St Thomas More: Where people are accompanied on their journeys through life

Bill Huebsch
Institute for Pastoral Studies
Loyola University of Chicago
You’re already a parish of accompaniment
In many ways, large and small

Marriage prep
Faith formation
Pastoral care
Liturgy and public prayer
Your funeral ministry
Your pastoral “voice”
Your mission

- To BE Christ in this neighborhood

- To treat people as Jesus would
  - The woman caught in adultery (John 8)
  - The walk to Emmaus (Luke 24)
  - Zacchaeus (Luke 19)
  - Matthew (Matthew 9)
  - On the road to Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8)
Back up...

- ...from all things churchy
  - Canon law, doctrine, even Scripture
- Look for **God**

- “Find God in all things”
  - Ignatius of Loyola
Wanna see a picture of God?
God is more than two men and a bird.

God is.

God is a force.

God is the *Force of Love* in the world.
Colossians 1

- [Christ] is the image of the invisible God
- the firstborn of all creation
- in him all things were created—things visible and invisible
- He is the force that holds the universe together.
Let’s look at the Greek...

exousia  
Power to act

dunamis  
Inherent power

εξουσία  
δύναμις

The power of God!
And Mary said to the angel,
"How shall this be, since I have no husband?"

And the angel said to her:
“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and \textit{the power of the Most High} will fill you.”  
Luke 1:34-35a
From Luke…

And Jesus returned

*in the power of the Spirit*

into Galilee

and a report concerning him

went out through all the surrounding country.

Luke 4:14
From Luke...

And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee...

...and all were astonished at his teaching,

for *his word was delivered with great power*.

Luke 4:32
From Luke...

He summoned the twelve
and *gave them power* and authority…
…and he sent them to proclaim the Reign of God
and to heal the sick.

Luke 9:1
This power...

...this force of love
Is God giving God’s own self
To us!
The Name of God

- We call God *Father*...
  - first origin of everything
  - at the same time: loving caregiver

- “God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of *Mother*...”

  *CCC article 239*
“The language of faith draws on the human experience of parents.

But... human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood...

God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman; God is just God.”
God is still speaking

- A tremendous and amazing reality
- God is speaking to us individually
- As well as through scripture & liturgy
  - And the whole ministry of the Church
"God is not remote from us.

He is at the point of my pen, my pick, my paintbrush, my needle —

and my heart and my thoughts."
Karl Rahner SJ

- At Vatican II:
  - God is acting in people’s lives
  - The only thing we can do about that
  - is to help people discern what God is asking of us in this moment
    - Discernment
    - Accompaniment
    - Prayer
Rahner

- This discernment occurs
  - within the church but also outside it

- Many whom God has, the church does not have

- Many whom the church has, God does not have
Discernment

- What is God asking of this person in this particular situation?
  - This doesn’t change church law
  - It doesn’t apply to everyone
  - It’s THIS person and their specific, concrete situation in life
    - Given the mitigating circumstances
    - And the limits they face in life
Pastoral Strategy

- Pope Francis sees accompaniment

- The key strategy
  - In order to help people **discern** God’s voice within their hearts
Pastoral Ministry History

**Jesus**
- Pastoral Ministry:
  - Personal
  - Accompaniment
  - Mercy vs Law

**Early Church**
- Lay ministry
- Personal
- Servant leaders

**The Founding Period**
- Under Constantine
  - Gregory the Great
  - Lateran Councils
  - Council of Trent

**325**
- Church became “legal”
- Clergy raised in rank to civil leaders
- Privilege and power
- Sacramental system for pastoral ministry
- Ministry: the business of the clergy
- Lay people: spectators
- Minimum “obligations” – the threat of Hell

**Today**
- Vatican II:
  - Not only hierarchy
  - The People of God

- Pastoral Ministry
  - Lay & clergy together
  - Return to style of Jesus
  - Conscience returns

- Pope Francis
  - Accompaniment
  - Mercy
What is accompaniment?
Accompaniment

- One Christian helping another to
  - Grow in intimacy with Jesus
  - & love the Church
- Find their way through the muddles which life presents
- Not the sole task of the clergy
  - Lay people have a key role to play
Karl Rahner asked

How does God ordinarily speak to us in prayer?
Deep within our conscience we discover a law which we have not laid upon ourselves but which we must obey.

Its voice, ever calling us to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in our hearts at the right moment....

For we have in our heart a law inscribed by God....

