

Catechetical Guidelines, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

The Design of the Catechetical Guidelines

"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

These Catechetical Guidelines recognize that all members of the parish are both teachers and learners in the ministry of lifelong faith formation. Catechesis is a lifelong journey for the disciples of Christ, sharing faith together.

With the help of the diocese, "every parish needs to develop a coherent catechetical plan that integrates the various components of the overall program and provides opportunities for all parishioners to hear the Gospel message, celebrate it in prayer and liturgy, and live it in their daily lives. That plan should reflect the priority of adult catechesis, take into account the needs of everyone in the parish, and provide special accommodation for cultural, racial and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, the neglected, and those unable to represent their own rights and interests."¹

These guidelines have been developed to promote complete and systematic faith formation throughout the lifecycle. They are constructed to reflect the six tasks of catechesis found in the NDC. Each task challenges the Christian to grow in discipleship. Being a disciple of Christ does not have an ending point, a graduation day. Christians continue to grow in:

1. knowledge of the faith,
2. meaningful participation in liturgy and sacraments,
3. moral formation,
4. knowledge of how to pray with Christ, in Christ, and in communion with the Church,
5. initiation into the life of the local Church community, and
6. promotion of a missionary spirit.

Of these six tasks, the GDC writes: "When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development" (no. 87).

The core of the guidelines, the six tasks of catechesis, are presented within the contexts of culture, family, the rural nature of much of our diocese, and the inculturation of many minority ethnic groups in West Virginia. The importance of catechizing with sensitivity to special needs and abilities of our people is also stressed.

These six tasks are essential to the building of the foundation of faith for the entire people of God in mission. These catechetical guidelines are offered to help illuminate the way.

¹ NDC, no. 60A

Catechesis Within the Church's Mission of Evangelization

What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1 Jn 1:3

In West Virginia, with its small Catholic population, evangelization is often thought of as reaching out to non-Catholics or bringing back the fallen away Catholics. In his wisdom, Pope Paul VI warned against limiting evangelization to making Christians out of non-Christians in the encyclical, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II called for a "new evangelization and mission to the nations." This is a call, he states, "[no] believer or institution of the Church is exempt from, to proclaim Christ to all people."² For the new evangelization to take place there is a need for a strong, complete, and systematic catechesis for all its members. A complete and systematic catechesis is one that nurtures a profound, lifelong conversion of the whole person and sets forth a comprehensive, contemporary synthesis of the faith.³ Catechesis cannot exist without evangelization, for its content is the same as the content of evangelization, namely, the person and gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴

Both the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *National Directory for Catechesis* place catechesis within the mission of evangelization. Evangelization and catechesis are among the principal means by which the Church hands on the faith.⁵

In addition to the traditional meaning of evangelization—the bringing of the Word of God to the unbaptized and the unchurched—the new evangelization is also directed to the Church itself, to the baptized. While it is true that many Catholics grow in faith through ongoing formation, regular reception of the sacraments, and the raising of children in the Church, that is not the case for all. Some members of the Church are formed by the values of the secularized culture, some have lost a sense of faith, and some have become alienated. The new evangelization is aimed at personal transformation through the development of a personal relationship with God, participation in sacramental worship, the development of a mature ethical and social conscience, ongoing catechesis, and a deepening integration of faith into all areas of life.⁶

Permanent or continuing catechesis involves the systematic presentation of the truths of the faith and the practice of Christian living. The function of permanent or lifelong catechesis is to nourish the faith of believers throughout their lives.⁷ A permanent catechesis centered on continual conversion "makes evangelizers of those

² John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer* (Washington, D. C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1990), 3.

³ GDC, nos. 121, 124.

⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), 30.

⁵ NDC, no. 15

⁶ NDC, no. 17A


⁷ NDC, no. 17C



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who have been evangelized.”⁸ “With God’s grace, catechesis develops initial faith, nourishes the Christian life, and continually unfolds the mystery of Christ until the believer willingly becomes his disciple.”⁹

Faith formation aims at enculturation of the Gospel, so that it is woven through the whole fabric of one’s life in the community. Faith formation needs to respect the natural rhythms of life and the dynamics of the culture in which it finds itself. Learning is measured in mission. In the Christian community, learning is not for its own sake, nor is it for greater understanding of the Bible or of theology alone. Learning is for the sake of mission and ministry.



