



THE  
EVANGELICAL  
CATHOLIC

# TOWARD AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

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*Revised and Expanded Edition*

PETER ANDRASTEK

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# TOWARD AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

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*Revised and Expanded Edition*

*by*

*Peter Andrastek*



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# INTRODUCTION: MOST STILL STRUGGLE TO MOVE FROM MAINTENANCE TO MISSION

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*I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.*

*-Pope Francis<sup>1</sup>*

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Most Catholics in the United States have heard the Church’s call to move from maintenance to mission. We’ve experienced the emptying pews, shrinking budgets, and consolidation of parishes firsthand. We know people (often in our own families) who have drifted away. In response to these phenomena and the Holy Spirit’s promptings over the last few decades, we’ve heard—through books, parish missions, conferences, podcasts, videos, and social media—how our parishes must move from maintenance to mission.<sup>2</sup> Virtually everyone, from recent popes to the average parishioner agree on this point.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, Vatican Website, March 5, 1995, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html), sec. 27 (hereafter cited as EG).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see: *From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish* by Fr. Robert S. Rivers, *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish From Maintenance to Mission* by Fr. James Mallon, the article “A Call to Discomfort: From Maintenance to Mission” by Catholic Apostolate Center, “The Upper Room” podcast, the “Divine Renovation Podcast.”

To this end, many parishes spend months devising multi-year pastoral plans. They hire consultants, buy software and video subscriptions. They change job titles and job descriptions to embrace language like “missionary discipleship,” “apostolic mission,” and “evangelization.” Even the Congregation for the Clergy released an instruction on the pastoral conversion of the parish in light of the pastoral priority of mission.<sup>3</sup>

Some genuine progress has been made, especially if a parish hires the right person or gets a pastor with enough dynamism. Or if they’ve partnered with one of the evangelically focused apostolates that have emerged in the last few decades, like Divine Renovation, Alpha, FOCUS, CLI, the Evangelical Catholic, or another one, they likely see positive change. Communities that have or seek to build strong spiritual and human leadership can gain momentum toward becoming mission oriented. But in my experience, apart from these (thankfully growing) exceptions, most parishes’ attempts fail to produce the hoped-for wide-spread change.

For all the many years of talk and exhortation, broadly speaking, the Church in the United States (as well as in Europe and other parts of the world), has made only negligible progress moving from a maintenance model to being fully apostolic in our parishes.

***The Church . . . has made only negligible progress moving from a maintenance model to being fully apostolic in our parishes.***

So how do we help our parishes move from maintenance to mission?

What does it *look like* to become apostolic? For example, what does a staffing structure at a parish look like, and how does it operate? What are the top priorities of the pastoral leadership on a day-

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<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction: *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in Light of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*. July 20, 2020. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html>.

to-day, week-to-week, and year-to-year basis? What do their job descriptions, schedules, and budgets look like? Moreover, what do the parishioners do in a fully apostolic parish? What is their engagement with the ministries and structures? And why is it so difficult to imagine all of this, especially for those of us who work for the Church?

For all the many questions we could ask about what an apostolic parish looks like, three questions need to be answered first—three questions that create the circumstances for all of the other questions to be answered. Thus, in this paper, we will address:

- What is the end goal of parish ministry? (Chapter 1)
- Why have we been failing in our attempt to become fully mission oriented? (Chapter 2)
- What does a parish need to do to begin a transition from maintenance to mission? (Chapters 3-4)

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## DISCUSS THE INTRODUCTION

1. How have you experienced the call to move from maintenance to mission on a personal level?
2. In what ways has your parish and/or your diocese made changes to move toward mission?

# CHAPTER 1

## IN PURSUIT OF LAY HOLINESS

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If we don't see the target, we'll never hit it. Begin with the end in mind, however, and we can determine the means to get there. So, what is the end, or goal, of parish ministry? *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* succinctly says that God "freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life."<sup>4</sup> The "purpose which governs everything" in the Church, therefore, is "the holiness of Christ's members."<sup>5</sup> Simply put, personal holiness is the end toward which everything in the Church is wholly ordered, including parishes.

Holiness, simply understood, is "the fullness of the Christian life,"<sup>6</sup> the life of the Trinity communicated to us in Christ. Ultimately, holiness is simple, because God is simple. But according to the human dimension of holiness it is multidimensional, because we are multidimensional. Here I would like to highlight just four dimensions of holiness: personal, communal, missional,<sup>7</sup> and, for the laity, secular.<sup>8</sup> We'll spend the bulk of our time on the missional and secular dimensions.

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<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 773.

<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 21 November, 1964," in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, Introductions by Douglas G. Bushman, S.T.L., and Marianne Lorraine Trouvé, FSP, ed., (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1999), sec. 40 (hereafter cited as *LG*).

<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, we will use the terms evangelization, apostolate, and mission interchangeably.

<sup>8</sup> These dimensions of holiness loosely correspond to the four marks of the Church. Personal: Holy. Communal: One. Missional: Apostolic. Secular: Catholic.

## Personal Dimension

The sacraments (initially Baptism and most profoundly the Eucharist) divinize us. By mystically configuring us to the Second Person of the Trinity, they cause us to “share in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Becoming sharers in the divine nature, we mysteriously become sons in the Son, Christ himself: “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me,” (Galatians 2:20). This identification with Christ is “the deepest mystery of the Christian vocation”<sup>9</sup> and “the culminating point of the mystery of our Christian life.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, holiness is living the very life of Christ. It is our only call. “We are called only to become one with him.”<sup>11</sup>

## Communal Dimension

Just as rays of the sun get closer to each other as they get closer to the sun, so also do you and I become one with each other as we become one with him. St. Paul explains, “for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Communion in the Mystical Body of Christ is intensified through growth in authentic relationships<sup>12</sup> and perfected through sharing in the Body of Christ in Eucharistic Communion.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the “we” of our communion together in Christ is so strong and intimate that it becomes the “I” of the Church. Thus “communion lies at the heart of the Church’s self-understanding.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, “Message of John Paul II to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the III World Youth Day 1990,” Vatican Website, August 15, 1990, [https://web.archive.org/web/20070930152655/http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_15081990\\_vi-world-youth-day\\_en.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20070930152655/http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/youth/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_15081990_vi-world-youth-day_en.html), sec. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, “Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, Homily of Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace,” Vatican Website, January 1, 1997, [https://web.archive.org/web/20070930135851/http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/1997/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19970101\\_en.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20070930135851/http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19970101_en.html), sec. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 521.

<sup>12</sup> See John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, Vatican Website, January 22, 1999, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_22011999\\_ecclesia-in-america.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america.html), sec. 41 (hereafter cited as *EA*).

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

<sup>14</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio notio*, Vatican Website, May 28, 1992, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_28051992\\_communio-notio\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communio-notio_en.html), sec. 3.

## Missional Dimension

Now to say that holiness—the life of Christ in us—is our deepest identity and only call is to affirm in the same breath that each and all of the baptized are called to evangelization, to apostolate. To evangelize is “to make oneself an instrument of [Jesus Christ’s] presence and action in the world.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, holiness and apostolate are only *conceptually* distinct. We distinguish them to speak about them in a meaningful way and to provide helpful formation. In reality, they are one and the same thing.<sup>16</sup>

***To say that holiness—the life of Christ in us—is our deepest identity and only call is to affirm in the same breath that each and all of the baptized are called to evangelization, to apostolate.***

The basis for this unity between holiness and apostolate is precisely our identity in Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word-become-flesh. In him identity and mission converge. As Eternal Word, he is the communication of the Father, and the purpose of communication is to draw into communion. His very name is “God Saves.” Thus, baptism into Christ is at the very same time baptism into apostolate. “For the Christian vocation by its very nature is a vocation to the apostolate.”<sup>17</sup>

A helpful metaphor for understanding this relationship between holiness and apostolate is the relationship between fire and heat.

<sup>15</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, Vatican Website, December 3, 2007, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20071203\\_notaevangellizzazione\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20071203_notaevangellizzazione_en.html), sec. 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Ernst Burkhardt and Javier López, *Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaría*, Vol. 1 (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2018), 206-208.

<sup>17</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 18 November, 1965,” in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, Introductions by Douglas G. Bushman, S.T.L., Marianne Lorraine Trouvé, FSP, ed. (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1999), sec. 2 (hereafter cited as AA).

Where there is fire (holiness), there is heat (evangelization).<sup>18</sup> Now consider how a fire spreads. A hot coal in some way mysteriously becomes the fire while remaining itself—even becoming its truest self. The burning coal then, coming close to other things, radiates heat and transforms its surroundings. It cannot help but to do this. In a similar way, evangelization is simply the radiation or communication of holiness. We are to become glowing, hot, burning coals that take on all the properties of the fire (Jesus) and radiate and spread that fire.

***For most Catholics, the vocation to apostolic holiness takes place in the middle of the world, amid secular settings and activities, because the vast majority of Catholics are laity.***

Apostolic holiness is the entire Church’s (therefore each Catholic’s) “grace and vocation” and “deepest identity.”<sup>19</sup> Each “exists in order to evangelize.”<sup>20</sup> And for most Catholics, the vocation to apostolic holiness takes place in the middle of the world, amid secular settings and activities, because the vast majority of Catholics are *laity*.

## Secular Dimension (The Laity)

It may seem an obvious point, that most Catholics are laity, but despite this fact most lay people (and indeed many priests and religious) have an anemic understanding of this most common

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<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed exposition on the relationship between holiness and apostolate, see “The Need for Deprofessionalizing Evangelization” by Peter Andrastek, University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, January 30, 2020, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/deprofessionalizing-the-apostolate/>.

<sup>19</sup> Pope St. Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican Website, December 8, 1975, [www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_ex\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_ex_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html), sec 14 (hereafter cited as *EN*).

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.* Evangelization being the grace, vocation, and deepest identity of the Church and each Catholic pertains to this age, prior to the Second Coming.

expression of Christian discipleship. The laity are usually defined by what they are not: not ordained, not vowed religious. But what *are* the lay faithful?

The lay faithful are those Christians who, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God in and through the ordinary circumstances of everyday life: family, school, work, social, civic, etc.<sup>21</sup> “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature.”<sup>22</sup> Secularity<sup>23</sup> comes from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning “age” so secularity is “of the age”. The laity, characterized by a secular nature, find the setting and means of their sanctity and apostolate *in the world*: it is their rightful jurisdiction for living and spreading the gospel.<sup>24</sup>

***The lay faithful rightly experience a gravitational pull toward the world, which they are not called to set aside or overcome.***

The laity’s *specific ecclesial role, then*, is to be secular. They are meant to have secular interests, hobbies, and work and to inform or infuse all these with faith, hope, charity, and indeed all of the supernatural virtues and gifts. The lay faithful, therefore, rightly experience a gravitational pull toward the world, which they are

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<sup>21</sup> “But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven” (LG, sec. 31). See also Pope St. John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, Vatican Website, December 30, 1988, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html), sec. 9 and 15-17 (hereafter cited as CL).

<sup>22</sup> LG, sec. 31.

