THE DAILY BREAD

The Missio of the Beloved



The Parish

From Volunteer to Apostle

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

THE DAILY BREAD

Missio of the Beloved

The Parish

From Volunteer to Apostle

More Than a Warm Body, More Than a Volunteer

✦ ✦ ✦

A Daily Bread Formation Book

The Everyday Apostle

INTRODUCTION

Rethinking What Your Parish Is

For many Catholic women, the parish is a place they go to receive, a spiritual service provider where they attend Mass, drop off their children for faith formation, and perhaps volunteer when asked. In many parishes, women already carry a disproportionate share of the practical and relational life, showing up, organizing, teaching the children, visiting the sick, and making sure the things that need to happen actually happen. Yet there is a difference between being a volunteer, a willing pair of hands filling gaps, and being an apostle, a formed agent who understands the mission of the parish and brings the full weight of her formation to bear on it. The question for a woman is whether she is contributing to the mission of her parish or merely consuming its services, and whether she understands what she is already doing as apostolic mission rather than mere volunteerism.

This book is about the parish and the shift from volunteer to apostle. It will show that the parish is more than a service provider; that it is the local face of the universal Church; that a woman is called to move from being a volunteer to being an apostle; the particular gifts women bring to parish life; how to discern a specific apostolic role rather than merely filling gaps; the two-way relationship between the parish and the domestic church; and how the parish serves as a launching pad for broader mission. The aim is to transform how a woman sees and engages her parish, so that she moves from consuming its services to contributing to its mission as a formed apostolic agent.

From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. — Ephesians 4:16

Scripture pictures the whole body growing and building itself up when each part works properly, and the parish is just such a body, growing and flourishing when each member, including each woman, contributes her proper part rather than remaining passive. This book will help a woman understand her parish rightly and take up her part in its mission. A parish is not a spiritual gas station where individuals fill up and leave, but a body in which every member has a role to play in the common mission, and a woman is called to be a working, contributing part of that body. This book is about taking up that role, moving from volunteer to apostle in the life of her parish.

CHAPTER ONE

More Than a Service Provider

From Consumer to Contributor

The first shift a woman must make is to stop seeing her parish as a service provider from which she receives and to begin seeing it as a community of mission to which she contributes, moving from the posture of a consumer to that of a contributor. Understanding that the parish is more than a service provider reframes a woman's whole relationship to it.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. — 1 Peter 4:10

The Parish Is Not a Spiritual Gas Station

The parish is not a spiritual gas station where individuals fill up and leave, but a community of mission, so that a woman is called to be part of it rather than merely a customer. A common but mistaken view treats the parish as a kind of spiritual gas station or service provider, a place where individuals come to receive religious services, Mass, sacraments, programs, and then leave, consuming what they need without further involvement, but the parish is in truth a community of mission, a body of believers joined in a common life and purpose, so that a woman is called to be a contributing member of that community rather than a customer of its services, the parish being a community to belong to and build, not a provider to use. This means a woman understands that the parish is not a spiritual gas station but a community of mission, so that she sees herself as a member called to contribute rather than a consumer receiving services. The woman who understands the parish is not a spiritual gas station sees herself as a contributing member. The parish is not a spiritual gas station but a community of mission, so that a woman is called to be part of it rather than a consumer of its services.

Consuming Versus Contributing

A woman must honestly ask whether she is consuming her parish's services or contributing to its mission, for the two are very different postures toward the same community. A crucial question for a woman is whether she is consuming or contributing, for it is possible to attend a parish for years, receiving its sacraments and benefiting from its programs, while contributing nothing to its life and mission, so that she must honestly examine her own posture, whether she comes to her parish mainly to receive or also to give, to consume its services or to contribute to its common mission, the difference between consuming and contributing marking the difference between a passive member

and an active one. This means a woman honestly examines whether she is consuming or contributing in her parish, so that she sees clearly whether she merely receives or also gives to its mission, and what is being asked of her. The woman who examines consuming versus contributing sees her true posture toward the parish. Consuming versus contributing distinguishes a passive member who only receives from an active one who gives, so that a woman examines which she has been.

