

Catechesis

Jesus Christ is the energizing center of evangelization and the heart of catechesis. Christ, the first evangelizer, is himself the Good News who proclaims the Kingdom of God and accomplishes the salvation of all by his redemptive suffering, death, and Resurrection. Catechesis unfolds the fullness of God's eternal plan entirely in the person of Jesus Christ. (NDC, no. 1)

Section One: Overview

Liturgy and Catechesis, p.2

Lifelong Faith Formation, p. 3

The Baptismal Catechumenate, p. 4, 5

Primacy of Adult Faith Formation, p. 6, 7


Sensitivity to Special Needs, p. 8

Welcoming the Participant, p. 9, 10, 11

Liturgy and Catechesis

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. (1 Cor 11:23-25)

"The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows."¹ The history of salvation, from the creation of the world to its redemption and eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ, is celebrated in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist.² "[The liturgy] is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God."³



All catechesis is handed on within the context of an active and faithful worshipping community. In fact, the ancient Latin adage "lex orandi, lex credendi" (loosely translated as "the law of prayer is the law of belief") points to the central place of liturgy in the handing on of our faith. Initially, the word catechesis (rooted in the Greek verb *katekhein*, to resound or echo) meant instructing in the way of the Lord. It was oral instruction, a handing on of all that has been received from Christ. Sacred Scripture, the Word of God written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has the preeminent position in the life of the Catholic Church and especially in the ministry of evangelization and catechesis.⁴ Catechesis is based on Scripture, Tradition, and liturgy, as well as on the teaching authority and life of the Church. The purpose of catechesis is to develop a living, explicit and active faith through the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.⁵

¹ CSL, no.10

² NDC, no.33

³ CCC, no. 1074

⁴ NDC, no. 24

⁵ Catholic Encyclopedia, p. 181

Lifelong Faith Formation

I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me. (Gal 2:20)

The Baptismal Catechumenate is the model for all catechesis. In the RCIA, sacramental initiation leads to the period of mystagogy when the newly baptized are immersed more deeply into the truths of the faith. Permanent or continuing catechesis follows and involves the systematic presentation of the truths of the faith and the practice of Christian living. Systematic faith formation can be carried out using one or more recognized approaches. The “breaking open of the Word” that takes place during the catechumenate enhances learning by aligning it with the liturgical year and the lectionary readings. The system can be the six tasks of catechesis specified in the NDC and the USCCB document *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. Other systematic models include the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the “scope and sequence” of a publisher approved by the USCCB Office on the Catechism.⁶

For any Christian, there never is a point when catechesis is complete. Christians always have something more to learn about Christ “in whom are ... all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” (Col 2:3) and about the Church, of whom all are members. Permanent catechesis nourishes the faith of believers throughout their lives. Catechesis strengthens Christians as they grow toward mature discipleship.

Catechesis for life in Christ stirs the heart, enlightens the mind, and inspires the soul. It aims to enable Christians to love God with all their hearts, all their souls, all their minds, and all their strength. It seeks to help believers form correct consciences, choose what is morally good, avoid sin and its occasions, and live in this world according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It teaches men and women their obligations in love toward God, others and ourselves. It summons everyone to recognize inherent dignity and to act in accord with the divine life in which all share. Catechesis offers the way of Christ, the way that leads away from death and toward life.⁷

Called by Baptism and nourished by the Eucharist in community, catechesis forms and leads believers to participation in mission as disciples of Jesus Christ.

⁶ The list of texts and series that carry a declaration of conformity to the CCC will be updated regularly at www.usccb.org/catechism/. See “List of Catechetical Texts in PDF” under “Conformity Reviews.”

⁷ NDC, no. 46

The Baptismal Catechumenate as the Cornerstone for All Catechesis

The NDC states that the Baptismal catechumenate as described in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) "should be the cornerstone of the parish catechetical plan."⁸ The initiation of new members of the Christian community is the responsibility of all the baptized⁹ and begins when the Good News has taken hold in the human heart and inspires initial faith and conversion to Jesus Christ.

This "first faith" must be nourished through steadily deepening involvement in the parish community's life of prayer, worship and service. This faith journey is shaped and renewed through participation in the celebration of seasons and feasts of the liturgical year as it "unfolds the entire mystery of Christ" and "carries out the formation of the faithful."¹⁰

Formal catechesis is also integral to this journey. This catechesis should present Catholic teaching in its entirety and also:

- enlighten faith
- direct the heart toward God,
- foster participation in the liturgy
- inspire apostolic activity
- and nurture a life completely in accord with the Spirit of Christ.¹¹

The doctrine that is taught must reflect the teaching of the Church in its worship and creed. In their preparation, catechists should rely especially on the CCC and other suitable materials.¹²

Finally, catechists should take care that their teaching is:

- filled with the spirit of the Gospel
- adapted to the signs and cycles of the liturgical year
- suited to those they catechize
- thoroughly grounded in Catholic doctrine.¹³

