
A CLEAR — PATH —

HOW TO MAKE MISSIONARY
DISCIPLES IN YOUR PARISH

JIM JANSEN



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HOW TO MAKE MISSIONARY
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How to Use This Book

This book is written for pastors, parish leaders, and the everyday faithful who labor beside them on pastoral councils, evangelization committees, and in the countless volunteer ministries that make up our parishes. Although the concepts presented are deeply rooted in the history and pastoral practice of the Church, I have resisted theological and philosophical language. This book tries to make that timeless wisdom accessible to all.

This book is best read within a missional community, even if that community is small. Specifically, this book is designed to be utilized by pastors and parish leaders to spark conversation. There are discussion questions at the end of each chapter designed for that purpose. It can also be used by ministry leaders in a specific context like youth ministry to create a clear path for that ministry. You will find concrete advice with plenty of latitude to apply the concepts to the context of your parish and your ministry.

The book comes in three parts. Part I lays out the essential concepts behind a clear path of discipleship. Those concepts are foundational, and they will run throughout the book. Part II covers the phases for building a clear path of discipleship. It shares step-by-step instructions and proven wisdom for how to implement the concepts from Part I. In Part III, you will read a fictional case study of St. Mary's Parish and their efforts to build a clear path.

The fictional case study is meant to provide inspiration and imagination for how the journey might unfold for your parish or ministry. Any resemblance to particular individuals is coincidental. The characters in the case study are a combination of dozens of real people and real stories designed to paint a picture of what the journey looks like in practice.

This book can be read in a few days, but it will take months to digest and potentially years to implement. The full fruition of a clear path of discipleship will likely take many years with ups, downs, twists, and turns. Some of those turns will lead to

dead ends, and others will lead to the joyful and unexpected fruit of changed lives. The journey's length and rigor require a firm conviction to persevere in the task. I hope the understanding and conversations sparked by this book will give you the wisdom and conviction necessary to build a clear path of discipleship.

Pope Francis knows that pastoral conversion requires a change in our hearts and minds away from self-preservation toward the evangelization of friends, family, and neighbors who do not know Christ. We must channel our customs and ways of doing things toward making disciples. A clear path of discipleship does just that. A clear path helps you live Pope Francis' "missionary impulse" for the evangelization of today's world...or at least your corner of it.

The Benefits of a Clear Path of Discipleship

Here is your second bit of encouragement. As you begin the process of building a clear path, the following benefits begin immediately, and they continue to grow and multiply as all the pieces come together.

A clear path makes disciples within our parishes.

So much of what afflicts parishes today is the lack of intentional disciples within our congregations. Even among those regularly attending Mass, a shockingly low percentage seem to be intentionally living as committed disciples of Jesus.¹⁵ We spend time addressing the symptoms of the problem by trying to encourage people to act like disciples. Consider financial giving and community service, for example. We try announcements, then encouragement, and then low-grade extortion in the form of "required" service hours. Consider civic involvement. We urge people to vote with a Catholic conscience. We challenge people to be a light in the larger community, yet the influence of faith continues to diminish in our culture. Consider evangelization. We tell people to share their faith. We ask them to share their faith with children, family, friends, and neighbors, but our congregations continue to shrink.

¹⁵ Excerpts from *Forming Intentional Disciples* © Sherry Weddell, 2012. Published by OSV. Used by permission.

All of this encouragement is good, but it is ignored by those who are not intentional disciples. Intentional disciples already want to live like disciples. They may still need encouragement, but the fundamental disposition is already there.

A clear path of discipleship gives your parish a way to make disciples within your parish. Becoming a disciple is a life-changing experience, especially for those who have been a part of a Christian community for many years but have never quite fully decided for Christ. Imagine the power if more of your parishioners were to experience the life, hope, peace, and joy of a life of discipleship. When they do, what was once sterile comes to life.

A clear path connects non-believers with your parish.

A clear path allows your parish to meet non-believers where they are in their faith journey. It enables your parish to fruitfully engage with those who are apathetic, atheists, spiritual seekers, fallen away Catholics, and anyone else you might encounter. It provides a spiritual on-ramp for everyone, no matter where they are in their spiritual journey. We often talk about the need to meet people where they are. A clear path of discipleship helps your parish do exactly that.

New people coming into your parish add life and vitality, especially when they are experiencing the power of the gospel for the first time. There is something special about the excitement new members bring that helps remind everyone of the gift of faith. Imagine what dozens of new disciples would do to revitalize your parish.

A clear path helps people take ownership of their spiritual growth.

We can easily feel overwhelmed by the number of options for participation in our parishes. People do not need any help being busy. Sometimes when people join a parish, they receive a giant parish ministry guidebook with a list of dozens of ministries. Although well meaning, so many choices paralyze people, preventing them from taking action. You have

probably experienced this kind of “choice paralysis” flipping through the endless movie options online. It is hard to decide with so many options. People wonder, “What is the right next step for me?” It may be counterintuitive, but narrowing the options with a clear path gives people greater freedom to act.