<sup>23</sup> We must be careful not to confuse secularity with secularism. Secularism is an ideology that seeks to excise religion or any religious sensibility from the temporal order.

<sup>24</sup> Setting and means but not the cause; the cause is grace.

not called to set aside or overcome.<sup>25</sup> Rather, they are called to sublimate and supernaturalize their secular pursuits with all the corresponding supernatural attitudes and virtues, putting Christ at the summit of all things.

To be clear, the world is the means, but grace is the cause of sanctity. So, the laity need continually to pursue Jesus and dispose themselves to receive his grace through frequent reception of the sacraments, daily prayer, devotions, spiritual reading, etc. But grace builds on nature, perfects and heals it, and takes it where it wants to go; therefore, lay Catholics must embrace, not conquer, their human nature if they truly want to become saints.

***The world is the means, but grace is the cause of sanctity. So, the laity need continually to pursue Jesus and dispose themselves to receive his grace.***

For most lay people, their secular world consists of family, professional work, social activities, civic duties, and cultural life. It is through these things that the laity exert themselves, grow in virtue, develop their personalities, enter relationships, and develop and pursue their aspirations. All of this, their *human* vocation, is part and parcel of their *divine* vocation; it is the very *matter* that grace informs.

What's more, secularity specifies not only the lay vocation, but also the lay apostolate, since holiness and evangelization are one. If the lay vocation is to become a contemplative in the middle of the world, then the laity's mission is to sanctify the world from *within* the world.<sup>26</sup>

*The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* says, "laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order . . . they should act in this domain in a direct way

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<sup>25</sup> Here we refer to the world that is good, that God created, redeemed, and saved; not the "world" that is opposed to the spirit of the gospel.

<sup>26</sup> See LG, sec. 31

and in their own specific manner.”<sup>27</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further underscores the secular character of lay apostolate when it says that “this evangelization . . . acquires a special property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the laity are the front line of the Church’s life; through them the Church is the vital principle of human society.<sup>29</sup>

***The lay apostolate is most effective when it is done on the laity’s turf—the gym, the office, the ballfield, the store, the driveway, the bar, etc.—because the secular world is their jurisdiction, where God is calling them to be salt and leaven.***

In other words, the lay apostolate is most effective when it is done on the laity’s turf—the gym, the office, the ball field, the store, the driveway, the bar, etc. Why? Because the secular world is their *jurisdiction*, their “office,”<sup>30</sup> where God is calling them to be “co-responsible for the Church’s being and acting.”<sup>31</sup> Since their jurisdiction (their scope of power and authority and their area of responsibility for the Church) is the world, God gives them (through Baptism and the character imparted by Confirmation) legitimate power and authority to act and effect change there.

<sup>27</sup> AA, sec. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 905.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 899.

<sup>30</sup> Here, we are borrowing the term and concept from the 1983 Code of Canon Law and applying it to the reality of the lay vocation. “An ecclesiastical office is any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose” (*Codex Iudex Canonici*, 145 §1). It is by divine ordinance that the laity have a secular character, are consigned to the apostolate, and are stably constituted as such in a stable manner. And the purpose is spiritual: to sanctify the temporal order.

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action*, October 8, 2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120810\\_fiac.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120810_fiac.html).

Moreover, each lay person is called in a special way to bring the good news to the places and circumstances where only they can.<sup>32</sup> Each has a personal, unique vocation and mission, God-given! Each is called and given the grace to be an individuated vessel of the Divine Personality wherever they find themselves—to be an instrument of Christ’s presence and action in the world. The mature Christian, who takes this vocation seriously, cannot help but evangelize;<sup>33</sup> and in doing so, becomes even more perfectly who they are: Christ himself.

## What Does Lay Holiness Look Like in Action?

The life of a lay person committed to holiness may not look substantially different (exteriorly) from the one who is not.<sup>34</sup> Yet, through ongoing conversion, aversion to sin, frequent prayer, reception of the sacraments, and formation, a lay person committed to holiness lives every aspect of life with *divinized* motives.<sup>35</sup>

For example, I know a financial advisor, Steve, who loves working with money. He is captivated by economics and deeply aware of the tremendous good that money well-invested can do. The psychology involved in economics also fascinates him. Outside of work, he loves sports and exercise: he loves the skill, mechanics, toughness, and excellence they draw out of him and others. On the weekends he enjoys being with his family, simply to have fun

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<sup>32</sup> See *LG*, sec. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Though this is not completely automatic, and takes formation and a great deal of intentionality.

<sup>34</sup> See St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Furrow*, 498. Paradoxically, this “very ordinary” quality of the lay vocation and mission can actually contribute to the difficulty of developing an imagination for what the lay vocation looks like, because the laity’s vocation is precisely to pass unnoticed, like leaven in the dough, or the soul in a person. They don’t wear, say, or do anything peculiar that makes them stand out: as St. Josemaría Escrivá was known to say, the lay faithful are not “like other people,” they “are other people.” We will address this problem of the Church’s lack of imagination for the lay vocation in the next chapter.

<sup>35</sup> The lay faithful do not wear, say, or do anything peculiar that makes them stand out. Like the soul, they pass unnoticed, yet give life. See “Epistle to Diognetus,” Vatican Website, [http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit\\_20010522\\_diogneto\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20010522_diogneto_en.html).

and spend time together. He also wants to earn a relatively high income so he can send his children to good schools, provide long-term security into retirement, live in a reasonably comfortable house, have good hobbies, and support good causes.

He sacrifices to receive the formation and accompaniment he needs to pursue apostolic holiness in these spaces. And his life is marked by habitual practices of prayer, community, and mission. He wakes up early in the morning to spend twenty minutes in personal prayer and usually prays the rosary or Divine Mercy chaplet with his family in the evenings. He goes to 6:30am weekday Mass before work and gets to confession regularly at a nearby parish over his lunch hour or right after work.

Steve knows through personal experience that he needs community and lots of ongoing formation, or, like a stick taken out of a bonfire, his fire will go out. So, for formation and accompaniment, he has a spiritual director whom he sees once a month. He views his spiritual director as indispensable for helping him to figure out how to navigate the complexities of his busy, fast-paced life in a way that sanctifies him and those around him. He also has an intentional small group of close Catholic friends who get together regularly—at least once a month. They rely on each other for formation, support, and encouragement in their vocation and apostolate. He sometimes listens to Catholic radio and podcasts in the car (in addition to sports radio and financial podcasts) and is usually reading a spiritual book or two, oftentimes with the other guys in his group.

The grace he receives purifies, orders, expands, and divinizes his secular activities, interests, desires, and motives. In other words, his effort to sublimate them is met with grace that sanctifies them: they are permeated by the Spirit for God's glory, the salvation of souls, and the redemption of the world. Sublimating his secular life is his path to sanctity and fruitful apostolate.

*Each lay person is called in a special way to bring  
the good news to the places and circumstances  
where only they can.*

Perhaps surprisingly, Steve will be *more* effective than clergy or a specialist<sup>36</sup> or anyone else in reaching the people God puts in his path. Why? Because for every call God gives, he provides the corresponding grace to respond and act. Nothing escapes God's providence. He has orchestrated all of time and history to put particular people in Steve's life. He has been Baptized and Confirmed, prepared for this purpose: God is calling him, and all of us, to act.

Only *Steve* can reach *Steve's* friends, coworkers, etc. because it's his example and witness they're going to see. It's he who has a relationship with them, who will be with them over the long haul, and in whom they trust. Only he knows his friends' likes and dislikes, aspirations, and situations. Only he has the ability to live among them, speak into their real concerns, and customize the gospel in a way they can receive it.<sup>37</sup>

A layperson's secular mission could play out a billion-and-one ways in everyday life, but it often starts by living an ordinary life, the same as everyone else's, but with the mysterious beauty of being transformed by grace. Working with generosity, zeal, and excellence, they will be light and leaven to those around them—what others would describe as “just great to be around,” even though they are well aware of their own weaknesses and failures.

Eventually a coworker or friend will approach Steve for advice or help with something. He will give that advice selflessly and cheerfully. He will follow up and help. He will find ways to be a bright spot in his friend's day.

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<sup>36</sup> “This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of ‘specialists’ but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the everyday *commitment of Christian communities and groups*” Pope St. John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, Vatican Website, January 6, 2001, [www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html), sec 40.

<sup>37</sup> It is true that familiarity sometimes breeds contempt, and those who are closest to us have a more closed-off disposition to *hearing* the gospel from us. But it is those people who we can *be* the gospel for—who we can, over time, “slow roast” (to extend the fire metaphor) with prayer, mortification, love, kindness, fun, etc.

Over time, as he prays for people he knows and deepens relationships in trust and transparency, he will see unique opportunities to share the secret of his peace, joy, and happiness with them. Already the Lord has begun working on them, but now, using Steve as his instrument in these authentic relationships, God will open horizons for people they never before imagined!<sup>38</sup>

In Steve's life, this will happen one person at a time, or perhaps a few at a time as his zeal and ability to be intentional and organized in his apostolate grows.

For example, over the years Steve has grown in friendship with a few guys from work and from his kids' school. He makes a point to get one-on-one with them occasionally (over lunch, coffee, or beer) to talk more deeply about life and growth. Additionally, Steve and his wife are intentionally growing in friendship with several couples they met through their kids' school and sports. Since his apostolate, because of God's grace and Steve's intentionality over the years, has become "a sea without shores," he frequently examines his priorities and commitments with the help of his wife, spiritual director, and community of friends.<sup>39</sup> In a beautiful way, apostolic activity is honing Steve, helping him become a better husband, father, and professional.

***This is the sublime calling of the lay faithful, the beauty of a life that radiates Christ in and to the world. It is how the laity become protagonists of salvation history.***

This is the sublime calling of the lay faithful, the beauty of a life that radiates Christ in and to the world. It is how the laity become protagonists of salvation history. It is, therefore, their path to

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<sup>38</sup> For an inspiring account of what this type of mission to peers and friends can look like, along with practical tips and helpful principles, see *Mission-Ready Friendship: A Blueprint for Deeper Relationships and Life-Changing Faith* by Jason J. Simon, President of the Evangelical Catholic (Ave Maria Press, 2024).

<sup>39</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá* (New York: Scepter, 2002), sec. 120, 185.

being good parishioners (even if some of them never get involved in parish ministries or their institutional structures).

Aspiring lay saints see professional work as participation in the creative and redemptive work of God. They see family life as a participation in the creative and loving communion of God.<sup>40</sup> Their well-ordered hobbies, culture, social life, etc. are ways of manifesting and communicating God's beauty, truth, and goodness.

But they won't be able to live this way without formation and support.

We've established that holiness is the end toward which everything in the Church is wholly ordered. The problem remains, however, that too few laity are aware of their vocation in the world. Indeed, grace is real and transformative, but it is not magic. Everyone needs appropriate formation to live their vocation, to empower them to become mature agents of the divine mission.

With the end in mind, we now turn to the means we can take to get there.

