

To Love, Learn & Live Christ



Discipleship Resources For Parish Lay Leadership

By Kate Wiskus

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Table of Contents

Foreward	1
Instruction on Baptism and Discipleship	
Introduction	2-3
Exposition of the Baptismal Graphic	4-6
Baptismal Graphic	7
Printed & Online Resources	8-9

FORWARD

I was blessed to grow up as I did, a Catholic in the minority, who had to learn early and deeply what it means to be a Christian Catholic. I was blessed to benefit from the witness of countless adults who brought Christ to me moment to moment in their behavior, their authentic love, their strong faith, and their outstanding examples. Beginning as a young adult, I was thrust into the role of catechist and faith formation administrator for smaller parishes. And immediately I recognized the overwhelming need for formation of the individuals in their faith beginning with an understanding of the blessings as well as responsibilities of baptism. I found, without exception, that individuals did want to know Jesus, did want to accept Jesus' love and salvation, and did want to live out of a healthy relationship with the LORD and with others.

As a diocesan director for the Diocese of Madison from 1998 to 2006, I found that the individuals in the parish likewise wanted to “do the right thing” but didn't have a firm foundation in their faith. This was especially true of individuals who found themselves serving as catechists and as members of councils and commissions. They were hungry for faith formation. They were seeking, but there were so few resources available to them.

As a fulltime professor of pastoral theology at Mundelein Seminary and University of Saint Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL from 2006 to 2015, I found that one of the primary requests from the seminarians in formation was for resources to use in the parishes in “growing disciples,” as we called it. We are blessed with the number of resources out there today for “growing disciples” in the Catholic Church. The dilemma isn't so much a lack of resources as a lack of understanding of the centrality of discipleship within our faith and a lack of effort to actively and tirelessly work to “grow disciples” in the parishes.

I encourage every parish to recognize their role in “growing disciples.” I pray that every parish will provide needed formation in the faith beginning with an understanding of baptism, discipleship, and mission.

While these materials are copyrighted by me (© 2016), you have my permission to use them and to adapt them to your own needs. It is all one Church. I pray that these resources are helpful and that through their use, individuals may grow in their love of Christ, their faith in His word, and their hope in his promise.

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Instruction on Baptism and Discipleship

Introduction:

Discipleship is loving Christ, learning Christ and living Christ every day. Our faith is not something we create. In fact, to quote a favorite Christian songwriter, “I did not make it, no it is making me.”¹

To quote Pope Francis’ words in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “It is a wonderful thing to be God’s faithful people. We achieve fulfillment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names.” You see, our mission is not impersonal – it’s not about numbers, profits, strategies or programs- on the contrary – it is essentially personal because it is relational. It is all about life made possible through our relationship with our loving Lord and using our lives to share that life with others so they, too, might have life. Our lives are a journey blessed by the love and presence of Jesus Christ and of so many others - of faces and names and stories of faith learned and lived out of love for Christ. For us as disciples, life should be all about loving Christ, learning Christ, and living Christ and accompanying others as they do the same.

We need to return to our baptisms where we were anointed priest, prophet and king to share in the ongoing salvific action of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and his priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to grace us and develop us so that we might be transformed through prayer, the sacraments and liturgy, that we might be receptive to the Word and take it in fully so we might proclaim it with conviction, and so that we might be people of community who reach out to others in loving service in the name of Jesus Christ. We must address it as whole persons of spirit, intellect, and body so that we might grow in holiness and journey with others. Baptism is the beginning of the mission but does not fulfill our obligation of being disciples. Discipleship is not a title bestowed but an office lived, and it must be informed and directed by the Spirit through prayer and the sacraments, through study, and through life in communion with our Lord and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We must consciously embrace our relationship with Christ initiated through our baptisms. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians, “it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us.”² Through our baptisms we become members of the Body of Christ, one body with many parts.³ Paul also reminds us that it is through love lived out that we will bring about the kingdom

¹ Lyrics from the song *Creed* written by Richard Mullins.

² Gal 2:19.

³ Rom 12:38.

here on earth, that we will grow the mystical body of Christ because love fulfills the law and surpasses it.⁴ We are called as the baptized to bring Christ's love for all humanity and our love of Christ to others so they might benefit from his love and learn to love him themselves and learning Christ, live Christ.

As the baptized who are cognizant of all that our baptism brings to us but also demands of us, we move individually and collectively from people who attend church to a community in, with and through Jesus Christ who are Church, His Church. We focus on our identity in Jesus Christ because of our relationship to Him.

