

Telling Our Story: Challenging the Catholic Aversion to Getting Personal

Tom Quinlan



The parish catechetical leaders in the Diocese of Joliet are trying something new this year, something exciting and long overdue. And I'm fairly certain we have the Holy Spirit to thank!

Last May, I had the privilege of attending an international and interdenominational gathering of Christian leaders in London. The encounter was a blessing in so many ways. It stretched me and gave me some new ways of seeing my ministry and the church. Two particular experiences came together to provide an insight with practical application that I brought home.

First, I had the pleasure of engaging in conversation with Christian evangelicals. I say "pleasure" because they were delightful people, warm, and welcoming and very transparent in their ardent love for Jesus Christ. There was no off-putting mistrust or challenging of my Catholicism. To the contrary, they seemed sincerely interested in learning more about Catholic faith and expressed a sense of kinship, a oneness in Christ, that engendered hope and joy in me.

Second, I heard a few presentations from Patrick Lencioni, a systems consultant who has written many books and is tapped to serve corporations in Silicon Valley and across the nation. He is public in his Catholic faith and is unafraid in weaving the best of Catholic tradition and wisdom into his talks. (You should check him out on YouTube.) He is also very funny.

RADICAL TRUST

Lencioni talked about the necessity for effective evangelists to be *real*, making themselves vulnerable for trust to develop in any group dynamic. He asserts that a team is never really going to breakthrough and move to a better place until there is radical trust among members of the team. And trust is an outgrowth of members feeling safe enough to share their

thoughts and feelings honestly. Lencioni challenges us to lead by example and create cultures where it is safe to risk, to share honestly, to be vulnerable with one another.

These seemingly unrelated experiences coalesced and caused me to imagine a path for growth in our DRE deanery groupings. The relational and professional dynamics in these inter-parish associations is actually quite strong. Our catechetical leaders meet regularly, enjoy each other's company, pray together, network and share good practices, support one another, and attend to their ongoing professional development and personal formation. I'm very proud of how these deaneries have come to function.

I have been a partner in ministry with many of our DREs for over a dozen years now. I know them well in some respects. And yet, when reflecting upon the natural inclination the evangelicals I met in London had for sharing their faith, telling of their journey to Christ, I realized that I don't know my parish catechetical leaders as I should. And they don't know me.



Photo by zeevvez

For all our conversation about so many things, we catechetical leaders in the Diocese of Joliet were not sharing in a meaningful, intentional manner who we are as people of faith. Why is this? We *are* people of faith. We have good and warm relationships to one another. And yet, there seems to be something in our shared Catholic DNA that inhibits us from thinking to reveal some of our faith journey, indeed our life journey within a faith context, with one another. After experiencing the natural inclination in evangelical culture for personal faith sharing, it occurred to me this is a great deficit in our Catholic culture and something that needs to be challenged.

Story is, of course, the mode in which Jesus taught. Story is evocative. Story is multivalent. It teases the imagination and

draws us in. It teaches without being didactic. Story, especially personal story, deepens relationships.

TELLING STORIES

I came back from London wanting to know my parish leadership colleagues better. I wanted to know who they are as people of faith, where they've been, what their struggles and joys have been, how they came to ministry. And so, I invited, exhorted, and maybe ever so slightly guilted our DREs to begin the practice, at each of their deanery meetings, of taking time for two or three members to tell us about their path, about their journey, their story. I asked that this become part and parcel of every meeting. And yes, when asked I went first in telling my story.

Our parish catechetical leaders have embraced this practice well. People take their turn only when they are ready and they share as they wish. No one should ever feel invaded in this. Everyone listens with respect and people seem to be genuinely enjoying the opportunity to share and to learn from one another at this richer, personal level of meaning. And

yes, it would be fair to say that some comfort zones are being stretched along the way.

TWO HOPES

I have two hopes for this. First, that we will bond more deeply as colleagues who are open to being real with one another and able to accompany one another as a more authentic community of believers. Patrick Lencioni properly recognizes that until we risk with one another, we will continue to skate on the relational surface and never be able to achieve greatness as a unit. Certainly, in the telling our story, we risk making ourselves vulnerable. There is risk in revealing a degree of who we are authentically, in our struggles and doubts as well as in our accomplishments and hopes. Such intimate sharing, given and received, can potentially help us to feel more invested in one another, more trusting, more personally gifted, and less alone.

My second hope is that as we practice this generous and humbling act of personal sharing and reflection upon the movements of grace in our lives, we catechetical leaders will grow in our inclination and ability to model this skill with

NCCL Evangelization Website: Growing a Curated Site to Serve Members and the Church

Tom Quinlan

Back in May at the annual conference in Cleveland, NCCL's Evangelization Committee unveiled 21stcentury-catholic-evangelization.org as a place anyone on the Internet can go to find useful information relating to evangelization from a Catholic perspective.

