine.

You and Those Around You
The next step isn't just to jump first and ask questions later. It is to pray. Ask God to give you his heart and desire to reach others for his sake. Ask him to help you love others enough to get a bit uncomfortable and to change your habits. Ask him to be with you. Then ask a very dangerous prayer - that he might give you the eyes to see the opportunities to evangelize those around you. He will answer these prayers!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Below are some questions I have found helpful in different situations. Note, not all questions are appropriate for every situation. You will have to learn to discern what you should ask and when.

Questions about life's meaning / purpose of life / identity / etc.

- Where do you believe humanity came from / what is our origin?
- Where do you find meaning in life?
- What is the source of power?
- How do you define "success"?
- What is your destiny? How do you know this?
- What brings meaning to your life?
- Do you believe in a Higher Power? If so, can you describe this power for me? If not, can you tell me why not?

Questions about truth / values / falsehoods / priorities

- How do you know what is true and what isn't?
- What are you willing to give your life for?
- What are your highest priorities? How did you arrive at these priorities?
- What are you passionate about? What do you find yourself arguing for or against? Why?
- What do you find most persuasive?
- What are your dreams for life? What do you hope to accomplish?
- What do you mean by describing yourself as ____?

Questions about how to live / how should I act / what is right or wrong

- How do you know right from wrong?
- How do you determine how you ought to act?
- Are there any universal human rights? What are they? How do we determine them?
- Are some acts morally relative?
- Is there anything that is universally moral?
- Where do the problems of humanity / evil come from?
- What is the solution to humanity's problems / evil?

Another way of categorizing questions is by understanding the different kinds of labels that people apply to themselves and trying to drill down on those labels, to get beyond them and see the person behind the label. Remember to "never accept a label in place of a story". The story tells you what the label doesn't! But, the label can be a starting point for a conversation.

Questions for Non Believers (atheists, agnostics, etc):

- Can you tell me about the god you don't believe in?
- Can you describe what you find most fulfilling about being _____?
- Tell me about God? How do you describe God to others
- What do you know about Jesus?
- If you have heard of Jesus, what do you know about Him?
- What do you think Christianity adds to the lives of others?
- Do you believe in any kind of universal or higher power?
- Have you believed in God in the past? If you did and don't any longer, why did you stop believing?
- If you did believe in a god, what kind of god would you believe in?

Questions for those from Non-Christian Religions (Hindu, Muslim, Mormon, etc):

- What are the different ways you pray?
- Can you describe what you find most fulfilling about being _____?
- Tell me about God? How do you describe God to others?
- What do you know about Jesus?
- Is there anything about Christianity that you find attractive?

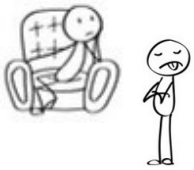
Questions for those Christians who are not Catholic:

- Could you describe what you believe about Jesus?
- Is your faith something your practice every day?
- How would you describe your relationship with Jesus?
- Is there anything about Catholicism that you find attractive?
- What do you know about the Catholic Church

Questions for those who are Catholic:

- Can you describe what it means to be Catholic, in your experience?
- Do you have a personal prayer life? If so, how do you pray?
- Is God someone you would say you have a personal relationship with?
- Have you had any kind of moment when you felt particularly close to Jesus? If so, can you tell me about it? If not, have you ever wanted to?

Let's look at these five thresholds of faith briefly:

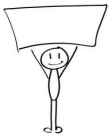


1. Initial trust: A person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.

2. Spiritual curiosity: A person finds himself intrigued by or desiring to know more about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some aspect of the Christian faith. This curiosity can range from mere awareness of a new possibility to something quite intense. Nevertheless, a person at the threshold of curiosity is not yet open to personal change. Curiosity is still essentially passive, but it is more than mere trust.

3. Spiritual openness: A person acknowledges to him or herself and to God that he or she is open to the possibility of personal and spiritual change. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a postmodern nonbeliever. Openness is not a commitment to change. People who are open are simply admitting they are open to the possibility of change.

4. Spiritual seeking: The person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know the God who is calling him or her. It is, if you will, "dating with a purpose" but not yet marriage. Seekers are asking, "Are you the one to whom I will give myself?" At this stage, the seeker is engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he or she can commit to Christ in his Church.



5. Intentional discipleship: This is the decision to "drop one's nets," to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder one's life accordingly.

cf. Forming Intentional Disciples: the Path to Knowing and Following Jesus, Sherry A. Weddell, Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2017, pp. 127-128; 129-130.

Let's look at the stages in the process of evangelization from the New Directory for Catechesis (2020):

1) **Pre-Evangelization** / Missionary activity as the first stage of evangelization
2) **First proclamation** issues the call to conversion
3) **Initiation into Christian faith and life**, through the catechumenal process (catechesis, sacraments, witness of charity, fraternal experience)
4) **Mystagogy** "to lead through the mysteries" (period of accompaniment for new Catholics as they discover what it means to fully participate in the sacramental mysteries of the Church)
5) **Ongoing education** in the faith

Why Catholic Strategic Planning Often Fails to Move The Needle

BY MARCEL LEJEUNE

Ask yourself - if my organization (e.g., parish, diocese, school, apostolate, etc.) has done some kind of long-range or strategic planning, did it help significantly impact the organization in a positive way? If not, then why not? Was there institutional renewal? Can we say that the planning process helped change our culture? Most Catholic leaders who have been through these processes in the last few generations would say they have not significantly helped, even if it was a positive thing to do. The Church continues to lose Catholics as more and more institutions go through long-range strategic planning processes. I have been a part of several of these efforts helping various kinds of Catholic institutions. Some efforts have had some good outcomes, but the long-range outcomes failed to significantly change the culture of the organization, even if there were some short-term wins. The statistical evidence tells us that most strategic planning puts a lot of time, money, and effort into the process, which ends up barely moving the needle for most Catholic organizations. We will explore why below and how we might improve these processes. Before I go further, I want to say that I am a big fan of long-range planning. I think it is helpful and necessary for any organization that wants success. But, HOW we do it matters as much as whether we do it or not. In fact, if we don't do a good job at long-range strategy and planning, it can lead to fewer leaders who want to spend the resources doing it, which entrenches us into the problems we currently have. Before we talk about improving the process, let us talk about some principles that need to inform our planning. WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO Why does the Catholic Church exist? The answer to this question gives us our mission. Our "why" can be written out as - "We [our institution - in this case, the Catholic Church] exist in order to _____." Here is the good news, the mission of Jesus, his disciples, and his Church has been given to us, so we don't need to re-write it or discover it!

Mission of the Church -

> "Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."" -Matt 28:18-20
>
> "And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." -Mark 16:15-16
>
> "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." -Acts 1:8

“"Henceforward the Church...receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth the seed and the beginning of that kingdom." -CCC 768

- The Church exists to make disciples of Jesus.
- Disciples of Jesus exist in order to make other disciples of Jesus.
- Thus, every Catholic institution exists in order to make disciples.

Parishes exist to make disciples.

Dioceses exist to make disciples.

Catholic schools exist to make disciples.

Catholic hospitals exist to make disciples.

Catholic colleges exist to make disciples.

Catholic social services exist to make disciples.

Yes, they all have other things to do, but this is THE mission of each of these organizations. We have to start with this principle which give us our "WHY". From there we can understand what happens when we lose our "why".

