

Stella Maris Parish
Parish Pastoral Plan
Be. Grow. Go.

Introduction

“He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.”
(Mark 3:13)

Jesus calls.

Our discipleship journey revolves around three fundamental concepts:

Identity: **Be** disciples

Formation: **Grow** disciples

Evangelization: **Go** spread the Good News

Through intentional pastoral planning and commitment to these discipleship stages, we will become a stronger, mission-oriented Catholic community, forming disciples who transform the world through the love of Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Dunn reminded us in his 2025 Ash Wednesday Pastoral Letter, *“We do not journey alone. We journey together with companions toward a deeper experience of God and our relationship with Him. Our companions can encourage and challenge us to listen attentively to the Lord calling us. Along the way our travelling companions enrich us with new ways of understanding things and fresh perspectives.”*

Be, Grow, and Go

As a parish, we want to engage in a spiritual journey to help ourselves deepen our understanding of our true identity: **Who we are called to be**. From there, we desire to help those who, out of their freedom, have chosen to follow Jesus, to **grow**. Finally, we trust that by deepening in our true identity and growing in our relationship with Jesus, we will be sent to **go on mission** in every aspect of our lives.

Discipleship Journey

Be

This stage focuses on our core identity based on our relationship with Christ. It calls the disciple to **be with Jesus**, to understand who He is, and to embrace their own identity as His followers.

Key Aspects:

- **Intimacy with Christ:** A deep personal relationship with Jesus through prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments.
- **Identity in Christ:** Recognizing oneself as a beloved child of God, shaped by His love and grace.
- **Being Present:** Spending time with the Lord and allowing His presence to transform one's heart and mind.

Biblical Foundation:

- *"As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax-collector station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with Jesus and his disciples." (Matthew 9:9-10)*

Grow

In this stage, disciples are **shaped, trained, and given the opportunity to engage in a life-long journey to be transformed according to the image of Christ**. It involves spiritual formation, growth in character, and learning the skills needed to live the Gospel.

Key Aspects:

- **Learning and Growth:** Through Scripture, Church teachings, and the community of faith, disciples grow in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.
- **Spiritual Disciplines:** Prayer, fasting, acts of service, and the sacraments play a central role in this formation process.
- **Character Development:** Formation involves becoming more like Christ, growing in virtues such as humility, love, patience, and obedience.

Biblical Foundation:

- *As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you have faith that I can do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith, let it be done to you." And their eyes were opened. (Matthew 9:27-30a)*
- *Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. (Luke 10:38-39)*
- *Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." (Matthew 13:36)*

Go

The final stage is about **mission**. It is about living out the Gospel in a free and mature way as witnesses to Christ and His message of salvation. Through the Church, Christ Himself sends His disciples into the world to **evangelize, serve others, and bear witness** to Christ's love.

Key Aspects:

- **Missionary Zeal:** A disciple is called to spread the Gospel in both word and deed, remembering that first of all we are called to be witnesses. Not everyone receives the calling to be a theologian or apologist, but we are all called to live out of the truth, beauty and goodness of the Gospel.
- **Service and Witness:** Living out the teachings of Jesus through acts of love, justice, and mercy, caring for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized.
- **Community and Evangelization:** Working within the Church and the broader community to help others grow in faith.

Biblical Foundation:

- *"And He said to them; go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15)*
- *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)*

Integration of the Three Stages

These stages are not strictly linear; rather, they **overlap and continuously deepen**. As disciples grow in their mission to **Go**, they also return to the stages of **Be** and **Grow** for renewal and deeper formation, making the entire process dynamic, iterative and ongoing.

Pastoral Planning Support Activities

Be:

1. Define parish mission and vision statements, and help all parish ministries and initiatives create a nested mission statement aligning themselves with the mission and vision of the Parish.
2. Establish a *School of Prayer*: One cannot *Be* without *being*. Prayer helps us understand our *being*.

Grow:

1. Establish a *School of the Word*. We must have a living relationship with the Word of God to grow in discipleship.
2. Establish a discipleship community program for the Parish.
3. Establish an accompaniment pathway for vocations of married, religious life or priesthood to understand God's will.
4. Establish a pastoral program to help in the healing process for those who are divorced and wish to be restored to the life of the Church.
5. Develop a process to collect and discern the needs of our parish and the broader community so as to support good decision making by parish leadership.

