

the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY CENTER

# C21 Resources

A SERVICE OF BOSTON COLLEGE

SPRING 2010

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Evangelizing Church*

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the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY CENTER  
BOSTON COLLEGE

Dear Friends,

You hold in your hands something very familiar and yet something new.



With this issue of *C21 Resources* we shift formats in dramatic fashion. It is our hope at the C21 Center that you will find this new version of *Resources* handy to take along with you on the subway, to work, or to share with a friend over coffee. Like faith itself, it is meant to travel and it is meant to be shared. You told us in our recent online survey that an amazing preponderance of our readers, some 58%, read every article in each new issue. Further, 72% of you pass on your copy of *C21 Resources* to a friend, co-worker, or family member. Behind each of these statistics is a heartening confirmation that this publication is worth reading and worthy of putting in front of the eyes and the hearts of others as well. Thank you for that good word!

During the spring of 2003 the first issue of *C21 Resources* was published and sent forth in the hope that providing good resources to thoughtful believers would assist the Church as a whole in responding to crisis and in regaining equilibrium and evangelical health. At that time the editors wrote of the questions facing us as the Church, "We do not have one answer, but we do offer resources: the best analyses, reflections and commentaries. For those who cannot attend the ongoing events on campus, for BC graduates and friends far from Boston, and all who want to think more deeply about the issues, we offer the following articles from across the spectrum of Catholic thought." Seven years later, we are working to do the same. Those first editors continued: "Future issues of *C21 Resources* will explore in greater detail the main topics of The Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." And so they will.

In the past you have found ideas here well worth reading and discussing. Hearts and minds have been nourished, challenged, moved, converted, and caused to wonder. In our new format may all these responses remain unchanged.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John P. McGinty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John P. McGinty  
Acting Director  
The Church in the 21st Century Center

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Cover image: Bob Gilroy, S.J., *A Contemplation to Achieve Divine Love*. Oil on canvas. ©2001.  
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I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me,...and consequently how he, the same Lord, desires to give me even his very self,...and consider what I on my part ought in all reason and justice to offer and give to the Divine Majesty, namely all my possessions, and myself along with them.

*"God is love..."*  
*(1 Jn 4:16)*

The arms reach beyond borders.  
Mission churches circle the red center.  
Each church has only one shaded wall.  
The body of Christ opens to new horizons.  
God labors in love.

—Saint Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises* 234

the CHURCH in the 21ST CENTURY CENTER

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*The Church in the 21st Century Center serves as a catalyst and a resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church in the United States*

— Bob Gilroy, S.J.



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*U.S. Catholic* magazine is published by the Claretian Missionaries, a Roman Catholic religious community of priests and brothers. The Claretians are dedicated to the mission of living and spreading the Gospel of Jesus. For more information, visit [www.claretians.org](http://www.claretians.org).

Visit the *U.S. Catholic* magazine Website for subscription information at [www.uscatholic.org](http://www.uscatholic.org).

*CHURCH Magazine* was an award-winning professional quarterly of pastoral theology and ministry. It was written especially for pastors, parish staff, parish leaders, and the directors and staffs of diocesan offices, and was published by the National Pastoral Life Center. *CHURCH* ceased publication with the fall 2009 issue.

# Growing Faith for an Evangelizing Church

BY JANE E. REGAN

*Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it. (GCD 40).*

This imperative to consider the formation of adults as “the chief form of catechesis” appeared for the first time almost 40 years ago in the *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD), a document published in 1971 by the Vatican office responsible for religious education.

Many Catholics who reflect on their experience vis-à-vis this directive respond with one question: What have we been doing for the past 40 years?

## In Light of Vatican Council II

Any conversation about the life of the Catholic Church in recent history almost inevitably brings us back to Vatican Council II (1962-1965). In this case, one could argue that it was the understanding of the Church and the role of the laity reflected in Vatican II documents that serve as important warrants for the ongoing formation of adults.

To give life to the understanding of the church that is reflected in *The Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen gentium*) and *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*) required that the adult community first understand the vision of the Church being presented, and then actively participate in the process of making that vision a reality. This required that adults have the opportunity to read

the Council’s documents and discuss their implications with others. Moving the focal point of the Church from the hierarchy to the whole People of God, the writers of the Council documents highlighted the role of the laity both within the Church (*Lumen gentium*) and in the wider social and political context (*Gaudium et spes*).

As more of the directives and instructions from the Council were issued, the role of the laity in various aspects of Church life was strengthened. *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum concilium*), the first of the Council documents to be promulgated, includes the hope that all of the faithful have that “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people...have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism” (SC 14). The writers of the document then make clear that instruction in the liturgy be made available for all people and that it be required in seminaries and religious houses of study.

In light of these new expectations, it followed that adults needed some serious catechesis. But, this did not happen in most parishes and even where it did, it was often short-lived or narrowly focused on preparing for a specific change in the ritual or training for a particular ministry. And, from the distance of almost 40 years, I wonder: What did the writers of the GCD mean when they said that adult catechesis “must be considered the chief form of catechesis?”

## Adult Catechesis = Programs?

Virtually every catechetical document from the publication of the GCD in

1971 up to the present has included the quote about the centrality of adult catechesis or something quite similar. Looking at the recent history of parish religious education makes clear that the primary response to this call was to create programs. Chief among the early programs were those for sacramental preparation for parents. While the quality of these programs varied widely both in the published materials and parish execution, the overall focus was to provide parents with the resources to teach their children about Eucharist and Penance. At the same time, programs for those involved in liturgical ministries were also being developed. In some cases these took the form of substantive exploration of the nature of the liturgy; in many parishes, however, the “training” consisted of a review of logistics so that the new ministers would know where to stand and how to use the microphone.

A few observations about these types of programs, some of which are still present in parishes across the country unchanged in their focus and content over the past two or three decades. First, as already mentioned, the focus of such programs tended to be narrow which meant that a small range of people from the parish would be involved. If you didn’t have young children and you weren’t involved in liturgical ministries, there was nothing for you. Second, for the most part the primary concern reflected in the programs was the internal life of the parish; generally speaking, short attention was given to the Church’s or the individual believer’s role in the wider social and political context. And, finally, pride of place was still given to the program for children; any offerings to adults were either an “add-on” or totally tangential to the work done with children. Overall, one would be hard

pressed to say that adult catechesis was even happening in most places; much less that it was the “chief form.” And in many cases that description is still true today.

While this description of adult programs might sound fairly gloomy (though realistic), I am in fact quite hopeful for the future of adult faith formation. The past ten years or so have seen the beginning of two significant shifts in the way religious education is understood at the parish level. The first is the growing awareness that faith is nurtured and supported not through programs alone but through the very life of the faith community. This call for lifelong and parish-wide faith formation was explored in the prior issue of *C21 Resources* entitled *Growing Faith for a Vibrant Church*. (Available online at [bc.edu/c21resources](http://bc.edu/c21resources)).

The second shift is a renewed understanding of the centrality of evangelization to the mission of the Church; there is a growing understanding of the significance of the fact that the Church “exists in order to evangelize.” That is the focus of this issue.

### Adult Catechesis = Evangelizing Church

Historically, Catholics haven’t been too comfortable with the concept of evangelization; for many it is equated to the TV-evangelist who pounds on the podium or Jehovah’s Witness who knocks on your door. What is described here is not evangelization but proselytizing; the aim of this type of preaching or teaching is to create new members for a specific expression of the Christian story. When I am proselytizing, I am telling you what you should believe; when I am evangelizing, I am speaking of what I believe, I am always “ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks [me] for a reason for [my] hope” (I Peter 3:15). What this means, of course, is that the Christian life must reflect the kind of hope that causes people to ask.

The past fifty years or so have seen some important shifts in the way in which the term “evangelization” is used in Catholic circles. In the past it was understood exclusively in terms of missionaries working in contexts where the Gospel had not yet been proclaimed. While this is one setting for evangelization, the promulgation of the apostolic exhortation *On Evangelization (Evangelii nuntiandi)* in 1975 by Pope Paul VI and the subsequent writings of Pope John Paul II on the need for a “new evangelization” have returned the work of evangelization to the center of the Church’s mission.

So, what do we mean by evangelization? “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (EN 18). So, on the one hand, evangelizing means conveying the Good News; that includes preaching and teaching, of course, but it also includes the way we respond to others, make decisions, raise our children, vote in elections, support the parish, and invest in our work. In other words, we evangelize by how we live our lives. St. Francis of Assisi articulated this evangelizing spirit: “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”

In addition to “bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity,” evangelization also involves “transforming humanity from within and making it new.” Beyond living lives that are reflective of Gospel values, we are also called to participate in transforming the human structures within society and the Church that fail to reflect these same values. It is not enough to preach the Gospel while ignoring the plight of those living in injustice.

In speaking of an evangelizing parish, the concern is not so much what we do as how we do it. Evangelization isn’t just another item to put on the parish “to-do” list; forming an Evangelization Committee doesn’t take care of the job. Recognizing that

the term “evangelizing” describes all that the parish does—evangelizing liturgy, evangelizing youth ministry, evangelizing pastoral care, evangelizing finance committee—makes clear that the dynamic energy of evangelization permeates all aspects of parish life.

The central theme of this issue of *C21 Resources* is the implication of being an evangelizing church for our understanding of adult faith. After a discussion of the nature of evangelization in an essay by Robert Rivers, C.S.P., we examine the pastoral and practical aspects of evangelization: Why is it so hard to talk about our faith? What would a parish look like that fosters an evangelizing faith? The remaining articles explore various expressions of adult Catholic faith, from “returning Catholics” and young adults to the faith of the second half of life and those who are elderly. Throughout this issue are recommendations and resources to support adults in their journey of faith and to support parishes as they strive to be and become places of evangelization.

An evangelizing parish has as its way of being in the world an orientation toward conveying the Gospel and participating in the work of transforming humanity. And this is where nurturing the faith of adults becomes so crucial. It is the adult community that is responsible for the capacity of the parish to respond effectively to its mission of evangelization. To be an evangelizing parish requires the ongoing maturing in faith of the adult community. It is for this reason that the catechesis of adults “must be considered the chief form of catechesis.”

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### Endnotes

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# Evangelization in the Contemporary Catholic Church

*Pope Paul VI, in his 1976 apostolic exhortation On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii nuntiandi), states: "The Church is both evangelizer and always in need of evangelization." In this essay, Robert Rivers proposes that the work of evangelization has the potential for bringing a renewed vigor to the Church even as the Church reaches out beyond its own boundaries.*

BY ROBERT S. RIVERS

It is not widely realized that evangelization was the principal theme of the Second Vatican Council. After all, there are no documents on evangelization. Yet Avery Dulles, now Cardinal Dulles, in a 1995 speech points to the opening of *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, which sums up the objectives of the Council as follows: "to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century."<sup>1</sup> In effect, Dulles says, in doing this Paul VI gave a new interpretation to the Council.<sup>2</sup> This evangelizing purpose is also expressed in a speech that John XXIII made prior to the Council in which he stated: "The purpose of the Council is, therefore, evangelization."<sup>3</sup> Evangelization, then, is not a new program. It is a way of being church. A great deal of what we have been doing in these last forty years of renewal—focusing more deeply on scripture, enriching the liturgy, working for justice for all—is evangelization. Paul VI defined evangelization in the broadest possible terms. In fact, he was concerned that we accept no partial or fragmentary definition that would diminish the complexity, dynamism, and richness of evangelization.<sup>4</sup>

This is one of the strengths of Catholic evangelization: It cannot be reduced to one-on-one conversion, door-to-door visitation, or televangelism.

However, if everything is evangelization, nothing is evangelization. Clearly, this is a way of being church that has a certain edge. What is this edge? Evangelization challenges all baptized persons to a conversion to Christ by living their faith fully, sharing it freely, and living these Gospel values in the world. It is not enough to live our faith in isolation, to keep it to ourselves. Evangelization thus provides a new lens through which we can view our Catholic faith. That lens is threefold: spiritual renewal, missionary activity, and action for justice in the world.<sup>5</sup>

One might even say that the Second Vatican Council was the Church evangelizing itself! Catholic culture prior to the Council was clerical, authoritarian, legalistic, moralistic, and ritualistic. This culture powerfully impacted the way that Catholics pursued their spiritual lives.

Often, spirituality was very narrowly defined. One of the great achievements of Vatican II was that it reaffirmed that all baptized persons are called to holiness, and that the laity's call was not to a monastic holiness but to a secular holiness, based on its proper vocation in the world. Similarly, the missionary consciousness of pre-Vatican II Catholics defined the missions as Africa, the Fiji Islands, China, and India. The missionaries were the Jesuits, the Franciscans, the Maryknoll Fathers and Sisters, and the Missionaries of Africa. Vatican II, however, asserted that the entire Church was by its very nature

missionary.<sup>6</sup> Wherever we are is the mission, and we are the missionaries.

