

**The Catholic Journey Experience
Of the Diocese of Helena Montana
In relationship to the book
"Forming Intentional Disciples -
The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus"
By: Sherry Weddell**

Statistics for the Catholic Church in America:

- 10% of the United States are ex-Catholics
- Of those raised as Catholics, 70% are no longer practicing by attending Mass at least once a month.
- Of that 70% who have left, about half no longer consider themselves Catholic; 3% are now in a non-Christian faith; 15% are now in a Protestant faith. The rest consider themselves as unaffiliated or non-believers. Very few who leave, ever return.
- Between 2000 and 2009, 10% left the Catholic Church – 2-1/2% entered the Catholic Church. (Net loss of 7-1/2%)
- Of Protestants, between 2000 and 2009 - 11% left their faith traditions – 8-1/2% entered their faith traditions. (Net loss 2-1/2%)
- The main reason for leaving, for both Catholic and Protestant -- "My spiritual needs were not being met" –. Very few leave because they were drawn to another church. None left because they found another church's services more "entertaining".
- Many Catholics do not trust God, because of the demands it might entail and many do not trust the Catholic Church.
- 3% or about two million Catholics left because of the Clergy sex scandal.
- Of those who leave the Catholic Church, 80% are under the age of 23 and 50% are under the age of 18.
- Over half of those who go through RCIA are no longer attending Mass at least once a month in 12 to 24 months.
- Only 50% of Catholics absolutely believe that they can have a personal relationship with Jesus.
- About 5% of Catholics feel that evangelization is part of their faith ministry as a Catholic. Of those, most treat it as an optional part of their Catholic faith.
- Most Catholics are fully sacramentalized, only foundationally catechized; and very few are evangelized to be active Intentional Disciples, energized and motivated by a life transforming deep personal relationship with Jesus.

With all of these sobering statistics, I believe it is obvious that the ministry of the Catholic Journey Experience is very important. We who are involved in the Catholic Journey Experience must have a clear understanding of what this ministry is at its core. It is about a spiritual journey for ourselves personally that motivates us to intentionally invite others to the same Journey.

Those who are leaders in the Catholic Journey Experience are on three distinct but inseparable and simultaneous spiritual journeys. These are Spiritual Journeys that are normative in the life of an intentional disciple.

- 1) The first journey is the root or foundational journey that is the lived life resulting from a deep and intentional personal relationship with Jesus. A love relationship that motivates a person at their core.

Luke 10:27 "Love the Lord your God with all your soul and all your strength and with all you mind --"

- 2) The second journey is the lived life as a part of the Body of Christ. It is our communal journey as the Catholic Church and it is a deep and intentional personal relationship with Jesus and each other. A love relationship present in the community of the faithful that motivates us together at our core.

Luke 10:27 "-- Love your neighbor as yourself." John 15:12 "My commandment is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

- 3) The third journey is the lived life as an intentional Disciple of Christ. This third journey is both deeply personal and profoundly communal, because it is our individual and joint response to Jesus. Out of our love for Him and one another as Church, we intentionally invite others to join us in an ever deepening love relationship with Jesus and the Catholic Church. It is the "Great Commissioning" that Jesus gave and gifted us to do.

Matthew: 28: 19 "Therefore Go and Make Disciples of all nations baptizing them the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" John 17: 20-26 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. --- I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

This third journey of intentional discipleship is what the Catholic Journey Experience has at its core ministry (We are Intentional disciples that are making disciples) and this cannot happen without the first two Journeys active and growing in our own lives. It cannot happen in the lives of Candidates without us inviting and assisting them on the first and second journeys. The Three Journeys as I said are **distinct, inseparable and simultaneous spiritual journeys that build one on another** and we cannot offer that which we ourselves do not have. When we invite someone to Christ -- Christ and we invite them to the Church -- Christ, the Church and we invite them into intentional discipleship.