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<sup>40</sup> For a more robust treatment on work as participation in God's creation and redemption, and family as a participation in God's creative communion, see International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040723\\_communion-stewardship\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html).

# DISCUSS

## CHAPTER 1

1. What is the relationship between holiness and apostolate (pp. 6-7)? What is the foundation of this relationship? How does making this connection change your understanding of evangelization?
2. Describe in your own words “secularity” (pp. 8-9). What does it mean that the laity have a “secular character?”
3. Discuss some people in your life who exemplify secular holiness. What do their lives look like?
4. What impact would it have for the faithful to more deeply understand their call to secular holiness? On their day-to-day lives? On the parish?

# CHAPTER 2

## A BROKEN PARADIGM

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Many means exist to provide formation to the laity including a growing number of lay movements and Catholic media outlets. Surely, these movements and media are due to new inspirations of the Holy Spirit! Nonetheless, the ordinary locus of lay apostolic formation and community still is (and ought to be) the parish.<sup>41</sup>

***The ordinary locus of lay apostolic formation and community still is (and ought to be) the parish.***

The parish is the ordinary instantiation<sup>42</sup> of the local Church where the people of God are both built and sent. A parish is a stable community (ordinarily a territory) of the faithful, established by the bishop, under the care of a pastor whose office is to sanctify, teach, and govern.<sup>43</sup> This community is gathered around the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and the Word of God, which build the Church.

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. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana [LEV], 2020), sec. 302.

<sup>42</sup> An instantiation refers to a specific and concrete application of something more general: a specific "instance" of something.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2179; *Code of Canon Law*, 515. For an introduction to the Church's own discernment on the development of the reality of the parish in light of contemporary culture, see Congregation for the Clergy, *Instruction: The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church*, sec. 6-16.

come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.<sup>44</sup>

As stated earlier, holiness “is the purpose which governs everything [in the Church].”<sup>45</sup> Recall also that holiness and apostolate are one. Thus, if over ninety-nine percent of the Church in any given parish consists of the lay faithful, then the ministry of the parish ought to prioritize forming the laity for apostolate in and to the secular world.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps no one has stated this more forcefully and authoritatively than the Holy Father, Pope Francis:

Parishes, beginning with their structures and the organization of parish life, are called to think of themselves primarily as being of service to the mission that the faithful carry out in society, in family life and the workplace, without concentrating exclusively on their own activities and their organizational needs. Parish communities increasingly need to become places from which the baptized set out as missionary disciples and to which they return, full of joy, in order to share the wonders worked by the Lord through their witness.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> EG, sec. 28. Pope Francis refers to the parish as a “community of communities,” echoing Pope St. John Paul II: “One way of renewing parishes, especially urgent for parishes in large cities, might be to consider the parish as a community of communities and movements. It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships. This will make it possible to live communion more intensely, ensuring that it is fostered not only ‘ad intra’, but also with the parish communities to which such groups belong, and with the entire diocesan and universal Church. In such a human context, it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word, and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ. The institution of the parish, thus renewed, ‘can be the source of great hope. It can gather people in community, assist family life, overcome the sense of anonymity, welcome people and help them to be involved in their neighborhood and in society’” (EA, sec. 41).

<sup>45</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 773.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed discussion on the distinction between ministry and apostolate, see “Where does the Ministry End and the Apostolate Begin?” by Peter Andrastek. *University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life*, April 20, 2018, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/where-does-the-ministry-end-and-the-apostolate-begin/>.

<sup>47</sup> Pope Francis, *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Parish Priests*, Vatican Website, May 2, 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2024/documents/20240502-lettera-parroci.html>.

And elsewhere:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.

The parish (ultimately the pastor) has a grave responsibility to prioritize formation and accompaniment of its parishioners such that they become true “instruments of Christ’s presence and action *in the world*.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, “the care of souls should always be infused with a missionary spirit,” and “evangelization is the cornerstone of all pastoral action, the demands of which are primary, preeminent and preferential.”<sup>49</sup> Often, however, our parishes neglect or are ill-prepared to provide what the laity need.<sup>50</sup>

## Parishes are Failing to form the Laity for Apostolate

Most American parishes do not provide adequate apostolic formation for the laity (I introduce an approach in chapters 3-4). They either do not know how or have not adequately prioritized doing so. Take, for example, a medium-to-large-sized parish with an annual budget of \$1.5 million. Among all their staff there is one director of adult formation, and only half of that person’s time and budget is dedicated specifically to apostolic formation and community-shepherding. The all-in annual budget for this position (salary, benefits, program budget) is \$80,000. In this scenario, the parish is dedicating a meager 2.67% of its budget to forming the laity for apostolic holiness. Both our experience and the declining numbers in parishes readily show the fruit of this lack of prioritization: family and friends are drifting, parents aren’t well formed and supported in passing faith on to their children, pews are emptying, budgets are shrinking, doors are closing, parishes are merging.

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<sup>48</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, sec. 2. Emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *Instruction: The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church*,” sec.12.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibid*, sec. 16-17.

Despite the call to renew our parishes, we have not moved substantially closer to making them mission oriented. We are, and have been for some time, experiencing a failure of the formative dimension of parishes.

## Inadequate Parish Structures

Broadly speaking, in the United States, this failure partly stems from an inherited pastoral and professional structure based on the classroom education of children (usually by priests or religious sisters). Such a structure was not calibrated for apostolic formation. It was built on the assumption that Catholic children would grow up Catholic, marry a Catholic, grow a large Catholic family, and live nearby.

***Our inherited parish structures were designed to support and maintain a Catholic life that would grow organically by way of boats and babies—that is, by continued immigration and large families.***

Our inherited structures also base the parish on a sort of “town square” experience for Catholics. Many Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were working class, uneducated or under-educated immigrants, not fully integrated into American life. They congregated together in tight-knit ethnic communities with parishes built and calibrated to receive them.

These parishes were often socially and devotionally rich and provided a respite amid a difficult, non-Catholic (sometimes anti-Catholic), English-only, mainstream American culture. People could pray together in a unified way, speak a common language, and share a common culture. Altar Rosary Societies, men’s clubs (bars in the church basement), Holy Name Societies, women’s sodalities, Knights of Columbus chapters, St. Vincent de Paul chapters, rummage sales, picnics, fish fries, and the like provided friendship, encouragement, and support.

All of this was designed to support and *maintain* a Catholic life that would grow organically by way of boats and babies—that

is, by continued immigration and large families. As long as the parish provided systematic catechesis to children and social and devotional support to adults, the Church would continue to grow.

But as society changed in multifaceted ways, these parish structures did not. Waves of priests and religious left in the 1970s and 80s, and, as the Church made provision for lay ecclesial ministry, professional lay staff took up catechetical and other roles priests and religious had previously held. As youth ministry, and eventually adult ministry, were introduced in the 1980s and 90s these new pastoral workers did only what they could imagine, based on previous experiences of parish ministry: classroom and large group education, social activities, devotions, and other events designed to create a more vibrant “parish life.” All of it was modeled on the relatively recent memory of 1940s and 50s American Catholicism.

Today, many if not most parishes that are made up of first-generation immigrants, and even other older “ethnic parishes” fit the above description of early- and mid-American immigrant parishes. In many ways, as they did in the past, they serve a very important, but very temporary, situation. What most older parishes are facing today is what these first-generation and ethnic parishes will face in a decade or two, if they aren’t already.

Moreover, many parishes today exist in areas of the country that are experiencing explosive growth due to new industries or companies moving to an area. Outer suburban parishes often experience similar growth patterns as people move to the outer suburbs while nearby inner suburban parishes see the beginning signs of decline. In these places of rapid growth, it’s hard to keep up with the traditional maintenance structures they’ve inherited. Even simply administering the sacraments presents a challenge. But these are simply a modern version of the Catholic parish of last century, where growth was facilitated by a new population moving in. They face the same (and potentially even more) risk of a sharp future decline since today’s churches don’t have Christendom or the family and community-centered culture of old to support them. With their inherited maintenance structures, these parishes are not forming their people according to their secular missional vocations, despite what looks on the outside like growth and health.

As parishes struggle to move from the inherited maintenance structures to mission, priests, pastoral workers, and others in leadership commonly experience the feeling of “rearranging the chairs.” Despite all the new (and good) programs, language, books, media, ideas, titles, etc., when pastoral workers plug these new tools into old structures they end up with the same results. Neither the content nor the structures they are plugged into are calibrated for apostolic formation of the laity.

***When pastoral workers plug new tools into old structures they end up with the same results.***

This self-defeating repetition happens because *our imagination is shaped by our experience*. Our brains struggle to imagine something we have never experienced, and most of us have never experienced parish ministry in a missionary tone.

## A Weak Imagination for Lay Agency

This principle—that our imagination is shaped by experience—introduces a root cause of our inability to move from maintenance to mission: popular Catholicism lacks a robust imagination for lay agency. In contrast, Catholic doctrine and theology in the twentieth century has seen tremendous development in the articulation of the lay vocation and mission (lay agency). On the level of Church teaching, there is increasing *conceptual clarity* on the notion of lay vocation and mission.

***Popular Catholicism lacks a robust imagination for lay agency.***

However, all the beautiful development of this doctrine has not yet permeated popular Catholicism. Nor are those charged with the formation of the laity yet inspiring lay imaginations for their vocation and mission. Formation is always on behalf

of a mission,<sup>51</sup> so without an imagination for what lay mission (agency) *looks like*, pastoral workers struggle to provide formation for it.

Pastoral workers' current imagination is largely based on their experience of studying theology, on the lives of the most popular saints, and on living immersed in what I have come to call "churchworld." A detailed examination of these obstacles exceeds the scope of this paper,<sup>52</sup> but for our purposes we can summarize as follows.

The typical pastoral worker's experience of studying theology consists largely of speculative and academic thought. As beautiful and necessary as studying academic theology is, this experience is not calibrated to formation in the way of discipleship for the typical lay Catholic. A corresponding experience is true for seminarians: the human and ascetical formation received in the seminary forms them to become priests. Seminary formation to form men as priests is absolutely necessary, but is calibrated for the formation of priests, not laity.

Additionally, the overwhelming majority of saints that Catholics are exposed to and familiar with are religious and ordained. These saints are trustworthy and beautiful examples of lived holiness. However, they are not always helpful for our imagination for forming the laity, because examples of clergy and religious help develop an imagination for religious and clerical holiness and mission.

***St. Francis's example of poverty is not always helpful for someone who has not taken a vow of poverty and who needs to provide for a family.***

Rarely will direct imitation of religious poverty, chastity, and obedience translate easily into the situations and circumstances

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<sup>51</sup> I am indebted to Fr. Michael Sweeney, O.P. for the articulation of this important principle.

<sup>52</sup> For more on this see "The Catholic Church Lacks an Imagination for Lay Agency," by Peter Andrastek, University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, May 26, 2022, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-catholic-church-lacks-an-imagination-for-lay-agency/>.

of lay life. For example, St. Francis's example of poverty is not always helpful for someone who has not taken a vow of poverty and who needs to provide for a family, save for retirement, and live an otherwise credible and attractive life for their peers and children. St. Rose of Lima, a paragon of modesty, may not provide practical guidance for spouses who seek to be attractive to each other out of love and affection.

