


## The Second Task of Catechesis—Promoting Meaningful Participation in Liturgy & Sacramental Life

*Since Christ is present in the Sacraments, the believer comes to know Christ in the liturgical celebrations of the Church and is drawn into communion with him. Catechists should promote an active, conscious, genuine participation in the Liturgy of the Church, not merely by explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for a community spirit, and for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds.<sup>1</sup>*

The National Directory for Catechesis devotes an entire chapter to “Catechesis in a Worshiping Community.”<sup>2</sup> It emphasizes that Liturgy and catechesis are inseparable. Catechesis both prepares believers to celebrate the Sacraments and to reflect later on their experience of the words, signs, rituals, and symbols used in the Sacraments.<sup>3</sup> Liturgy itself is catechetical because as the Scriptures and the Nicene Creed are proclaimed during the Eucharist, the faith of the people is profoundly shaped.



The NDC reaffirms the principle that the baptismal catechumenate is the inspiration for all catechesis. It also includes a detailed outline of the basic content of catechesis for each of the seven Sacraments<sup>4</sup> as well as recommendations on teaching sacramentals and Marian devotions.

### Infancy

Parents, as the “first catechists” of their children play a crucial role in introducing their young ones to the Liturgy and the prayer life of the Church. Even at home, there is much they can do to introduce their children to the concepts of sacramentality and ritual.

- Family members can regularly and gently trace the sign of the cross on the baby’s forehead.
- The activities of bathing, oiling, and feeding the baby can be connected to the Sacraments of Initiation.
- Mothers can reflect on the times they feed their infant during the day as sacred times, reflecting the official prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Hymns and psalm refrains can be part of the repertoire sung to the baby.

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<sup>1</sup> NDC, no. 20

<sup>2</sup> NDC, nos. 32-29

<sup>3</sup> NDC, no. 33

<sup>4</sup> NDC, nos. 35-36

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The celebration of Baptism is a crucial moment in encouraging participation in the Liturgy, and there is much that parish staffs can do to make this a “teachable moment” for the family and the assembly as a whole.

- Infants may be brought to the Church for a blessing, and even anointing with the Oil of Catechumens, before the Baptism takes place.
- The actual celebration of Baptism should be done in a very public, visible way, preferably during the Sunday Liturgy.

It is important to remember that baptized infants are a vital part of the worshipping community; they should be brought to Mass whenever possible. “Cry Rooms,” where they exist, should be used only for nursing, comforting and quieting.

### Preschool Children

Liturgical catechesis can continue in many ways even before the child enters kindergarten. Here are a few ideas:

- Parents and other family members can begin to teach the words and gestures of the Sign of the Cross to the toddler, modeling the gestures and moving the toddler’s right hand. The toddler’s hands can also be gently placed in a “praying” position.
- Even the simplest meal can begin with an uncomplicated grace (prayer of thanksgiving).
- Toddlers should be welcomed as part of the Sunday assembly. When they enter the church for Mass, they can be assisted in blessing themselves with holy water.
- Before or after Mass, toddlers can be taken on a tour of the church. Their attention can be directed to the altar, font, paschal candle, statues, windows, stations, etc.
- It is usually a good idea for families with toddlers and other children to sit near the front, so that the children can see and hear what is happening. The cry room should be the place of last resort.
- It is not a good idea for the toddler to expect to have food (cookies, crackers, cereal, etc.) available during Mass.
- Toddlers can help to put the family envelope in the collection basket.
- Toddlers can walk with other family members (or be carried) in the communion procession. Older preschoolers can walk on their own.
- Family customs in harmony with the liturgical year can be developed (Advent Wreath, setting up the Nativity Scene, baking special breads or cooking special meals, having an Easter Egg hunt, etc.) Advent feels different than Christmas; Lent feels different than Easter, and so forth.
- Regular reading aloud and telling stories prepare children for listening. At Mass, children can benefit from Children’s Liturgy of the Word at this time in their development. This is *not* a “class” or an arts and crafts experience; this is truly a

celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, simplified for children. (See section that follows on *Children's Liturgy of the Word*.)

