

Living as Missionary Disciples

A RESOURCE FOR EVANGELIZATION

LEADERSHIP RESOURCE

COMMITTEE ON EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops • Washington, DC

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General Secretary, USCCB

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The Catholic Apostolate Center, a ministry of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines), Immaculate Conception Province, was founded in 2011 to respond to the needs of the Church through developing, in collaboration with dioceses and other institutions and organizations, formation programs for evangelization; assisting pastoral leaders in deepening collaboration with one another; and providing formation and apostolic opportunities for members and collaborators of the Union of Catholic Apostolate.

To learn more, go to www.catholicapostolatocenter.org.

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Introduction

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew . . . I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”¹

As a Church, we are called to be missionary disciples who know and live the faith and confidently share the Gospel. There is a growing body of material on how to be a missionary Church. In keeping with the call of recent popes for Catholics to evangelize, bishops, in particular, need to offer direction and encouragement for a joyful evangelization to take place. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis) has developed this leadership resource for the purpose of encouraging missionary disciples in the task of evangelization. It is intended for use by bishops and other clergy, as well as religious, lay, and parish leaders and staff in dioceses, eparchies, associations, parishes, missions, and educational settings, especially those in Catholic schools, seminaries, and colleges/universities.

Purpose and Inspiration

The journey of evangelization has as its center the proclamation of Jesus Christ and an invitation to deeper missionary discipleship. This resource is designed to provide parishes and other church ministries with what might be called a *road map* toward “new paths for the Church’s journey” of evangelization. It is not intended to provide a ready-made program for a parish to follow or a detailed strategic plan to implement. Rather, it offers principles that parishes can apply to their efforts in evangelization and missionary discipleship within their particular pastoral context and as part of their existing planning process.

Although parishes are most often mentioned throughout this resource, it is hoped that it will also provide assistance to dioceses, schools, and all Catholic associations.

The immediate inspiration for this resource is found in Pope Francis's repeated calls to move our church, parish, and ministry strategies from a mindset of *maintenance* to *mission*. In the words of the Holy Father:

I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. "Mere administration" can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be "permanently in a state of mission."²

This missionary vision cannot be accomplished without shared effort by the whole church community. As Pope Francis told us during his apostolic journey to the United States in 2015, "[O]ur challenge today is . . . to foster a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in planning for the future of our parishes and institutions."³ Shared discernment and planning, rooted in prayer, marks the beginning of a fruitful effort at evangelization. It also requires time, energy, knowledge, skills, careful planning, and implementation—all with the Lord's grace, of course!

The focus must be outward directed, not on the parish as it is, but on how the parish or faith community can better and more fruitfully lead, minister, and engage people in the call to witness and discipleship. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis speaks of the need to move beyond an internal or self-directed focus:

Even if many are now involved in lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge.⁴

One way to ensure that our parishes are true communities of evangelization, focused on preparing Christians for discipleship, is for the whole parish to undertake a process of discernment to evaluate current pastoral ministry and outreach programs. What Pope Francis says about dioceses can also be applied to parishes; namely, that "to make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particu-

lar Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform.”⁵

We know too that successful pastoral ministry is not just about planning programs and activities. It depends first on pastoral leaders’ ongoing conversion and daily personal encounter with Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire and lead all ministries toward witness and discipleship, whether in liturgy, preaching, catechesis and education, administration, or works of mercy focused on the dignity of the human person and care for the poor.

The fruitfulness of pastoral ministry at the service of evangelization requires effective leadership focused on missionary discipleship. It means discerning the state and life or *pulse* of the parish community and whether *maintenance and self-preservation or mission and evangelization* best describes the parish’s life. Successful pastoral ministry also involves reevaluating parish ministries, programs, and activities to assess how effectively they serve missionary discipleship, with an honest assessment of how human and financial resources are prioritized and managed. Furthermore, fruitful ministry identifies the opportunities for and challenges to achieving mission and evangelization.

Using This Resource

Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization does not seek to duplicate or replace what has already been developed or to serve as a concrete formation program. Rather, it provides principles of evangelization and missionary discipleship, with resources designed for pastoral leaders to develop, enhance, and review their own local strategies to create an evangelizing parish. As mentioned earlier, it is meant to serve as a road map that leaders can use to:

- Integrate evangelization principles into existing pastoral plans for their specific community;
- Identify the rich inventory of pastoral and theological resources that already exist and can be adapted and integrated into existing initiatives;
- Employ its theological summary and evangelization principles in a variety of contexts including: catechetical reflection days; parish council discussions; in youth ministry; and in Catholic schools, with the goal of forming teachers and students to be missionary disciples.

Overview

Part I: Theological Summary of the New Evangelization

A brief summary is given of the theology of the New Evangelization, the goal of which is ultimately to lead people to become missionary disciples, so that they will draw others to Christ and his Church.

Part II: Developing A Pastoral Plan for Missionary Discipleship

Here are described the elements of a good pastoral plan, organized to support the four elements of the New Evangelization: “encounter,” “accompany,” “community,” and “send.” Using these principles will aid in the development of a pastoral plan focused on forming missionary disciples.

Appendix: Questions for Reflection

A framework is presented for assessing current pastoral practices in light of the New Evangelization. Each assessment item concludes with reflection questions to guide a review of the current parish situation.

PART I

Theological Summary of the New Evangelization

“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.”⁶ In his very first general audience, Pope Francis challenged all the baptized to “move beyond a dull or mechanical way of living our faith, and instead open the doors of our hearts, our lives, our parishes, our movements or associations, going out in search of others so as to bring them the light and the joy of our faith in Christ.”⁷ Intensifying our lived faith and opening ourselves and our faith communities more fully to all people—especially in our parishes, schools, and other ministries—are the goals at the heart of the New Evangelization. As the preparatory document for the Synod on the New Evangelization said, it is no longer time for us as Church to be about “business as usual.”⁸ To take up the challenge of Pope Francis, we must be missionary disciples, called to witness to Christ in every aspect of our lives.

What Is Evangelization?