Moreover, religious obedience is hard to apply to a secular situation—for instance, when an office supervisor is exercising poor judgment. And a religious example of humility that rejects recognition for accomplishments might not be helpful—could even be harmful—for the professional who needs to seek a promotion or raise to support her family or to improve a given field or society as a whole through her work.

Finally, there's "churchworld." Priests and pastoral workers are typically immersed in a professional, social, and cultural milieu that is almost completely subsumed by or related to ecclesiastical matters. Friends, colleagues, and "clients" are parish folks, who spend much (in some cases most) of their waking hours at the parish or at church events. They work in an explicitly faith-based environment, shaping their hobbies, interests, work days, thought-patterns, and rhythms around spiritual matters and "parish life." Whether they want to or not, their ministry causes them to live in churchworld: a Catholic subculture that creates a day-to-day experiential gap between them and the rest of society.

These factors give pastoral workers a sort of a handicap when forming the laity, because they have to overcome this experiential gap in order to speak meaningfully to many of the lay faithful. Pastoral workers are immersed in churchworld, have a conceptual grasp of theology, and have a highly developed imagination for religious sanctity; yet these are insufficient for (and can sometimes hinder) their work of forming lay people to become contemplatives in the middle of the secular world.

## The Net Result

Our inherited pastoral structures combine with a lack of imagination for lay agency to create a situation where most parish workers' lives, peers, and examples of holiness revolve around the

parish, religious and ordained life, and other explicitly Catholic things. Because of this experience, our imagination for lay agency and for parish structures is limited to just that: *involvement in ecclesiastical activities, being “connected to the parish,” and explicitly Catholic community.*

***Because of this impoverished imagination, the parish, rather than the world, “becomes the setting par excellence of the Christian life,” and also of evangelization.***

Thus, being Catholic is primarily about getting involved in what is commonly referred to as “parish life,” which entails “going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up in ecclesiastical matters,”<sup>53</sup> being engaged in ministries, organized volunteering, and regularly attending parish social activities. Because of this impoverished imagination, the parish, rather than the world, “becomes the setting par excellence of the Christian life,” and also of evangelization.<sup>54</sup>

Since lay agency (typically understood) is based on “parish life,” evangelization is thought of as parish-centered and programmatic. It mostly seeks to build up the parish as an organization or community where success is based on growth of involvement in the activities listed above. It creates a paradigm wherein “the parish”—i.e. the ministries, programs, and pastoral leaders tied to the institutional structures—is seen as the *engine* of evangelization and the people are the *fuel*. In this paradigm, spreading the gospel consists of drawing as many people to the physical parish as possible and getting them involved in “parish life.” The parishioners, being the fuel, serve the parish and keep it running.

Without a constant flow of volunteers, the engine fails to run. Hence, this paradigm requires more and more people to get involved in ministries so that the parish can get more people in

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<sup>53</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, “Homily: Passionately Loving the World”, Opus Dei, October 8, 1967, <https://opusdei.org/en/article/passionately-loving-the-world-2/>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the parish building, who will in turn volunteer or attend more programs and ministries. In this view, evangelization is parish-centric and ultimately utilitarian, because people become the means for parish success. It is driven by, centered in, and leading back to the parish structures.

Moreover, Jesus' call to become "fishers of men" in this paradigm becomes a sort of bobber fishing, wherein the parish sits comfortably on the dock and tries to attract passers-by with shiny lures (assuming people are interested in going to church in the first place). When those don't work, it tries new ones, hoping that—one of these times—it'll happen upon the right lure that will theoretically change everything with the big catch.

A successful parish within this paradigm, then, is one that has an externally visible, vibrant life of many programs, ministries, volunteers, and ministry leaders (a contemporary twist of the collective memory of the vibrant parish of the 1950s). Evangelization becomes synonymous with multiplying parish ministries, involvement, and volunteers. Thus in an odd paradox, evangelization becomes about *maintaining* Catholic or parish life, a life presented as being in competition with the very secular world to which the laity are in fact called.

***Evangelization becomes synonymous with multiplying parish ministries, involvement, and volunteers. Thus in an odd paradox, evangelization becomes about maintaining Catholic or parish life, a life presented as being in competition with the very secular world to which the laity are in fact called.***

This creates a situation where formation, ministries, and "parish life" are not relevant to the everyday life of the very people who the pastoral workers are trying to reach and can even be set up as being in competition with secular life. This inadvertently promotes a dis-integrated life of faith, which may result in manifestations of clericalism or quasi-religious life for those who want to grow—and irrelevance for everyone else.

In other words, the parish implies (often inadvertently) that those who want to take their faith seriously will make time to get involved in parish structures and ministries. Many who pursue involvement and leadership at the parish are drawn into a sort of lay clericalism as they find particular importance and even power in their role at the parish. Others—led by a need or desire to reject, flee, or at best tolerate earthly things—immerse themselves into parish life as though entering into a quasi-religious state and lose much of their potential force and impact on the world.

***Some—led by a need or desire to reject, flee, or at best tolerate earthly things—immerse themselves into parish life as though entering a quasi-religious state and lose much of their potential force and impact on the world. Others, seeing this example of the lay vocation, conclude that faith is not relevant or helpful to their daily lives in the world.***

Seeing this example of the lay vocation, the many lay people in the pews who do not feel attracted to parish involvement conclude that faith is not relevant or helpful to their daily lives in the world. A lack of imagination for secularity compounds this issue, leaving many of the faithful stuck with highly compartmentalized and lukewarm faith lives. Many drift away completely because they do not sense or understand the relevance of faith to their daily life. Thus, the frustrating consequence of trying to “build the Church” results in the exact opposite of what is hoped for.

# DISCUSS

## CHAPTER 2

1. Describe the parish structure “designed to support and maintain a Catholic life that would grow organically by way of boats and babies” (p. 20). Why is this inadequate today?
2. What are the consequences of a lack of imagination for lay agency (p. 22-25)?
3. What does a “successful parish” look like in this broken paradigm (p. 26)?
4. What is your response to rethinking this paradigm?

# CHAPTER 3

## A NEW PARADIGM, AN ANCIENT PROCESS

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To overcome the experiential gap of many pastoral workers and to stop recycling structures ill-fit for our age, what we need is a complete reversal of the paradigm. I will say it in three ways.

1. Rather than trying to draw people to the turf of the parish by asking them to serve the parish and get involved in “parish life,” the ministry structures of the parish ought to serve the faithful by forming and encouraging them to more effectively engage secular life, *on their turf*.

2. Rather than the parish functioning as the engine for evangelization and the people as the fuel or means for building up the parish ministries and structures, the lay faithful are the engine for evangelization and the parish ministry structures ought to fuel them, providing the formation, sacraments, and governance (ordering of vocations and charisms) essential for apostolic holiness.<sup>55</sup>

3. Rather than the parish being seen as a center of evangelization, as if the primary locus of evangelization happens at the parish property (essentially bobber fishing), the parish must be seen as a center of apostolic formation for the laity: forming and equipping the laity to “put out into deep water and lower [their] nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4) and shepherding them along the way.

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<sup>55</sup> In this paradigm, the primacy of the Marian dimension of the Church is protected (as end), and the Petrine dimension retains its proper place as means. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 773.

***Rather than the parish functioning as the engine for evangelization and the people as the fuel for building up the parish ministries and structures, the lay faithful are the engine for evangelization and the parish ministry structures ought to fuel them.***

But how are we supposed to change this paradigm with such an impoverished imagination for what lay agency and parish ministry in a missionary tone looks like?

Many evangelizers know the familiar saying: “The Church doesn’t have a mission; God’s mission has a Church.” There’s a lot to nuance in this statement, but for our purposes, it is a generally helpful way to think. So, let’s take a moment to observe, in broad strokes, how God himself established and expanded his mission-Church.

## **Jesus’ Mission Process**

*For us men and for our salvation* Jesus was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is God *and* the mission of God. He is “God Saves.” His mission was and is to reconcile the world back to the Father. He had less than three years to accomplish this mission, and he knew it. So what did he do?

***When we think of Jesus’ public ministry, we tend to forget a key ingredient—arguably the most important one: he called twelve men “to be with him” (Mark 3:14).***

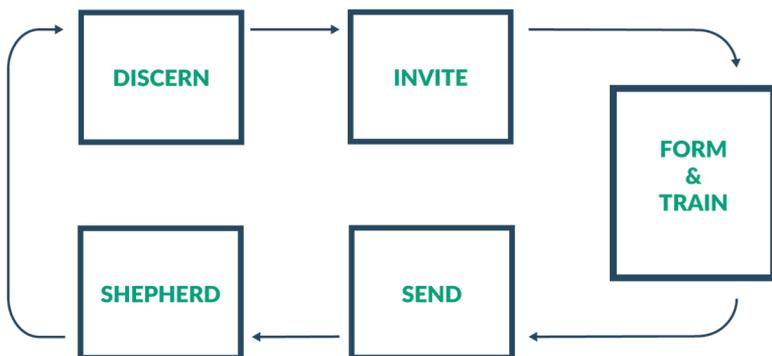
When we think of Jesus’ public ministry, we readily recall how he taught the multitudes, performed miracles, and traveled from town to town; but we tend to forget a key ingredient in his ministry—arguably the most important one. It is the reason we are here today, and why we even know about the other things Jesus did.

Early on in his public ministry, as he was building a following of disciples, he discerned from among them those whom he called “to be with him” (Mark 3:14), in community, whom he formed, trained, and eventually sent as apostles. He aimed to replicate himself in them, so he could send them to the ends of the earth, to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and to reconcile it all back to the Father (cf. Ephesians 2:14-18).

The Gospels tell us that even during those few years together, Jesus sent out his disciples on two different occasions. He instructed them to preach the kingdom, and afterwards he processed their experiences with them—almost like practicums! They were already beginning to take ownership of the mission. Then, at the end of his earthly mission, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to constitute the Church in mission fully, as the continuation of his Incarnation. He gave Peter (and his successors) to build and shepherd the Church. The Church became simultaneously the communion of humankind with God and each other and the mission of God to humankind.

Thus, we can see that Jesus used a rather simple “mission process” to establish his Church, both as his kingdom and as the mission of his kingdom. To build his kingdom-mission he: 1) *discerned* from among his disciples, 2) *called* those who he discerned to be with him and each other, 3) *formed and trained* them as apostles to the world, 4) *sent* them into the world, and 5) continually *shepherds* them in the world, both individually and as a community.

### *Jesus' Mission Process*



Once they were sent, what did they do? Since imagination is shaped by experience, they did what they had experienced. Immediately after the Resurrection, the remaining Apostles stayed in Jerusalem and “all these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Act 1:14).

As this fledgling community grew in number they lived community intensely, which at once supported and encouraged their own growth in discipleship and also attracted others, generating a mission culture right where they were (see Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16). These first Christians, supported by deep prayer and intense community, became missionaries to their families, neighbors, and coworkers as their witness attracted those around them.