Our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths.
Our Catechism #1785

- In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path,
  - we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice.
- We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross.
- We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
  - aided by the witness or advice of others
  - and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.
An accompanist

- Helps others hear the voice of God as it echoes in the depths of his or her conscience

- With reverence for how God may be leading this person
  - Fully aware of the mysterious ways of God
  - Such accompaniment happens at “God’s speed” (not at our own demanding pace)
Who needs accompaniment?

- Those in irregular marriage situations
  - Who want full communion
- Those seeking a deeper life in Christ
  - Who want the happiness that comes from self-giving love
- Those who are passing through one of life’s difficult moments
  - Who want support and assurance
A deeper look

- What do we teach about who can and who cannot be made welcome?
- What about the really big sinners?
- What about you?
Pause

Let’s look at chapter 8
And was greatly elaborated in **The Joy of Love**

- 9 chapters
- 325 articles long
- Dealing with
  - Family
  - Spirituality in marriage
  - Love in marriage, including sexual loving
  - Pastoral perspectives from many angles
  - Chapter 8
Apostolic Exhortation

- Used by the Popes to express their thoughts on contemporary issues
- No doctrinal or binding character
  - not like an “Apostolic Constitution”
  - or a “Motu proprio”
- More like an extended sermon
Apostolic Exhortation

- The contents are part of the ordinary magisterium of the Church,
  - As such, they call for our assent
Joy of Love #291

- [The Church] turns with love to those who participate in an incomplete manner...
- The Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children
- who show signs of a wounded and troubled love
by restoring in them hope and confidence,
  like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port
  or a torch carried among the people

“...the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital.”
Joy of Love

- Remarriage (JoL 292)
  - Constructive elements of love
  - Even though not up to the ideal

- Civil marriage or cohabitation (JoL 293)
  - Stability and care are present
  - Deep affection and shared children
  - Let us enter into dialogue with these
  - In the hope that they will gradually... (JoL 295)
Joy of Love (JoL 296-299)

- The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone
- But to walk with them
- Avoid judgements that do not take into account mitigating circumstances
- Should not feel excommunicated
When people fail

- Do we cast them off?
- Or work to reinstate them? (JoL 296)
- No one can be condemned forever

- Not only the divorced & remarried
- “But everyone in whatever situation they find themselves” (JoL 297)
The logic of integration

- They belong to us
- Because they belong to Christ
- ...not excommunicated (JoL 299)

What is needed is discernment of how God is speaking in their consciences. (JoL 300)
...direct the pastors of the Church to undertake discernment of each case,

the degree of responsibility is not the same in all cases

and, therefore, the rules may be applied differently

We must accompany each person...
Situations

- 2nd union consolidated over time
- Tried to save 1st marriage but were abandoned
- Enter the 2nd marriage for the kids
- Subjectively certain in conscience that the 1st marriage was not valid
- Violence, abuse, drugs, addiction
Many situations...

- If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations such as those I have mentioned...

- **No new set of rules**

- that would adequately apply to all cases

- is possible...
  - #300
What is possible (JoL 300)

- ...is a process of accompaniment and discernment
- which guides the faithful
- to an awareness of their situation before God.”
Church teaching...

- The Church has a very strong reason for teaching what it does about divorce
  - The New Testament teaches about it
  - It is in continuity with our history
  - It calls for self-giving, Paschal Mystery love

- And yet, a couple could discern that they are meeting these demands, even when a divorce or 2nd marriage results
Mitigating circumstances

- The Church has a solid body of reflection that helps us understand mitigating circumstances.
- ...we can no longer say, simply, that any person in an irregular situation is in a state of mortal sin or is deprived of sanctifying grace.
Mitigating circumstances

- Ignorance
- Inadvertence
- Duress
- Fear
- Habit
- Inordinate attachments
- Psychological or Social factors. CCC 1735

- Affective immaturity
- Force of habit
- Conditions of anxiety
- Other factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability. CCC 2352
A person can come to see that a particular decision is in line with “what God himself is asking” amid the concrete complexity of one’s specific situation while yet not fully the objective ideal.
Marriage

Joy of the Love #37

- We have stressed
  - Doctrine
  - Bioethics
  - Moral issues

- But not grace
  - Marriage as a dynamic pathway to personal development and fulfillment
  - Where is God leading you in this marriage?
Marriage

- We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful,
- who very often respond as best they can... and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations.
- We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.
  - Joy of Love #37
"Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits,"

It’s usually not black and white
Don’t close off the way of grace
Don’t throw stones #305

- For this reason, no pastor should ever believe that it is enough to simply apply a moral law to people in irregular situations without regard to conscience,
- *as though throwing stones at people’s lives.*
- “This shows the closed heart of one hiding behind Church teachings.”
Because of mitigating factors,
it is possible that in an objective situation of sin
a person may not be subjectively guilty;
this person can be living in God’s grace,
can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity,
while receiving the Church’s help to this end.
In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments.