MISSION DRIFT

When we don’t make disciples, we have started to drift from our mission. Mission drift is the natural tendency of an organization to lose its “why” and start doing other things, even other good things. It is the rip current we don’t see. It is the gravity pulling on us that we don't think about. It is found in the momentum of culture both outside and within our institutions. We see this when a Catholic college or school starts to focus on the academic reputation as a school, rather than making disciples. It happens when a social service organization tamps down their Catholic identity in order to not cause waves with donors. We see it when a parish worries more about the involvement than in conversion of non-disciples. Dioceses can drift from their mission when they get caught up in the nuts and bolts of handling mergers of parishes, budgets, buildings, and the like. Mission drift is real and has infected every part of Catholicism in the West. It is (in large measure) a way in which we can understand how we got into the current state of decline we are in.

Mission drift can and will happen to every group, unless it is consciously and consistently fought against. It is countered by a persistent clinging to the core of the mission. Because many generations of Catholics have not countered mission drift, we are in a season of rapid and tangible decline.

Did you know that Oxford, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (among other schools) all began as

explicitly Christian institutions? To this day, Princeton's crest reads "Dei sub numine viget," which means "Under God she flourishes." Not so much anymore.

Think of Catholic Universities that have lost their religious fervor. Think of the crisis of identity that many Catholic hospitals have undergone. Think of the parish who has watched people walk away and doesn't know how to stop the bleeding. For some of these there is no going back. Princeton will never go back to being a Christian institution. Some parishes are already closed down. This is a one-way street. Now, there is a chance for those organizations who haven't completely lost their way. We see it in the renewal that happened at Franciscan University at Steubenville. Through the 60s and into the 70s they had issues with Catholic identity, money, and vision. Fr. Michael Scanlan was assigned and decided to start the very difficult process of not only stopping the mission drift, but renewing the school. It took many decades of very difficult work. It took clarity around "WHY" the school existed. It was hard and long.

PLANNING, STRATEGY, AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Fr. Jaime took over Our Lady of Victory Parish in 2002. He had been ordained for 8 years and loved being a priest. This was his third assignment and second as a pastor. He had only been pastor at his previous parish for 3 years. OLVP was ripe for renewal. They had a few good programmatic elements, but little long-term vision. They ran a soup kitchen, had a parish retreat system in place, and a good youth program. After his first year on board, Fr. J felt like he had a good handle of the parish and started making some needed changes. He shut down a few social events that took a lot of resources, but little outcomes to fulfilling their mission. He started to cast a vision for evangelization and outreach. He led his staff and lay leaders in prayer times like they never experienced before.

Then they went through a strategic planning process. They hired a firm that had a good national reputation. The consultant surveyed the parish over the next 6 months, then presented the findings to the leadership of the parish. It had some insightful tidbits of information. From this data, the strategic planning committee started to develop a long-range plan. At the end of the process there was a 5 year plan of renewal that included hiring a few new positions, increasing the budget, starting some new initiatives, and possibly building a new R.E. wing. It all seemed so hopeful.

Flash forward to 2010. Fr. Jaime pulls the plan up on his computer and realizes that the process barely made a dent in his parish. He asks himself - "what happened?" and has no answer. It all seemed so good at the time and we worked so hard (and paid a lot of money for it). He is frustrated and deflated. He desires fruit so badly and is unsure how to move forward. Some bitterness begins to set in.

This story is fiction, but like so many other stories it bears truth. The results of many long-term strategic planning processes are found in libraries and gigabytes worth of documentation that show they have had little (if any) long-lasting impact when it comes to changing the culture of

most Catholic institutions. Why? I have 3 reasons:

3 Reasons Catholic Strategic Planning Fails

1 - Culture eats strategy for lunch (and breakfast)! Culture is the strongest human force your parish (or any organization) must overcome in order to lead it toward renewal. Stronger than mission, vision, strategy, goals, or values. “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” is famously attributed to the late management guru Peter Drucker. Put another way, “parish culture is more powerful than any plan”. It holds true in every circumstance. Now, this isn’t to say that by our cooperation with God’s grace we are incapable of renewing culture. But, as we will see, it is very long and very hard work. Before we go further, we must be clear as to what culture is.

Culture states emphatically - 'This is how we do things in this place and time” and “This is the way we expect things to be done”. Culture has its own momentum that needs no further energy or input to keep it going. It just exists naturally in every group of people. Culture causes mission drift (as seen above). It is found in the habits of the people in the group, the language, the things that aren’t talked about (as much as what IS talked about), the expectations, the values, the rules, the attitudes, and more. Thus, culture defines the unwritten way that a group of people behave. It serves not merely as the undercurrent, but the prevailing force (for good or bad or both) that the group lives in and expects.

Every parish has a unique culture and is never just like any other parish, even though they may share some of the wider traits of the larger Catholic culture. As with any other organization, parishes start to form their culture from the moment they are formed, yet it will change through the years and never remain completely the same through time. A parish will continue to form culture by drifting into the rules that define it, rather than by intentionally forming it themselves, unless they are intentional about shaping it themselves. Parish culture becomes the by-product of the things we do, say, and believe - esp. those things that are considered “normal”.

If you merely set out a plan thinking that a plan is enough to change culture, your plan will merely be absorbed into your culture - for good or bad.

2 - Culture change is hard and slow work. Culture change is very difficult. It takes good leadership that is intentional, strategic, long-term, and sustained to revitalize our parishes. But even good leadership is not enough by itself.

In an age of growing compartmentalization of personal faith, parishes are aging and declining rapidly. The numbers are staggering. We lose 6 people for every 1 new Catholic. But, that doesn’t tell the full story. During the last few generations, it seems the Church asks less and less of Catholics. Our parishes reflect these changes and many times our parishes are set up

to reward mediocre Catholicism. Mediocre Catholics are only able to perpetuate the current state of affairs or advance the mission drift. This is the state of our current parish culture in the USA. Are there exceptions to the norm? Absolutely. But, they are still not the norm. Culture is found in the norm.

Then there are the other obstacles that a parish faces in the attempt to change the culture. The Pastor is reassigned. Staff are laid off and programs cut because money is down. Ineffective leadership doesn't know how to turn things around, so they depend on what has worked a generation (or several) ago. Unresolved conflict is in the marrow of the parish and is never explicitly dealt with. The entrenched lay parishioners push back because they are not bought into the vision of renewal. Etc. Etc. Etc.

From our current vantage point, things may look bleak. But, let us open up a window and let some light in.

We can positively change the culture of our parishes. It has happened before, is currently happening, and will happen in the future. The question is - will we help in the process of renewal or be an agent of maintaining mediocrity / managing decline?

Sometimes the consultants get us excited, but after they leave, what we most often have is a plan with numerous goals (what), not necessarily a long-term strategy (how).

3 - We confuse goals / plans with strategy. This is a major issue. Strategy is the HOW we achieve our mission and vision (the process of success). Planning is the WHAT we need to get done. When we skip from mission/vision to planning/goals, we forget an important step - strategy.

Strategy focuses on an outcome you desire and why you desire it. Another way to think of strategy is it is the process in which you achieve your mission/vision.

To set a goal of increasing Mass attendance isn't a strategy. Numbers, objective metrics, etc. are the results of strategy, not strategy itself. In sports, it is easy to understand what a strategy is for, which is to beat the other team. In business the goal is to make more money than your competitors. In ministry, we have to massage the definition a bit. First of all, to win is still to beat the enemy (Satan and his minions) and to do so we win souls for God. In other words, our goal is to get people to heaven. That is how we "win" in Catholic ministry. Yet, strategy goes beyond this. It devises a plan on HOW we win.

