

THE SHAPE OF DISCIPLESHIP

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AN ESSAY ON DISCIPLESHIP

Does discipleship, particularly from a Catholic perspective, have a shape, a form, a set of definable points?

Issues of Discipleship

In fact, Catholic attitudes on discipleship range from, on the one hand, assuming that everyone who is baptized and responsive to faith in some way is a disciple to, on the other hand, assuming that discipleship must be built up in baptized people through extended teaching, personal experience, reflection, and renewed decision. Some senses of discipleship seem driven by experience: an intense experience of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, even something quite out of the ordinary. Other senses of discipleship revolve around particular external behaviors that involve ministry or modeling for others. Our modern culture can easily conceive of discipleship on a virtually personal level, indeed, without the need for ecclesial community. Our Catholic Church, however, cannot conceive of discipleship without a solid ecclesial dimension.

Part of the issue, of course, is that discipleship, as a form of living, cannot be some unchanging thing that just exists. Rather, people experience different degrees of religious consciousness in

their faith lives, and they do so at different points in their lives. Mystical teaching, for example, always distinguished an initial time of sweetness or consolation in our relationship with God, followed by periods of darkness and dryness, but ultimately leading to a greater sense of union with God. We likewise naturally differentiate experiences of faith for those who are young from experiences for the more mature, or even distinct experiences for seniors as they undergo physical or mental limitations.

Is discipleship primarily a self-description (“I feel like I have committed my life to God” or “I have accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior”), or does it have external factors that allow people to see it in others (“Of course you are a disciple, the way you live shows it”)?

One can also think of discipleship as a continuum, a line that pushes forward with Christian experience but never really has a final state. This means that, in some sense, discipleship is never complete. There is always space to grow, to deepen, to expand. As a result, one can think of discipleship as always incomplete. As an exercise, for example, we can put several horizontal lines on a sheet of paper and put an age at the start of that line. We can start with, say, fifteen and then write twenty-five and then thirty-five and so forth. On that line we can try to summarize our

experience of God during that age period. Chances are excellent that one would see significant growth and deepening as the ages advanced. Should our later growth lead us to dismiss earlier years? That would be absurd. We can only be the disciples that we can be given the different possibilities and limitations of our lives.

Experience of God at:	
15	_____
25	_____
35	_____
45	_____
55	_____

Another factor, underlined by spiritual thinkers like St. Francis de Sales, touches on our states in life. Monks are called to display sanctity in one way; married people display it another way. Our notions of discipleship should not lead us to dismiss how discipleship might be embodied in lives quite other than our own. Even among those who are married, couples starting out will express spiritual commitments differently than couples with a child; they, in turn, can be distinguished from couples with several children, couples who are empty nesters, or a married Christian who has lost a spouse. Just as there is no one spirituality for every state in life, so there should be multiple spiritualities as people mature in their following of Jesus. States in life, maturity in age, vocations, responsibilities, and personal charisms all have a place in producing various forms and displays of discipleship. St. Paul writes: "One and the same Spirit produces all of these" different gifts in Christian life (1 Cor 12:11).

Some clarity around discipleship would be of enormous help to Catholics today. It would, in the first place, begin to show how much discipleship is already part of Catholic life, even

if this is not readily recognized by Catholics. On the other hand, it would elaborate areas in which Catholics can grow further into discipleship. This essay seeks to further both these goals.

Traits of Discipleship

Given all these variables, it still would be helpful to try to point to traits that seem to characterize discipleship, traits that will be lived differently according to the age and experiences of different believers. These traits will not just be "inner states" of mind but rather patterns of behavior that portray discipleship. Because they are patterns of behavior, one can identify them, note their frequency, and reflect on their intensity. A disciple who makes celebrating the Eucharist central to her or his life certainly shows behaviors quite different from a Catholic who attends Mass irregularly. A disciple who often thinks about those who are poor or takes time to serve people in need shows a different pattern of behavior than one who sees faith as primarily personal and not having obligations toward others.

