

For Your Consideration

A Summary of Parish Issues, Concerns, and Solutions

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Executive Summary

Responding to the Church's call for a "New Evangelization" and the call of the Holy Spirit to go, I set out four years ago into the full time ministry of evangelization. This preaching and consulting ministry has afforded me the opportunity to travel around the country and see firsthand the issues plaguing our Pastors, their Staff, and the parishes as a whole. It is my sincerest hope that New Evangelization Ministries can become a resource for local Pastors, assisting them in their effort to bring about a revitalized Community, firmly established in God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Is it possible for one to receive the Holy Spirit and still not know Him? This is the crux of this discussion. Given that we are Baptizing infants who have neither cognitive knowledge nor memory of this event in later years, the answer to this question is an obvious YES. While pointing out key elements of the breakdown of faith seen by all in parish ministry, we will discuss four causes originally cited by St. Thomas Aquinas for why the Holy Spirit does not flow through the life of a Baptized believer. Surrounding these causes we have also identified three critical issues that we believe must be addressed to bring about effective and fruitful evangelization of our Parishioners.

Critical Issue #1 – Lack of Sacrifice and Suffering for the Kingdom: We somehow have lost sight of the fact that ministry is a war in which sacrifices need to be made for the building of the body. Too often, lay and clerical ministers had grown comfortable within their ministry assignments, seeking only to maintain what was currently under way. We must regain our fervor to see those we minister to come to intimate union with Christ!

Critical Issue #2 – The Absence of Testimony: The absence of credible witness from those who know him is a conspicuous void in the ministry of the Church. We lack in our training of Disciples of Christ the instruction of the purpose and methods for giving witness to Christ's presence now in their everyday lives.

Critical Issue #3 – Parishes do not appear to be led by the Holy Spirit: We no longer appear to be communities who follow a living God. We appear to be communities who follow a set of rules, programs, and schedules. This leaves little room for something new because "this is the way we have always done this. One would find it difficult to see signs of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in many of our parishes.

Aquinas Cause #1 – Poor Catechesis and Lack of Devotion: Great efforts are underway by our Bishops to restore substance to our catechesis. Within this substance we need to provide specific material describing and leading our faithful to initial conversion by enacting their free will to ratify the baptismal "Yes" spoken by the parents. Absent of this action, we will strengthen the content without leading them to establish a loving relationship with Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Aquinas Cause #2 – Sin: Sin obviously destroys our relationship with the Holy Spirit and must be addressed. At the core of this cause is the relationship that must be restored. Preaching will be critical

but even more important is the experienced presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our believers who will reveal to them the truth about sin.

Aquinas Cause #3 – Demonic Influence: Of all causes cited by St. Thomas Aquinas, this cause is the one that is least acknowledged within the local Church. Rarely will I see parishes where acknowledgement of the existence of Demons is openly taught. The forces of evil no longer have a holy nation keeping them at bay. We must not only engage the enemy but also catechize our faithful on their presence and methods for bondage.

Aquinas Cause #4 – Lack of Faith: The results of the previous three causes have reduced our faithful to a limited understanding and little dependence on the person of God for their everyday lives. Faith seems to be more about understanding historical facts and rules than responding to a trust relationship with Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. We must help them establish this relationship.

Conclusion & NEM Response: There are tangible things that can and must be done to turn the tide of moral decline in our world. Parishes need to begin to lead their faithful to the person of the Holy Spirit and instruct them on how a Disciple of Christ walks in the experience, power, and love of the Spirit.

New Evangelization Ministries (NEM) is dedicated to assisting local parishes by providing training for Parish Staff (Clergy and Laity working for Parish) and Pastoral Teams (Clergy, Staff, and volunteers in Leadership). We are currently developing Seminars to respond to the critical issues and causes identified above. These seminars are all designed to instruct the staff on how to catechize their faithful into a viable relationship with Christ, through intimate union with the Holy Spirit.