Just as Vatican II expanded our understanding of the universal call to holiness and missionary awareness, so it expanded our understanding of social justice. The years after the Council saw a growth in our awareness of the need to address the structures of society, as well as to rectify individual instances of injustice. Thus evangelization is an integral but unfinished part of the renewal of Vatican II. If the Church will carry out that renewal agenda in its explicit evangelizing dimensions, this will remedy much of the upheaval we face and will place the Church in a powerful position to be the light of the Gospel to the nations, as the Council originally intended. I would like now to look at four areas of Church life in which evangelization can help us respond to the current situation.

## From Fragmentation to Unity

Pope Paul VI's *On Evangelization in the Modern World* states that "evangelizing all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the Church...it is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize."<sup>7</sup> In other words, evangelization is not one program among a host of possibilities; it is the umbrella under which all ministries are carried out. Everything we do must be seen as evangelization. However, this was not really understood when we first began trying to carry out the Council's renewal agenda. We expended a lot of energy implementing separate aspects of the renewal in an isolated fashion. Often, we began with segments of the liturgical renewal. We also concentrated heavily on equip-

ping the baptized to carry out their rightful ministry. Social justice became a central concern in the parish. Catechesis, originally limited to schools and religious education programs, grew to include the family, youth, and young adults.

The result is that parishes have become very busy places; they seem to follow a philosophy that “more is better.” Sometimes this multiplication of ministries is accompanied by compartmentalization and a harmful “turfism.” We see ministers focusing on one area of ministry at the expense of the whole. Repeatedly, one encounters situations where the left hand does not know (or always care) what the right hand is doing. Evangelization, once it is understood as the essential mission of the Church, has a unifying power to break down both turfism and excessive compartmentalization in ministry. For example, evangelization can have a salutary effect on the role of catechesis in the Church. Today, there is a growing divide between Catholic schools and parishes. Many parishes find themselves sponsoring and supporting schools with an increasingly large population of families of inactive Catholics or people with no church family. And many school families direct their primary loyalty to the school, rather than to the parish. A mutual distrust and lack of support often result. However, the *General Directory for Catechesis* makes it very clear that catechesis is an essential moment in the overall ministry of evangelization.<sup>8</sup> So we now have a firm basis for establishing a new unity between school and parish, under the overall ministry of evangelization. The purpose of the parish and school is the same: evangelization.

### From Maintenance to Mission

One Sunday, an elderly couple came up to me after Mass and said: “Father, all this talk about evangelization is fine. But while you are out taking care of them, who is going to take care of us?”

Many parishes are maintenance-oriented because their parishioners have a consumer consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Influenced by our consumer culture, they come to church to get something, and they expect the leadership to provide it. These good people have little missionary awareness. Parishes end up spending a lot of time and energy serving them, the people who are present, rather than reaching out to those who are absent. But this is not what we hear in scripture. Jesus said to his listeners: “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2: 17). At the end of all the Gospels, a missionary mandate accompanies the resurrection appearances. The most dramatic is in Matthew: “Go, make disciples of all nations....” (28:16-20).

In keeping with this mandate, canon law emphasizes that the pastor is responsible for everyone within the parish boundaries, not just the people who regularly come to church. Canon 528 states: “The pastor...is to make every effort with the aid of the Christian faithful, to bring the Gospel message also to those who have ceased practicing their religion or who do not profess the true faith.”<sup>10</sup> But the need to reach out beyond our boundaries is more than a mandate; it is a practical necessity. In his monumental work, *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch comments that movements, in order to survive, have to institutionalize themselves. But institutions, in order to stay vital, have to stay in touch with the original inspiring character of their founding as a movement.<sup>11</sup> For the Church, this means that we have to constantly reawaken ourselves to the boundary-breaking, all-inclusive character of Jesus’ original mission of salvation for all. Parishes in America “should be distinguished by their missionary spirit, which leads them to reach out to those who are far away.”<sup>12</sup> This is how they stay vital. It is also how they stay healthy. Organizational development tells us that healthy organizations are

those that have a clear sense of mission. Could it be true that clarity about and steady focus on our outward-reaching mission provide the healthiest context from which to deal with our internal problems? In adopting a missionary rather than a maintenance approach, parishes are not only being faithful to the mandate of Christ, but they also might find a remedy for the malaise that comes from excessive focus on their internal affairs.

### From Blindness to Conversion

We human beings are like fish living in the ocean. We are largely oblivious to the culture that surrounds us and how it affects us. Ronald Rolheiser speaks about how many of us in the dominant culture are impacted in ways we don’t perceive by narcissism, pragmatism, and unbridled restlessness.<sup>13</sup> The figure of the blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mark 10: 46-52) is often regarded as a foil for the disciples. They, too, are blind, only they don’t realize it. Bartimaeus, though, is ready to throw off the cloak of fear and come to Jesus so that he might see and thus we may view him as a model disciple. I believe that God has made us with a powerful desire for truth, but also with a considerable capacity for self-delusion. We constantly need to have our eyes opened, so we can see things as they really are (*contemplatio*). This is the ongoing struggle to conversion, and we are all called to it.

Conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the heart of evangelization; it is the core of the message we bring to the world. If we actively open ourselves to the conversion power of the Gospel by proclaiming it to all people, including ourselves, in every possible situation, allowing it to function as a two-edged sword cutting through to the bone of the human situation, we will indeed be changed. This transformation can be brought about only by the power of the Holy Spirit who is the principal agent of evangelization. Only the Spirit can change hearts. Only the Spirit can lead us to ask ourselves the question: “What



do I need to change?”—rather than pointing a finger at another. There is nothing quite so humbling and salutary in the body of Christ as the humble admission of our own need to change.

### From Rugged Individualism to Solidarity

Goal III of the U.S. bishops’ plan for Catholic evangelization, *Go and Make Disciples*, states: “to foster Gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> In effect, Goal III focuses on the social justice aspect of evangelization. The document goes on: “The fruit of evangelization is changed lives and a changed world—holiness and justice, spirituality and peace.”<sup>15</sup> We are not content simply to change individuals; we want to change the world.

Moreover, we participate in the transformation of culture not by assuming that the Church has all the answers, but knowing that the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church and in the world, bringing about the fulfillment of God’s plan for God’s creation. We are engaged in a process of discerning where and how Gospel values are actually at work and in place in the world and in the Church. The document on adult faith formation, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, describes this challenge by saying: “Inculturation is a process of mutual enrichment between the Gospel and culture.”<sup>16</sup> So there is a powerful sense of solidarity with the world, a growing together with the world as we seek to bring God’s creation to its fulfillment. In particular, this solidarity must be with the world’s poor, those without recourse. Without a doubt, the widening division between the rich and the poor continues to be one of the most serious social justice issues facing our world. If we wish to wipe out the breeding ground of terrorism in a post-September 11 world, we could do no better than to start with this issue. God has linked us together, so

that one part of the world cannot thrive while another languishes. Our world is full of pain that arises out of our inability to find effective ways to live out the virtue of solidarity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes solidarity as a social charity that is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood.<sup>17</sup> In St. Paul’s words: “None of us lives to ourselves and none of us dies to ourselves” (Rom. 14:7). Solidarity is the conviction that humanity is rooted in a common origin as a family and bonded together in an obligation of mutual charity. Solidarity is the conviction that human existence is coexistence.<sup>18</sup> This is not a solo trip. We are required to live not just for ourselves, but in service to the common good. Evangelization is profoundly personal, inevitably communal, and ineluctably social in its perspective, and solidarity is the finest expression of this social perspective.

### Pastoral Implementation

Recently, evangelization has risen on the priority lists of parishes and archdioceses across the country. Many archdioceses have evangelization coordinators and many parishes have evangelization committees. Evangelization programs are more common. Catholics are beginning to grasp that evangelization is not something foreign to their faith, but lies at the core of what it means to be Catholic. However, evangelization has not yet truly taken its rightful place as the central mission of the Church. Two basic challenges need to be addressed before this can happen. First, as mentioned earlier, many parishes and archdioceses are stuck in a maintenance mode: A good deal of their energy is spent on those who are already present. There is little missionary awareness on the part of either the leadership or the people. We need to get beyond this maintenance orientation. The second challenge, not unrelated to the first, is that evangelization is not perceived as the essential mission of the Church again, either by the leadership or the people. Rather, it is seen as one priority among many. Often, it is viewed

as a program that can be assigned to and implemented by an already existing committee. It is not understood as a way of being church. For example, in the parish evangelization may become a committee of the parish council and a program to be carried out by this committee. That is like entrusting ushers with the task of creating a welcoming parish! Evangelization must be the work of the whole parish. It cannot be carried out by a committee. There is a legitimate function for an evangelization committee, but it is as a catalyst, a resource, and a model for evangelizing activities. It cannot “do” evangelization for parish members; that is taking from them a call and a responsibility that belong to everyone. At the archdiocesan level, evangelization often becomes a temporary priority in its overall pastoral agenda. It is the number one priority—until it is replaced by stewardship or a fund-raising campaign.

Or sometimes evangelization is chosen as the focus of an archdiocese for a theme year, only to be followed by something else the next year. For the most part, we have not yet fully understood what it means in our pastoral planning to make evangelization the essential mission of the Church, something that underlies and animates all our activities and programs.

In the period from the Second Vatican Council to the Jubilee Year, the Church was given the great grace of appropriating in our time evangelization as its essential mission. Beginning with the new millennium, we are being given the grace of systematically implementing it. In many ways, the fruits of that effort have yet to be seen.

### Endnotes

ROBERT S. RIVERS, CSP, holds an STL from Gregorian University in Rome and is vice president for mission advancement at the Paulist National Evangelization Association in Washington, DC. Excerpts from *Evangelizing America*, edited by Thomas P. Rausch, SJ. Copyright © 2004 by the California Province of the Jesuits (Society of Jesus). Paulist Press, Inc., Mahwah, NJ.

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1. Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1975), no. 2.
2. *Origins*, 25/23 (November 23, 1995), 397-400.
3. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II, vol. 1* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 439.
4. *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, no. 2.
5. The three essential characteristics of evangelization correspond to the three goals of *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan of Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 1993).
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9. Patrick J. Brennan, *Re-Imagining the Parish* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 10.
10. *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), 201.
11. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 52-54, 59.
12. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation, The Church in America* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999), no. 41.
13. Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 28-52.
14. *Go and Make Disciples*, 8.
15. *Ibid.*, 3.
16. *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999), 28.
17. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), no. 1939.
18. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 166.

## INTERNET IDEAS FOR GROWING FAITH

Take advantage of some of the great resources on the Internet. Here are some good starting places.

### 1. Check out these sites for Catholic teaching, news, and resources.

[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va): Use the official Vatican Website to keep up with Catholic developments. It has news items, an online resource library, and great information if you are planning a visit to Vatican City.

[www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org): Use the official Website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for up-to-date press releases, news items, and documents; regular features such as lectionary readings (audio, video, and podcast), an online copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, movie reviews, and a list of (arch)diocesan Website links.

[www.americancatholic.org](http://www.americancatholic.org): This is a useful site for all things Catholic. Run by St. Anthony Messenger Press and Franciscan Communications, they have daily features as well as archived copies of their magazine *St. Anthony Messenger* and newsletter-style publications such as *Every Day Catholic* and *Catholic Update*.

[www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21): Find the rich webcast archives by clicking on "C21 On Demand." Selections feature key Catholic thinkers. Back issues of *C21 Resources* and other reliable publications available in full text are also available on this site.

[www.bustedhalo.com](http://www.bustedhalo.com): Young adults especially enjoy this ever-changing, busy site which describes itself as "an online magazine for spiritual seekers." Directed by Dave Dwyer, CSP, a Paulist priest, one can always find something new on this site.

### 2. Follow a columnist or a column, regularly check out a blog, or follow a podcast.

*National Catholic Reporter* sends you an announcement when a columnist such as John Allen, Joan Chittister, John Dear, Richard McBrien or a column such as New Voices has a new article. Sign up: [ncronline.org/email-alert-signup](http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup).

[www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog](http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog): a blog about timely matters by the editors and guest contributors of *Commonweal*, a magazine edited and managed by lay Catholics.

[www.americamagazine.org/content/podcast/podcast-index.cfm](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/podcast/podcast-index.cfm): a weekly podcast has interviews with editors and writers of *America*, a national Jesuit weekly.

### 3. Start or join a book club.

These Websites have selections for a current book to read and directions for how to begin a book club.

*America Magazine*: [www.americamagazine.org/content/catholic-book-club.cfm](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/catholic-book-club.cfm); *National Catholic Reporter*: [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org).

### 4. Get resources online that assist you in a deeper prayer life.

[www.pray-as-you-go.org](http://www.pray-as-you-go.org): Jesuit Media Initiatives in the UK provides daily prayer with music, reading, and question for reflection which is ideal for use with an iPod and MP3 player.

[onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html): Creighton University is well known for this Website with daily reflections, online retreat, occasional book clubs, and other ways to encourage our spiritual growth.

