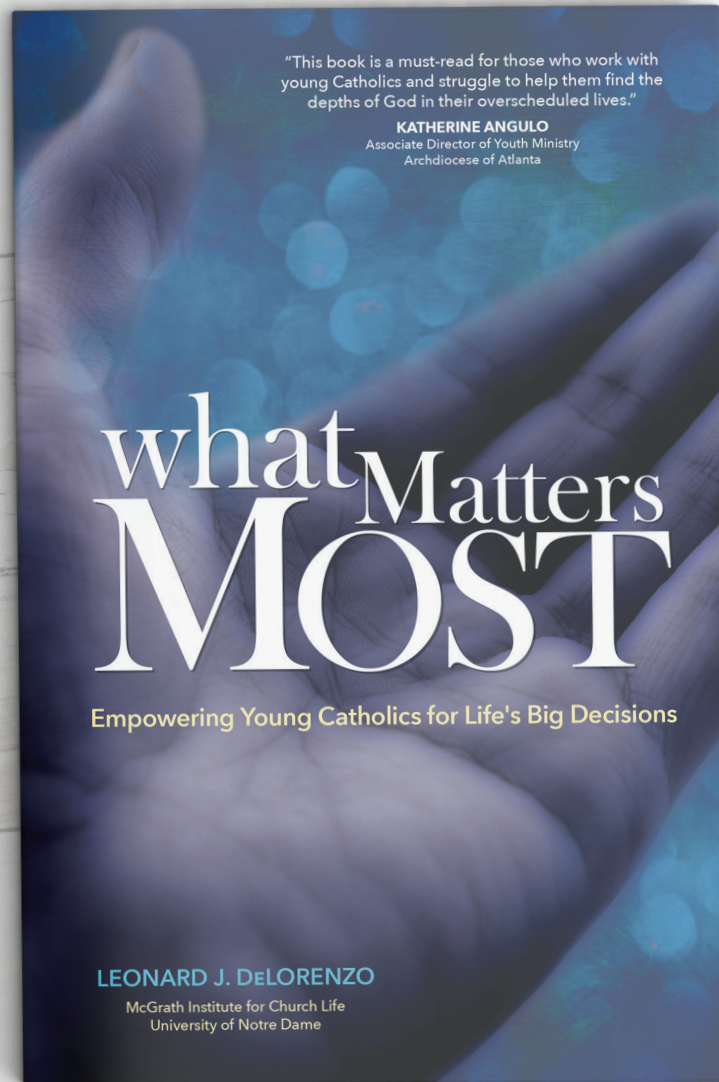


Empowering Young Catholics for Life's Big Decisions



Supplemental Guide for Catholic High Schools

Introduction

This book is about listening and acting. This book is about helping young people find their way into the freedom of the Gospel with the courage of a Christian disciple. That means, therefore, that this book is also about helping adults—like myself—who are charged with raising and educating young people. It is our mission to form them in such a way that they might encounter the Word of God and muster the courage to respond, with conviction and a sense of responsibility, especially in the face of life's big decisions. (From the preface of *What Matters Most*.)

Dear Educators,

The most fundamental questions for the education and formation of young people are the questions about the ultimate ends. These are questions like,

- **What are we preparing young people for?**
- **What do we want them to become?**
- **Who do we hope for them to be?**

How we answer these questions influences the strategies we put in place, the way we form our communities, and the regular practices that we adopt, not to mention how we measure the success of our efforts. For Catholic educators, ministers, and parents alike, the ultimate end we hope for our young people is to form them as complete disciples—that is, saints. This might sound either grandiose or vague, but in fact it is a quite definite thing. Saints hear the Word of God and act on it, to the point that their whole lives eventually become an expression of charity. Saints are free, brave, creative, generous, and alive.

We also want other things for our young people, not as competition to this final end, but rather as integrated into it. We want them to develop their minds, explore and refine their abilities, take risks, earn a living, contribute to their community, and so on. No one is more aware of the multiple desires and interests that figure into the lives of young people than administrators and faculty of Catholic high schools. Those interests come from the young people themselves, their parents, donors, colleges, and diocesan offices, to name a few.

This book—*What Matters Most*—offers Catholic school communities the opportunity to engage in lively conversation about the shared responsibility of forming and educating our young people to receive and respond to the Gospel. The book presents the pattern of discipleship from a meditative, theologically informed reading of Mary's Annunciation in the first chapter, then uses the four marks of her discipleship in each of the following chapters to assess our contemporary condition and propose ways forward. By clearly articulating "what matters most," we can more clearly see where we are, where we hope to be, and how we get from one to the other.

As Catholic high school administrators and faculty, reading this book together will help you to find space and inspiration to talk about the most important things about your school and your students. The next step is then to engage the parents of students in a similar conversation, utilizing the book as a launching point and guide for honest, aspirational, practical, and utterly meaningful dialogue.

To be clear, this is not a book that tries to tell you how to run your school or tells your parents how to parent, but rather presents the Christian vision in a compelling fashion and offers valuable prompts for the continual assessment of mission and practice in the Catholic high school setting.

