

DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12

SECTION 3



WHY?

Why do we need to change? What do we need to change?

There is a **crisis**. There is a crisis **in the Catholic Church**. There is a crisis in the Catholic Church regarding the unprecedented exodus of youth.

Crisis.

There is a **crisis**.

Crisis requires a response. Crisis requires **change**. As we attempt to learn more about how to change and what needs to be changed with youth formation we would do well to look to other formation systems within the Church. What can they teach us? How can we adapt within the Church using the lessons learned from other formation within the Church.

LEARNING FROM SEMINARY FORMATION

What can CCD learn from the seminary? Saint John Paul II wrote: “The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity.” Anything designated to be “one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity” is important.

Since the writing of *Pastores dabo vobis* in 1992 seminary formation has focused on four dimensions. “The seminary and its programs foster the formation of future priests by attending specifically to their human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation—the four pillars of priestly formation developed in *Pastores dabo vobis*. These pillars of formation and their finality give specificity to formation in seminaries as well as a sense of the integrated wholeness of the different dimensions of formation.” (*Program for Priestly Formation no. 70*)

In an ideal world, every man who is to be formed as a priest experiences a deep personal appropriation of grace within all four aspects of his life: the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Seminaries are better than ever, they are doing a better job attempting to prepare men for the reality of the priesthood. For many reasons the difficulties of formation parallel the changes in culture and family which produce the men going into the seminary. While each man is called to attend to all four pillars of priestly formation, rarely do we see it done perfectly. The mere demands of the intellectual formation often receive the majority of his time. Seminaries after all are not only houses of formation they are also graduate schools of theology. Men receive academic grades. They graduated with a diploma. Like it or not, most of his time is spent studying. Even the best seminaries with the best faculties must admit that while the vision of Saint John Paul II was for balanced formation within four dimensions, the system simply isn't designed to support that vision.

The Church has experienced the presence of priests who were well-formed as well as those who are non-integrated. We have all felt the effects of what happens when a person focuses on only one of the dimensions, intellectual formation, and neglects the other important aspects of his life. Intellectual formation is one of four pillars. It is important, but people deserve more. What is true for seminary formation is true with youth formation.

The US Bishops have not released a comprehensive vision on youth formation which addresses both the traditional structures of "CCD" and "youth ministry". The 1997 document *Renewing the Vision*, now 21 years old, is the last definitive statement from the USCCB regarding youth formation. The 2017 document from USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis entitled *Living as Missionary Disciples* is an extensive outline for parish renewal specifically aimed at formation of all parishioners of all ages. The accompaniment to that document is entitled the *National Directory for Catechesis Worksheets*. It is a very important, and yet very practical, resource designed to both evaluate and strengthen the traditional structure known as "CCD".

The same struggles that we see plaguing seminary formation are the same struggles gripping "CCD" and fueling the exodus of today's youth. Seminary formation is designed to address the whole person; however, in reality most seminarians primarily receive intellectual formation with the remaining dimensions rarely appropriated with the same intensity. CCD was never designed to address the whole person. Its history reveals that it was purely a response to intellectual formation. CCD, as mentioned earlier, was a 16th century solution to 16th century problems. The rapidly changing culture forming today's youth needs more than a 16th century approach.

To put it simply: today's youth need more than mere intellectual formation. There is a crisis within youth culture and we simply need more than just intellectual formation. The truths of the Church must be applied with the reality of one's life. We must continue to provide solid orthodox teaching. We must continue to provide theological content, but must do so within a more holistic approach.

LEARNING FROM RCIA

While seminary formation is an essential aspect within the mission of the church, RCIA stands alongside seminary formation, not only in the importance, but more so in its history. The Church has been focused on initiating the lay faithful into the fullness of the faith since the very dawn of Christianity. You may say that Christian initiation is the oldest ministry in the Church. Christian initiation formation has changed throughout the seasons within our 2,000-year history. RCIA has much to teach us about formation.

If you ask pastors to honestly share with you various griefs of their heart I am sure that you will discover that many pastors carry a sadness when they consider the number of people brought into the Church through the Easter Vigil only to be absent from the Church less than two years later. There are many reasons why we do not see newly initiated Catholics thriving in their faith long after that historic night. One reason among many is because of the way with which we walked with them in preparation for that historic night.