—Barbara Radtke

# Why Don't Catholics Share Their Faith?

*Many Catholics might get a bit nervous when they hear that the Church's primary mission is evangelization. Martin Pable gives some insight into this reaction and paints a picture of what an evangelizing adult might look like.*

BY MARTIN PABLE

In *America* in the spring of 2004, John C. Haughey, S.J., noted that many of his non-Catholic students are not shy about making personal faith statements, both in the classroom and outside. Catholic students, on the other hand, seldom do so. These Catholic young people will talk about Church issues and controversies or about moral values, but not about their relationship with Christ or about how they recognize God's action in their life. Father Haughey suggested some reasons for this phenomenon: a cultural bias against evangelicals, fear that such professions of faith may become mere formulas or the belief that one's actions (attending Mass, treating people with care) are the best ways to express one's faith in Christ.

My own experience working with parishes to help parishioners develop an evangelizing ministry convinces me that Catholics in general, not only students, are reluctant to give verbal expression of their faith in the presence of others. While I agree with Father Haughey's analysis, I believe there are a number of other reasons that explain why Catholics tend not to share their faith.

These reasons are historical. When Catholics in the United States emerged from their immigrant experience, they did not easily forget the discrimination their parents or grandparents had to endure in this country in earlier generations. Now, having received a quality education and desiring full acceptance into the professional and corporate worlds, "evangelization" or "Christian witness" were far from the minds of second- or

third-generation Catholics. They were hesitant to acknowledge their Catholicism, much less to share it with peers.

Most Catholics, moreover, have come to accept the American value of pluralism: "Live and let live." It seems socially ungracious and theologically unacceptable to "talk religion" around the water cooler or at the bowling alley. This attitude is reinforced when Catholics encounter the kind of "in your face" evangelism of some Christian evangelicals or Jehovah's Witnesses. And there is a further reason for the reluctance to share faith: many contemporary Catholics have grown up without clear knowledge of their beliefs and what underlies them. So they feel inadequate to explain or defend them if challenged. Add to this the fallout from the sexual abuse scandals, including the loss of credibility of Church authorities, and you have a multitude of reasons why Catholics find it daunting to share their faith in public ways. And anyway, isn't one's religion a private matter?

But the Gospel will not let us off so easily. According to Matthew, Jesus gathered the disciples together and gave them what is often called "the great commission," to go into the whole world and make disciples of all the nations (Mt 28:18-20). The words are similar in Mark (16:15-16) and in Luke (24:46-49). Jesus makes it clear that the church does not exist for its own sake. It has a mission, a purpose. It must not let the world forget Jesus Christ. It must continue to make him known and to proclaim his teachings everywhere until time is no more.

The first Christians took this mission very seriously. Nonbelievers were struck by the joy and love rippling through this new community, with the result that "every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). What was the process whereby this happened? My own speculation

goes something like this: The first Christian converts lived their newfound faith not in an ostentatious way, but in ways that were convincing. Their Jewish and Gentile neighbors observed how the Christians were devoted to their families, were conscientious in their jobs, did not go along with the immoral sexual practices of the time and reached out in care to those who were poor or sick. And they did all this with a spirit of joy and peacefulness.

At some point the Jew or Gentile neighbor would say: "You've changed. What's happened to you?" The new Christian would say, "You're right—I've come to know Jesus Christ, and it's made all the difference." "Well, tell me about him." And the Christian would tell the story of Jesus. If the other person were ready (and touched by divine grace), he or she would say: "That's what I'm looking for. What do I need to do?" The Christian would then introduce the person to the community and later to the catechumenate. I do not think there were many mass conversions after Pentecost. Rather, most people found their way into the church through the authentic witness and one-to-one connections with believing Christians.

This same basic process is relevant for today. For the past 15 years I have been teaching a course in parishes that I call "How to Share Your Faith Without Being Obnoxious." As with those first Christians, the starting point is living our faith before we talk about it. We need to be prayerful persons who nourish our faith by reading Scripture and participating in the Sunday Eucharist. We are devoted to our families and are conscientious in our work. We treat people with dignity and respect. We share our time and resources with the less fortunate. We do not engage in negative speech or back-stabbing. We try to create a positive and peaceful attitude in our environment. This is



what Pope Paul VI called “the wordless witness of your life,” the very first act of evangelization. He went on to say that this witness raises questions in people’s minds; it prompts them to wonder what motivates and inspires us. They may be moved to ask us. And at that point we need to be ready to share our faith.

Most often this will not take the form of answering direct questions, but rather of sharing worries or problems. People will sense they can talk to us. So the next skill in sharing faith is the ability to listen well. A variety of scenarios can be imagined. Someone confides a worry about health problems. A parent is upset about a son or daughter’s behavior. A spouse is troubled by tensions in marriage. Someone is worried about rumors of downsizing in the company and possible layoffs. Someone is grieving over the loss of a loved one or a broken relationship. A teen is feeling left out of a peer group. Instead of giving some easy advice or pious cliché, we listen carefully and respond in an empathic, non-judgmental manner. Perhaps we ask a few questions to clarify the situation, so that the person feels understood and accepted.

This is already a healing and evangelizing action. But often we can go further. Scripture exhorts us, “Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully” (1 Pt 3:15-16). The simplest, most direct form this can take is to share our own story. We do not need to have an abundance of biblical texts handy in order to evangelize or share our faith. Our greatest resource is our own spiritual experience. All of us, if we think about it, have had moments in which we knew we were in the presence of God, were touched or helped or encouraged or healed by God, were brought up short or deeply comforted by hearing or reading a Bible passage or listening to a Christian song. Often the encouragement or help came through some person; yet we were convinced it was really God who brought it about. That is what we share with the one who

has opened up to us: “You know, I’ve been through something like that in my own life. And what helped me most was my faith in God (or Jesus).” Then we go on to explain briefly what happened.

The beauty of this approach is that it is simple and non-invasive. We do not argue. We do not boast. We do not “talk theology.” We simply share our own experience. When we are finished, we give the other person a chance to respond. Perhaps this is as far as that person is willing to go at this point, which is fine. The questioner has had a good experience of being listened to and understood. In encounters like these, we give people something to think about. We can promise to pray for them, invite them to talk again, exchange phone numbers. If they show interest in learning more, we can invite them to a church service, a Bible study group, maybe even to a meeting of inquirers as part of a parish’s Christian initiation process for adults. If they have a question we are unable to answer, we offer to find out for them. Whatever the outcome, a seed has been planted. There has been a graced encounter.

We Catholics keep hearing that we need to move beyond our reticence and our habit of “keeping our faith to ourselves.” We are called to be more mission-driven, more willing to risk some degree of discomfort in order to further the message of Christ. But we have not been taught that there are ordinary, simple ways to share our faith. There are large numbers of people who, while not practicing any particular religion, are nevertheless searching for some higher purpose, for something to believe in. Our Catholic faith is a treasure that we are able to share with such seekers. Despite all the Church’s problems, Catholicism continues to have an appeal, to be almost fascinating, for many people. This is true even of non-practicing Catholics. While some want nothing more to do with the Church, the majority have just lost their connection with Catholicism. The faith still slumbers within them and

may be reawakened. Some research has found that at least one-third of inactive Catholics would like to reconnect with the Church, but they are reluctant to make the first move. They are waiting for an invitation, for some sign that they will be welcomed.

The approach described above provides an easy entrée for people who are searching. It assumes, however, that the seeker will initiate the conversation by sharing some problem or concern. Sometimes faith-sharing will require a more assertive approach. I have met Catholics who do not hesitate to initiate spiritual conversations, though not in a heavy-handed way. They will say to one or several people, “We had a special program at Mass last Sunday,” and then go on to describe it. Or, “Our church had an interesting speaker the other night.” “Did you read that article (or watch that television program)” about some spiritual topic?

The purpose of all these gestures is not to “make converts” or “fill the pews.” It is simply to open doors, to let others know that our faith has made a positive difference in our lives, and that God’s love and saving help are available to them as well. Above all, we share our faith because it is a gift entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus. It is an act of faithful stewardship.

I remember a cartoon of the ascension of Jesus. As he is returning to heaven, the apostles are looking up and saying, “Lord, what if we fail? Do you have a back-up plan?” And the risen Christ answers, “No—all I’ve got is you!” That is not a joke. It is a sobering and exciting reality.

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## Endnotes

MARTIN PABLE, O.F.M., Cap., is a retreat director at St. Anthony Retreat Center, Marathon, WI, and author of *Reclaim the Fire: A Parish Guide to Evangelization* (Ave Maria Press, 2002).

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# Characteristics of an Evangelizing Parish

*Deepening our attention to adult faith formation is not about adding more programs. Rather, we are challenged to recognize the way in which the very life of the parish contributes to maturing adult faith and enhances an evangelizing spirit. This essay looks at three dimensions of parish life that are part of this faith-filled setting: the commitment to hospitality, the capacity for conversation, and the development of faithful followers.*

BY JANE E. REGAN

To speak of an adult church is to speak of an evangelizing church. As the essay by Rivers makes clear the fundamental call of the Church is to evangelize, that is, “bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.” Responding effectively to this call requires a parish community that includes adults who have sufficient maturity of faith to embrace this call to evangelization in their own lives. It also requires that the church—in the form of the parish as well as complementary structures such as retreat centers, diocesan offices, and lay movements—be able to nurture this evangelizing spirit and support adults in their faith journey. In other words, to be an effective evangelizing parish, characteristics that foster evangelization and enhance maturing faith must be present. Exploring some of these characteristics is the focus of this essay.

The question is this: What dimensions of parish life require renewed attention because they are essential to the work of evangelization and crucial components for fostering adult faith? Here I want to look specifically at ways of being together, modes of interacting,

that enhance a parish’s effectiveness at engaging in its primary mission of evangelization. Three elements to be considered here are hospitality, conversation, and followership.

We begin with the recognition that in popular usage, each of these has been reduced to a narrow understanding; and yet each of these concepts has a rich lineage within the Jewish-Christian tradition that can be plumbed for insights for a contemporary re-appropriation. Proposals for an adult, evangelizing church arise in light of this reclaiming.

## Hospitality

Think for a minute of the contexts in which the term “hospitality” is used today: there is a “hospitality room” at a conference or in an upscale hotel; there is also the “hospitality industry”; some clubs, organizations, and parishes have “hospitality committees.” In these various settings, “hospitality” is designed to convey welcome, comfort, convenience, and a sort of professional personalizing of an experience. While a chocolate on my pillow at a hotel or coffee and doughnuts after Mass are

always welcome, the call to hospitality that marks an evangelizing, adult parish is more substantive and challenging than its common usage implies. To begin to articulate the dimensions of a Christian understanding of hospitality, we turn to the Scriptures. Looking briefly at one story from each testament can enhance our understanding of the call to hospitality today.<sup>1</sup>

The story of Abraham and Sarah<sup>2</sup> and the guests they welcomed into their home is the quintessential example of a hospitality story from the Old Testament: travelers arrive without warning; they are welcomed and given something to eat and drink, often the best the household has to offer; the travelers then convey a promise or blessing on those who offered them hospitality; and in that the travelers’ true identity as angels or messengers from God is revealed. What is clear in this story is that the hospitality was not seen as optional; it was a practical requirement among a nomadic people whose tent may be the only source of food and water for a fellow sojourner. And it was also an ethical requirement; as the Israelite nation matured, its laws made clear that the stranger is to be welcomed



Photo courtesy of BC Office of Marketing Communications.

as the Lord would be welcomed (Leviticus 19:34). The generosity of God's treatment of the Israelites when they were strangers in Egypt and travelers for forty years in the desert is seen as the measure of the hospitality that God's chosen ones are to show to others. In the Old Testament we find not simply hospitality but extravagant hospitality as an ethical imperative.

These ideas are echoed in the New Testament. At first glance it may look as though Jesus is teaching his disciples basic manners in the account that appears in Luke 14: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited" (8). Or later in the same chapter:

"When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (12-14).<sup>3</sup>

In these verses Jesus is setting out the basics of Christian hospitality: that it is often set within the context of a meal, source of life and sign of intimacy; and that it requires that we invite those who are perceived as "other" to join us. It is not enough to simply be generous to those around us; we must invite those who cannot give back in return and do so in such a way that they are not obligated to return in kind.

So, what does hospitality look like in our adult, evangelizing parish? On the one hand, we are called to make hospitality more than simply something we do: gather Thanksgiving baskets or support the food shelf. These are fine and important signs of hospitality, but what is called for is more of a habit or stance of hospitality. Essential to this is the creation of a welcoming and

hospitable space. It is also crucial that we recognize who the "other" is to this community; a fundamental way of doing this is by looking around and asking "Who is not present in our gatherings?" or "Who is always at the periphery of parish life?" As we honestly respond to these questions, we are called to engage in the hospitality that welcomes the stranger and those who are cast off from our social context. This is the beginning of Christian hospitality.

### Conversation

Like hospitality, "conversation" is a term used in contemporary culture to indicate a wide variety of experiences. The phrase "national conversation on health care," for example, refers to everything from heated disputes and political bargaining that have dominated the news media as well as the all too infrequent reasoned presentation or lecture that attempts to provide a more balanced account of the issues. Perhaps better described with the terms "debate" or "argument," this type of conversation serves to delineate the sides of an issue, seldom leading to new insights or even a common understanding of the topic at hand. Few minds are changed by virtue of debate or argument alone.