They *discerned* from among their already existing circles of influence precisely those who were attracted to their witness of this new way of life. They *invited* them to be *formed and trained* as disciples. As new disciples were initiated into the early Christian community and formed in a new way of life, love would *send* them every day back into their ordinary lives where they witnessed in deed and word to a new way of love-transformed life. And day by day they continued to gather as community to pray and be *shepherded*. The Church in Jerusalem grew.

Eventually, the gospel began to spread beyond Jerusalem. Persecution broke out and scattered the infant Church throughout the nearby regions of Samaria and Judea. Again, guided by life-transforming love (for that is really all they had) they did what they had experienced. They gathered in small communities of support with each other wherever they went and continued to evangelize. Who formed these small communities all over Judea and Samaria and spread the Church? Not the Apostles, who remained in Jerusalem, but devout, ordinary Christians— those we now term *lay faithful* (see Acts 8:1-4)!

Wherever they moved, they “went about preaching the word,” by their transformed lives (Acts 8:4). Transformed by love, into love, they radiated peace, love, and joy, redefining happiness for those around them; and they continually looked for and entered into new relationships. As they engaged people who were attracted to their way of life, they once again, *discerned* and *invited*

those who had the disposition to be *formed*, into communities of disciples; and love *sent* them on mission—mission to their families, friends, workplaces. And those who joined the mission were *shepherded* within these early Christian communities. Word spread about this growth, and eventually the Apostles back in Jerusalem heard of it. They sent Peter and John to confirm all the neophytes and provide more shepherding (see Acts 8:14). “The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace. It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the holy Spirit it grew in numbers” (Acts 9:31).

Again, persecution scattered Christians even further: to Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, and eventually to the limits of the known world. Missionary disciples (lay Christians) lived their transformed lives and transformed the world around them, person by person. As new people were *discerned* and *invited* into community, *formed* as missionary disciples, and *sent*, the early Church figured out how to *shepherd* them. This process became the general *modus operandi* of the Church’s growth throughout the centuries.

***Jesus began by forming a small community and showing them how to live. He formed them in a way of life marked by practices of prayer, community, and mission. This was the “mustard seed” of the Church.***

Notice how Jesus did not start with a strategic plan, charts, timelines, pathways, or structures that he shoehorned people into. He began by forming a small community of men and showing them how to live. He formed them in a way of life marked by practices of prayer, community, and mission. This was the “mustard seed” of the Church. As they lived in his new life and attracted people, and as the movement grew, they eventually discerned how to add structures to facilitate ongoing growth.<sup>56</sup>

This is not unique to Jesus. As illustrated above, it is how the early Church spread throughout the Mediterranean (with the lay

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<sup>56</sup> See Acts 6:1-7; 14:23.

faithful being instrumental protagonists); and it is the primary way movements have renewed the Church throughout its 2,000 years. For example, St. Anthony of Egypt, St. Francis, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. Josemaría Escrivá all started something new within the Church, something that hadn't existed before they responded to a call of the Holy Spirit. In all cases, when they began living a new way of love, others joined them. It was only after living in these new ways, oftentimes for many years, did they write rules and statutes or create structures to protect these realities and allow them to flourish. This process is the basic way that saints founded and grew orders and movements of renewal in the Church. And it is the way in which the various ecclesial movements in the Church continue to grow today.

## Applying Jesus' Mission Process to the Parish

Likewise, becoming an apostolic parish does not begin by crafting multi-year pastoral plans, rewriting mission statements, and restructuring, as if pastoral leaders could herd hundreds or thousands of people *en masse* into spiritual renewal.<sup>57</sup> It does not begin by getting more people involved in ministries and programs, simply fuel for the engine of the old maintenance paradigm. And it does not begin by trying to engage the lukewarm or entice people who aren't interested in going to church.

***Ministry staff must prioritize investing in people with the best disposition to receive formation for mission: people who are already living lives of discipleship, who want to evangelize.***

Transitioning from maintenance to mission begins as a mustard seed. It starts with discerning and inviting a *few* disciples *who desire* deeper prayer, community, and mission. It involves forming them as disciples on mission to their spheres of influence, in their

<sup>57</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the common deficiencies of pastoral plans, see "Pastoral Plans Don't Work" by Peter Andrastek, University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, September 13, 2024, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/pastoral-plans-dont-work/>.

jurisdiction, on their turf. This is an application of an extremely important principle for fruitful ministry: *that which is received is received according to the disposition of the receiver.*<sup>58</sup>

Ministry staff have very limited time and resources. To be maximally fruitful with the few resources they do have, they must prioritize investing in people with the best disposition to receive formation for mission: *adults who are already living lives of discipleship (even if at a very basic level), who want to evangelize.* In this way, they will begin like Jesus, St. Anthony, St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. Josemaría, and numerous other founders of renewal.

Dozens of adult disciples with the desire to live and share their faith more effectively already exist in every parish. They may be daily Mass goers, volunteers, strong Catholic parents, people who already attend formation offerings, etc. These growing disciples are ready to be formed as *missionary* disciples.

Once formed and accompanying each other in Christian community, *they* can reach the lukewarm in the pews, the nominal Catholics with kids in the parish school, and the myriad others from all walks of life not going to church, because *they* are those peoples' peers, coworkers, family members, neighbors, etc. These missionary disciples will engage people on their own turf, with an effectiveness that pastoral workers cannot dream of.<sup>59</sup> Why? Because they will be functioning *in their jurisdiction, within the context of authentic personal relationships.* Pastoral workers do not have access to the missionary disciple's circle of connections, and their connections do not desire to be engaged by pastoral workers.

The process of peers reaching peers will be at times—really, most of the time—long, slow, messy, incomplete, and largely hidden, because there's no way to evangelize *en masse* with uniform timelines and outcomes. There is no *guarantee* of fast results or any observable results at all, as we are dealing with the mystery of human freedom, God's grace, and the conversion of hearts. This is not to say that the result of deeper conversion in their

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<sup>58</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Vol. 1, 1ae, 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 1a, q. 12, a. 4; and "Questiones Disputatae de Veritate" q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>59</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 905

peers is unlikely. Just the opposite is true!<sup>60</sup> We see it happen all the time. The point here is that the Holy Spirit and the mystery of conversion will never be completely predictable, perfectly measurable, or proceed according to our plans and desires.

Because of how they accompany one another, these missionary disciples have sincere and attractive community to invite others into when the time is right. A place where their neighbors and friends can be further immersed in a discipleship culture and accompanied into discipleship.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, it turns out, the first step for our parishes to move from maintenance to mission is, in a certain sense, *to forget about the parish!*<sup>62</sup> Or at least to think less about the parish and more about individuals' respective circles of influence. For ministry to be fruitful, pastoral workers must prioritize work within their own circles of influence, which are those parishioners most disposed to formation for discipleship and mission. Doing so increases pastoral workers' effectiveness. The opposite also applies: when pastoral workers prioritize work outside their circles of influence but within their *circles of concern* (all the things they are concerned about, but have little-to-no influence on), their effectiveness decreases, ultimately shrinking their influence as well.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> "In the apostolate exercised by the individual, great riches are waiting to be discovered through an intensification of the missionary effort of each of the lay faithful. Such an individual form of apostolate can contribute greatly to a more extensive spreading of the Gospel, indeed it can reach as many places as there are daily lives of individual members of the lay faithful. Furthermore, the spread of the gospel will be continual, since a person's life and faith will be one. Likewise the spread of the gospel will be particularly incisive, because in sharing fully in the unique conditions of the life, work, difficulties and hopes of their sisters and brothers, the lay faithful will be able to reach the hearts of their neighbors, friends, and colleagues, opening them to a full sense of human existence, that is, to communion with God and with all people." (CL, sec. 28)

<sup>61</sup> "Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission" (CL, sec. 32). Also consider 1 John 1:3 "what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with *us*" (italics added).

<sup>62</sup> I am speaking in hyperbole here. I am not suggesting we forget about the sacraments. However, an important principle for effective pastoral work is to prioritize work within one's circle of greatest influence, impact, and effectiveness.

<sup>63</sup> For more on circles of influence and concern and how to increase proactivity and effectiveness, see Stephen Covey's classic book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The more pastoral workers focus on building “parish life,” ministry structures, and programs and the more they keep trying to engage the lukewarm and unchurched, the less effective they will be. With their focus and time tied up in fruitless pursuits, they will not be able to engage those with the desire and disposition to be formed as missionary disciples.

***Moving from maintenance to mission in parish ministry requires a laser focus on the few.***

Moreover, they run the risk of burning themselves out. Focusing on the thousand-and-one things and people in their circle of concern instead of their circle of influence severely drains them of both time and emotional bandwidth. Perpetually fighting a losing battle trying to engage those who do not want to be engaged and form those who are not ready for formation sets them up for defeat.

The path from maintenance to mission in parish ministry requires a *laser focus on the few*. Pastoral workers need to systematically find, form, and send those who most desire to be missionary disciples, and to shepherd them as they draw others into discipleship. This is the new (and the oldest) paradigm necessary for the parish to live out its deepest identity and vocation. The parish will evangelize the world when it effectively equips and empowers its members to bear apostolic fruit in their secular lives. It is time for parishes to turn their energy, time, and budgets towards equipping the laity to live their vocation in and to the world.

# DISCUSS

## CHAPTER 3

1. Name the phases of Jesus' mission process. What is new about this ancient process (pp. 30-31)?
2. What is attractive about "strategic plans, charts, timelines and structures" (p. 33)?
3. What is the difference between these methods and activating missionary disciples to reach their circles of influence?

# CHAPTER 4

## AN APPROACH THAT WORKS

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So far, I have introduced the theological and pastoral principles needed to guide a true shift from maintenance to mission. But what does it look like lived out? In what follows, I apply these theological and pastoral principles to a specific, effective process used by many communities in the United States. The Evangelical Catholic (EC) developed this mission process over decades of fruitful implementation in hundreds of parishes, college campus ministries, and military bases all over the country, and in some international communities and missionary apostolates as well.

At the beginning of this paper, we established that the goal of parish ministry is the apostolic holiness of each of her members. Likewise, this is the goal of the EC mission process. Here, we can make a clarifying distinction: the *proximate* goal of the mission process is to form individuals in a way of life marked by concrete and habitual practices of prayer, community, and mission. This is *initial apostolic conversion*. The *remote* goal is the transformation of the parish into a “community of communities”<sup>64</sup> of missionary disciples—an ecosystem of relationships, communities, and connections that provide ongoing formation, discernment, and accompaniment for the faithful’s vocation to sanctify the temporal order in a life of *ongoing apostolic conversion*.

