

OUTREACH *to the* UNAFFILIATED

COMMITTEE ON EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS



INTRODUCTION BY BISHOP BARRON



The phenomenon of the rising number of people who are disaffiliating from the Catholic Church—and religion altogether—presents a challenging cultural situation for the Church today. However, as Pope Francis reminds us, “challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor!” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 109).

While our current historical moment represents a crisis in the life of the Church, it is also a beautiful invitation, a *kairos* for us. Perhaps, it is serving as a summons to smart and spiritually alert catechists, evangelists, and witnesses, willing to give their lives to the great task before them.

Identifying who the disaffiliated are and seeking to understand their motivation should be a top priority in the life of the Church.

The Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis has prepared this booklet to

accompany the video resource for bishops in an effort to answer the questions:

- Who are the unaffiliated?
- Why are they leaving?
- How do we get them back?

Transitioning from abstract reflection to evaluation of next steps to address this challenge will depend upon the unique character and culture of each diocese. We recommend that you watch the video together with staff from your pastoral offices and use the following booklet as a discussion guide to create a plan on how to engage this task in your diocese. We encourage you to contact our Secretariat through the channels outlined on the back cover if you are looking for specific resources and models that can be adapted for your needs.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Barron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Robert Barron

WHO ARE THE UNAFFILIATED?

Unaffiliated refers to those who indicate “none” when asked to identify their religious affiliation.*

79% disaffiliate from religion before age 24

26% of the U.S. adult population identify as unaffiliated

6.5 The number of former Catholics for every one convert to the faith

1 in 4 Hispanics is a former Catholic

13 years old

Median age when they stopped identifying as Catholic

26.1 million

Americans who were baptized Catholic are no longer practicing

For Discussion

1. How are we seeing these trends play out in our own dioceses or even our families?
2. Since young people make up a large percentage of the unaffiliated, how must our current methods of evangelization change in order to address this growing trend?
3. At the diocesan and parish levels, who interacts with the unaffiliated? What resources and formation do these individuals need in order to effectively invite the unaffiliated to be disciples of Christ?
4. What groups within the diocese have been successful at reaching the unaffiliated? Which of their methods can be easily adapted for other diocesan ministries?

* Pew Research Center. Faith in Flux, 2009; Pew Research Center; In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace, 2019; Pew Research Center; The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States, 2014; Saint Mary's Press; Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics p. 42, 2017; Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate; Frequently Requested Church Statistics, 2018; Pew Research Center; 7 Facts about American Catholics, 2018.

WHY ARE THEY LEAVING?

- Almost half of the unaffiliated attribute disaffiliation to a lack of belief
- Many consider faith and religion to be incompatible with science and rational thinking
- Relativism and a culture of self-invention often result in objective truth being considered judgmental, oppressive, and intolerant
- For Hispanic Catholics, many did not receive appropriate catechesis, and most simply drifted away

“After my mom died, I was like, ‘No, there’s definitely no God for me.’”

For Discussion

1. What are young people’s questions about the faith that go unanswered?
2. Given that lack of belief is cited as one of the primary reasons for leaving, how do we preemptively teach on these questions and encourage an encounter with Jesus Christ?
3. What other ways can we work to prevent our current flock from disaffiliating?
4. If the foundational belief of God’s existence has been lost, where is the best point of entry in evangelization efforts?

HOW CAN WE GET THEM BACK?

“There is obviously no one answer, no magic bullet; however, a number of ideas emerged from those who have surveyed and work closely with the unaffiliated.”

—Bishop Barron

The video “Outreach to the Unaffiliated” identifies five paths or starting points that reflect what subjects resonate with those who identify as unaffiliated.

1. The Path of Justice
2. The Path of Beauty
3. The Path of New Media
4. The Path of Truth
5. The Path of Parish Transformation

“It’s not that I don’t want to go to church, it’s just that it doesn’t give me anything. I don’t feel different there.”



THE PATH OF JUSTICE

- Emphasize the Church's commitment to justice and the preferential option for the poor
- Take advantage of service opportunities to intentionally invite and engage those on the peripheries
- Build upon young people's instinctive grasp of the importance and value of the Church's work with the hungry, the homeless, the unemployed, and the poor

For Discussion

1. How can focusing on the Church's ministry to the marginalized lead someone to see God's Goodness?
2. How can we enable others to see Christ, the Word Incarnate, prefigured in the "seeds of the Word" in our culture?
3. How can we evangelize people through their thirst for justice, concern for the poor, and care for creation?
4. What do you see replacing religion among the unaffiliated? What need is it fulfilling, and how can we attend to that authentic need?
5. How might we grow in our desire for justice and care for the poor?

