



Missionary discipleship is a prime way to understand the nature of our response to Christ. As we come to know God, experience His love and forgiveness, read the Gospels and understand our faith, and gradually realize that this gracious invitation to enter into relationship with Jesus demands a response, we see ourselves as disciples of the Lord. This faith stance calls us to both follow and lead.

We follow Jesus Christ our entire lives, increasing in our surrender to His will, letting His Word of truth and the beauty of His love shape our values, our affections, life decisions, how we spend our money and time, and order our relationships. The sacraments and prayer become the secret spring of grace which waters our hearts and spirits. For a Christian disciple, life makes no sense without Jesus Christ at the center of everything. The saints show us what a human being, in love with God and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, looks like and is capable of. The more we follow Jesus, the more we act and sound like Him in all that we say and do.

Missionary disciples do not keep the fire power of the Gospel to themselves. We take seriously the Great Commission when Jesus sends His followers forth to proclaim the Gospel to every creature and make disciples. Christian disciples make other disciples! The hope of our evangelizing initiative is to equip every practicing Catholic in the diocese with the competence and confidence to witness the love and truth of Christ to others with boldness and gentleness. Sharing how we have come to know and love the Lord, inviting others to Mass and prayer, answering faith questions, witnessing to the Gospel through a life of love, joy, and service become the consistent methods by which a follower of Christ becomes a leader. In this way, a quiet and timid Catholic becomes a fiery missionary disciple!

A NOTE FROM BISHOP HYING

DISCIPLESHIP

“

**LET US INVOKE THE
HOLY SPIRIT EACH DAY:
HE GUIDES US ALONG
THE PATH OF DISCIPLESHIP
IN CHRIST.
- POPE FRANCIS**

”

YEARLY FORMATION NEWSLETTER TOPICS

EASTER 2020

The Paschal Mystery

JUNE 2020

Evangelization

JULY 2020

Discipleship

AUGUST 2020

Baptism and Confirmation

SEPTEMBER 2020

Reclaiming Sunday

OCTOBER 2020

Interior Life: Prayer

NOVEMBER 2020

Interior Life: Mortification

DECEMBER 2020

Confession

JANUARY 2021

Goodness

FEBRUARY 2021

Beauty

MARCH 2021

Truth

APRIL 2021

New Methods

DISCIPLESHIP

MICHELLE NILSSON

What is discipleship? We can begin answering that by recalling the night that the angel Gabriel appeared to a young Jewish woman and called her to be the first follower of Christ. The Incarnation inspires us to respond to the divine call to believe in Jesus and respond with our whole mind, heart, and life. In Mary's "yes" we see the first act of discipleship. The Gospels go on to show many more examples in which Jesus calls others to follow him. There is a terrific detail in the Gospel of Mark: "He went up to the mountain and summoned to himself those whom he wanted." [1] As disciples of Jesus we know we are not only called but we are wanted by God.

There are distinct characteristics that set apart the lives of disciples. We live sacramental lives, are steeped in Scripture and prayer, and live in the context of the Christian community. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the early disciples "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers." [2]

A few years ago Sherry Weddell published a book entitled *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*, in which she provides a deep look into the life and state of the Church. Her research shows that the numbers of those practicing the faith are grim (only about 24%). She then hypothesizes that the root of the declining faith in the Church is that many "so-called Catholics" have no personal relationship

with Jesus Christ and thus have never truly become intentional disciples. This is a true crisis indeed.

She goes on to outline a possible tool in the solution. She titles them "Thresholds of conversion." These are thresholds that most people must cross through in order to become "intentional" about their commitment to a life of faith. It appears from Weddell's research that many adult Catholics never progress through all the stages. Her proposal is that knowledge of these thresholds will help us personally in our own journey and in our work to assist others in their journey of faith. These thresholds include stages of trust, curiosity, openness, & seeking discipleship. [See diagram on next page.] But knowledge is not enough. She concludes that the most effective means of forming disciples is through the accompaniment of authentic witnesses who are willing to testify to Christ and a transformation of life.

But it doesn't even stop there. Jesus calls us all to the work of evangelization as missionary disciples when he states, "Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." [3] Disciples then are to become the disciple makers.