People who want to grow need a few clearly designated next steps to take ownership of their journey. Imagine how people who take ownership of their spiritual growth would change your parish culture. When people know their next steps, they can show initiative rather than acting like passive and demanding customers. A clear path helps everyone know and own their next step on the journey.

A clear path matures disciples.

Mature disciples not only function as disciples by serving and sharing their faith, but they do so with wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no substitute for mature, well-formed leaders, who have been equipped for evangelization. Imagine a pastoral council that combines a love for the parish, experience in professional life, *and* the gift of wise supernatural counsel. Imagine disciples who serve with discernment flowing from the fruit of prayer. That kind of counsel and discernment only comes from mature disciples, and that maturity must be cultivated. A clear path matures disciples in prayer and equips them for fruitful evangelization. The Synod of Bishops in 2011 wrote it this way: “People are able to evangelize only when they have been evangelized...renewed spiritually through a personal encounter and lived communion with Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ Many disciples are hungering for formation in evangelization. A commitment to provide support for growth and maturity will draw disciples hungry for more to your parish community.

¹⁶ *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops’ XIII Ordinary General Assembly, February 2011, #22. © Dicastero per la Comunicazione-Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

A clear path fosters true collaboration.

Evangelization is a team sport. The Spirit gives many different gifts and talents. Imagine all the gifts and charisms of the Spirit working in harmony to make disciples. It is like a sports team with everyone in his or her right position. Each ministry and every person will play a distinct role in that process. When a parish has articulated a clear path of discipleship, all ministries can unify around the common mission of making disciples. With a clear path, they can all consciously and cooperatively work for the same goal. For example, people with the charisms of mercy and healing would play a key role in connecting with non-believers. Once they have built relationships with non-believers, they can introduce them to disciples with the charisma of evangelization. These disciples would assist with the parish's efforts to foster encounter and conversion.

Once people have responded to the gospel and become disciples, they need formation to live as disciples. At that point, they would benefit from people with the charisms of teaching and pastoring. Once those disciples are ready to personally answer the call to mission, they need mature disciples with charisms of encouragement and wisdom to help equip and launch them into their personal mission as missionary disciples.

One of the greatest obstacles to evangelization today is that even those who recognize evangelization as an essential mission of the Church often think it is someone else's job. Now there are many reasons people do not take personal responsibility for evangelization, but I believe one of the main reasons is an overly narrow concept of evangelization. A clear path provides a full and broad concept of evangelization. With the full process of evangelization in mind, everyone can find a role that fits them and their unique gifts. Just like a good football team, your parish team has room for linemen, receivers, quarterbacks, and yes, even kickers.

Part III

A Clear Path Case Study St. Mary's "Highway to Heaven"



Paul had grown up in the St. Mary's neighborhood. He moved away for college but returned to the parish to be close to family. While he was at college, Paul had a profound encounter with the Lord. He became deeply involved at the Newman Center, the university's student parish. He briefly thought about serving as a missionary after college but never felt a call to full-time missionary work. Following the first meeting with Father Dave and the team, Paul felt called to reach out to men who were not practicing their faith.

Paul was no theologian, but he recognized most men would find going from non-practicing to regular Sunday Mass attendance too big a step. He had tried connecting with other men after Mass, but few people lingered, and the parking lot emptied quickly. Besides, those were the men already coming. His concern was for men who were not setting foot in the church. He had a recurring idea about starting a men's softball team as a place to connect with men from work, but he kept dismissing it...until the ministry mapping night.

On the way home from the ministry mapping, Paul and Anna had an unusual conversation. "Paul, I think Jesus wants you to get a team together and play softball this summer," Anna said. Paul gave a little snorting laugh.

"I think so too. Do you think Jesus will improve my batting average?" he asked.

"I doubt it," Anna replied with a smile.

Paul and Anna both knew a sports outreach could bring men to the parish because they saw it happen in college. The Newman Center used basketball with great effect. They saw countless men, who at first seemed to have no interest in faith, eventually become outstanding Christians and even missionaries. For many of those men, the journey started with basketball games on the quad between the freshman dorms.

Paul hoped softball could do the same thing, especially for his old friend Bill. Bill had been on Paul's mind the whole time the leadership team at St. Mary's talked about the thresholds. Bill and Paul had been friends in grade school but lost touch in high school and college. They had recently reconnected at work, but Bill seemed to have no interest in his faith. He was not hostile about it. He just seemed to be outside with no way back.

Bill had mostly fond memories of growing up Catholic. Bill was not a great student then. He did well enough, learning what he needed to progress from grade to grade. He still remembered those infamous questions in religion class. Bill's youthful eagerness to participate rarely delivered the right answer. Most of the time, he felt like he had struck out with everybody watching.