Seminars Available Through NEM

- Brothers, What Must We Do?
- Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit
- Discipleship – Walking in the Spirit
- The Teaching of the Apostles
- The Communal Life – The Church
- The Breaking of the Bread – The Sacraments
- The Prayers
- Unified Vision for Evangelization
- A Parish Infrastructure for Sustainable Growth
- Developing A Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal
- Volunteer Discipleship/Training in Evangelization
- Catechizing on the Demonic Influence on Parishes and People Parts 1 & 2
- Faith – Moving from Knowledge into Action
- A Spirit Led Parish
- The Sacrifice of Serving the Gospel of Jesus Christ

For Your Consideration

Church Fathers,

Let me begin by first commending myself to you and the service of your ministry. I count it great joy to be in the service of the Priesthood that I love. Having worked in local parishes for over 25 years and alongside Pastors that bear the burden of shepherding, I understand the burdens of your ministry and have made it my goal to support you in any way possible. Four years ago, the Lord called me into full time Evangelization Ministry. This ministry comprises of two separate initiatives. First is a preaching ministry that has provided me the opportunity to travel around the country and experience many parishes first hand. Although the Holy Spirit has given me the gift of preaching and frequent opportunities to utilize this gift for His purposes, my heart remains burdened by the decline of faith within our parishes and a strong desire to assist Pastors in bringing about life-giving, sustainable renewal in their parishes. The other initiative is in working closely with parishes in a consultative role, supporting their efforts for renewed faith among parishioners and staff.

Allow me to share what I have gleaned in these years of evaluating and assessing the current faith condition of local parishes. It is my hope that my experience confirms what you have learned from your own efforts. My observations and conclusions are intended to present areas where, through a concerted effort, tangible improvements for renewal of the faith can be achieved and sustained.

The prophetic words of Pope Paul VI, subsequent Popes and Council Fathers about spiritual decline have grown to full reality in the United States. The call for a new evangelization by Pope Paul VI appears to have finally reached local parishes across the country. However, the climate with which this news is received is clouded and confused as demonstrated by the reaction of those in the pews to the word 'evangelization.' Many do not understand its meaning. Some simplistically believe it is limited to inviting people to church. Others fear it as an attempt to become like Protestant denominations and want nothing to do with it. Universal clarity and understanding of evangelization, and its vital role in the Church, is a challenge both among Laity and the Parish Staff that serves them.

Today, there are many examples of spiritual decline. A staggering 70% of Baptized Catholics have left the Church to join other denominations, religions or have halted any religious practice at all (*The Dynamic Catholic Institute*). Of those still in attendance, 10% to 20% can be defined as a faith filled core and the corresponding 80%-90% as fringe. I define the core as those who exhibit evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They are counted among those who serve in the church and participate in its programs. The fringe consists of those who live out an inherited faith of rules and obligations. They generally attend Mass out of obligation or fear of going to hell, not as a result of any real connection to God or the Church. Most clergy I have encountered can identify this nationwide condition within their own parish.

If spiritual decline is the condition, I propose we consider the symptoms and potential remedies so that we might prevent further fundamental damage as time goes on. By identifying the symptoms, we may then be able to address them in an effective, organized manner, rather than allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed into denial. Let us examine some plausible reasons why spiritual disconnection continues to exist in our parishes.

When assessing a parish, I look for evidence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the parish. My experience with parishes, including discussions with Pastors, staff, and laity, repeatedly confirm the limited activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of many of our faithful – a significant issue dilemma. Although the Church and its catechesis call for an active participation in the Faith, there are unfortunately, many examples to the contrary. One needs only observe the singing during Mass to see an example of “lifeless” participation. In spite of Pastors and Music Ministers encouragement, many parishioners do not fully engage. Like a small child introduced to his parent’s friend and hiding behind the parent’s leg because they do not know the stranger, the faithful do not fully participate because they do not know the Holy Spirit. Pope Paul recognized this occurring in Europe and called for a new evangelization because there were “those baptized and living quite outside the Church” (*EN 52*). Initially this may appear to contradict Church teaching. But does it? The Church definitively teaches that one receives the Holy Spirit at Baptism, and it was the practice of the Apostles to confirm that the recipient had indeed received the Holy Spirit (*Acts 8:14-16*). St. Paul, in *Acts 19:1-7* provided an effective example of looking for evidence of the Holy Spirit among those claiming to be “disciples”. Upon finding no evidence of the Holy Spirit, he asked probing questions that revealed why the Spirit wasn’t present.