The mission of evangelization is concisely summarized in the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis statement, *Disciples Called to Witness*:

The Church’s *ad gentes* (“to the world”) mission given to her by Christ is the proclamation of the Good News to those who do not know him. The historical and social circumstances of the twentieth century prompted the Church to renew her mission to evangelize. This renewed vision of evangelization includes, as Pope Benedict XVI has stated, the challenge to “propose anew” the Good News to all of the Christian faithful, most especially to those of the faithful who are absent from the Lord’s Table.⁹

Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that “the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus, which we have received, the experience of salvation, which urges us to even greater love of him.”¹⁰ The proclamation (*kerygma*) of the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the Kingdom of God is at the core of evangelization.¹¹ “Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us.”¹² This love that comes from the risen Christ cannot be confined within the believer or the community of faith, the Church. “Faith becomes operative in the Christian on the basis of the gift received, the love which attracts our hearts to Christ (cf. Gal 5:6), and enables us to become part of the Church’s great pilgrimage through history until the end of the world. For those who have been transformed in this way, a new way of seeing opens up, faith becomes light for their eyes.”¹³ All the baptized are part of the Church’s mission of evangelization.

“To evangelize, one bears witness to God’s Revelation in Jesus through the Holy Spirit by living a life imbued with Christian virtues, by proclaiming unceasingly that salvation is offered to all people through the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and by preaching hope in God’s love for us.”¹⁴

Who Is Called to Evangelize?

All who are baptized are called to evangelize because “when the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment.”¹⁵ The evangelizing efforts of the baptized are not simply focused on those who have not heard of Christ. They are also directed toward our brothers and sisters who no longer join us around the Lord’s table. Furthermore, the baptized disciple of Christ is also continually evangelized through ongoing renewal of faith and living out that same faith. This is accomplished particularly through regular and frequent participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. This sacramental life fully lived leads the baptized disciple to share the virtues of faith, hope, and charity as one sent by Christ into a world in need of his transforming love. The parish community should furthermore nourish the baptized as “evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.”¹⁶

What Is the New Evangelization?

While the need for a renewed evangelization of the baptized was first formally articulated by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and stems back to the calling of the Second Vatican Council, it was St. John Paul II who, in 1983, formally called this pastoral strategy the “new evangelization.” This New Evangelization is new, not in the content of the message of the Gospel, but in its “ardor, methods, and expression”¹⁷ and its audience, namely those communities and peoples in the West who once bore the name Catholic but no longer do. This is precisely the point made by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 when he called for a “renewed evangelization” and “finding appropriate means to propose anew the perennial truth of Christ’s Gospel”¹⁸ to those in need of evangelization, both those who are already baptized but have left the practice of the faith and those who have yet to hear the message of the Gospel. “He clarified that the New Evangelization is new, not in content but rather in its inner thrust; new in its methods that must correspond to the times; and new because it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel to those who have already heard it.”¹⁹

The New Evangelization is a call for all of us to have a deeper encounter with Christ, best expressed in a simple, confident, informed, and joyous witness to the faith, which attracts others and invites them to wonder what secret is motivating the Christian disciple. Pope Francis affirms that the New Evangelization is a “summons addressed to all”²⁰ and connects this inner thrust with an outward movement of all the baptized as missionary disciples. “In our day Jesus’ command to ‘go and make disciples’ echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth.’”²¹ Our time should be as Pope Francis says, “a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!”²²

The New Evangelization: Renewal and Conversion

The work of the New Evangelization invites the baptized to renew their own faith in a way that leads to the evangelization of others—ultimately transforming our culture with the love of the Lord and his teaching. Personal faith renewal is a continual process of conversion, a journey

deeper into an ever-new life of faith. It is fundamental to the work of the New Evangelization. The goal of the New Evangelization, however, is always geared toward others. By the work of the Holy Spirit, each baptized person is continually encountering Christ in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as well as in the Sacred Scriptures and other people. After reflecting, praying, and experiencing a deep conversion and renewed confidence in the gospel message, a follower of Christ goes outward to evangelize others. The evangelized becomes the evangelizer. This involves outreach to those inactive in their faith, as well as embracing the mission *ad gentes* (to the nations). A community of renewed believers continues to go outward, ultimately leading to the evangelization of society and culture. Evangelizing the culture furthermore involves bringing the gift of *communio* (communion) to secularism, relativism, materialism, and individualism. As Pope Francis teaches, our life of faith calls us to work toward transforming the world. “Faith is truly a good for everyone; it is a common good. Its light does not simply brighten the interior of the Church, nor does it serve solely to build an eternal city in the hereafter; it helps us build our societies in such a way that they can journey toward a future of hope.”²³

“If it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.”²⁴ The work of the New Evangelization is done primarily through the witness of faith by the baptized in their everyday lives. “A Christian life lived with charity and faith is the most effective form of evangelization.”²⁵ We cannot give what we do not have. Therefore, cultivating a life of faith is essential to helping others to do so.

The work of the New Evangelization also invites the Church as a whole to ever-deeper renewal—a call to move from maintenance to mission.²⁶ As Pope Francis teaches, “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.”²⁷ Let us, therefore, envision and pray about ways of renewing the culture of faith within our own parishes and communities. Let us continue to create communities where those who have been renewed can find continued nourishment and strength in their journey of faith.

A Deeper Encounter with Christ: Formation for Discipleship

The work of the Holy Spirit permeates all of the work of the evangelization. The task of evangelization is ongoing and sustained by the Holy Spirit who leads a person to a life of passion and holiness culminating in a world transformed by Jesus Christ. Missionary discipleship takes place within the context of evangelization and begins with an encounter with Christ. We look to Jesus, the Master who personally formed his apostles and disciples, as the model of evangelization. Christ gives us the method: “Come and see” (Jn 1:46), “Follow me” (Mt 9:9), “Remain in me” (Jn 15:4), and “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). The method includes *encounter, accompany, community, and send*. This method is formation for missionary discipleship. It leads the believer to become a disciple and from there for the disciple to become a missionary.

“Do not be afraid! When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: ‘I am with you always’ (Mt 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus never leaves anyone alone! He always accompanies us.”²⁸ What awakens the disciple is an encounter with Jesus Christ, who accompanies the person, calls to community, and then sends the disciple on mission to the world. The remainder of this section will examine the *encounter, accompany, community, and send* methodology of missionary discipleship formation.

1. Encounter

The purpose of evangelization is to lead people to encounter Christ.

