

Becoming Intentional Disciples -

Sherry Weddell reports that when she and her team asked hundreds of diocesan and parish leaders from 60 dioceses throughout the English-speaking world, "What percent of your parishioners, would you estimate, are intentional disciples?" the consistent answer was "5%". This should make us ask ourselves: How can we work to create an environment that is conducive to the growth of personal faith and discipleship?

How can every single parishioner truly follow Christ more closely and live as He asks us to live? One big help is to talk more openly and sincerely about our lived relationship with the Lord. Sherry Weddell writes: "The Catholic norm of silence about a relationship with God, about Jesus Christ and His story, about our own stories of following Christ, and about the need for everyone to decide whether or not he or she will follow as a disciple is stifling the emergence of a culture of discipleship and all that flows from it.

One of the most powerful ways to challenge the silence is by making a safe place for others to talk about their own lived relationship with God." We could all make the concrete step of inviting people we know to talk about their lived relationship with God. We should listen prayerfully, seeking to learn what their journey has been like. If we take the time to first learn where people have been and where they are now, we can much more effectively encourage them on the journey to intentional discipleship.

Our RCIA programme at St Boniface has been beautiful, because it is a wonderful setting for individuals to explore their relationship with God and to get to know the beauty of our Catholic faith. But this also happens in our sacramental preparation programmes. We are hoping soon to do this through adult faith formation. Have you ever considered asking a person you meet:

Can you describe your relationship with God to this point in your life? Can you tell me the story of your relationship with God so far? We need to learn to listen to the wonderful ways God is at work in those around us. If we meet someone who describes himself or herself as "atheist", we could ask: What do you mean by "atheist"?

Tell me about the God you don't believe in. We could also ask: Have you ever believed in God? If so, why did you stop? Do you ever pray? If so, how? What gives meaning to your life? Could you ever imagine believing in God? If so, what would that God be like? In all of this we are listening for what the Church calls the "seeds of the Word". We trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the heart of every person through the seeds of the Word.

The Holy Spirit is at the very source of every person's existential and religious questioning. These seeds are a preparation for the Gospel. Another good question is: If you could ask God one question that you knew he would answer right away, what would it be? Such a conversation can often open up the door to sharing the Great Story of Jesus that awakens initial Christian faith and discipleship.