The exact text from the book entitled *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* gives pastors and parishes age old wisdom in how they should approach the formation of those in RCIA. RCIA, in its most authentic form, is not based off a calendar per se. It's not about the number of classes or "boxes to check off." RCIA is about a person, Jesus Christ. RCIA is about people, real people who are engaging with the person of Jesus. RCIA is about the heart, the mind and the will all being formed in one harmonious movement of the Holy Spirit. RCIA has always been open to the Spirit. The aim is not to "get to the Easter Vigil" as if that were some accomplishment or end of ministry. No, RCIA is about discernment. We discern: "Where is this person in relation to their readiness to take another step forward?"

In fact, there are rites that mark the journey of RCIA. There is the Rite of Acceptance, Rite of Enrollment, etc. Throughout RCIA there are thresholds that tell where parishioners are on the journey. Each threshold is an indication of what's happening in people's hearts. These thresholds measure the movement of God in a person's life.

For example, in no. 41 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* we read: "the rite that is called rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens is of utmost importance." How does a pastor and his RCIA team know if a person is ready for Rite of Acceptance? The Church supplies us thresholds. She describes what we should be looking for if we are to move forward. In no. 42 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* we read:

"The prerequisite for making this first step is the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates. There must be evidence of the first faith that was conceived during the period of evangelization and precatechumenate and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. Consequently, there must also be evidence of the first stirrings of repentance, a start of the practice of calling up on God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience other company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with some members of the community. The candidates should also be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical right of acceptance."

The discernment to celebrate the Rite of Acceptance needs to happen weeks before the scheduled celebration. The team and sponsors aid in this discernment process by reflecting back to the inquirer's growth in consciousness and change in lifestyle because of the initial exposure to the Gospel within the Catholic tradition. The rite gives us some of the "indicators" that guide us in this discernment process.

1. Evidence of first faith: Does the individual have a desire to be in relationship with God? Does he or she want to discover more to life?
2. Initial conversion: Has the individual begun to recognize that his or her life will change because of God? Have there been any preliminary changes and adjustments in the individual's life, attitudes, or actions because of what he or she has experienced to date?
3. Intent to change one's life: Does the individual desire to leave behind all that is inauthentic? Does he or she desire to live life fully, whatever the cost?

4. Intent to enter into relationship with God in Christ: Does the individual desire to follow the way of Christ in the Gospel? Is he or she able to embrace the demands of the Gospel willingly, at least as much as he or she knows of them now?
5. First stirrings of repentance: Does the individual recognize that there are areas of his or her life that are wounded and broken? Has he or she begun to accept responsibility for areas of failings in his or her own life?
6. Beginnings of the practice of prayer: Has the individual begun to pray outside of the gatherings? Does he or she recognize that prayer is an essential dimension of Christian life?
7. Sense of Church: Has the individual had the opportunity to discuss basic issues of the Catholic Church? Does he or she have a basic awareness of the distinctiveness of the Catholic Church?
8. Some experience of the community: Has the individual expressed an interest in getting to know more about the parish, especially through participation in parish activities? Has he or she had the opportunity to meet and spend time with members of the parish?

These thresholds guide the process. They indicate how to move forward, how fast to move forward, and what to focus on as we move forward. This process is relational. This process has been around for ages: “Let’s meet people where they are and then, based off of where they are, then, and only then, do we move forward.”

So, why isn’t this the case with CCD?

CCD, as it currently operates has very little adaptability to respond to the individual needs of each and every student. If we are honest with ourselves, we can admit that often what drives the program is a rigid adherence to the curriculum and an attitude that says we just need to “get them through the year’s requirements”. Perhaps this is because we are at a loss for what else to do. Perhaps we have fallen into a routine and have continued it because “we’ve always done it like this”. Perhaps, the calendar has driven our approach. Perhaps, our perception is that our focus should be on the required number of classes because “that’s what the diocese wants”. 79% of today’s youth leave the Catholic Church by their 23rd birthday. 79%. Why is this? Because instead of equipping our volunteers to walk with our young people, we have allowed peripheral things become our focus. This is not an indictment on the DREs, Youth Ministers, Parish or Diocesan staff, etc., but this is just an honest assessment of a structure that does not serve an ever-changing demographic that shifts at a more rapid pace than ever before.

