

Welcome to Making Disciples!

Go Make Disciples is not fundamentally about increasing numbers, making new members, or receiving a bigger weekly offering, but about *discipleship*. This is the first and foremost goal to keep in mind about this book. In our day, when worship has expanded out of traditional forms and spaces into many new styles and considerable diversity in order to attract as many people as possible, we are reminded of a startling reality: since the early centuries of the Christian church seekers were invited into the way of Jesus Christ through intentional instruction about the life of faith and the symbols and rituals that could sustain them in a community. It was known as a *catechumenate*.

We might then think about this handbook as providing some guidance into ways that a Christian community might work with seekers today. To those who are looking for a deeper meaning to life, a faith community says, Come and see what we do! Making disciples is about living and sharing the faith through symbols, rituals, and story with those who have either become distanced from a local community of faith or have never really encountered one. It is the first step where we share a story; not just any story, but a story about Jesus. We share that story not just verbally, but through the ways that we live and worship together. Jesus—the incarnate Word of God—literally takes flesh in a congregation of Christian believers. The congregation then offers seekers a way to take part in a story that is often very different from those presented by various contemporary media outlets.

This handbook is for those of us who wish to find help in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through instruction, worship, symbols, and art to people we encounter in our communities. You may be in a congregation that has recently struggled with finding its voice in an established—even ostensibly Christian—neighborhood. Yet all of a sudden you realize that you and others in your congregation don't even know the gospel story that well yourself. It may have been many years since you were in a confirmation class. You may have set out on a path of spiritual renewal within your congregation and have found that you have a story to share in words and deeds with neighbors around you, possibly even with neighbors who never took notice of your congregation in their midst. Perhaps now you are wondering how to invite others into a life of following Jesus Christ.

Or maybe you are in a community where a majority of people have no religious affiliation or history (sometimes called the *none* segment by sociologists). As with many communities of faith in the earliest centuries of the Christian church, you may be a part of a congregation that in its own intensity and seriousness draws

people toward your worship and service to the neighborhood and to the world beyond. You begin catechetical instruction from the very beginning, that is, simply telling the story of Jesus and inviting people into the rich fare that the community of faith offers. And you give these seekers a language: symbols and rituals that can sustain and to which people can cling especially when the going gets rough (and we all know the many bumps life offers us).

These are but two examples, and this handbook is definitely not limited to them. This handbook is intended for all congregations seeking to welcome others into the Christian faith. This handbook is also about helping you as a catechist, pastor, worship leader, musician, educator, sponsor, or other leader in the joyful task of forming other disciples in the body of Christ. Ultimately this handbook is for everyone who has questions about how to live out God's call to baptism and beyond. These questions might range from the simple to the complex. This handbook is for those who wish to respond with generosity to unchurched or uncatechized parents bringing their children for baptism. This handbook is for those who wish they had a clearer approach to the practice of baptism in their congregation. This handbook is for those wishing to deepen the life of faith in their community and for those wishing to live the Christian faith consciously as a form of invitation for all of their diverse neighbors. This handbook is for inviting unbaptized people into faith and for encouraging already baptized people to live out their faith more fully. This handbook is for you!