

# EVANGELIZING

*New Vision - New Directions*

# CATECHESIS

A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THEMES FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS

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*"Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways."  
(GDC, #105)*

*"The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ."  
(CT5) All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ."  
(GDC, #80)*

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

## Opening Prayer

Take a moment to place yourself in the presence of God's Spirit, then prayerfully read and reflect on the following passage:

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11)*

# Article 10

## Roles in Catechesis

by Janet Schaeffler, OP

Based on paragraphs #230-232 of the *General Directory for Catechesis*

### Preparing to Read

In preparing to read this article, please reflect on and discuss with others the following:

1. Who is most responsible for catechesis in a parish?
2. What is the role of the parish faith community in passing on the faith?

Long before the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child," became popular in our country, the Church understood its all-encompassing reality—and that truth has been emphatically reiterated in the *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)*.

The *GDC* leaves no one out when it talks about the responsibility for the ministry of catechesis: bishops, pastors, priests, parents and family, religious men and women, laity, catechists, and the entire Christian community.

In the third century, Tertullian was the first to acknowledge this crucial truth: "Christians are made, not born." The making of Christians depended then—as now—on everything that the Church is and does and on everyone's role within this community.

The roles might be different and unique, but each role is crucial. One of the fascinating realities of our Church is that we are a community of both/and; in many areas of Church life, theology, and practice we have a broad, all-encompassing view. This is especially true in today's understanding of the nature of and the roles of responsibility in catechesis.

The responsibility for sharing the faith, for walking with others in their faith journey, for initiating others into this Gospel community, does not rest with one group of people within the Church. All of us—in differing—but very real—ways are called to responsibility for catechesis.

At times, perhaps because of the impetus given to catechetical renewal by Vatican II, some of us may have created an unequal partnership. We attempted to do alone what is actually the task of many, of the entire faith community.

The *GDC* calls us back to examine and live the reality of

interrelationship and interdependence. The roles of bishops, priests, and catechists have been defined in many places. In this short exploration, let us look at two other roles highlighted in the *GDC*: family and community.

### The Family

How did your children learn how your family celebrates Christmas? Did you take your children on your lap saying,

"Let me tell you how our family celebrates Christmas. Here, you can read about it in this book and memorize these facts." (This scene could go on to include, "And in two weeks come back, and I'll give you a test.") Your children know—from an early age—how your family celebrates Christmas (or birthdays, etc.) because they experience it firsthand with all its sights, sounds, tastes, and feelings. The *GDC* states that parents are the primary educators in the faith. . . . all members of the family play an active part in the education of the younger members. . . . The family is defined as a "domestic Church" (see LG 11; see AA 11;FC 49), that is, in every Christian family the different aspects and functions of the life of the entire Church may be reflected: mission; catechesis; witness; prayer, etc. (*GDC*, #255)

Parents and family are the primary source of the experience of lived faith, of discipleship, of God's love. Authentic Christian parents catechize—profoundly and truly—by living out their faith in day-to-day events.

What does this mean for catechetical

leaders? What are some things to remember and some approaches to take?

1. All that we do as Church—as parish—needs to empower, encourage, and support parents to be what they already are:

## From the *General Directory for Catechesis*

"Conversion to Jesus Christ implies walking in his footsteps. Catechesis must, therefore, transmit to the disciples the attitudes of the Master himself. The disciples thus undertake a journey of interior transformation, in which, by participating in the paschal mystery of the Lord, 'they pass from the old man to the new man who has been made perfect in Christ' (*Decree on the Missionary Activity in the Church [Ad Gentes]*, #13). The Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus takes up the Decalogue, and impresses upon it the spirit of the beatitudes (see LG 62; CCC 1965-1986), is an indispensable point of reference for the moral formation which is most necessary today . . . . This moral testimony, which is prepared for by catechesis, must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel" (see CT 29f) (*GDC*, #85).



"the domestic Church." Parents need to hear that what they are already doing is holy.

2. When we work in programs that are predominantly for children and youth, catechists need to remember that their call is to minister to the whole family, not just that individual child.