Encounter Jesus Christ

The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.²⁹

This personal encounter is the key event in the life of every disciple that changes the direction of life, as we see happen so often in the lives of

the disciples recounted in the Scriptures. Meeting Jesus Christ changed everything. As Pope Benedict XVI stated, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”³⁰ As Pope Francis says, we must be convinced of the importance of this encounter if we will find the strength share our faith: “It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights.”³¹ Pope Francis invites “all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.”³²

What does it mean to have a “personal encounter with Jesus Christ”? An encounter with Jesus Christ can come in any way that the Holy Spirit leads, and the Church provides many ways to experience Jesus intimately such as through prayer, the sacraments, adoration, Scripture, and the works of mercy. The public profession of one’s faith through active participation in prayer and the sacraments (most especially the Eucharist and Penance) is essential in living a life of discipleship. The ancient art of *lectio divina*, whereby time is set aside to prayerfully meditate and reflect on the Scriptures, opens one’s heart and mind, allowing the Lord to speak through his Word. The Eucharist is the most intimate way in which Jesus Christ is present to us because he himself is the sacrament. He is fully present in the Eucharist. Every time we participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, we enter anew into the truth that Christ gave his very life for each one of us. When we receive the Lord himself, we are transformed and are able to become more and more like him. This encounter is at the core of who we are as Christians, and our hope is to one day join St. Paul in saying, “Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

By his Real Presence in the Eucharist, Christ fulfills his promise to be with us “always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). By participating in the Mass, each one of us has the opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ in the most profound way possible.

Increasingly, we recognize that generosity of spirit and commitment to charity and justice are vehicles to bring people more fully into a rela-

tionship with Christ and his Church. Christ himself stated, “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve” (Mt 20:28). Imitating Christ’s servant leadership, exemplified beautifully in the washing of the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper, leads us closer to him. This is often true for youth and young adults performing acts of charity and service, attending retreats, prayer, bible study, talks, and reflections. Social justice and direct service opportunities can be powerful experiences that lead people to intimacy with Christ. “Service, when understood as serving Christ in others and as a means to share the Gospel, has the ability to bring the server and the one being served closer to Christ.”³³

Those who will be his disciples are already seeking him (see Jn 1:38), but it is the Lord who calls them: “Follow me” (Mt 9:9; see Mk 1:17). This encounter must be constantly renewed by personal testimony, the proclamation of the *kerygma* (“the message of salvation of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ”³⁴), and the missionary action of the community. Without the *kerygma*, the other aspects of this process of evangelization are condemned to sterility, and we run the risk of having hearts not truly converted to the Lord. Only out of the *kerygma* does the possibility of true Christian initiation occur. Therefore, the Church should work to ensure the continual proclamation of the truth of the Gospel, including opportunities outside of the Mass for the Body of Christ to share their personal experiences of Christ. Each member of the Church is called to connect his or her experience of Christ with the overall history of salvation.

“The witness of Christians, whose lives are filled with the hope of Christ, opens the hearts and minds of those around them to Christ. This openness to Christ is a moment of conversion (*metanoia*).”³⁵ It is the moment in which a person’s life is reoriented to Christ, when he or she—by grace—enters into a relationship with him and thus enters into a relationship with the community of believers, the Church. In *Ecclesia in America*, conversion is explained as having an intimate link to the encounter with Christ:

An encounter with the Lord brings about a profound transformation in all who do not close themselves off from him. The first impulse coming from this transformation is to communicate to others the richness discovered in the experience of the encounter. This does not mean simply teaching what we have come to know but also, like the Samaritan woman, enabling others to encounter Jesus personally: “Come and see” (Jn 4:29). The result will be the same as that which

took place in the heart of the Samaritans, who said to the woman: “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42). The Church, which draws her life from the permanent and mysterious presence of her Risen Lord, has as the core of her mission a duty “to lead all people to encounter Christ”³⁶

“The purpose of this evangelization is to bring about faith and conversion to Christ. Faith involves a profound change of mind and heart, a change of life, a ‘*metanoia*.’”³⁷ Evangelization does not seek to invite people to experience only one moment of conversion but rather to experience the gradual and lifelong process of conversion: to draw all people into a deeper relationship with God, to participate in the sacramental life of the Church, to develop a mature conscience, to sustain one’s faith through ongoing catechesis, and to integrate one’s faith into all aspects of one’s life. “Within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given Him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his ‘mystery,’ the kingdom of God proclaimed by Him, the requirements and promises contained in His Gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him.”³⁸ “The process of conversion and evangelization that accomplishes the objectives above must include the witness of the Church through her members in the everyday living out of the Gospel.”³⁹

Encounter Jesus Within the Family

The family is our first community and the most basic way God the Father gathers us and forms us to act in the world. The early Church expressed this truth by referring to the Christian family as the Church of the home. The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church similarly states that “the family is, so to speak, the domestic church.”⁴⁰ It is within the family that we first learn who God is and how to prayerfully seek his will for us. As the first and most basic community to which we all belong, “the story of family life is a story about love—shared, nurtured, and sometimes rejected or lost. In every family God is revealed uniquely

and personally, for God is love and those who live in love, live in God and God dwells in them (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).⁴¹ In a Christian family that belongs to the Church, daily living becomes, in itself, an expression of the Church. The domestic Church is not complete by itself but finds its fullest expression when it is united with and supported by the parish and the larger Church.

“The Church is a family of families.”⁴² By the love of the Father, as disciples of Jesus Christ, and nourished by the Holy Spirit, we are called to communion with others. There can be no discipleship without communion. In Jesus Christ, we become one family of faith, the universal family of God in the Catholic Church. This culture of witness is sustained within the Church through the Sacrament of Matrimony and the life of the family. Marriage is the plan of God and has been elevated by Christ among the baptized to be a sacrament, a covenant of love, “at the service of communion and mission.”⁴³ It is through the example of one’s family that each person most concretely understands how to live a Christian life. Parents are the first educators of their children, and together with godparents, are responsible for nurturing their children’s faith and giving them the example of a life infused with the Gospel. Parishes should look for opportunities to help married couples and families deepen their faith and make their families true “domestic Churches,” places of prayer, love, and forgiveness. Marriages and families also witness in an irreplaceable way to the faithful, fruitful love of God. A healthy society is built on the foundation of healthy families. As a result, marriage and the family must be supported and strengthened by economics, policies, and laws outside of the parish.

Encounter Jesus in and Through the Church

The encounter with Jesus is carried out in and through his Church, of which the Christian family is a central part. The Church is universal—a community of faith that is diverse, international, and multicultural. Because the parish, through its pastor and members, is typically the first contact that Catholics have with the Church, “it is the responsibility of both pastors and laity to ensure that those doors are always open.”⁴⁴ Evangelization must remain rooted in the local Church. It is in the parish that one becomes engaged with the church community, learns how to become a missionary disciple of Christ, is nurtured by Scripture, is nourished by the sacraments, is catechized, and ultimately becomes a disciple of Christ.