- Children can be encouraged to make simple prayers of petition and thanksgiving as part of meal and night prayers. They can also learn to say "I'm sorry..." and talk about what they "believe."

### Children in Elementary School

Catechesis in the early years of schooling will focus on a special way in the preparation for the Sacraments of Penance and First Eucharist. See the article on "Sacraments of Initiation and Sacramental Preparation" in the *Catechesis* section of the Guidelines. Some ideas for older children in this age group include:

- Intermediate-aged children can grasp the concept that the Eucharistic Liturgy really begins before arriving at the church; they can recognize the importance of preparing mind and heart for Liturgy during the week.
- These children can be encouraged to pay more attention to the Liturgy of the Word; they can understand that the Word of God is powerful and makes things happen, that Jesus is called the Word of God. They can reflect on the meaning of the word "Gospel" as "Good News," and upon what Good News Jesus brought, and how he brought it.
- Intermediate-aged children can research the various Church collections and other requests for charitable donations, and begin to learn about the concept of setting aside a certain amount of "time, talent, and treasure" for the sake of the poor and needy.
- Concepts like "sacrifice," "sin," "Eucharist as Thanksgiving," "Communion," "the Body of Christ," and doing "in memory of Jesus" can begin to be explored in simple ways. The question of how to be an instrument of Christ's peace in family, school, and wider world can be raised for ongoing discussion.
- These children can be trained as servers and "apprenticed" as ushers.
- Children of this age should be encouraged to continue to use of the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation. At this age they are beginning to be capable of making moral decisions.

### Children in Middle School

The ministry of prayer and worship *celebrates* and *deepens* young people's relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it *awakens* their awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; it *incorporates* young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially Eucharist; it *nurtures* the personal prayer life of young people; and it *fosters* family rituals and prayer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> RTV, p. 44



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Young adolescents should be involved in liturgical celebration for the community in ministry roles. Those young adolescents still involved as altar servers often begin to drift away from this ministerial role at this age, not realizing that they can continue in the role or use their gifts in other ways in Liturgy and worship in the parish. Invitation is paramount to initiate and keep their involvement. Greater youth participation in the Liturgy will not occur without *intentional* effort to seek and encourage it. Parents, pastors, parish priests, youth and youth leaders, Liturgy committees, and concerned individuals need to create a local pastoral plan.<sup>6</sup> Teens who feel called to liturgical ministry and display the appropriate skills can be apprenticed as lectors, ushers, sacristans, cantors, and liturgical musicians. They can also assist an adult leader with Children's Liturgy of the Word.

This is often the time of preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. See the article on "Sacraments of Initiation and Sacramental Preparation" in the *Catechesis* section of the Guidelines. To enhance the likelihood that the candidates will remain involved in the parish after Confirmation, they should be exposed to effective youth ministry that continues to invite and welcome young people, especially in the person of the youth ministry team. Youth ministers should be involved in the process of preparation, the retreat, and given the opportunity to build personal relationships with the young people that will carry beyond the celebration of the Sacrament.



### High School Adolescents

Prayer and worship take on greater significance in the lives of young people as they grow in maturity and spiritual awareness. Significant adults can help youth grow by sharing their own spiritual journeys and praying with and for young people.

Teens have gifts they can share with the faith community when it gathers to worship and pray. As mentioned in the previous section, young people need to be intentionally invited to share their gifts with the whole community. At the same time, the community needs to be cognizant of the pastoral needs of youth when it gathers to worship so that young people find the Gospel message shared and expressed in ways relevant and meaningful to them.

At certain times and events, special liturgies will be celebrated for young people that are specifically geared to them; at youth retreats, at youth conferences and rallies, and on occasional parish Sunday celebrations for youth such as a "youth Mass." These can be wonderful and meaningful expressions of faith for youth. While this may be appropriate on "special occasions," participation of all youth in the parish Sunday Liturgy should be the norm with full intergenerational participation.

