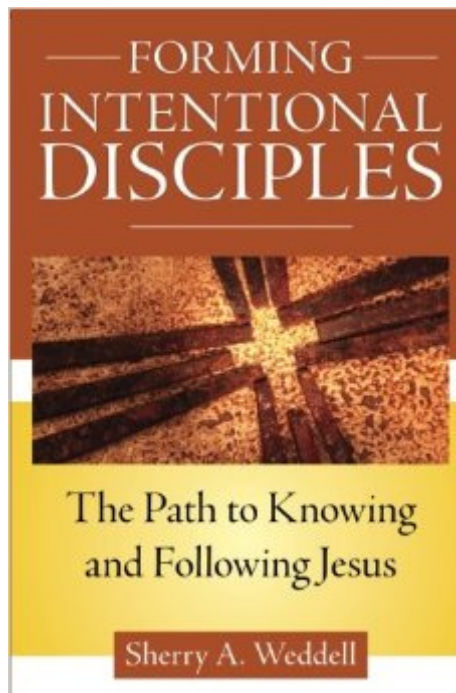


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Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path To Knowing And Following Jesus



Synopsis

How can we transmit a living, personal Catholic faith to future generations? By coming to know Jesus Christ, and following him as his disciples. These are times of immense challenge and immense opportunity for the Catholic Church. Consider these statistics for the United States. Only 30 percent of Americans who were raised Catholic are still practicing. Fully 10 percent of all adults in America are ex-Catholics. The number of marriages celebrated in the Church decreased dramatically, by nearly 60 percent, between 1972 and 2010. Only 60 percent of Catholics believe in a personal God. If the Church is to reverse these trends, the evangelizers must first be evangelized—in other words, Catholics-in-the-pew must make a conscious choice to know and follow Jesus before they can draw others to him. This work of discipleship lies at the heart of *Forming Intentional Disciples*, a book designed to help Church leaders, parish staff and all Catholics transform parish life from within. Drawing upon her fifteen years of experience with the Catherine of Siena Institute, Sherry Weddell leads readers through steps that will help Catholics enter more deeply into a relationship with God and the river of apostolic creativity, charisms, and vocation that flow from that relationship for the sake of the Church and the world. Learn about the five thresholds of postmodern conversion, how to open a conversation about faith and belief, how to ask thought-provoking questions and establish an atmosphere of trust, when to tell the Great Story of Jesus, how to help someone respond to God's call to intentional discipleship, and much more. And be prepared for conversion because when life at the parish level changes, the life of the whole Church will change.

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Customer Reviews

Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus by Sherry Weddell is the most important book I've read this year. That is not exaggeration or hyperbole, but a testament to the research, experience, and insight Weddell brings to the question of evangelization and catechesis in the Church today. Weddell's book is a synthesis of every deep conversation about catechesis and evangelization I've had with my local and national colleagues for the past four years. Weddell begins with a review of the data that should be familiar to all of us: decreasing Mass attendance, Catholics leaving the Church for Protestant communities, and a general "disengagement" from the life of the parish by many of the faithful. But she doesn't just leave us with cold, hard facts. Thanks to her work with parishes across the country Weddell is also able to weave compelling anecdotes that put a human face on the crisis. Most surprising to me were the number of people who have left the Catholic Church not because they were failing to moving closer to Christ but because, as they more fully embraced their call to discipleship, they had no one in their parishes to support them or who understood the sudden fire that had been lit in them. That the Church is losing both unengaged and highly motivated members -- leaking from both ends, as it were -- should alarm all of us. Weddell's overarching question in reviewing the data and stories is this: How many of our parishioners are truly disciples of Jesus Christ? How many are committed to living a life of faith in an intentional way? Her answer, based on conversations with pastors and parish staff across the country, is that about 5% of Catholics can be described as "intentional disciples." This is shockingly low.

Sherry Weddell has written an important book, which should be read by everyone in pastoral ministry. She truly understands that Christianity is about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that too many people in the "official" Church do not seem to understand this. Please read the numerous 5-star reviews to see the many positive aspects of this book. My review will take those other reviews as a given. Bearing that in mind, here are my problems. 1) Weddell uses a series of "thresholds" which tend to make judgements on a person's spiritual life. Although having such a list is good on a practical level as a shorthand when in professional ministry, these thresholds seem to be given too much concrete value. It can also lead to the awkward situation of a serious Christian sub-consciously (or consciously) of putting all of their friends and acquaintances into lists (e.g. Timmy and Suzy are Seekers, Bob is Open, and Jim is Curious). All the while, the person is comfortably listing themselves as a disciple. Yet maybe Timmy the Seeker just seems like a Seeker, and is actually a Disciple, etc. 2) The book seems to de-emphasize the Sacraments. Yes, it

talks about how wonderful they are, but the author openly disparages the argument of "letting the Sacraments work". Although we must avoid a magical view of Sacraments, and must not deny the need for a personal relationship with Christ, including a strong prayer life, sometimes we need to remember to let the Sacraments work.³) Her system does not seem to account for those disciples are seriously affected by sin. Those who truly love Jesus, but seem to love drink or women or money just a little bit more; those who struggle with themselves, but also struggle with Our Lord.

The drama of our times, according to the Second Vatican Council, is the dichotomy between faith and life. This dichotomy is now a full-blown crisis in the Catholic Church. When only 60% of Catholics believe in a personal God, is it any surprise that ex-Catholics if gathered together would comprise the third largest "denomination" in the United States? Many ex-Catholics who move to another church complain that their spiritual needs were not being met in the Catholic Church. We MUST try to understand how this can be! Through years of pastoral experience with thousands of Catholics in parish leadership, Sherry Weddell has correctly identified the reality: too many baptized Catholics never become true disciples of Jesus Christ. They may attend Mass regularly, and may even be leaders in the parish, but too many do not know what it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, at the grass roots level in many parishes, it wouldn't be regarded as "normal" for a Catholic to speak in this way--to claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus sounds foreign, even "protestant". But "cultural Catholicism" (or the so-called "Catholic identity") is no longer a compelling reason to remain in the Church. The new generation longs for authenticity and integrity. Thankfully, Sherry Weddell brings the good news that what they long for is not only possible, but necessary for every Catholic: a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Weddell's theme resonates deeply with the direction that Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have established in the New Evangelization. A personal relationship with Christ is essential to a living faith, and the renewal of the Church.

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