Successful evangelization and catechetical initiatives must be focused on the parish and parish life.⁴⁵ “In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.”⁴⁶

Encounter Jesus in Others

Christ commands us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are to proclaim his Good News to all people, everywhere and at all times. After Christ promises the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, he ascends into heaven. The disciples, rather than heeding Christ’s command to be his witnesses, stare “intently at the sky.” It takes “two men dressed in white garments” asking, “Men of Galilee, why are you . . . looking at the sky?” for the disciples to begin to realize the meaning of Christ’s command (Acts 1:10-11). How often do we fail to realize that we are called to be Christ’s witnesses to the world? Do we realize that our Baptism, Confirmation, and reception of the Eucharist bestow on us the grace we need to be disciples? Are we like the disciples staring at the sky rather than inviting those around us to experience Christ’s love and mercy through the Church? How often do we reach out to our missing brothers and sisters by inviting them to join us at Mass or by asking why they no longer feel welcomed at the Lord’s Table? The answers to these questions underlie the mission of the Church, especially in the call of the New Evangelization.⁴⁷

Once we have encountered Christ, as did the disciples, we are sent forth on mission “to the ends of the earth” to invite others to this encounter.

2. Accompany

The response to this encounter with Christ needs accompaniment.

To create a culture of encounter and witness, we must live explicit lives of discipleship. We are called not only to believe in the Gospel but to allow it to take deep root in us in a way that leaves us incapable of silence: we cannot help but to announce the Gospel in word and in deed. This missionary outreach is at the heart of discipleship. “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can

happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”⁴⁸ Of course, being a disciple is a challenge. We cannot live a life of discipleship alone. We need others to model lives of discipleship and accompany us as we grow in the spiritual life and experience ongoing conversion. Similarly, as missionary disciples, we are called to love and accept all people in a way that invites each person to a deeper relationship with Christ and a greater alignment of their lives with his teachings. However, we are not called to make judgments about others. Pope Francis warns that we cannot truly know a “person’s situation before God . . . from without.”⁴⁹

Pope Francis reminds us that the accompaniment aspect of becoming a disciple offers us a chance to be truly present to others, especially to those who are struggling: “Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way.”⁵⁰ The everyday moments of one’s life lived with Christian charity, faith, and hope provide a witness to family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others who may have stopped actively participating in the life of the Church or those who do not have a faith life. Sometimes, we may need to accompany those in difficult situations to help them take gradual steps toward restored sacramental communion.⁵¹ This witness is essential for reaching others in today’s world.

The Holy Father also calls us in a special way to accompany those in difficult situations related to marriage:

Seeing things with the eyes of Christ inspires the Church’s pastoral care for the faithful who are living together, or are only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried. Following this divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work . . . When a couple in an irregular union attains a noteworthy stability through a public bond—and is characterized by deep affection, responsibility toward the children and the ability to overcome trials—this can be seen as an opportunity, where possible, to lead them to celebrate the sacrament of Matrimony.⁵²

3. Community

Evangelization invites people to the Body of Christ, which is the Catholic Church.

The Church is a community brought together by the work of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony. Evangelization joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church.⁵³

The liturgical life of the Church (Baptism, first Holy Communion, Matrimony, Sunday Mass, indeed all the sacraments and other liturgical celebrations) is a natural source of accompaniment and comfort for the Christian faithful, which also builds community. When the liturgy of a parish is celebrated well, the faith of the members of the community is strengthened. It is also a door to evangelization. The community of faith is a place of invitation, welcome, and hospitality, especially for those who are inquiring or returning.⁵⁴ The Church's liturgy, by its very nature as a proclamation and enactment of the Good News of salvation, is an evangelical act: "The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving."⁵⁵

Fellowship and solidarity with one another in the community of faith is also a reflection of the Trinity. "The very mystery of the Trinity reminds us that we have been created in the image of that divine communion, and so we cannot achieve fulfillment or salvation purely by our own efforts. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek

and protect the good of others.”⁵⁶ The community of faith, the parish, does not remain focused on itself, but instead sends disciples out on mission.

4. Send

Evangelization leads disciples to accept God’s desire to send them on mission.

St. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* stated that the first form of evangelization is witness: “people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the ‘witness’ *par excellence* (Rv 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. Jn 15:26-27).”⁵⁷ As they get to know and love the Lord, disciples experience the need to share with others their joy by proclaiming Jesus Christ, not just with words, but also through service to those most in need. This is what it means to build the Kingdom of God and to be a missionary disciple. “Mission is inseparable from discipleship, and hence it must not be understood as a stage subsequent to formation, although it is carried out in different ways, depending on one’s own vocation and on the moment in human and Christian maturation at which the person stands.”⁵⁸

Pope Francis asks us: “Where does Jesus send us? There are no borders, no limits: he sends us to everyone. The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. It is not only for those who seem closer to us, more receptive, more welcoming. It is for everyone. Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent. The Lord seeks all, he wants everyone to feel the warmth of his mercy and his love.”⁵⁹

We become missionary disciples when we take our encounter with Jesus Christ out into the world. Pope Francis uses the term *missionary discipleship* often and provides a clear vision of the term in *Evangelii Gaudium*. He reminds us that all the baptized are called to be missionary disciples and that effective evangelization does not always require formal education or lengthy training.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries," but rather that we are always "missionary disciples."⁶⁰

The Mass is essential to nourish and form missionary disciples. The word Mass comes from the Latin word *missa* and carries within it the mission with which we are entrusted. When we hear the words, "Go forth, the Mass is ended," our work as disciples begins anew. With these words, we share in the mission of Christ by bringing forth his message to the world. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that "the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives".⁶¹ The dismissal at Mass invites us to respond to the Lord's command to "go and make disciples" by the faithful witness of our lives. Missionary discipleship and the Mass are intimately connected.

Dependent on the Holy Spirit

The baptized are sent by Christ in and through the Holy Spirit into the world as missionaries of faith, hope, and charity. It is with and through "firm trust in the Holy Spirit" that one's life is oriented toward Christ and one can live as a missionary disciple.⁶² "Therefore, complete trust in the work of the Holy Spirit is essential."⁶³

Bl. Pope Paul VI expressed this beautifully when he asked: "What do we feel is the first and last need of the blessed and beloved Church of ours? We must say it . . . the Holy Spirit, the animator and sanctifier of the

Church, her divine breath, the wind in her sails, the principle of her unity, the inner source of her light and strength, her support and consoler, her source of charisms and songs, her peace and her joy, her pledge and prelude to blessed and eternal life. The Church needs her perennial Pentecost; she needs fire in her heart, words on her lips, prophecy in her outlook. . . . The Church needs to rediscover the eagerness, the taste and the certainty of the truth that is hers.”⁶⁴

With the help of the Holy Spirit, parishes that foster this renewal of faith and the formation of evangelizers can transform the world. Living as missionary disciples, therefore, is a way of being Church. The evangelization principles offered in this resource can provide pastoral leaders with ways to respond with new “ardor, expressions, and methods” that will form and send missionary disciples.