Called to Serve with Your Gifts

Every woman has received gifts meant to be used in service of the parish community, so that she is called to contribute her particular gifts rather than leave the work to others. Scripture teaches that each person has received gifts to be used in serving one another as stewards of God's grace, and this applies directly to the parish, for a woman has received particular gifts, talents, and graces that are meant to be put to use in the service of the parish community, so that she is called not to bury her gifts or leave the work to others but to contribute what she has been given, serving the common mission with her particular gifts, the parish needing what each member brings. This means a woman understands that she is called to serve her parish with her gifts, so that she contributes her particular talents and graces to its mission rather than leaving the work to others or leaving her gifts unused. The woman who is called to serve with her gifts contributes her particular talents to the parish mission. Called to serve with your gifts means a woman uses her particular talents in the parish community, so that she contributes rather than leaving the work to others.

CHAPTER TWO

The Local Face of the Universal Church

Belonging to Something Larger

A parish is not an isolated or self-contained group but the local face of the universal Church, the place where the whole Body of Christ becomes present and tangible in a particular community, so that belonging to a parish means belonging to something far larger. Understanding the parish as the local face of the universal Church lifts a woman's sense of what she is part of.

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. — Ephesians 2:19-20

The Whole Church Made Local

The parish is the universal Church made local and tangible, the place where the whole Body of Christ becomes present and visible in a particular community. A parish is not merely a local club or an independent congregation but the universal Church made present in a particular place, for the one Church of Christ becomes local and tangible in each parish, where the same faith, sacraments, and communion of the whole Church are made available and visible, so that in belonging to a parish a woman belongs to the universal Church made local, the whole Body of Christ present and at work in her own community, the parish a window onto and a cell of the universal Church. This means a woman understands her parish as the whole Church made local, so that she sees it not as an isolated group but as the universal Church present in her community, tangible and near. The woman who understands the whole Church made local sees her parish as the universal Church present in her community. The whole Church made local is the parish, where the universal Church becomes present and tangible in a particular community.

Members of the Household of God

Through her parish a woman belongs to the household of God, the great family of the faithful across the world and the ages, so that her local belonging opens onto a vast communion. In belonging to her parish, a woman becomes, as Scripture says, a member of the household of God, part of the great family of the faithful that spans the whole world and all the ages, built on the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone, so that her local parish membership opens onto a vast communion, connecting her to believers everywhere and to the saints in heaven, her belonging to a particular parish being a belonging to the universal household of God. This means a woman understands that through her parish she belongs to the household of God, so that she sees her local membership as connecting her to the great family of the faithful across the world and the ages. The woman who understands she is a member of the household of God sees her parish opening onto a vast communion. Members of the household of God is what parish belonging makes a woman, so that her local membership opens onto the great family of the faithful everywhere.

Belonging That Lifts the Local

Seeing the parish as the local face of the universal Church lifts a woman's engagement with it, so that her local service is part of something vast and eternal rather than small and parochial. Understanding the parish as the local face of the universal Church lifts and dignifies a woman's engagement with it, for her service in a small parish is not a merely local or parochial affair but a participation in the mission of the whole Church, her work

there joined to the great work of God across the world, so that this vision raises the significance of her parish life, making even humble local service part of something vast, universal, and eternal rather than small and insignificant. This means a woman understands that seeing the parish as the local face of the universal Church lifts her engagement, so that she values her local service as part of something vast and eternal rather than small and parochial. The woman who sees belonging that lifts the local values her parish service as part of the universal mission. Belonging that lifts the local makes a woman's parish service part of something vast and eternal, so that even humble local work shares in the universal mission.