⁸ NDC, no. 61A6

⁹ RCIA, no. 9

¹⁰ GNLC, no. 1

¹¹ RCIA, no. 78

¹² NSC, no. 7

¹³ NSC no. 7, RCIA no. 16



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¹⁴ NDC, no. 46

The Primacy of Adult Faith Formation

Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us? (Lk 24:32)

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us and the *National Directory for Catechesis*, two recent documents of the USCCB, identify adult faith formation as the central axis of catechesis, around which all other catechesis revolves. To be a disciple of Christ requires an informed and mature faith along with the development of skills to share the Gospel, and to build families and communities of faith and service. The lifelong catechesis of adults must have high priority at all levels of the Church "because of its importance and because all other forms of catechesis are oriented in some way to it."¹⁵

Our Hearts Were Burning identifies six dimensions of adult faith formation content, drawn from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and identified in the NDC as the six tasks of catechesis:

- promote knowledge of the faith
- promote participation in the liturgy and the sacramental life of the Church
- integrate moral formation
- teach how to pray
- initiate into the life of the local Church and foster participation
- promote a missionary spirit.¹⁶

Given the broad scope of content of adult catechesis, no single approach can meet the diverse needs and learning styles of adults. A variety of activities and resources must be offered as faith-formation opportunities, including liturgy, Scripture reading and study, family or home-centered activities, small-group experiences, large groups, ecumenical dialogue, and individual materials for study.¹⁷ The goals of all adult catechesis are conversion to the Lord, membership and active participation in the Christian community, and Christian discipleship in the world.¹⁸

Adult catechesis relates the content of faith to life experience and includes study of Christian doctrine integrated with formation in Christian living. Adults have the responsibility to help identify their catechetical needs and to participate in the planning of ways to meet them. Adult catechesis should be based on the situations and the circumstances of those to whom it is addressed and should involve adults in such a way that they can teach and learn from one another.

Special forms of adult catechesis that are ongoing and systematic include:¹⁹

¹⁵ NDC, no. 188

¹⁶ NDC, no. 20

¹⁷ OHWB, pp.34-38

¹⁸ ACCC, nos. 36-38

¹⁹ OHWB, no. 176

INTERIM

- Catechesis for Christian initiation (the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults)
- Catechesis for parents
- Catechesis for the liturgical year
- Missionary catechesis
- Formation of catechists and the lay apostolate in the world
- Catechesis for the reception of the Sacraments
- Catechesis for special situations and experiences
- Catechesis for special events in the life of the Church and society.

Catechesis with Sensitivity to Special Needs

The creation of a fully accessible parish reaches beyond mere physical accommodations to encompass the attitudes of all parishioners toward persons with disabilities. Pastoral ministers are encouraged to develop specific programs aimed at forming a community of believers known for its joyful inclusion of all God's people around the table of the Lord. (Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments With Persons with Disabilities, 7)

We recognize that within our faith communities there must be full inclusion of persons with disabilities. Members of the community include those with cognitive, developmental, learning, emotional, physical, and sensory disabilities. All persons have the capacity to witness their faith to the community and to offer their gifts. Persons with disabilities are agents of catechesis as well as recipients. The goals of full inclusion should involve ways to celebrate the liturgy, receive the Sacraments, and grow in faith in the fullest and richest manner possible for all members of the community.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus never failed to display a profound respect for all people. He entered into their lives, met them in the streets and in their homes, and continually affirmed their dignity and value. Jesus healed the sick and the suffering, not as a display of power, but to restore them to society. Jesus embraced marginalized persons to help him build the faith community around forgiveness and love. Inclusion is a response to the call of Christ. It is not about helping participants with special needs, it is about enriching all of us. Inclusion begins with understanding that all participants have something to learn from each other.²⁰

Catechesis for persons with disabilities is most effective when it is carried out within the general pastoral care of the community. The whole community needs to be aware of the presence of persons with special needs and be involved in their catechesis. The involvement of families is paramount. Families are a uniquely valuable resource for understanding the needs of their members.

The NDC offers the following guidelines for providing catechesis for persons with special needs:

- Catechesis for persons with disabilities must be adapted in content and method to particular situations.
- Specially trained catechists should help persons interpret the meaning of their lives and give witness to Christ's presence in the local community in ways they can understand and appreciate.
- To avoid further isolation, these programs should be integrated with the normal catechetical activities of the parish as much as possible.
- The catechetical efforts should be promoted by staffs and committees that include persons with disabilities.²¹

²⁰ Nuzzi, Rev. Ronald J. *Progress*. ARC Community Support Systems. Teutopolis, IL. 1994.


²¹ NDC, no. 49

Welcoming the Participant

When we examine ways to participate in catechesis, to “echo the faith” we share in Christ Jesus, it is important to remember that all are called to be active members in the family of God. Every opportunity for faith formation must be open to the fullest sharing of the Gospel message, even when words are not used. When it comes to sharing faith, learners are not passive receivers of information. Learning environments need to be safe places where people can have genuine and full interaction with others and can experience the expression of Christian beliefs and practices in ways and words that communicate understanding and acceptance.