PART II

Developing a Pastoral Plan for Missionary Discipleship

“One of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church’s mission, and to enable them to fulfill that responsibility as missionary disciples, as a leaven of the Gospel in our world.”⁶⁵

In Pope Francis’s 2013 speech to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, he called for “a shared commitment to a pastoral plan which brings us back to the essential and which is *solidly focused on the essential; that is, on Jesus Christ*. To get diverted by many secondary or superfluous things does not help; what helps is to focus on the fundamental reality, which is the encounter with Christ, with his mercy and with his love, and to love our brothers and sisters as he has loved us.”⁶⁶

This pastoral planning framework suggests six key dimensions to assess the current status or pulse of the parish, establish an effective ministry, and develop a successful pastoral plan:

1. A planning process is permeated with prayer before, during, and after the process. Prayer is the most important work that the planning team will engage in. This is often an afterthought in pastoral planning but must be kept at the forefront of pastoral planning efforts.
2. A parish plan provides a direction focused on bearing fruit not just on having activities. It is intentional, visible, and based on well-thought-out, fruit-producing outcomes. This fruit is clearly rooted in the teachings and pastoral ministry principles of the Church.
3. The parish seeks out effective pastoral leaders who can inspire others with an engaging vision of missionary discipleship. These pastoral leaders, through their own witness of faith and holiness of life, lead

people to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, who in turn invites us into a fuller conversion and witness.

4. The content of services and ministries is rooted in the doctrine of the Church and supported by foundational pastoral practices (for example, principles derived from the National Directory for Catechesis) that point parishioners toward and prepare them for discipleship.
5. The parish ministries effectively engage people through welcome, inspiration, and effective communication. Meeting people where they are at and listening to them is crucial in beginning a relationship for the missionary disciple process.
6. The parish commits itself to being a good steward of its human and financial resources, using its resources prudently and responsibly and continually assessing the effectiveness of its efforts.

Six Dimensions to Consider During a Pastoral Planning Process

This section can be used as a resource for the pastoral leadership team as it develops a pastoral plan.

1. Planning for Ministry Is Permeated with Prayer

Fostering a culture of intentional missionary discipleship in the parish is clearly not a “one size fits all” approach. Each parish with its unique charisms manifests the Holy Spirit in different ways. Pope Francis reminds us, “The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (*parrhesía*) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition. Let us call upon him today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence.”⁶⁷

Consider all of the people on the parish committees, councils, boards of education, etc., and the various groups and ministries active in our parishes. There are many parishioners from diverse backgrounds whom the parish leadership interacts with on a regular basis. Engagement and participation, however, do not necessarily equate to missionary disciple-

ship. Rarely do our parishes have expectations for committees other than membership with a largely reporting or advisory function. It is important to regard these committees as small groups in need of evangelization and intentional spiritual formation, thus shifting the paradigm from maintenance to mission in the parish. Those parishioners who form the inner workings of the parish must be evangelized so that they too can share the Good News with others. As noted, prayer is central to this missionary endeavor. Many of our parish committees are separated by their area of interest (worship, catechesis, welcoming, etc.), but there is tremendous value in bringing all of these groups together regularly to pray, reflect, and discern in order to foster a culture of missionary discipleship in the parish. This also integrates each ministry with the greater work and mission of the parish and Church overall. It ensures a spirit of collaboration and invites each ministry outside of self-contained groups. When each group or ministry in the parish is evangelized, they are better able to be unified in the mission of evangelization of the parish as a whole. Gathering for prayer before, during, and after the process is critical for the success of pastoral planning.

Effective planning needs to be permeated with an atmosphere of prayer so that the Holy Spirit can guide the process and prune accordingly. It is in personal and communal prayer that the disciple, fed by Word and sacraments, cultivates a relationship of deep friendship with Jesus Christ and seeks to embrace the will of the Father through the Holy Spirit. Eucharistic nourishment and daily prayer is a sign of the primacy of grace in the missionary disciple's journey. Effective planning ought to make provision for ample opportunities for prayer and spiritual formation in the parish. Without the deep breath of prayer, our efforts will lose fervor, become fragmented, and ultimately become fruitless. Prayer is the foundation of all pastoral planning efforts and leads to a greater intensification of our ministry and mission. As such, mission-centered ministry is always concerned with bearing good fruit that will last (see Jn 15:16).

2. Effective Planning for Ministry Is Focused on Fruitfulness

The parish must be concerned with bearing fruit throughout the discipleship process. This shift in focus ensures that attention is directed toward pruning what is ineffective so that new life and fruit can occur. Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of fruit is used many different times and in

many ways in reference to mission. Jesus commands the disciples to “go and bear fruit that will remain” (Jn 15:16). The work of pastoral planning ought to bear fruit and also involve effective pruning through planning, organization, and implementation so that new life and growth can occur. Jesus reminds us that the Father “takes away every branch . . . that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit” (Jn 15:1-2). The status or effectiveness of our efforts in pastoral planning ought to be visible because fruit is clearly visible. Pope Francis invites us to orient all pastoral planning efforts to this end. “An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear.”⁶⁸

A planning framework focused on fruitfulness suggests an approach to pastoral ministry that discerns what will be fruitful, what needs to be pruned, and how weeds will be separated from new growth. This means, at the start of the process, identifying the overall fruit and outcomes that a parish or diocese desires for its ministry and aligning programs and ministries to achieve this result. The desired results also must be connected to the overall mission and ministry of the Church. For example, a parish identifies through prayer that its evangelical priority and desired result is to focus its ministry and resources on missionary discipleship. Together with their pastor, the planning leadership team would need to discuss and visualize what a parish with a mission and vision focused on missionary discipleship would look like and how existing ministries could be changed or strengthened to achieve this vision. Prayer would accompany all discussion and planning. Then, to achieve this goal, specific objectives would be identified and implemented through a logical process. Prayerful pruning will occur as the pastor and leadership team make adjustments throughout the planning process. We must always remember that we plant, water, and fertilize, but the fruit ultimately depends on God’s grace and timing (1 Cor 3:6-10).

