
Parish Discipleship Pathway

Diocese of Superior Evangelization & Missionary Discipleship

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."

MATTHEW 28:19

"Grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ."

EPHESIANS 4:15

Overview

Introduction

The mission of the Church is clear: it exists to evangelize. How we as 21st century Catholics in rural Wisconsin make that come to life is less clear.

Let's be honest, evangelization is a brand new and, frankly, rather uncomfortable concept for most of us. Transforming a parish's culture to truly prioritize this mission is going to take time, training, leadership and prayer.

As Bishop Powers' Pastoral Letter on Evangelization (May 2023) makes clear: we are not interested in 'flash in the pan solutions'. We want to pursue intentional transformation, always grounded in our own deeper conversion. Thus, the first step in this process must be our own lived encounter with the Lord Jesus. Put simply: evangelized people, evangelize people.

The goal of this booklet is not to script out a set of programs for the parishes to run. Rather, it is to provide resources and ideas so that when the Holy Spirit leads your parish to be more intentional in one of these areas of mission you, as parish leaders, know where to turn.

A Variety of Parishes, A Variety of Pathways

Every parish in our diocese is unique. While the phases of the discipleship pathway (see page 2) are universal, every parish must discern the specific ways that the Holy Spirit is calling them to live out those phases.

Also, does every parish need to offer programs and ministries for every area of mission? Not necessarily. Nevertheless, our goal is that every parish has a concrete pathway that at least incorporates resources from outside the parish to meet its peoples' needs in forming lives of intentional, missionary discipleship. For some parishes this might mean coming together as a cluster to offer some programs and events. Or, it might mean joining with other larger parishes in the area for particular parts of the process.

Parish Discipleship Pathway

Discipleship Process

1. *Pre-Evangelization*

The Body of Christ seeks to build relationships and establish trust -- tilling the soil for the planting of the seed. Focuses include: relationship, a sense of mutual belonging, invitation, and the joyful, authentic witness of Christian life.

2. *Evangelization*

This stage is the ardent proclamation of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Focuses include: proclaiming the Gospel, facilitating an encounter with the Lord Jesus – especially in the Eucharist – and invitation to respond by making a decision to follow him.

3. *Discipleship*

This is the stage for mentorship in the Christian life. The Church provides catechesis and sacramental grace leading to deeper conversion, and intellectual formation leading to a fully-integrated Christian vision. Adults receive Sacraments of Initiation in this stage.

4. *Apostolate*

The cycle begins anew. A disciple, continuing to grow and be fed in Christian community, carries out the Church's mission in his or her sphere of influence: accompanying people into conversion and bringing the healing power of Christ's redemption to the world.

Aspects of the Process

The Role of the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist

The mission of evangelization is not accomplished by us. The Holy Spirit is the only one that can change lives. The entirety of the Church's mission flows from the grace of God. The Eucharist, which is Christ's true presence among us, is thus referred to as the 'source and the summit' of the Christian life. When giving us the image that He is the vine and we are the branches, Jesus says: 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).

Universal Calls to Holiness and Mission

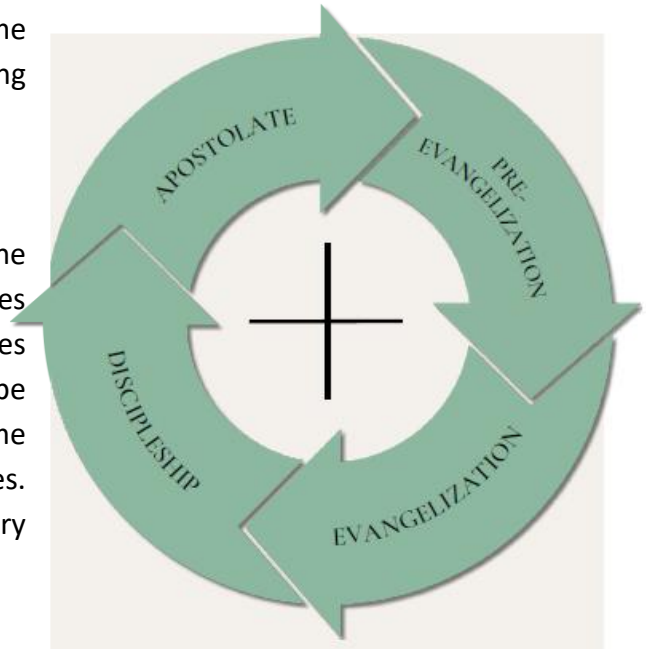
Without exception, all of the baptized are called to both a life of holiness and a life of mission. If we have heard the Good News, we respond in two key ways: a life of continuing conversion AND a life of mission, seeking to make Christ known and loved. Every human being is called to encounter Christ through evangelization, to follow him as a disciple, and to serve him in apostolate.

