

## REFLECTIONS ON THE NAAC ALBUQUERQUE GATHERING

Close to sixty participants from all over North America gathered at the Bosque Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico June 28-30 for our annual Gathering. Southwestern hospitality was plentiful, and the gourmet meals we shared, as we met to focus on this year's theme 'Sing a New Song: Unpacking the Mystery of Faith'.

Well-known liturgical composer Marty Haugen wove musical themes throughout our time together, serving both as presenter and musician for our liturgies. Marty's presentation invited parti-



cipants to ponder the place of Art in Liturgy, and the implications of what the use of art might be for the catechumenate. Dan Bene-



dict, author of *Come to the Waters* and long-time NAAC contributor, shared a wonderful overview of the catechumenate process. Many agreed that his presentation would be a great initial introduction to the ministry of the catechumenate for those new to NAAC. Lizette Larson-Miller presented two engaging presen-



tations that explored the meaning of Baptism in our contemporary world, and outlined challenging implications for the church today. One of the unique aspects of our gatherings is our small group process following every plenary

presentation. In small groups of seven or eight, with a facilitator, we process a few questions that relate to the presentation we have just experienced. These consistently are rich moments, and model the very catechumenal process we have gathered for.

Twelve workshops were offered, with various aspects of the catechumenate in mind. Topics varied from 'How to start a catechumenate in your congregation' by Martha Maier to 'The use of the internet in faith formation' by Chris Yaw. One of the unique qualities of this particular Gathering was the participation of more Roman Catholic partners. Of note, was the presence of Nick Wagner and Diana Macalintal from Team RCIA. Nick and Diana, as a husband and wife team, have been catechumenate leaders within the Roman Catholic community for many years. We look forward to our continued relationship and growth of being a truly ecumenical movement that promotes the

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## MAKING DISCIPLES

It's often true that we spend a lot of energy and creativity in inviting people into our congregations, and in creating a welcoming environment for visitors, but once they decide to actually become members and want to know "what's next?", we really don't have many answers for them. The Rev. Carol Anderson, former Rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills, CA, once remarked that church members (especially new members) want to know how to go deeper in their faith, and what the expectations are of being a Christian; the trouble is that we don't have any!

In almost every church I know, preparation for joining the church consist of a few meetings with the clergy and some brief instruction as to the history and customs of The Episcopal Church. What is almost always missing is a chance for some spiritual sharing and discussion about those questions of faith that have brought those folks to the church in the first place. We don't have in place a structure for making disciples, of moving beyond mere membership towards fully formed discipleship.

This past week, at our annual Presbyters' Retreat, your priests and I learned that there is a better way. A group called the North American Association of the Catechumenate has adapted a process from the ancient church to modern needs. In the earliest days of the church, catechumens were people who desired baptism. The word catechumeno means in Greek, to "hear an echo of something," in this case to pass down the teachings of the faith from

one generation to another. Before coming to the font, catechumens underwent an intense period of year-long formation, supported by the rest of the congregation, which culminated with their baptism on Easter Eve.

In the modern catechumenate process, candidates for baptism, parents of children being baptized, and those wishing to reaffirm their vows, participate in a lay-lead process of about 9 months, in which they meet for a meal and study once a week with their sponsors. Recent study has shown that churches that follow such a process form disciples who stay with the church for the long haul, and who assume leadership roles. Indeed, one Lutheran church we heard about went from 30 to 600 members in 15 years.

Key to this approach is helping new Christians understand how God is working in their lives, rather than just teaching them about history, theology, and liturgical practice. This is the model that Jesus' earlier followers used to grow the church--it was all about disciples making disciples.

At our retreat, we had the chance to learn more about this process from two excellent speakers who have used it in their churches for many years. They shared with us moving stories of hearts changed and lives transformed. We got to practice in small groups a different approach to Bible study (where the focus is on relationship with God rather than the meaning of the text). We also experienced first-hand one of the moving liturgies by which candidates are welcomed into the



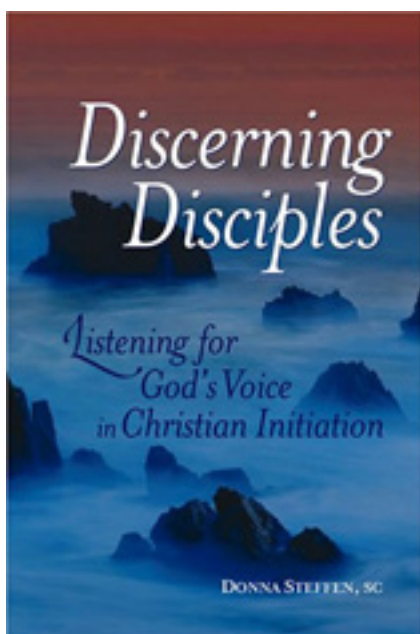
fellowship of the church. I suspect that many of you will be hearing more about this ancient/modern approach to Christian formation in the months ahead. It is adaptable to any size congregation. We hope that by late summer there will be an opportunity, sponsored by the Diocese, to train lay leaders to become such "catechists" in their local congregations.

