

## *God Has No Grandchildren: The New Evangelization and Postmodern Americans*

### **US in 2010: Constant Spiritual Motion**

- 9,292,000 people moved in and out of Christianity (3.1% of all Americans)
  - 5,698,000 conversions
  - 3,595,000 defections
- 25,460 Americans making critical spiritual decisions every day.  
1,060 decisions an hour.

*Nearly 18 Americans became Christian or left the faith during every second of 2010.*

### **Choosing one's faith is normative.**

- Fastest growing religious group in US: "Unaffiliated" or "Nones"  
19.6% of US adults and 1/3 of those under 30:
  - 6% (13 million) "atheist" or "agnostic"
  - 14% (33 million) "nothing in particular"  
(Pew Forum, *Nones on the Rise*, 2012)
- The majority of unaffiliated growth since 2007 is made up of people who were formally *affiliated* with a faith but *seldom or never attended*.

### **US Catholic Church of 2012:**

108.7 million Americans "who considered themselves Catholic at some point in their life":

- 32 million "former" Catholic adults: 13.2% of US adults. 5.4 million left in last 4 years
- 76.7 million self-identified Catholics (all ages)
- 24% of Catholic adults (all generations) say they attend Mass every weekend  
(CARA, July 2014)

### **Canadian Study: Young Adults Who Stay**

- Have experienced God's presence and seen answered prayer.
- Can ask and openly discuss their real spiritual questions in the Christian community.
- Understand the Gospel at a deep level.
- Have seen communities of faith and older adults authentically live their faith.  
(*Hemorrhaging Faith*, 2012)

### **Getting Personal?**

Less than half (48%) of Catholics are certain that you can have a personal relationship with God.

- Only 60% of Catholics believe in a personal God.

62% of Catholics seldom or never share their faith or view of God with anyone else (which is a lower rate than US atheists). (Pew Religious Landscape Survey)

### **The Majority of Catholics:**

- Don't believe that personal relationship with God is possible. (Pew Landscape Survey, 2008)
- Are "still *without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ*; they only have the *capacity to believe* placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit." (*Catechesis in Our Time*, 19)

### The Popes on Getting Personal

- “It is necessary to awaken again in believers a full relationship with Christ, mankind’s only Savior. Only from a personal relationship with Jesus can an effective evangelization develop.”  
- St. John Paul II, speech to bishops of Southern Germany, Dec. 4, 1992.
- “And it is only in this personal relationship with Christ, in this meeting with the Risen One, that we are truly Christian...”  
- Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Paul VI Hall, September 3, 2008
- “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them ...”  
- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 3

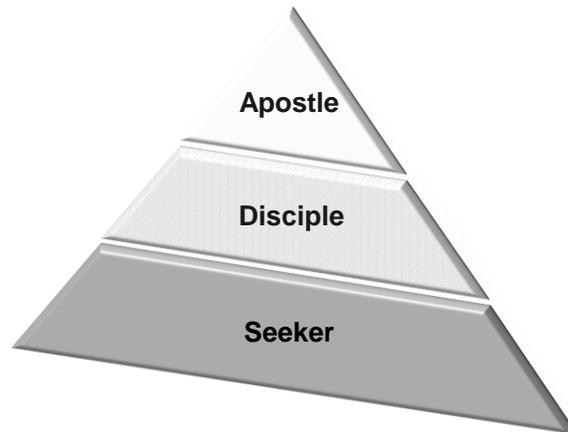
### Three Journeys

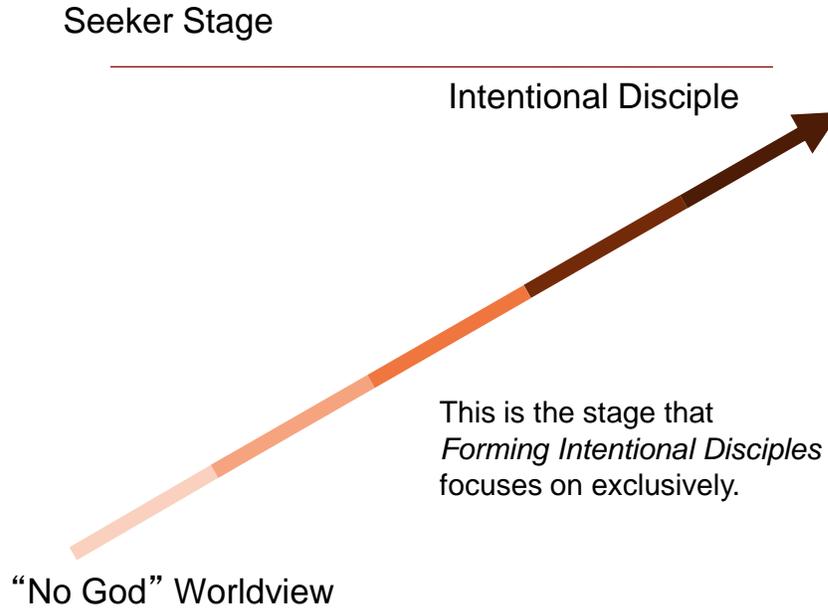
As evangelizers, we must attend to *three concurrent spiritual journeys in adults*:

- Personal interior journey: “act of faith” resulting in intentional discipleship
- Sacramental/ecclesial exterior journey: sacramental/ecclesial belonging
- “Active” or “inactive” journey: participatory belonging

### Three Stages of Adult Christian Development

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**Discipleship:** From the moment Peter “dropped his nets” to follow Jesus he was a disciple. But it would take a lifetime for him to become a saint.

**Faith: Capacity and Choice**

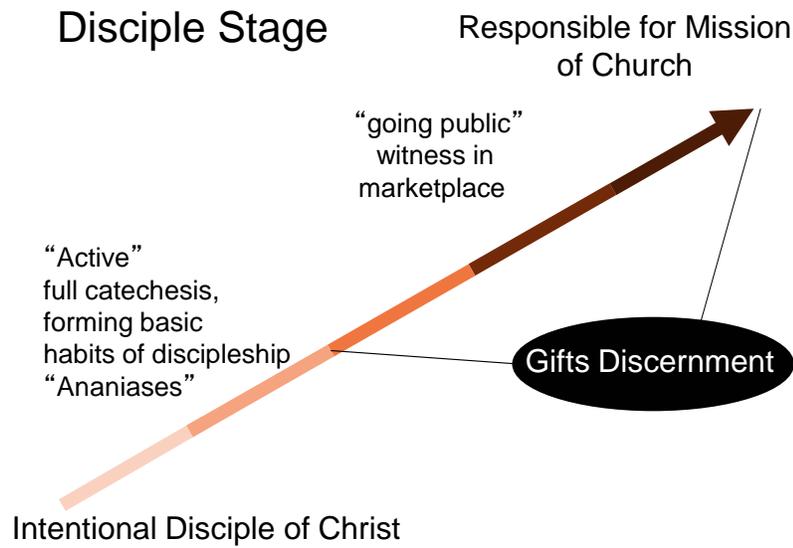
- *Virtus fidei* – the “virtue of faith” – the power or capacity to believe given to us in baptism, but *not* the act of faith.
- *Actus fidei* – the “act of faith”: the *explicit, personal, free choice* to respond to God’s grace with belief and discipleship.

“It is that personal act of faith...that transforms the human being from one who can be a believer to one who is a believer.” (Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 54 – 55.)

**“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Culture**

In many parishes, there is *cultural pressure against talking about or the expression of discipleship*.

- Most of us can’t think about things we have never heard anyone else talk about.
- So many Catholics don’t know it is possible to have a personal relationship with God.



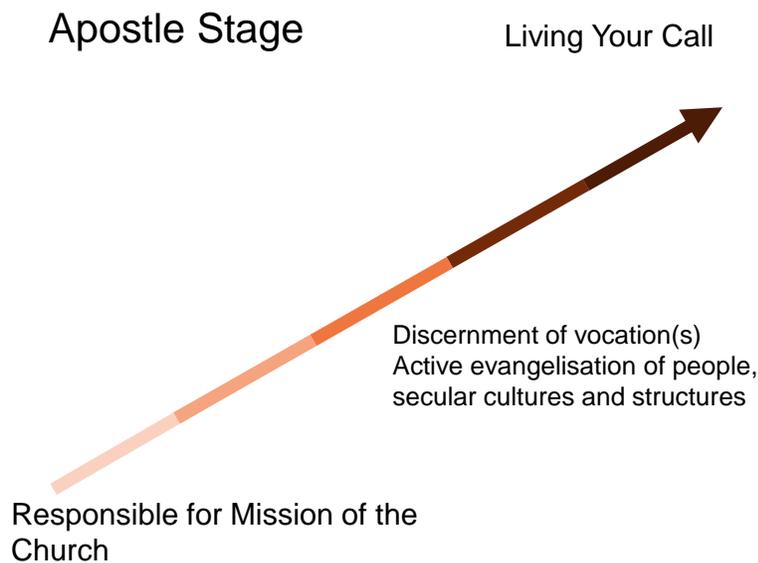
**Intentional Discipleship Transforms Lives.**