Ultimately, this approach to ministry and pastoral planning requires prayer, leadership, foresight, and discipline regarding the future direction of the parish. It entails knowing the destination before setting off on the journey. It requires thinking through and doing things in a prayerful way,

an orderly and disciplined way, basing choices on facts rather than assumptions, while retaining a degree of flexibility. In the end, it is always important to remember that a plan is a guide and that the Holy Spirit is the agent of the discipleship process.

3. Effective Planning for Ministry Requires Leaders

The implementation of a successful pastoral plan requires pastoral ministers who are not just managers and administrators but spiritual leaders with requisite planning skills. Such pastoral leaders are faithful and have a strong love and commitment to Jesus Christ. They are able to inspire others to share the Church's mission through their engaging vision of a lived faith in the Holy Spirit that calls all the baptized to live as missionary disciples. Pope Francis frequently speaks of the ministry of leadership in the Church as being strongly grounded in personal, pastoral, and spiritual formation. Below, we share a few qualities and practices of model pastoral leaders, who can best help their planning team, drawn from documents of the Catholic bishops of the United States.⁶⁹

Pastoral Leaders Embrace Pastoral Formation

Pastoral leaders, through their own behavior, lead and inspire others through an engaging vision, personal witness, and commitment as missionary disciples. A pastoral leader is in full communion with the Catholic Church, is able to minister joyfully and faithfully, and has a desire and willingness to accompany others on the spiritual journey toward Christ while living and teaching as the Church does.

Pastoral Leaders Embrace Spiritual Formation

The *kerygma*, or proclamation of the story of salvation, constitutes the foundation of spiritual formation for pastoral leaders. Spiritual leaders must not only know the *kerygma* and be able to proclaim it but also understand they are included in God's plan of salvation, which continues today. Ongoing catechesis, prayer, and participation in the sacramental life of the Church are important for this facet of formation, as they strengthen conversion and enable disciples to persevere in the Christian life. Spiritual formation includes growing in love of God and his Church.

A commitment to daily personal prayer, faithful weekly participation in the Mass, reception of other sacraments (especially the Sacrament of Penance), and acts of service, charity, and social justice all contribute to one's spiritual formation.

Pastoral Leaders Embrace Human Formation

Human formation includes an ability to empathize and to put other people first. It also includes a willingness to learn active listening skills and to collaborate with the bishop, pastor, and other pastoral leaders. Human formation involves emotional maturity, the ability to sustain friendships and professional relationships, the management of appropriate expression of anger and affection, and the ability to invite, delegate, and mentor others.

Pastoral Leaders Embrace Intellectual Formation

Because we were created with both an intellect and will, it is important to have strong intellectual formation. Intellectual formation consists of the study of the Sacred Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and important church documents on the New Evangelization. It also draws on a wide range of other disciplines: philosophy, literature and the arts, psychology, sociology, counseling, medical ethics, culture and language studies, business administration, leadership and organizational development, etc. The means of intellectual formation include lectures, discussions, research, and theological reflection on field experience; The use of technology can expand access to more disciplines of study as well as online communities and learning tools.

Pastoral Leaders Are Interculturally Competent

In the United States, many of today's parishes and schools are becoming multicultural parishes. In light of this demographic change, there are new intercultural competencies that are increasingly necessary for effective pastoral ministry. Knowledge, attitudes, and skills in intercultural and interracial relations are indispensable requirements for engaging in the Church's evangelizing mission to preach, teach, and witness to the Gospel. This means that leaders of different cultural communities within a single parish will have an intentional engagement regarding their common values as missionary disciples.

4. Effective Planning Is Rooted in the Teachings of Our Faith and Supported by Foundational Pastoral Practices

The content and substance of ministries, activities, and programs should be based in the Church's teaching and tradition. The theological summary provided in Part I is a key resource upon which to base pastoral planning for evangelization.

When pastoral leaders begin to work through a planning process for evangelization, they should first consider the review of current pastoral practice, and use this review to define areas of the parish ministry that are successful and areas that may need additional focus or attention.

5. Effective Planning for Ministry Engages and Inspires People Through a Culture of Encounter and Accompaniment, Building Strong and Trusting Relationships⁷⁰

Pope Francis has consistently called the Church to live within a culture of encounter. In his message to the bishops of Latin America, he said that “two pastoral categories stand out; they arise from the uniqueness of the Gospel, and we can employ them as guidelines for assessing how we are living missionary discipleship in the Church: *nearness and encounter*. Neither of these two categories is new; rather, they are the way God has revealed himself to us in history.”⁷¹ Pope Francis continued, recalling that pastoral plans that do not take account of these dimensions “can at best provide a dimension of proselytism, but they can never inspire people to feel part of, or belong to, the Church.” Following on the wisdom of Pope Francis, practices are listed below that speak of effective ministerial relationships and engagement practices that integrate a “culture of encounter” and the development of missionary disciples. Selecting one or two areas to focus on is often more effective than trying to improve many areas at once, and your parish may choose one of these areas to focus on in the next year or two of your parish plan.

Engaging Others Through Christian Witness in Everyday Life

Being a witness to Christ includes not only proclaiming the Gospel but also sharing one's personal conversion story, participating in the prayer life of the Church, and living the Gospel in all areas of one's life and work.

In particular, the Church teaches that social justice is an integral part of evangelization, a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel, and an essential part of the Church's mission. The center of the Church's social teaching is the life and intrinsic dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God.

Creating an Atmosphere of Invitation, Hospitality, and Trust

As noted previously, the pastoral ministry of the Church cannot be a "one size fits all" approach. We are called to follow the footsteps of Jesus by engaging, accompanying, and relating to our brothers and sisters where they are. The entire parish community, especially the parish leadership, must foster a spirit of hospitality and welcome. This spirit of hospitality must be extended to those on the peripheries, as well as to Catholics who approach the Church at key "teachable moments," such as couples seeking the Sacrament of Matrimony, parents interested in enrolling their children in Catholic schools and/or parish-based religious education or sacramental preparation programs, and Catholics seeking assistance from parish social ministry programs.

Building Collaborative Relationships, Teamwork, and Commitment

Being a collaborative member of a ministry team means working to secure cooperation, promoting teamwork, and resolving conflicts. Pastoral leaders recognize the potential value of differing ideas, opinions, and competing needs and are able to affirm and accept challenging situations as opportunities to make effective changes to fulfill the mission of the Church. Developing missionary disciples builds co-responsibility for the mission of Christ among all of the baptized.