One thing our leaders invited us all to do was to add to our Prayers of the People each Sunday a prayer that God might send to us those hungry to hear the saving news of Jesus and that we might be ready to welcome them and walk with them on their spiritual journey.

How about your congregation? Are you just signing up new members, or are you making disciples? (Editor's Note: A NAAC Training Event for Introducing the Catechumenate is happening in the Diocese of Arizona later this month.)

*Abridged from an original posting on the website of the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona in April 08, 2016 by The Rt. Rev. Kirk S. Smith, Bishop of Arizona (used with permission)*

## BOOK REVIEW



Steffen, Donna S.C., *Discerning Disciples: Listening for God's Voice in Christian Initiation*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago: 2004.

Donna Steffen, S.C. first became involved in parish Christian initiation ministry in 1981 and five years later completed an internship in spiritual direction. This twofold set of experiences and competencies is reflected here and makes this book an invaluable and, most of all, an accessible resource for anyone attempting to direct the catechumenate as a process and not a program.

It is easy to run a program. Denominational (and educational) publishers have made us experts through the materials that they have provided. Announce the time and place of the first session. Make sign-up sheets available after service, and/or publish an email address. Hand out schedules of readings and activities at the first meeting; the group

dynamics will kick in, and the ball will roll on its own. Good things will happen, and the participants will grow.

To run a process, though, is much more challenging — and messier. Using a process model makes the basis for the catechumenate not so much “head knowledge” or group interaction but much more discernment on the part of the participants and of the director and team. And discernment is an intimate process which is a bit like decision-making and a bit like spiritual direction, but is neither, for it has at its core a waiting upon and listening for God’s voice.

This book therefore provides an overview of the entire catechumenate from first contact through to mystagogy, highlighting the role that discernment might play in each phase. There are also chapters on how to companion an already baptized Christian who is seeking reaffirmation or reception and on how to deal with older children.

Most importantly, its six appendices are truly a treasure trove, providing templates for how to do individual interviews before gathering a group for an opening session and before celebrating each ritual transition point. Perhaps most valuable is Appendix 6 on how to train team members and sponsors in how to practice discerning listening.

Every catechumenate team director and member whom I have spoken with about this book speaks of it most highly. Written at a very accessible level, it is useful

both for interacting with those in a catechumenal process for team development and interaction.

A first word of warning, though: the terminology used throughout is solely Roman Catholic. An additional challenge is that the equivalent terminology differs among the different North American Protestant churches that have resources for the catechumenate. Available online at the NAAC website, though, is Dan Benedict’s extremely useful article, “Terminology—Becoming Bilingual” which surveys all the possibilities.

A second word of warning: the first edition was from Paulist Press in 1996; the second by Liturgy Training Publications in 2004. Especially if you are ordering online, be certain to get the second edition because its resources are much expanded from the original.

Michael Marchal. NAAC Board

***“Donna keeps  
before us  
the understanding  
that  
we are listening  
for God’s action.”***

## ALBUQUERQUE GATHERING

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ministry of the catechumenate in the church.

In short, this year's Gathering continued to be the unique inter-

denominational annual gathering in North America that solely focuses on the ministry of Adult Christian Initiation called the Catechumenate. Be looking for the

announcement for The Gathering 2017!

Larry Ehren  
Vice President, NAAC

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This newsletter is published quarterly. Submissions of stories of Catechumenal practice and resource reviews are welcome, with much gratitude. Of particular interest to our members are sto-

ries about "How to begin a Catechumenate Process in the Parish" or "Dealing with Challenges and Obstacles." If you can contribute a story of personal experience, please send along submissions in

Word format to newsletter editor, Greg Smith at [gsmit@uwo.ca](mailto:gsmit@uwo.ca). Accompanying photos are welcome and should be attached as a separate file. Thank you all.

## NAAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS (JUNE 2016)

(A new Board of Directors was acclaimed at the Annual General Meeting held during the Annual Gathering in Albuquerque 2016. They are listed below for your reference.)

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