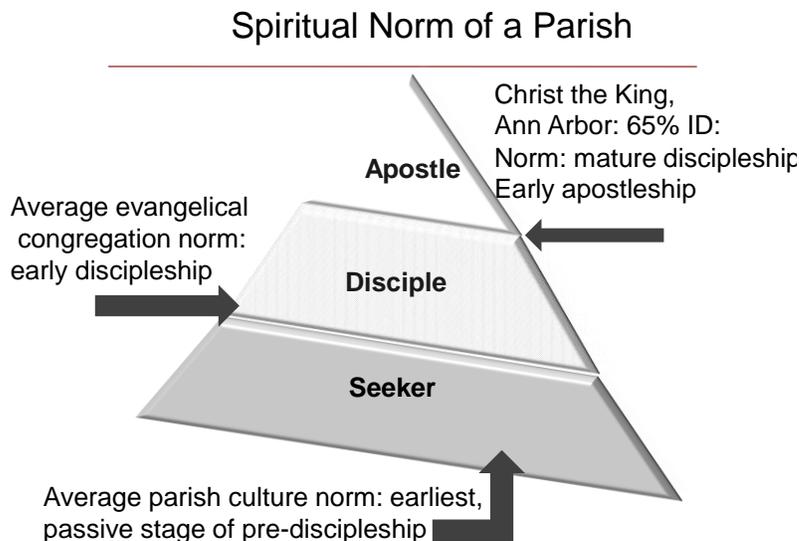
People’s priorities change. They begin to

- Worship
  - Pray
  - Serve
  - Give
  - Study
  - Discern
- (Elements of intentional discipleship)

Not out of guilt, but out of a living, growing relationship with God.

*This has tremendous implications for stewardship, attendance, apostolic creativity, pastoral governance, evangelization, vocations, and religious education/catechesis.*





### **The Generation of Saints: How a Group of Disciple-Friends Changed the Spiritual Climate of a Whole Nation**

This group of friends included:

- A Cardinal
- A Bishop
- Three priests including one who had grown up a peasant
- Two young widows with children
- A Parisian housewife
- A single woman
- A professional soldier

They were the center of a religious revival and reform movement that involved tens of thousands of French Catholics and whose impact was felt *for 150 years*. Today, the same group is recognized for including four canonized saints, one “Blessed”, one Doctor of the Church, and six founders of religious congregations.

#### *St. Francis de Sales*

- *Introduction to the Devout Life*: first major work of spirituality that insisted that lay Christians could become holy through the living of their secular call.
- His gentle confidence in God helped the next generation focus less on penance and more on the service of others.

#### *Barbe Acarie (1566 - 1618)*

- Parisian housewife.
- Major conversion at 21. Mystic with great practical ability. Her home becomes a salon where the leaders of the Catholic renewal meet and plan.
- 1604: She has a vision in which Teresa of Avila asks her to bring the discalced Carmelites to France. With the help of her cousin, Cardinal Berulle, she does so. She also brings the Ursulines to France.

#### *St. Vincent de Paul (1580 - 1660)*

### **St. Vincent de Paul and Evangelization**

- Raised in a peasant family; chaplain to the Queen of France.
- Founded Congregation of the Mission dedicated to evangelization of rural areas in France.
- A mission would last for a month or more. A laywoman-run “Charity” would sustain the impact of the mission after the missionaries were gone.
- Creator of new groups and systems to provide for the poor and abandoned.

### **A Tale of One Parish: St. Sulpice, Paris**

1641: The Pastor is Fr. Jean Jacques Olier.

His three goals:

1. Reform the parish
2. Establish a seminary to establish a new standard for diocesan priesthood
3. Evangelize the Sorbonne

*Olier was pastor for 10 years.* In that time these actions were taken to reform the parish and evangelize:

- Parish broken up into 8 districts. Thirteen catechetical centers established.
- Specialized instruction for all groups: beggars, servants, midwives, working men, etc.
- Outreach to non-Catholics (hundreds converted).
- Leaflets, prayer book, holy cards distributed to unchurched, bookstore started.
- The poor cared for according to St. Vincent de Paul’s plan.
- Lay spirituality championed: the idea that holiness was only for priests and religious combated.

### **What We Can Learn:**

They were intentional disciples together.

- In mission together: clergy, religious, and laity, men and women, all classes and educational levels
- Adapted ideas from outside (St. Philip Neri and St. Charles Borromeo in Italy)
- Future oriented: Sought to apply the Gospel to the needs of their generation, not recreate the past.
- Creative: Created many new evangelically-oriented communities and structures.
- Prayerful: Intercessory prayer and penance (40 women’s religious houses founded in Paris in 50 years)

### **Will we be the “Generation of Saints” for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

#### **Discussion:**

Are you seeing intentional disciples emerge in your parish or diocese? If yes, why? If not, why do you think that intentional disciples are not emerging?

How could you and your friends/co-workers/fellow parishioners become part of a 21<sup>st</sup> century “Generation of Saints”?