CHAPTER THREE

From Volunteer to Apostle

The Shift That Changes Everything

The central shift this book calls for is from being a volunteer, a willing pair of hands filling gaps, to being an apostle, a formed agent who understands the mission and brings her whole formation to bear on it. Understanding the shift from volunteer to apostle reveals what the parish truly needs a woman to be.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, having gifts that differ. — Romans 12:4-6

The Volunteer and the Warm Body

A parish can use a woman merely as a volunteer or a warm body, filling tasks without understanding the mission, and this is far less than what she is called to be. A parish often relates to women as volunteers, willing hands to fill slots and complete tasks, or even as warm bodies to fill a room or a role, and while such help is needed, it falls far short of a woman's calling, for the volunteer may do good work without ever understanding the deeper mission of the parish or bringing her formation to bear on it, serving as useful labor rather than as a formed apostolic agent, so that being merely a volunteer or a warm body is less than what a woman is called to be. This means a woman recognizes the limits of being merely a volunteer or a warm body, so that she sees that filling tasks without understanding the mission falls short of her true calling. The woman who recognizes the volunteer and the warm body sees that mere task-filling falls short of her calling. The volunteer and the warm body fill tasks without understanding the mission, so that a woman sees this falls short of what she is called to be.

The Apostle Understands the Mission

An apostle, by contrast, understands the mission of the parish and serves it with purpose and formation, not merely completing tasks but building the Kingdom with understanding. Unlike the mere volunteer, the apostle understands the mission she serves, for she grasps what the parish is for, the building up of the Body of Christ and the sending of the Gospel into the community, and she brings that understanding to everything she does, so that her service is not blind task-completion but purposeful participation in a mission she comprehends, her formation giving her work meaning and direction, the apostle serving with understanding where the volunteer merely serves. This means a woman understands that the apostle grasps the mission she serves, so that she sees her calling as serving the parish with understanding and purpose rather than merely completing assigned tasks. The woman who understands the apostle grasps the mission serves her parish with purpose and understanding. The apostle understands the mission, so that a woman serves the parish with purpose and formation rather than merely completing tasks.

Bringing Your Whole Formation to Bear

The apostle brings the whole weight of her formation to her parish service, letting all she has learned and become shape how she serves, so that she contributes far more than her hands. The mark of the apostle is that she brings her whole formation to bear on her parish service, for everything she has learned and become, her understanding of the faith, her prayer, her virtue, her sense of mission, now informs and elevates how she serves, so that she contributes not merely her time and hands but her formed mind, heart, and apostolic vision, bringing the full weight of her formation to the life of the parish and thereby offering something far richer than mere labor. This means a woman brings her whole formation to bear on her parish service, so that she contributes her formed mind, heart, and vision rather than merely her hands, serving as a fully formed apostle. The woman who brings her whole formation to bear offers her parish far more than labor. Bringing your whole formation to bear means letting all a woman has learned and become shape her parish service, so that she contributes far more than her hands.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Gifts Women Bring

What a Parish Needs from Her

Women bring to parish life particular gifts that the parish deeply needs, the relational, attentive, and nurturing capacities of the feminine genius, offered not merely as labor but as the contribution of formed apostolic agents. Understanding the gifts women bring helps a woman value and offer what she uniquely contributes to her parish.

And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and all the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. — Exodus 35:25-26

The Relational and Attentive Gifts

Women bring to parish life a particular gift for relationship and attentiveness, building the bonds and noticing the needs that knit a community together. Among the chief gifts women bring to parish life are the relational and attentive ones, for women often excel at building relationships, welcoming newcomers, noticing who is struggling or absent, and weaving the personal bonds that turn a collection of individuals into a genuine community, so that their relational and attentive gifts are vital to the parish, supplying the personal warmth, connection, and care that knit the community together and that no program can manufacture, the feminine attentiveness to persons being a great gift to parish life. This means a woman values the relational and attentive gifts she brings to her parish, so that she sees her capacity for building relationships and noticing needs as a vital contribution to the community. The woman who values the relational and attentive gifts offers vital warmth and connection to her parish. The relational and attentive gifts women bring build the bonds and notice the needs that knit a parish community together.

