



Called to teach.

Missionary Discipleship in Vocare

When a teacher becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, he is like the owner of a house who is able to take from his storeroom treasures new and old.

-Mt. 13:52

Jesus' words show us that the knowledge of a teacher, while very important, is not what makes them an effective transmitter of God's Word. We must be *disciples* – those who follow the Lord and devote our lives to him. To bring the 'treasures' of our faith, both the new and the old, to those we catechize, *we must be disciples!* As Blessed Pope Paul VI said, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

In the past, catechesis has seemed to some to be a strict academic exercise. Our catechetical programs have followed an academic model towards imparting the content of faith. While this seems adequate on the surface, what it lacks is often the true heart of catechesis – an encounter with Christ.

St. Isadore in his *Book of Maxims* shares:

Learning unsupported by grace may get into our ears but it never reaches into the heart. It makes a great noise outside, but serves no inner purpose. But when God's grace touches our innermost minds to bring understanding, his word which has been received sinks deep into the heart.

In order to receive this grace, the disciple must first and foremost be a person who cultivates a deep interior life of prayer. The interior life of a disciple must also be rooted in the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the entire Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself." (CCC 1324)

Catechesis as an activity of discipleship is proposed by Saint John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae*, “Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted...in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (18). That initiated fullness is an encounter with Christ and a lived response – becoming His disciple. As catechists we rightly desire to make disciples through our catechesis, to do so we must be disciples.

The Office for Evangelization and Discipleship (OED) has built into the Vocare certification process the concept of Missionary Discipleship. To be called (*vocare*) by God to be a catechist is a call to missionary discipleship. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized (EG 120)." As we seek to form students who know Christ and care for the souls of others, we assist them in developing a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the Church.

Missionary disciples are formed and sustained in Christian community. Saint John Paul II wrote, "It seems timely to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships. In such a human context it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ" (*Ecclesia in America*, 41). Without a commitment to community in our on-going journey of conversion, catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren. Through our commitment to small group faith-sharing, we as catechists are supported in our efforts to grow in our relationship with Christ. Through the telling of the stories of God's presence in our lives, we come to experience the richness of God's call to us as catechists who 'echo' God's love for others. We deepen our fellowship as 'disciples of the kingdom of heaven.'

Beginning during the *Inspire* badge, the Missionary Discipleship portion of the Vocare certification process is the requirement to participate in an ongoing small group that shares faith. This can take varied forms, and everyone does not have to be in the same group. This may be a bible study, an ALPHA or CRHP or RENEW group, Why Catholic, a Symbolon group, Evangelical Catholic, School of Faith, FOCUS for Parishes, ChristLife, Emmaus, and other groups as approved by the OED. Small faith-communities are essential to disciple because they offer an opportunity to develop relationships of faith, and in turn, deepen our relationship with Christ.

At the same time, mere activity in a small faith group is not a magic bullet. In the best of circumstances, participation in a small faith group becomes a place where the Church is experienced in a real way. It becomes a true "school for discipleship" (National Directory for Catechesis, 29) in which we are apprenticed in the heart and habits of the Christian life and we, in turn, are initiated into the "art of accompaniment" of others (EG 169).

The Missionary Discipleship experience of friendship, accompaniment, and on-going conversion will help us become a better catechist who's lived faith spills over into our catechesis as we accompany others in their own growth as disciples of Christ. Not all disciples will be catechists, but all catechists desperately *need* to be disciples!

The call to be a catechist, rooted in our baptismal call, requires our commitment to lifelong formation. This includes growing in knowledge of the Faith, as offered through

Vocare, as well as practical disciplines of faith, as experienced in small groups. As in many endeavors, you will likely reap a multitude of benefits, including seeing many under your charge enjoy the life-changing experience of encountering Jesus Christ.