We cannot ever forget that intentional discipleship is not about us individually or communally as a team. It is totally about Jesus. It demands that we not only love Him, but we must love every person He loves. These are the candidates. It is about the candidates falling in love with Jesus in a deeply personal love. That is the first Journey we invite them to. Then it is about helping them fall in love with the Catholic Church. That is the second Journey we invite them to. Only after they are well on those two Journeys can we truly help them on the third Journey to become intentional disciples.

On the Weekend, we need to become aware of where each candidate is on each of these three journeys. For most candidates it is the need to be seeking a deep, intentional and personal relationship with Jesus. For some that deep, intentional and personal relationship with Jesus is well established, but their need is to be seeking a deep, intentional personal and communal relationship with the Body of Christ in the Catholic Church. For a few they are at the threshold of becoming intentional disciples or already are intentional disciples and they are in need of our support.

I cannot talk about all of the aspects brought up in this book; but I will touch on what Sherry Weddell calls "the five thresholds of conversion". I see them as applicable to anyone's journey of faith, no matter where they are in their spiritual formation on those three journeys.

There are "Five Thresholds of Conversion":

- 1) **Initial Trust:** (We not only need initial trust but it must be constantly expanding)
- 2) **Spiritual Curiosity:** (Our curiosity must always be alive to continue to motivate us)
- 3) **Spiritual Openness:** (This involves becoming a little vulnerable)
- 4) **Spiritual Seeking:** (This involves becoming very vulnerable because they are intentionally and actively seeking a long term and deep spiritual relationship)
- 5) **Intentional Discipleship:** (This is the fruit of spiritually seeking and making those first two distinct but inseparable spiritual journeys to Jesus and the Catholic Church that we want to share with others.)

The first three thresholds are what we hope would at least develop within each candidate during the three day weekend and or some more will develop. At the very basic level it was those three that motivated them to fill out an application and attend. Someone they trusted invited and sponsored them. To accomplish this sponsors needed to develop within their candidates a little curiosity and openness.

The last two thresholds are what we are inviting them to at the local parish. To accomplish this, we in the ministry need to be there in an active role at the parish level. The candidates are seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus and the Church. These are at their core spiritual journeys which are supported by our love, prayer, presence and active intentional involvement with them. Remember people leave because, "their spiritual needs were not being met". This can also be said about why people stop seeking. Their spiritual journey cannot be rooted in just catechistical instruction and sacramental preparation. Catechization and Sacramental celebrations flow out of and in support of their spiritual journey, however their roots are in the personal and communal relationships with Christ and each of us in the parish.

Sherry Weddell's book "Forming Intentional Disciples - The path to knowing and following Jesus" in many ways sums up what has been the focus of my last 35 year faith journey and the reason for my ordination as Deacon and the commitment to RCIA, the Cursillo, the Charismatic renewal and creation of The Catholic Journey Experience. I am sure this is the same for many of you as I have heard many of your individual testimonies. The book spends the first chapters in a straight forward understanding of where we are as a church of disciples. Then moves from what is the reality to what are the possibilities we have before us. The rest presents what are options to reach those possibilities. Its focus is, "when life at the Parish level changes, the life of the whole Church will change". The material is applicable to all responses to the New Evangelization. The Catholic Journey Experience clearly is a response that is directly in line with reaching those possibilities and is similar to what many parishes and dioceses around the country are doing in various ways.

I believe that this book has a very important message and places a specific challenge out there for us who would hope to bring others to Christ and His Church in a powerful and life transforming way. Many in the Missoula Deanery Secretariat are obtaining this book and some are now reading it. I would hope that many in the other deaneries would do the same, especially those members of the Diocesan Secretariat. When we have read it then we can have meaningful discussions in a collaborative effort as to how we might respond.

Some discussion about a response might be centered on topics such as these four: 1) How to develop the Catholic Journey Experiences pre and post weekend ministry at Parishes into becoming a dynamic portion of the ongoing ministry of the Catholic Journey Experience for not just recent candidates but for each person involved. 2) How to help expand the dynamics of Catholic Lay Evangelization into a normative and one of the principle ministries of many of our fellow parishioners. 3) How to better understand and present the Catholic

Journey Experience Apostolate as but one instrument in the profound transformation that a life committed to Christ brings to each of us and to our parishes. 4) How to facilitate modifications to the three day weekends if needed in light of the previous 3 points.