Part of sketching the shape of discipleship, then, would be to look at traits that reveal how Catholics express discipleship. These traits should spring from long-accepted patterns of Catholic behavior; they might also be reflected in the writings of popes and Catholic leaders on what it means to be a Catholic today.

One can begin by articulating Catholic discipleship as the expression of Catholic life in view of one's encounter with God, the God that Jesus revealed and the God to whom the Holy Spirit unites us. Certainly, Pope Francis, in the opening sections of *Evangelii Gaudium*, roots Catholic life in the experience of encounter (#1, 3); in doing this, he is expanding the teaching of St. John Paul II who points, in *Catechesi Tradendae*, to encounter as an essential dimension of catechesis (#5). This direction of St. John Paul II and Pope Francis has influenced

the articulation of the *General Directory for Catechesis* as well as the more recent *Directory for Catechesis*. In this context, catechesis means more than catechism; rather, it includes what people today refer to as lifelong faith formation.

Encounter, in the form of coming to know God and developing a relationship with God, leads to patterns through which we express what this relationship with God means to us, patterns that show how this encounter has taken shape in our lives. For, having encountered God, we then must weave faith into our daily lives. The integration of faith in our lives cannot happen without levels of community or expressions of service to others. These traits, in turn, are supported by the distinct values and practices of our Catholic faith. In this way, it becomes possible to talk about discipleship in a framework that many can accept and refer to and in a language that advances both personal and communal reflection.

Referring to those adults who have been prepared for baptism, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* expresses these ideas that are pertinent to discipleship: “As they [the newly prepared for baptism] become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation” (#75.2). In this section we can see the seeds of various traits of discipleship: (1) encountering God, (2) integrating faith and life, (3) accompanying and being accompanied by others, (4) serving others, and (5) living as a Catholic. These are the traits that need elaboration.



Encountering God

No pattern seems more prevalent in the Scriptures than that of God calling to an individual and the individual responding to that call. Whether Adam or Abraham or Moses or Samuel or Miriam or Hannah or Esther or any of the prophets, the structure is invariable: God calls by name. (This, by the way, is powerfully reflected in the opening of any celebration of Baptism when the celebrant asks for the name of the person to be baptized.) Even if, for example, David was not directly called by God initially, he certainly was called through Samuel and certainly came to respond to God’s calls throughout his life. The call might receive a variety of answers, from Moses’ reluctance in Exodus 3 (“I do not know how to talk”) to Isaiah’s enthusiasm (“Here I am, send me”—Is 6:8).

The phenomenon of being called by God arises from the way Christians see God: as a Trinity of self-giving being, extending Godself throughout creation and, ultimately, in and through human consciousness as a distinct level of creation. As a result, the divine call emerges, whether conscious to us or not, as a dimension of human experience. St. John succinctly captures this in the phrase, near the beginning of his Gospel, where he talks about the Word of God as the true light “that enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9). In this way, faith is a conscious appropriation of how God engages with all humans. Further, emphasizing the trait of encounter elaborates the structure of discipleship as defined by God’s initiating grace.

Most Catholics would easily see the notion of encountering God as a dimension of their personal prayer life; many would also see this in their engagement with the Scriptures. Encounter is based on relationship; one's relationship with God begins an interior dialogue with God, one that is nourished by a variety of prayers and, for a growing number of Catholics, by the Scriptures. Special prayer experiences like retreats and parish renewals, as well as intimate moments of silent prayer, often during Adoration, supplement the trait of encounter in Catholic life.

The encounter with God happens both implicitly and explicitly at different moments in the disciple's life. When Catholics baptize their children, they are consciously deciding to plant God's call in the life of that child as that child grows in awareness. When children hear stories of God's presence and actions, they implicitly are forming attitudes that shape their faith lives. When people, even (or especially!) as children, think about God and pray to God, they are responding to an encounter whose origin is a divine call. The encounter with God, then, comes saturated with grace: the unmerited and love-filled opening of God toward us, which is the basis of the lives of every human and, even more so, the lives of every believer. When St. Paul talks about the love of God being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), he is not defining an exceptional experience for Christians. He is describing a foundational experience that disciples see in varying degrees at different times in their lives.