Listen to Pope Francis: “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.” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Journey to Cuba, September 26, 2015)

We must change. We must, as the Holy Father says, respond with “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”.

If thresholds work for RCIA, why can't they work for what we used to call "CCD" or youth formation?

- First, thresholds honor the movement of God.
- Second, thresholds honor the young person.
- Third, thresholds yield greater fruit because we are meeting the reality of the student's situation with the reality of the Gospel.

Thresholds are markers of where we are in the present and are connected to where we want to go. What would thresholds look like in youth formation? Let us begin with what are moving toward?

From May through December of 2016 the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux went through a comprehensive planning process. There was an emphasis on forming disciples which was to serve as the golden thread woven throughout all of the planning. The Bishop was clear with his desire: the renewal of parish life. The Holy Father Pope Francis has clearly called us to **make disciples**.

If "making disciples" was to be the golden thread, we needed to ask the question: *How* do you make a disciple? Specifically: How do we make one in a parish? In our diocese? With our resources? Yet, before we could answer how do you make a disciple we first needed to answer the question: **What is a disciple?**

The word disciple appears 22 times in the Gospel. The word disciple is not limited to Jesus, for many of the great teachers at the time of Jesus had disciples. John the Baptist had disciples, as we read in John 1:35-37: "The next day John was there again with two of his **disciples** and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' The two **disciples** heard what he said and followed Jesus."

The word disciple in the Bible, especially in the Gospels, reveals three things. A disciple: (1) learned what the master taught, (2) taught what the master taught, and (3) tried to live like the master.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to commit to the same three things. Disciples **learn** what Jesus taught. Disciples **teach** others what Jesus taught. Disciples long to **live** like Jesus. The first two are understandable and expected. The third is the most difficult. Disciples strive to live like Jesus. Whew, no pressure.

What does it look like to concretely **live** as a disciple? What are the thresholds one should strive for? What is the visible fruit we should expect to see in one's life?

Our strategic planning team analyzed the following documents:

- *Lumen Gentium (The Church in the Modern World)* Second Vatican Council, 1964
- *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World)* Pope Paul VI, 1975
- *Redemptoris Missio (Mission of the Redeemer)* Pope John Paul II, 1990
- *Go and Make Disciples* USCCB, 1992
- *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* USCCB, 1999
- *Ecclesia in America (The Church in America)* Pope John Paul II, 1999
- *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)* Pope Francis, 2013

After summarizing the core themes from each of these major documents on evangelization, we illustrated what we believe to be nine dimensions of a mature missionary disciple. Of course, we are always on the journey. We will never be complete in our growth. Yet, this is the visible fruit we would hope to see in one's life as they mature as a disciple.

Characteristics of a Mature MISSIONARY DISCIPLE



RELATIONSHIP

I have a **personal relationship with Jesus Christ** that gives my life meaning and direction.



CONVERSION

I say **YES** to that which brings me closer to God.
I say **NO** to that which pulls me away from God.
I have aligned my lifestyle with the Gospel.



DISCERNMENT

I want what God wants.
I begin to discern the little things.
I can recognize His voice, and I follow as He leads me.



SACRAMENTS

The Sacraments are a regular part of my life.
Sunday Mass and frequent Confession.
Additional Masses, especially during Lent and Easter.



HOLINESS

I pray daily. I am growing in virtue, particularly
Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance,
Humility, Faith, Hope, & Charity.
I want to be a witness of holiness.



GROUNDING

My relationship with God is **no longer dependent upon whether I "feel" His presence.**
I study the Bible and Church teaching.
On-going study of my faith is a lifestyle.



COMMUNITY

I have people who hold me accountable.
I have regular conversation about
where I am with my commitment to Christ.



OTHERS

I no longer live in a "me-centered" world.
My Faith is no longer just "me and Jesus."
I see and respond to others as Christ does.



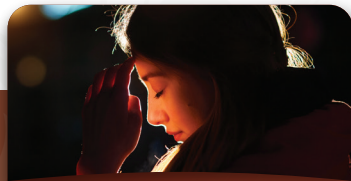
EVANGELIZATION

I know my testimony - the story of what God has done in my life.
I can share and do share that testimony with others.