In looking at our parishes today, a common practice is to baptize adults and declare that they have the Holy Spirit, without scrutinizing whether the Spirit has indeed fallen on the recipient, as illustrated in the first three hundred years of Church History.¹ Our catechesis affirms among our parishioners that they already have God in them (through Baptism) and that what they experience (or do not experience) of God is normal. Yet it has become quite clear that one can be baptized and still not know or experience the Holy Spirit given them at Baptism. It is in that life, without the Church’s intended connection to God, that one could be tempted to look toward other groups, activities, religions, etc. for life-giving meaning.

Consider the Baptism of an infant. The child does not act of its free will (with authentic repentance) and has no understanding of the significance of being baptized (as an older person could.) Being baptized is a choice of its parents. And so we assume that the infant’s parents, by making this choice, are going to “raise their child up in the Faith.” But what exactly does that mean? Is it right to assume the parents are going to lead their child into repentance, then an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through deep knowledge of the Holy Spirit? If the parent’s foundation is a faith of rules and obligations, what will they actually be passing on to their children? And when these children, trained by parents with such a faith, grow up and desire to pass their faith on to their own children, what will the result be? Therefore, a key question would be, “Are parents properly equipped for this critical task with not only the catechesis of what should occur but also with their own intimate union with the Holy Spirit?”

Attendance to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is consistently down everywhere. I am personally aware of only a handful of parishes where attendance to Reconciliation would be considered ‘good,’ but is still not used by the majority of those attending Mass. In *John 16:7-11*, Jesus reveals that the Father

¹ McDonnell, Kilian, and George T. Montague. "12." *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994. 144-154. Print.

will send the Advocate, who will reveal the sin of the world. The Spirit has been sent, but the people appear to lack the connection to Him that enables them to, among other things, be convicted and grieve the loss of relationship. So, if we were to follow St. Paul's example and accept that these "Disciples" are not acting like they are true followers of Jesus Christ, we would need to ask "Why not?" Why do those in our flock, who have been baptized, appear to lack an intimate connection with the Holy Spirit? If there is no relationship, nothing has been lost by sin.

It is commonly understood today that some of our catechesis has been ineffective and our Bishops are working diligently to resolve content issues and restore substance to our curriculum. Many local Churches have grown comfortable with the dispensing of the sacraments without ever making sure that the heart connection has been established. The GDC and the CCC define this as initial conversion (*GDC 15&16, CCC 1430*). Church documents that address this issue agree that initial conversion is essential for establishing union with Christ and we know this to be through the power of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately in the catechesis, it is our assumption that 'they know the Spirit.' There are, I believe, four causes and three critical issues that need to be addressed.

Critical Issue #1 – Lack of Sacrifice and Suffering for the Kingdom

Many of our faithful who are trying to pass on the faith (the evangelistic message) no longer understand the role of sacrifice in delivering the message. Evident in the motives, efforts and results of the faithful is a significant lack of understanding of sacrifice and the absence of suffering for the message. The work of evangelization requires time, energy, resources, and personal sacrifice – resources that are too often perceived as limited, and therefore, allocated to other activities deemed more valuable. As we go through this discussion I will cite examples, however, let us remember that many good ideas (improvements) are not implemented because of the high personal or corporate cost required.

St. Thomas Aquinas addressed this very question in his *Summa Theologica*. (*Summa Theological Part 3, q 68-69*) He stated four causes for why the Holy Spirit does not flow through the heart and life of a believer. The remainder of this document is dedicated to considering each of these causes and discussing related critical issues as they apply to today's paradigm. Aquinas utilizes Devotion to identify the absence of conversion where one establishes a relationship of love with Christ. The nonexistence of this love relationship, or alternately stated, the absence of the heart, is the foundation of our problem. And the "lack of devotion" among our faithful is the evidence of this condition.