Strategy has angst or nervousness with it. It deals with unknown (but hoped for) outcomes sometime in the future. We invest time, effort, and make decisions to get there. Strategy demands trade-offs. You have to give something up to be able to do other things. A parish that wants to reach the unchurched who never come to the parish, can't just run more programs at

the parish and expect people to show up. Thus, they will have to stop doing some things in order to reallocate their time, money, and people into other things.

Strategy is found by having a vision that fulfills your mission. Strategy is achieved by planning. WHY then WHERE then HOW then WHAT.
Plans are easily doable. Strategy is theoretical. But, we don't stay in the theoretical, but make it practical (via planning based on a strategy). Strategy (how) needs a logic (why). We ought to ask - what would have to be true about our culture, our world, our strategy - for this vision to work? It necessitates that we change a strategy when we bump into realities that prove our assumptions were wrong.

For it to be accomplished you have to be able to take it from theoretical to doable. Thus, you need to make your theory simple, doable, and clear.

To be able to do planning, you don't need these things. It is usually siloed "to do" lists that each person (or department) wants. In a dioceses planning process you get groups that want different things and plans are made to get there. So, the Catholic schools offices wants more diocesan support, the Catechetical office needs 4 new computers and a new elementary school curriculum approval process, the chancellor wants a new roof on the office building, etc.

There is no internal clarity or unity to the planning nor is there a collective goal for the whole organization. Thus, it lacks strategy. It is merely a list of goals and plans.

Planning takes over because it is easier, more achievable, gives us the sense that we are accomplishing something, and comes from a culture of getting things done, rather than achieving long-term visionary (and centralized) goals. Planning also comes out of controlling costs, which can more accurately be known and then planned around. Thus, it is about the ones doing the planning. The ones who will lay out and use the costs. The employees, leaders, or volunteers in your organization.

Strategy focuses on the outcome, not the costs. The focus is on the ones being reached and served. The people that need to be evangelized. The disciples that need to be accompanied and formed into missionaries. It is externally focused.

SUMMARY
To achieve a goal of changing the culture of your Catholic institution, you will need clarity and single-minded devotion to:
MISSION - WHY you exist
VISION - WHERE you are going
STRATEGY - HOW you will get there

Why Catholic Parishes Struggle To Get Volunteers and What To Do About It!

BY MARCEL LEJEUNE

If you have been Catholic long enough, you have seen the Catholic version of the military draft that many parishes enact annually. Before or after Mass, someone gets up for the announcements and tells the parish that “We are in dire need of catechists and volunteers for our youth classes” or “our parish festival is in a week and we only have 50% of the volunteers we need to run it.” Thus, a few folks are guilted into helping, some are nagged, and a few more might do it because they just want the announcements to stop. They get reluctantly drafted into helping. But, as with the military draft, people who haven't willingly signed up aren't going to be as caring, invested, or interested as those who desire to serve. The reason this happens is because we simply don’t have a culture in which most Catholics have taken ownership of their parishes, rather they are simply renting some space there. Think about the things you have rented or leased - cars, houses, event space, vacation cabins, etc. Now think about similar items you have owned. How did you see them differently? How did you treat them differently? When I was growing up, my parents had a rental property that we would periodically have to clean after the renters would move out. I have to say, some of the grossest things I have ever cleaned were in that house. I learned at an early age that a lot of folks just don’t take care of things they don’t own (and some don’t even take care of things they do own). When it comes to our parishes, the same can be said of the culture we have created. We all view our parish as either renters or owners.

RENTERS

The Catholic renter is someone who views the parish from a consumerist mentality. They go to church with the mentality that they are their to be served and to receive. Just like you would walk into a restaurant or store - this is the mindset that many Catholics bring into our parishes. From the parish the Catholic renter would like to receive:

something in return for time put in

something to show for the investment of money

something pay off if they volunteer for an event or program

What Catholic leaders need to realize is that begging, nagging, asking, pleading, and even personal invite will only work on a small slice of the Catholic renter. No matter what you do, the culture you are swimming in is carrying the majority of Catholics in it. This culture of consumerism is (pardon the pun) consuming your strategy. In fact, most renters will just be put off further by your attempt to guilt them with obligation. They just don't care about what many Catholic leaders care about, at least not in the same way.

You might not like it, but after decades of failed leadership, scandal, partisan politics (hidden under a veneer of Christianity many times), radical generational changes in morality, growth of distrust in institutions, etc - then we need to understand that what we struggled with 20 years ago (getting volunteers) is only going to get worse if we keep doing the same things. Renters don't share your mentality about the parish, because they aren't invested in your parish!

We can't build on a consumerist model of parishes and expect consumers not to expect more of it! The history of the Catholic Church in the USA has gone through radical changes in the past few generations. Yet, we still do the same things. Why? Because that is what we know how to do and because we are scared to take big risks (even small risks scare most Catholic leaders). Yet, the real risk is sticking to what isn't working. So, we can't double-down on invitations, bulletins advertising, Mass announcements, etc and merely see the issue as a marketing scheme to get buy-in from more renters.

Rather, we need to transform renters into owners.

OWNERS

If you are a homeowner, you know both the joy and fear of signing a big check to a bank or title company, then being handed the keys to a house. A place that is all your own. A place you call home. A place you are invested in. A place that you are responsible for. This is the same kind of reality that we are aiming for by moving folks from renters to owners of their parishes.

Owners understand things renters will never know. If a renter moves out and then someone buys the home and moves into it themselves, the house remains the same, but the owners see it completely differently. They care for it, because they have to for it to remain a good house. It isn't just about the return on their investment, it is about the people inside the home.

As Catholic leaders, we need to help those coming to our parishes to understand that their parish is their home. They are responsible for it. They need to care for it. Yet this mentality won't just come from having the right strategy, the right advertising, the right buzzwords, or any other tactic we might employ. The solution runs so much deeper.

PARISH CULTURE

Too many times our parishes are set up to reward mediocre Catholicism. Mediocre Catholics can only perpetuate the current state of affairs. This is the state of our current parish culture in the USA. Are there exceptions to the norm? Absolutely. But, they are still not the norm. Culture is found in the norm. Culture is the unspoken rules that state "this is how we think and act in this time and place".

Then there are the other obstacles that a parish faces in the attempt to change the culture.

The Pastor is reassigned. Staff are laid off and programs cut because money is down. Ineffective leadership doesn't know how to turn things around, so they depend on what has worked a generation (or several) ago. Unresolved conflict is in the marrow of the parish and is never explicitly dealt with. The entrenched lay parishioners push back because they are not bought into the vision. Etc. Etc. Etc.

From our current vantage point, things may look bleak. But, let us open up a window and let some light in.

We can positively change the culture of our parishes. It has happened before, is currently happening, and will happen in the future. The question is - will we help in the process of renewal or be an agent of maintaining mediocrity / managing decline?

Up front I want to point out a VERY IMPORTANT POINT. No one program, event, strategy, or organization can change every parish - in other words there is no magic bullet. You and your fellow parishioners are the experts in the local culture. No outsider, including the best experts the Church has to offer, knows more about your local community than you do. Thus, be wary of trying something merely because it worked at another parish.

With that being said, let us move forward.

We have a lot of years of an unhealthy Catholic culture (in many places) to overcome in our work of evangelization / discipleship / renewal - apathy, ignorance, hypocrisy, bad leadership, poor vision-casting, a failure to make intentional disciples, and much more.