Given the starting point of God's call and our encounter with God (in all the various ways that happens developmentally and experientially in the actual lives of people), one can see the Christian dimensions that have to be part of this trait: faith, prayer, deep trust and reliance on God, a desire to know God more fully, conversion, and an engagement with the Scriptures as a way to refine the meaning of our spiritual encounter. In fact, one can see the

whole movement toward renewal in the Catholic Church, expressed climactically in the Second Vatican Council, as precisely making it possible for Catholics to see these experiences more clearly in their faith lives.

This trait touches on a dimension of Catholic experience that, paradoxically, might escape explicit articulation in Catholic life. When, for example, do Catholics explicitly affirm the fact that they have encountered God through Jesus? When do they say that they have experienced conversion? How do they know the level of their total trust in God? While some of these dimensions can be quite implicit in the lives of many Catholics, they are, for that reason, no less real. If, say, some Christian traditions focus quite consciously on some of the dimensions of encounter (e.g., personal conversion), that hardly means that analogous experiences are absent from Catholic life. Indeed, helping Catholics see the relational side of their faith might be one of the important tasks for church leaders to pursue today, especially in view of cultural pressures on Catholics today. The issue is not whether Catholics encounter God; they do. Rather, this issue is helping Catholics see more explicitly how this is part of their lives. Catholics can tie their membership in the Church to the encounters they have with God reinforced by Christian community.



Integrating Faith and Life

Because the faith that arises from one's encounter with God does not occupy some ethereal space in a believer's mind but rather looks for ways in which it might be embodied in a believer's actions, our encounter with God strives to find a place in our daily lives. As part of the human reality of belief, faith touches and

shapes the things people do as believers. This involves both the attitudes we bring to the various situations of our lives as well as the challenges that these situations make upon our faith. As people live faith, they integrate it more fully in their attitudes and behaviors. This reflects the incarnational basis of Christian life in which faith, as it is embodied, becomes more actualized. Faith impacts our lives; our lives, likewise, impact our faith.

Certainly, Christian morality exposes an essential way in which faith is called to impact daily life. Beyond any commandments or any ethical theory, if someone has experienced the mercy of God but then refuses to show mercy to others, the incongruity of this situation asks whether God's mercy has really been integrated into life. Likewise, a faith that insists that all human life is related to God cannot, then, accept situations in which people are treated without basic dignity and care. After encountering God, every moment in life becomes an opportunity to respond to God. Every new situation places an invitation before a believer: what will she or he do in terms of faith?

More fundamental than moral actions, however, are the attitudes that believers develop, the virtues that become clearer, and the ongoing questioning and learning that comes as part of one's faith life. We can think of this as formation, the process by which foundations are laid in such a way that the actions of our lives can build them. Almost all actions that we do harken back to earlier instances, those occasions when a basic approach or lesson impressed itself upon us, those behaviors that have stayed with us over the decades of our lives. Formation, and ongoing formation in faith, are the ways we integrate faith and daily experiences; Christians see the Holy Spirit having a distinct role as virtues become incarnate and life patterns form.

Formation, like encounter, never stops. It has a knowing component, of course; as we interact with people, as we raise questions, as we read the Scriptures, and as we study the truths of our faith, our minds seek to know and our questions seek an answer. Nevertheless, as with all education, experience forms us more than anything else because it forces an acceptance and appropriation of our knowledge. After all is said and done, however much Christians might understand about God and revelation, they bring all of that to prayer and worship. Formation, in addition to *knowing*, also has a *feeling* dimension as our inner space takes shape and comes to realize itself as more and more "at home." As integration grows, our sense of alienation diminishes. In this way, our intellectual quotient and our emotional quotient are always at play in our lives as disciples.

As long as we have experience, we have the challenge to integrate that experience with our basic faith commitments. In this way, integrating faith and life forms a journey in which the pilgrim grows personally richer along the way. This integration, for most disciples, will merge with those deeper vocations around which we organize our behaviors. Our vocations, in turn, reinforce the identities we form toward others and in our own self-attitudes. As we integrate faith and life, we come to realize who we are, why we are, and what we are living for.