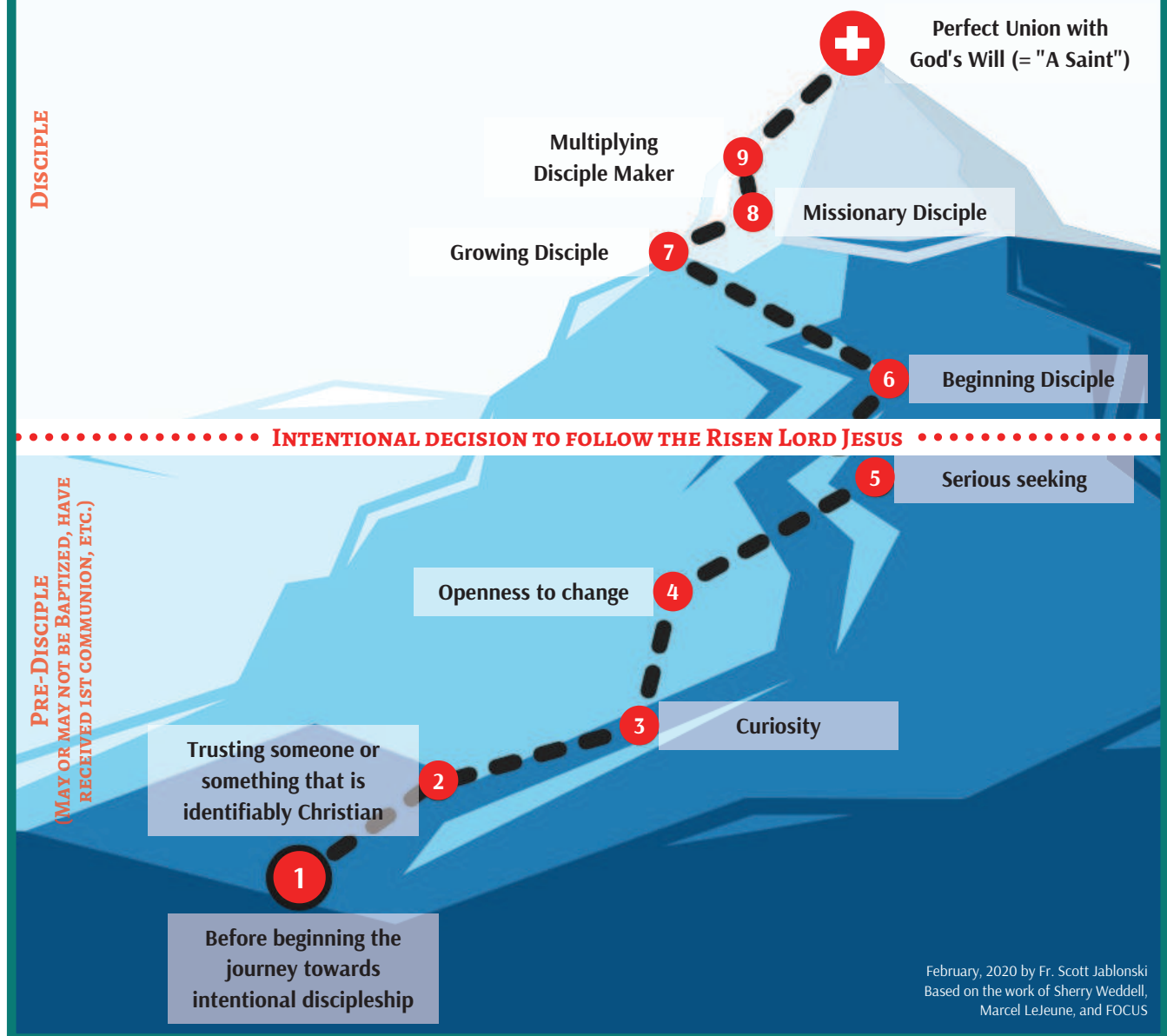
[1] Mark 3:13

[2] Acts 2:42

[3] Matthew 28:19-20

THE PATH OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP: STEPS OF CONVERSION

*"Jesus took Peter, James, and
John his brother, and led them
up a high mountain..."
- Matthew 17:1*



STEPS OF DISCIPLESHIP

STEP 1: Before beginning the journey towards intentional discipleship.

A person at this stage may or may not be “sacramentalized” (baptized, confirmed, etc.) and/or catechized. He/she may be indifferent to or ignorant about Jesus and the Church, or even initially skeptical or hostile.