That was in stark contrast to Bill's success on the athletic field. Bill was good at sports, especially baseball. He missed sports, but it was not the reason he signed up for Paul's softball team. Bill was not at church to see the softball advertisement, but his wife Lori was there. She brought the flyer home. She encouraged Bill to give it a shot, secretly hoping softball with the guys from church might somehow be an avenue for Bill to rekindle his faith. Unknown to Lori, Bill had heard about the softball team on social media and from the guys at work. Bill had already decided to sign up when Paul invited him at one of the company gatherings.

The season went well, not so much on the field, but in the dugout and while grabbing a drink after the games. Paul made a point to connect with Bill. Sunflower seeds did the trick. Before long they were just two guys playing softball, but Bill immediately noticed there was something different about Paul.

Bill was always a little distracted by his performance athletically. Having played in high school and junior college, Bill had unreasonable expectations for his 40-year-old body.

Paul, on the other hand, seemed remarkably free. He was competitive and wanted to win, but he never let a bad call or a mistake ruin his fun.

Bill also noticed Paul seemed genuinely interested in him and his teammates. Paul remembered what they talked about the week before, and he asked questions about Bill's family beyond the superficial "bro talk" Bill had come to expect from most of his other friendships.

St. Mary's Discernment Phase

The discernment phase of building a clear path of discipleship is about developing a blueprint for the future programs that will make up the clear path. (See Chapter 7 beginning on page 106.)

Assessing the ministries went well, so Father Dave and the team had some confidence moving forward in building a clear path. They began the difficult challenge of discerning what their clear path of discipleship should look like. They had some good ministries, but they also had big gaps. They knew not every ministry would be part of their clear path. Real discernment was going to be necessary to develop their clear path.

Father Dave was determined to enter the discernment process as deeply as possible. He had been burned too many times by the work of well-meaning committees that added a long list of to-dos to his plate. He was confident the Lord wanted them to do something new. He was also confident he only had the time to do what the Lord was really asking.

By chance, Father Dave stumbled across a method for discernment while talking to Tim, an old friend from seminary. Tim joined a religious order rather than serving in a diocese. As part of his religious vows, Tim received the name Father Ambrose. Father Dave arranged his vacation so he could stop at the monastery to visit his old friend.

As they talked, Father Dave shared his concerns about the process he was undertaking at St. Mary's to build a clear path

of discipleship. It took about an hour, but with the help of his friend's gentle questions, Father Dave finally figured out what was really bothering him.

"Tim, I mean Ambrose, I think what I really want is a simple way to invite my people to discern with me," Father Dave said. "Most of them would get lost in the language we learned in seminary about discernment. They know how to pray, but they are not theologians. I am confident they hear God's voice, but I do not know how to guide them through the process as a group."

"It sounds like you need something that's both familiar and communal," said Father Ambrose with a smile. He proceeded to share the process he used to discern entering the monastery. "I just went to our mother, Mary, in the Rosary, only I did not meditate on the mysteries. I meditated on the questions in my heart. I brought her specific questions and prayed each decade with one of my questions. I listened as I prayed. The familiar repetition of the Rosary helped me quiet my mind so I could hear what the Lord was saying in response to my questions."

Father Dave knew this was the answer to his dilemma. St. Mary's parishioners had a strong devotion to Mary. Father Dave had done his best to deepen and cultivate it right from the start. It seemed fitting to use the familiar prayer of the Rosary to help his leaders join him in discernment about building a clear path. Everyone loved it. They prayed the "Discernment Rosary" with Father Dave on four separate nights and even committed to prepare with a simple fast, like the one observed on Ash Wednesday.

When they were finished, Father Dave and the team had a plan for what their clear path of discipleship would look like. It was a blueprint that would guide their efforts to build a clear path. At least it was a start.

HOW DO YOU MAKE DISCIPLES IN A PARISH?

A Clear Path: How to Make Missionary Disciples in Your Parish is a practical and tangible answer to this question. Inside this book you will find a vision for a clear path of discipleship along with a step-by-step guide for building it.

Author Jim Jansen brings these concepts to life through the story of one parish's journey to build a clear path and to change lives with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

With discussion questions at the end of each chapter, this book is a must read for clergy, parish staff, volunteers, and anyone who is passionate about renewing their parish from the inside out.

“Creating a clear path for making disciples is a game changer for us as pastors. Jim’s book is the perfect tool to help you and your team grow in your focus and impact. I highly recommend *A Clear Path* to parish leaders.”

Fr. James Mallon

PARISH PRIEST AND FOUNDER, DIVINE RENOVATION

“Clear, concise, and compelling, Jim Jansen provides a pathway for making missionary disciples at your parish that is accessible, practical, and transferable to your unique parish situation. This book includes reflection questions, sample diagrams, and documents that you can use in your ministry today.”

Julianne Stanz

DIRECTOR OF EVANGELIZATION AND DISCIPLESHIP
DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

Jim Jansen is a coach and consultant with decades of experience in evangelization and parish renewal. As one of the first FOCUS missionaries, Jim specializes in the process of making disciples. He now works for the Archdiocese of Omaha leading a team dedicated to supporting parishes as they rediscover their missionary identity.



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