Imagine a parish in which hundreds of parishioners are connected to each other by way of a network of dozens of groups. These small communities are not insular or cliquish. Rather, they are mission oriented because the individuals in them are mission oriented. They are composed of missionary disciples who provide formation, support, and encouragement for each other’s secular lives, growth in discipleship, and their missions in and

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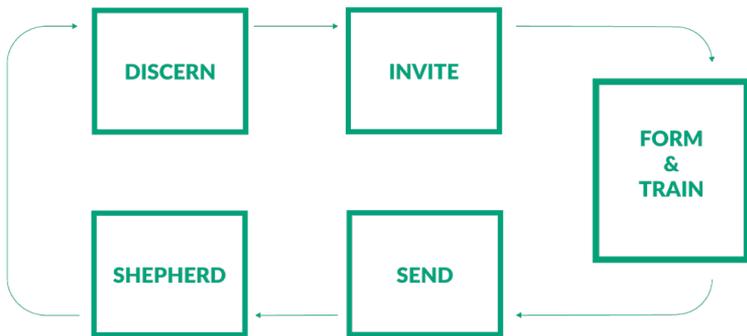
<sup>64</sup> EA, sec. 41.

to the world. Supported by each other, these parishioners have a high degree of personal ownership of their interior lives and their personal apostolates. In other words, when it comes to their vocation and mission in the world, they are not waiting for pastoral staff or a curriculum to tell them what to do. Nor do they assume it's "the parish's" job to reach their neighbors, coworkers, and friends. They know it is their own calling, born out of their intimacy with Christ.

Moreover, the pastoral staff and leadership of the parish know many of the individuals in this network personally, because in most cases parish staff provided initial apostolic formation to these parishioners, which instigated connections among them. These parishioners trust the pastoral staff and are eager to receive ongoing formation and accompaniment from them because what they receive is solid and relevant to their lives.

By grace and a growing web of interconnected relationships, people feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves. This is the community of communities, the ecosystem of relationships that the parish is called to be. It is the remote goal of the EC mission process.

## **How Do We Get There?**



Pastoral workers begin applying Jesus' mission process by *discerning* the most faithful, available, and teachable parishioners they know—those who desire formation and support for their secular vocation, and who want to change the world. They *invite* six to twelve<sup>65</sup> of them into an initial period of *formation and training* that includes habitual practices of prayer, community, and mission. Already during this period, but again at the end of the initial formation, they *send* them back to their circles of influence to sanctify them. Then pastoral workers continue to *shepherd* or accompany the individuals in their lifelong quest to walk in holiness and mission, to put Christ at the summit of all things. While continuing to shepherd the first community of individuals (who by now want to shepherd one another), they begin the process again, with a second community of individuals.

If a pastoral worker runs the above mission process twice a year, each time forming six to twelve parishioners in habitual practices of prayer, community, and mission, and then sending them back to their spheres of influence, in a few short years they will shepherd a growing army of missionary disciples equipped to sanctify the temporal order and engage the many people in their lives whom the pastoral worker cannot reach.

## The Option of Beginning with Pastoral Staff or Leadership

While many parishes begin this process spearheaded by one or two staff inviting the most disposed parishioners into formation, if a pastor and pastoral leadership have the desire to be formed into a community of missionary disciples, this process can begin with them!<sup>66</sup> *They* will be the “mustard seed” that begins a movement of renewal at the parish. Formed into a community

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<sup>65</sup> This number is variable. It could be as few as four or five. But twelve is likely the maximum number of people one would invite into the initial group. It is more likely that the initial group will consist of five to nine participants.

<sup>66</sup> If the parish has a pastor and staff or leadership ready to engage in this process, they can be a great starting point. But many do not have staff, or many have many staff or leadership who are not willing or disposed to participate. In those cases, or in many others, beginning with parishioners could be the best place to start, and growing fruitfulness among them can eventually dispose pastoral staff and leadership to participate.

of missionary disciples who live out this call in their ordinary lives, they will be all the more effective professionally in discerning, inviting, forming, training, sending, and shepherding parishioners because they themselves will have experienced the formation and transformation they seek to pass on.<sup>67</sup> *They will be witnesses to this new way of life.* The witness is the most effective evangelist, because witness is the evidence of a life transformed.<sup>68</sup> Witness speaks from a place of union or connaturality with the object, from “inside experience,” so to speak:<sup>69</sup>

Since love can only be understood by someone who actually loves, the Christian mystery can only be effectively communicated by those who allow themselves to be genuinely possessed by God’s love.<sup>70</sup>

From this newly formed community comprised of pastoral staff and leadership who are beginning to accompany each other in apostolic holiness, a few will discern to begin the process with parishioners. They will discern and invite the first, best disposed

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<sup>67</sup> “I would like to urge you to base everything you do in a spirit of sharing and fraternity among yourselves . . . We cannot be authentic fathers unless we are first sons and brothers. And we cannot foster communion and participation in the communities entrusted to our care unless, before all else, we live out those realities among ourselves. I am quite aware that, amid the constant call of our pastoral responsibilities, this commitment may seem burdensome, even a waste of time, but the opposite is true: indeed, only in this way will we be credible and our activity not end up scattering what others have already gathered” (Pope Francis, *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Parish Priests*)

<sup>68</sup> “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (*EN*, sec. 41).

<sup>69</sup> “Generally speaking, connaturality refers to a situation in which an entity A has a relationship with another entity B so intimate that A shares in the natural dispositions of B as if they were its own. Connaturality permits a particular and profound form of knowledge. For example, to the extent that one friend is united to another, he or she becomes capable of judging spontaneously what suits the other because he or she shares the very inclinations of the other and so understands by connaturality what is good or bad for the other. This is a knowledge, in other words, of a different order than objective knowledge, which proceeds by way of conceptualisation and reasoning. It is a knowledge by empathy, or a knowledge of the heart” (International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, Vatican Website, 2014, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html), sec. 50).

<sup>70</sup> John Paul II, *Address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Baltimore, Washington, Atlanta and Miami on their “Ad Limina” Visit*, no. 3. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/march/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19980317\\_ad-limina-usa-iii.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980317_ad-limina-usa-iii.html)

parishioners into missionary discipleship formation. This community of pastoral staff and leadership, *while being community with and for each other*, also becomes the instigator and shepherd of other missionary disciples. In this manner, personal and communal transformation among pastoral staff and leadership is the mustard seed which is the beginning of *cultural* transformation for the whole parish.<sup>71</sup> It can be the true and healthy starting point of “the pastoral conversion of the parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church,” beginning with the pastor and the ministry leadership of the parish.<sup>72</sup>

Repeated and multiplied over years, with increasing numbers of pastoral staff and leadership building and shepherding more and more parishioners into a life of prayer, community, and mission—and also living these practices themselves—the remote goal of the mission process is approached. The parish becomes the “community of communities” Pope Saint John Paul II envisioned and Pope Francis describes.<sup>73</sup> It will truly be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters . . . in contact with the homes and lives of its people.”<sup>74</sup> The parish will finally become a place where,

in all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a center of constant missionary outreach.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> An important principle from the business world becomes relevant. “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” In a pastoral context, culture is equivalent to the reality of holiness, and strategy is equivalent to structure. In fidelity to the law of the mustard seed, the culture of holiness must begin small, and it will usually grow slowly and arduously. For more on this principle, see “Pastoral Plans Don’t Work” by Peter Andrastek, University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, September 13, 2024, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/pastoral-plans-dont-work/>.

<sup>72</sup> This is the title of the Instruction from the Congregation for the Clergy dated July 20, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> See *EA*, sec. 41 and *EG*, sec. 28.

<sup>74</sup> *EG*, sec. 28.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Components of Initial Apostolic Formation

The laity need a curriculum of *mission formation* in sustainable practices for a life of missionary discipleship<sup>76</sup>. This curriculum must deepen their apostolic consciousness and attitudes. Additionally, within the context of this formation, the curriculum should occasionally train them in various skills (or competencies) that are helpful for apostolate in the world, such as conversational skills, recognizing thresholds of continual conversion, facilitating group discussions, and more.

Since the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, their apostolic formation is specially characterized by the distinctively secular and particular quality of the lay state and by its own form of the spiritual life.<sup>77</sup>

The EC has developed an initial twelve-week period of formation that consists of four essential components designed to achieve the proximate goal of the mission process: growth in a way of life marked by the development of concrete and habitual practices of prayer, community, and mission.

### **Component 1: Weekly Small Group Sessions**

Weekly small group sessions help establish deep friendship among members, giving them an experience of the practice of meaningful Christian community. The sessions also provide formative content by way of inspired teaching and facilitated discussions based on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition that is calibrated to their secular vocations (see Heart and Habits of Mission below), and help them to develop apostolic consciousness, attitudes, and skills.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> A detailed scope and sequence of curriculum exceeds the scope of this paper. Rather, we will provide a broad overview of the components and topics of initial formation, which would then need to be extended out in spaced repetition over a lifetime of ongoing formation and accompaniment.

<sup>77</sup> AA, sec. 29.

<sup>78</sup> Some of these groups continue to meet long term even after the initial period of formation. However, even when they don't, individuals will nearly always continue to desire and many seek after such community in their own way. Hence, even in these circumstances, the habitual practice of community is still acquired.

### **Component 2: Daily Prayer Prompts**

Each person commits to at least fifteen minutes of daily personal prayer time for the duration of the formation process. This helps establish people in the practice of daily mental prayer<sup>79</sup> while internalizing the formation they receive in the small group sessions.

### **Component 3: Mission Prompts**

Each group session sends people back home into their secular lives with prompts that apply the teachings in their regular lives. This helps establish people in practices of intentional—and eventually habitual—mission.

### **Component 4: One-on-One Accompaniment**

Pastoral workers meet with each participant regularly for individualized accompaniment that helps them grow in the practices of prayer, community, and mission. They discuss life in a supernatural tone, their growth in the practices of prayer, their internalization of the formation, and their growth in the habitual practice of mission from the mission prompts.

Thus, the initial period of formation forms the participants in practices of prayer, community, and mission, helping them to develop a “rule” or plan of life comprised of such practices.

Additionally, and *very* importantly, this initial period of formation also begins to form pastoral workers with a new imagination for the lay vocation and for what “pastoral ministry in a missionary key” could be.<sup>80</sup> This new imagination comes from frequent and habitual interaction with more and more parishioners who are striving to develop operative faith in their secular vocations. In other words, pastoral workers’ ongoing formation comes *precisely by way of doing the pastoral work*, like a plumber learns to plumb by plumbing, a bicyclist learns to bike by biking, and a toddler learns to walk by walking.<sup>81</sup>

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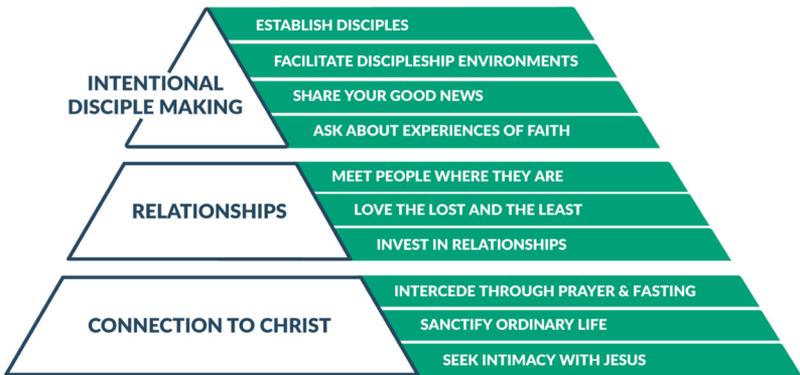
<sup>79</sup> Mental prayer, otherwise known as meditation and contemplation (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 2705-2719).

