

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Synod 2014

Background Paper:

Formation for Discipleship

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This section was written Bishop Donald J. Hying, the Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, and it serves as the introduction for all eight Synod background papers. Bishop Hying presents “intentional discipleship” as our fundamental Catholic identity and the singular focus for all of our Synod considerations and challenges us to view all aspects of the Church in light of “formation for discipleship

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I. **Introduction: Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity**
Introduction written by Bishop Donald J. Hying

In the Gospels, Jesus confronts us with a fundamental question: Who do you say that I am? As Christians and members of the Church, we answer with Simon, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” In faith, we can add Savior, Light of the world, the Word made flesh, the Resurrection, the Prince of Peace. Through the saving activity of Jesus’ Incarnation, life, death and resurrection, we become adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, all in the mystery, communion and sacrament of the Church. The relationship that Jesus enjoys with the Father by nature of who he is, we receive as a pure offer of grace.

Baptized into the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, we proclaim Christ’s saving Gospel through a faith lived out in the words, actions, work, relationships and values of our lives. Our fundamental identity as disciples of Jesus Christ gives focus and method to the important activity of the new evangelization. As we painfully know, too many Catholics have not really been evangelized to know and experience the personal love of Jesus Christ, have been poorly catechized in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, and do not participate in the sacramental life of the Church in any meaningful way. If we seek to change this disturbing trend, parishes must continue to grow in their fundamental identity as dynamic communities of faith which form intentional disciples. If we are not focused on formation for discipleship, we are failing the mission of Christ.

What do intentional Catholic disciples look like? How do they act? What is qualitatively different about their lives and personalities? The answer is clear yet challenging. Disciples are ordinary people who have experienced the love, forgiveness, presence, consolation and challenge of God poured out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. They have fallen in love with the Lord and find their deepest identity in their relationship with him. They find God and the mission of his Kingdom to be the fundamental purpose of their lives and, having a strong **Catholic identity**, find the whole Catholic experience of the Scriptures, sacraments, moral life and prayer to be the transformative means of their ongoing conversion. As Paul discovered on the road to Damascus, they are people loved and forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Disciples instinctively **evangelize**, that is they naturally share their experience of God and their faith in him with others. The power of moral example itself evangelizes, as others intuitively sense that such a person lives from a very different center of meaning and purpose than secular society. In addition to witnessing by example, disciples are both courageous and articulate in their proclamation of Jesus and the difference he has made in their lives. They will freely pray with others, do volunteer work, witness to how the Lord has worked in their daily experience, offer moral advice when asked, share spiritual books, CDs and DVDs with family, friends and co-workers, all the while actively cultivating a discipleship response in those around them. The power of one Catholic who knows, practices and proclaims the faith is truly remarkable.

An intentional disciple is a good **steward**, knowing that everything in life is a superabundant gift freely bestowed upon us by the Lord, both to enrich us but also to bless and benefit others. This deep conviction of existence as a gift leads to a profound gratitude that pours itself out in deeds of mercy, love and healing. Like Mary who anoints the feet of Jesus with an extravagant costly perfume that cost 300 days' wages, we are compelled to break open and pour out the gifts of our lives in loving service of others and so fill the world with the sacred fragrance of Christ.

An intentional disciple is a Catholic maximalist, not asking what the minimum is that **must** be done in order to be saved, but rather asking what **can** be done for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Like St. Paul, a disciple has moved from the obligation of the law into the astonishing freedom of Christ, who liberates us to do every good work. In this context, the Blessed Virgin Mary is clearly the first and premier disciple who responds in total faith to the seemingly impossible proposal of the angel, places her entire being at the service of God and gives flesh to the Incarnate Word.

St. Augustine insists that when a Christian disciple places the whole mystery and gift of life at the service of God, the Lord Jesus takes flesh within that person and is offered to the world once again. For us as Catholics, in this critical moment in history, we cannot afford to proceed with business as usual. All over the world, millions of Catholics are asking the same questions:

- How can I have a deeper and more authentic relationship with Jesus Christ?
- How can I more effectively live out my faith in such a way that it actually makes a difference in the lives of others, especially my family and friends?
- How can we continue to insert Gospel values into the public square of politics, economy, health care and education?
- How can we bring back all of those Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of the faith?