As Tertullian once said, "Christians are made, not born." Our parish culture is either part of this process of making disciples or works against it. When we experience a culture that isn't about our discipleship of Jesus, then why would we expect more disciples to come out of it?

So what do we do to shape culture? Here are some principles that can inform our work. We have many other blog posts that take a deep dive into each of these issues:

Prayer is at the foundation of our work, discernment, and vision. Without prayer, how can we expect to be vessels of God's grace to the world? Without prayer, we are powerless to have a deep impact on changing our own internal culture, must less the wider culture. Prayer is the beginning and end of our work.

Pastoral leadership that is clear about mission, vision, and strategy. Vision tells us where we are going. Mission tells us why we do what we do. Strategy tells us how to accomplish our mission and vision. All three are necessary and need to be compelling, clear, communicated, and committed.

Perseverance is a necessary virtue of all good leaders. There are no quick-fixes or easy answers. We not only need to stop looking for the easy answers, we need to set our hearts on the tasks which require years (and possibly decades) of faithful perseverance.

Processes that set us up for success. All that we do should be seen through our mission of making and maturing disciples. Once we do that, the processes we use to do these things

should make sense, be widely known / used, and we need to be committed to them for the long-run. If we don't know what works, then the first step is gaining the knowledge of what does work in changing culture. Not every process is going to be fruitful.

WHAT TRUE OWNERSHIP LOOKS LIKE

If we are to truly be disciples of Jesus, then we need to recapture what it is like to follow him closely and faithfully. Which means now is not the time to avoid the tough subjects, but to understand them and then effectively communicate them to others, without just trying to beat the truth into them (which rarely, if ever, helps).

Consumerist Christianity doesn't work. We have tried it for too long and it has failed us (and the world).
Passive Catholicism doesn't change lives.
Soft-selling discipleship means we don't make disciples of Jesus, but merely comfortably soft Catholics, who will fade away when things (or doctrines, morality, human sin, scandal, etc) get too tough.

You and I are called to be the salt and light to the world. But, are we? Because if we aren't, then the world has no chance of salvation, because Jesus doesn't have a plan B to make up for the failures of his Church (AKA - you and me). We are meant to be the instrument of salvation to the world. If we don't do it, then the world goes to hell (literally).

We don't need more people who are somber saints, half-hearted disciples, cultural Catholics, or comfortable Christians. We don't need more Catholic gadgets, buzzwords, meetings, or documents that few people read. So, let's get rid of consumerism in our parishes!

Rather, what we really need is radical witnesses who have died to themselves, so that Christ might live in them. We need people who are great evangelists and disciple-makers. We need saints and prayer warriors. We need people who are willing to die (whether figuratively or literally) so that others might live forever.

START WITH YOURSELF

If we make true disciples out of others, then all the other issues will eventually get better as well.

Some facts we know about the Catholic Church:

- **The issue is not doctrine, if it is true.**
- **The issue is not the Gospel, if it leads to life.**
- **The issue is not the Sacraments, if they give us grace.**
- **The issue is not our hierarchy, if it is God-willed. The issue is not the Scriptures, if they are Spirit-breathed. The issue is not Jesus, if He is God.**
- **Then many may say that the issue are external to the Church. But, that isn't the right an-**

swer either. Here are more facts:

- **The issue is not the culture, but the Church that isn't reaching the culture.**
- **The problem is not the people who don't know God, but the Church that isn't making disciples.**
- **The problem is not politicians who have forgotten God, but a Church that has forgotten her identity as evangelists.**
- **The problem is not moral relativism, but a Church that has lost her moral credibility, because of bad leaders.**

So, rather than placing blame elsewhere, we who are Catholic leaders need to own our collective failures in our Church. Individual Catholic leaders need to own their failures too. Since the problem is not in Catholic devotions, Sacraments, teachings, doctrine, hierarchy, structure, etc. The problem is in our approach to these things. In other words, the problem is in our vision, strategy, execution, lack of holiness, lack of accountability, and lack of prayer.

The issue is starts with us as leaders who have either perpetuated or even supported a Catholic culture of consumerism, leading to parish renters.

So, if you are a leader in a parish or diocese, ask yourself these 4 questions:

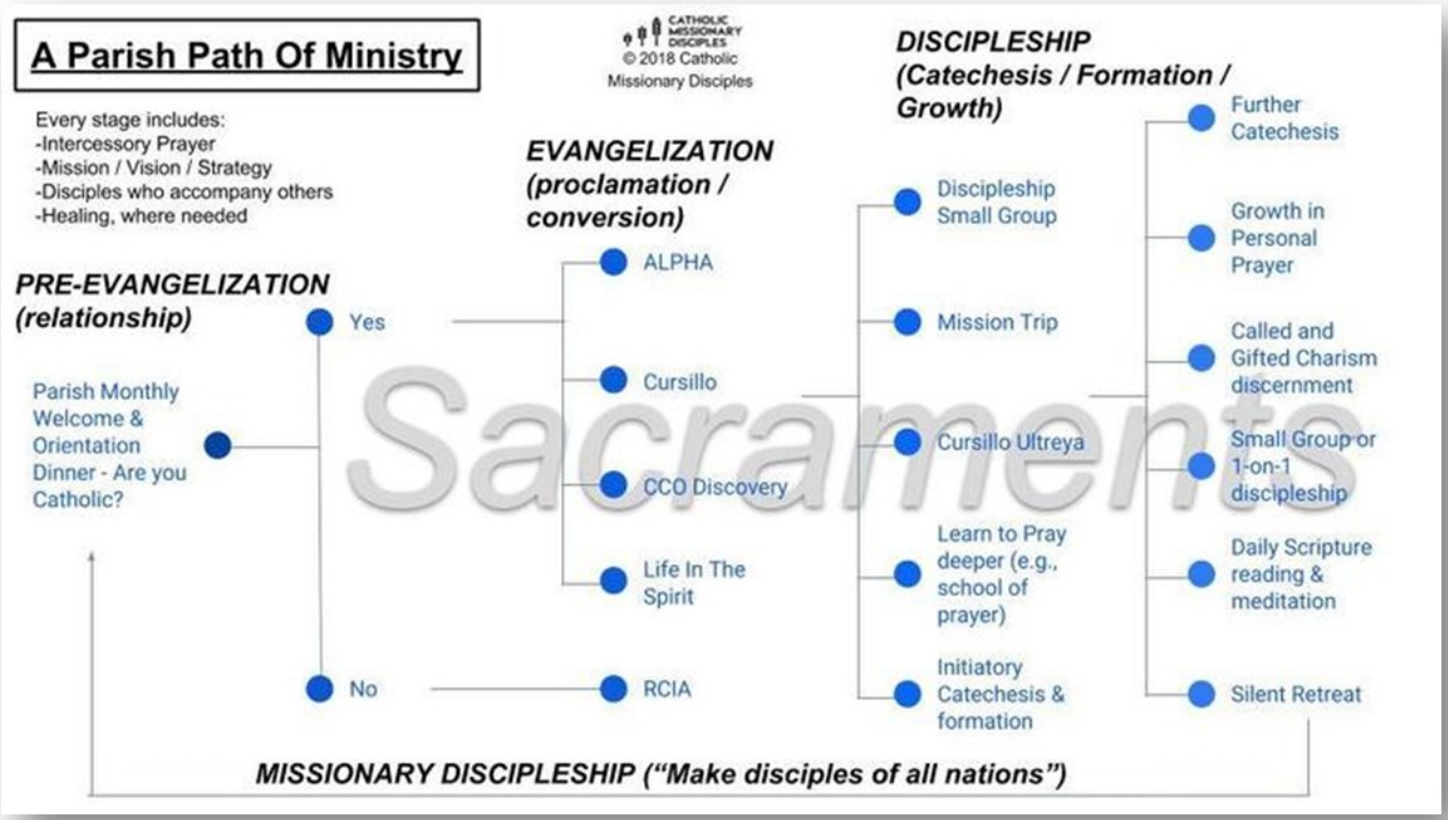
Who are you leading? Not just, who do I have authority over. Rather, who is following me, when I lead. Are these people intentionally following you and do they know where you are leading them, because if they don't, then you aren't a true leader - you are a manager. The Church needs more purposeful leaders.

