

Discipleship Pathways

Part 1: The What and the Why

Introduction

- [Introduce yourself]
- Today we'll be talking about Discipleship Pathways
 - This session, which is Part 1, will cover the "what" and the "why": What is a Discipleship Pathway, and why do we need one?
 - In Part 2, which will be right after this session, we will cover how to create a Discipleship Pathway and look at some examples from other parishes

What Is the Mission of the Church?

- Before we discover what a DP is, we need to ask an even more basic "what" question: What is the mission of the Church?
- What would you say the mission of the Church is?
- Here's what the Church says about Herself:
 - **EN 14:** "'We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.' ... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize"
 - **LG 5:** "From this source the Church ... receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God"
 - **AG 2:** "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature ..."
 - **Doctrinal Note 2:** "The term evangelization has a very rich meaning. In the broad sense, it sums up the Church's entire mission: her whole life consists in accomplishing the proclamation and handing on of the Gospel"
 - **Disciples Called to Witness, pg. 5:** "The Church's *ad gentes* ('to the world') mission given to her by Christ is the proclamation of the Good News to those who do not know him."
- Now, why is this important?
 - It's important because a Discipleship Pathway is your plan for intentionally carrying out this particular mission in the world
 - This means that, before we even go any further, you have to ask yourself: What is the mission of my parish? Does it even have one?
 - Ask yourself: Why are we even here? Why are we doing all this stuff?
 - If your parish's reason for being is not to proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, and send them on mission, then you have no use for a Discipleship Pathway
 - You might as well get up and go home.
 - A Discipleship Pathway will not even work unless the mission of the Church is the mission of your parish

What Is a DP?

- A DP is a simple, intentional, and integrated process by which the parish meets the spiritual needs of people and facilitates progression along the journey of faith that leads to missionary discipleship
- Now, when we speak generally, at the 30,000 foot level, about how the universal Church makes disciples, then we call this the Process of Evangelization
 - It's represented by the arrows on the PED Diagram
- But, when we zoom into to how this is practically accomplished in your unique setting, that's when the Discipleship Pathway emerges
- A Discipleship Pathway is how the theory comes alive in your parish
- It's your way of saying: This is how we make missionary disciples here
- There's a piece of Church Management Software called "Mission Pathways" that you can use to track a person's journey with your parish. Here's how they define a DP:
 - A discipleship pathway is your plan to:
 - Accompany parishioners and guests to encounter Christ, and
 - Assist parishioners and guests to deepen their relationship with Him (individually and as a community) so that...
 - Empowered by the Holy Spirit and growing intentionally in the image and likeness of Christ, they proclaim the Good News to others by their words, actions, and the witness of their lives.
- It is not the extent of what your parish is doing, just what your parish is *prioritizing* in order to make missionary disciples.
- Any questions about what a DP is?

Why does your parish need a DP?

- Well, we've already discussed one reason, right?
 - 1. If a DP is your way of aligning the mission of your parish with the mission of the Universal Church, then you need a DP so that you can make that alignment
- But, there are other reasons, too
- Have you ever tried to make a piece of Ikea furniture without the instructions?
 - Ikea furniture is hard enough to build with instructions, let alone without them
 - Build a dresser or bunkbed without instructions and you could hurt someone!
- And yet, what do parishes do every day?
 - They say they're about making disciples, but they have no comprehensive plan for how to go about it
 - Like building a bunkbed without instructions, at best they're ineffective, at worst they're actually harmful
- 2. You need a DP so that you can bring some order and direction to your effort, which will make you more likely to succeed
 - Without a plan, you're just hoping that somehow it will all work out

- How is this working for anyone? Is any quality furniture built that way?
- The task of making missionary disciples is much more complex than building a bunk bed
- If you need a plan for building furniture, then you definitely need a plan for making missionary disciples
- 3. A DP also brings intentionality and deliberateness to the work you do every day.
 - This is why I said that it is an “**intentional**” process
 - Instead of doing random things whenever and hoping that something sticks,
 - Instead of leaving conversion and discipleship up to happenstance,
 - We make ministry decisions based upon the unique needs of people at a particular stage or threshold of the journey
 - Now you have a better reason for doing something other than “it’s what we’ve always done” or “it seems interesting to me” or “it’s the latest thing”
 - Now I’m making decisions based on my knowledge of the journey of faith and based on how the parish supports that journey
 - This is a new and better reason for doing ministry
 - Even mundane and everyday decisions take on a new meaning and importance once we bring this kind of intentionality to them
- This leads to my next reason: 4. It filters all decision-making through the parish mission
 - If evangelizing and making missionary disciples is the most important thing, then, suddenly, nothing is more important than the DP and all decisions should be guided by what will best support the DP
 - This includes ministry decisions, of course, but also decisions about the use of facilities and space, and even budget allotments.
 - Your budget reflects your priorities
 - If you’re putting your money where your mouth is, then you should be spending the most money on the things that support the Pathway
 - Also, when the mission is providing this filtering influence on your decision-making, then all lesser filters are eliminated
 - We don’t always make decisions based on what will make disciples, do we?
 - Sometimes we decide based on seniority (“The quilters have been here for 50 years!”) or favoritism, or popularity, or the loudest voice, or the path of least resistance, or “this is what we’ve always done!” or “this option is the cheapest” or “this is what I personally prefer.”
 - When the mission is the filter, then no one can accuse you of bias, favoritism, conflict-avoidance, or negligence in your decision-making
 - You’re only doing what’s best for the mission
- Of course, if **all** decision-making is going to be filtered through the mission, then this means that everyone has to be on board