3. In our renewed efforts in adult faith formation, particular attention needs to be given to opportunities for parents.

4. We do a wonderful job with families at the times of sacraments. Our Catholic life isn't only about sacraments; it is about discipleship (the living out of the sacraments). Do we pay attention to families at times other than sacramental times?

5. The *GDC* says, "Indeed, 'family catechesis precedes . . . accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis'" (CT 68) (*GDC*, #226). Are we creative in our programming to, for, and with families?

### The Community as Catechist

As important as family is, often when we put all our programming there, we are still concentrating upon children's faith formation. As important as children are, growth in faith includes and challenges everyone. The emerging conviction of community as catechist gives us new ways to look at children's faith formation as well as taking us far beyond that.

In the past we have often thought that we "learn" in religious education settings and then live it in the parish at home (and the world) and celebrate it in the liturgy. But, the

reverse is true. We "learn"—or rather, "catch"—faith as we learn everything else: through imitation of others and through our experiences. (Recall the story of how children learn about the family celebration of Christmas.) Then, in "classes" we learn *why* we are doing it.

Unfortunately our educational background has often programmed us to put so much emphasis on telling people the "what" that we have forgotten the significance of experience. We learn first through experience, then by imagining (stories), and last of all through the use of signs (language).

Life is about constant experience; experience is inescapable. We are constantly experiencing. If we learn primarily through experience, then everything influences us,

teaches us, catechizes us, forms us. This truth is emphasized in the *GDC* and in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* as well as through the writings and dreams of the prominent catechetical leaders of the last 20 years. In the words of Maria Harris, the entire life of the Church has the creative power to "fashion a people." What a wonderful time to be alive and ministering in the Church!

The Church in every dimension of its life forms in its people a living faith: through proclamation, teaching, worship, service, and community life. The *GDC* says:

The parish is, without doubt, the most important *locus* in which the Christian community is formed and expressed. This is called to be a fraternal and welcoming fam-

## Reflection Questions for Individuals and Groups

Select some of the following questions to help you assimilate your understanding of this article.

1. What new insights did you gain from this article on the roles in catechesis?
2. How are the different roles in catechesis related?
3. How can the family as "domestic church" reflect the different functions of Church, i.e., mission, catechesis, witness, prayer, etc.?
4. What does your parish do to foster faith growth of parents and the "domestic church" outside of sacramental preparation? Would this be important? Why or why not?
5. How important is family catechesis for a person's journey of faith?
6. What can be done in a parish to help the community understand its role as catechist?
7. How would various groups in your parish respond to and see their role and responsibility for this statement: "The Church in every dimension of its life forms in its people a living faith through proclamation, teaching, worship, service, and community life?"

ily where Christians become aware of being the people of God (see CT 67c) (GDC, #257).

The catechetical influence of the parish includes everything: from the way secretaries answer phone calls to the celebration of sacraments; from the way decisions are made to how resources are used and allocated. Formation takes place in all of the formal and informal ways in which the community gathers or fails to gather.

For instance, our prayer lives are only half developed if our prayer is exclusively personal. We need to pray as a community. The way of "learning" is not just sessions about community prayer but sessions of community praying.

Does the parish council annually ask themselves the question: In everything that we are living, doing, and ways that we are functioning as a parish, what are we teaching people about faith; about Church?

A friend of mine has—more than once—given a homily on Catechetical Sunday that illustrates the point: "We run two religious education programs here: the one that children, youth, or adults come to on Monday evenings or Tuesday afternoons and the one that happens when people leave liturgy early, the one that happens when no one sings at liturgy, the one that happens when no one comes forward for the justice and service needs in the community, and so on."

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### Closing Prayer



*Good and gracious God, you call us to be your people, echoing your Word and presence through our ordinary lives as we strive to bring about your reign in our world today. We pray that we will continue to recognize and respond to your presence as we go forth to evangelize our world with your good news and promote a new vision and new direction for the catechetical ministry of all people. We ask for your blessing and intimate presence on our ongoing journey of conversion, becoming disciples who will transform the world through proclaiming and living Gospel values.*

*We ask this in your name. Amen.*

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### For Further Reading

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