In millions of different ways, intentional disciples are living out the exciting answers to these important questions. If the Gospel is the script of our lives, the new evangelization is the urgent challenge to act out with fresh enthusiasm and generosity the great drama of Christ's salvation.

Synod 2014 invites us to consider anew how to be intentional disciples, especially in the areas of Catholic Social Teaching, Cultural Diversity, Evangelization, Formation, Leadership, Liturgy, Marriage and Family, and Stewardship.

II. Formation for Discipleship: Introduction and Overview

*A sower went out to sow.
And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up.
Other seed fell on rocky soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep.
And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots.
Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain.
And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit.
It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and hundredfold.*

—Mark 4:3-8

Formation for discipleship aims to bring all baptized Catholics to maturity of faith. Mature, intentional discipleship is a process that occurs gradually through an ever-deepening relationship with Christ and his Church. Mature faith is faith that is “living, explicit, and fruitful” (*General Directory for Catechesis [GDC]*, 1998, no.82). It produces the harvest of the coming of the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.”

For some, the seeds of faith begin to grow as an adult decision professed before the Catholic community at the Easter Vigil. For others, it is the acceptance of the gift of Baptism received as children, a decision initially made by their parents. Formation nurtures the sprouting seeds of initial conversion and cultivates their transformation into fruitful maturity.

Formation for discipleship, according to Blessed John Paul II, is a “totally integrated formation” that encompasses all that we are as human beings (*Christifideles Laici [CL]*, no. 60). Formation is the action of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and our cooperation with it. It shapes who we are, what we do, and how we share our faith as Catholics.

Catechetical formation is “the totality of the Church’s efforts to make disciples” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no.4). Catechesis is a multi-dimensional process that involves six interrelated dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. Initial and ongoing formation is necessary in every dimension. In fact, “when catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development” (*GDC*, no.87).

The Great Commission requires both evangelization and catechesis. Jesus orders the disciples to make disciples and baptize them. Then he instructs the Apostles to “teach them to observe all I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). There is a close link between evangelization and catechesis (*Catechesi Tradendae [CT]*, John Paul II, 1979, no.18).

Just as plants need good soil, sunlight, moisture, and nutrients to thrive, Catholic disciples need formation to become all that Christ intends for them to be. Formation gradually transforms the baptized into mature, intentional disciples of Christ. Maturation of Christians is an ongoing, lifelong process that reaches its fullness only when they “go home to the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).

III. Formation for Discipleship: Current Cultural Realities

Seeds of faith are being tended in every parish and district of the archdiocese. We have experienced some successful efforts in the area of adult faith formation. Parish faith formation programs are staffed by faith-filled professional and volunteer catechists who give generously of their time and talent to forming Catholic identity in our public school children and youth. We are blessed with many wonderful Catholic schools and educators dedicated to shaping Catholic identity. Voucher programs have made it possible for children to attend Catholic schools who might otherwise not have this option.

Certification programs in religious education and lay ministry prepare Catholic educators and catechists so that the continuity of Catholic identity is preserved. Advances in technology have expanded the opportunities for communicating the teachings of the Catholic Church more readily than any other time in our history.

Each year the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is enriched by hundreds of adult men and women who are led by the Spirit to become full members of the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and Adult Confirmation. We are blessed by those who accompany these new believers through the process of initial conversion and the ongoing formation that follows. There is good work being done in the archdiocese through the ministry of catechesis.

Challenges

Living faith, like wheat, requires attentiveness at every stage between sowing and harvesting. The wise farmer is diligently on the lookout for anything that might jeopardize his crop. Likewise, we must be attentive to cultural conditions that threaten maturity of faith in Catholic believers. Catholic identity, evangelization, and stewardship are three areas affected by negative influences that are impacting the fruitfulness of faith formation efforts.

Who we are as Catholics is at risk today as a growing number of adults reduce Catholic identity to a family tradition rather than as an interior disposition of discipleship that flows from a loving relationship with Christ and his Church. When Christian formation is viewed as a required hoop to jump through in order to obtain sacramental milestones, Catholic identity suffers. This distortion of Catholic identity is evident in the prevalent understanding of Confirmation as “graduation” from religious education.