- the Pastor, the DRE, the youth minister, the liturgy director, the business manager, the administrative assistant, the Parish Council, the RCIA Coordinator, the maintenance man, the grounds keeper
- essentially everyone either getting paid by the parish or in a leadership role at the parish needs to be aligned on the mission in order for the DP to flourish and bear fruit
- 5. This means that you need a DP because it can be an opportunity and a catalyst for parish staff and leadership cohesion
 - This is why I said it's an **"integrated"** process – it must be infused within the entire leadership structure of the parish
 - When it is, then staff and leadership cohesion occurs
 - It occurs because it must! Otherwise, the DP won't work.
 - This cohesion occurs not only because we're all making decisions based on what's best for the DP, but also because, once we're all in this together, then we have to actually be in conversation with each other and working together to make sure that we're in alignment and in step with each other
 - Making disciples is an elaborately choreographed dance where every dancer knows their own steps but also the steps of the dancers next to them so that, together, they can move in unison and make something beautiful
 - Yet, often times, in parishes what do we have? We have a collection of individual leaders making unilateral decisions within their own siloed spheres of influence
 - I'm convinced that we cannot initiate culture change and create a disciple-making culture as long as this situation remains
 - It would be like getting a team of dancers together and then saying, "Now everyone do their own thing" and then expecting something choreographed and beautiful to happen.
- 6. Additionally, when I, as a volunteer ministry leader, am serving at a parish with a DP, then I know exactly where I fit in
 - I know how my ministry relates to the other ministries
 - I know what is the purpose and role of my ministry
 - This can reinvigorate volunteer leaders who are burnt out
 - This can give new meaning and vitality to their work
 - It can make them feel important, needed, vital to the mission of the parish
 - Now, as a leader, I'm doggedly pursuing my reason for being and filtering all of MY decisions through lens of, "Will this fulfill the purpose of my ministry?" and "What can I do to fulfill my purpose better?"
 - We're seeing now how the DP positively impacts volunteer ministry leaders, as well as parish staff and leadership teams

- 7. The final reason why you need a DP is because it provides simple and clear messaging so that parishioners and visitors to your parish can see right away exactly how your parish can serve them.
 - This is why I said it was a “**simple**” process
 - Big parishes
 - Sometimes we pride ourselves on having these drop-down menus on our parish website that go down the whole length of the page
 - We tend to think that busyness equals vitality
 - But, what’s this like for the visitor, for the new person in town, for the stranger who is thinking about becoming Catholic?
 - Large parishes are often doing so much that it’s overwhelming
 - New people don’t know who to call, young people don’t like using the phone or even emailing someone, so you’ve just lost them.
 - Small parishes
 - On the other end of the spectrum, you have these small parishes that, when you visit their website, they have the date for when Rel. Ed starts, the Mass and Confession times, a button to download the bulletin, and that’s it.
 - I’ve got no clue if this parish is actually doing anything for adults
 - So, I’m probably not going to go there either
 - But, the DP says, “Look! We’ve actually thought about this! We have a sense of what your needs might be, and here’s how we can meet them! We’re not a hot mess, we’re actually doing something!”
 - As a new person, it’s good for me to see that
 - Now, based on my needs, I know exactly what to try or at least what to inquire about
 - More than that, I know that this parish has thought about me and they care about me

Review: Why Do You Need a DP?

1. A DP aligns your parish mission w/ the mission of the Church
2. It provides order and direction, so that you’re not proceeding haphazardly and you’re more likely to succeed
3. It brings a new intentionality and deliberateness to your decision-making
4. It filters all decision-making through the objective lens of the mission
5. It can be a catalyst for parish staff and leadership cohesion
6. It provides for volunteer leaders a new orientation, purpose, and importance for their ministry
7. It makes it clear to visitors and regulars how the parish can serve them

Any questions?