When we look at the Six Tasks of Catechesis across the life cycle, learners of all abilities need to have varying and meaningful access to the components of the faith and ways of learning more about them.

Promoting Knowledge of the Faith



Knowledge of the faith relies heavily on words and meanings of symbols, so visual, auditory, tactile experiences must be added to make more information available to persons with many ways of learning and experiencing. Stories of our faith can be transmitted with music, with art, with movement such as participating in the Stations of the Cross, within experiential forms of prayer, within family traditions celebrated within a home. The substance of the faith will be experienced many times in a lifetime of learning and worshiping. Concepts can be broken down into pieces and taught in many creative ways. It is important to present ideas about the concepts of our faith in ways and activities that speak to the multiple intelligences that learners use to process what they receive.²²

Promoting Meaningful Participation in Liturgical Worship and Sacramental Life

Participation in liturgy and sacramental life can be designed in many ways to meet the needs of the participants. Persons can spend time in a worship space when liturgy is not taking place to learn about and to become more familiar with the major symbols and locations that have meaning during the active movements of liturgical prayer. “It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to all people, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together.”²³ We are called to undertake forms of evangelization that speak to the particular needs of all persons, make those liturgical adaptations which promote their active participation, and provide help and services that reflect our loving concern for those with special situations and needs. Parish sacramental celebrations should be

²² *We Grow in Faith Together*, The Catechist Manual of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Program to Improve Catholic Religious Education for Children and Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. Diocese of Pittsburgh, 1996.


²³ *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities*. 1989.

accessible to persons of all abilities and open to their full, active and conscious participation, according to their capacity.²⁴

Integrating Moral Formation into a Christian Way of Life

Once participants are led into the presence, holiness, and experience of God, they will not forget His place in their lives. The reverence and devotion that they experience within the community in times of worship, learning, and prayer will be modeled. Participants can be invited to a sharing of beliefs, experiences, ideals, and values, but they must be able to feel these shared by others in the faith community. All can be invited to put aside selfish goals and private interest for the sake of a common good.²⁵ Another aspect of integrating moral formation into a lifestyle is to teach and model skills to help the implementation of desired actions and behaviors.

Teaching How to Pray



All experiences of catechesis should begin and end with prayer. Participants of all abilities have a deep sense of the sacred, which goes beyond our ability to understand or explain. One of the most important aspects of catechesis is to empower and enable participants to pray together and to encourage them to be able to carry prayer into their private lives. Participants can be given the examples of many prayer experiences that touch different abilities to understand and model. Liturgical prayer can be experienced in the worship space, in the adoration of the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and participants can pray with Scriptures, symbols, or icons in specially created prayer centers or in beautiful outdoor settings.

Initiating into the Life of the local Church and Fostering Active Participation

A main goal of catechesis is to help every participant become a vital and integral member of the parish community. Each participant has much to contribute and to enrich the community. Full inclusion leads to the breaking down of barriers of fear and prejudice, and to the creation of places of belonging and acceptance. When participants are recognized as full members of the parish community, the accommodations that make inclusion possible become almost automatically recognized and the responsibilities shared. Successful inclusion is based on the willingness of all community members to accept responsibility, individually and corporately, for the way each lives, uses his or her time, talent and treasure, and responds to the needs and rights of others.²⁶

²⁴ *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1995.

²⁵ *We Grow in Faith Together*, p. 10.

²⁶ *We Grow in Faith Together*, p. 11

Promoting a Missionary Spirit

All Christians are called to reach out in love to others. It is important that persons with all abilities are invited to share in the ministry of the Church. If the parish has outreach programs, persons with all abilities should have a place to help within these projects. The inclusion of all parishioners in the mission of service will heighten the Gospel message for all who collaborate in the service opportunities.

Identifying and Targeting Learning Strengths of the Participants

Some participants in faith formation opportunities will have strong cognitive strengths, the abilities to retain, recall, and recite facts and prayers of the faith. Some will have strong memories, but may have difficulty comprehending something that they can remember. These persons will need help transferring the memory to their life experience, and then to the "holy" message of faith.

Other participants will have intuitive strengths rather than cognitive strengths. These learners have more positive successes when they encounter affective and symbolic learning experiences. A catechist can learn to rely on the intuition of the learner, and to share faith in ways that touch the heart and the mind, and use symbols of the faith as much as possible. It is not important that participants give back oral information or be able to memorize texts. The process of sharing the faith is the human methodology and the divine grace of faith formation.

Spirituality and faith development are brought to a practical and meaningful level when a participant is encouraged to act on their learned faith values. Active participation as a liturgical minister whenever possible is an important part of membership in the parish community. All participants need to be recognized for their talents and abilities, not just for their disabilities.²⁷

²⁷ *Parents Speaking to Parents About Faith Development of Children with Intellectual Disabilities*. The Parent Handbook of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Program to Improve Catholic Religious Education for Children and Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. p. 30, 3