

Forming Catholic Disciples

Session 1:

Putting Encounter in the Center

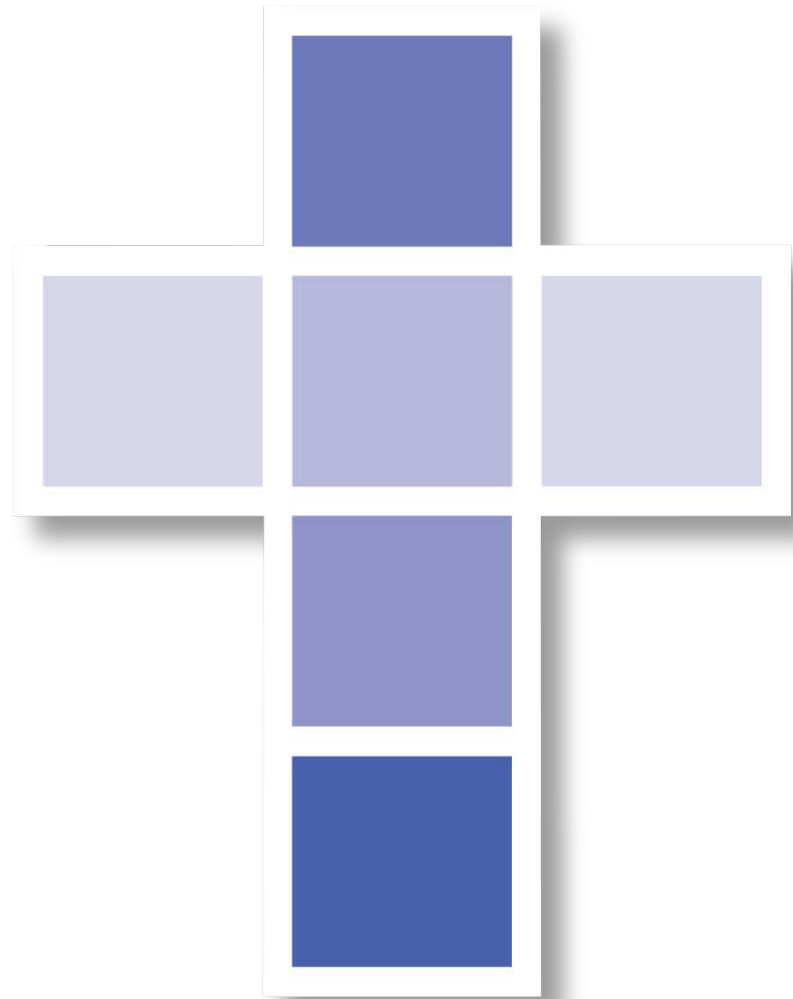


Opening Prayer

O Holy Spirit of God, take me as your disciple. Guide me, illuminate me, sanctify me. Bind my hands that they may do no evil. Cover my eyes that they may see it no more. Sanctify my heart, that evil may not dwell within me. Be my guard. Be my guide.

Wherever you lead me I will go. Whatever you forbid me, I will renounce. Whatever you command me, in your strength I will do. Lead me, then, to the fullness of your truth. Amen.

(Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, 1809-1892)



Unit 1: Exploring the Issue



Background

- ▶ We have been through a huge transition as a Church, from most ethnic small-town or urban parish communities to acculturated Catholics living in suburbs. Some Latino and Asian communities experience a more ethnic community, but most Catholics do not.
- ▶ We are also experiencing a severe drop in church participation, especially in terms of younger generations.
- ▶ But millions of Catholics in the US still do practice their faith on a regular basis, and many young families attend church with their children.



Background

- ▶ St. John XXIII—Vatican II—pilgrim people serving together to accomplish the mission of Jesus.
- ▶ St. Paul VI—said “evangelization is the basic mission of the Church.”
- ▶ St. John Paul II—talked about the “new evangelization” from 1983 on.
- ▶ Pope Benedict XVI called for a synod on the New Evangelization which met in 2012.
- ▶ Pope Francis called us to be “missionary disciples” in 2013.



Basic Question

Are Catholics called to be disciples?
Is this something new for us?