Welcoming and Embracing Ethnically Diverse Communities

Pastoral leaders, now more than ever, must welcome and be open to ethnically diverse families in order to effectively proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and promote the life and dignity of every human being. Stronger intercultural competence will promote integration of ethnically diverse families in the ministry and mission of the parish.

Engagement and Current Pastoral Practice

In summary, when assessing and developing the details of a parish's unique plan for evangelization, pastoral leaders should consider ways to integrate

the following aspects of current pastoral practice: leadership and team preparation, Scripture and homiletics, catechesis and faith formation, life and dignity of the human person, inculcation, solidarity and subsidiarity, evangelization and conversion, marriage and family, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.

6. Planning for Ministry Requires Intentional Stewardship

All ministry and pastoral care relies on the availability of human and financial resources applied by leaders with good management and administrative skills. A parish can develop superior plans and strategies, but they will be effective only when human and financial resources are made available to implement them. Below is a review of several foundational skills that are necessary for the effective use of human and financial resources in pastoral planning.

Managing, Supervising, and Developing People

Pastoral leaders have a responsibility to ensure that talented and qualified staff and volunteers, who are dedicated to the mission of the Church, are developing into missionary disciples. This also includes seeking to improve personal and pastoral performance, valuing sustained personal growth in knowledge and skills, and encouraging continued growth.

Sound Business Practices and Ethical Standards

Stewardship of church finances requires adherence to the most stringent ethical, legal, canonical and fiscal standards. Additionally, pastoral leaders must be open, consultative, collegial, and accountable in the conduct of their affairs. Parishioners exercise responsibility for the viability of their parishes, schools, related ministries, and outreach by generously contributing—both financially and through personal service—to the life of the parish. The local parish community must be willing to provide financial support for its own pastoral ministries as well as for the Church's charitable works carried out within the diocese, nationally, and internationally. Demonstrating and cultivating a culture of generous contribution and stewardship is an extremely effective way of evangelizing.

Conclusion

No pastoral plan in and of itself will evangelize and cause people to live as missionary disciples. A plan is not an end in itself. It is a means of nurturing, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the witness to Christ in the world. Faithful witnesses have encountered Christ, been accompanied and formed by the community of faith, and have been sent on mission to transform the world through the grace of Christ. Pastoral leaders cannot do this task of forming missionary disciples alone. Evangelizing parishes that form missionary disciples foster co-responsibility among all the baptized. Pope Francis reminded pastoral leaders in the United States of this way of being Church during his apostolic visit in 2015:

One of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church's mission, and to enable them to fulfill that responsibility as missionary disciples, as a leaven of the Gospel in our world. This will require creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.⁷²

May the theological and pastoral resources provided assist your community of faith in its journey toward forming missionary disciples and transforming the world with the love and mercy of Jesus Christ! Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!

APPENDIX

Questions for Reflection

The New Evangelization is a way of being a Church that forms missionary disciples. The following considerations are meant to assist parishes in moving from the practice of maintenance to cultivating missionary-focused discipleship efforts. Evangelization is not for a few but rather a challenge for every baptized person and the entire parish community. As such, this section outlines personal and ministerial reflection questions so that each person invited into the process can participate fully.

The following considerations are not exhaustive, but they are intended to help parishes assess their current efforts to determine which areas of ministry are effective and which need to be strengthened. The description of each stage of discipleship is followed by questions to spark reflection and discussion. This outlines some of the considerations that parishes, schools, and apostolates ought to be attentive to in order to be a missionary-oriented community.

The Soil of Missionary Discipleship

The Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3-8) provides a helpful context and insight into cultivating a missionary-oriented approach. It is important that parishes, schools, and apostolates consider, tend to, and nourish the soil in which the seeds of discipleship are to be planted. Each person receives the seeds of God's Word differently. Parishes, imitating Jesus, are called to be attentive to the specific needs and level of receptivity of those to whom they minister. Provision should be made for fostering a culture of accompaniment so that persons are supported and encouraged on their journey. It is also important to remember that the seeds a parish plants

may grow slowly and may be harvested by others later on. Prayer should accompany all discussion and planning, in order to ensure that the soil of parish life receives the nourishment it needs so that the seeds of discipleship can bear fruit.

Encounter

All Christians are invited to a “renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.”⁷³

Christ calls all people to himself in his Body, the Church, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, so that we can enter into a personal relationship with God the Father. “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.”⁷⁴ Reflective reading, *lectio divina*, and the study of Scripture will aid in deepening the encounter with Christ. The Sunday homily breaks open the Word of God by stirring the hearts of people, deepening our knowledge of the faith, renewing our participation in the Church and her sacraments, and strengthening us for the daily challenges of life. By participating in Mass, learning common prayers, and practicing personal and public devotions, Christians appropriate the teachings of the faith into their own lives and are sent forth to witness Christ.

Discipleship involves helping people enter into a personal encounter with Christ through prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, works of mercy, and faith formation.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do I have a relationship with Jesus Christ?
- In what ways do I cultivate this friendship with Jesus and his Church?
- How do I help others grow in their relationship with Christ and the Church?
- What opportunities does the parish provide to cultivate ongoing encounters with Jesus?
- In what ways does the parish accompany our family, friends, and community through the journey of conversion?
- Are there opportunities that are not in place in our parish ministries that we may need to provide?

Accompany

“The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5).”⁷⁵

The Good News of Accompaniment

The parish must provide experienced missionary disciples who can accompany those who are returning to the Church and guide them throughout their journey. In accompanying others, the disciple possesses a love for others and the Church by being welcoming and hospitable. The disciple must be willing to walk with others, share the Good News, and help others grow in their faith and live in solidarity with others. Reconciliation offers the experience of God’s grace and mercy. Catechesis should include formation on the Creed, the seven sacraments, the moral and social teachings of the Church, prayer based on the *kerygma*, and missionary discipleship. This formation should utilize the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what ways am I accompanied on my journey of faith? Who accompanies me and my family?
- How do I accompany others on their journey of faith?
- Do we plan parish activities keeping the art of accompaniment in mind?
- What opportunities for accompaniment are offered in support of the faith of parishioners? What areas can be improved?