Therefore, the first and foremost step into a lived discipleship is the realization that all is dependent upon a relationship with Christ. We can't be a people who just know about him and his teachings, we must move to being a people in *love* with Jesus Christ. Loving Him opens us to the wonderment of learning Him as the first disciples did. The first disciples encountered Christ and then followed him. Day to day they witnessed his works and took in his teachings, manifestations of Him as Son, sent by the Father⁵, filled and led by the Holy Spirit.⁶ Day to day the first disciples learned Christ as we *learn* or come to "know" another. As disciples in the modern era, we must also encounter the person Jesus Christ and not settle for merely knowing about Him but insist that we *learn* Him. Finally, when we *love* Christ and we *learn* Christ, we are compelled to *live* Christ.

An individual committed to *loving, learning, and living* Jesus Christ is that light on a hill.⁷ An individual committed to *loving, learning, and living* Jesus Christ is that leavening agent that changes from within.⁸ An individual committed to *loving, learning, and living* Jesus Christ is a missionary laboring in the field on the ultimate mission of He who came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly.⁹ An individual committed to *loving, learning, and living* Jesus Christ is an instrument in the ongoing salvific action of Christ in the world.

⁴ Rom. 13: 8-10.

⁵ John 3:17

⁶ Luke 4:1

⁷ Matthew 5:14

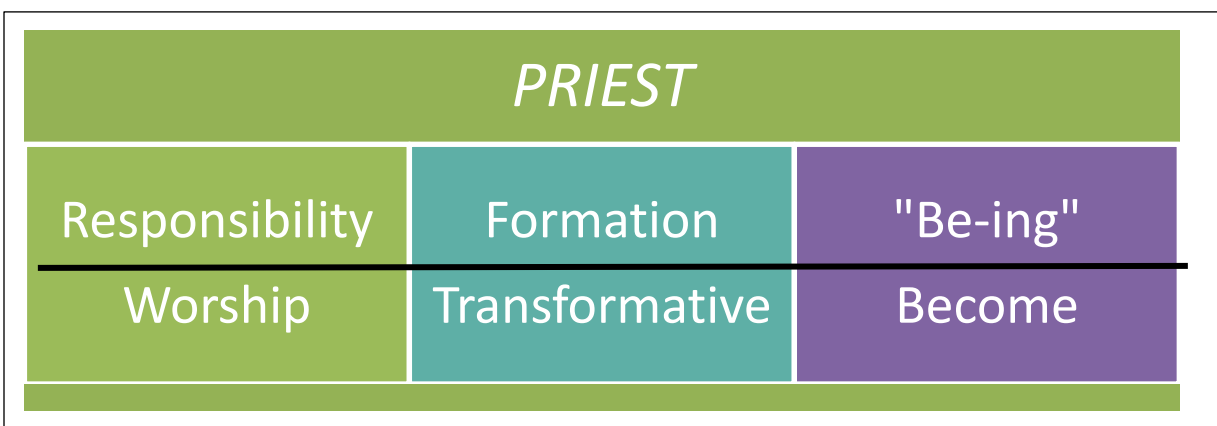
⁸ Matthew 13:33

⁹ John 10:10

EXPOSITION OF BAPTISM GRAPHIC

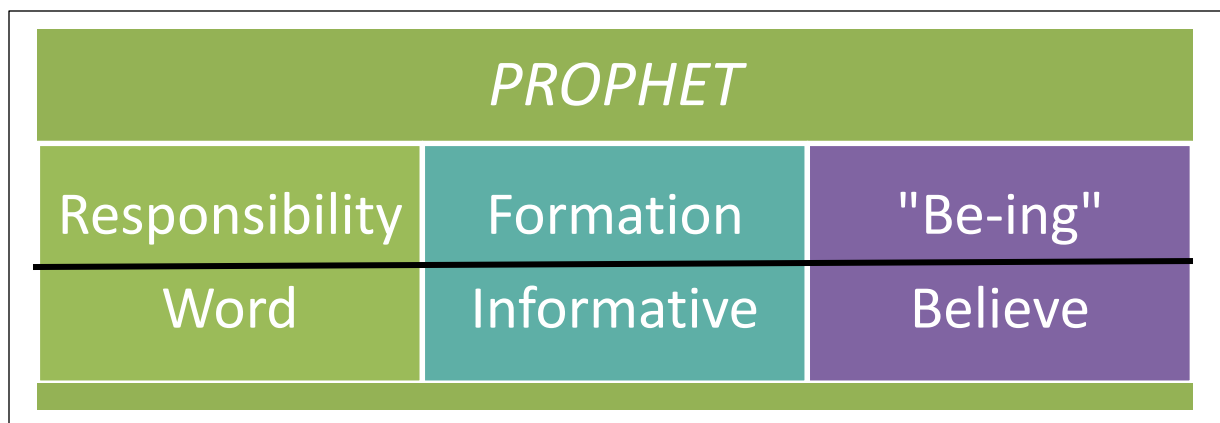
At our baptisms, we are anointed *PRIEST*, *PROPHET*, and *KING*. By our baptisms, we “are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God” and we “share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.” The baptized are called by God and “being led by the spirit to the Gospel...contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others.”¹⁰

How do we do that? Let’s take one office at a time beginning with *PRIEST*. Let us look specifically at the primary function/responsibility of each office. Secondly, let us look at the primary impact of the office and its function to our lifelong formation. Thirdly, let us consider ourselves as human beings, made in the image and likeness of our LORD whose very name means “Being” (I AM), and the contribution of the office to our own “Be-ing”.