Receiving Holy Communion

- ▶ Before St. Pius X (reigned 1903-1914), Catholics received communion, for the most part, once or twice a year.
- ▶ He called for frequent reception of Holy Communion.
- ▶ He also allowed children to receive communion from the age of “reason” (usually accounted as 7) when they could recognize the difference between ordinary bread and Holy Communion.
- ▶ Some parishes that gave Communion 400 times in 1905, gave Communion 15,000 times in 1925.



Question

What does the frequent reception of Holy Communion do to the attitudes of everyday Catholics in terms of their feeling like followers of Christ?

What did the call of Vatican II that we be full, conscious, and active participants at Mass imply?



Baptism—Vatican II

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. Therefore, all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them.

(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #10)



Quick Poll

If someone on Sunday asked how many in our congregation saw themselves as disciples, how many would do you think would raise their hands?

- 10%
- 25%
- 50%
- 75% or more



Possible Catholic Attitudes on Discipleship

- ▶ Catholics have received the sacraments but are not evangelized or catechized.
- ▶ Catholics learn their catechism but are not evangelized.
- ▶ Catholic formation, for youth or adults, does not produce intentional disciples.
- ▶ Catholics go through some of the motions, but they've never committed themselves to a personal relationship with Christ.
- ▶ Practicing Catholics live as disciples but have not been trained to recognize this in their lives.



Catholics and Scripture

At Church on Sundays, Catholics are regularly asked some pointed questions from the Scriptures, particularly the Gospel. Although we do not state our responses out loud, in our hearts we are responding. Here are some questions from Jesus...What would Catholics say?

1. Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:13)
2. Will you also depart from me? (John 6:67)
3. You, come! Follow me. (Matthew 9:9)



Spiritual Exercise

- ▶ Open to p. 5 of the booklet.
- ▶ Spent a few moments look at this exercise in which we find ourselves suddenly talking with Jesus.
- ▶ Reflect on this for 5 or 10 minutes and begin writing your thoughts. You do not have to complete this exercise now.
- ▶ Share for one minute with the person next to you what this exercise evoked in you as you were trying to do it.

Each unit ends with a spiritual exercise—a practice or prayer you can do with others or by yourself. The exercise helps sharpen our awareness of our relationship with God; this makes us clearer about the experiences of personal encounter and discipleship that are part of our Catholic life.

Spiritual Exercise

Imagine yourself sitting peacefully on a quiet afternoon. Your daily worries have receded. Fatigue has faded. You feel quiet, but totally alert. Imagine an empty chair next to you, one you hadn't noticed very much before. All of a sudden, a figure comes and sits down in the chair. Although you cannot nail down who it is, you cannot believe it is anyone else but Jesus.

He makes no sound, speaks no words. He just sits there, looking at you, with an all-accepting smile. You finally can resist no longer. You turn your head and look directly at Jesus, acknowledging that he is looking directly at you. Although he makes no gesture, no demand, you suddenly feel an intense desire to speak to him.

