**How Would St. Augustine Form Disciples?**

At what point do you consider abandoning the evangelization process for a person who adamantly refuses to seek Christ in his life?” You may want to ask yourself; what have I done to form a genuine relationship with the person in the first place?” The journey towards discipleship is not an instant process. In many ways it is a gradual journey towards conversion. And, when part of our ministry involves forming disciples in Christ, we should first look toward the dignity of the person versus just the person.

The great doctor of the Church St. Augustine of Hippo was no stranger to the conversion process that leads to discipleship in Christ. In many ways he wrote the book on it e.g. [Confessions.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confess) One of the most telling aspects of his Confessions was the importance of the virtue of charity. It was in charity where he came to the realization of God’s love for him and that he was entering into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. It was an eternal light of truth that he came to see the reality of Christ.

Authentic discipleship is rooted in the ability to love and show mercy to your fellow human being. It reflects an understanding of recognizing the dignity of the human person for who he is as a child of God. The great evangelist St. Paul echoed the importance of charity when he extolled his followers to embrace the failing of the weak so as to not please ourselves, let each of us please his neighbor for his good and edify him (Rom 15:1-3).

St. Paul’s words are very important for us to hear because when we begin the process of forming disciples the result is not a point of self-fulfillment, instead it’s the realization that hope reigns because of Christ and His Church. It’s the journey of walking and living in Christ not against Him. This was in many ways the same realization St. Augustine came to when he finally saw the light of eternal truth.

**St. Augustine’s Methodology**

At the heart of this great Doctor’s methodology as found in his [***First Catechetical Instruction***](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1303.htm) was the **Kerygma i.e. the proclamation of the Gospel.** This involved introducing to the person that he is indeed part of God’s plan by the very nature of his creation in God’s image and likeness. This method would involve revealing the reality of the Church and providing ample examples of how we can live this life with joy. And this leads to a second point of St. Augustine’s methodology;

**The disciple must possess joy.** The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that it is impossible to please God without faith since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who try to find him (Heb 11:6). Thus, when forming disciples those involved in the formation process are called to have a joyful spirit and actually live a life rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If the premise of discipleship is joy, then those we form will witness the virtue lived out authentically.

**The content of forming disciples must establish a way of life that leads to God.** One of the many dangers in this step of the journey is that we tend to be strangled by the process of discipleship versus the journey of faith. What I mean by process is the steps leading up to forming disciples. At times we can preoccupy ourselves with the logistical steps towards forming disciples without ever arriving at the journey of discipleship which leads to conversion and results in joy.

Pope Paul VI understood the value of authentic joy when exclaiming that modern man is more willing to listen to an authentic witness of the Gospel ([**Evangelization In the Modern World, 41**](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html)). The content of discipleship involves a genuine love for the Word of God, a willingness to live out the Word and a desire to hand it on to others. Some elements regarding the content of forming disciples are as follows:

**One:** Preach the Gospel, especially Christ Crucified (1 Cor 1:23; Gal 1:4)

**Two:** Ask the question: What do you believe? This question serves as good Segway to the Creed.

**Three:** Root discipleship in joy and hope (1 Pt 3:15) A holy disposition goes a long way.

**Four:** Evangelization is the greatest act of love. (Rom 5:5-8) Our evangelistic aim is an exposition of the truth of Jesus Christ not an imposition.

These elements set the stage to encounter the reality of Christ that St. Augustine expressed when he realized that his journey was not complete until he embraced Christ as the way, the truth and light (Jn 14:5-6;Lib, 7, 10, 18; 10, 27). It is imperative that the aim of our evangelistic efforts is the maturation of the soul to unveil the beauty of Christ’s light.

Pope Francis has made it quite clear as to our mission in this world. [We are called to proclaim the Gospel with authentic joy.](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) Thus our aim is to move from the process of conversion to the actual journey of conversion which results in the gift of joy. History has dictated, and St. Augustine has revealed that the most effective means of evangelization and catechesis rest with the gift of joy.