<sup>80</sup> *EG*, sec. 33.

<sup>81</sup> In the context of a partnership with the EC, the pastoral workers receive formation and training from EC consultants and an online system concurrently with executing the Mission Process. The formation and training consist of pastoral and theological formation and personalized consulting and advising customized for their pastoral situation and their own personal gifts and strengths.

## The Contents of Formation: The Heart and Habits of Mission

The content and teachings of the curriculum, drawn from Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, form parishioners' consciousness of their identity in Christ, in the core attitudes and habitual practices of life in Christ, and in some helpful skills for the apostolate. The teachings are received and discussed in the weekly group sessions, prayed through in the prayer companion, converted into action through the weekly mission prompts, and individually processed in one-on-one accompaniment. The EC calls these teachings the Heart and Habits of Mission,<sup>82</sup> depicted below.



<sup>82</sup> The Heart and Habits of Discipleship are based on the "Tasks of Catechesis," found in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 84-87.

**1. Seek Intimacy with Jesus.** This is the heart of all discipleship and mission.

**2. Sanctify Ordinary Life.** Seek, find, and build the kingdom in daily work and secular interests.

**3. Intercede through Prayer and Fasting.** Join Jesus' ongoing intercession for all of creation to be filled with the glorious freedom of God's love.

**4. Invest in Relationships.** Practice the building blocks of relationship and the art of conversation.

**5. Love the Lost and the Least.** Join in God's compassion and urgent concern for those most in need of his mercy and help.

**6. Meet People Where They Are.** Then help them take the next step. Use the Thresholds of Deepening Conversion to grow in attentiveness.

**7. Ask about Experiences of Faith.** Seize the right opportunities to discuss the deeper things.

**8. Share Your Good News.** You have stories of God's victory in your life. He's changing you. Sometimes, others need to hear about it.

**9. Facilitate Discipleship Environments.** Where two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus is present. God's word is living and effective.

**10. Establish Disciples.** Form them in the Heart and Habits of Discipleship. Go and make disciples of all nations.

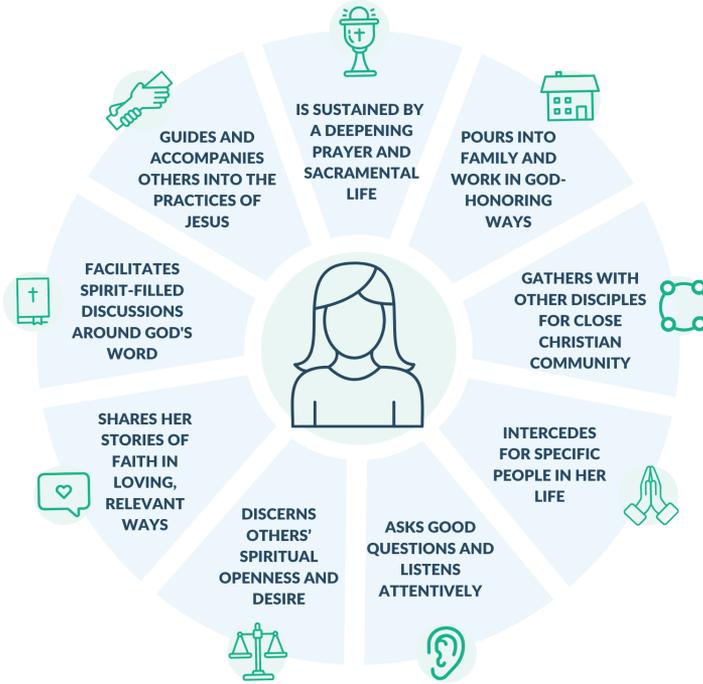
To effectively form people to live the heart and habits of mission, all four components listed above are needed (weekly small group sessions, daily prayer prompts, mission prompts, and one-on-one accompaniment). All components, together with the teachings help participants develop a “*rule of life*” around *prayer, community, and mission*, which shapes their consciousness and attitudes into those of a missionary disciple.

Thus, the practice of daily prayer *together with* the teachings on seeking intimacy with Jesus develops deep connection to Christ, and the experience and conviction that without him we can do nothing (see John 15:5). The group setting *together with* all the teachings provide formative discussion, witness, and support from other Catholics, connection to something bigger, and the practice of habitual community. Mission prompts *together with* teachings on secularity and select apostolic skills develop practices of mission, an apostolic attitude, and forge a path from the head to the heart. And individual, one-on-one accompaniment by pastoral workers allows them to provide individualized application, encouragement and support, and sometimes course-correction in a flexible and customized way that takes into consideration the needs, circumstances, and desires of the individual.

As noted above, the initial period of mission formation lasts several months. This period walks people progressively through the above teachings. The formation—both in teaching content and in its four components—is calibrated for those with secular, busy lives. It deepens the connection to Christ they are already living, casts a clear vision for their secular character, and gives them an outward orientation. In our experience, this period consistently enlivens them, as they are formed and affirmed in their God-given, secular vocation. Most lay people have never before heard their vocation positively articulated and find the formation to be powerful and liberating.

Once again, this period of initial formation and the acquisition of practices of prayer, community, and mission, leads individuals into *initial* apostolic conversion, the proximate goal of the mission process.

To show the proximate goal of this formation in a more personal and organic way, consider a lay missionary disciple with the following abilities and desires, proactively living out these priorities as the Spirit leads and as opportunities arise.



## Shepherding the Community of Communities

The initial apostolic conversion must then transition into a life of ongoing continual apostolic conversion and growth in these practices. If it fails to do so, the fire will fade and ultimately the remote goal of the mission process will not be reached.

While it is the responsibility of the trained missionary disciples to include in their rule of life a plan for sustainable, supportive Christian community, it is still the role and grave responsibility of parish pastoral ministry to shepherd its people. This falls under the *munera* (duty, obligation) of “governance” in the pastor’s three-fold ministry of prophet (teaching), priest (sanctifying) and king (governing). Ongoing pastoral shepherding happens in both large-group settings and through individual accompaniment.

### **Large-Group Formation and Prayer**

Shepherding missionary disciples will necessitate offering regular large group formation and prayer opportunities for the growing movement. Large group events offer a number of benefits. Chiefly among these, they provide a way to repeatedly deliver vision and inspired teaching (based largely on the Heart and Habits of Mission) to large groups of people at once and provide an environment for many missionary disciples to interact and feel a part of something bigger. They also provide an opportunity to invite new well-disposed individuals to experience a culture of missionary discipleship and cultivate in them a desire for the initial mission formation. Think of ongoing group formation and prayer events as gathering glowing embers together to create a large bonfire. The heat and energy generated from this large bonfire reignite any smoldering branches, enflame the embers, and shoot sparks far afield, which will create more brushfires in the surrounding area.

### **Ongoing One-On-One Accompaniment**

Yet the *munera* of governance cannot be reduced to running large events. Events seem efficient, and they can be. When well executed and attended, they are indeed energizing. Perhaps counterintuitively, however, the more effective and energizing large events and their teaching are, the more pastoral workers and leadership will need to provide one-on-one guidance and accompaniment as follow-up. A successful event means people will actually be trying to apply the teachings to their lives. And when people take teaching seriously, they need—and will desire—individual shepherding. Yes, they will discuss the teachings among their friends and individual communities; and their friends and communities will provide an indispensable mode of accompaniment. But many will also desire to be accompanied by the very people who delivered the inspired group teaching or by those who have a bit more formation and the grace of pastoral governance to help them. Indeed, the more people try to put into practice Church teaching and disciplines, the more they will discover their need for individual accompaniment.

In other words, pastoral governance hinges on shepherding *individuals*. While the Church precedes the individual, particular communities and movements are made up of individuals.

Though it may seem inefficient, one-on-one accompaniment for shepherding will be the backbone of the entire movement. This is because,

the individual apostolate, flowing generously from its source in a truly Christian life (cf. John 4:14), is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even of the organized type, and it admits of no substitute.<sup>83</sup>

The individual apostolate comes from the *individual apostle*; and the individual apostle needs individual accompaniment. The variety of individuals' personalities, internal and external landscapes of personal holiness, and personal apostolates are constantly changing. There are ups and downs, detours and straightaways.

All this leads to the necessity, perhaps redundant by now, of articulating the principle that *shepherding or governing this "community of communities" hinges on shepherding the individual*.<sup>84</sup> If multiple individuals begin to waver or drift, the small community they are part of is in jeopardy; and when multiple small communities are in jeopardy, so is the larger community and the entire ecosystem. Moreover, as a matter of principle, the dignity of the human person requires individual care since each individual is an end, not a cog in a machine or means subordinated to a greater end.

Keeping a pastoral priority on shepherding the individual guards against a common pitfall among parishes regarding groups. For the community of communities we have discussed must not be understood as a sort of centrally coordinated or managed "small group ministry of the parish." When this happens, the focus shifts away from forming and equipping missionary disciples to live a rule of life including prayer, community, and mission. Instead, the conversation becomes about building *groups*, coordinating *groups*, supporting *groups*, activating *groups*, and counting *groups*. Such an approach assumes (consciously or

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<sup>83</sup> AA, sec. 16.

<sup>84</sup> For more on the necessity of individualized shepherding, see "Chief Obstacles to Good Spiritual Direction," by Peter Andrastek, University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, January 17, 2019, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/chief-obstacles-to-good-spiritual-direction/>.

subconsciously) that the groups themselves have agency and are the engine of the Church's apostolate. When this happens, both pastoral workers and the parishioners themselves are tempted to consider individual missionary disciples as "parish volunteers" or "leaders" to be coordinated or managed, and everyone else as "members" or "participants" to be counted. What often follows is the subtle and unintentional temptation to shift the emphasis away from ongoing personal conversion toward metrics and doing various things that "the parish" desires for them. Thus, the whole process, in a strange turn, can become parish focused rather than mission focused.

Instead, the combination of ongoing group formation and one-on-one accompaniment helps **each individual** "own" their discipleship and apostolate.<sup>85</sup> Ownership is a marker of a mature Christian personality, a person who is nothing other than themselves acting as an instrument of God's presence and action in the world.<sup>86</sup>

## Common Concerns

Most pastoral workers intuitively understand the need for a new paradigm and are open to a new approach. However, the implications and consequences of this approach long term quickly cause them to question its viability. They have never experienced this kind of ministry. They worry it will conflict with the current pastoral and professional structures, ways of doing things, and even the culture of "parish life." Because they have not yet developed the relevant conceptual or experiential categories, they have a hard time imagining how a mission-oriented ministry will develop.

In a way, ushering in a new process and paradigm is like growing a family. When a young couple first marries, they have no idea

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<sup>85</sup> In this context, "ownership" can be understood as a combination of initiative, intentionality, organization or prioritization, and follow-through.

