



EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

2016 Reflections

Article 10. Roles in Catechesis

By Patrice Spirou

Every day Pope Francis speaks to catechists about what changes we must make within ourselves and our ministries to more effectively spread the Gospel message as Jesus commissions us to do. From the Holy Father's writing and interviews we hear statements similar to those listed below. Surprisingly, as timely as they are, these points are not the Holy Father's words, but have actually been gleaned from, *Evangelizing Catechesis: New Vision- New Directions* by Sr. Janet Schaeffler, OP.

1. *Parents must be supported to advance the "the domestic church." This means. . . 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 time of sacraments. Our Catholic life isn't only about sacraments; it is about discipleship (the living out of the sacraments).*
5. *The GDC says, "Indeed, family catechesis precedes. . . accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis" (GDC,#226). Are we creative in our programming to, for, and with families?*

Sr. Janet Schaeffler's 2001 commentary sought to answer two important questions: 1) Who is most responsible for catechesis in a parish? and 2) What is the role of the parish faith community in passing on the faith? Today, following the Holy Father's lead, these questions are being re-examined with great intentionality at every level of the Church. The Church is now placing great emphasis on equipping the family and the community to assist them in taking up their role to evangelize and catechize.

So as catechists we find ourselves in a time of transition. The power of experiential faith formation within the family, and the indisputable fact that parents are the primary educators of their children, is becoming front and center in the evangelization conversation. However, Sr. Janet advocated for this exact discussion almost fifteen years ago: "Authentic Christian parents catechize-profoundly and truly-by living out their faith in day-to-day events."

It is safe to say that Sr. Janet is a catechist who has been ahead of her time! In this moment our Holy Father, Pope Francis together with our Catholic bishops, is steering the heart of the Church back

toward the home to renew our faith communities. Many dioceses and parishes are currently in the process of implementing pastoral plans that address the needs of family and whole community catechesis. As catechists we are discovering that to evangelize families is vital to answering Jesus' call *to go make disciples*, because it is within the family that disciples are made.

Patrice Spirou is Assistant Director of Religious Education in the Office of Formation & Discipleship in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. She has more than twenty-five years of experience serving and teaching in Catholic schools and parishes. Patrice is a passionate advocate of family centered faith formation.