



"We must not be afraid to venture into uncharted waters within our ministries and rely on others to breathe new life into outreach."

At the end of Jesus's earthly ministry, he commissions his disciples saying, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:18-20). This Great Commission charged the disciples to carry the light of the Gospel to restless hearts that yearned for the divine. Empowered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the first missionary disciples got on the move, drawing others to encounter the God who saves (cf. Ps. 68:21).

The same missionary excitement and zeal of those first followers of Christ continues to animate the Church today. By virtue of our baptism, all missionary disciples are called to witness to the joy of the Gospel and to draw others to encounter Jesus Christ (*Evangelii gaudium*, 120). We, like the first disciples, are commissioned to venture forth to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, inviting those on the peripheries to cross the threshold into God's fold.

As the synodal dialogue began, a sense of hopeful excitement and anticipation at how the Holy Spirit would animate the discerning Church was present. As we listened, the themes of effective communication, engagement and accompaniment with those on the margins, and ecclesial outreach through a missionary lens rose to the surface in the shared stories. Each of these broad thematic concentrations somehow speaks to the social, cultural, and religious environments within the Diocese of Cleveland, and sets a necessary trajectory of the Church's missionary work into the future, which involves a unifying campaign of drawing others into relationship with Jesus.

Many people are disconnected from the faith community and do not look to the Church for meaning or fulfillment, sometimes due to significant failures within the Church itself. The current political and social milieu of the culture is incredibly polarizing and divisive, and this perception often carries over to how people view the Church. In the midst of a fractured environment (socially, economically, politically, and religiously), the Church must serve as a unifying presence through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World confirms this saying, “By virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all men of whatever nation, race or culture, the Church stands forth as a sign of that brotherhood which allows honest dialogue and gives it vigor” (Gaudium et spes, 92). With this focus and strength, the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit, must be a witness to the transformative and unifying love of God, which is (and has always been) counter cultural.

As the Church in the Diocese of Cleveland continues to identify pastoral strategies from the Synod, it must respond to the missionary impulse of the Holy Spirit, which challenges means and methods of doing ministry (Evangelii gaudium, 27). Forming teams of disciple-makers that work one-on-one with others to shape a culture in the church community is imperative. The scope of ecclesial outreach should be broadened to include those not normally invited to share in evangelization efforts. Accompaniment includes collaboration. We must not be afraid to venture into uncharted waters within our ministries and rely on others to breathe new life into outreach.

Using effective communication methods and mediums that thoughtfully go beyond church walls to the field hospitals where potential saints abound, is critical. These efforts involve compassionately addressing issues that divide and push people away from the Church. Creativity, ingenuity, and a willingness to take risks are important.

The Church must form disciples as captivating storytellers who witness to Jesus Christ wherever they find themselves. The Directory for Catechesis beautifully proposes that the “language that has the greatest hold on the digital generation is that of the story rather than that of argumentation” (363). As a Missionary Church on the move, focusing on forming “joyful messengers of challenging proposals” (DfC, 84), masterful storytellers who can share the Gospel through the lens of their own faith experiences can and will have the greatest impact in drawing others to Christ.

At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). Like the first disciples, inspired, emboldened, and empowered by Christ’s presence, let’s get on the move.

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