Aquinas Cause #1 – Poor Catechesis and Lack of Devotion

While it is our great desire and work to bring people in union with God through the Sacraments, and they are told they have been united with God, there is no evidence of the fruits of this union. The catechesis apparently only helps them understand what a Catholic does (service). Why this shortcoming? Although not intended, I believe that much of our current catechetical efforts only describe what a Catholic should look and behave like, rather than instructing how one should walk in the life, love and power of the Holy Spirit, who will enable them to be Christ-like (live a life of service as instructed). *Concern #1 is the absence of Sacrifice*. It is easy for individuals to work within the confines

of rules, requirements and rituals. However, to enter the waters of relational ministry where we seek authentic conversion (and which would be a sign of union with Christ) is a more difficult and challenging task.

Referring again to the baptism of infants as an example, the Church rightly proclaims that the child has received the Holy Spirit. It then leaves it to the parents to make sure that the child grows up to experience authentic repentance, prepare to give their life away (die to self) and receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit. However, because our catechesis teaches parents that all of this has been accomplished through Baptism, their perception becomes that their only responsibility is to make sure their children receive the remainder of their sacraments and go to Mass. There is no catechesis that I know of, that leads and instructs parents about their role regarding these significant issues after Baptism.

Consider those in the pews. Their focus is merely to “pay their membership obligations” (tithes, Mass attendance, marry in the Church, make sure their kids attain their entrance sacraments, etc.) and hope that their membership, will in the end (at death) unite them with Christ in heaven. They lack the understanding that an invigorated, life giving relationship can be experienced and developed more fully through intimate union with the Holy Spirit.

The 2nd concern regarding our current catechesis has to do with Evangelization. Although the GDC tells us that all catechesis is at the service of Evangelization, this does not appear to be the case. While serving at a local parish in Raleigh, N.C., I became acutely aware of a unique phenomenon. In an effort to bring Catechesis to adults, I was transitioning our religious education program from CCD to an all-generation catechetical program. While we were developing the content for the first year, specifically regarding Baptism, it was clear that the teaching was designed for an audience that had already been evangelized and was united with Christ in the Spirit. The catechesis taught that they had received God (all there was to receive of Him) at Baptism. Thus, they go many years without truly experiencing God, led them to believe that God is a distant God who expects absolute obedience before they can experience union with him (after death). Accordingly, I adapted the content on Baptism and reoriented its focus on entering into a relationship with God, an intimate being that infuses the heart with His fire of love, stirring believers to holiness because of a desire for nothing more than to please Him. All the Catechesis material was re-designed to present the teachings of the faith, as all should know them, emphasizing the goal of the faith, union with God, through the redemptive act of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The 3rd concern with the Catechesis has to do with the presentation of Repentance and Baptism. When asked by the faithful what they should do to receive what the Apostles received at Pentecost, St. Peter replied, “repent, be baptized and receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit”. Today, many participants of the RCIA Program are not learning or experiencing what authentic repentance really is. A critical question to consider would be “*Without repentance, why would the Spirit move?*” Will he enter a heart that has no contrition? Instead of bringing people into authentic repentance (acknowledgement that they are not God and to cease acting like one), our instruction often indirectly leads them to believe it is acceptable for them to pick and choose those rules by which they wish to live (whether sinful or not).

In considering how most parishes are catechizing about Baptism, it is a struggle to find any mention of Baptism as a personal choice of giving one’s life to God. The faithful are not taught or led to offer their lives to God as St. Paul describes in Romans 3:20. Many Catholics see Baptism as the way to begin adding Jesus to their lives, rather than replacing their lives with His. Gradually they add Jesus to a

variety of activities, habits, goals, dreams or relationships in their lives without the love experiences of union with the Holy Spirit. Understanding this, it is easy to grasp why they struggle in their faith! We must lead them to make God the most important pursuit of life.

It is clear that catechetical reform should be comprehensive. Content regarding conversion must be corrected along with material on discipleship, evangelization and other topics. If these elements are not included in the catechetical reforms, our faithful will continue to perceive our faith as law based, unattainable, and burdensome. And, while the need for updating the catechesis may be right and true, we must first lead them to conversion so that their hearts are properly disposed to receive the catechesis of Discipleship. If we think of our parishioners as wood burning stoves and the quality of our catechetical content as solid pieces of oak, the improved quality of wood (which is heavier and denser) will only place more weight upon the stove if the fire is not first lit (conversion.)