Parish Discipleship Pathway

The parish's responsibilities follow these same callings: tending the flock (holiness) and equipping the flock to become fishers of men (mission).

The Cycle of Mission

There is no graduation in this process. The process of evangelization and discipleship culminates in a life of holiness and mission pouring ourselves back into this cycle wherever the Lord calls us. Pope Francis put this best when he said that some Christians are not disciples and others missionaries. Rather, all of the baptized are called to be missionary disciples in their unique spheres of influence.



Pre-Evangelization

In the parish, this phase is accomplished through hospitality and building community. Fr. James Mallon says we have to 'go to war with the notion of anonymous Christianity'. Meaning, as parishes we need to not only graciously welcome everyone that comes in the door, but also get to know them and invite them deeper into the life of the parish. It also means being intentional about social events at the parish in a few key ways:

1. Have advertising and branding for your parish's discipleship pathway on hand: for example, if the parish is planning to run Alpha or Christ Life soon, have cards advertising that on the tables at a fish fry or other community event.
2. Have hospitality ministers on hand to welcome and direct guests. Better yet, equip parishioners to do organic hospitality ministry: welcoming guests, learning their names, making connections, establishing relationships, building trust.

In our individual lives, this phase is about becoming 'fishers of men'. Missionary Disciples are aware of who the people in our spheres are. And they prayerfully discern whom the Lord might be calling them to 'fish' for through relationships that lead to invitation and witness.

Key Aspects

- *Working toward Openness*
- *Relationship*
- *A Sense of Belonging*
- *Invitation*
- *Witness of Christian Life*
- *Prayer*

Parish Discipleship Pathway

Evangelization

In the parish, this phase is accomplished through a number of ways, but the heart of evangelization is always the proclamation of the Kerygma and an invitation for individuals to respond in a concrete way. This can and ought to happen in a number of different settings:

- Preaching at Masses -- especially on Christmas and Easter
- Catholic School programs, Religious Education classes and Youth Ministry events – especially gatherings with parents at checkpoints like Sacramental Preparation years.
- Parish Missions and Parish Retreats
- Specific programs for evangelization (see page 5).

There are a number of different evangelization tools such as Alpha in a Catholic Context, Christ Life, the Search, the 99, and the Rescued Project. The goal of these programs is to meet adults where they are at, speak to their questions and common human experience, and proclaim the fullness of the Gospel in a way that invites a response and decision to follow Jesus.

Retreats can also be a powerful means of facilitating evangelization and an encounter with God. Some options for this sort of retreat would be Cursillo, Christ Renews His Parish (now known as Welcome), and Life in the Spirit.

Key Aspects

- Proclamation of the Gospel
- Testimony
- Encounter with Jesus
- Invitation to Respond
- Prayer

Evangelization Tools

The goal of evangelization is to lead individuals to encounter Christ and make a decision to surrender themselves to Him in a life of discipleship. As Catholics, we are not accustomed to pursuing this very intentionally or very boldly. So, utilizing an effective tool to help us is vital. Here are some tried and true resources:

Parish Discipleship Pathway

	NUMBER OF SESSIONS	STREAMING/D VD	RETREAT COMPONENT	FOLLOW-UP COMPONENT	ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	COST
ALPHA	11 VIDEO SESSIONS	STREAMING THROUGH ALPHA.ORG	BUILT-IN WEEKEND RETREAT	NO	TRAINING MODULES, PARTICIPANT GUIDE, PROMO MATERIALS	FREE
DISCOVERING CHRIST	7 VIDEO SESSIONS	DVD SET	BUILT-IN ONE DAY RETREAT	FOLLOWING CHRIST PROGRAM & SHARING CHRIST PROGRAM	COORDINATOR MANUAL, TRAINING DVDS, PARTICIPANT BOOKLET, PROMO MATERIALS	\$160 FOR BASIC KIT (FURTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE)
THE 99	3 VIDEO SESSIONS	DVD SET	NO	BOOK STUDY	TRAINING COURSE, HANDBOOK, PROMO MATERIALS	\$199.95
THE SEARCH	7 VIDEO SESSIONS	STREAMING THROUGH FORMED.ORG OR DVD SET	OPTIONAL WEEKEND RETREAT	<i>AFTER THE SEARCH</i> 7 SESSION VIDEO SERIES	COORDINATOR MANUAL, PARTICIPANT BOOKLET, PROMO MATERIALS	FREE WITH FORMED.ORG SUBSCRIPTION OR PURCHASE DVD SET FOR \$139.95
RESCUED PROJECT	9 VIDEO SESSIONS	STREAMING THROUGH ACTSXXIX.ORG	NO	NO	COORDINATOR MANUAL, PARTICIPANT BOOKLET, PROMO MATERIALS	FREE

Parish Discipleship Pathway

The Hinge of Invitation

Building a culture of invitation is vital. It must become normal for average parishioners to invite other parishioners and others in their life to participate in these programs. In fact, unless that happens, these programs will only serve the same group that probably already attends everything our parishes offer.