Intentional disciples never graduate from Christian formation. In fact, Blessed John Paul II states, “the more we are formed... the more we feel the need to pursue and deepen formation” (*CL*, 63). Ongoing attentiveness and cooperation with the Holy Spirit are essential components of the journey towards Christian maturity.

What we do as Catholics is hindered by the growing challenge of forming children, youth, and adults whose faith has not yet been initially awakened. A common observation from catechists and Catholic educators is that a growing number of parents enroll children and youth in parish faith formation programs and Catholic schools but rarely attend Mass or pray in their homes.

Formation provided by parishes and schools without the partnership of evangelization in the home is incomplete because it lacks the roots necessary for formation to take hold.

How we share the Catholic faith as faithful stewards of God's word is also fraught with concerns. Though "the single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a professionally trained parish catechetical leader" (*National Directory of Catechesis [NDC]*, p.706), only 52% of the 265 parish catechetical leaders in the archdiocese have a ministry-related degree. Small parishes cannot afford the just wages and compensation needed to hire professional catechetical leaders. Many Catholic schools in rural areas are struggling to keep their doors open as fiscal viability and sustainability grows further out of reach. Only a small percentage of our 4000 parish catechists have completed Basic Certification in Religious Education that is required to serve as a parish catechist or Catholic educator. The stewardship of time presents obstacles as sports and school activities frequently take precedence over formation.

We are heavily invested in forming children and youth through Catholic education in parishes and schools with the expectation that our youth will grow to be mature adult disciples of Christ. However, recent studies indicate that only 23 percent of these young Catholics continue to attend Mass each week when they reach adulthood (*National Catholic Reporter*, William D'Antonio, 2011).

It is important to provide quality formation for children and youth, however, formation cannot end there. Formation during the adult years is the "chief," "principal," and "central" form of catechesis because adults have the "greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form" (*CT*, no.43). Ongoing formation throughout adulthood gradually transforms the way we see ourselves: as Catholic disciples called to evangelize through faithful stewardship of God's gift.

IV. Formation for Discipleship: Theological Foundations

Despite the challenges to Catholic identity, evangelization, and stewardship present today, there are reasons for hope. Throughout the history of the Church the formation of Christ's disciples has taken place in cultural settings contrary to the Gospel of Christ. Some of our most beloved saints and martyrs have emerged out of rock-strewn and thorn-infested cultural terrain, so to speak. Our Catholic heritage offers wisdom that we can draw upon as we seek understanding today.

Formation is Rooted in the Church

How did Jesus go about forming a new identity in his disciples while on earth? The Scriptures tell us that he invited followers and formed them into intentional disciples within the context of community. He formed his Body, the Church, by teaching his disciples about the Kingdom of God, modeling how to pray and worship God, and demonstrating the kind of love for neighbor that God desires of his people. Jesus rooted the ministry of catechesis in the Church.

After his death and Resurrection, the Apostles continued the pattern of forming disciples established by Jesus. The early Church “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). When the first disciples dispersed and more communities of disciples were formed, the appointment of successors safeguarded the teaching mission entrusted to the Church by Christ.

The Church has always believed that every baptized person “has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life” (CT, 14). Historically, we find that the more catechesis is given priority, the more effectively the Church evangelizes. Through catechesis the Church finds “a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church” (CT, no.15). The Church is the “origin, locus, and goal of catechesis” (NDC, 2005, no.19.C). Through charisms that flow from the Church to serve the Church, parents, catechists, Catholic educators, and clergy build up the Body of Christ by faithfully teaching the Catholic faith to children, youth, and adults. Providing systematic and comprehensive formation for those who teach the faith to others is a top priority of faithful stewardship.

Formation is a Gradual Process

Each year we witness the stages of growth in crops planted in fields across southeastern Wisconsin. In the springtime the tiny seedlings emerge, barely visible to passersby. We wait patiently as periods of sunshine and rain give way to taller and fuller plants. During the soaring heat of July and August when rainfall is sparse, growth slows. Then a good thunderstorm rolls in and replenishes the dry, parched soil. Crops quickly respond and burst forth with renewed energy.

Forming intentional disciples is a spiritual process that unfolds gradually through periods of sunshine and darkness, moisture and dryness, dying and rising. Each stage of growth in the life of intentional discipleship advances through the support of catechesis.