Offering Skill and Heart

As the women of Scripture offered their skill and willing hearts for the building of the sanctuary, so women offer their varied skills and devoted hearts for the building up of the parish. Scripture records how skillful women whose hearts were stirred offered their craft for the building of the tabernacle, a beautiful image of women offering both skill and heart for the work of God, and women today likewise bring to the parish a wealth of skills, practical, organizational, artistic, and professional, together with devoted hearts willing to serve, so that they offer not only labor but skill and heart, their varied competencies and their love poured into the building up of the parish community and its mission. This means a woman offers her skill and heart to the parish as the women of Scripture offered theirs, so that she contributes her particular competencies and her devoted love to the work of God in her community. The woman who offers skill and heart contributes both her competence and her love to the parish. Offering skill and heart

means women bring their varied skills and devoted hearts to the building up of the parish, as the women of Scripture offered theirs for the sanctuary.

Formed Agents, Not Just Workers

The parish needs women not merely as workers but as formed apostolic agents who understand and advance its mission, so that women contribute their formation and vision as well as their effort. The parish needs women to be formed apostolic agents, not merely workers, for the damage done when women are present only as hands to complete tasks, without being formed or understanding the mission, is that their deeper gifts go untapped, whereas women who are both formed and serving bring understanding, vision, and apostolic purpose to their work, so that the parish is best served when women contribute as formed agents who grasp and advance its mission rather than only as willing labor. This means a woman understands that the parish needs her as a formed agent, not just a worker, so that she brings her formation and apostolic vision to her service rather than offering only her effort. The woman who understands she is a formed agent, not just a worker, brings vision and purpose to her parish service. Formed agents, not just workers, is what the parish needs women to be, so that they contribute understanding and apostolic vision as well as effort.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discerning Your Apostolic Role

Purpose Over Reaction

Rather than simply filling whatever gaps appear or saying yes to whoever asks first, a woman is called to discern the specific apostolic role to which God is calling her in the parish, serving from purpose rather than mere reaction. Understanding how to discern her apostolic role helps a woman serve where she is truly called rather than wherever she is pulled.

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. — 1 Corinthians 12:18

Not Just Filling Gaps

A woman is called to more than filling whatever gaps appear or saying yes to every request, for reactive service scattered across every need is not the same as a discerned apostolic role. Many women serve their parish reactively, filling whatever gaps appear

and saying yes to whoever asks first, and while willingness is good, this reactive pattern can scatter a woman across many needs without purpose, leaving her overextended and serving where she is pulled rather than where she is called, so that she is invited to move beyond merely filling gaps toward a discerned role, recognizing that saying yes to everything is not the same as finding her true apostolic place. This means a woman recognizes that her calling is more than filling gaps or saying yes to every request, so that she moves beyond reactive, scattered service toward a discerned apostolic role. The woman who sees she is not just filling gaps moves toward a discerned role rather than reactive service. Not just filling gaps means a woman is called beyond reactive service to every need, so that she seeks a discerned role rather than saying yes to everything.

Finding Where You Are Called

A woman discerns her apostolic role by seeking where God has placed and gifted her to serve, matching her particular gifts and the parish's real needs to find her specific calling. God arranges each member in the body as He chooses, and a woman discerns her apostolic role by seeking where He has placed and gifted her to serve, considering her particular gifts, passions, and formation alongside the genuine needs of her parish, and praying to find the specific role to which she is called, so that rather than serving randomly she finds where she is truly called, the place where her gifts meet the parish's needs and where God has arranged her to contribute, her specific apostolic role discerned rather than stumbled into. This means a woman discerns where she is called by matching her gifts to the parish's needs in prayer, so that she finds her specific apostolic role rather than serving randomly. The woman who finds where she is called serves from her true place in the body. Finding where you are called means discerning the role where a woman's gifts meet the parish's needs, so that she serves from her true apostolic place.