At the same time, "conversation" can refer to the day-to-day interchanges that people have at home and at work. Often referred to as "discussion" the exchange of ideas at a meeting at times sounds more like sequential monologues than conversation. And the desultory chat among parents as they wait to pick up their children at the end of a school day passes the time but is easily forgotten. So debates, arguments, discussions, and chats may all have the designation "conversation"; but for the sake of this essay, a more focused understanding of the term is helpful and important.

As portrayed in the Gospel, Jesus was a great one for conversation. The story of Jesus' encounter with the rich young man (Mark 10: 17-22) is a good example of the kind of conversations

that Jesus had with all types of people.

The story begins at the initiation of the rich young man; perhaps he was a "seeker" in the way Tim Muldoon describes today's young adults in his article in this issue. Or perhaps he was trying to justify his lifestyle or check to be sure that he has done what's needed to get to heaven (v. 17). Jesus' response (v. 19) seems a bit terse: "You know the commandments..." he said. And then went on to name the basics. The rich man agreed and said that he had been following these all his life. The evangelist Mark then wrote:

"Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (v. 21-22).

And in this interchange we have indication of conversation: both parties spoke, both parties listened, and the outcome only came clear in the exchange. Neither Jesus nor the rich man knew where the conversation was going to go when it began. And we don't know how it finally ended: Did the rich man come back and talk further with Jesus? Did he become one of his followers later, or one of the earlier believers following the events of Pentecost? We just don't know. That is the nature of genuine conversation: it continues on in the minds and hearts of the participants long after the verbal exchange is over.

I contend that one of the most important dimensions of an adult church is the capacity to engage in sustained, critical conversation. It is primarily in the context of conversation with other adults about things that matter that adult faith is nourished and strengthened.

Engaging in sustained, critical conversation has many positive effects that strengthen the parish's capacity to be evangelizing. It enhances our



ability to express our faith; we often come to clarity about what we think and believe by talking with others. Conversation provides a context for making the connection between faith and life; hearing how other people live lives of hope and faith can strengthen our own. Engaging in sustained critical conversation also helps us to recognize pluralism within our faith community and gives us the means for communication across differences. Finally, conversation across time allows believers to set beliefs outside themselves and to examine them critically. We are able to ask: Is this what I really believe? Why do I believe this? What are the implications of this belief for how I live my life, raise my children, and make decisions? Exploring these questions is essential to the formation of adult, evangelizing faith.

### Followership

Who wants to be a follower? Who hopes their children will grow up to be followers? Have you ever seen a bumper sticker that says: “My child was Student Follower of the Month”? In general parlance, follower refers to those who are not too bright (“They follow like sheep”) or worse (“I was just following my orders”). And yet, I would contend that what we need in these times more than ever are effective followers. Whether we look at failures in financial institutions, the construction industry, or church governance, what we find beyond ineffective and, at times, malevolent leaders are followers who did not effectively challenge them.<sup>4</sup> Within a parish context the challenges of these days and the common call to discipleship require adults to be faithful followers.

The call to followership was at the heart of Jesus’ invitation to discipleship. “Come, follow me.” These were the words Peter and his brother Andrew heard as they were tending their boats and Matthew heard as he was sitting at the tax booth. The rich young man heard those words, too, but he sadly turned away; perhaps he realized sooner than the others did that the call to

followership was not going to be easy.

One of the clearest articulations of what being a faithful follower meant to Jesus and the disciples is in the Gospel of John, chapters 13 through 17 when Jesus is speaking with and praying for the disciples at their last meal. It is there that Jesus reminds them of the vision that has given meaning to his life and to theirs. He calls attention to the challenges and persecutions that will be theirs as his followers, but encourages them by affirming for them again who and whose they are and by promising to send the Advocate, the Spirit of truth who will guide them as they move from roles of followers to those of leaders.

This shift in the disciples’ roles is important; Jesus calls attention to it in his prayer: “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21). Jesus is praying for them as his followers, but also as leaders who will bring others to believe in him. Discipleship is their identity; they expressed that one identity through followership and leadership.

And this is true for us as well. Within any parish setting, few are called to leadership roles, but all are called to discipleship through Baptism. And most express that discipleship by being faithful followers. But again, the word “faithful” has to be redefined in the same way as “follower.” With adult faith, the locus of one’s faithfulness shifts from received teachings, defined identity, and external authority; it shifts toward creating meaning within personally appropriated teaching, self-identity, and internal authority.

To live out of this shift is to understand faithful followers not as followers faithful to the Church, but followers who are faithful in the process of being and becoming the Church. These faithful followers neither give

their fidelity naively nor their loyalty too easily. Rather, they are steadfast in their commitment to the always challenging, often uncertain, and at times confrontational process of coming to faith in today’s Church.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

The call to the local parish to participate in the Church’s mission of evangelization requires that it be a place where adult faith is fostered and strengthened. This means that the parish serves as the context where adults are welcomed, challenged, and directed in their faith journey. Attending to the practices of hospitality, conversation, and followership provides an important point of entry to that work.

### Endnotes

JANE E. REGAN is Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. In addition to her academic background—a Ph.D. in Religious Education from The Catholic University of America—she has extensive pastoral experience in adult faith formation.

1. To examine this notion of hospitality in more depth, see Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999; and Letty Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference*. Edited by Clarkson and Ott. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
2. For the story of Abraham and Sarah, see Genesis 18:2-14. In the next chapter of Genesis (19:1-23) Lot offered hospitality to strangers and he and his family were saved from the destruction of Sodom. A similar story can be found in I Kings 17:8-16 when Elijah visited the widow of Zarephath. In other stories the travelers/angels are offered food which they instruct their host to offer to God; see, for example, the call of Gideon (Judges 6:11-24) or the foretelling of the birth of Samson (Judges 13:2-23).
3. This story, with slight alterations, is also found in Mt 18:15-30 and Luke 18:18-30.
4. The resource that most influenced my thinking on followership is Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To and For Our Leaders*. Second Edition, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005. Also helpful is Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008.
5. I develop this a bit more in my article “Fostering the Next Generation of Faithful Women.” In Colleen Griffith (ed.) *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women’s Strategies for Reform*. Crossroad: 2009.

## UPDATE

SPRING 2010

## JANUARY

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2010

LECTURE

*Called to Become a Community of Practice* ■ **Presenter:** Jane Regan, Associate Professor, STM\* ■ **Location/Time:** Room 100, 9 Lake Street, 5:30 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and the C21 Center\*\* ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** February 11, 2010

## JANUARY – MARCH 2010

LIBRARY EXHIBIT

*Two Centuries of Faith: The Influence of Catholicism on Boston, 1808-2008* ■ **Location:** Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Library (coming in late January) ■ **Sponsors:** Office of the University Historian, O'Neill Library, Burns Library and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21)

## FEBRUARY

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2010

LECTURE SERIES

*Carmelite Authors 101: Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection* ■ **Presenter:** Salvatore Scurba, O.C.D. ■ **Location/Time:** Trinity Chapel, 885 Centre Street, Newton Campus, 10:00 am ■ **Sponsors:** Institute of Carmelite Studies, STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** February 20, 2010

## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2010

LECTURE

*Living a Christian Life in the Age of Distraction* ■ **Presenter:** Thomas Massaro, S.J., Professor, STM ■ **Location/Time:** 2101 Commonwealth Avenue (former Cardinal's Residence), Brighton Campus, 5:30 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** March 3, 2010

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2010

LECTURE

*Mixed Marriages: A 40-year Retrospective* ■ **Presenter:** James Conn, S.J., Visiting Professor, STM ■ **Location/Time:** Room 100, 9 Lake Street, Brighton Campus, 5:30 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or [www.bc.edu/stmce](http://www.bc.edu/stmce) ■ **Webcast available:** March 9, 2010

## MARCH

## SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2010

LECTURE SERIES

*Carmelite Authors 101: St. Teresa of Avila* ■ **Presenter:** Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. ■ **Location/Time:** Trinity Chapel, 885 Centre Street, Newton Campus, 10:00 am ■ **Sponsors:** Institute of Carmelite Studies, STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** March 20, 2010

## MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2010

LECTURE

*The Imperative of Ministering to Hispanic Youth: Pastoral Juvenil Hispana* ■ **Presenter:** Dr. Carmen Maria Cervantes, Executive Director of the Institute for Faith and Life ■ **Location/Time:** Room 100, 9 Lake Street, Brighton Campus, 5:30 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** March 22, 2010

## TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2010

LECTURE

*Formative Years: Jesuit Institutions and the Challenge of Faith* ■ **Presenter:** Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio, Archbishop for the Military Services, U.S.A. ■ **Location/Time:** Gasson Hall 100, 8:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** The C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** March 30, 2010

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2010

C21 WOMEN'S SERIES

*From the Pews in the Back: Young Women and Catholicism* ■ **Presenters:** Kate Dugan and Jennifer Owens, Authors ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 4:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** BC Women's Resource Center and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** March 31, 2010

## THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2010

LECTURE

*Friendship with God* ■ **Presenter:** William Barry, S.J., Co-Director of The Jesuit Tertiarity Program ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 7:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** The Center for Ignatian Spirituality and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** April 1, 2010 ■ The C21 Center's "Art of Believing" Series

## ABBREVIATIONS

\* STM: BC School of Theology and Ministry

\*\*C21 Center: The Church in the 21st Century Center

\*\*\*CSON: The Connell School of Nursing

\*\*\*\*GSW: The Graduate School of Social Work

## TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2010

LECTURE

*In Due Season: A Catholic Life* ■ **Presenter:** Paul Wilkes, Author and Filmmaker ■ **Location/Time:** Murray Function Room, Yawkey Center, 7:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Theology Department and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** April 6, 2010 ■ The C21 Center's "Art of Believing" Series

## THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2010

LECTURE

*Growing in Faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Preacher's Perspective* ■ **Presenter:** Roy Pereira, S.J., Philosophy Department ■ **Location/Time:** Gasson Hall 100, 7:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** The C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** April 8, 2010 ■ The C21 Center's "Art of Believing" Series

## A P R I L

### THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2010

LECTURE

*Pope Benedict and the Reception of Vatican II* ■ **Presenter:** Fr. Robert Imbelli, Associate Professor, Theology Department ■ **Location/Time:** 2101 Commonwealth Avenue (former Cardinal's Residence), 7:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM, Theology Department and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** April 22, 2010

### SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 2010

SYMPOSIUM/CONFERENCE

*Living the Journey: Spirituality for the Second Half of Life* ■ **Keynotes:** Jennie Chin Hansen, President of AARP; John Shea, O.S.A. Professor STM ■ **Location/Time:** Robsham Theater, 9:00 am ■ **Sponsors:** BC Alumni Association, STM, CSON\*\*\*, GSW\*\*\*\*, BC Institute on Aging, Sloan Center on Aging & Work and the C21 Center. Fees: Individual prior to March 15, \$45; after March 15, \$55; BC Student, \$25. Registration Deadline: April 3 ■ **Information:** 617-552-1607 or [www.bc.edu/journey](http://www.bc.edu/journey) ■ **Webcast available:** April 24, 2010

### THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 2010

LECTURE

*"Seeing"* ■ **Presenter:** Ron Hansen, Novelist ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 pm ■ **Sponsor:** The C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** April 29, 2010 ■ The C21 Center's "Art of Believing" Series

### WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2010

LECTURE

*James Carroll: Practicing Catholic* ■ **Presenter:** James Carroll, Author ■ **Location/Time:** Room 100, 9 Lake Street, Brighton Campus, 7:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** May 5, 2010 ■ The C21 Center's "Art of Believing" Series

### THURSDAY, APRIL 22, 2010

LECTURE

*Bernard Lonergan: Growing in Faith as the Eyes of Being-in-Love with God* ■ **Presenter:** Fred Lawrence, Associate Professor, Theology Department ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 7:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Theology Department and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** May 6, 2010

### SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 2010

LECTURE SERIES

*Carmelite Authors 101: St. Therese of Lisieux* ■ **Presenter:** Marc Foley, O.C.D. ■ **Location/Time:** BC Law School, Stuart House, Room 120, 885 Centre Street, Newton Campus, 10:00 am ■ **Sponsors:** Institute of Carmelite Studies, STM and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** May 8, 2010

### THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 2010 & FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 2010

SYMPOSIUM/CONFERENCE

*The Emerging Call: Discipleship and Ministry in a Changing Church* ■ **Presenters:** Marti Jewell, Assistant Professor of Theology, University of Dallas; Edward Hahnenberg, Associate Professor of Theology, Xavier University ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, April 29, 5:30 pm and April 30, 9:00 am–3:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM, Theology Department and the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** May 13, 2010

## J U N E

### TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 2010

CONFERENCE

*Catholic Schools Growing Faith* ■ **Presenters:** Joseph O'Keefe, S.J., Dean, Lynch School of Education; Rabbi Daniel Lehmann, President, Hebrew College; Katharine Gallo, Ed.D., Sacred Heart High School, Kingston, MA ■ **Location/Time:** TBA, 9:00 am–2:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Lynch School of Education, the C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21) ■ **Webcast available:** July 6, 2010

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# Back to Where You Once Belonged

*By weaving together data from research and the stories of a number of “returning Catholics,” María Ruiz Scaperlanda provides insight into their experiences. At the same time, those connected with the Church are given a sense of how to be an evangelizing force for non-practicing Catholics.*

BY MARÍA RUIZ SCAPERLANDA

As a 39-year-old husband and father, much of Mark’s life is taken up with the daily and often demanding tasks of family, including spending time with his 6-year-old son. While Mark’s father and grandfather once experienced the Catholic Church as part of this fabric of life, the same is not true for the Denver programmer and systems analyst, who was raised Catholic in a family of six children.