Sincerely,



Leonard J. DeLorenzo

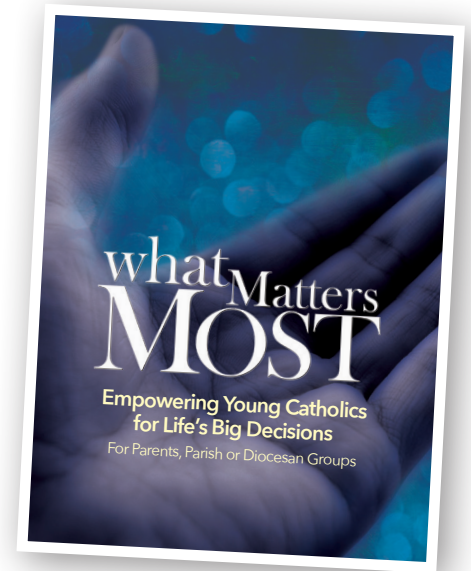
Proposed Levels of Engagement

Level 1: School leadership team with perhaps several “leader parents” read *What Matters Most* together, in a discussion group, typically over the course of six or seven weeks.

Level 2: Entire faculty and staff of the school engage the text, ideally for a faculty/staff day of reflection, in-service, or retreat.

Level 3: All parents of students in the school are provided with a copy of the book—perhaps at the beginning of the summer—to prepare for a multi-session summit in the early fall. Discussion groups among parents are also possible.

Level 4: Every year thereafter, the book is provided to parents of incoming students, with a session or sessions of new parent orientation designed according to the key themes of the book. Again, forming discussion groups among parents—perhaps with a faculty member or administrator—might prove beneficial.



Preface and Chapter 1

- In the preface, the author recalls a student who said during a class discussion that, “I feel like we are taught to be ambitious but we are not taught how to listen to the voice of God.” Does this ring true for us, either personally when reflecting on our own education or in our work as educators now thinking about what our own students might say?
- In the beginning of chapter 1, the author recalls an experience with his young daughter where he glimpsed—or heard—who he wanted her to be as someone who notices the needs of others, cares about them, wants to do something for them, and takes steps to follow through. When has the beauty and goodness of our own students struck us? Recall particular moments.
- In the middle of chapter 1, the question “What are you going through?” gets a lot of attention, both from the divine and human perspective. In our school community, how do we guide our students to share what they are going through and to pay attention to what others are going through? How do we witness to the importance of this as a leadership team? How well do we embody this among our colleagues?
- The final section of the chapter establishes the Marian pattern that is not only the basis of the book, but also the full image of discipleship (at least in Luke’s Gospel). What did I (or we) learn in this section? What sparked my imagination or caught my attention? What am I now wondering about?

Chapter 2

- What does the schedule of the typical student in our school community look like, including extra- and co-curricular activities? What about the schedules of those we hold up as our very best students?
- Is multitasking worn like a merit badge in our community? In reality, how much does “the more the better” mindset function among our students, or even ourselves?
- How are we teaching our students to cultivate attentiveness? In the classroom? In other areas of our school community?
- Do we commit our families and students to activities on Sunday? Does our workload require Sunday homework?
- How do we now, or how can we incorporate periods of silence and reflection into our regular schedule, perhaps especially with adoration?
- How anxious are our young people? Why?
- What is the role of technology in our schools? How does the role of technology in our school culture affect the home life of students, or conversely, how do the digital habits of home life affect our school culture?

Chapter 3

- What are the expectations placed on our school for defining success and moving our young people toward that end? Where do these expectations come from (diocese, parents, ourselves, the need to recruit students, competition with other schools, etc.)?
- What do we make of the “Turning the Tide” report presented in the middle of the chapter, as well as the analysis of the deeper issue that the author articulates? (See pp. 76-80.)
- From the perspective of an objective, outside observer, what does our school community value most? What are our young people being taught to value most in practice? (The more honest we can be here, the better.)
- If we were to paint a portrait of our ideal graduate, what would be that person’s characteristics? What would he or she be capable of? What would he or she care about? What would he or she do habitually?
- How well do our students learn Scripture? How do we teach them to think about Scripture? As a moral guide book only? Do they learn how to contemplate scripture, to learn to read it “horizontally”, to see connections, to wonder? (See pp. 88-95.)
- How do we foster a sacramental vision for our students? In our school community?
- Who are the models of “success” that we hold up for young people in our community?

Chapter 4

- How do we lead our students to practice the Works of Mercy?
- How do we present the practice of mercy as essential to the fullness of discipleship and of what a complete life looks like?
- For our students of privilege, how often do they encounter the trying circumstances of those who do not enjoy the same privileges?
- For our students from underprivileged circumstances, how well are they able to share their lives and situations with others?
- How well are home life and school life integrated for our students?
- In the middle of the chapter, the author writes: “Parents begin their formation for the kind of parents they become when they themselves are teenagers and young adults. This means, of course, that we must shift our focus from wanting to form those who are teenagers and young adults right now simply as teenagers and young adults. Instead, we have to think about forming them as the mature adults and indeed parents we hope... they become” (115). What effect does this view have on the way we think about our work of education and formation in the school?

Chapter 5

- How do we cultivate a sense of personal responsibility in our students?
- How do we empower them to identify, make, and follow through on commitments?
- The author describes “discernment season” in his college setting. How similar or different is what he describes to what happens with students at our school, especially seniors?
- The two disciplines highlighted in this chapter are “solitude” and “community.” How do we reflect on these in our particular setting?
- How do we teach our students to say “no” to doing so much that they cannot give themselves fully to what they do commit themselves to?
- How does the witness of the saints provide our school community and our students with an image of the truly good life?
- From the perspective of the end of this book, how do we reflect again on the Marian pattern presented from the beginning? What does this mean for how we educate, form, and mentor our young people?

Epilogue

- What might we, as leaders, need to focus on practicing in order to become the witnesses and guides that our students need?
- How do we support each other?
- What other kinds of support do we need?