

#### **4 Simple Steps to Begin Fostering A Culture of Intentional Discipleship in Your Parish.**

“We are now on the way of the New Evangelization: learning from Our Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Church what it means to be a disciple. It is a... journey of prayer, preaching, teaching and growing in faith, that will help us *not necessarily to do more, but to be more; to be more like Jesus* in all aspects of our lives, work and ministries.”

Bishop Ricken, April 22, 2014

There are 157 parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay each with their own particular traditions, approaches to ministry, parish culture and customs. Fostering a culture of intentional discipleship in your parish is clearly not a “one size” fits all approach. Each parish with its unique charisms manifests the Holy Spirit in different ways and with particular emphases. Pope Francis reminds us “that the parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration”. (Evangelii Gaudium #28).

Parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay are called to be holy, fully engaged and fully alive in reaching all souls for Christ. It is no time to be complacent and comfortable in our attitude or in our approach. This is a time to be a missionary church centered on Christ which inspires credible witnesses capable of reaching others for Christ. Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. (Evangelii Gaudium #33). Here are a couple of recommendations to get started:

##### **1. A Praying Parish is A Spirit Filled Parish.**

We cannot do the work of the new evangelization without continuously refocusing our attention on Christ and drawing upon the power of the Holy Spirit in our ministries. Nobody is exempt from this, not the pastor, nor the catechetical, the pastoral or the maintenance staff. “Spirit-filled evangelizers means evangelizers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit made the apostles go forth from themselves and turned them into heralds of God’s wondrous deeds, capable of speaking to each person in his or her own language. 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. (Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium #259). Bishop Ricken is asking all parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay to offer monthly Holy Hours for the new

evangelization and to continually grow in our relationship with Christ so that we can truly minister to the people in our parishes.

### **Questions For Parish Reflection:**

Does our parish staff pray together each day? Do we pray before important undertakings? Is going to daily Mass encouraged as a staff at this parish? Do we make a Holy Hour with the intention of the new evangelization in mind? Are we so busy that we neglect our own spiritual growth as a parish team?

**Recommendation:** Call upon the Holy Spirit in your every undertaking and draw close to Our Lord, Jesus Christ. For parish staff, it is recommended that time be set aside for the parish staff to pray together, to attend Mass or to partake in a Holy Hour each day. Praying together as a parish team is a beautiful way to focus your gaze on Christ and direct your attention to the new evangelization. In the prayer section of the new evangelization website you will find the “Parish Discipleship Prayer: Go and Make Disciples” which you can print and pray together.

## **2. Gather The People.**

If we stop to consider all of the people on our parish committees, finance councils, boards of education etc and the groups in our parishes such as the Rosary Society, the Knights of Columbus etc we would realize that there are many people with whom we interact with on a regular basis that are engaged in the life of the parish. Engagement and participation however, does not mean discipleship. Rarely do our parishes have expectations for our committees other than membership with a largely reporting or advisory function. If we would regard these committees for example as small groups in need of evangelization and intentional spiritual formation the paradigm from maintenance to mission would shift dramatically at our parish. The people who form the inner working of the parish must be evangelized so that they too can share the good news with others and it is essential that all of your parish committees and groups understand the demands of living a Gospel life. 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 occasionally to focus on the best ways to go about fostering a culture of intentional discipleship in the parish. If your parish has 80 of its members on committees and in leadership groups at the parish and these persons would grow in faith together, imagine the change that this would affect at the parish!

**Reflection:** What kinds of committees and groups are active at our parish? Are these committees and groups praying together? Growing together in faith? Sharing their faith with others? Why/Why not? Do our committees and groups understand the mission of our parish? How can we effect real change with those on our committees and in our parish

groups? Which persons are clearly disciples and capable of discipling others in faith? What is our plan for helping our parish committees and groups to grow in faith.

**Recommendation:** Challenge and engage your parish committees and organizations as an intentional act of discipleship. It is imperative that every parish committee and group reflect upon the purpose of their work in the parish. Do we meet just to meet or are we growing our parish? It is imperative that parish committees and groups begin and end meetings with prayer. Faith sharing and Lectio Divina could be added as the group progresses. If you need help with this consult the prayer section of this website for simple prayers that can be used with your parish committees. The New Evangelization section also includes a “Seven Principles for Evangelizing Communities” booklet from Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* which guides parishes through a process of self-reflection and renewal.

Every sixth meeting of your parish committees should ideally be a time for reflection and spiritual growth rather than business. Prescribe a night where members of all committees come together to hear a witness story, inspiring talk or pray together.

Schedule a night with Julianne Stanz [jstanz@gbdioc.org](mailto:jstanz@gbdioc.org) or call (920) 272 8270 in the Department of New Evangelization talk about the new evangelization, missionary discipleship and moving from maintenance to mission.

These nights can help to center people on the essential tasks of the new evangelization so that each parish committee or group can be energized, uplifted and feel renewed to undertake the work of the parish.

Alternatively, consider using the information in Father Robert Barron’s “Catholicism: New Evangelization” series as a helpful tool in forming people in an understanding of the New Evangelization. The Department of New Evangelization through the generosity of a grant from The Catholic Foundation made the “Catholicism: The New Evangelization” series available for parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay for \$25. This price included a training session, the DVDs, Leadership Guide and Prayer Cards. If you did not receive this offer but would like to preview the material, you are welcome to borrow the Leader’s Kit from the Department of New Evangelization.

For parishes grappling with what the new evangelization means for their parish, the format in the Leader’s Guide for the optional training and formation session is a good place to begin. Viewing the series as a parish staff ensures that all can be on the same page and begin to reflect upon the challenges and possibilities posed by the new evangelization.