Hence, “I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy” JoG 44.

I would also point out that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” JoG 47.
Canon 915

“Those... who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin,

are not to be admitted to holy communion.”
Canon 912

- If there is no mortal sin:
- “Any baptized person who is not forbidden by law
- may and must be admitted to holy communion.”
“I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion.

But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness,
Rhetorical style

- Francis wants to reach hearts and souls
- He wants to influence them
- Very much like the Fathers of the Church
- This began at Vatican II
- And Pope Francis is continuing it now
- He is raising up the ideal of Catholic life
- Knowing not everyone is able to live it
Rhetorical style

- So he isn’t laying out laws to follow
- But ideals to be lived up to
  - Gradually
  - As one is able
  - Given one’s limits
  - And the circumstances of one’s life

- Reality is more important than ideas
Jesus accompanied Matthew

- Jesus called Matthew
- Jesus looked on that man with mercy

#8 in *The Face of Mercy*

- Pope Francis’ motto:
  - *Miserando atque Eligendo*
  - I hold nothing against you and I choose you
What can you as a parish do with this?
How to expand this

- Usually a parish would
  - Study current pastoral theology
    - Maybe 2-3 months
    - Reading & study groups
  - Make a decision as a parish
    - To embrace accompaniment more fully
    - A public, well-understood decision
  - Do some planning about how each part of the parish will pick this up

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For our parishioners

- Every parish priest
- Your paid and volunteer team
  - Formation, pastoral care, liturgy
  - Communications, welcoming, facilities
- Spouses for each other
  - Within the home
- A community of accompanists
Don’t fear

- Each case is about *a person before God*
- You are not changing church teaching because you offer a particular bit of mercy
- **Your address is to each person**
  - Not to the rest of the church
  - Each person is your subject
  - *What is God asking of her or him in this situation?*
  - *How can you help him or her discern that?*
We accompanying folks...

- People discerning their primary relationships
- Pastoral care situations
  - Illness, dying, sadness, loss, change
- Faith formation
  - Young couples with kids
- As a whole parish
  - Especially in liturgy
We accompany

- Parents accompany their kids
- Children accompany older parents
- Spouses with one another
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Fellow parishioners at STM
Accompaniment

- A way of walking with one another
- That leads to a more genuine faith
  - Living what we believe:
    - Forgiveness
    - A way to manage our wealth
    - How we treat the immigrant and refugee
    - Shared meals and intimate conversation
    - The presence of the Lord in our midst
    - Hearing God’s voice echo in our souls
How is accompaniment done?
What is the method?

6 steps
In short:

- You sit down with someone
- And walk then through theological reflection & discernment

Theological Reflection:

- Seeking to hear what God may be asking of us in a given situation
Quick look at the 6 steps

1) Make yourself available
2) Invite the seeker to tell their story
3) Listen carefully
4) Inquire and nudge just a little
5) Help them discern what God is asking of them
6) Help them reach a decision
The 1st Step

- Make yourself available
- Let it be widely known that all are welcome
  - That no one will be judged or punished
  - That each one’s story is valuable
- Become known as the place where people are safe to talk
The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Step

- Someone (the seeker)
- Comes to see you (the accompanist)
  - In the school or among the parents
  - Formal or informal
- Invite them to tell their story
  - Listen with “the ears of God”
  - Clarify only a little
  - Don’t interfere with their story

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The 3rd Step

- Listen
- Don’t judge them
  - Or at least temper your judgments
- Don’t throw verses of Scripture at them
- Don’t quote the *Catechism*

*Let them talk*
As an accompanist

- God is working in this person’s life
- It’s a mystery
- Learn to trust that
- And even to remove your sandals in reverence

- This takes us to the 4th step
The 4th Step

- The Art of Sacred Inquiry
- Gently nudge
  - with open questions
  - help the seeker clarify his or her heart
- Don’t be intrusive
- And allow for God’s time
  - This may take many weeks or longer
In the back of your mind

- Keep in mind as you listen
- Three sources of wisdom
  - The stories from Scripture
  - Church teaching
  - The culture of this person
    - and the “signs of the times”
Jesus

- Keep in mind the stories and teachings of Jesus
- Pray with imaginative prayer
  - Placing yourself in the story
  - Hearing the Lord speak to you
- How would Jesus respond to this situation or decision?
The Call to Holiness

- How are you called to die to yourself?
- How is that call embedded in this situation?
  - A call to forgive
  - To be generous
  - To always choose love over hate
  - To be non-judgmental
  - To turn the other cheek
Church teaching

- How does this decision or situation measure up to what we teach?

- How do our teachings inform and guide this decision?
Church teaching

- If not perfectly up to the ideal,
  - How can you reconcile yourself to this?
  - How does your “exception” fit into the values the Church has?

- To depart from a teaching
- Is not to dissent from it
The signs of the times

Karl Barth:
Have the Bible in one hand
And the Newspaper in the other
Signs of the Times

- **Biblical directive**
  - Matthew 16: know how to read the signs of the times

- **Church directive**
  - Church in the Modern World #4
  - *Signa temporum perscrutandi*
  - News, medicine, psychology, sociology
  - What call is embedded in them?
Why the signs of the times?

- In order to interpret them in the light of the Gospel
- Because these are the times in which your parishioners are living
- They aren’t living in the 1950s any longer... for example
Method for Scrutinizing this Age

- In prayerful theological reflection
- Ask questions of the times

- How does this or that development or situation inform our lives of faith?
- Does this reflect the teaching of Jesus and the Gospels?
Don’t condemn everything that you find in the signs of our times
  - In truth, everything was NOT better in past years
  - It’s all moving along with God’s hand
But don’t consecrate everything either
  - Not every new bit is a good one
  - Avoid casting out what is old arbitrarily
For example

- How does advancing human knowledge in medicine and psychology inform what we teach now about
  - Birth control
  - Same sex orientations
  - Capital punishment
  - The care of the earth
  - The place of women
  - Marriage and married people in ministry
For example

- How does our understanding of what Jesus teaches in Matthew 25
  - Inform our thinking about immigrants today in our society
  - Inform how we help the poor
- How does Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man
  - Inform what we do with our own money
Review

1) Make yourself available
2) Invite the seeker to tell their story
3) Listen carefully
4) Inquire and nudge just a little
5) Help them discern what God is asking of them
The 5th Step

- Discernment

With all this in mind:

- The story of the seeker
- Your sacred inquiry and gentle nudges
  - About Jesus, the Church, and the culture

What is God asking of this person

- In this particular, concrete situation?
- (This doesn’t change Church law)
Discernment

- Ask the seeker to be attentive
  - What are you hearing in the depths of your conscience?
  - What is God asking of you?

- Be attentive to feelings of **Consolation**
- Or **Desolation**
How do you know?

- Consolation
  - Focus outside & *beyond* ourselves
  - See the joys and sorrows of *other people*
  - Bonds us more closely to our community
  - Refreshes our inner vision

- Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us
  - Releases new energy in us
How do you know?

- **Desolation**
  - Turns us in on ourselves
    - Drives us ever deeper into our negative feelings
  - Cuts us off from *community*
  - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us

- **Prevents us from hearing God**
  - Drains us of energy
The Power of Darkness

- If the seeker seems to reach
  - A decision to be violent or abusive
  - Against life and for death
  - Hate and prejudice

- The accompanist may need to speak up
- God does not call anyone to these
The 6th Step

- Reach a decision
  - Accompaniment happens in God’s time
  - For some, very quickly
  - For others, much more time

- Listen with faith for God’s voice
  - Reach a point of believing:
  - This is what God is calling me to in this moment
Restoration

- How will this person be welcomed into the life of the parish?
  - It may need to be quiet
  - Follow pastoral guidelines
- Invite the seeker to help identify this

- Discernment leads to action
Individual Accompaniment

Review the steps

1) Make yourself available
2) Invite the seeker to tell their story
3) Listen carefully
4) Inquire and nudge just a little
5) Help them discern what God is asking of them
6) Help them reach a decision and enjoy full life in the community
For St Thomas More

- What’s next?
  - This isn’t a “new program”
  - It’s not like Alpha or RENEW or other programs
  - It’s a way of living the Gospel
  - As individuals within the parish family
  - We insert it into everything we do
So what’s next?

- Study and get to know the pastoral theology behind this
  - Small groups
  - Within your existing ministry groups
- Decide to make this your “identity”
- Name someone to guide you
- Begin educating everyone