Aquinas Cause #2 – Sin

We have all witnessed sin in the normal decline of our parishes, as well as our nation. The significant drop in attendance is understandable when our culture (Hollywood, media, educational establishments, government, etc.) marginalizes the Church and our own catechesis does not adequately equip the individual to live their faith. Fulton Sheen defined sin as not just the breaking of a law, but also the hurting of a relationship. The faithful need to be taught the importance of a relationship with Christ, and that when one sins the relationship is severed and must then be repaired through Reconciliation. Our teaching on sin must be re-focused on relationship (not simply law) *and* reinforced by our preaching.

It is common for individuals to disregard rules that are perceived to be old fashioned or out dated. Where there is no personal connection, there is no motivation to obey. The closer the relationship between God and his children, the greater their desire is to restore it. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will not be valued unless there is a relationship that may be damaged by the sin. A union with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, resulting in a loving relationship with the person of God, will produce in the faithful that essential motivation to obey.

Aquinas Cause #3 – Demonic Influence

Many are surprised when this topic is raised, but after some discussion, most recognize its existence. One of the demons first strategic tactics is ambiguity. It serves their purposes that their presence in a parish remains concealed. When discussing this subject with Pastors, there was a general response of acknowledgement, but little to no teaching or preaching on it. Our catechesis is also greatly lacking in this area. There is no effort to instruct the faithful regarding the presence of demons, their methods or objectives. There is therefore, no active defense against demonic influence. The faithful must be educated and equipped so that they can recognize and reject demonic influence and be free to respond to grace through a thriving, loving relationship with Christ.

Once discovered, the demons second weapon of choice is to strike fear into the hearts of those who become aware of their presence. While preaching a mission in a parish in Texas, I became acutely

aware of the presence of a powerful demon (a spiritual sense) sitting on the church as though it were a throne. During adoration, in preparation for that evening's presentation, I received the sense that the demon was in control of the parish and was not going to sit idly by and watch the Pastor bring about spiritual renewal. In another instance, while preaching a mission in Michigan, I was distributing communion at the Saturday Vigil Mass. As parishioners came forward, I began to sense a very dark presence within several women. During the first night of the mission, I mentioned to those in attendance that I sensed the spirit of incest within the parish. After the presentation numerous individuals approached me and confirmed that incest is the quiet, secret problem in this small rural town. It is a practice of demons to dumb down, cloud or darken the perception of truth. They present an image that excludes God and his ability to overcome challenging circumstances. When people embrace this perception, it is difficult for them to trust or believe that God can help. This brings us to St. Thomas' fourth cause.

Aquinas Cause #4 – Lack of Faith

In our parishes today faith is frequently defined as the accumulation of knowledge. Growing in faith is equated with growing in knowledge. In my travels and visits to parishes throughout our country, there has not been much evidence of parish staff encouraging parishioners to exercise authentic faith based on the truth. As beings created to love, there must be a relationship for love to occur. However, the existence of a relationship does not always guarantee that love will be shared. If today, we were to teach our parishioners that not only can they have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, but also that they must, most would nod agreement and then not know what to do. It is not enough to inform them that this relationship should exist. We must teach them how to establish it, how to discern the Spirit's voice, how to follow the Spirit's prompting, and how to trust in the Spirit's providence.

One of the greatest voids I have witnessed in our parishes is in leading our people to engage their free will in the act of trusting. In this culture, where from an early age we are taught not to trust strangers; it is increasingly difficult to know each other. If we cannot know each other, we will not trust each other. If relationships in general are difficult for the average person, how can parishioners be expected to have a loving relationship with God? If one never experiences initial conversion, how much can they trust God with life issues? And if there were neither trust nor relationship, why would the faithful bother to learn and follow God's will for their lives?

Critical Issue #2 – The Absence of Testimony

There is a general absence of the use of Testimony from the Pulpit and from the faith filled. I see this as a critical issue because of the Biblical depiction of how the Dragon was defeated in the book of Revelation 12:11, "But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony". People not only need to know what Jesus -did two thousand years ago, they also need to know what Jesus is doing today in the hearts of those who experience life in the Holy Spirit. It is vital to share the many ways in which Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, healed the broken hearted, healed the sinner of his habitual sin and set captives free.

