Catechesis

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Content for Catechesis

On another occasion he began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them at length in parables.
(Mk 4:1-2)

The content of the faith is available to catechists and other adults in two major Church documents. They are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and its U.S. adaptation, *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA). The CCC is intended to be a reference book rather than a textbook. The USCAA meets the need for a more accessible version of the universal *Catechism*. It contains a useful subject and scriptural index.

The other major catechetical documents, the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) and its U.S. adaptation, the *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC), provide suggested methodology and context. In particular, the revised GDC of 1997 and the CCC are to be used hand in hand. Chapters 3, 5, and 6 of the NDC are devoted to a reflection on and presentation of the breadth of Catholic teaching. The NDC follows the same structure found in the *Catechism* and recognizes the need for a full, complete presentation of the faith. The USCCB document *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* provides valuable insights into the planning for adult faith formation.

Following the publication of the *Catechism*, the U.S. bishops created an Episcopal Committee to oversee the use of the *Catechism*. This Committee for the Use of the Catechism ensures that catechetical materials are in conformity with the *Catechism*. The committee established a voluntary process whereby publishers of religious textbooks can seek a "declaration of conformity" from the committee. This declaration is not an endorsement of the book or series. It simply means that a given text reflects the teaching of the *Catechism* in a way that is both accurate and complete.

For the purpose of choosing age-appropriate materials, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston recommends beginning the search with the *Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series* periodically released by the USCCB. That list is included in the Appendix to these *Catechetical Guidelines* (see www.usccb.org/catechism/index.htm for updates to the list).To receive help in choosing the most appropriate materials for use in your parish, contact your vicariate Faith Formation Consultant.

How to Evaluate a Textbook Series

When a parish (priest, catechetical leader, and/or education committee) makes the decision to choose a textbook series for a catechetical program, there are many things to consider. The list periodically released by the USCCB contains series in which the teachings are in conformity with the *Catechism*. Within this list are many choices and it is important to determine which ones best serve the needs of the individual parish. Some publishers will send samples on request and the vicariate Faith Formation Consultant has samples of most of the series. Considering the parish catechetical plan and the models of faith formation, some of the following criteria should be considered:

- Does the series reflect the parish's community and ethnic identity?
- Does it include ways to support different learning styles?
- Is it adaptable for use in the home as well as the parish setting?
- Does it include help for catechists and parents?
- Are the instructions easy to follow?
- Could it be used in a variety of ways and in different models of faith formation?
- Does it include different forms of prayer?
- Does it come with online and media support or enhancement?
- Does it have a clear "scope and sequence" design?
- Is it age-appropriate for the groups it is designed for?
- Is there support for the promotion of the six tasks of catechesis?
- Is there a component for families?
- Does it have bilingual components, if necessary, for the parish?
- Does it contain additional resources to facilitate its use with different abilities and needs?
- Does it reflect cultural diversity and healthy gender roles?

Catholic Social Teaching

The human being's dignity as a child of God is the source of human rights and of corresponding duties. For this reason, "every offense against the dignity of persons is an offense against God himself, in whose image men and women are made.
(EA, no. 57)

Catholic social teaching is considered by many to be the Church's "best-kept secret." At the heart of such a statement is the reality that the average Catholic has limited knowledge and understanding of what is meant by "Catholic social teaching." The Church's teaching in this area is a "systematic moral framework"[1] based on Sacred Scripture, papal encyclicals, councilor documents and Episcopal statements.[2] Perhaps an even greater challenge arises because it does not suffice only to be informed of what the teaching is, but one must use the principles, born in the crucible of history and events, to engage in an ever-renewed critique of local and global events of our day.

In 2005, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace released an excellent resource titled the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* published in this country by the USCCB. It contains every major document relating to the Church's social teaching.

As with all things Christian, Catholic social teaching begins with the person of Christ himself. Jesus cared in a special way for the poor. He treated persons with equal dignity. He continues to call us to love in action through community. The Church must speak the truth when the social order contributes to the denial of human dignity, when people are starving, when basic human rights are trampled. Catholic social teaching becomes a lens through which we can see the persecuted and crucified Christ in the lives of those suffering from injustice, discrimination, and lack of basic human needs.