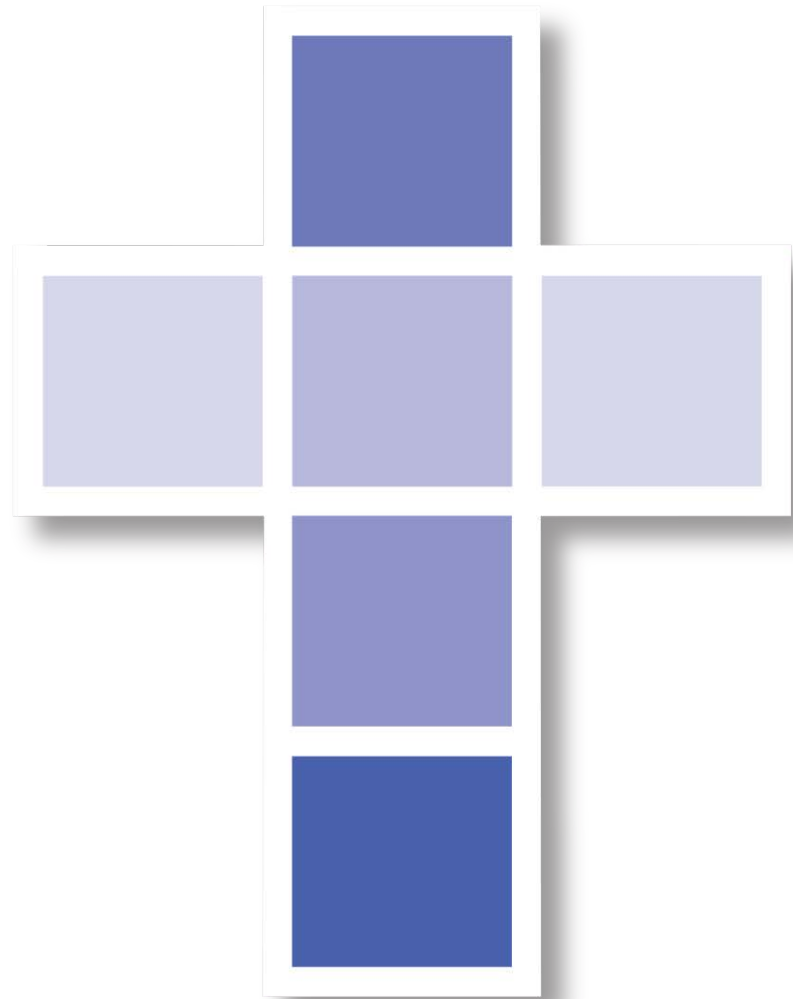
He tilts his head, smiles even more broadly, and gestures for you to speak.

In this moment of encounter, of self-disclosure, what do you hear yourself saying?

And what do you hear Jesus saying back to you?

Spend at least ten minutes with this exercise. Make sure you are in a quiet spot where there will be no distractions—from others or from your electronic devices. Put extra effort into the words that you would say to Jesus. From what part of you are these words coming? How deeply do you have to reach for them? How easily do they flow?

Make sure you give even more time to listen to what Jesus is saying to you in this exercise. Note how you interpret his attitude toward you. Try not to miss whatever Jesus speaks to you.



Unit 2: Conversion



Objectives

- ▶ To reflect on ideas about conversion.
- ▶ To heighten our awareness of conversion.
- ▶ To think about opportunities for conversion.
- ▶ To be able to talk more freely about conversion.



Quick Poll

If someone on Sunday asked how many in our congregation saw themselves as converted, how many would do you think would raise their hands?

___ 10%

___ 25%

___ 50%

___ 75% or more



Being Questioned

“Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?”

This is a familiar question asked by some Protestants.

When you are asked this question, how does it make you feel?



Romantic Notions

Americans tend to think of religion today the way they think of romantic love: you know it when you feel it. In fact, the presumption is that the feeling produces the reality and, without that feeling, then there is no reality. If I don't feel it, then I'm not in love; then I'm not converted.

(p. 9)



Contrast

Protestant Evangelical Assumptions

Conversion is a conscious experience, the result of a choice made in adulthood, representing a clear break with the past and a new future.

Catholics and others baptizing children

Conversion is an environment in which one grows up, maturing as one ages, with a slow dawning of the meaning of faith and a continual response to faith.



Purpose of Conversion

- ▶ Conversion is not the goal of the process.
- ▶ Conversion is the beginning of the process of being a disciple.
- ▶ Conversion must grow into sustained discipleship or else it has no meaning.
- ▶ Discipleship must be sustained over time or else it has no meaning.



US Bishops— “Go and Make Disciples”

We know that people experience conversion in many ways. Some experience a sudden, shattering insight that brings rapid transformation. Some experience a gradual growth over many years. Others undergo conversion as they take part in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults—the normal way adults become members of the Church today. **Many experience conversion through the ordinary relationships of family and friends.** Others have experienced it through the formation received from Catholic schools and religious education programs. Still others have experienced ongoing conversion in renewals, ecumenical encounters, retreats, parish missions, or through some of the great spiritual movements that have blessed church life today.