Catechesis gives form to the missionary preaching that is intended to arouse the first signs of faith. It shapes the initial proclamation of the Gospel. Catechesis assists the early examination of reasons for belief. It communicates the essential elements in the experience of Christian living. It prepares for the celebration of the sacraments. It facilitates integration into the ecclesial community. It urges apostolic activity and missionary witness. It instills a zeal for the unity of Christians and prepares one for the ecumenical understanding and mission of the Church (NDC, no.19.C).

Each stage of the RCIA process is a source of inspiration for catechesis, however, the final stage “reminds the Church that her catechesis accompanies a continual conversion to Christ and an ongoing initiation into the celebration of the sacraments and the life of the Church” (NDC, no.35.D). Formation for discipleship is an ongoing process that forms disciples who go forth as living witnesses in the world.

The catechesis of Christ proclaimed through his Church gradually shapes the identity of Catholic disciples, forms disciples who evangelize, and calls forth gifts of service through stewardship.

Formation is Inculturated

The cultivation of breeds that can grow in particular soils and climates makes it possible for crops to thrive in a variety of locations around the world. When successfully adapted, crop production becomes a source of sustainability and a transformative agent in communities.

Likewise, forming Catholic identity in the U.S. is most effective when it makes use of the language, signs, and symbols of the culture to authentically transmit the Catholic faith. By connecting faith and life through catechesis, the Catholic faith becomes anchored in everyday life experiences of the people.

Inculturation supports a meaningful dialogue between culture and the Gospel that addresses the real questions and concrete situations of the people. It affirms what is consistent in the culture with the Gospel and purifies what is not. Catechesis that effectively communicates the teachings of Christ becomes a “transforming and regenerating force” in culture (*NDC*, 21.C).

At the heart of the “New Evangelization” is the search for more effective transmission of the Catholic faith. Technology has revolutionized how we communicate. A growing number of Catholic educators and catechists are using technology and media to teach the faith in ways that are meaningful for today’s children, youth, and adults (e.g., movies, music, videos, apps, podcasts, websites, e-books, webinars, and social networks).

Along with an increase in Catholic immigrants to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, a renewed appreciation for incorporating popular piety into catechesis has developed in recent years. The assimilation of popular piety and devotions from other cultures has broadened and enriched our understanding of the universality of Catholic identity, evangelization, and stewardship.

Formation is Fruitful

Although the process of tending growth may be enjoyable and rewarding, a bountiful harvest is the goal. The blessings reaped from a fruitful harvest benefit all that depend upon it for their livelihood and positively impact the larger community. Similarly, fruitful formation transforms the lives of individual believers, families, parishes, the archdiocese, and society.

Fruitful formation is “a catechesis of the twofold commandment of charity: to love God above all things, and to love neighbor as ourselves” (*NDC*, no.40). Well-formed disciples become living witnesses to the saving actions of Christ in word and deed.

Intentional disciples are called to imbue a Catholic identity of holiness. By cooperating with God’s grace, formation bears the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23).

Formation bears the fruit of equipping disciples to participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. They freely share the Good News and are able to confidently explain what it means to be a Catholic Christian. “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Pt 3:15).

Formation empowers disciples to become faithful stewards of the gifts entrusted to them by God. Formed disciples generously share their time, talent, and treasure both in their Church community and society. They become leaven in the world and agents of transformation in society.

V. Formation for Discipleship: Other Related Information

Formation is an Apprenticeship

While there is a tendency to associate formation with acquiring knowledge of the Catholic faith, formation for discipleship attends to all six dimensions of catechesis: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, and missionary spirit.

In other words, discipleship is an apprenticeship in the Catholic Christian way of life. Intentional disciples are formed through the living witness of mature disciples modeling the faith for other disciples.

In fact, the word “catechesis” comes from a Greek word that means “to echo or resound.” The history of the Catholic Church is a movement through the ages of disciples “echoing” the words and deeds proclaimed and practiced by disciples before them.

- **Catholic Identity** is modeled by intentional disciples forming disciples in the making.
- **Evangelization** is learned by intentional disciples articulating the Catholic faith for disciples in the making.
- **Stewardship** is demonstrated by intentional disciples sharing their gifts with disciples in the making.

Formation for discipleship is directly related to disciples who embody Catholic identity, evangelization, and stewardship and intentionally model these principles for disciples in the making.