Part of the demonic influence is derived by the formation individuals receive from the world. They are formed to live lies, deny their true selves, wear masks and build walls around their hearts. We learn to portray a life without problems, without struggles over sin. In recent years, the common feeling has been that a person's faith is a private matter. If that were true, how can the Gospel possibly be shared? People are hungry. They have doubts and questions. They want to know if God is real and if He is big enough to handle their problems. Sharing a testimony requires sacrifice and vulnerability. To give witness of God's healing power, one would have to describe what affliction or sin He healed them of. People are fearful of self-disclosure for fear of what others would think. This is yet another example of the lack of suffering required to spread the Gospel.

Critical Issue #3 – Parishes do not appear to be led by the Spirit

It appears that many of our parishes are not led through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a hard word and I certainly share this without making an indictment against our Priesthood. It is my understanding that our Priesthood did not receive training on Evangelization in Seminary. Therefore I believe this has less to do with negligence and more to do with individual experience. If a priest grew up in a parish where there were neither visible signs nor focus on the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit, they would most likely follow the examples of priests before them. If, however, he has an encounter with the Lord, through a powerful indwelling of the Holy Spirit, his discipleship (as well as his priestly formation) would certainly be influenced by this power-filled relationship. Like any good Father, he would want to pass on to his children the best of what he has. Like Parents in their faith, they can't give what they don't have.

In my interactions with Pastors, I have only encountered a handful whose actions profoundly demonstrated their pursuit of the will of the Holy Spirit. I observed among these few that in the Office of Pastor, Christ is acknowledged as the Head of the Body (and Parish) and that their role requires them to discern what the head wants and then do it. This witness has a tremendous impact on those who serve them. His perspective places Jesus at the center of all efforts as discerned through the Holy Spirit and was visible to his staff, enabling them to recognize the source of the Pastor's discernment. The staff in turn identifies the Pastor as a man of prayer. Because this is seen as part of his lifestyle, he is an encouragement to his staff to pray and discern guidance for their own lives and decisions. This method of leadership communicates volumes more about a relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit than dozens of classes. This is a model one can observe and experience.

Does St. Paul intend for us to grow up into the Body of Christ where Jesus is the head? (Eph. 4:3) If so, then we must re-orient the way our spiritual lives are led and the manner in which we function as a Church. The book of Acts reveals a Community desperately unified to the Holy Spirit for guidance. Why have we lost that desperate need to be informed by the Spirit as to what we should do? Decisions in parishes across the country are made in several ways: by Pastors alone, by Parish Councils, Parish Staff or committees. Frequently only a token prayer asking God to bless "their" plans is made. We must place a greater emphasis on the will of the Holy Spirit and instruct our people into direct interaction with Him. Imagine how parishes would be transformed if decisions were made by the collective discernment of the Spirit's will. Not only would the parishes be impacted significantly, but also each individual would be moved to a new level in their relationship with Christ and the spirit-filled life we desire for them.

If the physical man communicates with the rest of the body through messages originating in the brain (head), then the body of Christ must also possess a conduit through which Jesus communicates with all parts of the body. The obvious connection is the Holy Spirit, who is given to each who has given themselves to Christ. However, the actual conduit is the heart and the substance that delivers the message is the love we share with Christ. The more open the heart is, the more love a person receives and experiences, and the more responsive (obedient) they are.

If the statistics that state that 70% of US Baptized Catholics are no longer attending the Church are true, then the Body of Christ appears to have suffered a stroke. Could it be that the body struggles so because this large percentage is not fully connected to the head? There have been various calls by Bishops to encourage their clergy to pray more. Unfortunately, many local parishes do not have the virtue of Prayer. I experienced this personally when I was mentoring a young Youth Minister on how to deepen his ministry and I encouraged him to start every day of work with 30 minutes before the Lord in the Tabernacle. When he went to his Pastor and asked if he could do this, he received a resounding “No, not on church time, if you want to pray for the ministry, you need to do it on your own time.” It is shocking that a Pastor would not want his people to bathe their efforts and preparations in prayer. If we are not rooted in prayer then we are depending on ourselves for the completion of the mission of Christ where we are assigned.