The principles of Catholic social teaching should hold a prominent place in catechesis. These principles represent the Good News of Christ spoken to the world today. The U.S. Bishops have identified seven key themes that form the heart of the Catholic teaching:

1. The life and dignity of the human person. Life is sacred from womb to tomb. Every person is precious and has equal dignity before God.

2. The call to family, community and participation. Human beings are not meant to live alone, but in relationship with others. Healthy families and communities help people to grow and thrive.

3. Rights and responsibilities. While every human being has a right to the basic necessities of life, this right comes with a responsibility to participate and contribute to family and community.

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[1] NDC, no. 171
[2] *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, p. 3

4. The option for the poor and vulnerable. The moral test for any community or nation is *how are the most vulnerable members faring?* The needs of the poor and vulnerable must rank first and be considered most urgent.

5. The dignity of work and the rights of workers. People are always more important than things. Workers have basic rights and should not be exploited for profit.

6. Solidarity. We are a global human family and are interdependent upon one another for survival.

7. Care for God's creation.[3] Blessed with a rich, diverse and beautiful world, we are called to be good stewards—caring for, maintaining, and sharing God's creation.

The best way to teach Catholic social teaching is to model these basic principles in our day-to-day lives as Catholic Christians. Great hope for our world is born in the work of acquainting persons of all ages with an awareness of and an ability to apply the principles of Catholic social teaching.

[3] *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, pp. 4-6

Characteristics of Catechesis: National Directory for Catechesis

The Church teaches that catechesis should have the following characteristics.

1) Authentic catechesis

• Faithfully teaches the doctrine and traditions of the Catholic Church, which are safeguarded by the bishops, who teach with a unique authority
• Has Scripture and Tradition as its single source for the Christian message
• Is centered in Christ
• Is Trinitarian in nature and content
• Comes from and leads to the Church
• Is sacramental
• Focuses on the moral life
• Focuses on eternal life

A. Catechesis centered in Christ teaches that

- Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, became man.
- He assumed human nature without losing his divine nature.
- Jesus Christ is true God and true man.
- All of Christ's life is a teaching.
- He taught in his words, parables, miracles, prayers, love for people, and acceptance of the will of his Father, which resulted in the sacrifice of the cross and the Resurrection.
- The object of catechesis that is Christ-centered is communion with Christ.
- Jesus became man not only so that we might know God's loving plan for our salvation, but also that we might be redeemed through his life, death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension.

B. Catechesis should be Trinitarian in nature and content and teach that

- Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and life.
- Through Jesus, the Trinity has been revealed as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- Authentic catechesis teaches faithfully what Jesus has revealed.
- The three divine persons are inseparable in who they are and in what they do. Yet each is revealed through actions that are proper to him: the Father is revealed through creation, the Son through his redemptive mission, and the Holy Spirit through his sanctifying activity that continues in the Church.
- When baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity here on earth and after death for eternity.

C. Catechesis comes from and leads to the Church and teaches that

- The Church is founded by Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.
- The best way to deepen faith is to grow in knowledge of the faith, prepare to receive and celebrate the sacraments, live moral lives, be people of prayer, and witness to Jesus Christ—even in a society that does not always reflect and support Christian values.
- All the baptized are called to accept the missionary mandate Christ gave to his disciples to teach in his name.
- Some have unique responsibilities for catechesis in the Church: bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay leaders, and parents.
- Bishops, as successors of the apostles, are the primary teachers of the Church and receive from Christ the power to act in his name.
- Parents are the first and most influential catechists for their children.
- All the baptized who are committed to spreading the Gospel message have a role in the Church's catechetical mission.
- Those who catechize have a unique opportunity to prepare others to witness to Christ in society.

D. Catechesis is sacramental:

- All the liturgy and worship of the Church is catechetical.
- The liturgical life of the Church revolves around the sacraments with the Eucharist at the center.
- Catechesis communicates sound sacramental theology.
- The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church.
- The Seven Sacraments are moments of encounter with Christ.
- Sacramental catechesis is a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith that integrates the knowledge of the faith with the living of the faith.
- Preparation to celebrate and receive the sacraments is intended for all members of the Church.
- The sacramental life of the Church takes place within and involves the community of faith.
- Sacramental catechesis is lifelong and ongoing.