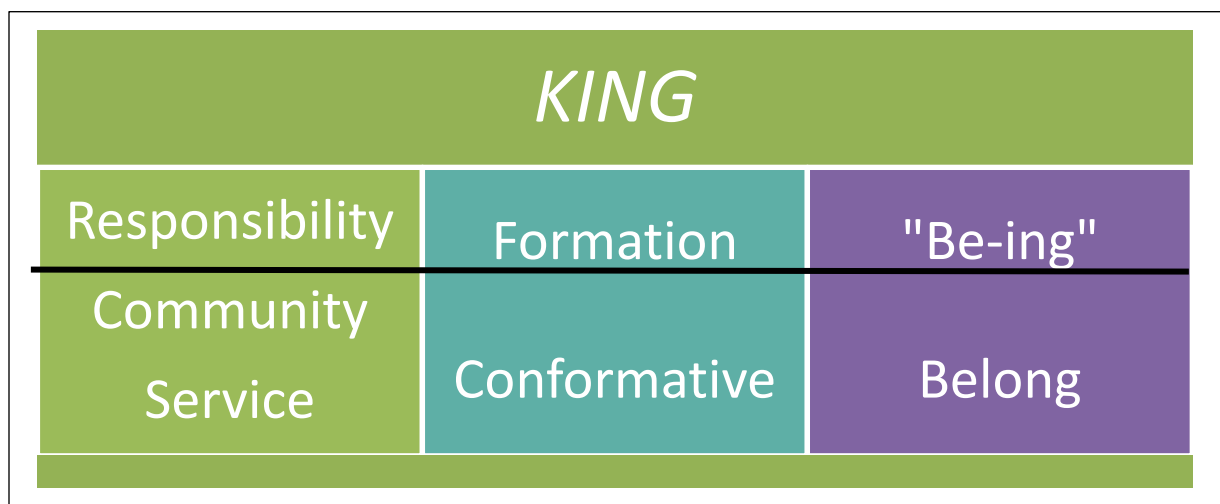


The primary responsibility and function of the *PRIEST* is **worship**. We know from our history that from the beginning, the priest of the community was a person of prayer who led others to and in prayer. Today we live this office out by being people of prayer, by participating fully in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, by receiving the sacraments and seeking to live them and cooperate with the graces bestowed through them, by daily offering our own personal prayer, and by joining with the community in prayer. The especially **transformative** nature of prayer contributes to our life long formation. And through the graces of worship and prayer, we **become**. For example, through the graces of baptism, we become *Children of God*. Through the graces of Eucharist, we become a *member of the living Body of Christ*. Through the graces of confirmation, we become *Temples of the Holy Spirit*. Through the graces of reconciliation, we become *Reconciled to God and one another*.

¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 31.



The primary responsibility and function of *PROPHET* is **word**. We live this office out by being people of the scriptures, reading them, learning them, living them, proclaiming them. We also participate in the office when we seek to be further informed by the teachings of the Church, the writings of Church leaders, and even by listening to homilies at Mass. We receive the Word and we proclaim the Word to others. The especially **informative** nature of word whether scripture, writings, or homilies contributes to our life long formation. And through the graces of the word received, “chewed” and digested, we **believe**.



The primary responsibility and function of *KING* are two-fold. The first focuses on the building up of the kingdom and the second on the welfare of everyone within the kingdom. We emphasize community and we emphasize service. We live this office out by being people of community, of hospitality, of inclusion, of unity. We live this office by reaching out to others, by serving others charitably and without expectation of return. We live this office by being self-less as our redeemer king showed us in his encounters and in his ultimate self-less act of service, his death for our sins. The especially **conformative** nature of community and service contributes to our

life long formation. And through the graces of community and service, we **belong** first to Christ and secondly to one another.

A disciple of Christ is one who lives these offices moment to moment, day to day. A disciple of Christ is one who lives a balance of the offices including worship/prayer, word/education, community, and service every day. And a community of disciples is marked by a community life that includes worship, word, community, and service. In fact, as we look at our sacraments, at our formation, at our community, and at our outreach in the name of Christ and his love, we find that while each component has a primary function, each component has one area of impact that is highlighted, and each component contributes more heavily to one area of our well “be-ing”, each component is present and operative to some extent in the other components.