Discipleship

The goal of this phase is to mentor and form the baptized as they learn to follow Christ in every aspect of their lives. The Church talks about four areas of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. True discipleship includes all four areas. Discipleship is the process by which we come to see the world as Christ sees it and love the way that Christ loves.

Discipleship takes place both at the parish and outside of the parish. At the parish, it occurs through programs like prayer groups, bible studies, small groups, formation classes, spiritual direction, and the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA). It also occurs through events like retreats, parish missions, and opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration and communal penance. Of course, the celebration of the Mass and reception of the Holy Eucharist is the heart of discipleship.

Parishes can also partner with apostolates such as Evangelical Catholic or FOCUS Parish Missions to greatly augment their discipleship efforts (See page 9).

Discipleship can and ought to happen at home as well through personal and family prayer, but also through coming together with other disciples in our homes for prayer and authentic Christian friendship.

There are more resources for discipleship today than ever before, from online courses, talks, podcasts, and books, to trainings and apostolates you can partner with. See page 10 for a listing of some available resources.

Key Aspects

- Mentorship
- in the Christian Life
- Building a Life of Prayer
- Reception of the Sacraments
- Catechesis

Parish Discipleship Pathway

Apostolate

"Go forth and proclaim the Good News!"

An 'apostle' is simply someone that is 'sent'. At the conclusion of every Mass, all of the faithful are called to take up the Church's mission in their lives.

There is a strong temptation to think that this first and foremost means being more and more active in the parish. For some, it may, for others it may not. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the vocation of the laity is to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (898). It is their role to bring the Kingdom of God into every sphere of society: their homes first, but also their work, their social life, the political sphere and the public square. Through their life of discipleship -- especially their life of prayer and discernment -- the laity are called to follow where the Lord leads them.

For some this includes ministry in the life of the parish either as volunteers or as staff. After all, the life of the parish depends upon the laity sharing their time, talent and treasure generously to advance the mission of the parish.

"Holy Spirit, I'm available. Use me as you will today."

A first step that all the faithful can take is saying this simple prayer daily. Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of the Church being available to those in our lives. We must genuinely listen and encounter them in the pains, trials and sorrows they share with us. These exchanges are amazing opportunities to respond in love and give witness to the reason for our hope in Jesus. Ryan O'Hara's free course 'Everyday Apostles' on ReviveParishes.com provides a great training in this.

Key Aspects

- Continued discipleship
- Radical self-gift according to one's particular vocation
- Docility to the Holy Spirit

"As disciples mature, they reach a turning point where they take personal ownership and responsibility for the mission of the Church. They realize that they have also been anointed and sent by Christ on a mission, and that there is no such thing as missional unemployment for the baptized." – Sherry Weddell

Parish Discipleship Pathway

Discerning Vision

Step 1 - Prayerfully Pursue a Discipleship Pathway

As a group, read, study, and pray together. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a clear vision of what a missional parish is going to look like for you. Be bold. Take stock of and assess everything your parish is already doing. You may already be doing some things that fit your vision well. Other things may need tweaking; while others might not fit at all.

Do not plan to start a whole bunch of new programs all at once. Do start to envision a holistic approach to mission that is intentional about all four phases. The following pages have many books, video series, and apostolates that can help you pursue this process. For parishes that are new to this, this step could take a year to pursue healthily - be patient!

Step 2 - Cast a Clear Vision

Cast this vision of your discipleship pathway to the faithful of your parish. Make cards and signage to make this vision as simple and accessible as possible. Refer to it constantly in homilies, in parent meetings, until it's something everyone around the parish is aware of. The goal here is to normalize the expectation that all of us are called to ongoing conversion and apostolate. Even if you are not ready to fully implement the vision, start communicating where as a parish you are going to go -- build confidence, energy, and investment.

Step 3 - Takes Steps of Implementation

Patiently and prayerfully take steps to establish the key elements of your discipleship pathway. There are different strategies you could take here, but slow growth tends to be lasting growth.

"At parish and diocesan levels, people commonly talk about the new evangelization as 'getting people to come to Mass again,' or 'getting them active in the parish.' While these are good things, unfortunately we also have people coming to Mass or active in the parish who are not converted, according to the definition of John Paul II. His definition of conversion includes a 'complete and sincere adherence to Christ and the Gospel,' and 'accepting by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.' To surrender to the Lordship of Christ by a conscious, personal decision is no little thing!" – Dr. Ralph Martin

Parish Discipleship Pathway

Mission Partners

Leadership Resources

Very few of us have specific training in organizational leadership. 'Discerning a vision', 'casting a vision', 'implementing a vision', 'transforming a culture' -- these are concepts that are foreign to us. Luckily, there are authentically Catholic organizations that you can work with to build these skills. Here are a few to check out:



- AMAZING PARISH provides coaching and resources to pastors and their teams. They focus on promoting effective leadership and healthy organizational culture, so that parish leaders can pursue the mission of evangelization and discipleship.



