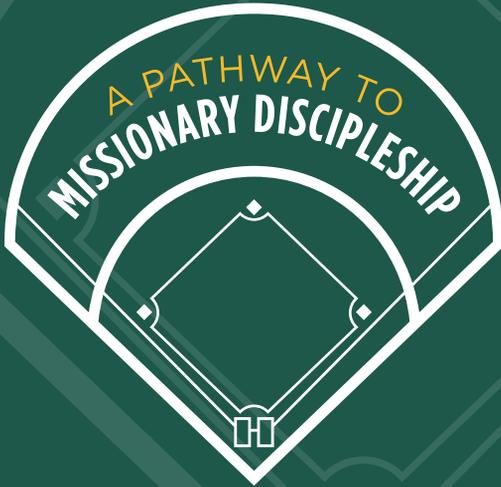


Pathway of Missionary Discipleship

COVER STORY



A disciple is someone who is a follower or student of Jesus. Each one of us is called to be a disciple of Christ, just like He called the Twelve in the Gospels. Jesus did not call perfect people. In fact, one denied Christ, another betrayed Him, one doubted and others fought over who was the greatest. Jesus invested three years into these 12 men, calling them to leave behind their old selves and becoming new creations. Jesus would transform the world through these disciples by sending them out as His missionary disciples.

A missionary disciple is an intentional follower of Jesus who knows how to make, and is actively making, other disciples. Read that last definition again and ask yourself, “Am I a missionary disciple?” If you feel you aren’t, don’t lose hope. Peter, James and John were not missionary disciples at first either. It took time. The Lord will teach us how to become missionary disciples and give us the grace that we need.

In November 2018, Bishop R. Daniel Conlon released his pastoral letter, “‘Go’ He said.” In March of this year, we formed a committee called the Missionary Discipleship Team (MDT), made up of 10 members of the Curia, including Bishop Conlon. We have been meeting weekly to pray, discern, brainstorm and share our thoughts about the letter and missionary discipleship. Last month, our priest convocation focused on this topic of missionary discipleship with national speakers, Deacon Keith Strohm and Marcel LeJeune.

Our diocese is not the first to take up Pope Francis’s call to missionary discipleship, so we have been studying best practices all over the country. We can see that the Holy Spirit is at work because so many of these dioceses and apostolates are speaking the same

language. We have learned a few important things along the way. There is no silver bullet to solve the crisis of people leaving the Church, but missionary discipleship, which is about handing on the faith in an intentional way to individual people whom God has placed in our lives, is building great enthusiasm around the country.

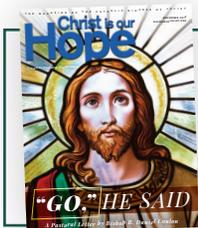
It is not a program; it’s an investment in people. We believe that, if we invest ourselves in making disciples, many of our problems will be resolved because disciples volunteer, give generously, evangelize others, and raise up the next generation of leaders by discipling others. This is not going to happen in one year, but we must think long term and lay a strong foundation. This is the method Jesus used to evangelize the world. He invested in 12 men, and today there are more than 1.2 billion Catholics!

“And He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

(EPHESIANS 4:11-12)

As we were looking at best practices in other dioceses, I came across a baseball diamond to describe the pathway to missionary discipleship. We have developed our own baseball diamond paradigm, and we find it very helpful to describe the pathway one might take to become a missionary disciple. This is not *the* pathway, but a pathway to becoming a missionary disciple.

In the spirit of baseball, let’s take two trips around the bases. The first trip around the bases will be as a growing disciple, which describes how each one of us becomes a true disciple of Jesus. The second trip around the bases will be as a missionary disciple, which describes how we walk around the bases with another person as they grow as a disciple of Jesus. This trip around the bases as a missionary disciple can be repeated many times with different people.