Who am I following? You need to know who you are listening to, being mentored by, and following. This isn't just about listening to a podcast, reading a book on leadership (or this blog), or even following Jesus. Rather, this is about real friends who you look up to and are intentionally guided by. Do they know you deeply? Are you close to them? Do they have a plan to help you be a great saint and evangelist? If not...then you are not being led well.

Where are we going? If you are not sure, then how can you measure success or lead others? You can't. What is the overarching strategy to guide your mission? Do you have a vision and strategy to achieve it? Here is one way to envision what success in a parish looks like.

How will we reach our destination? What tactics can we employ to help us. If you don't know, then we encourage you to read other posts on this blog that explore how to best reach others for Jesus.

For too long the Church has propped up consumerism. This experiment in leadership has failed us. Now is the time to appropriately plan on how we can achieve the mission Jesus has given us, to "make disciples of all nations".



Expectations for Prayer Ministry Team

---> **EncounterMinistries.us** <---

- We understand that there are many different charismatic ministries, methods and models that are doing good work for God's Kingdom.
- However, when it comes to intercessory prayer / prayer ministry Fr. Liam needs the entire team on the same page and working from the same principles.
- This is highly delicate "work" that requires a great deal of practical prudence and discernment. One does not need to be a student of the 2-year program, but capable of demonstrating knowledge of the approach taught by Encounter Ministries. Much of this material is available on their website. The 4-day intensive program is highly recommended.

Why Reverence and Piety Alone Won't Renew a Parish

BY MARCEL LEJEUNE

The renewal of Catholic parishes will not happen by merely having a more reverent liturgy or increased piety. While these are good things (and things I really want the Catholic Church in the USA to grow in), by themselves, they are incapable of renewing a parish. Why? Well, we will explore this below. The first issue lies deep in Catholic identity issues. Too many Catholics don't understand the primary reason the Church exists. Benedict XVI put it this way,

"The Church exists to evangelize. Faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ's command, his disciples went out to the whole world to announce the Good News, spreading Christian communities everywhere."

Paul VI wrote:

"Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize."

In other words, the Catholic Church exists in order to get people to heaven. The source of her power, which drives this mission, is found in the person of Jesus, who gives us his grace (a free gift of divine life that we cannot earn). Grace is always given to us when we receive the sacraments.

Thus, we ought not separate our efforts of evangelization from the sacraments. The graces we receive in the sacraments allow us to be evangelists. Our evangelization should ultimately bring others back to the sacraments. Therefore, evangelization culminates in the sacraments, for the unsacramentalized and strengthens those who are already evangelized to go out and evangelize others. The relationship is inseparable and united as one movement of the Church.

Still, we need to explore further this relationship between grace, evangelization, and the sacraments.

THE BIG DEAL!

Too often, grace is thought of as magic by many Catholics. Grace doesn't work to make us Saints or get us to heaven, just because one has received the sacraments - without our consent and conversion. Yes, grace is received every time the sacrament is validly celebrated and worthily received. Still, they require faith, which is predicated on our consent. This is why the Catechism says:

"From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal

holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them." -CCC 1128

Notice that disposition of the person is necessary in order to receive the fruits of the sacraments. Earlier in the Catechism, it reads (quoting Vatican II, which I quote in larger context below):

"The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church": it must be preceded by evangelization, faith, and conversion. It can then produce its fruits in the lives of the faithful: new life in the Spirit, involvement in the mission of the Church, and service to her unity." -CCC 1072

Again, we see that in order for the sacraments (or any other spiritual practice or devotion) to change us, we need to say "yes" again and again to the grace we receive from them. Sacramental grace isn't magic that works without faith, conversion, or consent.

This is why so many baptized Catholics still need to be evangelized. In many ways, we Catholics haven't done enough to help others come to the point of personalizing their faith, but just offered the sacraments and crossed our fingers that they would work on hearts and minds of those receiving them. In many cases (most in the United States), it isn't working.

MAGIC?

This is why so few parishes are being renewed, growing, and changing the culture around them. We treat the sacramental graces like magic and expect them to change folks just by giving the sacraments to those coming to us. Yet, without conversion, faith, repentance, consent, etc. - why would we expect changed hearts, minds, lives, families, and parishes?

Furthermore, reverence and piety are wonderful for things to grow into, for those who already have faith, but since so many Catholics don't pray, don't believe, and don't center their lives around God - why would we expect that merely offering more reverent Masses or pious devotions would change the parish?

This is why reverence and piety are incapable of renewing a parish by themselves, because it is still treating grace like magic. When folks are not having inward conversion, then we can't expect outward actions (as good as they are) will be able to change their hearts and lives.

Now, this isn't to say that it is impossible for a beautiful Mass to change a life, a pious devotion to be a moment of conversion, or that God can change hearts anyway he pleases. Not at all. Rather, it is to say that these things generally happen to those who are already somewhat open to God, going to Mass, and ready for an encounter with God.

It isn't an either/or. It is a matter of sequence and understanding how grace works.

God acts first, he gives us grace.

Grace (for it to be fully operative in our lives) requires faith, repentance, and conversion (which we consent to).

Once we have faith, repentance, and conversion, the graces of the sacraments are fully opened up in our lives.

This drives us back to the sacraments (especially the Eucharist = the “source and summit”), so that we can grow ever closer to God and be impelled to share him with others.

The primary mission of the Catholic Church is to save souls. Thus, we are meant to evangelize. Once one believes, repents, and is converted, they can become a saint, grow as a disciple, get others, participate fully in the Sacraments, be more reverent, practice piety, etc.

So let us do all these things, but in the right order and manner - not forgetting that one thing (or merely some things), without the others, is incapable of renewing a parish and changing our world.

I know that one objection will be to say, "that is nice, but you have never been to my parish. Father has offered a more traditional liturgy and folks love it. We have more people every year." That is great. I love traditional liturgies myself. But, true growth is measured in conversion, not Catholics moving from one parish to another. So, unless the parish has an RCIA that is busting at the seams, you are shifting Catholics around, not truly growing. The fact is that we are in decline and moving the church-going Catholics from one parish to another isn't fixing our issues.