STEP 2. Trusting someone or something that is identifiably Christian

“A person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.”*

STEP 3. Curiosity

“A person finds himself intrigued by or desiring to know more about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some aspect of the Christian faith. This curiosity can range from mere awareness of a new possibility to something quite intense.”*

STEP 4. Openness to change

“A person acknowledges to himself or herself and to God that he or she is open to the possibility of personal and spiritual change. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a postmodern nonbeliever.”*

STEP 5. Serious seeking

“The person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know the God who is calling him or her. It is, if you will, “dating with a purpose” but not yet marriage. Seekers are asking, “Are you the one to whom I will give myself?”*

STEP 6. Beginning disciple

“This is the decision to ‘drop one’s nets,’ to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder one’s life accordingly.”*

STEP 7. Growing disciple

“Growing closer to Jesus; still somewhat ignorant of Christian life and teaching; self-centered spirituality; has started some daily prayer, and seeks freedom from sin; regular sacramental life; starting to try active evangelization, but only in certain safe situations; serves sporadically.”**

STEP 8. Missionary disciple

“Actively evangelizing for Jesus and may be able to make disciples, but not multiply; prays daily; seeks personal formation themselves, rather than depending on others; deep sacramental life; moving to other-centered/God-centered; serves consistently; works through charisms.”**

STEP 9. Multiplying disciple maker

“Discipling others who do the same and spiritually multiplying; prayer is personal, daily, intense, and deep; considered knowledgeable on doctrine and practice; sacraments are center of spiritual life; other-centered/God-centered – humility; serves constantly; helps others work through charisms.”**

* Sherry A. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 129–30.

* Marcel LeJeune, “Pathway of Discipleship – a Model to Help Guide You and Others,” (Catholic Missionary Disciples, 2018): <https://catholicmissionarydisciples.com/news/pathway-of-discipleship-a-model-to-help-guide-you-others>

FURTHER STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS DOCUMENTS

- Pope Francis, [The Joy of the Gospel](#)
- USCCB, [Disciples Called to Witness](#)
- USCCB, [Living as Missionary Disciples](#)

PROGRAMS

- Ascension Press, [The Activated Disciple](#)
- [Revive Parishes](#), Forming Everyday Missionary Disciples with Julianne Stanz

BOOKS

- James Pauley, [Liturgical Catechesis in the 21st Century: A School of Discipleship](#)
- Edward Sri, [Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple of Christ](#)
- Sherry Weddell, [Fruitful Discipleship: Living the Mission of Jesus in the Church & the World](#)
- Sherry Weddell, [Forming Intentional Disciples](#)
- Marcel LeJeune, [A Beginner's Guide to Missionary Discipleship](#)

VIDEOS

- Bishop Barron, [On Intentional Discipleship](#)
- Year of Faith Series, [New Evangelization](#)

TIPS FOR PARISH LEADERSHIP

Keep in mind that these first few months of Phase 1 are the most important in the formation of the leadership in the Parish. It is very important that the leaders in a parish are disciples who can lead others to discipleship. Reflecting on the message of someone like Sherry Weddell can be very helpful.

The first step is to take a hard look at where your leaders are in their own journey (this includes but is not limited to all staff at the parish). Phase 1 is for them to have the opportunity to grow in faith and solidify their witness to Christ. Weddell's book or any of the other resources listed here will help your parish leadership to look inward and be honest about the ways that they can grow. You could choose one resource to have all your parish leadership do together, or allow each group to choose from the list to the left to read or watch and reflect upon together.

FORMATION IN THE PARISH

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- How would you describe where you are in your journey of discipleship with the Lord?
- Do any of the thresholds ring true in your life?
- What is one spiritual practice that you think you should improve in to further your walk with the Lord?
- Whom do you surround yourself with that you can talk to about your journey of discipleship?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

- How would you describe someone who is living as an intentional disciple?
- Who are people in your parish whom you look up to in their walk of discipleship? Why so?
- What effects have you seen in your parish from the dwindling practice of faith?
- What are your hopes for your parish while growing efforts of discipleship?



**CALLING OF ST.
MATTHEW, 1600**

CARAVAGGIO

Caravaggio is famous for his dramatic use of contrasting light and darkness. In this painting of *The Calling of St. Matthew*, you see the beam of light slanting down along the line of Jesus's pointing finger and falling full on the face of Matthew, the bearded figure who points to himself in surprise as if to say: *Who, me?* Matthew, a greedy tax-collector, is caught in the act of counting money with a group of wealthy and worldly looking men. Jesus appears suddenly and unexpectedly, as he does in our own lives, but instead of condemning Matthew, he simply calls him, saying: *Follow me*. Looking carefully, you can see Jesus's foot already turned away back toward the door. He isn't going to wait around. There is an urgency to his call. He is on a mission to fulfill the will of his Father. Notice that Jesus's hand looks very much like the hand of Adam in the famous scene of Sistine chapel, but it is turned around so that Jesus stands in the position of God. By his obedience unto death, even death on a cross, he will undo the sin of Adam and accomplish the re-creation of the world. Jesus is on a mission, but he pauses at the door of each of our hearts calling us to follow him on the path of discipleship, a path of righteousness, obedience, and self-denial. Matthew got up immediately and followed him, all the way to martyrdom. What are you going to do?