Conclusion

As we know the Lord modeled two different methods of ministry in the Gospels. The first was what today we refer to as “Program” oriented ministry, where He sat on a hillside and preached to the multitudes that came to hear him. The second was “Relational” ministry, where he called twelve men to follow him and invested His heart in them. This was the model he chose to expand the Gospel.

Our Parishes today are program dependent and ill equipped to reach out to people in the pew, let alone the community. Programs are assembled which become the infrastructure for our parishes. Instead of training (discipleship) our faithful on how to lead others into a viable relationship with Jesus through intimate union with the Holy Spirit, this infrastructure continues to depend on procreation as the primary method of evangelization. Most catechesis has been reduced to sacramental preparation, leaving participants to conclude that sacraments are all they need. In other words, parishes are designed to minister primarily to the evangelized.

It is necessary to redefine the role of a Parish in terms of Evangelization. Instead of more programs with no evangelistic vision, our parishes must present a clear vision of what it means to be a Catholic – a Disciple of Jesus Christ. Our Catechesis should more clearly instruct them on how to achieve the vision which is this relationship with Christ in the power and union of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments must be redefined for the faithful as the means to achieve the vision not the goal in and of itself. This is a vision that not all have seen and many are not completely sure how to do. The thought of reorienting a parish is daunting and prompts many valid questions and comments. “What is the model for the new Church focus?” “Who is doing it well that we might learn from them?” “I have never seen nor done anything like this.” “I don’t have the gifts to do something like this.” “I’m too old to start something like this in my Parish.” This is Christ’s vision given to us from the inception of the Church, but we are not able to see it because we are not focused on the Holy Spirit.

Clearly, our parishes must be Spirit led and the Pastor must support this undertaking, or like so many other efforts in the church, it will die. Let us equip our Pastors - as Jesus taught and equipped the twelve - so they can then lead their faithful to a life-giving relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. And, thus, our people will also be taught and equipped to pass their faith on to their children and future generations effectively.

I believe the Holy Spirit is the only one who can successfully accomplish this and that He desires to do it through us. Perhaps, we will once again regain the desire for desperate unity with the Holy Spirit (in seeking His direction for what to do) and return to that place where the faithful can live the life of Christ through intimate knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Our people will learn that the Sacraments are not the end, but rather a profound means of encountering the living God more fully on earth. They will understand that a living, thriving relationship with Christ is possible and that maintaining a growing relationship in the Holy Spirit is the key responsibility in the life of a Disciple. It is in this journey that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, each will begin to behave as one who is "like Christ."

NEM Response

A unified vision is needed and yet no vision can be complete without the power-filled indwelling of the Holy Spirit. New Evangelization Ministries' commitment is to partner with Parish Pastors and their staff by leading them through a series of Seminars into this experience of the Holy Spirit and provide for them the sound understanding of Evangelization and Discipleship as held by the Apostles. It is our desire that through this deeper knowledge of and relationship with the Holy Spirit, participants will be better equipped to teach their parishioners these same faith building (and life changing) disciplines.

The following is a brief list of NEM seminars with brief descriptions and their objectives. They are all designed to equip and support Pastors, staff, and laity in the evangelization of their parishioners.

NEM Evangelization Seminars

1. "Brothers, What Must We Do?" This seminar is designed to lead people into the initial conversion. It is here that they must identify, examine, understand and enact with their own free will, the repentance and ratification intended through the "yes" their Parents made for them at Baptism. This seminar will delve into what are (1) authentic repentance and (2) the consequence of Baptism in the life of the believer. Participants will learn that gaining entrance into the Body of Christ (Baptism) is a decision to "lose your life so that you might gain it" in Christ. They will recognize that a life, love, and relationship with Christ, experienced through the Holy Spirit, is worth more than what one can gain from the world and its pursuits.
2. Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit In this seminar we will help individuals come to a full understanding of how God desires to empower us through the indwelling of his Spirit - to achieve imperfect union with God now. This seminar will enable them to fully understand how the Holy Spirit works from within their heart to enable them to grow in holiness, obedience and humility. They will continue in the process of understanding and understand how once trust in

that relationship has grown sufficiently, they will be empowered with gifts for the building up of the body of Christ – Gifts to serve the body.