Julianne Stanz in the Department of New Evangelization would be happy to tailor an approach to your specific need.

## **2. “Forming Intentional Disciples” by Sherry Weddell.**

Inspiration in the midst of what can sometimes seem to be an overwhelming process is a key part of grappling with the question of where to begin. There are a number of Catholic authors who have made tremendous contributions to field of the new evangelization and particularly in helping parishes to become mission centered. Sherry Weddell is one of the leading Catholic experts in this regard. In August of 2013 the Diocese of Green Bay brought Sherry in to speak to parish leaders. If you did attend Sherry’s talk consider anew how some of the information that was presented could be of use to the parish. If you did not have the opportunity to attend this talk please consider the book “Forming Intentional Disciples” by Sherry Weddell essential reading. Parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay are using the book in various ways- some parish staff are reading the book together and reflecting upon it, some parishes are using the book as a formation tool with all parish committees and others are organizing parish-wide small faith sharing groups to discuss the information and to develop an action plan. The New Evangelization page includes a helpful “What is intentional discipleship” section which has numerous study guides and small faith sharing materials that correlate to the book “Forming Intentional Disciples”.

### **For Reflection:**

What aspects of the information in Sherry Weddell’s talk or book resonated with me? What did I find most challenging? Most affirming? What specific things could be a “game changer” for the mission of forming intentional disciples at our parish? What specific ideas could my parish use?

### **Recommendation:**

Purchase or contact the Department of New Evangelization for a copy of the book “Forming Intentional Disciples”. Consider reading this book with your pastor, as a parish staff and if possible with all those engaged in parish leadership at some level.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore has created a very helpful study guide to correspond with the book “Forming Intentional Disciples”. This would be a helpful resource for you to use in your evangelization efforts. On this page are links to a study guide created by the Archdiocese of Baltimore to accompany Sherry Weddell’s book and a small group process that St. Dominic Parish in San Francisco, California are using to foster a culture of intentional discipleship at their parish.

## **3. From Maintenance to Mission- GO!**

Decide upon a couple of key initiatives centered on the essential. Taking a look at your parish data should be an essential part of figuring out the next steps. This can be daunting for a parish but it can be a very useful tool in strategizing for possibilities and opportunities.

If you need help in this regard, Mark Mogilka, the Director of Pastoral Services and Stewardship can help you with particular information and helpful statistics unique to your parish. Mark can be reached at (920) 272 8297 or [mmogilka@gbdioc.org](mailto:mmogilka@gbdioc.org) Once this information has been collated and examined there needs to be boldness in both approach and attitude. Consider the words of Pope Francis in this regard “Mere administration” can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be “permanently in a state of mission”. (Evangelium Gaudium #22).

It is important to set goals as discipleship does not simply happen because people show up. It happens when there is an intentional and systematic thrust to facilitate spiritual maturity. “I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory”. (Evangelium Gaudium #22).

### **Reflection:**

Are we in a state of maintenance or mission at our parish? What structures, ideas and frameworks keep us from being in a missionary state? What do we need to stop doing at our parish to form disciples? What do we need to start doing at our parish to form disciples? What do we need to keep doing to form disciples at our parish? What is the mission of our parish? Why would someone join this parish and not another Catholic parish near here?

### **Recommendation:**

Conduct an assessment of your parish culture. Take note of trends and upward or downward turns. As a parish staff decide upon a course of action to minimize the downward trends if possible. Identify key areas for growth and possibilities. Draft an action plan with key goals and some measurable targets. Engage all parish committees in this regard so that all parish staff and committees are working together on a small number of carefully thought out projects and initiatives. In the book “*Becoming a Parish of Intentional Disciples*” edited by Sherry A. Weddell, there is a very valuable chapter that explores the differences between a maintenance-oriented parish versus a mission-oriented parish. Written by Bobby Vidal who is the Director of Evangelization and Lay Formation at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Church in Santa Clarita, California the list below is an outline of seven differences with an eighth added by Sherry Weddell. You might want to talk through these principles with your parish team.

The maintenance-driven parish FOCUS is listed first with the mission-driven parish FOCUS listed in parenthesis.

1) Activity! getting people involved in events, activities in parish.

(vs. helping all people encounter Jesus and experience conversion through their involvement at the parish and outside.)

2) Forming individuals to take on parish leadership roles.

(vs. forming individuals to discern their charisms and God-given vocations).

3) Getting parishioners to give more time, talent, and treasure to the parish.

(vs. Helping individuals commit their entire life to Jesus and live out that commitment daily.)

4) Sustaining the current parish structures & number of people.

(vs. Sustaining a culture of discipleship, nurturing and sustaining the work of conversion in individuals.)

5) Relying solely on catechesis as the means of transmitting the faith.

(vs transmitting the faith through pre-evangelization, initial proclamation and then catechesis in a systematic way).

6) Providing formation for ministries exercised only for the parish.

(vs. answering the outward call of the parish by providing formation for individuals to both take part in parish ministries and transform the secular world).

7) Communicating in “insider” language.

(vs. communicating in language both “insiders and outsiders” can understand)

And the addition from Sherry Weddell:

8) Presuming that the goal is to get people to come to the parish “plant”.

(vs. leaving the parish plant to go out into the neighborhoods of the parish)

### **Conclusion:**

Fostering a culture of intentional discipleship is not easy but Jesus did not promise us this. The mandate to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) will not take us down the path of comfortable and status quo. We are asked, not just to believe in the Gospel but to allow it to take deep root in us so that we cannot help but to announce the Gospel with our lives in word and in deed. This missionary outreach is at the heart of a life 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”. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*#126).