

In St. Mark's Gospel, Jesus launches his public life by exclaiming "repent and believe in the Gospel." With this approach to his mission, Jesus states that a new era is about to begin. He wants to reveal a new vision of the world and a new outlook on life. His words apply to us today especially as we are soon to begin the Lenten season. When we are marked with ashes from the burned remains of last year's Palm Sunday palm fronds, we are seeking this same transformation.

Another word, which is often used, is conversion (metanoia): a change of mind but a radical one. As intentional disciples, we grasp the deep meaning of this expression. I believe that at some point in our lives, we come to the realization that we are not perfect, that our encounter with Christ enlightens our life's journey and through this experience and growing relationship, we are compelled to be like him. Although, sometimes we say, "You have to take me as I am." On the surface, this may be true but if we become satisfied with ourselves, we can also become complacent and instead of being a part of the mission of the coming of the Kingdom of God, we become simply a spectator. Changing our lives to be more Christ-like is a daily challenge for all and for all ages.

Being as the Father is our mission and our goal: all loving, all merciful, and forgiving, not for ourselves but for those around us. This conversion is not only a personal journey of life but also one that we do with the support of others. Our faith in the Trinity does not make each of us an island in this world of ours, even though we may feel this way at times. There is always a way of improving oneself and that is our journey of conversion.

We often hear people say there is no Lenten season. This is very far from the truth. More than ever, we are asked to give more time to prayer, to fasting, and to almsgiving. In the past, we were told what we had to do. These obligations remain today. However, we are also asked to choose something freely that goes beyond our annual Lenten obligations. It is more personal but just as demanding, if not more so. It is a time to invite ourselves to our own conversion. What does each of us need to change to be the image of Christ in our world of today? What is relevant in our own life that needs Christ and that needs us to change ourselves to be like Christ in our family, our neighbourhood, our city, and our world?

Again, this is our mission. I ask you to reflect on the choices you will soon make. What could happen in your life that would help bring about this change? No doubt, there are many things to choose from but start with just one whether it is done alone, as a family, or as a group. It can be a choice of the church community who also wants to change their community witnessing. I also like to hear of families taking on a Lenten challenge together. There are many acts of mercy from which to choose, physical and spiritual. Make a commitment. Do not ask what others are doing before you know what you will be doing. Repent, convert, and believe in the Good News!

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FORMING INTENTIONAL DISCIPLES

Conversion



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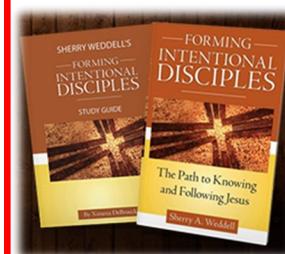
For more information about the Forming Intentional Disciples initiative, you may check out our webpage at @padiocese.ca or contact Christine Taylor. To phone, call (306)922-4747 extension 227 or via email, catechetics@padiocese.ca

Since the fall workshop, the phrase “Intentional Disciples” is being circulated around the Diocese. Some may be wondering what it means to be an intentional disciple or if they are an intentional disciple.

An intentional disciple is someone who knows the love of God not as an abstract ideal, but rather as a lived relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In response to the relationship, the person ‘intentionally’ chooses to be a follower - a disciple - of Jesus. As in all relationships, the relationship grows and there becomes a desire to share what one has received with others. Just as when we fall in love and realize that we are loved in return, we cannot help but share that good news with others.

Unfortunately, it has been assumed that many of us are intentional disciples when in fact no one has shown us the way. We began by going to Mass with our parents each Sunday. As young adults we may not have been quite as loyal to each Sunday Mass but upon marrying and having our own children, the regular attendance at Mass resumed as part of what we did as Catholic Christians. “In

the twenty-first century, cultural Catholicism is dead as a retention strategy, because God has no grandchildren. In the twenty-first



century, we have to foster intentional Catholicism rather than cultural Catholicism.” (Forming Intentional Disciples (FID), p. 39)

Many of us who are ‘cradle Catholics’ have what could be called a ‘Catholic identity.’ What this means is that we see ourselves as Catholic and that we attend Mass more or less regularly. This ‘Catholic identity’ that many of us have is not what is meant by intentional discipleship. We are responding more from a sense of duty of, ‘I have to’, rather than out of a sense of love because we have been loved first. As Jesus said to the woman at the well, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” Many think that this “personal

discipleship is a kind of optional spiritual enrichment for the exceptionally pious or spiritually gifted.” (FID, p.55) Many of us are missing out on so much that our faith has to offer.

This is where the conversion piece comes in. When most of us hear the word conversion, we think of St. Paul being knocked off his horse and blinded. It was a dramatic event. It was a first encounter with Christ. **If I am already Catholic, why do I need to learn about conversion?**

A line from one of the Lenten songs says it all, “Come back to me with all your heart. Don’t let sin keep us apart.” Just like St. Peter who denied Christ three times, we have sinned and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation we have the opportunity to return to the Father from whom we have strayed. (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1423) Though this humble path to conversion seems quite simple, many challenges may hinder us from moving forward and receiving the love of Christ. “It is the movement of a ‘contrite heart,’ drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.” (CCC, 1428) It is our Catholic path to healing and growth.



On-going conversion is one piece of the journey to becoming an intentional disciple. Once aware of the grace we have received, we will then be compelled to share with others what we have been gifted with; calling them to follow Christ too.

“Create
in me a
clean heart,
O God,
and put a
new
and right
spirit
within me.”
Psalm 51:10

Metanoia is the Greek term most commonly translated as repentance in the New Testament (i.e., Luke 24.47).

The term ‘metanoia’ is used to describe a change in one’s life resulting from penance or a spiritual conversion, sometimes referred to as a change of heart.

Let us together continue to invoke the Holy Spirit to help us encounter Christ and bring about the renewal He wants for our Diocese.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

**O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.**