In many ways, Mark (who asked that his last name not be used) is typical of an estimated 17 million non-practicing Catholics in the United States, the second largest religious group in the country, according to the 1999 *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* (Abingdon Press), ironically sandwiched between 61 million self-declared Catholics and 15 million Baptists.

Much like the estimated two-thirds of U.S. Catholics who drop out of regular participation for a portion of their lives, Mark was already confirmed when he decided to break from his Catholicism. In a manner typical of other inactive Catholics, he names the “freedom to make my own choice” as a reason for leaving, later deciding that the Church lacked relevance to his life. Like a timeworn but memorable personal postcard, Mark carries with him the image of an overbearing Catholic Church, with little to offer him personally.

And while Mark acknowledges, along

with 35 percent of young adult Catholics, laziness as a reason for not attending church (according to a recent survey in *America* magazine), he also admits that it’s not merely a question of time. Like other inactive Catholics, he lists himself in conflict with the teachings of the Church on some matters of faith and morality. “To tell a person in a country that is overpopulated and has people starving to death that they can’t use birth control is not a realistic approach to the problem.”

In their 1992 document *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, the U.S. bishops spoke boldly about reconciliation, calling attention to those “millions of Catholics [who] no longer practice their faith. Although many of them may say they are Catholic, they no longer worship with the community and thereby deprive themselves of the gifts of Word and sacrament.”

Getting inactive Catholics such as Mark to come home is a top national evangelizing priority. But how to make this a reality is a tricky question, one that demands a critical analysis of current conditions and a commitment to living out the charisms of forgiveness and hospitality.

## Who Are Inactive Catholics?

Describing inactive Catholics can be akin to defining what is American. It’s simply too broad to easily generalize. They are male and female. They are barely within the legal definition of adults, as well as retired senior citizens. They are single, married, divorced, students, professionals. They reach across all ethnic, racial, and economic lines.

There are, however, some generalities to their circumstances. Most inactive or non-practicing Catholics have been hurt by either the Church as

an institution or by a particular Church representative. There is a tendency to assume they have become inactive because of a direct conflict over such things as Church authority, artificial contraception, abortion, homosexuality, or the ordination of women. Yet experts contend that most do not leave for such reasons. A growing number of inactive Catholics simply assume themselves to be outside the graces of the Church. Many of them get out of the habit of practicing their faith. They leave home or move away and never appropriate their Catholic faith as adult individuals.

For statistical purposes, the category of non-practicing Catholics can be defined as “persons who identify themselves as Catholic when asked their religion who subsequently say they attend Mass ‘never’ or ‘less than once a year,’ and persons raised Catholic who say they ‘currently have no religion,’” notes Michael Hout, a sociology professor at University of California-Berkeley.

Hout, who has been working for the past two years on a book on American religion in collaboration with sociologist Father Andrew Greeley and Melissa J. Wilde, a doctoral candidate in sociology at Berkeley, notes there are no “statistically significant differences among the major ancestry groups in [terms of] ‘activity’ in the 1990s.” According to Hout, ethnically, the inactive Catholic population more or less resembles the active Catholic population: 80 percent non-Hispanic whites; 12 percent Latinos; 4 percent African Americans; 4 percent other.

While U.S. Catholics drop out of regular church participation for a myriad of personal reasons, the issues most often cited are second marriages, divorce, annulment, and marriage outside the Church although Hout notes that fewer defections are now taking place because of mixed marriages.

Divorce is another matter. According to Hout, the defection rate among divorced Catholics who remarry is about twice that of other persons raised Catholic. “So inability to remarry in the Church is important for divorced Catholics who want to remarry.” Yet even those who divorce and remain single often assume, inaccurately, that they are at odds with the Church.

Of those coming back, many are baby boomers for whom “the Church was too restrictive in their 20s,” remarks Father Tim Sullivan, associate pastor of St. Paul the Apostle in New York City. “They left around college time and never became rooted. The Church represented authority, rules, and regulations, and they were looking for a wilder ride on the Ferris wheel.”

Forty-five percent of the baby boomers who were raised Catholic are inactive, notes Deacon Tom Johnson, who has made ministering to inactive Catholics his personal crusade for the Diocese of Austin. “Most of these people, at some point in their lives, recognize there’s an empty spot in their gut and say, ‘I want to come back, but I don’t know how.’”

Returnees tend to be “baby boomers who left because they were searching,” agrees Sister Nancy Clemmons, who heads the returning Catholics ministry at St. Monica’s in Santa Monica, California. “The biggest group are in their late 30s to early 50s. Often they declare that they’re missing the Eucharist, the sacraments, and the sense of community of the Catholic Church.”

How people make their way back to the Catholic Church is as varied and individual as they are. A parish in Gig Harbor, Washington has a banner over its parking lot: “Welcome Returning Catholics: call Paul (phone number) or Mary (phone number).”

Tom Johnson’s parish, St. Thomas More in Austin, presents infomercials two-to-three-minute sound bites at

Easter and Christmas as official invitations. Presented by someone who has walked the journey back, they have the effect of a family letter, a note from a loving aunt with the simple message: “Welcome! We miss you. Why don’t you come home?”



As many as half of those who return are self-initiated, most often beginning their journey by approaching a priest for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Others wait for a personal or public invitation.

“Many people want to come home, but since no one ever asks them, they think they are not welcome,” says Judy Reilly of St. Thomas More University Parish in Norman, Oklahoma. “It’s important to make it a priority, especially at Christmas and Easter, to welcome and invite them back home.”

Once the invitation has been given and they respond, there needs to be something to offer them, Reilly adds. “They already feel isolated and rejected. It takes a lot of courage for someone to make a call, to see someone, or even send an e-mail. That person becomes vulnerable. It’s especially the case for someone returning to the Church,” notes Reilly, who is also a pastoral associate and campus minister. “Any further experience

of being put off by Church authorities or staff only adds to the hurt and may delay or ruin the chance of their return.”

### Correcting the Damage

Almost without exception, one of the first steps for someone coming back to the Church involves forgiveness and reconciliation to self, to Christ, and to the Church. “Especially in light of the papal announcement that we may have screwed up over human history and we apologize, there’s a sense that the Church is acknowledging that it is a human body, and it may have in some way been culpable. I think that’s important,” remarks Father Tim Sullivan, a Paulist priest from New York City. “The Church needs to ‘fess up to ways it may have done damage in its approach in the past, not so much in the content of the teaching but the way it was done.”

Programs such as Landings, a Paulist national ministry to returning Catholics, help to “enflesh the human welcoming, the empathetic side of the Church,” Sullivan remarks. Landings meets in small groups, mixing active laypeople from the parish with returning Catholics. The groups gather as many weeks as the size of the small groups (groups of six people for six weeks, eight people for eight weeks) to give everyone in the group a chance to share their faith journey. “It gives people an experience of community, puts a human face on the church first. And that’s very key. This then frees a person to deal with Church teaching or doctrine.”

A number of personal and life events typically facilitate the return of many inactive Catholics: the birth or Baptism of a child, the death of a loved one, a serious illness or personal crisis, or simply the awareness of a need or void that cannot yet be named. While some parishes or dioceses have created individual programs for Catholics ready to explore the possibility of returning, a

*Continued on Page 29*

# Refracting the Light

*Young adults, generally understood to be those between the ages of 18 and 39, constitute an important component of the adult community. How do we extend the life of the parish into their lives beyond youth ministry and marriage preparation? Mary Anne Reese proposes that the first step is recognizing the diversity and giftedness among young adults.*

BY MARY ANNE REESE

They are married, single, divorced and of every nationality and ethnic group. Their ranks include professionals, laborers, students, military and immigrants. Some are straight, some gay, some are parents and some have disabilities. The common ground is that they are Catholic young adults, defined by the U.S. bishops as men and women between the ages of 18 and 39. They also have in common an abundance of gifts, energy and heart.

In their pastoral letter *Sons and Daughters of the Light* (1977), the U.S. bishops stated strongly that the Church wants and needs a stronger connection with young adult Catholics. So the question becomes: Who are these Catholic young adults? And how can the Church best minister to and with them?

Several years ago, when I started the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's young adult ministry, I asked Eric Styles, a 24-year-old college senior, what the church should understand about his generation. He pushed back his long dreadlocks and responded, "Just know that we're not all the same. And our generation has many gifts to offer the Church."

Since then, hundreds of young adult Catholics who have crossed my path have confirmed Eric's observations. Young adult lifestyles, motivations, and spiritualities cover a broad spectrum,



Photo courtesy of the Office of Marketing Communications.

with distinct colors as well as subtle nuances and shades. To make such breadth more manageable, I have developed a framework of eight groups into which I believe most Catholic young adults fall.

This framework, of course, has limitations. It is based on observation and experience rather than hard science. Each individual is unique and to some extent defies categorization, and many individuals fit into more than one group. These descriptions are not mutually exclusive; and some important factors, like race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, are not developed here. Nonetheless, I have found this framework helpful for understanding young adults and for developing ministry with them.

## The Church in Mission

This group is primarily motivated by the image of Jesus who directs us to wash one another's feet. Oriented to service since their 8th-grade confirmation, members of this group have carried this passion through their

high school and college years. Many have immersed themselves in service projects or in long-term volunteer programs like the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Demographers call this segment the millennial generation, whose first wave is now graduating from college. The book *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, by Neil Howe and William Strauss, profiles this group in detail.

**Challenges:** Members of the "Church in Mission" meet the challenge of making countercultural choices in our consumption-driven society. Their preference for volunteerism and work that "makes a difference" often draws concern from parents and others whose emphasis is financial security.

**Gifts:** This group works tirelessly to meet needs and to do what needs to be done, without expecting to change the world immediately. They work seamlessly alongside those who are much older and younger, since service ministries are often multigenerational.

## The Church in Search

As a result of people deciding to marry later (if at all) and the growing divorce rate, the Church is now home to a large contingent of single and divorced adults, typically over the age of 30. Many of them have experienced suffering and loneliness in life and are dissatisfied with the bar scene and the superficial relationships that this culture offers them. This group is often drawn to the Church as a place to find friends with similar values, potential partners and activities to fill their calendars.

**Challenges:** Young adults in the "Church in Search" embrace mainstream Catholic spirituality, but because of their single status they have difficulty finding a home in the average



family-oriented parish, and they often turn to university and other singles-friendly parishes. Therefore this group makes great efforts toward tolerance and inclusion.

*Gifts:* The Church in Search devotes time and energy to community-building and ministry. A majority of them lead and regularly participate in regional young adult groups and weekend retreats.

### **The Church Youthful**

Each year high schools produce a large number of young adults who have come through youth ministry programs. Many go on to college and are served by Newman Centers, touching base with their parishes during breaks and summers. “Church Youthful” people fall into the age range 18 to 23, and they are accustomed to having ministry built around their own schedules. The campus 10 p.m. Mass is one example. These young adults grew up in a church that served as an extended family.

*Challenges:* Parishes as well as youth and campus ministries could serve the Church Youthful by guiding them from a church in which ministry was focused on their lifestyle and was even done for them to a place of ever greater responsibility and leadership.

*Gifts:* The Church Youthful brings unlimited energy and a can-do attitude to the community. They have the physical stamina to lead all-night junior high lock-ins or construct booths for the parish festival. They see opportunities rather than limitations, and their enthusiasm is infectious.

### **The Church Apologist**

The “Church Apologist” group is especially filled with awe for the transcendent God, and its members are dedicated to personal prayer, learning and spreading fervor for Catholicism among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Colleen Carroll explores

their faith in her recent book *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*.

To counterbalance the often murky standards of our culture, members of the Church Apologist take comfort in the clarity of the new catechism and the teaching of Pope John Paul II. They see Christianity in combat with evil in the world and their language evokes military imagery, speaking of prayer warriors and soldiers of Christ. Their prayer centers on traditional devotions like eucharistic adoration and the rosary.

*Challenges:* Church Apologist people can experience tension within less traditional families and faith communities because of their views and the vigor with which they promote them.

*Gifts:* These young adults are highly motivated and capable of seeking out the many spiritual resources available to them, like Steubenville programs, Youth 2000 and membership in movements like Opus Dei or traditional religious communities. With their wholehearted dedication, the ministries they create can grow and become self-sustaining over the long haul.