Accompanying and Being Accompanied

While some formation happens personally, through prayer and reflection, the overwhelming proportion of our formation

happens through our relationships with others. In fact, any personal formation comes only after formative experiences with others. People cannot be understood apart from the communities out of which they come and in which they live. So being accompanied by others, and accompanying others in turn, makes for the essential environment in which we live as disciples.

We can see major portions of our faith life in terms of the way we are called to be with others. Every one of us began as part of a family; our interactions with our family members embedded in us the human emotional language that has shaped every other interaction that we have. The emotional vocabulary of love, acceptance, sacrifice, care, give-and-take, and standing by another all comes from the communal experience we have as part of our human existence. In healthy families, children learn this emotional vocabulary without conflict. In troubled families, this emotional vocabulary might well be garbled. Still, every learning after early childhood basically builds itself upon those earliest interactions.

A preferred way of being with others comes through friendship in which, on top of initial family instincts, we find ourselves deeply connected to others. Friends open for us a sense of goodness and bonding that confirms who we are and why we are living. Friends draw us outside ourselves as we are invited to give to those we love. Friends often come to shape our lives as much as family. Probably the most powerful experience of friendship belongs to those who find life partners, usually in marriage; we tie our own identities to our relationship with these partners on our journey. Marriage can stand as one of the prime instances of discipleship because, through the Paschal Mystery, we can understand people giving themselves unconditionally to others as a profound experience of salvation. Marriage means that husbands and wives are shaping

each other's lives as disciples in the most direct way.

Along with family and friends, church community shapes our lives as disciples. Although often experienced less intensely than friendship, the love we have for our fellow believers in community tests the love that we have for God. Can we claim to love an invisible God, St. John asks us, when we do not love the very visible sisters and brothers who surround us (1 Jn 4:20)? The witness and presence of our fellow believers form our own sense of identity and belonging with the community of faith. The sacraments that we celebrate are unique ways of accompanying each other. Together we celebrate Christ's action at various points in our lives, assuring each other of commitment and support. Baptize a child before a congregation: everyone present beams with joy. Present a young disciple for Confirmation; the congregation glows. Let a couple walk down the aisle to commit themselves to each other: everyone stands in applause.

We can accompany others because we have learned by being accompanied by others. As we have been supported, often in very difficult times by others, so we have the privilege of supporting others in their difficulties. Accompaniment, a word used quite often by Pope Francis, is a way to speak of how we hold onto each other in some of the most difficult times of our lives. Often this happens over long periods of time and often without a certain result; this stance of accompaniment frequently has to motivate our attitude toward less-than-active Catholics, particularly family members and friends. But if any good emerges from that difficult situation, it will be because of the accompaniment that people showed. For this reason, Christian communities must define themselves as broadly as possible, being reluctant to write another off as lost or not worth it.

Ministry is a form of accompaniment. When Catholics become ministers of one sort or

another, whether ordained or lay, they say they are available to support the needs of others. We no longer think of ministry in terms of a special class of people; we think of ministry as something that, whether overtly or not, is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us become the ways we grow precisely because we use those gifts for the needs of others. While Catholics might more readily apply the word “volunteer” to their service of others, in fact all volunteering is a way to give ourselves to others as ministers.

Accompaniment points to the relationships that, in fact, constitute both the lives of individuals and the life of a community. These relationships, sometimes unseen and sometimes taken for granted, form the soil that is absolutely necessary for the growth of discipleship. How many of Jesus’ parables, as reported in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, revolve around the image of soil, plants, and growth? The fecundity of a seed, and the fecundity of the relationships we form, depends on the surrounding soil, the environment, which cultivates bonding and commitment. When these environments become distorted because they lose the theme of love and take up more destructive themes like possessiveness or control or cynicism or indifference, then the distortion begins to eat into the mentality of the members themselves. We have, in recent decades, seen all too well what scandalous behavior does to the human environment of our faith communities.