I believe the foundation of the three days is very solid. However, it has been pointed out by several individuals in various ways that the 10 talks are too catechistical in their presentation. They point out that the topics and sequence of talks is good but the talks should be more focused on the personal relationship with Jesus and that reinforced more by applicable personal testimony. Sherry Weddell points out that Evangelization has as its root focus the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in salvation history and in our personal lives and faith Journey (the Kerygma). Catechizing has as its root focus the good news of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. These both are important on the weekend but if the talks themselves are to reflect more of a focus and balance on the proclamation of Jesus in our lives in a profoundly personal way and to a lesser extent how Jesus is alive and present through the community of Faithful in the Catholic Church, then the talks would require some shift in presentation. Because we are inviting peoples ranging from: active Catholics, non-practicing Catholics, people of other Christian denominations and even those who are non-Christian or having no faith, both the personal relationship with Jesus and relationship with the Church must be presented and done well, with the focus strongly on a personal relationship with Jesus at this point. Most candidates on this spiritual journey need to have their personal relationship with Jesus established and/or reinforced.

For an example of this shift in the talks might be as follows:

Friday

What are you looking for? : As a talk it would present strongly that an ultimate goal in life must address both our spiritual and physical dimensions as a Humans and it must also have an eternal perspective that transcends this life. We were created by God for something that would exist beyond this life.

The Grace to become and live as child of God: As a talk it would focus on the fact that God is offering and seeking a deeply personal and eternal relationship with each one of us. God is very committed to that ultimate goal. It is a family relationship that is offered. God offers to us the relationship of becoming His Adopted Children. It has at its core the offering of God's love for us personally but it also empowers us to respond with our love in return. We call it the gift of Grace. This Grace gives us Faith, Hope and Love of God. God is so committed to this ultimate goal that He sent his Son to be the source of that Grace and the Holy Spirit to mature and strengthen it into an Ultimate Goal that we each can have.

Home for the Children of God: as a talk it would present God's offer of an eternal relationship is like a parent with their children. The relationship is personal with each child but at the very same time communal as in a family. It truly is a home for us and God has a home for us here in this life and in heaven after this life. Here that home is the community or family that His Son Jesus established to continue His ministry of growing and forming the family of God. The Catholic Church is to be the Family and the actual presence of Jesus in the world. The Catholic Church is our home and everyone is invited. The weekend is the experience of living in that Family of God.

Sacraments: As a talk it would point out that Jesus is the perfect Child of God and we are adopted into the Family of God in a manner that Jesus selected, Baptism. We receive special graces to take on roles in the family and live them out in the same manner as He did. We call these sources of special graces Sacraments and through them we receive the graces of taking on an attribute of Christ. These graces are not magic; they

are Mystery because they make the divine life of Jesus available to us so that we may live life so as to have Jesus live within and through us.

Saturday

Holiness: As a talk it would point out that living out this deep and intentional personal relationship with Jesus is an act of profound love and it is what we call Holiness. It is a life filled with Grace. Holiness is God and ourselves in a relationship of Love that motivates and transforms us at our core. It is the living out of the Ultimate Goal God has offered to each one of us. It is the fulfilment of our deepest desires. Holiness is witnessed in the team as individuals reaching for God knowing that God is reaching for them.

Wisdom: as a talk it would point out that spiritual wisdom is the seeking of God's presence in our lives through the experiences of Life, through the Church and through the Holy Spirit. Then letting us become transformed by the discovery of God's presence and lastly by responding to the transforming presence of God. God wants us to know Him intimately in mind, body and soul. He wants that wisdom to be our guide in all aspects of our lives. This spiritual wisdom is what the weekend is offering through the 3 day lived experience of Catholic Community, the sharing of the faith by the speakers and with one another and by the Holy Spirit in prayer, meditation and personal reflection. God is present for us to know Him.

