

# **The Game Plan**

## **Building a Culture of Missionary Discipleship in the Catholic Parish**

When we think of Evangelization, we often think of hitting the streets, going out there to the highways and bi-ways to try to motivate people to come to church. But, when we think about Evangelization in that way, we're really putting the cart before the horse. When the Church invites us to take up the call of the new Evangelization, one of the things that are new about it is The Audience.

The National Directory for Catechesis says, "The New Evangelization is directed to the church herself...

... To the baptized who were never effectively evangelized before...

... To those who have never made a personal commitment to Christ and the Gospel...

... To those formed by the values of secular culture...

... To those who have lost a sense of faith...

... To those who were alienated...

The New Evangelization is aimed at personal transformation through the development of a personal relationship with God:

- Participation in sacramental worship
- The development of a mature ethical and social conscience
- Ongoing catechesis and a deepening integration of faith, into all areas of Life. "

Let's break that down. The New Evangelization is directed to the Church herself...

Before we can hit the streets, before we can evangelize others, we have to be evangelized. Those of us who go to church have to be transformed by a personal relationship with God. But many times we find that the cultures of our parishes aren't really geared to that. There might be lots of programs and activities going on, with little sense of how they fit into the overall discipleship process. So how can we become more intentional about the way we form disciples in the parish? Taking our cues from the general directory for Catechesis, we pay attention to the fact the Evangelization happens in a series of slow stages.

Evangelization is a Gradual Process. So, if the purpose of a parish is to make disciples then what's the process? How do we actually do it? We can picture this process like we picture the stages of a baseball game. Baseball unfolds in a series of stages as well. The first goal is to get to first base and

the second goal is to get to 2nd base, then 3rd then home plate to score a run. In terms of Evangelization, the first stage is called primary or initial Evangelization. At this stage a person is lead through a series of thresholds to the decision to put Jesus at the center of their lives. In Evangelization terms, that decision is 1st base. This stage is especially geared to nonbelievers and the religiously indifferent. But it's also important to help baptized and practicing Catholics to evaluate where they stand in their relationship with Jesus.

The next phase for the person who has made the decision to follow Jesus is called Initiatory Catechesis. This phase is like an apprenticeship in the hearts and habits of a disciple. It helps person get traction in their relationship with Jesus by developing

- the habit of prayer
- regular meditation on the scriptures
- growing in friendship with other Christians,
- getting rooted in sacramental life
- Learning to rely on the help of the Holy Spirit.
- Getting a basic sense of the Catholic Proposal and developing a heart for service.

This prepares the person for 2nd base. 2nd base is almost a world of its own. It's what the general directory refers to as Permanent Perfective Catechesis, where we unpack the whole bottomless treasury of the Church. Over the course of a lifetime, we learn Salvation History, the Sacramental Economy, Church History, Sacred Tradition, Morality, the Importance of Mary, and the Lives of the Saints, Christian Spirituality and Catholic Social Teaching. It's an endless truly lifelong process. But the Lord doesn't just want us to know things. He wants also to prepare us to be Missionary Disciples. At 3rd base we are equipped with basic skills in Evangelization. We learn about the special gifts that God has invested in us to help build the Church. Finally we head back out into the world fully equipped to go make Disciples and to help them come to know Jesus in the Church.

One of our challenges that the GDC points out is that we often try to send baptized people straight to 2nd base. It's very hard to catechize people who have no explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ. Let's go back to 1st base. Pope Francis talked about this first stage where he said, "We have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement of Kerygma which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... On the lips of the catechists the first proclamation must ring out over and over. "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." " This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten about or replaced by other, more important things...It is first because it is the principal proclamation ... the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level, and every moment. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in, and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the

significance of every subject which the latter treats.

Ok, so we have initial Evangelization with the kerygma to bring people to first base, the decision to put Christ at the center of their lives. Then we form these people in the hearts and habits of a disciple with initiatory catechesis. Then we start unpacking the world of permanent lifelong catechesis at 2<sup>nd</sup> base. 3<sup>rd</sup> base offers opportunities for training to make more disciples using the gifts God has entrusted to you. And then you go back into the world to go make disciples. Once we have understood this simple framework we now want to implement this same process everywhere. This is called Alignment. Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process. Alignment ensures that the entire church body is moving in the same direction. Use the stages of the diamond to align all of the process we use to form people- Adult Formation, RCIA, Youth Programs, Sacramental Prep ... to that same framework. Each formative effort, whether for adults or youth or new converts or lifelong Catholics would have its own age appropriate content and design.

Let's consider adult formation as an example. Using the small group discipleship materials of Catholic Christian outreach, Discovery is the book that helps with the process of getting to 1<sup>st</sup> base. Source, Growth and Obedience are the books that facilitate the process of Initiatory Catechesis forming the hearts and habits of a Disciple. We'll come back to 2<sup>nd</sup> base later. For now at this 1<sup>st</sup> level of Formation, Commission serves the process of getting to 3<sup>rd</sup> base. With basic formation and the skills and attitudes that will enable a person to evangelize others. The cool thing about this framework is that it enables you to hold all the pieces of the process together when planning for formation. You can even mix and match. For example let's think about the RCIA process. You could use ALPHA, Discovering Christ or CCO's Discovery as a part of the inquiry process. Then use SYMBOLON or ACM Materials for the Catechumenates, or if you have very talented Catechists, you could develop your own material for 1<sup>st</sup> base, 2<sup>nd</sup> base, and so on. What about High School Confirmation? Programs like Chosen or Decision Point have these steps built in. Programs like Disciple are also mindful of this same framework. This same framework can be used to think through all of the formation aspects of the Church's life. Integrating this same process in each ministry department makes a profound impact on the culture of discipleship as a whole. As we establish a more intentional culture of discipleship inside the church, we'll be much better prepared to go out there to the highways and bi-ways to find those whom Jesus is calling into friendship with Himself.