Disciples must respond to various kinds of deprivation: emotional, educational, cultural, and, in a special way, religious. As disciples realize how much faith gives to them in all the dimensions of their lives, so they should desire that as many people as possible find the treasures of faith in their own lives. If there is a desire to uplift others, believers know that nothing can lift people higher than an explicit sense of God’s love and grace. As we have been encountered and graced by God, so we want to

share our blessings with as many as can receive it. Sharing with others, especially faith, stands out as a profound way to accompany them.

One of the classic texts on community life comes from St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. One can read this letter as a classical study of the possibilities, and the threats, of community sharing. The early references to the divisions of the Corinthian community bring Paul to powerfully reflect on “the body” in chapters eleven and twelve. This sets the stage for Paul’s famous chapter on love, which most Christians read romantically, as if these were lines from a greeting card. A more powerful reading of Paul’s thirteenth chapter would see these as irony: love may be patient, but the Corinthians surely are not. Love may be kind or not jealous, but Paul has shown his community to be quite unkind, filled with people jealous of each other.

How we accompany each other remains a central point both in our formation as Christians and also in judgment about the quality of our Christian life.



Serving Others

All dimensions of discipleship lead us to the question of our relationship with “the other.” For serving begins with the needs one perceives in another, often in people one might not know directly. Serving others gives disciples a way to put love in service of justice. The unjustifiable situations of others, whether in our immediate vicinity or whether quite far away, pull us outside ourselves and even our comfort zones as we try to lift another up.

Ritually, this trait of discipleship receives decisive endorsement in the liturgy of Holy Thursday. The second reading chosen for that day narrates the institution of the Eucharist from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians; the Gospel, however, uses Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet to underscore what it means to celebrate the Eucharist. Unless our union with Christ moves us to serve each other in humble love, we have not really grasped what the Eucharist is about.

The social teaching of the Church, which sprang from fundamental Christian commitments of charity and justice during the Industrial Revolution, calls Catholics to be concerned with the common good and also with our common home. Because the emphasis is on "common," it includes everyone. Disciples do not pick and choose who deserves love. They respond because of the lovability of everyone; everyone is created by God and therefore destined for the fullness of life and love. Serving others puts into action fundamental human empathy, which Christians intensify with their teaching that everyone is priceless.

In this way the poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunity, and lack of justice of any person call out to the believer for both compassion and action. While we might acknowledge there will always be inequality that people have in their possessions and access to resources, this can in no way justify a fundamental lack of those things they need for simple survival. Disciples, therefore, are called to extend themselves to reach those people whose deprivation devalues their lives and whose deprivation touches on and, in some way, diminishes the welfare of all humankind.

Because of its importance, financial deprivation naturally deserves great response. Pope Francis has vividly articulated this distortion of economy in his writings; in doing so, he brings to the front what has always been part of Catholic social teaching. But, again, disciples must respond to all kinds of deprivation.



Catholic Living

To the grace of encounter with God and of everything that flows from it (formation, accompaniment, and service), Catholic discipleship adds particular expressions of faith that make living faithfully more possible and richer. These expressions arise from Catholic traditions of faith that, over centuries, have come to express profound Christian values and essential Catholic goals. These expressions have often arisen from the everyday piety of Catholic life over the centuries.

Most of these traditions revolve around prayer because prayer runs through so much of a disciple's life. Ranking high among traditions is the witness Catholics receive from their brother and sister believers whom they call saints. Saints have expressed discipleship to such a pronounced extent that they have become models for the ways others can encounter God in Jesus and live out the implications of that encounter. The ancient Christian doctrine of the "communion of saints" points to the ways in which we share a common life seeking holiness and the ways in which we assist each other in accomplishing this. Far from prayer being some kind of worship of the saints, Catholic prayer in this tradition represents the reality of accompaniment that transcends even the borders of time and death. Prayer of this type identifies the Catholic with the lived values of a saint that continue to endure in importance.