**"I do believe
in taking care
of the less
fortunate."**



THE PATH OF BEAUTY

- As this is often the only way to reach the truly disaffiliated, highlight the Church's 2,000-year history of art and vision of beauty
- Use imagery that conveys mystery as an invitation to engage life more deeply
- Cultivate a culture that encourages, discerns, and produces world-class stories, poetry, drama, film, and television

“When I see something beautiful, it fills me with immense joy and peace and calm. I just kind of breathe it all in. . . It’s very calming, it’s very relaxing. It gives me the utmost joy in life.”

For Discussion

1. What do dioceses need to do this (personnel, formation, resources)?
2. If we use the way of beauty as an entry point of encounter with the unaffiliated, where do we go from there? Are we prepared for the next step?
3. How can we create a culture in our parishes that values and utilizes beauty as an entry point to evangelize the unaffiliated as described by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 167?
4. What groups, communities, and individuals would be a resource for our diocese in this endeavor?

THE PATH OF NEW MEDIA

- Encourage all ministries to utilize new media (especially social media) as a tool and entry point into the modern culture and to engage the disaffiliated
- Invest in and revitalize media departments as an indispensable part of our evangelization efforts in conjunction with all ministries and in support of their work
- Proactively capture the many good things that the Catholic Church does and make them visible in a way that can be noticed and appreciated

“Every free second I get, I just pull out my phone and start looking at it and start flipping through things.”

For Discussion

1. Are we fully committed to spreading the Gospel with every resource available to us?
2. How do we use digital media to enhance, not replace, our current methods of evangelization and catechesis?
3. How do we evaluate our current digital presence and look for opportunities to grow in the use of digital technology?
4. How can we create a culture in our parish programs that builds on the various beautiful movies, works of art, and literature available through digital technology?



THE PATH OF TRUTH

“Don’t dumb down the Faith”

- Devote the time it takes to accompany natural inquiry, and build lasting pathways to answers
- Be responsive to and engage worldviews of the culture (often shaped by modern scientific advancements/STEM fields)
- Invest in the formation of those on the front lines: priests, deacons, DREs, youth ministers, catechists, Catholic school teachers, parents, etc.

For Discussion



1. How can we integrate the questions of science with the questions of faith and enable people to see the unity of faith and reason?
2. How do we encourage Catholics to develop a deeper life of prayer as a necessary part of encountering Christ as the center of all reality?
3. How can we expose people to the teachings of the saints and great thinkers of the Catholic tradition in a way that provides insight into all areas of human life?
4. How do we bridge the gap between our faith and everyday life in modern culture?

“As I grew up, science took over, logic took over. There's tradition that complicates this. That tradition has rules which don't allow science to coexist . . . and I think that's where that fine line is with me.”

THE PATH OF PARISH TRANSFORMATION

**“Mission is at once passion for Jesus and passion for his people.”
EG no. 268**

“Transform parishes into mission societies”

- Foster a culture of discipleship not only in our parishes, but also in our schools, ministries, and apostolates
- Prioritize relational evangelization over programmatic evangelization
- Support and equip families to share their faith at home and in the community
- Increase outreach to those in pivotal moments in human development (youth at the age of disaffiliation, college students, before and after marriage, new parents, etc.)
- Explore opportunities for all parishioners to understand their baptismal role in sharing the Gospel and engaging the unaffiliated in their daily life

For Discussion

1. What do we need to stop doing, begin doing, and continue doing in order to make our parishes true missionary societies that reach out to the unaffiliated?
2. What resources are needed for parishes to make this happen and what obstacles need to be removed from our parishes in order to proclaim the faith effectively?
3. Young people are capable of bearing a unique witness to the Gospel: how are we listening to their insights and incorporating them into the life of our parish?



For additional resources and information
about grants available to fund evangelization
efforts in your diocese, please contact:

Secretariat of Evangelization and Catechesis

Phone: 202-541-3032

Email: evangcat@uscbb.org

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