Serving from Purpose, Not Pressure

A woman serves her parish best from a discerned sense of purpose rather than from pressure, guilt, or the inability to say no, so that her service is sustainable and fruitful. The fruit of discernment is that a woman serves from purpose rather than pressure, for when she has discerned her apostolic role, she can serve deliberately and wholeheartedly in it, and can decline other requests without guilt, no longer driven by the pressure to say yes to everything or the fear of letting people down, so that her service flows from a sense of calling and purpose rather than from pressure, guilt, or an inability to refuse, making it both sustainable and fruitful. This means a woman serves from purpose rather than pressure, serving deliberately in her discerned role and declining other requests without guilt, so that her service is sustainable and fruitful rather than driven and scattered. The woman who serves from purpose, not pressure, serves wholeheartedly in her calling and

declines the rest without guilt. Serving from purpose, not pressure, means a woman serves in her discerned role deliberately, so that she declines other requests without guilt and serves sustainably.

CHAPTER SIX

Parish and the Domestic Church

How the Two Strengthen Each Other

The parish and the domestic church are not rivals for a woman's energy but partners that strengthen each other, for a healthy parish strengthens families and formed families strengthen the parish. Understanding the relationship between parish and domestic church helps a woman see her home and her parish as mutually reinforcing rather than competing.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. — Romans 12:10

A Healthy Parish Strengthens Families

A healthy parish strengthens the families within it, supporting the domestic church with sacraments, formation, community, and encouragement that no family could supply alone. The parish and the domestic church are meant to strengthen each other, and a healthy parish strengthens the families within it, for it supplies the sacraments that nourish family faith, the formation that teaches parents and children, the community that supports and encourages, and the shared life that no isolated family could provide for itself, so that the parish undergirds and strengthens the domestic church, giving families what they need to be churches of the home, the healthy parish a great support to the families it serves. This means a woman understands that a healthy parish strengthens families, so that she sees her parish as a vital support to her own domestic church rather than a competitor for her time. The woman who understands a healthy parish strengthens families sees it as a support to her home. A healthy parish strengthens families, supplying the sacraments, formation, and community that no family could provide alone.

Formed Families Strengthen the Parish

In turn, families formed in faith strengthen the parish, sending into it members who are grounded, apostolic, and able to build up the community rather than only consume from

it. The strengthening runs both ways, for just as a healthy parish strengthens families, formed and faithful families strengthen the parish, sending into its life members, parents and children alike, who are grounded in faith, apostolic in spirit, and able to contribute rather than only consume, so that strong domestic churches build up the parish with their faith, service, and witness, the formed family being a source of life and strength to the parish community rather than a drain on it. This means a woman understands that formed families strengthen the parish, so that she sees her own home's faith as a contribution to the parish, sending grounded and apostolic members into its life. The woman who understands formed families strengthen the parish sees her home as a source of strength to it. Formed families strengthen the parish, sending into it grounded and apostolic members who build up the community rather than only consume.

No Rivalry Between Home and Parish

A woman need not see her home and her parish as rivals for her limited energy, for rightly ordered they reinforce each other, her investment in each strengthening the other. Because the parish and the domestic church strengthen each other, a woman need not regard them as rivals competing for her limited time and energy, for rightly ordered, her investment in her family strengthens the parish and her engagement with the parish strengthens her family, the two reinforcing rather than depleting each other, so that she can hold both together without guilt or false conflict, seeing home and parish as partners in the one mission rather than competitors, each enriched by her service to the other. This means a woman sees no rivalry between home and parish, so that she holds both together as mutually reinforcing partners rather than competitors for her energy. The woman who sees no rivalry between home and parish holds both together as partners in one mission. No rivalry between home and parish means the two reinforce each other, so that a woman's investment in each strengthens the other rather than competing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Parish as Launching Pad

Local Roots for a Wider Reach

The parish is not only a place to serve but a launching pad for broader apostolic mission, for the local roots and relationships it provides enable a reach into the surrounding community that no program or platform could replicate. Understanding the parish as a launching pad shows a woman how her local engagement opens onto wider mission.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them… and they laid their hands on them and sent them off. — Acts 13:2-3

