



THE PERSONAL APOSTOLATE

By virtue of Baptism, all of us in the Church are sent on a mission—to live the Gospel and to give witness to the love and power of Jesus Christ by our words, actions, and values. Many times we may think that is the job of priests, sisters, bishops, and deacons, but the Lord calls everyone to go forth and make disciples. How do we accomplish such a daunting task?

If we take our lead from the example of the early Church, we see those first followers of Jesus being immersed in the Holy Spirit, giving themselves to prayer, and continuing to study the teachings of Christ. We can only share with others what we ourselves have received, so the first step in discipleship is a profound commitment to prayer and study, with the sacraments as our grounding.

Next, the first disciples fearlessly spoke of their faith in Christ and what he had accomplished in them. Coupled with a fervent and generous love which reached out to the poor and suffering, this proclamation of Jesus' power and truth was remarkably effective. Simply through kindness, love, joy, sympathy, and generosity, our actions radiate Christ. When we join those actions to simple moments of speaking of our faith, people will be attracted to the One who guides and directs our life.

The Lord bids us to proclaim our faith from the housetops! We do not have to be a Bible thumper or quote the Catechism constantly to live out our apostolate. Who are the people in your life who need Jesus? Need His healing, mercy, and peace? Listen to their problems, pray with and for them, buy them a Bible and a Catechism, invite them to join you at church, cultivate their faith, as you would nourish a little sprout bursting through the soil. Imagine if every Catholic brought someone into the practice of the faith every few years!

A NOTE FROM BISHOP HYING

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**GOD IS CALLING
YOU TO SERVE HIM
IN AND FROM
THE ORDINARY.**

- ST. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

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YEARLY FORMATION NEWSLETTER TOPICS

EASTER 2020

The Paschal Mystery

JUNE 2020

Evangelization

JULY 2020

Discipleship

AUGUST 2020

Baptism and Confirmation

SEPTEMBER 2020

Reclaiming Sunday

OCTOBER 2020

Interior Life: Prayer

NOVEMBER 2020

Interior Life: Mortification

DECEMBER 2020

Confession

JANUARY 2021

Goodness

FEBRUARY 2021

Beauty

MARCH 2021

Truth

APRIL 2021

The Personal Apostolate

YOU MUST REALIZE NOW, MORE CLEARLY THAN EVER, THAT GOD IS CALLING YOU TO SERVE HIM IN AND FROM THE ORDINARY, SECULAR, AND CIVIL ACTIVITIES OF HUMAN LIFE. HE WAITS FOR US EVERYDAY, IN THE LABORATORY, IN THE OPERATING THEATRE, IN THE ARMY BARRACKS, IN THE UNIVERSITY CHAIR, IN THE FACTORY, IN THE WORKSHOP, IN THE FIELDS, IN THE HOME, AND IN ALL THE IMMENSE PANORAMA OF WORK.

- ST. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

DEFINING OUR TERMS

Laity: The laity are all the members of the Church who are not clergy or members of a religious community. The laity participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministry of Christ in the world (CCC 897).

Duties of the laity: To share in the universal call to holiness, develop a strong spiritual life, unite themselves with Christ through prayer, good works, and the sacraments. They are called to be witnesses of Christ, and, by their word and example, bring the Gospel message to the world. The laity are called to use their gifts and material goods for God's glory in the world.

Apostolate: "All members of the Church share in [Christ's] mission, though in various ways: 'The Christian vocation is, of its nature a vocation to the Apostolate as well.' Indeed, we call an apostolate 'every activity of the Mystical Body' that aims 'to spread the kingdom of Christ all over the earth'" (CCC 863).

Vocation: The calling or destiny we have in this life and hereafter. God has created the human person to know, love, and serve him; the fulfillment of this vocation is eternal happiness. Christ calls the faithful to the perfection of holiness (CCC Glossary).

Charism: A specific gift or grace of the Holy Spirit which benefits the Church, given in order to help a person live out the Christian life and to serve the common good in the building up of the Church.

RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL IN OUR PERSONAL APOSTOLATE

In the recent past I was blessed to work alongside a very joyful, holy, young adult woman who was actively seeking and discerning God's plan for her life. Let's call my friend Gina (names have been changed to protect the innocent). Gina came to work in the diocese for summer employment. She was in her junior year of an intensive nursing program at a Catholic university in the eastern part of the country.

A few details about Gina, that are important background information: she is a practicing Catholic who lives a life in accord with the teaching of the Church. What is beautiful about Gina is not just that she is obedient, but that she loves the teaching of the Church and wants to be faithful to God's call in her life. Gina grew up in a big Catholic family where she was raised to love and serve the Church. I was immediately impressed with her sincerity in seeking the Lord and in her faithfulness to answer God's will for her own life. She understood inherently that encounter with Christ leads to a response. Gina was praying and open to a religious vocation or to marriage. She hoped that working for the Church that summer would help her to see where God might be leading her – she would soon need to make some decisions in life.

After spending eight weeks serving in the Diocese, I had the last few days with Gina as she processed her time here. I noticed that she seemed to be overwhelmed and confused. We talked through life and her frustrations. Gina began to wonder about where God was calling her. During the summer she began to see the importance of sharing the message of Christ with others. Like so many others, she was not sure how to do this. She started to question her inclination to be a nurse and work in hospitals – the dream she had her entire life. She boldly stated one day, "Well, I guess I will have to change my major." She thought the only solution to wanting to share the Gospel was to be a church employee. I listened to her patiently as she made a case to dump her nursing dream and get a degree in Theology.