Cathy Cornue and I, as co-chairs of the Evangelization Committee, have greatly enjoyed supporting the continued build-out of this site under the leadership of Lois DeFelice and John Roberto and their team of committee members. We felt it would be helpful to provide more insight into the development of and purpose for this curated website. And so, below are excerpts

from an interview I conducted with Lois and John on this subject.

What is digital curation and why is it an important component of today's pastoral landscape?

Lois: *In catechesis today, we have started to be part of the digital world with our resources and ways of interacting. At NCCL, there has been conversation for years around bringing "best practices" together. As part of the evangelization committee, we looked at how this could become a reality. John Roberto brought the expertise of web design to the committee and the adventure of digital curation began!*

John: *I want to quote Beth Kanter from Beth's Blog, "Content curation is the process of sorting through the vast amounts of content on the web*

and presenting it in a meaningful and organized way around a specific theme. The work involves sifting, sorting, arranging, and publishing information. A content curator cherry picks the best content that is important and relevant to share with their community. Content curators provide a customized, vetted selection of the best and most relevant resources on a very specific topic or theme."

A faith formation curator is someone who continually finds, groups, organizes, and shares the best and most relevant content and experiences on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. Content curators can provide a personalized, qualified selection of the best and most relevant content and resources available. They do not create more content, but make sense of all the content that others

others, namely, catechists, children, and parents. What a blessing it will be if our sharing at DRE meetings can translate into an entire ecosystem of Catholic people becoming comfortable with and skilled in this practice!

Recognizing that everyone has a story imbued with grace, one that dynamically plays out within the context of our collective story of saving grace in human history, is powerful. Articulating it and sharing it with others is gift. Told through the lens of faith in Jesus Christ, our life story can and should be essentially catechetical! Empowering others to do the same, to recognize their life as meaning-filled, their story as grace, may

result in communities evangelizing one another in an organic, integrated, and powerful manner.

It's early but good fruit is blossoming as a result of this effort in our diocese. I'm grateful to the giftedness of evangelicals, the wisdom of a systems-thinker...and the Holy Spirit for helping me to leave London last May with one less blind spot in my understanding of catechetical leadership. ■

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are creating. Curation is an evolving idea that addresses two parallel trends: the explosive growth in information, and our need to be able to find information in coherent, reasonably contextual groupings.

The emerging role of the faith formation curator is to: 1) research and aggregate a wide variety of content and experiences available from a great diversity of sources, 2) evaluate quality and appropriateness, 3) organize and deliver via a faith formation network and website, and 4) communicate the resources available to your audience through a variety of media and connect them to the content and experiences.

What is the purpose for the NCCL curated evangelization website?

Lois: To offer a one-stop place that assists diocesan offices, catechetical leaders, evangelization directors, and others. As members submit content to be placed on the site, anyone who visits the site will have a great sampling of the latest tools and resources.

John: The front page of the website states it nicely. It seeks "to provide approaches, strategies, and resources to help parish and diocesan leaders address three audiences for the transmission of the Christian faith: initial

evangelization, rediscovering faith, and evangelizing catechesis."

What is on the site and how can people use it and benefit from it?

John: There are six tabs people can open with a growing multitude of information and resources available within each one. They are 1.) Understanding Catholic Evangelization; 2.) Religious Trends; 3.) Effective Practices and Approaches; 4.) Evangelization Organizations; 5.) Evangelization Resources; and 6.) Educating Leaders.

In its current form, the Evangelization website does a good job of providing people with content for understanding and developing evangelization in pastoral settings.

What do we want to accomplish with the site in the future? What content and features do we hope to add?

Lois: In the future, we hope to continue to grow the content through the efforts of the committee and through submissions from visitors to the site. And our subcommittee just began a discussion of offering training webinars so that the website can be interactive.

John: We will make the website more interactive, e.g., forums where peo-

ple can exchange ideas, get answers to questions, and get help finding resources from the community of people using the website.

What do we wish to ask of NCCL members (and others) to help the site to become all it can be?

Lois: We invite all NCCL members and others who visit the site to join us in building a one-stop place to find the best resources and tools for evangelization.

John: The big issue for me is having people identify effective practices and models of evangelization in Catholic parishes that we can add to the website. We want to make this site a clearinghouse for the best knowledge, practices, and tools for evangelization.

In addition to asking members to submit resources and other content, I wish to invite all to go and subscribe to the site and share the site with others (including those not affiliated with NCCL). Together, we can build 21stcenturycatholicsevangeli-zation.org to be the go-to site for all things Catholic evangelization in the months and years ahead. Everyone reading this can consider themselves part of the team!