

# Interview



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*Interview with Dr. Christine A. Mugridge from Catechetical Institute Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, USA.*

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**1. Christine, you studied in Rome from 2003 to 2008 at three pontifical universities, focusing your studies in the field of theology and social communication. Today, among other things, you work as one of the mentors of the Catechetical Institute of the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Last year, for the first time, she led a mentoring program for a group of Slovaks. We in Slovakia know the concept of “spiritual guidance”. Is mentoring any different?**

This is an excellent question. Yes, there is a different understanding between these two areas of ministry in the Church: “Spiritual Guidance or Spiritual Direction” and “Pastoral Accompaniment or Mentoring” – The Church is urging her members of all vocations to incorporate both Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Accompaniment in this era of “new evangelization”. However, the concept of Mentoring is not new at all. The return to pastoral accompaniment is based upon the model of Christ Himself, who taught his Disciples in both word and witness. The first Christians lived in community and followed very closely the discipleship model of Jesus. The first Christian leaders were taught about the core beliefs of “The Way” through the life witness of the first Apostles, Disciples and Christian community leaders. When sent into ministry and mission, these leaders were

**Christ models for us pastoral accompaniment-mentoring as He lived with His disciples.**

sent in teams of two or more. The interpersonal expression of the faith is one which the Church today seeks to reinvigorate through embracing the Mentoring/Pastoral Accompaniment model of the early Church. We today are teaching this model in both method and principle and incorporating it into the broader applied pastoral studies of the field of Catechetics and Evangelization. Spiritual Direction involves accompaniment yes, but of a different nature. To guide one into a deeper spiritual maturity and personal advancement in the faith. The accompaniment model or “mentoring method” as the Catechetical Institute understands it in reference to the field of Catechetics and Evangelization seeks to imitate the model of Christ in forming His disciples – those who learned the precepts of the Christian faith and then were sent to share it with others to bring the faith to the world.

**2. Do you offer such mentoring (as for us in Slovakia) for catechists in other countries as well? Could you tell us about your vision for this mentoring program?**

Yes, the Franciscan University Catechetical Institute offers the pastoral accompaniment model of mentoring to learners/catechists in many other countries. We are presently working internationally in nearly all continents. I myself have worked and am working with several newly formed Mentor Teams in Central Europe, Canada and Africa. The Catechetical Institute has mentors now who are working with multiple dioceses internationally. Teaching the mentoring method is part of our understanding of “best practices” in the field of catechetics and evangelization. While our

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partners do appreciate the offering of this pastoral accompaniment element, it is not insisted upon. The final goal is to establish teams of mentors in these nations who are from that nation itself. The goal for this mentoring program is based upon CI's vision of subsidiarity: we seek to develop and form ecclesial leaders at the local Church level who move within the diocese according to the pastoral plan of the bishop. Forming local catechists who come from and return into the local cultural realities is very important.

**3. Your studies in Rome were closely related (if I am not mistaken) to the field of communication, you also became a permanent member of the Vatican Press Corps, you were Head of Department of Communications/Outreach and Director of Media Relations, you worked for(with) the largest Catholic TV station in the USA, EWTN. How did you get into the field of mentoring through all of this?**

[Correction: I was on air televised with Mother Angelica on her EWTN Live program and worked in additional collaboration with Mother – I was not employed per se.]

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My studies in Rome were focused upon Communications Science, Public Relations for Religious Institutions and Theology. While studying in



Rome, I reported live for Relevant Radio network. I reported on the papacy and personal events of St. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Understanding the development of a theology of communication within the pontificate of St. Pope John Paul II was and is very interesting to me. This field of study involves evaluation and application of the model of discipleship of Christ and His communication of the faith. Christ models for us pastoral accompaniment-mentoring as He lived with His disciples. His teaching of His followers was not isolated to a classroom or synagogue setting. Christ taught through both His word and the witness of His daily life. I am presently working in the area of catechetics and evangelization and also teaching of MS Theology here at Franciscan University. In the area of international outreach, I've been greatly blessed to assist the hierarchy of other nations in the formation of their diocesan officials. As part of our offerings, the Catechetical Institute suggests utilizing our Mentor Formation training. My experience of doing mission/

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catechetical work in over 20 countries is a natural fit for this outreach. The bishops CI partners with have made the decision to accept and apply the offering of mentor formation. It has been my joy and blessing to be assigned to these areas of outreach.

### **4. How or why did you decide to go to work at Franciscan University of Steubenville? What makes this university special for you?**

This is an easy question to answer. I am an alumni of Franciscan University – MA Theology & Christian Ministry. The method of accompaniment and excellence in formation I experienced here was integral to the development of both my professional and spiritual life. The academic and spiritual realities of my education here assisted me in maturing in the Catholic faith as well as provided me with a strong foundation for working in the Church. After many years and numerous experiences in my home country of the United States and working internationally, I desired to return to this University and offer my talents in whatever way I could. I desired to give back to Franciscan University. Franciscan University offers its students and constituents a unique and excellent experience in formation. The university prepares young adults who are well-educated and highly trained graduates; graduates who know how to live the Catholic faith in a mature and integrated manner in the profession of their choice.

