How to Talk with Young People About God!

Bob McCarty
bobm@nfcym.org
www.nfcym.org

Objectives:
Rationale: Pedagogy of God
Methodology: Life to Faith to Life
Dimensions of a Ministry Map

• There is a God who created the universe
• This God wants to communicate with us
• This God does communicate with us through human events and inspired words (scripture)
  (Pedagogy of God, GDC 38)
• We often miss God’s self communication

Basic Presuppositions

We are experience rich and language poor.

And for young people ... 

• 1 in 3 teenagers report a significant, personal experience of God by age 16.
  (Gallup)
• But .... do they have a language to talk about, reflect on that experience?
• Do they have a faith community that assists them in integrating that experience into their lives and world view?

What is the “language” of young people?
Underlying assumptions

- God is mystery... beyond words... incomprehensible
- No expression of God can be taken literally, so we use
  - Analogy (similar qualities)
  - Metaphor (like or as)
  - Symbol (images, rituals, concepts that point beyond)
- We need to give God “many names”
  - No one ‘name’ can contain God
  - “Poverty of vocabulary”, “If you have understood, it is not God” Aquinas

So ...

- As Christians, we believe that God does not remain aloof, rather God engages the world with meaningful love, bringing the mystery near.
- Incarnation: “Jesus Christ is God, spelling himself (sic) out in a language we can understand.” Meister Eckert

How to Teach: Not only to teach Jesus and what he taught, but how he taught?
- A bit naive in our time and place. But...
- Our approach should be consistent with that of Jesus’ public ministry

Catechists and parents are challenged to imitate “the pedagogy of Jesus Christ” (GDC #140)

Jesus described as “teacher” and as “teaching” 150 times.

Focusing on Jesus’ pedagogy as evident in explicit events, esp. the parables, his overall dynamic was to lead people from life to Faith to life

He did so by:
- Engaging ordinary and everyday of people’s lives; fishing, farming, home
- To reflect on their reality, to question, often to “see” in whole new way
- Taught Gospel with authority (Mk1:22)
- Encouraged people to see for themselves, with personal conviction
- Invited to decision – to follow his “way” as disciples

- Invite people to share their own story and vision (Life)
- Share with them the Story and Vision of the Faith community (Life to Faith)
- Bring them to see for themselves and to personally embrace Christian Faith (Faith to Life)
**Dual Goals:** Mature Adult Disciples

- **Personal:** Individual faith identity
- **Communal:** Corporate identity as a Catholic Christian

**Dual Roles:**
- **Midwife:** enable young people to give birth to their personal and individual faith identity. (their own words)
- **Adoption Agency:** enable young people to take on for themselves the wisdom, values, lifestyle, beliefs of the Catholic Christian community. (the faith community’s words)

---

**Faith Identity – First Name**

**Personal**
- Who I am in my uniqueness?
- Sense of self, individuality

**Faith**
- The “I” of the believer
- Sense of a personal call by God
- Personal relationship with God

---

**Faith Identity – Last Name**

**Personal**
- Communal identity – my family name
- Family history, celebrations, rituals, stories (traditions)
- Belonging – connection with others

**Faith**
- Communal faith identity
- History, celebrations, rituals, stories (Tradition)
- Levels of belonging - religion

---

**Methodology:** LIFE

- Jesus asked questions ... and listened to answers
- On a scale of 1 to 10 ...
  - How’s your prayer life?
  - How’s your relationship with God?
  - How important is faith to you?
  - How important is your parish to you?

---

**The Road to Emmaus**

He walked with them; heard their traumatic story and shattered vision; retold the Story and Vision of faith community; waited for them to “see for themselves”; they returned to deepened faith.

(Lk 24: 13-35)

Life to Faith to Life

---

**Methodology:** LIFE

Analogy ... similar qualities
- What images of God do you remember?
- Creation as a work of art ... God as Artist
- Genesis: Created good ... we participate in the overflowing goodness, truth, and beauty of the One who made it.
Methodology: LIFE

• Metaphor ... two disparate realities in a strange association ... “like” and “as”
• My faith is more like:
  – a pillow... a rock
  – planting a garden ... mining for gold
  – climbing a mountain... snowboarding
  – a question ... an answer

Methodology:
LIFE

• Metaphor: Jesus is more like ...
  – near me... far from me
  – a cheerleader... a coach
  – a friend... a teacher
  – knows suffering... brings peace
  – divine... human

Methodology:
LIFE

• Metaphor:
  God (prayer, faith ...) is like __________
  because ____________________.
• The kingdom of God is like ...

Methodology:
Life to FAITH

• Symbol
  – images, gestures, rituals that point beyond themselves to something else ... a deeper reality
• Sacramentality
  – We are Catholic – we ‘see’ the world differently!

Methodology:
Life to Faith

To be Catholic is social
  – We are communal – People of God
  – Catholic identity is connected with the community – Eucharist as Source and Summit
  – Catholic imagination ... Catholic world view

Methodology:
Life to Faith

To be Catholic is holistic
  – Head, Heart, and Hands
  – Life to Faith to Life
  – Apprenticeship to the community
  – Engaging the world
  – Passing on the faith includes passing on the community

Bob McCarty, bobm@nfcym.org,
@BobNFCYM
Methodology: Life to Faith to LIFE

- How do I live out this call to discipleship?
- What is the role of the faith community in this process?

Dimensions of a Ministry Map

Comprehensive approach
- vertical and horizontal spirituality
- head, heart, and hands = know, love, and serve God

Comprehensive Ministry

Discipleship

Home

Faith Formation

Religious Education

Dimensions of a Ministry Map

The Call to Discipleship
Skills for living as a faith-filled person (apprenticeship)

Faith Skills

Deepen our relationship with God
- How to pray
- How to use scripture
- Recognize God’s Presence
- Keep the Sabbath
Faith Skills
To participate in the faith community
- Participate in Mass and prayer experiences
- Make and keep commitments
- Appreciate the Tradition
- Provide welcome and hospitality

Faith Skills
To live as disciples of Jesus
- Make moral decisions
- Practice forgiveness
- Reach out in service and compassion
- Critical reflection/critique societal values

Dimensions of a Ministry Map
Small faith communities
e.g. Faith Sharing, Scripture, Disciples

Dimensions of the Ministry Map
Collaboration
- begins with a shared understanding about the mission of the Church
- between all pastoral ministries
- a partnership between pastoral leaders and parents

Serving those who serve the young Catholic Church

Bob McCarty, bobm@nfcym.org,
@BobNFCYM