E. Catechesis focuses on the moral life:

- It prepares believers to be disciples of Jesus Christ, that is, to have complete life in Christ.
- It stirs the heart, enlightens the mind, and inspires the soul.

- It seeks to help people form correct consciences, choose what is morally good, avoid sin, and live in this world according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- It teaches what it means to live according to the moral teachings of the Church, especially as found in the moral law or Ten Commandments, presented in light of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

F. Catechesis focuses on eternal life and teaches us that

- We should look beyond this life to salvation and eternal life with God.
- The Creed is our profession of faith in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- We firmly believe and hope that after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ.
- Jesus, the Son of God, freely suffered death because of his free and complete acceptance of the Father's will.
- By his death, Christ conquered death, and so opened the possibility of salvation to all.

II. Complete and systematic catechesis

A. Complete catechesis

- Reflects the entirety of the teaching of the Church as found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994).
- Presents the doctrines of the faith as an integrated whole.
- Presents the complete content of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Includes: the articles of the Creed, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.
- Has content rooted in Scripture and reflects various sources of the faith such as the teachings from the Councils, the Eastern and Western Fathers, liturgical texts, and spiritual writings.
- By following the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium, ensures that what the Church teaches in matters of faith and morals is faithful to the teaching of Christ as handed down to us from the Apostles.

B. Systematic catechesis asserts that

- The basic teachings of the faith as found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* need to be taught in a planned manner and be continually reinforced.
- The teachings of the faith are expanded upon and adapted to the age and ability of the learner.
- Instruction in the faith begins in the home.

- As the child ages, others support parents in educating their child in the faith by providing systematic catechetical programs.
- Programs of adult faith formation in the RCIA process should include systematic catechesis.
- Catechesis is to be a lifelong and ongoing catechetical activity.
- A variety of methods and techniques can be employed in the transmission of the knowledge of the faith. "Learning "by heart" (memorization) is particularly important.
- What is to be memorized includes prayers, facts about Scripture, key themes and major figures in salvation history, facts about the Church, worship and the Church year, devotions, holy days, the saints, the works of mercy, the mysteries of the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit, theological and moral virtues, Precepts of the Church, principles of Catholic social teaching, the examination of conscience, and songs.

III. Integral Catechesis

- All the teachings of the Church are interrelated and complement one another.
- The teachings form an organic whole because there is only one source for catechesis, the Word of God revealed by Jesus Christ.
- All catechesis draws its content from this one source as transmitted through Scripture and Tradition.
- There are no contradictions; all the teachings support and uphold one another.

IV. Divine Pedagogy

- What we believe and teach has first been taught to us by God.
- The content of our faith has been revealed to us by him and transmitted through Scripture and Tradition.
- All of what we teach comes to us from God through the Church.
- We teach about the very nature of the God who loves us and who wants to effect in us a response to this love: a conversion to Christ that leads to faith that is celebrated, lived, and prayed.

V. Lifelong catechesis

- Catechesis should be a permanent part of our lives.
- Catechists should be formed and trained to teach the Gospel message according to their particular circumstances.
- Catechetical materials are to be carefully selected so that the faith can be taught in such a way that the person can incorporate the doctrine according to his or her age and ability.
- We never learn all we can or need to know.

• Ongoing catechesis ensures continuing conversion to Christ and living lives compatible with the Gospel.

VI. Inculturated catechesis

• Catechesis must reflect an understanding of the culture in which the learner lives and how the Gospel message can transform the culture. This is one aspect of the meaning of inculturation.
• Inculturation involves identifying the presence of God and traces of the Gospel message in a culture and discerning how the Gospel message can be brought effectively to the people of that culture.
• A catechesis of inculturation means presenting the teaching of the faith in a complete and authentic way in dialogue with the language, customs, and practices of those to whom the Gospel is presented.
• The cultural pluralism in the United States is a positive value.
• Distinct cultural identities should be preserved while the unity of faith is promoted.

--------From the *Leader's Guide to the National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005.