<sup>86</sup> For more on the necessity of an integrated and holistic approach to apostolic formation, see "The Need for Deprofessionalizing Evangelization" by Peter Andrastek, University of Notre Dame Church Life Journal, A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life, January 30, 2020. <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/deprofessionalizing-the-apostolate/>.

what it takes to raise several children. They don't know how much money, time, energy, and emotional bandwidth they need—they cannot imagine it. In a very certain sense, if they think too much about the unknowns of parenthood, they risk intimidating and paralyzing themselves until they are closed off to having a large family, or any children at all.

But as they have children, and strive to be generous and open to life, they learn what it takes to raise one, two, and eventually a few kids. Over the years, they get better at projecting what the food budget will be, when they'll need another bedroom, when to start saving for various items, projects, and so on. They develop rules and structures for family life that work for them. They develop the proper roles needed to care for everyone in a holistic way. And, most importantly, they develop the proper rhythms and “structures” to protect and foster the growth of their own *communio* or love for each other.

Like starting a new family and growing it over the years, developing mission-oriented ministry cannot be planned out from start to finish ahead of time. Parishes must take steps forward in faith, in the right direction, that open up a new reality, expanding and heightening their understanding of what their parishioners need to flourish and their community needs to grow. Along the way, the parish builds structures and roles to support ongoing formation and growth.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to address some of the more common questions that arise as soon as pastoral workers intuit that this paradigm shift will be difficult.

***This seems so time consuming! What about all the other things going on in the parish?***

True. Shepherding a growing movement of missionary disciples is time consuming. There is no way around that. But it doesn't have to be an unsurpassable obstacle. How badly does the pastor want to change the paradigm? If the pastoral staff continue to run the same ministries and programs year after year, change will not happen. People will continue to drift, and whatever trajectory the parish is on toward merging, closing, or plateauing will continue.

That being said, don't take the ax to everything. The current problems did not arise overnight, and they will not disappear overnight. At first, pastoral workers can let most things be while carving out time to run the mission process with the right people. If a pastor starts by devoting one or two of his pastoral staff (or even himself!) to this work for fifteen to twenty hours per week they can get the movement started over the first year to two.

The movement grows incrementally, and once the pastoral staff becomes familiar with what it takes to build and shepherd people in a growing community of missionary disciples, they can more easily project future demands on their time and energy. Because the staff has this mustard seed of experience from running the mission process a few times, they will be able to creatively and proactively imagine what could be, even years down the road. And they can proactively address the impact these changes will have on inherited ministry structures.

***But only a few people are already living lives of deep discipleship. Won't we quickly run out of people to form as missionary disciples?***

No. As more parishioners are formed in the Heart and Habits of Mission, they will ignite others as disciples, readying more people to receive mission formation. That being said, this does not happen quickly or automatically. Pastoral staff must also, over time, become adept at “shaking the branches”—constantly seeking out and building relationships with people who have the disposition to be formed (there are more out there than you think), creating funnels into mission formation, and preparing the way for mission formation by inculcating a love of Jesus and invitation to discipleship in the broader population.

***What if the people we're looking for are already engaged in ministries?***

Some will be, and that's okay. The mission process does not necessarily pull people out of parish ministries. As the pastoral staff provide apostolic formation, they will recalibrate people's vision for their apostolate.

Many people equate being a good Catholic (and even evangelization) with parish ministry involvement *to the neglect of personal apostolate* in their secular lives. They have no other picture of a faithful life to draw on. The formation proposed here

simply balances their vision by introducing their *primary vocation to secular apostolate* among their peers: family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and everyone they encounter.

The mission formation, in addition to forming them for apostolate to their peers, will also make them more effective in their current ministries because it will deepen their supernatural outlook and give them evangelical skills. Even if over time some people leave involvement in parish ministries, it will be God’s will, because their formation teaches them to make decisions through prayerful discernment and under the shepherding care of the pastor or pastoral staff. No matter what, the Church will be more fruitful as they follow the Holy Spirit!

### *How are we going to care for all these people?*

We can almost guarantee from our experience that when one pastoral staff person runs the process of mission formation twice a year, within three years, that staff person is shepherding thirty to forty missionary disciples who are growing in their interior lives and living intentional, personal apostolate in their spheres of influence. A vibrant, growing movement of evangelization like this will soon stress the inherited maintenance structures of the parish, forcing the pastor to make decisions that prioritize growth. This is a good thing! After all, prioritization is about actual decisions, not just intentions.

And congratulations. Stressing the inherited parish structures is the first step toward moving into a legitimate *apostolic* structure. If the pastor and pastoral leadership stay the course—without compromise—they will creatively shift responsibilities, hire people, and find more help (not without pain and difficulty) to shepherd this growing army of missionary disciples.

The parish indeed “possesses great flexibility [and] can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.”<sup>87</sup> As the pastor and parish leadership grow in their openness to make decisions based on missionary creativity, they will incrementally usher in a new paradigm of mission among the Church in their community.

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<sup>87</sup> EG, sec. 28.

## New Paradigms Demand New Zeal and Excellence

This new apostolic paradigm for parishes (actually the original paradigm in the Church) demands something new from priests and pastoral workers. They need a new spiritual fervor, characterized by ever-increased fidelity to personal prayer, the sacraments, the teachings of the Church, and personal virtue; in sum: personal holiness. Their personal holiness must be ever-increasingly apostolic, not just in their professional and ministry spheres, but also in their personal lives. Priests and pastoral workers must pray every day for increased apostolic zeal and creativity and then create situations to live this way, both personally and professionally.

An apostolic paradigm also demands a new caliber of Church professionals who hold excellence, proactivity, focus, and tenacity in the highest regard. Moreover, they will need a new type of flexibility, because priests and pastoral workers (and the sacraments) must be available when lay people are: evenings, early mornings before work days begin, and weekends. The shift may even require a new degree of mobility to reach very busy people where they are, not in a figurative sense but quite literally. These changes may cause discomfort or demand sacrifice, but they are necessary. Finally, ministry in a missionary tone requires a new level of relational intelligence and ability, for pastoral workers in this paradigm are less program coordinators and more shepherds of souls.

As already indicated, none of this happens overnight. The road ahead is long and arduous and at times can feel more like losing than winning. Difficult conversations, unpopular decisions, angry parishioners and pastoral staff, and perhaps even friendly fire and challenging questions from the diocese will arise. But this is precisely the mystery of the Cross, and the Cross demands that suffering and death precede new life.

## The Evangelical Catholic Helps Parishes Move to an Apostolic Paradigm

Fortunately, pastoral workers do not have to navigate this change and figure it all out on their own. The Evangelical Catholic exists

precisely to lead and accompany ministries through the paradigm shift from maintenance to mission. Since 1999 we have been developing and executing this approach and guiding ministries into this new reality.

We partner with parishes, campus ministries, and other communities who are serious about moving from maintenance to mission and ready to put in the work to make it happen. We provide vision, formation, training, and ongoing support for the pastor and pastoral staff. They have access to a robust learning management system and personalized consulting, helping them apply the mission process in their unique community. We also offer onsite visits for staff formation, in-depth training, and strategy, as well as large-scale events to impact parishioners at large. As we serve hundreds of communities implementing an apostolic mission process in real time, we are always learning and developing new material and improved approaches. Our only mission is to serve the Church by unleashing the transformative power of the gospel in the world through the apostolate of the laity.

## Conclusion

Apostolic formation is a process in which pastoral workers invest in a small number of the most faithful, available, and teachable parishioners and gradually form them to live a proactive life of missionary discipleship. These lay disciples live by a personally discerned rule of life that includes intentional plans for a deep prayer and sacramental life, supportive Christian community, and secular mission (apostolate) within their circles of influence.

Repeating this process over and over gradually and systematically builds a movement and community of communities of missionary disciples. As the movement grows, pastoral workers must then develop a structure that prioritizes the further building and ongoing shepherding of this growing movement and ecosystem of missionary disciples.

A parish that prioritizes such a process for lay apostolic formation equips the laity to live out their vocation on the front lines of the Church's mission. Through the laity the Church will sanctify the

temporal order and put Christ at the summit of all things. In the long run, they will set the lukewarm in the pews on fire and fill the empty pews with friends and coworkers and neighbors. Over time, more adult children and grandchildren will come to see the Eucharist as a vital part of their lives. Through missionary lay people, vocations to ordained and religious life will increase as holy and evangelical parents and friends activate others' interior lives, readying them to hear God's call.

Pastors and professional pastoral workers shoulder a duty to form these lay people for holiness and mission. The Evangelical Catholic wants to help pastoral workers carry this cross. Let us pray for creativity and prudence, for boldness and tenacity, to discover new ways of reaching and forming the secular hearts of the lay faithful for deep apostolic holiness.

## DISCUSS

# CHAPTER 4

1. Peter explains that “most pastoral workers intuitively understand the need for a new paradigm . . . however the implications and consequences of this approach long term cause them to question its viability” (p. 52). Name some of the challenging implications and consequences of the paradigm shift.
2. What can a parish learn from the growth model of a young family (pp. 52-53) as it ushers in a new paradigm?
3. If each lay person has a personal and unique mission (recall from p. 11), how might this affect the way pastoral workers approach their work (p. 56)?
4. What is one step you could take soon to build momentum toward becoming a more apostolic parish or community?



# APPENDIX:

## EC FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

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The EC methods are built not only upon years of experiential learning, but also upon several core principles we have discerned and refined over the years. These principles support the fruitful implementation of the EC mission process, ongoing parish alignment, and strategic decision-making around other aspects of the parish.

1

Evangelization is the essential mission of the Church, no matter the chosen spirituality, theological perspective, or liturgical preference. The Church exists in order to evangelize. Therefore, evangelization (the great commission) is a point of unification within the diverse Catholic Church.

2

Evangelization (also called the apostolate) is the universal vocation of every member of the Church and is lived out in unique and varied ways.

3

John 15:5 is paradigmatic for all of Christian life and ministry: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing,” (John 15:5). Therefore, “all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness.”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, Vatican Website, January 6, 2001, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html), sec. 30.

- 4 The laity have a secular character and thus are uniquely situated on the front lines of evangelization in the world.
- 5 Evangelization is most fruitful within the context of authentic personal relationships.
- 6 Each member of the lay faithful has a “personal apostolate”—a unique calling and circle of influence within which they exhibit natural effectiveness and supernatural authority to carry out the great commission.
- 7 The parish lives out an essential aspect of its purpose when it fuels the apostolate of the laity.
- 8 Prioritizing work within one’s circle of influence increases effectiveness, while prioritizing work within one’s circle of concern (and outside of one’s circle of influence) decreases effectiveness.
- 9 Love obeys a law of gradualness, because whatever is received is received according to the disposition of the receiver.<sup>89</sup>
- 10 Personal ownership of one’s apostolate is evidence of Christian maturity.

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Vol. 1, 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 1a, q. 12, a. 4; and “*Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*” q. 2, a. 3.

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# FOR FURTHER READING

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*In addition to the resources cited in the bibliography, please see the following resources for further reading.*

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