Intentional Disciples

Seek The Lost

January 2014

St. Dominic’s Catholic Church
Overview

What do you mean by Intentional Disciple?

Few Christians would argue the premise that we are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. What “being a disciple” means and what that looks like in our lives, is a great deal more confusing. At St. Dominic’s, we invite you to engage the concept of discipleship head-on. Maybe you’re already a disciple. If so, hopefully you will discover how to be more intentional about your discipleship. Maybe you’re not yet a disciple. If so, hopefully you will enter into a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple and become more hungry to respond to Jesus’ call.

What is asked of me?

First, pick up a booklet at St. Dominic’s each month and follow along. If you can, attend one of the Explore (everyone is welcome) sessions offered each month. If you want to go deeper, sign up for a Small Christian Community. Small community will meet twice a month to discuss. We hope to be able to offer committed small communities and drop-in small communities as we get a better understanding of people’s interested. Please see the back cover for specific dates.

When did the Intentional Disciples initiative start?

St. Dominic’s kicked off the Intentional Disciples initiative in September 2013. We are gradually rolling it out to the whole parish. We hope to be able to connect people whenever they learn about the initiative or are ready to get involved.

What if I’m not sure how much of this I’m ready to do?

Pick up a booklet, and try it out. Pray about it.

I’m interested, but I just don’t have the time.

We understand that this will not fit everyone’s interest or schedule. We would like to ask you to pray for this initiative in the parish.

Jesus, let us hear your call anew.
Bless us with the courage to respond.
Clear away all barriers. Make us your disciples.
Format

Each month we’ll pick several scripture passages around an aspect or theme of discipleship. We’ll spend the month exploring that theme, going deeper and challenging ourselves. In September and October, we rolled this out to the parish. We have formed several small communities, but it is not too late to join one if you are interested (see the back cover). We plan to make this a yearlong initiative. Here’s the planned format for each month:

**Week 1 - Explore**
Break open the scripture and explore discipleship. Our goal here is not just to understand how discipleship functioned when Jesus walked the Earth, we want to understand what discipleship means in our lives, today.

You can explore the scripture on your own through this book, or you can attend one of the presentations offered (see the upcoming schedule on the back cover).

**Week 2 - Share**
Consider joining a small community to discuss the meaning of discipleship to you. There is something powerful about gathering with others to explore our relationship with Jesus.

If you can’t join a small community, you can take time each day to pray the scripture and reflect on your own journey.

**Week 3 - Act**
This week we’ll challenged ourselves to take some practical step exploring discipleship in our daily lives. We’ll do this on our own, so if you’re part of a small community, there will not be a meeting this week.

**Week 4 - Share**
Gather again in your small community or reflect on your own.
To kick off this initiative, we asked:

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? (Yes, No, I Don’t Know)
Was this question easy or hard to answer?
Is this an important question?
What would you need to be able to answer this question?

This month:

**Starter**

*I’m sure you know the parable of the Prodigal Son. If you had to summarize it’s message for someone, what is it about?*

*What does the message mean for disciples?*
Then the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"
He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Genesis 4:9

In this month's scriptures we will look at three parables that Jesus tells in response to the challenge: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." We need to hear the message of each parable individually, but they are also designed to be heard together. Jesus tells us that he came for the lost, and that the heavens rejoice when one of the lost returns. Now, what are you going to do about the lost?

Our scriptures ask the simple questions: Who does God seek, and who do we seek? It is safe to say that we all have a list of people or groups of people that we believe are outsiders. Through their choices and their actions, they've followed a path that has taken them away from God. We might think about them using different terms (e.g., bad people, sinners, evil, stupid), but they are definitely lost. This month we need to face the fact that we believe in a God who seeks the lost. As disciples, we are called to do the same.

Now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found.'

Luke 15:32
The Accusation

Luke 15:1  The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to [Jesus], 2 but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So to them he addressed this parable.

Ask: What’s happening here? What is the message for disciples?

Lost Sheep

4"What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? 5 And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy 6 and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

Ask: What’s happening here? What is the message for disciples?
Lost Coin

8"Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? 9And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.' 10In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Ask: What’s happening here? What is the message for disciples?

Lost Son

11Then he said, "A man had two sons, 12and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. 13After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. 14When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. 15So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. 16And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. 17Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. 18I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' 20So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. 21His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against
you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' 22 But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

25 Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. 26 He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. 27 The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. 30 But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'

31 He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. 32 But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"
Key Insights

General

- Luke’s Community and Ours
  - Our text, all from one chapter in Luke’s Gospel, includes an accusation by the Pharisees and Jesus response (three parables).
  - Jesus’ response is directed at the Pharisees, and anyone who might sympathize with their point of view.
  - It is also likely that Saint Luke believed that this message was an important one for his community.
  - We want to understand the struggles of Saint Luke’s early Christian community because we will find in it some of our own struggles today.
  - Of the three parables, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son are only found in Luke’s Gospel.

- Parables
  - Parables are stories that Jesus told to teach.
  - Typically, parables contain something designed to grab our attention, something that just doesn’t make sense.
  - Parables do not depict the world as it is; they speak of the world as it should be.

The Accusation

- The three parables that Jesus tells are his response to the accusations, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

- Pharisees
  - A Jewish sect attempting to live the Torah’s 613 laws.
  - Saw holiness as separateness, avoiding contact with anything that would defile (e.g., tax collectors, sinners).
  - Jesus did not fit their criteria for a Messiah, a Rabbi, or even a holy person. Jesus is hanging out with the wrong people.

- Tax collectors
  - Jewish people who collaborated with the Roman occupiers.
  - They bid for the contract with the Romans, and then they got to keep any additional money they collected.
  - They were viewed as crooks who used the power of the Roman army to extort money from the Jews.
Lost Sheep

- Jesus’ example is a shepherd. Shepherds were at the bottom of society and were considered unclean by the Pharisees. The Pharisees would not have appreciated the comparison.
- The “lost” in this parable, the sheep, does not carry with it a moral failing. We wouldn’t blame the sheep for wandering off.
- “What man among you...would not”: Jesus’ parable starts with the expectation that this is what everyone would do. Yet, it doesn't make sense to leave ninety-nine sheep alone to find one missing sheep. Jesus makes it sound like it is normal (at least it is for God).
- Using the example of a Shepherd would have called to mind Ezekiel 34 (see Further Reading below).
- We frequently find images of being carried connected to God's saving action: “Because of his love and pity he redeemed them himself, Lifting them and carrying them all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:9).
- Jesus summarizes the moral of the parable by referencing the joy in heaven for each sinner who repents.
- The oldest depictions we have of Jesus show him as a shepherd carrying a sheep (combining the Good Shepherd of John 10 with the image from this parable).

Lost Coin

- Now Jesus’ example is woman. Considering the status of women in the first century, the Pharisees would not have appreciated this comparison either.
- The “lost,” a coin, definitely has no moral implications.
- The coin lost would represent about a day’s wage.
- It is worth searching for, but her celebration is over the top.
- Again, we see the celebration in Heaven, rejoicing for the good fortune of another.
**Lost Son**

- This is, perhaps, one of the most iconic stories in the Bible.
- It is considered a “summary Gospel.”
- The younger son treats the father like he is dead (that when his inheritance would have come to him).
- The father goes along with the affront, bring shame upon himself.
- The son’s fall is complete when he is lower than the pigs (unclean according to Jewish law).
- The father sees the son a long way off. He must be looking.
- The father runs to the son, unheard of in the ancient world!
- The son’s speech to the father is truncated. The father doesn’t let him finish before he restores him to his former status (far beyond what he was going to ask for).
- The celebration is, again, over the top. There is no mention of the son’s affront to the father.
- The older son is now angry, not by the return of his younger son, but by the generosity and celebration of the father.
- He makes the father come out to beg him (a huge affront).
- The older brother magnifies the younger brother’s actions: “squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation” becomes “swallowed up your property with prostitutes.”
- The family bond is broken (“your son,” not “my brother”), but the father doesn’t play along (“your brother”).
- This parable, and the three parable sequence, ends with a cliffhanger: Will the older son enter the party?
- This is the most direct challenge to the Pharisees, to Luke’s community, and to us.
Further Readings

Ezekiel 34:1  Thus the word of the LORD came to me: 2Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, in these words prophesy to them (to the shepherds): Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves! Should not shepherds, rather, pasture sheep? 3You have fed off their milk, worn their wool, and slaughtered the fatlings, but the sheep you have not pastured. 4You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. You did not bring back the strayed nor seek the lost, but you lorded it over them harshly and brutally. 5So they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered 6 and wandered over all the mountains and high hills; my sheep were scattered over the whole earth, with no one to look after them or to search for them. 7Therefore, shepherds, hear the word of the LORD. 8As I live, says the Lord GOD, because my sheep have been given over to pillage, and because my sheep have become food for every wild beast, for lack of a shepherd; because my shepherds did not look after my sheep, but pastured themselves and did not pasture my sheep; 9because of this, shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10Thus says the Lord GOD: I swear I am coming against these shepherds. I will claim my sheep from them and put a stop to their shepherding my sheep so that they may no longer pasture themselves. I will save my sheep, that they may no longer be food for their mouths. 11For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. 12As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. 13I will lead them out from among the peoples and gather them from the foreign lands; I will bring them back to their own country and pasture them upon the mountains of Israel (in the land’s ravines and all its inhabited places). 14In good pastures will I pasture them, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing ground. There they shall lie down on good grazing ground, and in rich pastures shall they be pastured on the mountains of Israel. 15I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord GOD. 16The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal (but the sleek and the strong I will destroy), shepherding them rightly.
John 10:1 "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. 2But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. 5But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." 6Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them. 7So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who came (before me) are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. 11I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. 13This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. 14I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father." 19Again there was a division among the Jews because of these words. 20Many of them said, "He is possessed and out of his mind; why listen to him?" 21Others said, "These are not the words of one possessed; surely a demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?"

Genesis 4:9 Then the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"
Recap & Prepare for Week 2

- Reread the scripture for this week.
  - Underline phrases that capture the essence of discipleship
  - Pick a phrase, one each morning
  - Write it on a slip of paper
  - Find seven times during the day to think about it and pray it
- Reflection questions:

  What groups of people do I consider lost?

  How would Jesus approach them?

We all know people who have wandered away from God. They are our friends, coworkers, and family members. We probably know a little about their stories and struggles, but it easier to let them go their own way. In seeking the lost, we probably want to start close to home.

  What friends, coworkers, or family members seem far from God?

  How might I approach them?

  What are my barriers to seeking the lost?
Week 2 - Share

Individual Option
- Find 20-30 minutes where you won't be interrupted.
- (10-15 minutes) Follow the prayer format (*Examination of Conscience*) on page 16.
- (10-20 minutes) Spend time reflecting on the questions outlined above.

Advice For Participating In Small Christian Communities
- The facilitator’s role is to guide the flow of the meeting. They are not in the group to be experts. Help the facilitators by following their lead.
- During the discussion period, there will be multiple questions or topic for conversation. It is best to take them one at a time (i.e., let everyone share about one before moving to the next).
- Don’t attempt to give the “right answer.” Just share your experience, insights, and perspective.
- Please stay on topic (the questions asked).
- Pay attention to time. Keep your answers on the shorter side. You can always add more later.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak (i.e., give others a chance to speak before sharing a second time).
- It’s ok to not share if you don’t feel comfortable, but challenge yourself to share occasionally.
- Give your attention to the person speaking. Please don’t start side conversations.
- Avoid asking follow-up questions. Let people share what they want to share. It is always good to affirm others.
- Avoid answering other people’s questions (i.e., taking on the role of expert).
Examination of Conscience Based On Luke 15:11-32

About An Examination of Conscience

- An Examination of Conscience is a form of prayer that seeks to uncover our hidden weakness by shining the light of the Gospel on our conscience.
- In it, we take a scripture passage and let it challenge us. We do this by asking ourselves questions about how we stand in relation to the Gospel.
- Typically, only a few of the questions will resonate with us. It is those questions that we need to focus on and to bring deeper into prayer.

Instructions

- Read the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32, pp.7-8)
- Go around a circle in your group with each person reading one question.
- Pause 3-5 seconds between questions. Let them sink in a little.
- At the end, take 5-10 minutes in silence to for each person to spend some time in prayer around the questions that really resonated with them.

The Prodigal Son

- Have I said, “thank you,” for all that I have received?
- Have I done or said things that I now regret?
- Have I used others for my pleasure?
- Have I covered my pain with food, alcohol, work, or anything that allows me to forget?
- Have I been too quick to create justification for my actions?
- Have I taken the time to recognize my own brokenness?
- Have I squandered any gifts that have been given me?
- Have I blamed my misfortunes on others?
- Have I been slow to admit my failings and to ask for forgiveness?
- Have I viewed myself as worthless and undeserving of forgiveness?
- Have I refused to recognize my dependence on others?
- Have I taken the easy way out?
- Have I learned from my mistakes?
The Father

- Have I been willing to share my many gifts with others?
- Have I been quick to forgive others, and to restore them to my good graces?
- Have I run to meet others who desire to return to God?
- Have I been the face and hands of God for others?
- Have I been willing to trust others?
- Have I celebrated the great moments in life?
- Have I been sensitive to the pain and fear of others?
- Have I fully appreciated those around me?
- Have I been a peacemaker?

The Older Son

- Have I spoken poorly of others?
- Have I refused to reconcile with others?
- Have I held on to anger and resentment?
- Have I been quick to point out the flaws of others?
- Have I failed to celebrate the good fortune of others?
- Have I been jealous of the recognition others receive?
- Have I approached the world with a sense of entitlement?
- Have I tried to manipulate others into doing what I want?
- Have I valued other’s opinions of myself over God’s?
- Have I looked to others to affirm me?
- Have I been demanding of the time, energy, or attention of others?
- Have I taken the time to recognize the gifts that have always been mine?
Small Christian Community Process - First Meeting  
(Suggested timing based on a 60/90 minute meeting)

- Welcome & Check In (5/10 minutes)
- Review Format (5/5 minutes)  
  ○ Review the participant’s advice (page 15)  
  ○ Prayer will be about 15 minutes  
  ○ Review the prayer format: Examination of Conscience (page 16)  
  ○ Discussion will follow based on the prayer and the questions (page 14).
- Prayer (10/15 minutes)  
  ○ Transition Phrase: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)  
  ○ Examination of Conscience: Luke 15:11-32 (pages 16-17)
- Discussion (30/45 minutes)  
  ○ Begin with insights from the prayer experience  
  ○ Discussing the reflection questions (page 13)
- Action/Request (5/10 minutes)  
  ○ The practical exercise is listed on the next page  
  ○ Participants can share thoughts and plans  
  ○ Review date of the next group session  
  ○ Participants can request prayers from the group

It’s ok to change your mind.
How do we seek the lost? It would be great if Jesus could just take care of that for us. Surely he'd do a better job than we would. It's time to roll up our sleeves and give it a try. First and foremost, we cannot evangelize (share the Gospel) unless we love. The whole point of seeking the lost is to share the love of God. We don't have to be overt about it, but we do have to be clear about what we are doing.

This week we'll focus on seeking out someone who seems lost. We'll start close to home:

- What friends, coworkers, or family members seem far from God?
- What are my barriers to seeking the lost?

There are many different ways to seek the last. Remember, all we know is that Jesus welcomed them and ate with them. Here are a few ideas:

- Have a meal
- Share your story
- Write a prayer for someone
- Invite someone to Mass or an event at St. Dominic's
- Share a song, a book, a favorite Bible passage
- Ask them about their hopes, desires, loves

Brainstorm other creative ways to reach out to people:
Focus on some specific people:

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Now we need to give it a try. Pick one person from above, and consciously seek them out.

*Person:*

*Outreach:*

*What happened?*

*What did I do right and wrong?*

*What’s next?*
**Week 4 - Share**

**Preparing**
- Continue to use the scripture phrases you highlighted when you prepared for Week 2:
  - Pick a phrase, one each morning
  - Write it on a slip of paper
  - Find seven times during the day to think about it and pray it
- **Week 3 exercise:**
  - Plan to share something about your Week 3 exercise
  - If you were not able to do it, plan to share your barriers.

**Individual Option**
- Find 20-30 minutes where you won’t be interrupted.
- (10-15 minutes) Follow the prayer format (*Examination of Conscience*) on page 16.
- (10-20 minutes) Journal about the experience of the exercise from Week 3.

**Small Christian Community Process - Second Meeting**
*Suggested timing based on a 60/90 minute meeting*

- **Welcome & Check In (5/10 minutes)**
- **Review Format (5/5 minutes)**
  - Review the participant’s advice (page 14)
  - Prayer will be about 15 minutes
  - Review the prayer: *Examination of Conscience* (page 16)
  - Discussion will follow based on the prayer the Act exercise (page 17)
- **Prayer (10/15 minutes)**
  - Transition Passage: “Now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.” (Luke 15:32)
- **Discussion (30/45 minutes)**
  - Begin with insights from the prayer experience
  - Discussing insights from the Act exercise
- **Action/Request (5/10 minutes)**
  - Review date of the next Explore session
  - Participants can request prayers from the group
Extra: Take your list of the “lost,” and pray for them each morning. Make sure you pray “for” them not “against” them. Praying “against” someone is praying that something bad will happen to them. Praying “for” them is praying that they will know and experience God’s love.
THREE WAYS TO GET INVOLVED WITH INTENTIONAL DISCIPLES

1. Pick up a booklet, and explore on your own. -or-

2. Attend an “Explore” session to learn about this month’s scripture. Everyone is welcome. - or-

3. Check out a Small Christian Community to join with others to go deeper.

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UPCOMING “EXPLORE” SESSIONS

Monday, January 6, 7:30-9 PM, Aquinas Room
Young Adults’ Session*, Wed., Jan. 8, 7:30-9 PM, Parish Hall
Thursday, January 9, 12:00-1:30 PM, Aquinas Room
Sunday, January 12, 10:30-11:30 AM, School Basement

* The Young Adults group is a community of single and married Catholic adults in our 20s and 30s; to find out more, visit: http://stdominics.org/youngadults

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CONNECT WITH A SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Contact Scott Moyer at scott@stdominics.org

We would like to start a Wednesday evening women’s group. If you’re interested, please contact Scott.

SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DECEMBER MEETING DATES

Sunday: January 19 & 26  
YAG (Sunday): January 12 & 26  
Monday: January 13 & 27  
Thursday: January 16 & 30