Formation is the Responsibility of the Whole Parish

When we think of formation, we tend to relegate this activity to those called to serve as catechists of children, youth, or adults. However, formation is the responsibility of the entire parish community.

“The parish serves as an effective catechetical agent precisely to the extent that it is a clear, living, and authentic sacrament of Christ. On the other hand, where a parish is lifeless and stagnant, it undermines both evangelization and catechesis. In such situations, no catechetical ‘program’ can be expected to overcome the catechetical message of the parish as a whole” (NDC, no.29.C).

Formation for discipleship is only effective when parishes actively embrace the Great Commission to make disciples and form them in the Catholic Christian way of life. When intentional discipleship is made the axis around which the lives of parishes revolve, they become vibrant, living signs of Christ’s embodiment on earth.

VI. Formation for Discipleship: Key Issues to Be Addressed

In response to our current situation, there are three key issues that need to be addressed.

- The need for a renewed vision of parishes as centers of formation for discipleship that includes Christian formation, the Catholic schools they support, and especially efforts to catechize adults.
- The need for a renewed vision that forms intentional disciples in all six dimensions of catechesis (i.e., knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit).
- The need to form professional parish catechetical leaders, catechists, Catholic educators, and parents who model intentional discipleship for disciples in the making.

In order to address these issues, the development of a strategic plan is needed in the archdiocese to guide the work of formation for discipleship in parishes and Catholic schools.

First, a **communication plan** needs to be developed to persuasively and systematically communicate the vision of formation for discipleship to ordained and lay leaders through the archdiocese.

Secondly, an **implementation plan** needs to be developed so that the parishes and Catholic schools have a clear roadmap for embarking on the mission of formation for discipleship.

Third, a **leadership plan** needs to be developed to identify the process for forming and multiplying leaders who can promote the vision and shepherd the implementation plan.

Finally, a **resource development plan** needs to be articulated for developing resources that support formation for discipleship.

All four of these plans need to be formulated with specific, observable, and measurable short and long term strategic goals.

VII. Formation for Discipleship: Key Questions for Consideration

The key questions for consideration are directly related to the key issues to be addressed noted in the previous section. These questions are designed to focus discussion on specific strategies that respond to the three issues to be addressed.

- 1a. How can we formulate a creative and compelling **communication plan** on the vision of formation for discipleship?
- 1b. What archdiocesan, parish, and school resources are necessary to make this happen?

- 1c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?
- 2a. How can we develop an **implementation plan** that provides a user-friendly roadmap for diverse parishes and Catholic schools to embark on the mission of formation for discipleship?
- 2b. What archdiocesan, parish, and school resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 2c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?
- 3a. How can we develop a **leadership plan** for forming and multiplying leaders to promote the vision and shepherd the implementation plan?
- 3b. What archdiocesan, parish, and school resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 3c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?
- 4a. How can we develop a **resource development plan** necessary to support the formation of catechists, Catholic educators, and parents as formators for discipleship?
- 4b. What archdiocesan, parish, and school resources are necessary to make this happen?
- 4c. What are some specific short-term goals for making this strategy happen?

VIII. Formation for Discipleship: Conclusion

Formation for discipleship is the Great Commission entrusted by Christ to his Church: “Go, therefore, and make disciples... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” (Mt. 28:19-20). The missionary imperative is to make disciples, teach them Christ’s commands, and form them to observe the Christian way of life. Catechesis at each stage is necessary in the fulfillment of making, teaching, and observing lives of intentional discipleship.

Catechesis is so central to the Church’s mission of evangelization, that if evangelization were to fail to integrate catechesis, initial faith aroused by the original proclamation of the Gospel would not mature, education in the faith through a deeper knowledge of the person and message of Jesus Christ would not transpire, and discipleship in Christ through apostolic witness would not be fostered. (*NDC*, 22)

Through formation for discipleship Catholic identity is shaped, evangelization flourishes in the living witness and articulated word, and stewardship becomes a way of life.

As an echo of the call for evangelization, it is time for a new Pentecost! Let us pray that, like the first disciples, the Holy Spirit will come down upon us as in tongues of fire to make our hearts burn with love for the Gospel, such that we overcome our fear and find our true voice for proclaiming the Good News of Jesus within the Church and to the wider people and culture of our day!

Come Holy Spirit!