### **The Church Devotional**

Because of outward similarities and their preference for traditional piety, it is easy to confuse young adults of the “Church Devotional” with those of the Church Apologist. The two groups differ, however, in several respects. First, the Church Devotional is less attuned to internal Church politics; they therefore seem surprised that their prayer practices would cause some to label them “conservative.” Second, they are less interested in drawing others into their particular spirituality or belief system. Many immigrants, particularly Asians and Hispanics, fit into these two groups.

*Challenges:* The Church Devotional is less inclined than the Church Apologist to join traditional movements,

and often looks to parishes and regional ministries to help them learn about and share their faith. Theology on Tap, a popular program that brings presenters into local bars to interact with young adults on matters of faith and church, helps meet the social and educational needs of this group [see this issue, p. 23].

*Gifts:* Church Devotional people have a deep desire to grow closer to Jesus. They are well read and open to different ideas and to new methods of prayer. Members of this group make committed leaders and participants, especially for retreats and catechetical events.

### **The Church Busy**

The “Church Busy” consists mainly of young professionals, married couples and young parents whose days and nights are filled with career, travel, family and civic and social commitments. While they value their Catholicism, they are unlikely to attend events that take up an entire weekend or to participate in regional gatherings. Their church involvement is usually limited to parish ministries that occur on Sunday. They may also engage in short-term ministries, like marriage and baptismal preparation or support groups for mothers.

*Challenges:* Not surprisingly, the biggest challenge to ministry with this group is time. For this reason, it is best to offer them focused programs or short-term projects. The Church Busy needs to feel supported and affirmed in both their workplace and marriage and parenthood as an aspect of ministerial life.

*Gifts:* The Church can benefit from tapping the experience and competence these young adults are developing in other realms.

### **The Church Creative**

They may not wear all-black or sport tattoos, but many in this group embrace liberal values, politics and

spirituality with an artistic expression. The “Church Creative” is educated and well read, and likely to frequent art films, alternative concert venues or peace demonstrations. Tom Beaudoin wrote much about this group in *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*.

The “Church Creative” values prayer and contact with God, and these young adults are known for treating parish and even denominational boundaries with fluidity—worshiping at a Mass one week, a Buddhist temple the next and a non-denominational megachurch the third. They value independent thinking, and might be heard quoting papal pronouncements about the death penalty or debt relief on one hand while questioning teaching about homosexuality or women’s ordination on the other. In my area, a number of African-American Catholics fall into this group, sometimes blending in elements from African culture or the Baptist tradition as they inhabit urban neighborhoods in a creative class environment. In fact, the Church Creative is most comfortable in multicultural and university parishes.

*Challenges:* The Church Creative is like other groups: busy, with time and choices spread out among creative outlets and other responsibilities. The broad pastoral tent of our church must be maintained so it can respond to the differences and questions this group brings.

*Gifts:* Not surprisingly, the Church Creative develops ministry programs and prayer services that are artistic and innovative. Additionally, they are in a position to invite to the Church similar young people who are unchurched, alienated or seeking a spiritual connection.

### The Church Disconnected

A final group of young adults that poses a challenge to ministry is the

“Church Disconnected.” This group grew up Catholic and may even have graduated from Catholic high school or college, but for a variety of reasons—or no discernable reason at all—they are now distant from the Church. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions about why they are disconnected or how to reach out to them. Some are focused on advancement at work, while others are busy building intimate relationships or hanging out with friends. Some are put off by Church teaching; others simply find services boring and the institution irrelevant.

Church leaders, parents and grandparents often wring their hands over what to do about the Church Disconnected. One pat response is, “They’ll come back when their first child is baptized.” Tom Beaudoin is skeptical about this laissez-faire approach, however, because non-denominational mega churches now actively reach out to them. Whether they will return to Catholicism is an open question.

The Church Disconnected is mission territory—a fertile field for carrying out Christ’s commission to spread the good news. Heeding that call, Jesuits of the Chicago Province are actively responding. Charis Ministries retreats, which boasts several hundred participants in its first three years, targets recent alumni of local Catholic high schools and universities. They are encouraged to come, “whether your faith life is confused, conflicted, committed or anywhere in between.” The peer-led retreat then offers a chance to step back from the stresses of modern life and “sort out what you believe.”

James Joyce once characterized the spirit of the Church thus: “Here comes everybody.” He could have been talking about the broad spectrum of today’s young adult Catholics, with the wide variety of spiritualities, gifts and challenges they present to ministry. From as far back as the days of

1 Corinthians 12, we have known that different people and groups possess certain gifts to benefit the whole Body of Christ. Just as the Dominicans claim the gift of preaching and the Sisters of Mercy service, each of these Catholic young adult groups brings unique riches to the faith community—riches to be mined, polished and put to good use.

Furthermore, in addition to capitalizing on their own gifts, the young people in each group can grow and develop through exposure to the complementary charisms of the others. For example, the Church in Mission can find rest in the contemplative stillness of the Church Devotional, who can in turn touch a unique face of Christ through Christian service.

The task of inviting, welcoming and ministering with such a broad spectrum of young people may seem daunting. The U.S. bishops’ young adult ministry pastoral begins by apologizing for past failures in this area, and others have proposed that Church communities make “a preferential option for the young.” Many national and local efforts are underway to develop young adult ministry, but the roads and the road maps at this stage are still under construction. Still, this much is clear: the Church needs all its “sons and daughters of the light” to show forth the glory of the rainbow.

### Endnotes

MARY ANNE REESE is the Coordinator of Young Adult Ministry for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as a writer and lawyer. She is the author of *Doing What Comes Naturally: Jobs, Career and Vocation*, a young adult guide to discernment.

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# Seeking the Seekers

## Parish Ministry to Young Adults Today

*While declining numbers in attendance at Sunday liturgy extend across all age levels, this seems to be particularly the case with young adults. Where are they? And what do people within the Church need to do to effectively invite the participation of many young adult Catholics? These are the questions Tim Muldoon addresses in this essay.*

BY TIM MULDOON

Why aren't young adults in church? Why do many parents lament the absence of their children from participation in the Church's liturgy? Before I answer these questions, a few observations about the experience of young adults in the United States are in order. First, half of all Catholics under age ten are Hispanic, meaning that it is increasingly imperative that leaders in parishes and dioceses develop their understanding of and outreach to Hispanic communities.<sup>1</sup> Second, over the last several decades two factors, namely increased economic and geographic mobility and delayed ages of marriage, have contributed to a large number of young adults who do not have close ties to a family of origin or responsibility for a family through marriage. They are, in a word, solitary, in ways for which there are few precedents in the social history of this country. Thirdly, then, there are very many young adults (especially in urban areas) who are negotiating a cluster of challenges in forming their identities as adults: not only basic questions like what work to pursue, how to spend money and time, how to form meaningful relationships, and how to plan for the future; but also deeper, more existential questions like what meaning they find in their lives, what they desire, and what they believe. And they are negotiating these challenges sometimes among informal groups of friends; sometimes among communities

both real and virtual; but often alone.

Understanding and ministering to young adults represents an important and exciting challenge for Catholics today. This essay will seek to explore questions and offer suggestions about ministry to young adult Catholics, in order that parish leaders might begin to think about how they can draw them more fully into the life of the local Church.

### Questions About Young Adult Catholics Today

*How do they believe?* Most younger Catholics have grown up in a world without the kind of rich Catholic subcultures that prevailed in many places around the country through the middle of the twentieth century. Older Catholics often speak nostalgically about their childhood experiences in largely ethnic parishes, where various groups like sodalities, devotional and service organizations, and sports associations for young people shaped daily life of communities.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many can still recall the answers to questions in the Baltimore Catechism, and the names of the nuns that taught in parochial schools. As Catholics gained economic and political power, many moved out of urban areas into the suburbs, while those in more rural areas found themselves regarded less and less as a marginalized community amidst a majority Protestant culture. The story of the Church for older Catholics is a success story—a story of a community that supported its own, had a strong sense of identity and mission, and succeeded in promoting its own to the highest levels of U.S. society.

Younger Catholics, by contrast, do not share this story. The many who grew up in comparative economic security have no experience of a church community upon whom families depended

at times for their very survival. For them, membership in the Church may have developed as a commitment, but an optional commitment rather than a necessary one. Further, young Catholics are the most assimilated to the wider U.S. society among the generations in the Church,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that they do not perceive their Catholicism as summoning from them a difficult decision in the face of persecution or pressure. For them, membership in the Church is more like membership in a club or any other type of voluntary organization. At best, their commitment is a sincere sense that God calls them into worship in the community of faith; but at worst, their commitment is one more obligation that can easily be dropped if something more interesting comes along.

Underlying this posture toward Church membership is an important observation that applies to all kinds of choices that young people face in their lives. They have grown up in a U.S. culture driven by consumer imperatives: everything from the kind of education they receive, to the way they are taught to use money, to the expectations they develop about marriage are shaped by implicit understandings of how to use the precious resources of their time and energy. In a world of seemingly limitless choices—from cereal to cars to colleges—everything becomes an object for consumption, including even religious truth claims and the communities who profess them.<sup>4</sup> They have friends who come from many religious traditions (or no particular religious tradition), and therefore find it hard to make the simple claim that Catholic faith is necessarily the best. They navigate their way in a global economy and have information about the world at their fingertips, and so know that the majority of the world



is not Catholic. In light of these factors, young people approach the Church as they do any other organization: as smart consumers, who need to be persuaded that their participation is worth their time and energy.

To be sure, the roles that families play in the faith lives of young adults ought not be underestimated. Young Catholics will still see themselves as Catholic even if they have not engaged in any meaningful practices of the faith for years.<sup>5</sup> There is, it seems, still a lingering truth to Andrew Greeley's observation that there is something unique about the Catholic imagination, which shapes the way young people look at the world. But what is strength is also a liability: we are good at preserving the practices of our faith because we know that our traditions take hold of people's imagination; but because we know this truth, we do not often see the imperative to develop new ways of celebrating it. It is precisely this point which, I suggest, is the crux of our growth as a faith community in the twenty-first century: we must bring from the storehouse of Catholic traditions both the old and the new, those things which appeal both to lifelong "in their bones" Catholics and young "seeker" Catholics. We must be prepared to ask what resources from our traditions have cultivated our sacramental imagination—that is, our ability to discern the presence of God in the community of faith through manifold symbols, sacramentals, and sacraments—and then ask what resources we might use to invite young people to similarly discern God's presence.

Some specific examples will illustrate the potential difficulty with this question. What if, for example, we should learn that what young people really want is Latin mass, priests in cassocks and nuns in habits, weekly confession, meatless Fridays throughout the year, recited Angelus prayers in the middle of the school- and workday, regular rosary prayer, Eucharistic adoration, and so on? What if, in other words, the practices that will draw young people into more

vibrant participation in the life of the faith community are precisely those practices which so many older Catholics left behind in the rush of post-Vatican II enthusiasm? Such questions challenge us to consider what we understand Church membership to be about: Is it about having a nurturing community? A good sermon? A place of comfort? A dramatic experience of worship?

I am not suggesting that a return to these older forms of public and private devotion are the answer to how to develop the faith lives of all young adults in the Catholic community, even though it is clear to me that some young adults are attracted to them. I am, however, suggesting the need to remind ourselves that what older Catholics have left behind in their own faith journeys might yet be helpful elements in the lives of those at earlier stages of the pilgrimage toward God. Some young people do yearn for an experience of mystery in worship, an experience they do not find in other dimensions of their lives. Some may desire the kinds of romanticized, Hollywood scenes of Catholic worship, scenes which, tellingly, often look more pre-Vatican II than post-Vatican II. To be sure, it is still important for older Catholics to share their stories of why they were relieved when things changed; but it is also important to ask why many young people want to experience mystery. Perhaps it is because they see the Church as a place willing to explore the mystery of God, in contrast to the hyper-ordered world they live in, which does not often attend to the most compelling questions about life and death. Perhaps what they want is a community as serious about the mystery dimension of the spiritual life—that is, the dimension of spirituality that is willing to admit that our ability to speak about God is limited—as they are in their private lives. It has become a truism to speak about young people as spiritual but not religious; our challenge is to offer a religious community that fosters, deepens, and challenges them to become more authentically spiritual.

## What Do They Think About the Church?

At present, a minority of young adults think of the Church as a community that nourishes their spirituality. For many others, the Church may be their home, if parents or grandparents modeled faith for them. It may be the community that they return to for holidays. It may be the place they seek out when they want to get married or baptize a child. But generally speaking, young adults do not perceive the Church as a group of people that will help them grow in their spiritual lives and in their ability to practice love and justice. And I am suggesting that thinking about the Church in these ways, and asking how our community might embody these aspirations, will draw young adults back into fuller participation. Why? For several reasons.

First, we live in the post-sexual abuse Church. Claims to moral authority are assumed by a minority who have grown up in strong Catholic families, but the majority are likely to view any claims to authority with more than a little bit of skepticism. They must be persuaded and shown how the Gospel transforms lives; words simply won't do it.