For Catholics, Mary has a special place among the saints. She, as our sister and our mother, experienced the most profound encounter with

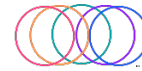
God, such that God's Son, God's Word, took flesh in her. She lives with an such an assurance of faith and trust that she can accompany Jesus in his darkest hours of suffering (Jn 19:25); she can also rejoice in her place among the disciples who received the first explicit outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:14).

These traditions of prayer have enriched the lives of Catholics for centuries; often these traditions are among the few things that held Catholics together in times of persecution and fear. The Rosary, and other litany-type prayers (prayers that have a repetition to them), have stayed with Catholics at moments of greatest sorrow and trial. Quiet moments spent in church before the Blessed Sacrament (the Eucharistic Bread saved from Sunday) reaffirm encounter at ever-deeper points in the lives of believers. Processions and devotions put some of the most instinctual communal feelings into an organized and expressive form.

Sometimes these Catholic forms arise from certain ethnic customs; often they have moved from their ethnic origins to universal practice among Catholics. Apparitions of Mary, and even of Jesus, through the centuries are the greatest examples of this. Catholics from all cultures wear medals and other religious items on their bodies to show their identity with these holy values. Likewise, Catholic homes often have images or even small shrines to draw a family's attention to the importance of faith.

These particular Catholic expressions of faith bring a concreteness and accessibility to living as disciples. Among those literate and not, the intensity of feeling often associated with Catholic devotional life adds a quality of relational connectedness to God and to the whole Catholic community. A simple act like the Sign of the Cross, which typifies both Catholic and Orthodox behavior, joins both profound doctrinal commitments around salvation and our understanding of God with an ongoing identity with a community of faith. Rather than being add-ons to discipleship, they

reinforce and express elements of Catholic discipleship that deeply shape identity.



Conclusion

Beginning with the experience of encounter (both being encountered and encountering), for which there is tremendous testimony in both Christian life and in the Scriptures, it is possible to touch upon other essential elements in the idea of Catholic discipleship, thereby affording the possibility of giving a coherent account of discipleship as Catholics embody it. Encounter spills over beyond itself into other avenues of Christian experience: ongoing formation, various levels of the experience of community, and ways of giving oneself in service to others. All of these, in turn, are enhanced by the traditions that have come to mark so much of the external forms of Catholicism, particularly its prayer and devotion.

As with David's taking a census in ancient Israel (2 Sam 24), our pastoral tools can become ways in which we work against each other rather than reinforcing a central vision of discipleship. Groups writing off other groups because "they aren't really disciples" can cripple conversation among believers. Once a certain group decides that it is "really evangelized" but the majority of Catholics active in a parish are not, the parish can become immobilized because of its divisions.

Rather than seeing a coherent picture of discipleship that all Catholics are called to live, certain believers can identify with one or another trait or, otherwise, use the traits to create implicit hierarchies. The deepest Catholic traditions, however, see discipleship and holiness as something capable of great breadth in the life of the Church. Certainly, the popularity of St. Thérèse of Lisieux at the turn of

the twentieth century arose in no small way from her articulation of a “little way” of holiness, which brought this ideal into the daily lives of countless believers.

Instead of using these various traits of discipleship to judge others, a far more inclusive approach would use these traits to help Catholics think about how they actualize discipleship in their lives. Is there a way to help describe the way someone incarnates the ideals of discipleship in her or his unique way? While there is no one way to live as a disciple, all Catholics can reflect on how they embody these traits of discipleship by how often they are actualized in a particular life. In this way, a Catholic can be helped to get a snapshot of discipleship as a way of getting a more comprehensive picture of their lives as disciples. This, in turn, can help Catholics think about under-actualized parts of their lives and how they might grow further in living a fuller Catholic life.



A Pastoral Tool

With a sketch such as this, we have a way to both think about discipleship and reflect about supporting discipleship. A sketch of Catholic discipleship traits like this can help us formulate

those dimensions in the lives of an individual or a parish that are most readily actualized as well as those areas that tend to be underdeveloped. The five elements can serve as ways in which Catholics express discipleship, to one or another extent, in individual and communal life. As such, they provide an outline of discernment for those who wish to grow as Catholic disciples. These five expressions of discipleship underly the approach of a new pastoral tool, **CATHOLIC DISCIPLESHIP PROFILE™**.