(#13)



US Bishops— “Go and Make Disciples”

Conversion is the change that happens in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

(#2)



Spiritual Exercise

- ▶ On page 13 you will find a series of lines demarcated by various ages in life.
- ▶ On each line try to summarize your attitude toward God, Jesus, the Church or faith.
- ▶ Look at your list after you are finished and note any immediate observations.

Spiritual Exercise

Think back at your life when you were 15, trying to identify the assumptions and practice of your faith life. Now move ahead to 25, and 35, and 45. Keep moving ahead every five or ten years until you get to the current years in your life. Write a one-sentence description that summarizes your relationship to God/faith during the years in question.

15 _____

25 _____

35 _____

45 _____

55 _____

65 _____

75 _____

85+ _____

Compare the different decades. What do you notice about the changes? In

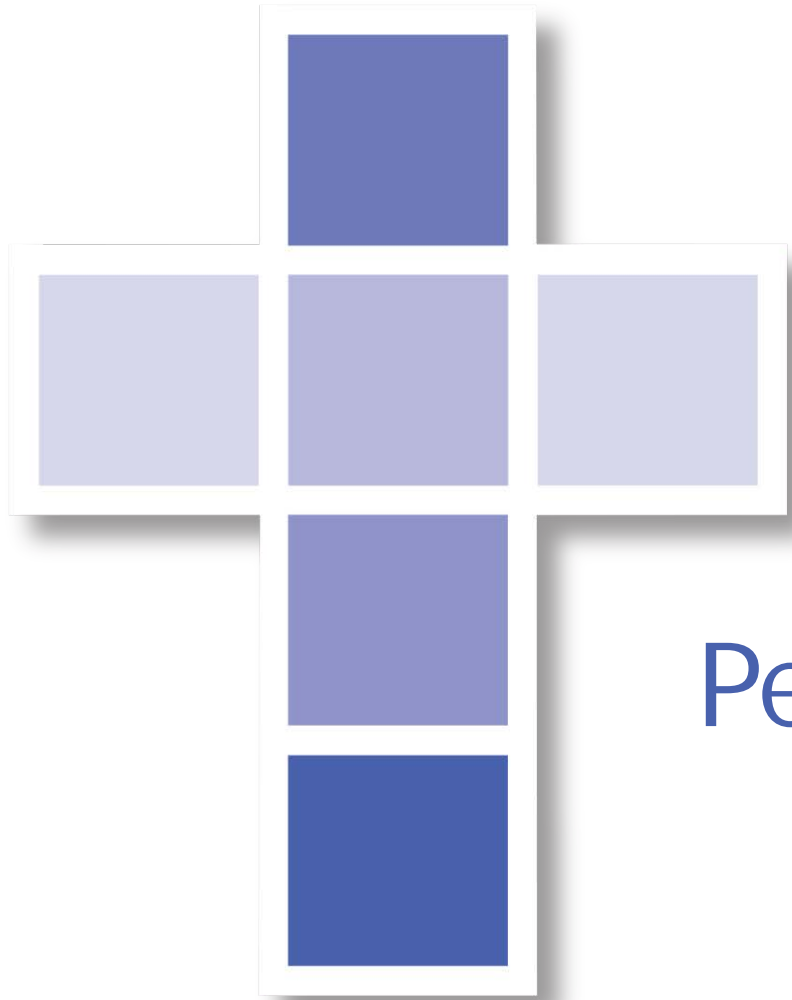


RCIA

- ▶ **Inquiry** period
- ▶ **Catechumen** period of growing in knowledge and commitment
- ▶ Enlightenment period in which one progresses toward conversion ("**elect**")
- ▶ **Initiation** when we receive the sacraments
- ▶ **Mystagogia** when we grow as new believers

Identify how these different kinds of periods are present in our ongoing lives of practicing our faith.

Think about these different dynamics in our Catholic faith life: how are they related to "ongoing conversion"?



Unit 3

Personal Encounter



“Encounter”

- ▶ Part of the language of “On Catechesis in our Day.”
- ▶ Incorporated into the General Catechetical Directory.
- ▶ Used by St. John Paul II when he issued “Ecclesia in America”—from the meeting of the bishops of North and South America in the year 2000.
- ▶ Part of the language of the Synod “On the New Evangelization,” held in Rome in 2012.
- ▶ A major theme from Pope Francis in “The Joy of the Gospel.”