Second, ours is an information age; religious truth claims (again, words) are as much consumer items as toothpaste and apparel. If the primary PR about the Church has to do with statements from bishops and the Vatican, it is unlikely that such statements will draw more than those young people already committed to deepening their understanding of the faith. What is needed, in a word, are saints: people committed to showing how their Catholic faith makes them more loving, more committed to justice, more courageous in their public witness. Words won't do; personal witness will.

Third, young people are interested in spirituality but do not now perceive the Church as contributing to it in a meaningful way. If we are to draw young adults into the life of the faith community, we must think

about how our parishes help deepen people's spiritual lives. Are liturgies perfunctory? Are sermons arcane? Are there opportunities to pray in small groups outside of Mass? Are there opportunities for service and—equally important—opportunities to reflect on service in the context of shared prayer?

Fourth, young people often lack models of meaningful relationships in their lives, and so if a parish community practices authentic hospitality and offers them opportunities to cultivate meaningful relationships across customary lines of age, economic class, race, and so on, it will be a place where they will learn the skills of agapic love. By cultivating these relationships, parishes will gently invite them to see that the practice of spirituality is not ultimately something one can do on one's own terms, but rather the challenge to deepen one's love of God through the sometimes difficult practice of loving others.

### What Does the Church Offer to Young Adults? What Might It Offer?

The Church offers Christ to young adults—it is the community moved by love to be Christ for the world; the community willing to be formed not by the exigencies of consumerism, or political debate, or any other balkanizing forces, but rather seeking to be conformed to the Body of Christ through conversion, repentance, and reconciliation. Our constant invitation to young adults must be this: We want you for who you really are, not for what you do.

### What Will This Invitation Look Like in Practice? Here Are Some Ideas:

*Theology on Tap.* This is the most successful ministry to young adults over the past quarter century, rooted in the invitation to young people to share time together reflecting on the Gospel.

*A good Website.* Show the young adults in your community that you

understand the way they inhabit the world and seek information. Include links to various ministries they can be involved in; links to Catholic Websites where they can learn more about their faith; links to small communities



Photo courtesy of BCC Office of Marketing Communications

where they can share faith or read scripture; links to vocations Websites and volunteer opportunities after college. Send the parish bulletin via email, and have a section devoted to young adults.

*Sensitive liturgy.* Not all Catholics are in families; be sensitive to how language sounds to people who are single, especially if not by choice.

*Marriage and baptismal preparation.* Many parishes miss the opportunity to make these programs places where young married people can get to know each other and grow together.

*Devotions.* Invite smaller groups to use worship space for their own devotions. For example, a Sant'Egidio group prays together in different worship spaces near where I live.

*Service opportunities.* Issue invitations to specific young people to lead trips to soup kitchens or nursing homes, and provide leadership in helping the groups to reflect meaningfully on their experiences in the context of prayer.

*RCLIA.* Give young adults the chance to meet one another in the context of their own preparation for the sacraments.

### What Do Young Adults Offer to the Church?

By inviting young adults into our midst, and by being willing to mentor them in faith, we will find ourselves having to reflect critically on our own faith lives. It is precisely this process of reflection which I hope will help us to see more clearly the ways that God is moving in our midst, challenging us to discern what brings us closer to God and what draws us further away. The dynamics of this process are reflective of the promise of a God whom Jesus reveals to us as one who always makes old things new.

### Endnotes

TIM MULDOON is the author of *Seeds of Hope: Young Adults and the Catholic Church in the United States* (Paulist, 2008) and the forthcoming *Longing to Love: A Memoir of Desire, Relationships, and Spiritual Transformation* (Loyola, 2010). He teaches in the Boston College Honors Program and serves in the Office of University Mission and Ministry.

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1. *CARA* reports that at present, about one-third of U.S. Catholics are Hispanic today (<http://cara.georgetown.edu/CCP2007.pdf>), while the Instituto Fe y Vida reports the figure about Catholics under age ten (<http://www.feyvida.org/research/fastfacts.html>).
2. See the work of Robert Orsi for stories about Catholic devotions in the 20th century, as well as James M. O'Toole's study *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Cornell University Press, 2004).
3. See James D. Davidson, et al., *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 1997).
4. Vincent Miller explores the implications of consumerism on religion in his fine book *Consuming Religion: Religious Belief and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003). See also Tom Beaudoin's *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are with What We Buy* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2004).
5. See Dean R. Hoge, et al., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

# Adult Faith Formation

## A Catholic Vision

*With a shift in our understanding of adult faith formation away from programs to an awareness of the formative role of the life of the parish community, we also shift our sense of who the learner is, what kind of teacher is needed, and what content best serves the goal of forming an evangelizing church.*

BY EDMUND F. GORDON

Catholic parishes will have fewer liturgies every Sunday. More important than the looming priest shortage, all of the studies show that those who are under 40 are much less likely to participate in liturgy on a weekly basis than those over forty (CARA, 2002,4).

Catholic parishes will have fewer financial resources. Not only will there be fewer people who attend liturgy on a weekly basis, but younger Catholics give a smaller percent of their income to the Church than do older Catholics.

There will be a smaller percentage of Catholic children in Catholic schools. Despite the fact that there is a correlation between attending Catholic schools and commitment to the Church, our present schools are often located in areas where there is a declining Catholic population. The parents of school-age children are less likely to have attended Catholic schools themselves than those of previous generations (CARA 2002, 3). And the relatively high cost of Catholic schools means parents may need to sacrifice to send their children there, a choice they may not be willing to make. In all probability there will be fewer Catholic schools in the near future.

There will be fewer marriages performed in the Church. Despite the

growth in the number of Catholics in the United States, the number of marriages has declined from 348,999 in 1985 to 207,112 in 2005. Catholics under forty are marrying later, and are more likely to marry someone not of the Catholic faith and marry outside of the Church (D'Antonio, et al., 144).

The Pew Religious Landscape Survey of 2008 said, "Approximately one-third of the survey respondents who say they were raised Catholic no longer describe themselves as Catholic. This means that roughly 10% of all Americans are former Catholics." Studies of American Catholic Teens (Smith) and generations of adults (D'Antonio, et al.) indicate continuing diminishment in commitment to the Church. "Young adult Catholics are less likely than their elders to say that their faith is the most important part or among the most important parts of their lives" (CARA, 2002, 4).

And yet, this future is not inevitable. It is only inevitable if the institutional Catholic Church does not change its way of being church in this country and this culture. Someone once said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

It is my firm belief that we need to change our focus and priorities to place more of our resources and efforts into forming adults. Numerous catechetical documents published since the 1970s have articulated a vision of catechesis with adult faith formation at its center. Yet, in practice this appears more a hope and dream rather than an operational imperative. We are still doing what we did for the last one hundred years and expecting different results.

If the current trends in the Catholic Church are to be reversed or stemmed,

the Church must increasingly direct its efforts to invigorating its adults, and move them from membership to discipleship (*National Directory of Catechesis*, 47, A3). We will need a different culture in the Catholic Church, one that takes seriously the importance of lifelong learning and puts more emphasis on and resources into creating a church of adult disciples. The creation of this culture must be purposeful and intentional.

### The Adult Learner

There is no "generic" adult. Adulthood encompasses the longest part of life and can be divided in a number of different ways. One such classification parses it this way: young adulthood (20-45), mid-life (46-65) and old age (65+). Yet even these categories are elastic. At one time, one could fairly well describe the various life tasks associated with the ages of adulthood. This is no longer the case. For instance, today we find persons in mid-life with younger children, seniors who have the vitality and life force of those much younger, and those in their mid- to late-thirties just beginning their families.

In other words, some of the developmental tasks assigned to each of these groups are sliding back and forth among the age groups. Younger adulthood is lengthening, extending from the early twenties to the mid-forties, as a result of people living longer and taking longer to accomplish many of the development tasks of early adult life (Wuthnow, xvi). Despite the challenges of categorization, it is helpful to look at the adults in a congregation to see what programs might be most helpful to persons in various stages of life. Each of these age groups has a different set of needs for the development of their



spiritual lives.

Another way to perceive American adults is to think of the generations of adults. This is an approach favored by many sociologists who study American Catholics (see D'Antonio, et al.). One such study states, "Our previous studies have shown that Catholics who are born at different points of history learn to approach the faith and the Church in different ways" (D'Antonio, et al., 11).

### The General Breakdown of These Historical Cohorts Is:

*Pre-Vatican II Catholics*, whose central values and spiritual life were shaped in the period before the Second Vatican Council, are the adults born before 1945. This group makes up about seventeen percent of adult Catholics. Some describe them as "Catechism Catholics" because a catechism was the principal tool used in their faith formation. These Catholics "respect civil and religious authorities; they were taught to do what their elders asked them to do. The Church is a very important part of their lives; they believe in it and know they have to support it. They are most likely to emphasize the Church's authority and the importance of participating in Church" (D'Antonio, et al., 70). They have a strong Catholic identity (defined by how important the Catholic Church is to one's life, whether one would ever think of leaving the Church, and attendance at the Eucharist).

*Vatican II Catholics*, born between 1946 and 1964, are formed in the Catholic Church of Vatican II. They comprise about thirty-three percent of adult Church members. They are the generation of seekers (Roof) who have "mixed feelings about authority (versus making up their own minds) and institutional commitment (versus personal spirituality)" (D'Antonio, et al., 70). Various studies have shown that commitment to the Catholic Church and a sense of Catholic identity are less strong among this generation than among their parents' cohort. At the

same time, one still finds that much of the Catholic identity of this generation has been inherited from the pre-Vatican II Catholics, and the residue of an ethnic Catholic culture persists, especially among the oldest members of the cohort. One can see, however, a loosening of institutional ties among these Baby Boomer Catholics.

*Post-Vatican II Catholics* fall into the group of people born between 1964 and 1980, which has been labeled Generation X. They are sometimes called "Christian Catholics" to emphasize their lack of a strong Catholic identity. These adults comprise about forty percent of adult membership and are much more loosely connected to the institutional Catholic Church. Scott Appleby, professor at the University of Notre Dame, said, "Previous generations had their Catholic identity given to them. This generation has had to create their own." One often finds they don't create their identity out of a whole cloth but rather out of bits and pieces they find helpful and meaningful. As such, their Catholic identity is more like a quilt (see Wuthnow).

*Millennials* are the emerging adult generation, born in the 1980s and '90s, who are coming of age and being formed by the culture of the late 1990s and the beginning of the new century. At this time they make up less than ten percent of the Catholic adult population. However, it appears that the Millennials have an even more tenuous relationship with the Catholic Church than the Gen-Xers. Catholic identity for this group is similar to the post-Vatican II group, that is, loosely connected and weakly committed. Yet this generation seems to emphasize many devotional aspects that puzzle their elders, especially the Vatican II Catholics, who hold most of the leadership positions in church ministry (except for youth ministry).

These four generations gather at the same Eucharistic table as sons and daughters of God. Each of these generations brings a different set of experiences to the faith, and looks

at faith through a different lens. Is this diversity a blessing or a burden? Adult faith formation programs need to honor these differences and keep them in mind when designing educational programs.

A Church focused on mission, a Church of disciples, engaged with the culture and proclaiming the kingdom of God, has the potential to reverse the trends cited at the beginning of this paper. A Church focused on mission can attract the young adults who are looking for something and someone to believe in. Adult faith formation will play an essential part in forming adult disciples for the mission. It will take a reprioritizing of resources to bring about a different culture in the Church, but it will be worth it. Let us begin now.

### Endnotes

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# Don't Miss the Second Half

*Author and teacher in aspects of spirituality Richard Rohr gives us a sense of the movement from the first to second half of life. What role does suffering serve in this transition? What tasks mark the second half of the journey of faith?*

## INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD ROHR

As he's entered middle age, Franciscan Father Richard Rohr, who has been riding the spirituality circuit for more than 30 years, has started to think about life in halves: the first dedicated to establishing boundaries and a sense of self in one's own group, the second to opening oneself to a more universal vision of the world.

Rohr is quick to point out, though, that you've got to have the first before you pass into the second. "We need to begin 'conservatively' with clear boundaries, identity, a sense of 'chosenness,'" he writes in his newsletter *Radical Grace*. "Then as we grow older, we should move toward more compassionate, tolerant, and forgiving world views."

Rohr's own first and second halves have been full and busy. In his first half, he founded the charismatic New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati in 1971 and the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1986. Today, though still a popular speaker and author, Rohr spends more time alone, living in a hermitage behind his community.

*You've said that spirituality is different in the two halves of life. What do you mean by that?* In a nutshell, the task in the first half of life is the development of identity and boundaries. One must develop a necessary concern for the self: "Am I special? Am I chosen? Am I beloved?" Unfortunately it often takes the form of "Am I right?" leading to either/or thinking.

This accounts for much of our contemporary confusion, it seems to me. The first half of life is concerned with the container; the second with the contents. But most people become preoccupied with the container.

*Can you give an example of a first-half-of-life person?* Let's look at a typical military school cadet. Who would not admire him? His pants are creased; his hair is cut; he's clean; he's polite; he's on time; he loves God and country. If I need to hire an employee, give me a West Point cadet. He'll do what he's told. Great stuff, but don't for a second call it the Gospel.