Paulist Evangelization Ministries has developed a self-survey, called the **CATHOLIC DISCIPLESHIP PROFILE™**, based on these five traits to help Catholics get a snapshot of how they put discipleship into action. Using 81 statements, participants respond using a four-point scale that allows them to describe the frequency of their actions (always, often, seldom, and never). This survey was developed with the input of hundreds of people whose responses were statistically analyzed; this process uncovered the five areas of discipleship discussed above.

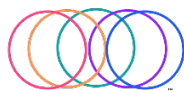
After completing their responses, participants receive an extensive report that shows them, through the use of graphs, which aspects of discipleship are most prevalent in their lives as well as those which tend to be under-actualized. In this detailed report, a participant then is given questions for reflection. These both affirm the ways discipleship is being lived as well as evoke questions about areas in a Catholic's life that show less activity. The report can be used for personal reflection, or it can be shared with a spiritual advisor or mentor. No participant's responses can be seen by anyone else without the direct giving of the report by a participant to another.

There are two theoretical concepts behind this **CATHOLIC DISCIPLESHIP PROFILE™**. One is to help Catholics identify themselves as disciples according to the actual behaviors they embody. Frequently discipleship appears as an elusive concept, or even as a non-Catholic notion, for

Catholics. They look upon their present behavior in primarily organizational terms (i.e., what they do because they belong to a parish or because of their heritage.) An exercise like this allows Catholics to begin seeing authentic discipleship behaviors as part of their existing Catholic life.

The other theoretical idea involves inviting Catholics to a more comprehensive living of their faith. Often Catholics default to a specific set of behaviors; they can become quite content with those despite many exhortations from Church documents and leaders. However, if a participant can note how many fewer actions of social justice, for example, are done compared with actions of personal prayer, she or he may begin to see ways to expand how they live as followers of Jesus. Popes and bishops have called Catholics to broad visions of evangelization for decades, for example, but these are not generally actualized in many Catholic parishes.

The **CATHOLIC DISCIPLESHIP PROFILE™** can also be used by groups (e.g., parish staffs, catechetical teams, Confirmation candidates) so they can look at the dominant faith actions that they have in common as well as plan for resources to help the group or parish grow in areas which are more undeveloped. In this way, too, a parish might develop adult faith resources to heighten attention in a certain area, or a group may do an in-service day to highlight certain dimensions of discipleship for their growth. Indeed, parishes that wish to explore discipleship among its members can employ this pastoral tool and use the abundant provided resources of the **CATHOLIC DISCIPLESHIP PROFILE™** to deepen their common grasp and exercise of discipleship.



Looking Ahead

One of the major pastoral tasks that Catholics face in the decades ahead, given the transformations in contemporary culture that make establishing an identity more elusive and downplay the importance of institutions, is to help Catholics root their identity in their sense of being a Catholic disciple. The “disciple” dimension can focus a sense of personal commitment and conversion; the “Catholic” dimension can focus on who we are as a worldwide community of people bound together by Christ’s love and empowered to serve by the Holy Spirit.

The past fifty years have seen a massive shift in Catholic institutions, particularly in the numbers of Catholic parochial schools and hospitals but also in the number of parishes and priests. This massive shift has been a slow readjustment not only to the influences of modernity but, more importantly, to the emphases of the Second Vatican Council, which, in its four major constitutions, called Catholics to see themselves as a community of pilgrims, enlightened by the Word of God, called to personal holiness and worship, and in service to the modern world. In other words, Vatican II was a profound call to Catholic discipleship. Just as we cannot expect to form Catholics as they were formed in the 1950s, because that culture no longer exists, so we also need to discover how our present culture can, even with contemporary societal changes, form Catholic disciples today.

This sketch of discipleship might help give us a common language; a tool like the **CATHOLIC DISCIPLESHIP PROFILE™** can give us a way to visualize and further that ideal.