⁸ GDC, no. 58

⁹ NDC, no. 19A

Vision of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

*"During his earthly ministry of evangelization, Jesus made it his special concern to instruct and form his disciples to whom he would eventually entrust the mission of preaching the Gospel. Jesus is seen often carefully explaining the meaning of his parables and sayings to them, searching for time alone with them in a quiet place, and at prayer with them. Following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles took up the role not only of evangelizing the world around them but also teaching the Christian community to know Christ and to follow his teaching."*¹⁰

"Catechesis must be addressed to all the members of the Church, adults as well as youth and adolescents. While the Diocesan Catholic School system plays an important role in evangelization and catechesis, the Church cannot forget the youth and young adults being educated outside the Catholic School system, nor can it ignore the duty to provide an ongoing program of faith formation for adults. For this reason, the Diocesan Church must develop a comprehensive plan of catechetics and spiritual formation, mindful that the goal of such instruction is to assist all Christians in undertaking the role of evangelizer."¹¹

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's plan for implementing the vision of lifelong faith formation centers on the role of the Bishop, Pastor, and the Faith Formation Consultants in all seven vicariates to help each parish in creating or enriching plans for lifelong catechesis, with adult faith formation as a priority. Each parish is challenged to develop competent catechetical leaders, youth ministers and catechists with the help of the diocese. The ongoing formation of these and all lay leaders is encouraged through the programs of TIMELY (Theology in Ministry for Ecclesial Leaders and Youth), Faith Harvest, Koinonia, Echoes of Faith, and diocesan and vicariate offerings.

The Church is entering a period of new vitality, a time in which adult Catholic laity will play a pivotal leadership role in fulfilling the Christian mission of evangelizing and transforming society (see *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*). For adults to fulfill their role in this new era in the Church, there is a need for a strong, complete and systematic catechesis for all its members. A complete and systematic catechesis is one that nurtures a profound, lifelong conversion of the whole person and sets forth a comprehensive, contemporary synthesis of the faith.¹² Catechesis cannot exist without evangelization, for its content is the same as the content of evangelization, namely, the person of Jesus Christ.¹³

¹⁰ Documents of the Ninth Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, p. 15

¹¹ Documents of the Ninth Diocesan Synod, p. 16

¹² GDC, nos. 121, 124

¹³ CT, no. 30

Developing a Catechetical Plan

A parish catechetical plan provides opportunities for all parishioners to hear the Gospel message, celebrate it in prayer and liturgy, and live it in their daily lives. The parish plan should reflect the priority of adult catechesis¹⁴, take into account the needs of everyone in the parish, and provide special accommodation for cultural, racial, and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, the neglected, and those unable to represent their own rights and interests. A parish plan should reflect goals and objectives specific to the parish community and include a regular assessment of progress. The parish plan should be adequately financed and staffed by professionally trained catechetical leaders so that the teachings of the Church are readily assessable to all in the parish.¹⁵ Smaller parishes might share in the services of a competent catechetical leader to ensure that the programs in these parishes have the benefit of catechetical planning, organization and direction.¹⁶

A parish's catechetical priorities should ensure that all segments of the parish have an opportunity to grow in understanding and practice of the Catholic faith. A comprehensive catechetical plan harmonizes the catechesis of adults, families, parents, youth, children in parish programs and Catholic schools, children in the Baptismal Catechumenate, and Small Christian Communities.¹⁷

One of the first steps in the implementation of the Catechetical Guidelines of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston will involve the engagement of parish leadership in a review of existing opportunities of faith formation and the identification of ways to enhance and strengthen what is already in place. The recognition of what is not included within a parish is the basis for the study of the catechetical plan and its development. The Vicariate Faith Formation Consultant is an important resource to the parish during this review process.

Resources for Catechetical Leaders & Catechists

The diocese offers a number of educational opportunities for deepening knowledge of the faith and appropriate methods of catechesis. Contact the Faith Formation Consultant in your vicariate for information on courses offered through the Koinonia program or online through the University of Dayton's Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation.

¹⁴ OHWB, no. 13

¹⁵ NDC, no. 60a

¹⁶ NDC, no. 61

¹⁷ NDC, no. 61