### **5. Do you think it is possible for a Slovak to come and study at your university? :) Which field of study would you definitely recommend?**

Absolutely, yes I would recommend internatio-

nal students to come to Franciscan University to study. There are many degree fields to choose from. We are known for nursing, chemistry, engineering to name a few and of course theology, catechetics and evangelization. Many students will study a particular field of interest and add what we refer to as a “double major” by taking a second area of study: theology. There are students here from all corners of the world. When a student arrives, they are encouraged also to

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seek out “fellowship and friendship” opportunities by joining a “Student Household” – this is a group of students who commit to prayer together and encourage one another to live the Catholic sacramental life. The experience for students provides deeper friendships while they are here and life-long friendships thereafter. We have different opportunities to fit the various needs of international students such as online studies for degrees and certification through our Catechetical Institute as well as on ground studies here in Steubenville, Ohio. Please feel free to contact our university to investigate which of the opportunities to study with us will work best. We welcome you! [www.franciscan.edu/](http://www.franciscan.edu/)

**6. Let's go back to mentoring. Here in Slovakia, the field of mentoring and coaching is a novelty of just recent years. These techniques are mainly used in secular industries and are popular especially in the field of management.**

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**But what do mentoring and catechesis have in common and why is it even important to talk about mentoring in the process of creating and imparting catechesis?**

The importance of mentoring in the process of creating and imparting catechesis I personally feel is essential to living our Catholic faith in the modern world. The Church in this era referred to as a time of “new evangelization” realizes that modern man often feels isolated, disconnected, overly stressed and lonely. This may also be true of individuals working in the Church; whether they are employed or are volunteering. The Church wants to emphasize a more person-centered approach to sharing the faith with a goal of living communion more deeply. Yes, there is always a place for the academic side of theological research and learning. However, as the question emphasizes, mentoring and coaching are a part

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of the techniques presently employed in secular industries because these industries know that this technique works very well to “form” their employee into their field. The concept of formation of the whole person versus an approach that is strictly academic is not new in education. This way of education was at one point referred to as “apprenticing” – the apprentice learned by word and deed. So too now, the Church sees the value in encouraging that the passing on of the Catholic faith be done by someone who will accompany the other person. Especially in light of the Christian teaching of the Lord Himself – the passing on of the faith is considered a Work of Mercy – a

work of charity which cannot be expressed only in the academic setting.

**7. Theologian Scott Hahn, who is also popular here in Slovakia, also works at this university. How do you see him as a professor? Do you work together in any kind of education?**

Dr. Scott Hahn and his wife Kimberly are neighbors here in Steubenville where I live. I see them at holy mass on the campus of Franciscan University. Scott is a professor who is definitely living the accompaniment model and is very much available to his students. Both Scott and Kimberly along with their children live a vibrant witness of the Christian faith. Several of their sons have responded to the call to priesthood. Their married children practice the faith in an exemplary manner. They are wonderful Catholic leaders who are very humble and supportive also of the faculty and staff of the University. Although I do not work directly with Dr. Hahn, I see him as a colleague and brother in the faith here at Franciscan University.

**8. You are also intensively devoted to the area of new evangelization. Even in our country, this term is often used, but sometimes it is not understood quite correctly. How would you explain the essence of the new evangelization and how it is related to catechesis?**

The essence of the new evangelization is found in the personal encounter with the living Jesus Christ. It is related to catechesis precisely in this way: one is not able to share what the Lord Jesus Christ taught if one does not know the Lord Himself. It is an understanding of first “being in relationship with Jesus Christ” before one takes

up an activity for Him. The new evangelization is a growing awareness of a time of New Advent for the Church. A growing awareness of the gift of the Person of Jesus Christ. Accepting Christ as The Gift from the Father leads one to a deeper, life-long conversion experience. It is through this conversion in Christ that we each then are brought into the communion of the Most Holy Trinity. Our lives as Catholics are meant to be lived within the Communion that God lives Himself. The highlight of this lived communion is expressed by living the sacramental life; especially in reception of the Eucharist – our most holy Communion with God. This is the bond we live as baptized Catholics then with one another. Our unity is a shared communion of the Trinitarian Communion. The new evangelization is a call to share the love of God in Christ with everyone. The communion we have with God and each other is not to be kept to ourselves, thus becoming stagnant. Catholics of all vocations live our communion also through expressions of Works of Mercy. Works of Mercy imitate the mission of our Redeemer. In the new evangelization we are called to live the mission of Jesus Christ with fresh enthusiasm and impe-



tus. This means simply that each of us it intended to bring the love of God manifest in Christ to the world in and through works of mercy that meet the needs of our neighbor. St. Pope John Paul II. developed a series of spiritual exercises to assist us in growing in our spiritual understanding of the new evangelization in the Third Millennium. Presently I give guided retreats and seminar talks on this topic which focusses on a spirituality of solidarity according to the Church's teachings and specifically through St. Pope John Paul II's vision. It is personally a very fulfilling small ministry in the Church! Those who wish to discover more on this ministry may contact me directly: [cmugridge@franciscan.edu](mailto:cmugridge@franciscan.edu).

## **9. What do you think is absolutely the most important thing that every catechist should know, the thing, you would surely tell every catechist?**

The most important thing that I feel every catechist should know is twofold: First a catechist must have a very deep relationship with each Person of the Trinity – their life should give evidence of this deep communion with God for a catechist teaches in both word and life-witness. Second, a catechist's service to the Church must always and only be an expression of the pastoral plan and teaching office of the bishop. That is to say, the bishop is the primary teacher of the faith in the local diocese. As a catechist, we serve under and in deference to the authority of our local bishop. We must therefore be obedient to him, know and understand his vision, agree to fulfill his teaching plan and be willing to be a well-formed, well-educated and faithful Catholic on the bishop's "team". We serve the bishop as we serve the Lord: prayerfully, with faithfulness, charity and humility.