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<sup>6</sup> FAA, p. 2




## Young Adults

The goal at this age is to invite, empower and enable young adults to participate in the life of the Church through worship and sacramental life.<sup>7</sup> Some strategies include:

- Encourage homilists to address a wide range of life's issues.<sup>8</sup>
- Invite young adults to be liturgical ministers, and provide necessary training.<sup>9</sup>
- Provide opportunities for and encourage continued use of the Sunday readings for daily reflection.
- Unite young adults with the prayer of the Church by encouraging them to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Young adults can be blessed publicly at Mass when joining the parish, moving away, going on to college, going to military or mission service, entering seminary or religious life, during pregnancy, at the birth of child, etc. They can also be prayed with and for during times of unemployment.

## Adults



Adults of all ages can benefit from faith formation efforts to deepen their understanding of, and appreciation for, the Eucharistic Liturgy and the other Sacraments. Parishes should have a Liturgy Committee comprising parishioners representing all the different groups in the parish. The pastor and staff can benefit from hearing the recommendations of the parishioners regarding Liturgy and this is also an excellent opportunity to catechize these parish leaders. Here are some other ideas:

- Several times a year, schedule a "Teaching Mass," in which a commentator explains the meaning of the Eucharistic Liturgy. A carefully crafted script here can be a great way to reach a large number of people at once. One idea is to focus on the Liturgy of the Word in the fall and the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the spring.
- Consider scheduling the Koinonia courses on the Liturgy and the Sacraments of Initiation.
- Promote the special events at the Diocesan Pastoral Centers that focus on Liturgy and Sacraments.
- Keep a well-stocked parish library that includes books and DVDs that parishioners may borrow. The Appendix to the Guidelines includes a listing of sources for good catechetical materials.

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<sup>7</sup> FAA, 33

<sup>8</sup> FAA, 35

<sup>9</sup> FAA, 35




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- Make sure all adults feel welcome to participate in liturgical ministries, and then form them well. Set terms of service for the various ministries and encourage liturgical coordinators to welcome new volunteers.
- As adults age, they often experience hearing problems, sometimes without realizing it. Ensure the sound system in the worship space is working well and consider offering an amplification system to hard-of-hearing parishioners. Consider having one Mass each weekend interpreted for the deaf.
- Keep the narthex well-stocked with good adult formation materials relating to the Liturgy, and include short pieces in the bulletin each week.
- Encourage staff members to attend regional or national liturgical conferences so they can be updated on the best liturgical practices.

### Senior Adults

Seniors often are a neglected group when it comes to liturgical involvement. Every parish can make special efforts to help them participate fully and enable them to give witness to their lives of faith.

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- Large print worship aids, good sound systems, accessible Church architecture (ramps, handrails, non-slip flooring) are all signs of welcome for seniors. Consideration can be shown/offered to elders during periods of kneeling or long periods of standing
  - Older parishioners should continue to be included among the liturgical ministers and be mentors to various liturgical ministers. They should be represented on the parish Liturgy committee.
  - They should be included as “Pray-ers” on behalf of the community; this ministry is available to the homebound as well as those who are not. (see *Ministry of Praise* in the Appendix) Seniors should also be included as “composers” of the intercessions for Mass and consulted in homily preparation.
  - Seniors can make good RCIA sponsors, sponsor couples for marriage preparation, and can be very active in sacramental preparation and bereavement ministry.
  - Elders should be anointed in the community setting—during Mass when possible.
  - Milestone wedding/religious profession anniversaries (and any wedding/religious profession anniversary yearly after 50!) should be celebrated with blessings during the Sunday Liturgy, with the parish community. Grandparents and great-grandparents can also be blessed.