This is another in a series of articles about Missionary Discipleship in response to Bishop R. Daniel Conlon's recent Pastoral Letter on the Need for Missionary Disciples in the Diocese. If you haven't done so yet, please read or listen to the bishop's pastoral letter in the November 2018 issue of the magazine by going to this site: www.dioceseofjoliet.org/bishop

STORY BY FATHER BURKE MASTERS,
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GROWING DISCIPLE

Do you remember when you first encountered Jesus? I remember reading the Gospel of Matthew and receiving the Eucharist by accident in high school. These were my first encounters with Jesus, and they sparked a desire to know Him more. I have had subsequent encounters with Jesus on retreats, in adoration and meeting people who were in love with Jesus. We believe that this **ENCOUNTER** (between home and first base) with Jesus is critical, because, once the encounter happens, people will desire to know Him more. St. Peter encountered Jesus when the fisherman was asked to cast out into the deep (Luke 5:4-11). When they caught enough fish to almost sink two boats, Peter decided to make the commitment to follow Christ by dropping his nets. Jesus would later turn him into a fisher of men (missionary disciple).

When we make an initial commitment to follow Jesus (first base), we don't know where it will lead, but we know that something about Him captivates us. When this happens, we want to know all we can about Jesus. We want to **GROW** (between first and second base), a stage characterized by time of prayer and study, focused around the Scriptures and Sacraments. Just as we would want to get to know a new friend, we study everything we can about Jesus to get to know Him better.

Immersing ourselves into the community is also very important because the community forms and supports us. Being a part of a weekly small group, while attending Mass on Sunday with the larger community, can be great ways to grow into the disciple Jesus calls us to be. At some point during this **GROW** stage, we make the commitment to be a life-long disciple of Jesus. In John 6:66-69, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of everlasting life." Peter was all in. He committed his entire life to following Jesus (second base).

Once this commitment is made to follow Jesus forever, we need to be equipped for the mission. We used this word **EQUIP** because there needs to be intentionality in the way we prepare for this mission. We need to learn how to discern which persons we will invest in as friends in order to walk around the bases with them. We need to learn to use our God-given gifts in the greatest way possible.

Through discipline, we learn to sharpen our skills for evangelization (see Hebrews 12:1-13). At some point, we make the commitment to be a disciple-maker, to share with others what we have learned and experienced. We then begin to **GO**. (see John 20:21) This does not mean that we don't do any evangelizing until we reach third base; it means that we are ready to branch out on our own. I like the apprenticeship model used in the trades. Think about walking with an apprentice around the bases as they learn the trade of evangelization: 1) I do; you watch. 2) I do; you help. 3) You do; I help. And, finally, 4) You do; I watch.

MISSIONARY DISCIPLE

As we begin as a missionary disciple, we are equipped to make friends with the intention of eventually introducing our friends to Jesus. In Cursillo (www.jolietcursillo.org), an apostolic movement that leads Catholics to discover and better live the basic teachings of Jesus, they have a motto: "Make a friend, be a friend, and bring that friend to Christ."

That is basically what a missionary disciple does. We are friends with Jesus. We befriend others. We introduce our friends to Jesus. Friendship is the basis by which the faith has been handed down through the centuries. St. Paul writes, "With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us." (1 Thessalonians 2:8) Through this friendship, we walk with people through the five thresholds of conversion by Sherry Weddell (trust, curiosity, openness, seeking, intentional discipleship). As we walk with these friends in faith, it is important at some point to ask them if they are ready to make a commitment to follow Jesus. We might say, "Will you follow Jesus with me?"

Once your friend commits to following Jesus, then you can start to help them grow. In Acts 2:42, we hear that the early Christian community "devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." Like the early Apostles, we can focus on the teaching (catechesis), community (both small group and larger community), Sacramental life (especially Eucharist and Reconciliation) and prayer (Lectio Divina and other prayer forms) with our friends. At some point, we ask them to make the commitment to be life-long disciples with us (second base). Then we begin to **EQUIP** them with the vision to live the method of Jesus — to be missionary disciples.

The greatest evangelizer of all time, St. Paul, says, "And He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-12) We can help them see how God might be calling them to use their gifts.

To sum up, we cannot give what we don't have. Jesus calls all of us to "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19-20) I think we have many disciples, those who are intentional followers of Jesus. We need to teach people how to actively make other disciples. This is the big culture shift needed in the Church. This model is simple and manageable, but it requires our time and intention, which is a definite challenge. Imagine what will happen in our diocese, in our country and in our world, if we start to increase the number of missionary disciples! Come, Holy Spirit, come! †

➔ **CHECK OUT** *Christ is our Hope's* bi-weekly newsletter on missionary discipleship. Its goal is to inspire Catholics to learn how to grow and go as a missionary disciple. Check out this site and subscribe for free: <https://joliet.substack.com/>