Go:

1. Develop an evangelistic educational program to equip our parishioners to share our Catholic faith and effectively welcome new disciples.
2. Identify specific areas where God is calling our parish to serve the poor and build teams to meet these needs.
3. Provide pastoral care for seniors who in long term care facilities in our parish.
4. Identify specific areas of need for care and compassion of parishioners and build teams to meet these needs.

The Theological Context: *Redemptoris Missio*

As we reflect on this pastoral plan to **Be, Grow** and **Go** let us consider the following points on discipleship as included in a 1990 encyclical written by Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, which in English means “The Mission of the Redeemer.” We are called to partake in Christ’s mission.

Relationship with Christ: *Be*

A discipleship journey must begin by fostering a personal and transformative encounter with Jesus Christ. St. John Paul II emphasized that discipleship is not merely a set of rules or duties but a living relationship with Christ. He contended that a parish can cultivate this through initiatives like regular Eucharistic adoration, guided Lectio Divina with Scripture, and retreats focused on Christ’s life and love. By encouraging parishioners to know and love Jesus through prayer, reflection, and community, foundations are laid for authentic discipleship, as this intimacy with Christ inspires all other aspects of the Christian life.

Call to Holiness: *Grow*

Central to St. John Paul II’s discipleship plan is the universal call to holiness, where every baptized person is invited to follow Christ and grow in virtue. The parish discipleship journey should emphasize that holiness is not reserved for religious sisters, priests or saints but is the vocation of all. Practical steps could include offering workshops on the virtues, small faith-sharing groups to discuss living out Christian values, and sacramental preparation that highlights personal sanctification. By teaching parishioners that holiness is achievable through daily fidelity to God, the journey empowers them to respond to Christ’s call in their unique circumstances.

Missionary Zeal: Go

St. John Paul II taught that discipleship is inherently missionary, meaning that every follower of Christ is sent to share the Gospel with others. A parish discipleship journey should ignite this zeal by equipping parishioners with tools for evangelization, such as training in apologetics, opportunities for community outreach, and encouragement to witness to their faith in everyday life. Events like parish missions, service projects, or inviting testimonies from active disciples can inspire others to embrace their role as ambassadors of Christ, ensuring the program extends beyond the church walls into the world.

Sacrificial Love

Following Christ, as St. John Paul II stressed, involves embracing the cross with sacrificial love. The discipleship journey can help parishioners understand this by integrating teachings on redemptive suffering and offering support for carrying personal crosses. This might include prayer groups for those facing hardships, reflections on Christ's Passion during Lent, or sessions on uniting daily struggles to Jesus' sacrifice. By framing sacrifice as an act of love rather than mere burden, the parish can guide disciples to imitate Christ's self-giving heart, deepening their commitment to Him.

Eucharistic Centrality

St. John Paul II saw the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life, making it essential to any discipleship journey. Our parish community desires regular participation in Mass, encourages frequent reception of the Eucharist, and provides opportunities for deeper Eucharistic devotion, such as holy hours or catechesis on the Real Presence. By rooting discipleship in the Eucharist, parishioners can draw strength from Christ's living presence, allowing this sacrament to nourish their spiritual growth and sustain their mission as disciples in the world.

Mary as the Perfect Disciple

St. John Paul II often pointed to Mary as the model of discipleship, with her fiat exemplifying obedience and faith. The parish journey can incorporate Marian devotion, through the Rosary, Marian consecration, or reflections on her life, to inspire parishioners to emulate her trust in God. Highlighting Mary's role as both mother and disciple, the journey could offer studies on her Scriptural appearances or celebrate her feast days with special events. By holding up Mary as a guide, the parish helps disciples learn to say "yes" to God's will with humility and courage, as she did.

Conclusion

Our parish's mission is clear: *To **Be** with Christ, **Grow** in Him, and **Go** forth to spread His good news.* Through intentional pastoral planning and commitment to these discipleship stages, we will become a stronger, mission-oriented Catholic community, forming disciples who transform the world through the love of Jesus Christ.