3. Discipleship - Walking in the Spirit A clear vision of the personal journey as a Disciple of Christ and how it is accomplished in the Holy Spirit is the focus of this seminar. From the moment a person experiences conversion caused by the indwelling of the Spirit, they will want to know what to do next, just as the Apostles did. The members of the early Church committed themselves to four spiritual disciplines as led by the Holy Spirit and this seminar provides an overview of these four disciplines, setting a launching point for individual seminars on each, encouraging in depth discussion and sharing life application of each.
4. The Teaching of the Apostles – Scriptures This seminar will instruct the believer how to enter into Scripture Study with the Holy Spirit. We will use this seminar to introduce the spiritual paradigm of entering the “school of the Spirit” who is the teacher. Participants will receive practical instruction on how to recognize the voice and promptings of the Spirit through the fruits of the Spirit, provided in Galatians chapter 5.
5. The Communal Life – The Church What does it mean to be a member of the Church and how does the Spirit draw us together? This seminar is designed to instruct the believer on the unifying work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Through close examination of St. Paul’s admonition for unity in the Epistle to the Ephesians, participants will view through the lens of the Holy Spirit how His love draws us to be of one mind and one heart.
6. The Breaking of the Bread – The Sacraments The objective of this seminar is to help the believer understand how the Holy Spirit works through the Sacraments to bring us into closer union with God. The focus of this spiritual discipline is on how the believer can attain deeper intimacy, grace, and love as they dispose themselves and their loved ones to the Lord in each Sacrament.
7. The Prayers This session is designed to instruct the believer on how the development of their own relationship with God is vitally dependent on their daily prayer life in the Spirit. Because the majority of members of the body of Christ struggle with prayer, it is vital for participants to understand and appreciate how the Holy Spirit uses this to help us grow closer to Him.
8. Unified Vision for Evangelization This seminar will help Parish Ministers to recognize the need for a unified vision for evangelization of the Parish. After completing this task we will move immediately to outline the process for its development.
9. A Parish Infrastructure for Sustainable Growth Most parish staff have a good handle on the development and maintenance of a program. This seminar will help them to adapt those skills into developing the infrastructure needed to have growth that is sustainable over the life of the parish.
10. Developing a Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal This presentation will equip staff and/or Pastoral Teams with a working knowledge of creating plans to establish and progress the evangelistic growth of their parish. This is a hands-on process of planning for the Parish Evangelization.
11. Volunteer Discipleship/Training in Evangelization This session will equip Staff and Lay Leaders with the tools to train their volunteers on evangelization within their own particular focus of ministry within the parish.

12. Catechizing on the Demonic Influence and Parishes and People Parts 1 & 2 This is a short course on Angelology and Demonology with a very practical application to parish life and demonic interference on the life of believers.
13. Faith – Moving from Knowledge into Action This seminar will help staff to lead their parishioners into growing in Faith. Staff will have the practical methods needed to instruct their faithful in practically applying the knowledge in the exercise of faith.
14. A Spirit Led Parish This seminar practically defines what it means to be a parish that seeks in every facet of parish life to place the Holy Spirit at the center of their pursuit of will of God for the planning and life of the parish.
15. The Sacrifice of Serving the Gospel of Jesus Christ Jesus informed his Disciples that following him would cost their very lives. This seminar will instruct those in attendance on how to make sacrifice an integral part of their relationship with Christ and their service for him.

It is the mission of New Evangelization Ministries to continue supporting the local church in their efforts to bring about authentic, sustainable renewal in their parishes. We are working hard to respond to the call of the Church Fathers for new and creative ways to evangelize. We see each parish as unique and our goal is to equip the saints serving each parish with the tools needed to lead others into conversion and growth in the Spirit.

Please contact us if you have any questions or would like to inquire more about NEM services.

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