Vatican II put it this way:

“The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion: "How then are they to call upon him in whom they have not yet believed? But how are they to believe him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear if no one preaches? And how are men to preach unless they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

Therefore the Church announces the good tidings of salvation to those who do not believe, so that all men may know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and may be converted from their ways, doing penance. To believers also the Church must ever preach faith and penance, she must prepare them for the sacraments, teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded, and invite them to all the works of charity, piety, and the apostolate. For all these works make it clear that Christ's faithful, though not of this world, are to be the light of the world and to glorify the Father before men.” -SC 59

Becoming The Parish God Wants Us To Be

BY MARCEL LEJEUNE

Most Catholic parishes are stuck in a culture that rewards status quo, comfort, ease, and administration of the decline. This makes it very difficult to change the momentum of the culture in our parishes. No program, event, new idea, tweaking of old ways, conference, gimmick, or online video series will change our parishes. We know this. YOU know this. Rather, it takes an honest look at what really does work and what is failing us. We could have called this post - "How to get Parish Renewal Started"

BECOMING THE PARISH GOD WANTS US TO BE

1 - We care more about "the way we have done things" than "the way we ought to do things".

**Our history, teachings, Saints, doctrines, etc will always matter and we should know them and use them. In fact, we can not be Catholic without these things. But let us not confuse the things that are essential to Catholic identity with the programs, events, classes, etc that make up the main part of activity in a modern parish. Clearly, these are not revealed by God. The Sacraments, the Scriptures, the doctrines, etc are not optional, but many of the ways we spend our time and money (outside of the essentials) are optional. **We can't forget about what is before us and where God wants to lead us. Each parish needs to ask:

Are we really discerning what God wants of us, as a local parish?

How are we reaching out to those who aren't coming to church?

Could we call our parish a disciple factory or is it more like a museum?

What exactly do we exist, as a Church, for?

Do we have a positive impact on the local community and how do we measure it?

How do we stop doing the things that are taking away from what we ought to be doing?

In many ways, we have the wrong goals. Getting folks to Mass, getting involved, increased collections, etc are not the right goals. Our goal should be to lead folks to Jesus, then everything else that happens afterward should flow from our discipleship (following) of Jesus. That would include all the rest.

--Try this instead - Visionary leadership. Know what the mission of Jesus is (to "make disciples of all nations") and follow His lead. Let this mission be the guide for your parish. Orient all activities in a parish around this mission. Stop doing things that don't play a part in fulfilling this mission. Then only start new things that will help you get better at it. Change is hard, but necessary, if we are going to go wherever Jesus leads us.

2 - We see the culture as an enemy, rather than an opportunity.

**We look at our modern problems and seek out the "holy bubbles" where we (and our families/friends) can be safely kept from their influence. But, the problems found in our current generation aren't the real issues, but are distractions. Why? Because Jesus had it much worse. He lived in a country that was ruled by an oppressive outsider regime (Rome). They had many restrictions on freedom, just as many sins, and it got so bad, they executed him for daring to speak out.

The early Christians faced much harder issues than us too. They were rounded up and murdered, persecuted, and maligned. Still, they spread the Gospel. Today, Catholic apathy is a bigger problem than cultural issues and we need to honestly look at why that is. We don't want to pay the cost of sainthood, we aren't very good at relationships, we don't like change, and we are too comfortable.

--Try this instead - Let God change how we act, think, and operate as a parish community. This starts with how we act, think, and operate as individuals. Think of the affect a small handful of faithful, joyful, dedicated, and apostolic leaders could have on a parish! Now imagine that group growing to include multitudes more people 5 or 10 years later. You could see real transformation, if you set them free to impact people's lives.

3 - We don't embrace all of what it means to be Catholic.

**There are many parishes who completely leave behind the missionary mandate of Jesus. This means that many times we define ourselves by the secondary issues - preferences in prayer, music, or devotions, what organizations we belong to, what kind of ethnic group we are part of, our politics, etc. The facts are clear, we just don't get evangelization or discipleship. If we did, we wouldn't have such massive decline in our parishes. Rather, we would be transforming our local communities. If the mission of the church is to "make disciples" and we aren't doing that, then we aren't embracing all of what it means to be Catholic!

--Try this instead - model evangelization and discipleship, by doing them yourself first. If you are a diocesan or parish staff member and don't know where to start or how to accomplish this, we can help. Still, find someway to grow in your own discipleship and start to share your journey with Jesus with others. It isn't meant to be kept to yourself!

4 - We depend on clergy (and other professional staff) to be our primary caregivers.

**This model wears out staff and ultimately bottlenecks pastoral care to be done by the "experts". Think of how busy your parish priests and staff are. Think of how many have been burned out, because they are paid little, don't have time to themselves, feel overburdened, etc. This is an unsustainable model, because it means that "ministry" to one another is kept for the privileged few that we go to for their expertise. This isn't the way Jesus intended us to care for one another. Of course, there are things that only clergy can do (namely, the Sacra-

ments and other rites reserved to them). But, we still rely too heavily on them even outside of these duties.

--Try this instead - We need to a model where we care for one another through real relationships and an intentionally structured community. We all want to be connected to others and know we are truly valued and cared for. We have to do this for one another to be able to reach the masses. Leave it to the "experts" rather than the common people and we will only be able to reach a select few, rather than the crowds that need to know they are cared for too. Empowering the average Catholic to take on their own personal mission - by apprenticing under more mature Christians - is the model taught by Jesus.

5 - We don't have a clear path for parishioners to walk, but a hodge-podge of programming instead.

**Does a newcomer to your parish know how to get involved and what each step on their pathway of discipleship would entail? Would the average parishioner be able to tell you what the plan for themselves (and others) is? If not, then why not? One big reason is we aim for attendance over discipleship. Disciples achieve all our smaller goals - attend church, give money, volunteer, and know they are valued - AND they can make other disciples. People who aren't disciples, will (most likely) stop attending at some point.

--Try this instead - create a clear pathway, based on the understanding of what it takes to make a disciple and grow a missionary disciple. Then base all activities, events, classes, and programs within this pathway. If something doesn't correspond to the pathway, then stop doing it - it is a distraction. Of course, we need not change our teachings, liturgy, etc to be more welcoming, do evangelization more, or follow a clear path to discipleship. Rather, it should make us better at all those things.

6 - We confuse method with mission.

Methods are what we do - some we don't have the power to change (e.g., prayers in Mass), but some we do - programs / events / classes / planning / etc. Mission tells us why we exist. It is the engine which drives the car. We don't get anywhere without it. When we make our methods into sacred cows - we start to forget what our mission is and make the methods more valuable. Newspapers that won't go digital (and have gone bankrupt) - are good examples of other organizations that have confused method for mission. So, what are we in the business of? Reporting news or making newspaper? Programs and events or making disciples?

--Try this instead - communicate your mission clearly and allow it to not get confused with methods. The sacred cow events, programs, and classes need to be integrated into the mission or cut. This kind of change is difficult and will take a long time. Thus, it needs to be bathed in discernment and prayer. It will also need leaders of courage and patience, because you will not get 100% buy-in, no leader who does the right thing will (even Jesus)! It is worth the price you have to pay, to see souls enter into heaven.

Diagnosing What Ails Catholic Parishes!

BY MARCEL LEJEUNE

My toe was so painful, I could barely walk, much less continue training for a marathon. It was swollen to almost twice the normal size, and I knew something was wrong. So, I went to a podiatrist, who diagnosed overtraining as the issue. He gave me shots and a prescription (which helped in the short term). But, he misdiagnosed my underlying illness. It wasn't overtraining, it was psoriatic arthritis (an autoimmune disease). Much later I was correctly diagnosed by a rheumatologist who helped me find an appropriate treatment plan, which took years to accomplish. It was a hard and painful time.