Local Roots Enable Wider Reach

The deep local roots a woman gains through her parish enable a wider reach into her community, for genuine relationships and standing in a place open doors that no outside program can. The parish gives a woman deep local roots, and these roots enable a wider apostolic reach, for through her parish she is embedded in a particular community, known and trusted, connected to local relationships and networks, so that from this rooted position she can reach into the surrounding community in ways no outside program or platform could, her local standing and relationships opening doors to mission that only genuine presence in a place can open, the parish roots enabling a reach beyond the parish. This means a woman understands that her local parish roots enable a wider reach, so that she sees her embeddedness in a community as the foundation for mission beyond the parish rather than a limitation. The woman who understands local roots enable wider reach sees her parish standing as a foundation for broader mission. Local roots enable wider reach, so that a woman's embeddedness in her parish community opens doors to mission that no outside program could.

The Parish That Sends

Like the church at Antioch that sent out missionaries, a parish is meant to be a sending community, forming and launching its members into apostolic work beyond its walls. Scripture shows the church at Antioch, gathered in worship, hearing the Spirit's call to set apart and send out Barnabas and Saul for mission, a model of the parish as a sending community, for a parish is meant not only to gather and nourish its members but to form and launch them into apostolic work beyond its walls, so that the parish that understands its mission sends its members out, equipping and commissioning them for the wider apostolate, and a woman can be one whom the parish forms and sends into mission in the broader community. This means a woman understands the parish as a community that sends, so that she sees it as forming and launching her into apostolic work beyond its walls rather than only serving its own internal needs. The woman who understands the parish that sends sees it forming and launching her into wider mission. The parish that sends forms and launches its members into apostolic work beyond its walls, so that a woman is equipped and commissioned for wider mission.

From the Parish into the World

A woman carries her parish formation out from the parish into the world, letting the faith, relationships, and mission rooted in her parish extend into the wider community she touches. The ultimate purpose of the parish as launching pad is that a woman carries her formation and mission from the parish out into the world, letting the faith she is nourished in, the relationships she builds, and the apostolic purpose she develops extend beyond the parish into her workplace, neighborhood, and the wider community, so that the parish becomes the base from which her mission reaches into the world, her local roots feeding a wider apostolate as she carries the parish's mission outward into every sphere she touches. This means a woman carries her parish formation from the parish into the world, so that she lets the faith and mission rooted in her parish extend into the wider community rather than remaining within parish walls. The woman who carries her formation from the parish into the world extends its mission into every sphere she touches. From the parish into the world is where a woman carries her formation, so that the mission rooted in her parish extends into the wider community.

CONCLUSION

Be an Apostle in Your Parish

The woman who saw her parish as a service provider now sees it as a community of mission to which she is called to contribute. We have seen that the parish is more than a service provider, a community of mission rather than a spiritual gas station, calling her from consuming to contributing; that it is the local face of the universal Church, making her a member of the household of God; that she is called to shift from volunteer to apostle, understanding the mission and bringing her whole formation to bear; that women bring particular relational and skilled gifts, needed as formed agents and not just workers; that she should discern her specific apostolic role, serving from purpose rather than reaction; that parish and domestic church strengthen each other without rivalry; and that the parish is a launching pad from which her mission reaches into the world.

Running through all of it is a single shift: from volunteer to apostle. Your parish needs you to be more than a warm body and more than a volunteer, to be a formed apostolic agent who understands its mission and gives herself to it with purpose, gift, and vision.

So be an apostle in your parish. Stop seeing it as a service provider and start contributing to its mission as a member of the Body. Know that your parish is the universal Church made local, and that your service there shares in something vast and eternal. Make the shift from volunteer to apostle, bringing your whole formation to bear on how you serve. Offer the particular gifts you bring, your relational heart, your skills, your formed vision,

as a true apostolic agent. Discern your specific role, serving from purpose rather than pressure. See your home and your parish as partners that strengthen each other. And let your parish be the launching pad from which your mission reaches into the world. Your parish needs you to be more than a volunteer. Be an apostle in it.

✦ ✦ ✦

The Parish: From Volunteer to Apostle is part of The Daily Bread Library.