

to teach

Modern Questions. Gospel Answers.



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Jesus' imperative "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15) makes explicit this connection between authentic discipleship and penitential discipline. Discipleship, our following of Jesus, embraces discipline, a firm commitment to do whatever is demanded in furthering God's kingdom. . . . Growth in spiritual maturity demands a certain level of specificity, for it shows that we take seriously God's call to discipline and are willing to hold ourselves accountable.

—*Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*

DISCIPLINE: THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Every group has their rules—including schools, parishes, school boards, and PTA/PTO groups. They keep order and allow us to come together more effectively and collaboratively.

Unfortunately, rules (and discipline) often have a bad reputation in the minds of many children, youth, and adults. We hear that discipline is painful, burdensome, and to be avoided. But if that is what discipline seems to represent, then people have forgotten what it really means. Through discipline, we become better disciples—better followers of Jesus. When we associate discipline with discipleship, then it becomes "a firm commitment to do whatever is demanded in furthering God's kingdom" (*Penitential Practices of Today's Catholic*, p. 4).

During Lent, we explore our call to ongoing conversion, discipleship, and the ways in which we act in the world. We pay special attention to particular times for—and opportunities to practice—penitential disciplines, especially prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

This issue of *To Teach* includes various suggestions on how to practice a more disciplined life, leading us to a better understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. 🍏

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

In *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the bishops of the United States write, "Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves. . . . The authentic disciple regards all he or she is and possesses as gifts and blessings and realizes the need to share those gifts and blessings with others for the sake of the kingdom of God" (p. 1-2).

According to this definition, mature disciples share five characteristics: (1) they make a **conscious choice** to be followers; (2) they live that choice through **actions**; (3) they do not care about the cost—the **sacrifice**—to themselves of their actions; (4) they treat all they have, both talents

and possessions, as **gifts and blessings to be shared** with others; and (5) they share what they have as a way to further **build the kingdom of God**.

Make a Conscious Choice

Following Jesus is a conscious choice that grows as we examine how God is calling us to serve him. Spend part of a staff meeting or development day reading the four calls—to holiness, community, mission and ministry, and Christian maturity—in *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* and reflecting on the discussion questions at the end of each section. This text can also be used with senior high school students.

Act

One of the ways to live the call to discipleship is to practice the corporate and spiritual works of mercy that are listed in *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*.

continued on p. 2



Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feeding the hungry*
- Sheltering the homeless*
- Clothing the naked*
- Visiting the sick*
- Visiting the imprisoned
- Giving drink to the thirsty*
- Burying the dead

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Converting sinners
- Instructing the ignorant*
- Advising the doubtful
- Comforting the sorrowful*
- Bearing wrongs patiently*
- Forgiving injuries*
- Praying for the living and dead*

* Good with young children

With your staff or students, choose two or three of the works of mercy to focus on. Those that are asterisked are particularly good for young children. Identify concrete ways that you and your students or staff can practice these works every week during Lent. Work to make these actions a regular habit that can continue throughout the rest of the school year and the summer. (See page 4 for reproducible card that lists the works of mercy.)

The Sacrifice

When we consciously choose to be a disciple, we choose to be in relationship with God and others. One of the challenges to discipleship is our sinfulness, which separates us from God and makes us less aware of the needs of others. Reconciliation reminds us that we live for others, regardless of the cost to ourselves. During this Lent, encourage your students and adult peers to participate in the Sacrament of Penance on a regular basis. Prepare them and yourself by reviewing *Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance* and *How to Go to Confession*.

Gifts and Blessings to Share

Mature disciples recognize their gifts



to teach

THE BOOKSTORE

CALLED AND GIFTED FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

English: No. 5-002, 32 pp.
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STEWARDSHIP: A DISCIPLE'S RESPONSE

A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship Tenth Anniversary Edition
English: No. 5-465, 80 pp., \$9.95
Spanish: No. 5-883, 84 pp., \$9.95

WAY OF THE CROSS

Toward Justice and Peace
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25+ copies, \$1.95 each



and blessings, and they respond in gratitude and share them responsibly. *Stewardship and Young Adults* provides a brief and engaging description of how to respond in gratitude and responsibly. Make the text a centerpiece of a meeting with teachers, PTA/PTO members, and school board members, or in class with high school students. Use the discussion questions at the end of the brochure to identify the gifts and blessings for the group and how they can be shared with the community.

Build the Kingdom of God

While performing works of mercy that further the Kingdom of God, prayer is also important. *A Litany of the Way* is a perfect prayer mantra for children, youth, and adults. Written in a call-and-response format, each response begins with "Teach us . . ." It reminds us that as we journey in faith, we need to continue to learn how to be disciples in order to build the Kingdom of God. 🍏

LIVING AS DISCIPLES IN LENT AND EASTER

for Principals & School Boards

- Familiarize parents at the next PTO or PTA meeting with the Rite of Penance by handing out copies of *Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance* and walking through the rite. Invite the parish priest to participate and answer any additional questions about the sacrament. Encourage parents to review the rite with their children at home in preparation for communal reconciliation services during Lent.
- Give teachers a copy of *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*. Brainstorm how the school community will keep each of the three practices—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving—as a community. Also, identify what additional education is needed to support consistent practice throughout the season.
- At a staff meeting, reflect on what special gifts the teachers, administrators, and staff bring to the parish and school communities. Use the reflection questions from *Stewardship and Young Adults* as a starting point for discussion.
- Offer the Sacrament of Penance at the school or parish for all staff and students. Schedule the sacrament at additional times throughout the season for those who would like to go to individual confession more frequently.
- Use *Way of the Cross* to begin or end a staff, school board, or parents' meeting with a brief stations of the cross.
- During a staff, PTA/PTO, or school board meeting, encourage parents, teachers, administrators, and staff to support Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) "Operation Rice Bowl" (http://www.catholicrelief.org/our_work/where_we_work/united_states/home_or_parish_based/operation_rice_bowl/index.cfm). "Operation Rice Bowl" challenges us to put our faith into action and walk in solidarity with our neighbors in need around the world. CRS also provides a variety of activities and reflections for all age groups to support "Operation Rice Bowl."

for Educators

- Distribute copies and walk through the steps for *How to Go to Confession* with your students in preparation for your parish or school Lenten reconciliation service.
- Pray the rosary each Friday using one of the following resources: *A Rosary for Peace* or *A Scriptural Rosary for Justice and Peace*.
- Invite students to write their own personal response to each step of Jesus' way of the cross. Use the *Way of the Cross: Toward Justice and Peace* as a starting point for reflection.
- Review the lists of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*. Create images on paper that interpret each of the works of mercy. Tape the papers together to create a "quilt" of the Church's works of mercy.
- Participate in Catholic Relief Services' "Operation Rice Bowl" (http://www.catholicrelief.org/our_work/where_we_work/united_states/home_or_parish_based/operation_rice_bowl/index.cfm). "Operation Rice Bowl" challenges us to put our faith into action and walk in solidarity with our neighbors in need around the world.
- Review the seven corporal works of mercy with your students (see *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics* or page 4 for a list). Identify ways in which your young people will put each into practice throughout Lent. Using a classroom, church, or parish youth room bulletin board, illustrate the seven works and what actions the group has decided to take.
- Begin each school day in Lent with *A Litany of the Way*. Distribute copies of the prayer card to each student. Help the students memorize the responses. Continue prayer with a reflection on the gospel that is referred to in one of the prayer's stanzas.





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