## Children's Liturgy of the Word

When planning to begin a Children's Liturgy of the Word program, or to make changes to an existing program, parish leaders need to explore several questions. What is the goal of separating the children from the assembly? What are the parents' expectations? Who will work with the children and how should they be prepared? How often should the children be dismissed? What materials will be used? In answering these and other questions, parish leaders should first consult the *Directory for Masses With Children*<sup>10</sup>, which anticipates a separate Children's Liturgy of the Word in certain circumstances (n. 17-18).

Parishes vary considerably in how they answer these questions and, thus, in how they implement the Children's Liturgy of the Word. There are, however, several important principles that should guide the practice.

The primary purpose of a Children's Liturgy of the Word is to open the Scriptures of the day's Eucharistic Liturgy in a way that speaks to children. Another goal is to enhance liturgical formation and, in time, participation by the children. The process should look like this:

- The children are called forward by the presider just before the Liturgy of the Word begins with the first reading of the day.
- After a brief prayer by the presider, the children and their adult leader(s) are given the *Lectionary for Masses With Children*, and they hold it high and process from the worship space to a separate room. This should be a place worthy of a part of the Liturgy, not a room with toys, cribs, and so forth. It can be a tastefully arranged classroom or a section of the parish hall. It will have a stand to hold the Lectionary, and chairs, a rug, or carpet squares on which the children can sit comfortably.
- The children listen to the first reading for the day, then sing or speak a simple psalm response (by echoing a refrain, no paper words or music needed), and then listen to the second reading.
- The children stand and sing a simple Alleluia and cross themselves as usual before the reading of the Gospel. Their leader then shares a reflection appropriate for the age group. This should not be a question-and-answer session, but occasionally children may be invited to share a response from their lives to what they have just heard.
- The children stand and echo a simple form of the Creed. The adult leader offers a series of intercessions, and the children respond with the same response used in the assembly. Children may be invited to offer their own intercessions.
- An usher or member of the assembly calls the children to return when the offering plates begin to be passed in the assembly. The children return quietly to sit with their families in time for the bringing up of the gifts.

<sup>10</sup> *Directory for Masses With Children*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1973

**Who to dismiss:** Some parishes limit the dismissal to children who have not yet received the Eucharist, believing that children who participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist should also be present for the Liturgy of the Word. This is sound reasoning. Some parishes invite children up to Grade 6 to participate and over time allow the older children the opportunity to be the lectors, the psalm leaders, and the readers of the intercessions.

Generally speaking, children from first grade and up should be remain in the assembly learning how to actively participate as they prepare to celebrate their First Eucharist.

**How often to dismiss:** Some parishes dismiss the children every week, but many do so only occasionally or just for certain liturgical seasons. The latter is a good model because it helps the children to be formed at their level of understanding while allowing them to observe adult role models participating in Liturgy on a regular basis.

Whenever a special event is celebrated (a Baptism, an Anointing, a feast day celebration, etc.), the children should not be dismissed. These are times to remain with the worshipping community.

Here are some other guiding principles:

- Children's Liturgy of the Word should not be used as a babysitting opportunity for children considered too young to be present at Liturgy.
- It should not be a place where children are entertained or distracted. Working on crafts or coloring pages or puzzles takes time away from offering formation in Liturgy. Occasionally, a good worksheet or symbol can be found that correlates well with the Sunday's Gospel, and this can be given to the children as they leave to return to their families. An example would be a mustard seed taped to a card, a shaft of wheat, etc. The objects should never be such that they are a danger to a young child or a major distraction to the family and assembly, such as a bell. The objects or worksheets could be used later by the family to discuss the day's Liturgy. One good resource is *Celebrating the Lectionary*.<sup>11</sup>
- It should not be a substitute for ongoing faith formation for the children of the parish. If this is the only time available for preschool religious formation, then it might be better to use a good preschool or kindergarten faith formation program for the entire Mass time.

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<sup>11</sup> Resource Publications, [www.rpinet.com](http://www.rpinet.com) or 1-888-273-7782.