What does “the nine” look like for healthy youth formation? Our team consulted with experts across the country to translate the benchmarks of adult formation to age appropriate expectations for our youth. If we look at youth formation through the lens of 6-12th grade, we ask ourselves: “If we have seven years, from 6th thru 12th grade, to work with our youth, what would we want to see in their lives by the time the graduate from high school?”

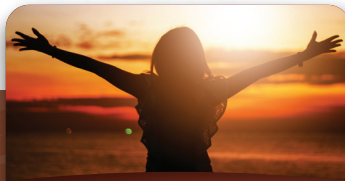
Imagine, for a moment, if all our graduating high school seniors looked like this.

Characteristics of a Teenage **MISSIONARY DISCIPLE**



RELATIONSHIP

Have a relationship with Jesus Christ
Pray more days than they don't for 20 minutes
in a contemplative manner with Scripture



CONVERSION

Have learned how engage their will
Seek out monthly confession
and a weekly examination of conscience



DISCERNMENT

Ask God to show them the way
Are able to pray and hear God speak.
Do what God and the Church asks of them.



SACRAMENTS

Committed to the sacraments
Go to Mass weekly, open to daily Mass.
Confession once a month.



HOLINESS

Growing in virtue
Growing in the virtues of
prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude



GROUNDING

Relationship with God not governed by feeling
They feel comfortable reading the Bible
and understand the Church on tough topics



COMMUNITY

They have others who hold them accountable
See small group accountability as a need
and know how to build it



OTHERS

It's not about “me and Jesus”
Have a general sense of being other-focused
and willing to serve on their own



EVANGELIZATION

Not afraid to share their story
Are familiar with their own faith testimony
and want to share it

How do we get there? How do we partner with God so that our teens grow in the aforementioned graces? Thresholds. We set thresholds from 6th thru 12th grade and then design a curriculum and formation process designed to help teenagers mature through the thresholds.

For example, we know that we want our teens to have a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It's part of "the nine" that we just illustrated for teenagers. What we are illustrating is that we want our 12th grade graduating seniors to "Pray more days than they don't". We want them to be able to pray "for 20 minutes" and we want them to do so "in a contemplative manner with Scripture". In order for that to happen, we have to work backwards from 12th grade.

- In order to progress to that threshold of prayer, where would we want to be in 11th grade?
- In order to reach that threshold of prayer by their 12th grade year, where would we want to be in 10th grade?
- When do we teach them about prayer?
- What does it practically look like in their lives?
- What are the small goals we can give them?

The thresholds regarding prayer would need to be strategically placed throughout the curriculum and mentoring. Of course, this approach is incompatible with "How many classes we need to cover to keep the diocese happy?" However, this approach using thresholds is compatible with the mind of the Church and RCIA. It is also in line with the mind of the US Bishops and their most recent document *Living as Missionary Disciples*. The bishops write:

"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' (John 15:16)." (pg. 22)

"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." (pg. 2)

We must change. Our attitudes, our calendars, our curriculum, everything we do in youth formation needs to fundamentally be at the service of our young people and their formation. We must change the mentality and false perception that it is a certain number of classes is "what the diocese wants". It is *not* about the number of classes. Regardless of how things may have been presented, it never was. It is *not* about the DREs calendar, it never was. It is *not* about "getting them through the year."

The need for change is critical. *We are in this together.* We all need to be part of the solution. This is how Jesus envisioned it when He commanded us "go, therefore and make disciples".



What about Confirmation?

SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

As anticipate better serving our teens, many are asking, “What about confirmation?”

The details of the new Confirmation preparation, as well as the first draft of the curriculum based on thresholds and assessments, will be presented to all the priests and DREs on **September 26, 2018**.

There will be a few options of how you can see the presentation.

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM	Option 1 (for priests): Presentation for Pastors and Associate Pastors, in person
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Option 2 (for priests): Livestream via YouTube for Pastors and Associate Pastors
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Option 1 (for lay leaders): Meeting with Coordinators of Youth Formation (DREs and/or youth ministers)
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Option 2 (for lay leaders): Meeting with Coordinators of Youth Formation (DREs and/or youth ministers)

Looking forward to presenting all of this for you and your staff!