Discipleship: As a talk it would point out that discipleship is the response that Jesus wants of us. God graces and empowers us to be active participants in Jesus' ministry to save and redeem humanity. Our life, just like Jesus', is directed toward Resurrection and eternal fullness, love, joy and peace but not just for ourselves but for all of those who share this human life with us. The team is presented as intentional disciple of Jesus present in their lives.

Obstacles to a life of Grace: as a talk it would point out that this intentionally lived journey of Holiness, Wisdom and Discipleship will include many very difficult obstacles and we will share in them just as Jesus did in His life. It will only be through Christ and the graces He has made available to us and our unwavering love, trust and commitment to Him personally and communally that we will prevail.

Sunday

I discovered what I was looking for: as a talk it would point out that what we have shared about these simultaneous and inseparable Journeys into a deep personal relationship with God and the Catholic Church does in fact transform a person's life and is an ultimate goal with an eternal perspective. It offers the fulfilment of all of our desires just as God created us to be.

Can the Journey continue? : As a talk it would point out that we are inviting the candidates to join us in the ongoing Journey of spiritually seeking a deeper, intentional and personal relationship with God and the Catholic Church. This takes place for each one of us at our parish and within the Catholic community that resides there. If during the three days we accomplish the development of "Initial Trust, Spiritual Curiosity, and Spiritual Openness" (to use three of Sherry Weddell's terms in helping people fall in love with Jesus) then our invitation to parish offers the invitation to "Spiritual Seeking and finally Intentional Discipleship" (which again are Sherry Weddell's terms for the last two steps on the Path to "Knowing and Following Jesus" and for helping people fall in love with Christ and the Church).

Each of us may have different ideas of what this could all be but that is the Holy Spirit's way of teaching us the Grace of Catholic Community and being the people of God. Our individual personal relationship with Jesus and the Catholic Church is what we each have to bring to the Catholic Journey Experience community. As a speaker on the weekend we are called to Let Jesus's prayer be answered and come alive so that it is clear that "I myself may be in them". In honoring Jesus' presence and the Holy Spirit at work in each one of us we develop and grow that relationship with Jesus and The Church within and amongst ourselves and those to whom we reach out.

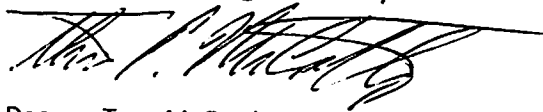
Please obtain and read this book. Some of the terms and common words used in the book like discipleship, conversion, evangelization, trust, curiosity and others have many different meanings and undertones for each one of us. A person can be very misunderstood when using these unless you know how the other person you are talking to uses and understands those terms. I found Sherry Weddell's understanding and use of some terms to be different than mine at times, so I had to focus on what she was saying and not what I thought I understood based on my use and definition. Be assured Sherry Weddell is a profoundly focused and committed convert to the Catholic Church.

The really good news is that I think we all know that we have been doing the right thing with the Catholic Journey Experience. This book can be of great assistance in forming a foundational base of discussion as we go forward. It raises questions and presents options to questions like; can we do what we do better and where can this take us to do more to complete what we have started in our own lives and in the lives of others. We are not trying to build a Kingdom, Jesus has already done that, we are trying to grow His Kingdom of God and get there as a People of God. It is really all he ever asked us to try and accomplish. WE ARE RELYING ON HIS HELP AS HE PROMISED. "Be prepared for conversions"!

I am looking for us to open our views as we move forward and especially in the specific relationship to the PRE and POST WEEKEND PARISH portions of the ministry. Without those two components we will minimize the fruits we hope to grow for The Kingdom of God.

Maybe we can have Sherry Weddell do a Diocesan "Fourth Day" seminar for the Catholic Journey Experience Community and others who would be interested? ☺

God's many Blessings on all of you



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