A first example of this would be the Eucharistic celebration. While it is primarily considered an act of worship that brings with its worthwhile celebration transformation and accomplishing our “becoming what it is that we receive – the Body of Christ,” it is also true that the Mass also features the proclamation of the Word, the gathering of the community, and service to the community present but also to the world beyond. While we may say that the Mass is most especially transformative, we must also admit that it is highly informative of our intellect as well as our spirit and conformative to Christ. Likewise, while we may stress the “becoming” aspect, we must acknowledge that within the context of the Eucharistic celebration, there is “believing” as we listen to the Word and the Eucharistic prayer and creed with faith and there is “belonging” as we gather together in harmony, recite our creed, seek reconciliation with our LORD and one another.

A second example of this balance and blending can be illustrated with the faith formation processes in our parishes. While the primary function is education and the purpose is to inform our minds, hearts and spirits, a program without prayer, community, or action would be lacking. Balance is struck in the formation programs by including prayer, building community, and living out what is being learned. Parents may send their children to formation for the sacrament because they want them to “become” Catholic. But in the process, they are also seeking to underscore what it is we “believe.” And as the process unfolds, the individual preparing as well as the family celebrating this moment of blessings and grace recognize that this is also about “belonging.” This is about being Christian, belonging to Christ...being Catholic, belonging to the Church.

To live into our discipleship, we must strike that balance. We must continue to follow (as a disciple, a follower) our Lord’s example and join with him in his mission, his ongoing salvific action in our world. We must be people who *Love, Learn and Live Christ* today, tomorrow and always.



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Discipleship Graphic

PRINTED & ONLINE RESOURCES ON DISCIPLESHIP

The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium) an apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis

This document is perhaps the best to use as an introduction to discipleship, its scope, its importance to the individual, and its connection to the realization of Christ's mission. While I would highly recommend the entire book, if one is limited to the amount of time available for study, I would recommend the first chapter, "The Church's Missionary Transformation." This clearly spells out the individual's responsibility to engage their faith and to participate in the ongoing salvific action of Christ in our world and in our day. I would also recommend the third chapter "The Proclamation of the Gospel". Finally, I would recommend the final chapter, "Spirit Filled Evangelizers." This final chapter speaks of the very real need for a personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus. As we all know, one is not a disciple because of what one knows but because of who one knows.

It is essential that parish pastoral councils spend time at every meeting in prayer and in study and discussion. The ideal would be to get a copy of the exhortation and to break it up into study segments for each month. The entire text could be digested in one year. The benefit of doing it within the context of the meeting is that it will exponentially escalate the enthusiasm of the individuals for their faith discussing it within the context of their role as servant. It is essential, too, that it not be just read independently by the members but that it is studied and discussed together. We know from Edgar Dale's Cone of Learning that we remember only 10% of what we read but 70% of what we say. Participating in a discussion about the text maximizes its impact and retention. Council meetings should be limited to 90 minutes: 15 minutes for prayer, 15- 30 minutes for group discussion of study material, 45 – 60 minutes on parish business. When leaders understand the mission and their roles as disciples, business actually takes less time and the business of the parish is mission focused.

This text can be accessed online at the Vatican website. Individuals can access it to read online or to print one copy for personal use. Use the following link:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

The book is available in paperback from Amazon and the USCCB site.

Disciples Called to Witness by the USCCB

This document is phenomenal in that it is “digestible” in length (27 pages), it is affordable (usually \$6 or less on Amazon or through USCCB store), it is an easy read, and it gives numerous examples and strategies for implementing the new evangelization at the parish level. This is an especially good resource for councils and for commission members in that it points to real ways that the parish can undertake the mission for its own families, for the individual and for the whole community. This would be an excellent 2nd step for parish lay leadership in that it gives concrete ways to bring the mission of Christ and lived discipleship to the forefront.

This document can be accessed at the USCCB website as a PDF and can be read online or individuals could access it and print it for their personal use. The link at USCCB is

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/disciples-called-to-witness/>

This book is also available through the USCCB store

<http://store.usccb.org/SearchResults.asp?Search=disciples+called+to+witness&Submit=>

Lumen Gentium - Second Vatican Council Document – *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*

This document from the Second Vatican Council is foundational to a modern understanding of discipleship especially as it relates to the laity. While the whole document has merit, as a resource for laity on their discipleship, chapter IV “The Laity” is especially important. It is here that our baptismal anointing to a sharing in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices is highlighted. It is here that we learn of the laity’s manifestation of these offices through worship, word, community, and service. A second chapter that is beneficial for the laity’s understanding of discipleship is chapter V “The Call to Holiness.”

This document is available online at <http://www.vatican.va/archive>. Look for *Lumen Gentium* by name in the search or you can go to it directly with the following link: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

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