I do not doubt Gina's sincerity to preach "Christ to all she meets." And I certainly attribute that to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. That summer, I could see that God was growing something new in her heart and equipping her with charisms to live out her vocation and call in the future. But to say it bluntly, she may have had it wrong. I do think she was hearing the Lord's call – but that didn't necessarily require her to change her major and work in the Church. I began to unpack with her what it means to live out this personal apostolate in every ordinary workplace.

VOCATION & UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

You see, we all have a vocation given to us by God. First and foremost, we must pray and discern what state in life God is leading us to. For many faithful lay Catholics there has been a misunderstanding that in order to be really holy – we would have to be a priest or religious.

For Gina, she was still unpacking her choice between religious life and married life. She grew up in a good Catholic family and loved the idea of having her own, but she also saw the value in visiting convents and being open to the possibility of a religious call. I give her credit for her openness to the Lord's will. But there is a higher vocation to which all Christians are called from the moment of our baptism. The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* says, "Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification'. However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others" (LG 39).

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This vocation to be holy begins at the moment we are initiated into the Body of Christ. At Baptism we are united to Christ. As such, we participate in his priestly mission, his prophetic mission, and his kingly mission in the world. That is to say, we take the Good News we have been given in order to renew the temporal order in our daily lives. So when I say that Gina may have had it wrong, I meant to say that her "burn to share the Gospel" was true and good, but that God may have wanted her do it in the context of the "nursing life" for which she was preparing. Another way to look at this vocation in an applied or practical sense is to understand or seek our "personal apostolate". This universal call to holiness and this urge to respond to the Gospel means putting our faith to "work" in the world to heal and sanctify it. In the Vatican II document *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which is the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the council fathers teach us this reality: "The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth. . . . In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. . . . The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world" (AA 2).

DISCERNING OUR APOSTOLATE

As laity most of us are called to live in the world permeating society as leaven of the Gospel message. It is important that we take inventory of our personal strengths but also our desires and God-given charisms that may inform our hearts of the way God is calling us to share him with the world. It was apparent to me after spending time with Gina that she was extremely nurturing, and her love for people was apparent in how she listened and showed compassion/empathy for others. I can't say for sure but I would not be surprised to hear that her apostolate may in fact be in the medical world! We all ought to be as thoughtful as Gina as we seek to know the path to live out our own call.

FURTHER STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

TO READ

- Christifidelis Laici, St. John Paul II
- Apostolicam Actuositatem, Second Vatican Council
- The Way, The Furrow, The Forge, St. Josemaría Escrivá
- Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace, Dr. Scott Hahn

TO WATCH

- Universal Call to Holiness, John Bergsma
- What's my vocation?, Fr. Mike Schmitz

TO ASSESS

- Called and Gifted, Charism Assessment by the Siena Institute

TIPS FOR PARISH LEADERSHIP

As this first year of formation of leaders is coming to a close, take some time with your Evangelization team and parish or school staff to reflect on what you have been through.

- What did you learn about the Church's mission of evangelization and your role in it?
- How did you grow spiritually? Which of the 4 holy habits made the biggest impact on your interior life?
- What do you still need to grow in confidence and competence as an evangelizer?
- Who do you feel called to be sharing the gospel with right now in the midst of your life and work?

The next cycle of newsletters to aid in formation will be ready this May! Share with each other goals for the coming year as you continue to grow and learn together in community.

FORMATION IN THE PARISH

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- What comes to mind when you reflect on the phrase "universal call to holiness"? What does this mean in your state of life and situation?
- What comes to mind when you think of a personal apostolate?
- Who is someone in your own life that God may be calling you to evangelize?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

- After reading this story about Gina, reflect on what it means to "restore the temporal order" or "sanctify the world" in our personal apostolate.
- Share reasons why this is essential to the work of evangelization and our Go Make Disciples initiative in the Diocese.



MARY AND ELIZABETH, 1866

CARL HEINRICH BLOCH

desire and response to serve in the ordinary ways of life was her way of answering God's call to share Jesus with others—her personal apostolate. Mary professes her joy to answer God's call when she says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1: 46). We can only strive to hope that we too can have the grace and courage to magnify the Lord in all the places we go in this world.

"O blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, with joy and wonder we seek to make our own your Magnificat, joining you in your hymn of thankfulness and love. With you we give thanks to God, 'whose mercy is from generation to generation,' for the exalted vocation and the many forms of mission entrusted to the lay faithful" (AA 64).

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:39-43)

This image of the Visitation is a shining example of encounter and response. Mary had just encountered God in the most profound way any human being could. She said Yes to him and allowed him to be incarnate within her body and thus within the world. This encounter with God then leads her to go and bring Christ to another.

I like to imagine this greeting as a loving embracing after Mary's long hard trip to visit her cousin. The joy on Elizabeth's gives us a sense of the love and friendship shared by them. The splendor radiating from Mary's face portrays the light that she carries to the world.

Her response to the Incarnation is a beautiful moment of poetry but it is also a simple act of service to another pregnant woman—Elizabeth. After the Annunciation, Mary did not give a great theological sermon with volumes of theological speculation. She was not trying to do a great religious work that would lead her to fame or popularity. She was simply living as the woman and the family member she was called to be—the duty of the moment in a holy way. Her