Encounter

- ▶ “Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ...”
 - ▶ Catechesis in our Day, (#5)
- ▶ “The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus...”
 - ▶ General Directory for Catechesis, (#53)



Encounter

- ▶ “This presence of the Risen One in the Church makes it possible for us to encounter him, thanks to the invisible working of his life-giving Spirit. This encounter takes place in the faith received from and lived in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.”
 - ▶ Ecclesia in America, (#68)
- ▶ “The New Evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith calls all believers to renew their faith and their personal encounter with Jesus in the Church, to deepen their appreciation of the truth of the faith and joyfully to share it.”
 - ▶ Synod on New Evangelization, Proposition (#57)



Catholic Attitudes

“I don’t wear my faith on my sleeve.”

- How do Catholics talk to other Catholics about faith? Is it easy or hard? When do Catholics do this most readily?
- How do Catholics talk to other people about their Catholic faith? Is this something regular or something mostly rare?
- What makes Catholics uneasy about showing their faith?



Experiences of Encounter

- ▶ From our devotional lives (prayer, Adoration, reciting Psalms, days of recollection)
- ▶ From my experience of “community” in the Catholic Church—fellow parishioners, small groups, service groups, the people gathered on Sunday
- ▶ From my experience of the saints as our older brothers and sisters in the faith
- ▶ From the sacred items that give us a sense of contact with God and the holy—rosaries, candles, holy water, prayer books, medals



Encounter

- ▶ **Family life, the life of my closest friends:**
how do these help me get a sense of personally encountering Jesus.
- ▶ **The Sacraments, especially the Mass:**
how do these foster a sense of personal encounter with Jesus.



Levels of Encounter

- ▶ Acquaintances
- ▶ Service people at the store or in an office
- ▶ Professional people who relate to me
 - ▶ Doctors, counselors, religious, clergy
- ▶ My circle of friends
- ▶ My closest friends
- ▶ My family

On what level would Jesus want to encounter us?



Encounter

We can think of our Catholic life, in the end, as a way to have a succession of encounters with Jesus. In some way, every aspect of Catholic life involves encountering Christ, or his Word, or his Church, in his Spirit. We shortchange ourselves and the power of our Catholic faith by not recognizing just how personal and involved we have become with Jesus, and how much Jesus opens our lives to a renewed vision of God, and a powerful life in the Spirit.

(p. 20)



Spiritual Exercise

“The Christian faith is above all conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person, and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ making, of oneself a disciple of him” .

(General Directory for Catechesis, #53)

Explore the word “adhere”—to “stick to” something.
In what way do you think this word is reflective of your relationship with Jesus? In what way does it reflect Jesus relationship with you?

personal and involved we have become with Jesus, and how much Jesus opens our lives to a renewed vision of God, and a powerful life in the Spirit.



Spiritual Exercise

“The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ making, of oneself a disciple of him” (General Directory for Catechesis, #53).

Write down some of the times you have felt “full and sincere” adherence to Jesus.

How do you feel Christ adheres to (sticks with”) you?

How do you sense that you adhere to (“stick with”) Jesus?





Scripture— John 1:35-42

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).



Catholic Discipleship Prayer

Lord, God, through our baptisms you have made us disciples, followers of Jesus who attend to his Word, pray and worship in his Spirit, experience love in his community of the Church, and are sent to serve by helping others as he did. Lead us, Father, more fully into your Kingdom, which Jesus came to begin and fulfill. Help us, through his Spirit, to adhere to him and bring his Good News to all we encounter. We pray this in his name. Amen.

Our Father...



Contact

Frank DeSiano, CSP

President, Paulist Evangelization Ministries

- ▶ **Email:** ministry@pemdc.org
- ▶ **Online:**
 - ▶ www.pemdc.org
 - ▶ www.fpdetano.com
- ▶ **Mailing Address:**
 - ▶ PO Box 29121
 - ▶ Washington, DC 20017



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