A misdiagnosis of an illness means treatments may not work and in some cases can even make the illness worse. In a similar way, this may happen in Catholic dioceses and parishes. The symptoms of our problems are obvious - decline in numbers, fewer young people, low priestly vocations, etc. But, many have misdiagnosed the underlying illness. We look at the symptoms and blame them on various issues (e.g., "we haven't catechized well", clericalism, loss of reverence, immorality, the sexual revolution, etc). While these are not unimportant issues, they aren't the root cause of our illness.

One way Catholics may misdiagnose the situation is when blame is put on Catholic structures (e.g., diocesan offices, parishes, hospitals, schools, etc). But these are not the source of our problems. Rather, the problems come from having the structures without the right understanding of mission and/or the lack of understanding/implementation a proper identity that leads to a proper mission and then strategy.

Most of the people we (CMD) work with (Catholic diocesan and parish leaders), desire to be more fruitful. They want to evangelize, lead, and make missionary disciples - but there are major symptoms that clog up the system. We need to know what the symptoms are to find the underlying cause and then work on good health.

So, what is causing our problems? What is the proper diagnosis? Here are five underlying illnesses The Catholic Church is currently suffering from.

1 - Catholic Identity Sickness

Some believe the Church exists to maintain the structures. Others believe the Church exists to give us the Sacraments, feed the poor, teach right doctrine, etc. These are important, but not why the Church exists. The Catholic Church exists to evangelize. The Church exists to make disciples. When we don't operate according to this identity - we can fall into maintenance mode and lose our deeper identity. Our identity is missionary. The structures are meant to support that identity and mission, not take their place. To treat identity sickness, we need a deeper understanding of the identity of the Church and a return to the core mission. You can diagnosis whether your parish or diocese is suffering from this by looking at where your priorities (in budget, calendar, staffing, etc) are.

2 - The Wrong Strategy Disease

The Church does not exist in order to run programs, events, classes, etc. If we don't have the right strategy, then we end up replacing the strategy of Jesus for programs, events, & classes. Too few

Catholic leaders truly believe that deep investment in a few people is Jesus' strategy, but all the evidence tells us it is. Jesus knew all. He spent 75% of his 3 years in active ministry with 12 men. Did he mess up? Do we think we know better than God? I don't. But many Catholic leaders operate as if they do, because they don't do what Jesus did. Rather, they have become managers of parish machinery, not fruitful evangelists, who live it out in every aspect of life. Rather, we are investing in the crowds, with diminishing returns. This strategy has failed us. Jesus' strategy changed the world. It can do so again.

3 - This Is What We Know and Do Disorder

This sickness is related to "Lack of Faith & Courage to Operate Outside of The Norm sickness". Too often we don't want to be uncomfortable. We don't want to take a risk (either in relationships or in work). Therefore, we stunt our own growth and the growth of others. God WANTS renewal, way more than we do. He also revealed to us (in Jesus) a clear way we ought to operate. Still, God waits to work through His Church (us) until we choose to allow him to. He isn't going to force us to do something we don't want to do. God waits for us to be bold and courageous. This means somebody has to take a risk for God! Someone has to lead in renewal. Look at the Saints. They didn't become holier by being OK with being OK. They stepped out of comfort and into being abnormal. They operated differently. Faith and courage are required to do so. Renewal also requires courageous and visionary leadership, that moves a group of people toward God's vision. It doesn't settle for the way we have always done things.

4 - False Discipleship Sickness

The Catholic Church is using all the right buzzwords (discipleship, missionary disciples, evangelization, accompaniment, etc), and we are talking a good game. But we still need to understand that leading someone to conversion (making disciples) is NOT the FINAL goal. The final goal is to make disciples who make other disciples who make other disciples, etc. In other words it means they don’t stop with one conversion to Jesus, but continue to work until we are all holy evangelists for Jesus who can make even more disciples. That kind of goal is much higher than just getting folks to be a bare-minimum intentional disciple. We need to talk in much bigger terms of evangelization and discipleship with leaders. We need to shoot for a higher goal - the bar that Jesus set for us. He wasn't ok with the conversion of the 12. He sent them out to make other disciples and do what he did. So, they also deeply invested in others and sent out further missionary disciples. What about us? Why aren't we as fruitful as we can be? What is the bar of "success" in our context?

5 - Creeping Universalism Disorder

If you don’t believe Hell is a real possibility for someone or you don’t believe Jesus is the only way in which someone is saved, then you won’t evangelize. Unfortunately, most Catholics operate and believe as Universalists or semi-Universalists. That is, they aren’t convinced that heaven, hell, and salvation are what the Catholic Church says they are. If we really believe that salvation comes through Jesus Christ by faith, hope, and love of Him, if we really believe Heaven exists and the grace of God, through faith, is the way to enter heaven, then why would we ever withhold such a truth from anyone? Holding to a form of universalism kills our impetus to evangelize.

These five underlying illnesses aren’t the only things that are causing our problems, but they are at the root of our problems. Let us start to properly diagnosing our sicknesses and then work to alleviate them with greater love of Jesus and others. Let us work for renewal and salvation. These are the things that can drive us to be a healthier Church. A healthier Body of Christ.

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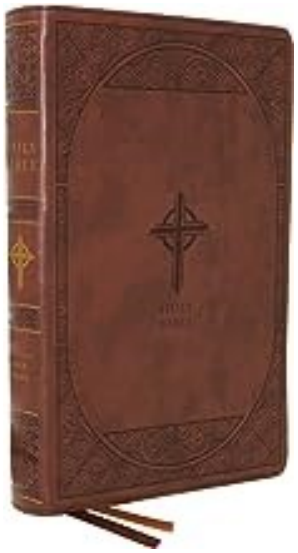
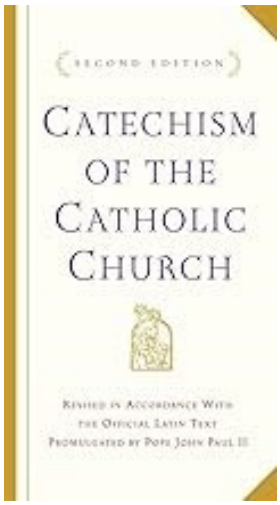
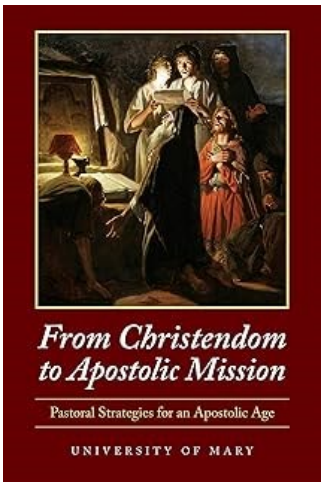
CATHOLIC MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

