

The Present Journey of the Archdiocese

The implementation of the resolutions of the recently-completed Synod will provide a practical test for the people of the Archdiocese. It will help them discern where they find themselves on the conversion/discipleship scale.

In a sense, the Synod was a peak experience in which, once the people arrived, they participated with energy. Implementation will be a conversion/discipleship experience – much longer and complicated, much more demanding. It will require the participation of the majority of and *all* categories of the Archdiocesan community.

The Archdiocese needs your participation to implement the Synod and build up the Church.

Find more about the Synod at www.rcpos.org

Points for Examination from the Heart

What do you understand by the apostle Paul saying we “were baptised into his [Christ’s] death” to rise with him and “live in newness of life”?

Conversion “is not about denying something or going back, but a reception of something new, a leap forward” (Cantalamesa, R). Discuss.

How do you see yourself ‘following’ and contributing to growth in your family, parish, school, workplace, community? Are there any risks involved?

What are the four steps to communicating the Faith?

For Children

Along with your parent or teacher read the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15: 11–32.

What phrases (a – g) will best complete the sentences below?

a lost and is found. **b** left for a distant country. **c** come to life. **d** killed the calf. **e** go to my father. **f** moved with pity. **g** was out in the fields.

1. The younger son... ____
2. I will leave this place and... ____
3. His father was... ____
4. This son of mine was... ____
5. The elder son... ____
6. Your father has... ____
7. Your brother who was dead has... ____

How is this story a conversion story?

Praying with the Word

Memory Verse:

“Lead us back to you, O Lord, that we may be restored” (Lamentations 5:21).

Towards Transformation

How can members of your community best support one another in achieving **ongoing conversion** and **growth in the Faith**? Write down your suggestions and identify three actions by which you can measure progress or celebrate milestones along the journey.



Called to be
Catholic

**CONVERSION AND
DISCIPLESHIP**

(Adapted from the **Archbishop's Column**, published in the *Catholic News* 22 March 2009)

*conversion
discipleship*

Many years ago, I took part in a retreat for priests. During the first conference, the retreat master asked us:

- 1) whether we had ever had a conversion experience?
- 2) whether we could specify the time of the conversion experience?
- 3) whether ongoing conversion was an operative reality in our lives?

He then explained why, in his opinion, the three questions were important. He stated:

- 1) People who really struggled with discipleship were people who probably never had a conversion experience. As a result, their faith relationship with the Lord was so thin and weak that it could not sustain the day-to-day demands of a relationship with the Lord;
- 2) Those without a conversion experience were frequently still trying to find meaning and peace in life by attempting to combine the sacred with the secular. They had not yet discovered that it was not possible to have it both ways;
- 3) Because people have been making some effort to relate to God, they might be able to function as Catholics during peak experiences. They were unable, however, to sustain their response on a day-to-day basis which is what the spiritual life is really all about;
- 4) The conversion dynamic was more than struggling with human weakness, which we all must do. He suggested that, in many cases, difficulties with perseverance in the process of spiritual growth flow from the lack of a conversion experience to the Lord in a person's life. The absence of a conversion experience blocks authentic discipleship in their lives.

Let us briefly look at conversion and discipleship.

Conversion Experiences

Conversion experiences are not all the same. The dramatic conversion of Paul is a case in point. The conversion of Augustine was just as valid as Paul's but quite different.

People who have been baptised for many years and who have lived on the comfortable edge of their Faith all during that time can have a less dramatic conversion experience than Paul, but one that is very powerful for them. It can lead them to appreciate what Baptism really means and to change their lives significantly.

The Theology of Conversion

Conversion is never automatic. We must co-operate with the invitation from God. Many people do not or possibly cannot co-operate with God's call. For example, there are many people who were baptised but who were never formed in the Faith. Others while they may believe in a generic sense, they almost inevitably become inactive Catholics.

The issue in conversion is not the type of experience itself, but rather what it calls us *from* and what it calls us *to*.

The initiative for conversion comes from God. Our responsibility is to recognise the call, identify the idols in our lives which will block our response, accept the call and surrender to the implications of conversion.

The result of conversion is a transformation of how we think, what we desire and how we act. Through truly converted people, changes occur in family, community and society. People become involved in important issues that their selfish privacy prevented them from becoming involved in before. Most importantly, they nourish their conversion with a lifestyle of ongoing conversion.

Discipleship

Conversion is a condition for faith, discipleship and salvation. Discipleship is a term used to describe the condition of being a follower of Jesus.

Discipleship, first of all, represents a decision to have an encounter with the person of Jesus. Pope Benedict XVI continually stresses this point: Unless we have an encounter with the person of Jesus nothing else will work. Therefore, discipleship is a radical form of love in response to the biblical command to love God with one's whole heart.

How does one encounter Jesus? How do we make Jesus Lord of our lives?

The answer is progressively. To be a disciple we must encounter Jesus by getting to know him better by experiencing his presence and action in our lives. The operative word is "experiencing".

What are the specifics of experiencing an encounter with Jesus?

The answer is getting to know the community of Jesus better by experiencing its faith and living tradition, its symbols and rituals and its mission and ministries. The operative word again is *experiencing*.

As we investigate personally what it means to be a disciple we begin to learn and understand the theology of the community, the pastoral skills of the community and the attitudes fostered by the community along with its values.

The understanding of discipleship described above affects how the content of the Faith is communicated. The context of communicating the content of the Faith becomes fourfold: continually walking with Jesus, learning from Jesus, participating in the mission of Jesus and participating in the community life of Jesus, the Church.