Community

The Church in the United States is a community of faith that is composed of members of many different cultures. Respect, understanding, and openness to this diversity is key to assisting all in having a personal encounter with Christ and growing as missionary disciples. True hospitality extends to all members of the community: new and established parishioners, especially children and youth, young adults, the newly married and parents, the divorced or widowed, immigrants, those seeking assistance, and those who feel alienated from the Church. A sense of welcome is fostered by

warm words from the pastor, offering Mass and the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at convenient times, ensuring accessibility of worship and inclusion for those with physical and mental disabilities, and using multiple languages, where needed. Disciples find communion in their families, their parish, and relationships with others.

Questions for Reflection:

- *How do we cultivate a communal and missionary spirit within our family?*
- *Are there areas that we need to work on to strengthen our family as a community of faith?*
- *In what ways can we offer more ongoing formation and support of family life?*
- *How can we become a more welcoming parish community? Where are the areas for growth?*

Send

The commitment to living the Christian life is an essential element of the culture of witness. We witness to the Christian life through living out our respective vocations. As St. Peter tells us, we must “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks . . . for a reason for [our] hope” (1 Pt 3:15). We should be looking for ways to share with others the way we have experienced the salvific love of Jesus Christ. As Bl. Paul VI said, “In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one’s personal experience of faith?”⁷⁶ The public profession of one’s faith through works of charity and justice—which promote solidarity, peace, and the stewardship of creation—builds up the Kingdom of God. Social justice and direct missionary opportunities provide powerful encounters with the person of Jesus and his Church. The innate dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Human life is sacred. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to all that is required to protect and preserve human dignity. The Catholic Church believes that every person is precious and that the measure of every policy and institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life of the human person.

“Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society”.⁷⁷ A basic moral test of culture is to see how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred

by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Disciples on mission witness to the Christian life in word and deed, through the practice of the works of mercy, while affirming the dignity of all human life.

Questions for Reflection:

- *In what ways do I publically witness to the Christian life?*
- *What are the areas of missionary discipleship that I experience as the most challenging to me?*
- *How are these areas calling me to ongoing conversion?*
- *How do we encourage parishioners to publicly witness to the Christian life?*
- *How does our parish show that it is committed to those in need and what are we doing to encourage parishioners to intentionally and actively help those in need?*
- *Do we foster initiatives that outwardly and actively support the life and dignity of the human person?*
- *How might I find ways to share with others the difference the love of Christ has made in my life?*

Notes

- 1 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), no. 1.
- 2 EG, no. 25.
- 3 Pope Francis, Homily, Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, Philadelphia, PA, September 26, 2015.
- 4 EG, no. 102.
- 5 EG, no. 30.
- 6 Jn 15:16.
- 7 Pope Francis, General Audience, March 27, 2013.
- 8 *Lineamenta*, Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, February 2, 2011, no. 10.
- 9 *Disciples Called to Witness* (DCW) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012), 5.
- 10 EG, no. 264.
- 11 EG, nos. 160-162.
- 12 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (LF), no. 20.
- 13 LF, no. 22.
- 14 DCW, 5.
- 15 EG, no. 10.
- 16 EG, no. 259.
- 17 Pope John Paul II, Opening Address to the Assembly of CELAM, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, March 9, 1983 (translation from *L’Osservatore Romano* English Edition 16/780, April 18, 1983, no. 9).
- 18 Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, June 28, 2010.
- 19 DCW, 6.
- 20 EG, no. 14; See also EG, no. 15, which describes the three groups the new evangelization is addressed to.
- 21 EG, no. 20.
- 22 EG, no. 261.
- 23 LF, no. 51.
- 24 Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), no. 18
- 25 DCW, 10.
- 26 See *Lineamenta*, Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, no. 10, which challenges the Church to examine all her pastoral practices and renew them with a missionary character.
- 27 EG, no. 11.

28 Pope Francis, Homily at Mass on the Occasion of the Twenty-Eighth World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013, no. 2.

29 EG, no. 24.

30 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1. Also see EG, no. 7.

31 EG, no. 266

32 EG, no. 3.

33 DCW, 12.

34 See Thirteenth Ordinary Synod of Bishops, List of Final Propositions, October 7-28, 2012, no. 9.

35 DCW, 12-13.

36 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, no. 68.

37 *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), no. 17.A.

38 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 20.

39 DCW, 13.

40 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

41 *Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message of the US Catholic Bishops to Families*, “Families Are a Sign of God’s Presence,” (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1994), <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/follow-the-way-of-love.cfm>.

42 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), no. 87

43 *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops–Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006) no. 321.

44 *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities: A Framework of Access and Inclusion* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998), no. 6, www.usccb.org/_cs_upload/8104_1.pdf.

45 DCW, 15.

46 EG, no. 28.

47 DCW, Preface.

48 EG, no. 127.

49 Ibid., no. 172.

50 EG, no. 46.

51 See AL, Chapter 8.

52 AL, no. 78, quoting the *Relatio Finalis* 2015, nos. 53-54.

53 EG, no. 117.

54 See EG, no. 27.

55 EG, no. 24.

56 EG, no. 178.

57 Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Redemptoris Missio*, no. 42.

58 Concluding Document, *Aparecida*, Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, May 13-31, 2007, no. 278(e).

59 Pope Francis, Homily at Mass on the Occasion of the Twenty-Eighth World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013, no. 1.

60 EG, no. 120.

61 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), no. 1332.

62 EG, no. 280.

63 DCW, 15.

64 Pope Paul VI, General Audience, November 29, 1972. English translation taken from Speech of Prof. Guzmán Carriquiry, Sub-Secretary, Pontifical Council for the Laity, “To Covenant Charismatic Communities of United States.”

65 Pope Francis, Homily at Holy Mass, Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, Philadelphia, Apostolic Journey to the United States, Sept. 26, 2015.

66 Pope Francis, Speech to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, October 14, 2013, no. 3.

67 EG, no. 259.

68 EG, no. 24.

69 The principles in this section are derived from the USCCB documents: *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*, 17; *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation*, 21-31; *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 33-41; and *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions*, 32.

70 The reflection points in this section are derived from these USCCB documents: *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*, 17; *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation*, 21-31; *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 33-41; and *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions*, 32.

71 Pope Francis, Speech to the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013.

72 Pope Francis, Homily, Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, Philadelphia, PA, September 26, 2015.

73 EG, no. 3.

74 EG, no. 120.

75 EG, no. 169.

76 Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 46.

77 EG, no. 187.

Living as Missionary Disciples provides dioceses and parishes and other church ministries with a road map to "new paths for the Church's journey" of evangelization. It is not intended to provide a ready-made program for a parish to follow or a detailed strategic plan to implement. Rather, it offers principles that dioceses and parishes can apply to their efforts in evangelization and missionary discipleship.