- DIVINE RENOVATION MINISTRIES offers a wide variety of resources to parishes trying to move from 'Maintenance to Mission'. They have a number of books on topics ranging from big picture strategy, to practical guidance on various aspects of mission. They also have many online resources, including mission coaching programs for priests.

Mission Resources

As human beings, we all need real-life examples to be able to see what we are pursuing. A great benefit of working with the following partners is exposure and direct mentorship in missionary discipleship.



- EVANGELICAL CATHOLIC (EC) trains leaders at the parish to disciple parishioners into conversion and a life of missionary discipleship. They do this through formation, coaching and resources. EC says,

"Imagine your lay people striving to live out their baptismal call to holiness, longing for the sacraments, praying daily, and going out to bring more people to Jesus in the Church. Imagine your Catholic community equipped with lay people who can fruitfully witness and make more disciples of Jesus in the world. It's possible! They are just waiting to be personally called into mission and formed to carry out Jesus' call to make disciples."

In 2023 EC launched an annual conference for clergy called Priests for an Apostolic Age. The conference is a great opportunity for priests and deacons to be trained and inspired to go and stay on mission as leaders in their parishes.



- FOCUS PARISH MISSIONS, an outgrowth of Fellowship of Catholic University Students, sends two missionaries to live at parishes for a term of three years, where they serve by

Parish Discipleship Pathway

evangelizing and discipling parishioners, and working with leadership to help create a culture of discipleship. They say,

"The vision is simple. It's not a program; it's Christ's model of face-to-face evangelization, and of building a community of disciples who are both faithful to the Church and equipped with the practical skills to share their faith with others."

"In an apostolic time, institutions need to become more self-conscious about their mission, their aims, and their inner spirit. Those who lead and inhabit them need to know with greater clarity what they are doing, why they are doing it, what the likely consequences of taking certain kinds of decisions will be, and how the inner culture of the institution is best maintained against the tide." – Msgr. James P. Shea

Diocesan Resources

Each of the talks given in our Maintenance to Mission initiative have been recorded and are available at the Superior Evangelization & Missionary Discipleship YouTube page. Many other resources are also available at catholicdos.org.

- Maintenance to Mission Overview - This video contains a broad overview of our diocesan evangelization initiative and is a great place to start.
- Our Cultural Moment with Msgr. James Shea - This video is an introduction to the concept of ours being a new Apostolic Age.
- The Mission of the Parish with Fr. James Mallon - This video introduces the essential mission of evangelization and proposes first steps for renewal.
- The Priest's Role in Mission with Bishop Andrew Cozzens - This video discusses the unique role of priests in the Church's mission.
- The Primacy of Prayer with Fr. Dave Pivonka - This video teaches us the essential role that prayer and the Holy Spirit play in our mission.
- Evangelization Teams with Michael Havercamp - This video teaches us some basics of working with a Parish Evangelization Team.
- Back to Basics - These six videos teach about the Church's mission of evangelization and discipleship and her call for a New Evangelization in our day.
- The Kerygma with Ryan O'Hara - A four part series walking through the Kerygma. These talks were given at the 2022 Clergy Workshop. (Coming Soon!)

Parish Discipleship Pathway

Additional Resources

Online Trainings and Resources

- REVIVE PARISHES offers twenty free online courses on all of the vital aspects of parish renewal: evangelization, discipleship, stewardship, leadership, the Eucharist, small groups and more. Each course is given by leading experts such as Chris Stefanick, Bishop Andrew Cozzens, Fr. Mike Schmitz and Patrick Lencioni.
- WORD ON FIRE (WOF), founded by Bishop Robert Barron, provides evangelization through a variety of resources including podcasts, videos, books, articles, Scripture studies, and Gospel meditations. The ministry also runs the Word on Fire Institute, which offers online courses to equip evangelists for the 21st century. Course topics center on topics such as theology, philosophy, evangelization, and culture.

Important Books

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| • From Christendom to Apostolic Mission
<i>Monsignor James Shea</i> | • Making Missionary Disciples
<i>Curtis Martin</i> |
| • Divine Renovation
<i>Fr. James Mallon</i> | • Fruitful Discipleship
<i>Sherry Weddell</i> |
| • Rescued
<i>Fr. John Riccardo</i> | • Forming Intentional Disciples
<i>Sherry Weddell</i> |

“To seek, love and bear witness to Jesus!
This is your commitment;
these are the instructions I leave you!”

- ST. JOHN PAUL II