But, unfortunately, I think we have. For many of us, that's what it means to be a Christian, and that not only misses the point, it openly obstructs it. Remember what Jesus said: "Your virtue must surpass the virtue of the scribes and Pharisees." It's a virtue of sorts but not yet what he is talking about.

A mere concern for order, purity, identity, self-esteem, and self-image is necessary to get you started. You have to have an ego to let go of your ego. You have to have a self to die to yourself, but the creation of a positive self-image is not the issue of the Gospel. Quite the contrary. That's probably why Jesus did not start teaching until he was 30 and seems to have almost exclusively taught adults.

Once you teach something like "love your enemies," you're not talking about tit-for-tat morality anymore. That kind of thinking is not understandable to people still involved in the tasks of the first stage of life. In fact, it appears dangerous and heretical to them.

*How does someone move from the first half of life to the second?* The two stages are not primarily chronological, although they can be affected by chronology.

Normally there has to be a precipitating event that leads to transformation. I call it the "stumbling stone," using a biblical term. Your two-plus-two world has to fail you, has to fall apart. Business as usual doesn't work. Usually that involves something very personal: suffering or failure or humiliation.

The fair-haired boy or girl who just dances from success to success will easily stay in the first half of life forever. I think that's what Jesus means by saying that it's harder for a rich man to enter the reign of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. It's a strong statement.

Thomas Merton wrote about new monks coming in. He recommended that monasteries not accept anyone who had not gone through a spiritual crisis. He argued that they weren't ready for religious life. In fact, he thought the monastery's job might be to facilitate a spiritual crisis for many of the monks.

If you are lucky, God will lead you to a situation you cannot control, you cannot fix, or you cannot even understand. At that point true spirituality begins. Up to that point is all just preparation.

*Does suffering always lead to the second half of life?* Not always. Sometimes it just leads you to circle the wagons of your own little group. It depends on whether you deal with your suffering in secular space or sacred space.

The secular response to suffering is to fix it, control it, understand it, look for someone to blame. You learn nothing. Unless suffering pulls you into sacred space, it doesn't transform you. It makes you bitter.

In sacred space, if you can somehow see God in it, suffering can lead you to the universal experience of human suffering, even identification with the suffering of God. At that point, you're

moving into the second half of life. The questions are now more mystical than merely moral.

*Are you in danger of idealizing suffering?* Yes. But I'm not saying go out and search for it. Suffering is inevitable, and if you can be convinced that it is a teachable moment and not something to run from, you're doing yourself a great favor.

There are really only two paths to transformation: prayer and suffering. But because few of us just walk into a wonderful journey of surrendered prayer, you can really say there is only one path, which is suffering.

That's why Jesus talks about the Way of the Cross so much. Until your nice, coherent interpretation of reality has been beaten up a bit, why would you let go of it? Some form of suffering is the only thing strong enough to destabilize the ego, in my opinion.

*What specific experiences can cause this to happen?* Loss of a job can be a big one, especially if you're very invested in your work. Death, of course, is the biggest of all, especially the death of someone close or an unjust death. A major humiliation is another way. I know a lot of priests who have come to God through being accused—rightly or wrongly—of sexual abuse. The public persona isn't there anymore, so who am I now?

Moral failure is a common biblical pattern that leads to the second half of life, as we see very clearly in both Peter and Paul. Somewhere along the way my own moral failures have the power to get me to finally fall into the mercy of a loving God. If I lied to that person or I used that woman, I have to ask myself, "What kind of person am I that I did that?"

#### Endnotes

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## GROWING FAITH IN MATURING ADULTS

*How does a parish community support the "maturing adults"—the elders of the parish—in their growing in faith? Richard Johnson provides insightful guidance to help us rethink the focus and direction of the support elders need.*

In *Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: Principles, Plans and Bold Proposals* (New London, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 2007), Richard P. Johnson, who has done important work in the area of gerontology and spiritual life, proposes twelve guiding principles for ministry with and for maturing adults. He discusses maturing adults within three distinct, yet overlapping categories: 1. Those who are often referred to as "Boomers," generally ages 55-70; 2. Those who are in their 70s until the point at which some impairment of daily living occurs; and 3. Those who require some level of assistance: either living independently, assisted living, in a retirement center, or skilled care center. (These are taken from the Website <http://www.senioradultministry.com>.)

#### Johnson's Guiding Principles:

Parish ministry for maturing adults pays attention to three dimensions of growth: spiritual, psychological, and physical.

Parish ministry for maturing adults is part of the parish plan, well organized, and consistent in offering services that people can come to count on.

Parish ministry for maturing adults employs styles of teaching and learning unique to the people being served.

Parish ministry for maturing adults is based on the idea that God is calling each maturing adult in the parish to a profound personal vocation.

Parish ministry for maturing adults shifts the focus of parish activity to a broad understanding of ministry at every level of mature adulthood: shared activities as well as shared growth in faith and life.

Parish ministry for maturing adults explicitly welcomes maturing adults into mainstream ministries of the parish.

The goal of parish ministry for maturing adults is spiritual transformation.

The content of programs offered in parish ministry for maturing adults rises out of the real situations in which such people live, including moments of transition and daily life.

Parish ministry for maturing adults focuses on both interior and exterior growth.

Parish ministry for maturing adults is Christ-centered.

Successful parish ministry for maturing adults is developmental, ongoing, and lifelong.

Successful parish ministry for maturing adults honors diversity of age, stage, personality, ethnicity, and spirituality.

#### Other Resources:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Blessing of Ages: A Pastoral Message on Growing Older Within the Faith Community* in 1999. Other information and resources can be found at their site: <http://www.usccb.org/laity/blessings/factsheet/shtml>.

Taken from *Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults*. New London, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 2007.



# The Twilight Time

*Throughout her book, Joan Chittister invites us to reflect on the burdens and blessings of old age and to recognize in each aspect of growing older the presence of God and the potential for spiritual growth.*

BY JOAN CHITTISTER

## *Afterword The Twilight Time*

*Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made: Our times are in His hand Who saith "A whole I planned, Youth shows but half; Trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"*

— Robert Browning

Sean walks a couple miles every day and continues to write and research. Bill tees off at 6 a.m. every morning and handles his real estate work the rest of the day. Dick and his wife Willie take a trip to somewhere new in the world every year and do community service work in between. Treva still does bedside nursing every single day. Annie and Sophie never miss a card game. Mary Margaret does spiritual direction at the prison. Bernie is a hospital chaplain who walks miles of corridors visiting sick people, consoling families she will never see again. Maureen, a

financial manager, goes to the office to deal with hundreds of thousands of dollars of income from one fiscal year to another.

They're an impressive group. They make the world go round. They are the center of their families, the voice of their era, the memory of their groups. The real beauty of them, however, is that none of them are unusual. Their numbers are legion.

Millions of other people just like them are doing the same kinds of things every day. And, like them, they are all between the ages of seventy and ninety.

They are healthy and happy, alert and active, full of life and very, very productive. But don't be fooled; they—and all of us—will all slow down before it's over.

Then will come the twilight time, that space between here and there, between earth and eternity, when we begin to be more there than here. When the concerns of this world fade away and we begin to be concentrated somewhere else.

That does not mean that this last period of life is an inactive time, a meaningless time. Not at all.

This may be the time in the nursing home, in the hospital, in the housing complex infirmary when, focused like laser beams, we see life—our own and everybody else's—with fresh and uncanny awareness. We begin to understand things we never even contemplated before, like the meaning of time, the preeminence of beauty, the power of the touch of a hand.

Then, little by little, the old cares begin to dim. Nothing seems so important today as it did yesterday. All those things, too, we know—all those things which once consumed us with their demands—will fail to grip us anymore. They will also one day disappear into the cauldron of life and be melted down into nothingness.

We gave our lives to such things once and now can hardly remember what they were anymore. We cried over them and fretted over them, we ended relationships because of them and began other relationships for the very same reason. We gave our lives to what we know now were very little things. We are, now, at peace.

The raging has ended. The dying has begun. Life has done its best with us. We are finished now, except for the finishing. We have bigger things to think about now than the things that, up to now, have consumed us. Instead, we must figure out now how to say good-bye to those who refuse to admit that we're going. We must determine how to live in this new, quiet way. We must stir up enough energy in us to be present, one last time at least, to those who come to be present to us.

But our own work is not yet complete. The twilight time, like all the time before



Photo courtesy of BC Office of Marketing Communications.

it, is not for nothing. It has its own tasks, its burdens, its subtle gifts to give us. The twilight time is time for trust. It's all out of our hands now. We have used our last years well. We have lived with all the energy we had. And now we must trust the time of no energy at all to make us open in a different way to those around us. We must trust our doctors and our caregivers and our situation and our passage. We must allow ourselves to be cared for and trust that the people doing it are receiving something from us, as we receive from them.

We must summon the patience that pain takes or that breathing demands or that the schedules of others impose on us. We must give ourselves to the process of dying one muscle, one moment at a time. There is time now for a new kind of strength, as well as for the weakness that culls it. It takes strength to bear well what we cannot do a thing to change.

There is a strength, a new kind of dignity, that comes with bearing weakness well, for smiling when there is nothing much to smile about by pedestrian standards, for believing that death is the birthing passage to a new life.

It's time now for surrender to acceptance. Perhaps for the first time in our adult lives, we will go into a period of total dependence. We will be asked to accept rather than to resist, to welcome instead of to question, to believe instead of to doubt.

There will be conversations yet to have. This is our last time to be honest, to be loving, to be open, to be grateful, to be patient, to be lovable and loving and loved.

This is the time for melting into God. The words that come now will be the honest ones, the hopeful ones. This time will be the culmination of all the learning of all the other years. The veil between us and eternity will begin to tear and we will begin the slow walk through it, ready, open, thrown upon the heart of God.

We know now that this life is whole. The first part was good, so good. Why would we doubt for a moment that this half will be anything less?

Now the Mystery is about to reveal itself. Now the time is complete. Now it is finished. Now it is only beginning.

#### Endnotes

JOAN D. CHITTISTER, O.S.B., is an internationally known writer and lecturer, and the Executive Director of Benetvision, a resource and research center for contemporary spirituality. She is the author of *In the Heart of the Temple; Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*; and *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*.

Excerpt from *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*, by Joan Chittister, published by Blue-Bridge, an imprint of United Tribes Media Inc. Used by permission.

## Back to Where You Once...

*Continued from Page 17*

number of national plans also help people reconnect with the Church community. In addition to Landings, such programs include Catholics Coming Home and Re-Membering Church.

An authentic life being lived in faith is the best catechesis, notes Pat Stankus, religious education consultant for the Diocese of Austin and executive director of the diocesan synod. "There are no easy answers, no perfect programs, no specific approaches that will work. People who live their faith and are a light are the most effective means to bringing people back. Others see them and want what they have. Faith is caught, not taught, not manipulated. God works."

For many Catholics such as Mark, who in the past few years has dropped home for a visit on a handful of Sundays, there are no shortcuts for walking the journey. All historical and institutional arguments aside, he concedes, "I know there are individuals in the Catholic Church who personify the love and compassion of Jesus. And I'd consider going back at some point. It's not totally out of the realm of possibility."

"Ultimately it has to be an individual realization," one returnee emphasizes, "something that someone really wants. A person has to see the hole in his or her spiritual heart and be looking for something to fill that void."

#### Endnotes

MARÍA RUIZ SCAPERLANDA has been a freelance writer since 1981. She is the author of several books and has been published regularly in numerous national and regional periodicals, including *Our Sunday Visitor* and *The Daily Oklahoman*.

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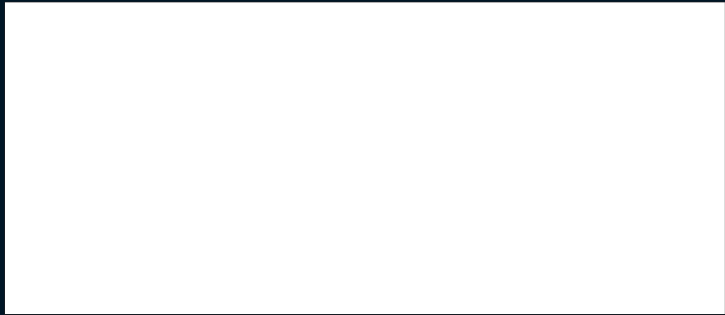
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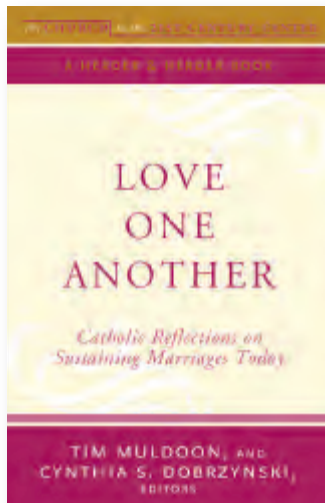
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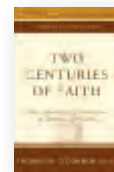
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