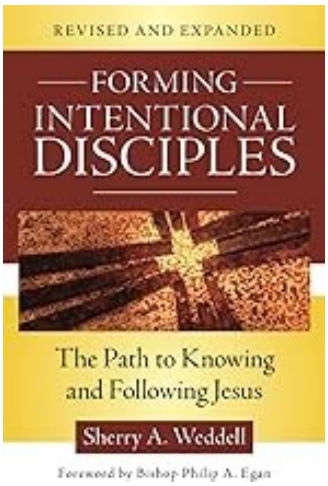
STRATEGY	PRE-EVANGELIZATION & EVANGELIZATION	DISCIPLESHIP			
STAGE	**Stranger To Jesus**	**Acquaintance of Jesus**	**Jesus is a Friend**	**Jesus is a Close Friend**	**Jesus is your Best Friend**
OTHER NAME	Seeker / Non-Disciple	Intentional Disciple	Developing Disciple	Missionary Disciple	Multiplying Disciple
MARKERS	-Spiritually apart from Jesus. -Has never intentionally chosen to make Jesus the center of their life. -Possibly catechized, but not evangelized.	-Knows Jesus and has intentionally chosen to follow him and make him the center of their life. -Attitude is positive toward Jesus and the Church. -Still ignorant of a life with Jesus. -Self-centered spiritually, -Excited to talk about Jesus, when the time is right. -Serves out of zeal or obligation.	-Growing closer to Jesus. -Still somewhat ignorant of Christian life & teaching. -Self-centered spiritually. -Has started some daily prayer, and seeks freedom from sin -Regular Sacramental life. -Starting to try active evangelization, but only in certain safe situations. -Serves sporadically.	-Actively evangelizing for Jesus and may be able to make disciples, but not multiply. -Prays daily. -Seeks personal formation themselves, rather than depending on others. -Deep Sacramental life. -Moving to other-centered / God-centered. -Serves consistently. -Works through charisms	-Discipling others who do the same and spiritually multiplying. -Prayer is personal, daily, intense, and deep. -Considered knowledgeable on doctrine and practice. -Sacraments are center of spiritual life. -Other-centered / God-centered - humility. -Serves constantly. -Helps others work through charisms
NEEDS	-Needs initial conversion to Jesus - response to the Kerygma and inviting Jesus in as Lord and Savior. -May know about Kerygma, but hasn't responded to it personally. -Needs clear presentation of Kerygma and opportunity to respond.	-Needs basic formation in following Jesus. -Starting Prayer, Scripture, Catechesis, moral life, etc. -Needs good mentorship in following Jesus and a lot of time and accountability. -Clarity on big picture of discipleship is key.	-Needs further formation in following Jesus & how to start mission. -Accountability is still a large part of discipleship. -Overcoming ignorance, but still very large gaps in knowledge. -Needs the big picture of the Church and her mission.	-Needs deep formation and accountability for mission. -Is considered an exemplary Christian. Needs accountability, but less hands on work. -Encouragement and guidance toward holiness and mission are at forefront.	-Forms others and holds them accountable to mission. -Is on mission for the glory of God's Kingdom. -Needs community and accountability, but is a leader in most Christian relationships.

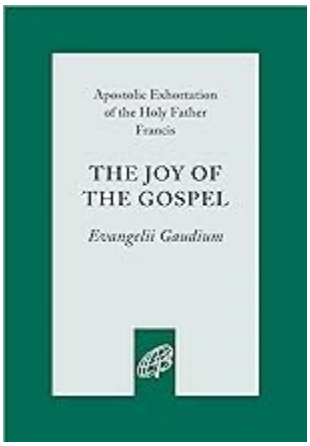
Book Shelf
(Equipping for Apostolic Mission)

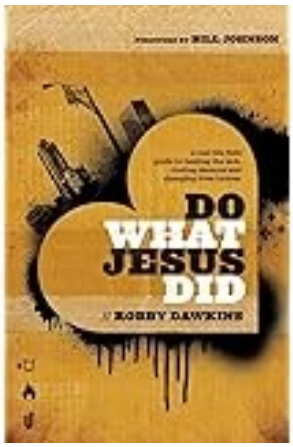


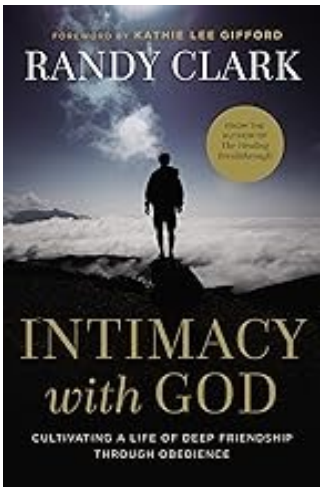


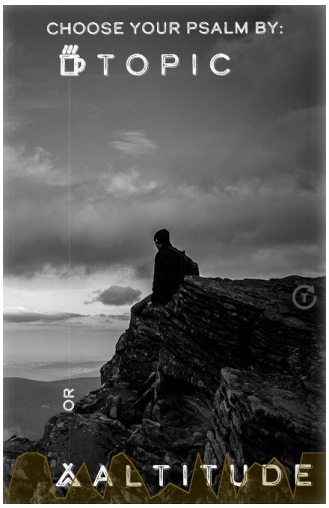


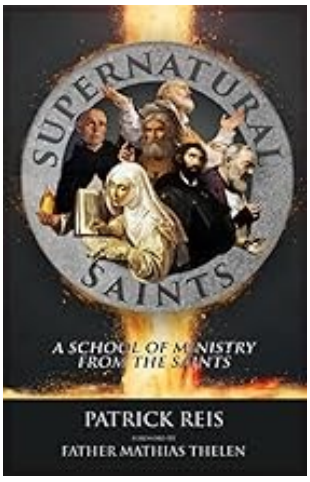


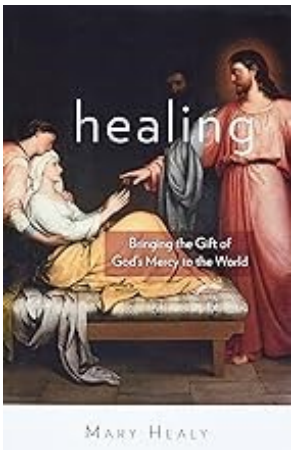


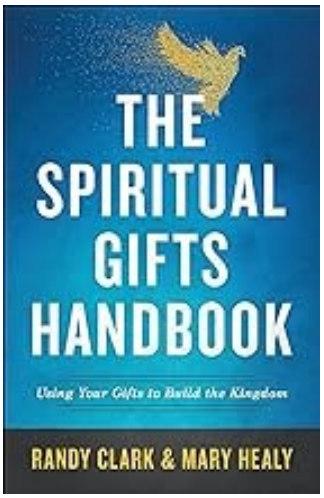


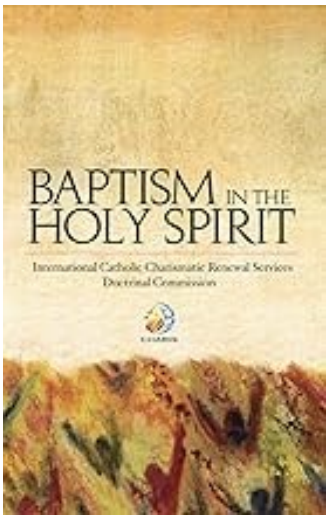












notes:

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"Ingredients" for the journey ahead:

- **Hunger** (for the more that God wants for you)
- **Expectation**: give God an open door to act in your life
- **Silent longing & desire** (especially at prayer)
- **Posture 'I'm a novice on this side of heaven'**: humble, always learning, teachable, adaptable, flexible, collaborative, obedient to the Holy Spirit
- **Develop a secret prayer life** with God aimed at an intimate relationship with God
- **Become grounded in His Word**
- **Fast & pray**
- **Field hospital mode**: get used to ministry that is more messy and less cosmetic
- **Confession + Eucharist** = forcefields up
- **Visit places where God is pouring out His Spirit** & hang around people who are tasting the goodness of God and not afraid to share it
- **Get in a prayer group** where you can share what you are going through on a weekly basis and have people pray for and with you
- **Work for the unity Jesus prays for in John 17:20**. These are trying times & pastoral teams are trying their best in difficult to *humanly* impossible situations.
- **Humility**: