

# St Thomas More:

Where people are accompanied  
on their journeys through life



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# St Thomas More

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- 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

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- 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...

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- ...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?

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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

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- [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...

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**exousia**

Power to act

**dunamis**

Inherent power

ἐξουσία

δύναμις

The **power** of God!





## From Luke...

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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 ***the power of the Most High***  
will fill you."      Luke 1:34-35a



## From Luke...

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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...

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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...

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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...

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...this force of love  
Is God giving God's own self  
**To us!**



# The Name of God

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- 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



# God is just God

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CCC #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

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- A tremendous and amazing reality
- God is speaking to us individually
- As well as through scripture & liturgy
  - And the whole ministry of the Church





# Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ

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"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

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- **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

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- 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

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- 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

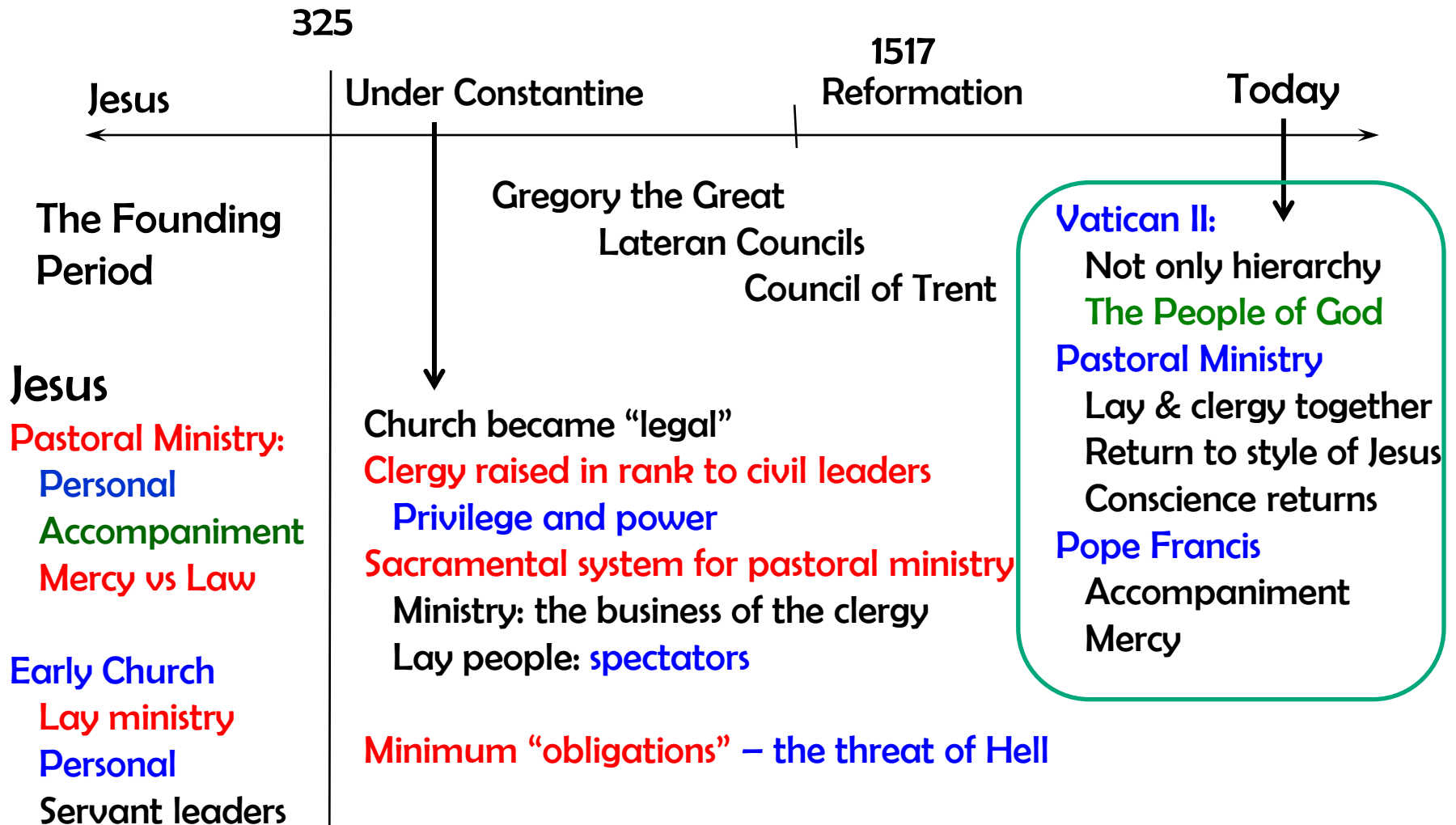


# Pastoral Strategy

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- Pope Francis sees accompaniment
- **The key strategy**
  - In order to help people **discern** God's voice within their hearts

# Pastoral Ministry History



# What is accompaniment?





# Accompaniment

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- 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

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How does God ordinarily  
speak to us in prayer?



# The Church in Modern World #16

## Our Catechism #1776

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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?

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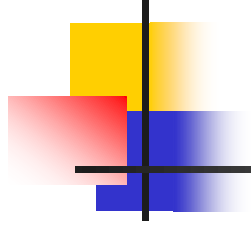
- Those in irregular marriage situations
  - Who want full communion
- Those seeking a deeper life in Christ
  - Who want the happiness that comes from self-giving love
- Those who are passing through one of life's difficult moments
  - Who want support and assurance



# A deeper look

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- The contents are part of the **ordinary magisterium** of the Church,
  - As such, they call for our assent



# Joy of Love #291

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- [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



# Joy of Love #291

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- 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

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- **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

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- **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

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- 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)





# Joy of Love

(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

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



# Many situations...

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- 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

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(JoL 300)

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



# Church teaching...

JoL #292

- 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 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage results



# Mitigating circumstances #301

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- 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 #302

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- 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

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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

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- 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



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# Joy of Love #305

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- 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

351



## Footnote 351

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- 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

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- “Those... who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin,
- are not to be admitted to holy communion.”



# Canon 912

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- If there is no mortal sin:
- “Any baptized person who is not forbidden by law
- may and must be admitted to holy communion.”





# Pope Francis

JoL 308

- “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

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- 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

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- 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

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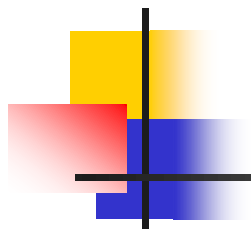
- Jesus called Matthew
- Jesus looked on that man with mercy

#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

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- 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



# For our parishioners

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- 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

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- 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...

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- 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

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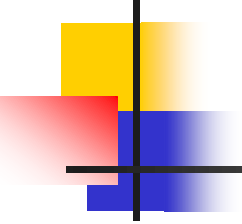
- Parents accompany their kids
- Children accompany older parents
- Spouses with one another
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Fellow parishioners at STM



# Accompaniment

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- 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



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How is accompaniment done?  
What is the method?

6 steps



## In short:

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- 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

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- 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 1<sup>st</sup> Step

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- Make yourself available
- Let it be widely know 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<sup>nd</sup> Step

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- 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





# The 3<sup>rd</sup> Step

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- 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

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- 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 4<sup>th</sup> step



# The 4<sup>th</sup> Step

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- **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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- How does this decision or situation measure up to what we teach?
- How do our teachings inform and guide this decision?



# Church teaching

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- 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

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



# Signs of the Times

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- **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?

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- 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

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- 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?



# Pope Francis

Sep 4, 2015

- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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 5<sup>th</sup> Step

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- 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

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- 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?

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- 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?

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- 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

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- 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 6<sup>th</sup> Step

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- 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

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- 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**



# Review the steps

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- 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

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- 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?

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- 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