



EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

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

*"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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Opening Prayer

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

"We have heard them, we know them; our ancestors have recited them to us. We do not keep them from our children; we recite them to the next generation, the praiseworthy and mighty deeds of the Lord, the wonders that he performed."

(Psalm 78:3-4)

Article 4

Catechumenal Model: Inspiration for Initial and Ongoing Catechesis

by Dr. Gerard F. Baumbach

Based on paragraphs 63-68 and 88-91 in the *General Directory for Catechesis*

Preparing to Read

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

1. How would you define the words *catechumenate* and *conversion*?
2. What are some ways your parish catechizes?
3. How does your experience of liturgy influence your catechetical ministry?



NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

As a river's clear waters flow deliberately yet gently, surprising landscapes with tributaries to previously unknown places, so does the catechumenate help chart our course on the way of Jesus throughout our lives. The catechumenate offers catechesis a way of navigating the river of life in Christ, cornerstone of faith (see 1 Peter 2:4-9). Jesus holds us together as one in him (see Ephesians 2:19-22), formed together in the community of the Church.

The baptismal catechumenate is the Church's framework for initiation into the faith. It also is "the model of its catechizing activity" (*General Directory for Catechesis* #90). It provides a mutually enriching setting for the experience of coming to faith (initial catechesis) and growing in faith (ongoing catechesis). Of course, catechumens (unbaptized persons preparing for the Easter sacraments) and persons already baptized are not the same. Yet the catechumenate inspires catechesis for everyone, forming all in Christ. Catechesis aims "to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ" (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, #5). How, then, does the catechumenate inspire all of catechesis?

One dictionary meaning of "inspire" is "to fill with an animating, quickening, or exalting influence." Just as the sweet aromas of a simmering crockpot filter through a home, so does the catechumenate affect parish catechesis. The parish that seeks the inspiration of the catechumenate sounds forth for all to hear the abundant and priceless message of the Gospel.

Some Foundations

The catechumenate is traceable to the early centuries of the Church. While its history is one of peaks and valleys, we are blessed with its restoration in our age by the Second Vatican Council. Later it was introduced into diocesan and parish life with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

The catechumenate helps the parish to tell time but not according to the usual calendar year. The parish's 24-hour day has to do with priorities different from those of a neighboring business or franchise, or a nearby shopping mall or country inn. The peak seasons of the Church's life are directed not by a selling cycle but by the saving mystery of Christ with us. The parish's seasonal and daily life is rooted in the three days of the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday evening to Easter Sunday evening). Its catechesis is an essential dimension of the broader mission of the Church to be an evangelizing presence within the community.

We are living in an age of reawakening to the Good News of Jesus Christ. The inspired parish welcomes and reaches out

enthusiastically to both baptized and unbaptized people, all of whom are searchers. The Holy Spirit opens the hearts of those embarking on this search, a walk Christians have referred to for centuries as "the way." The way is not some random or hidden path but "the way of faith and conversion" (RCIA, #1). We travel it together.

The parish catechumenate offers initial catechesis for those who approach and then share in the sacramental mysteries (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist). This catechesis is shaped by the liturgical year and supported by the Word of God. The experience of life and faith, strengthened by liturgical rites, heightens people's movement together on the way of Christ. Catechumenal formation is, after all, a time of training for living the Christian life—from sunrise to sunset to the next sunrise (See *GDC* #67).

The parish's initial catechesis is linked naturally to its ongoing catechesis for all. This catechesis also has foundations in the Church's liturgical life. The community and the newly baptized, for example, meditate on the Word of God, worship together, and embrace the Gospel call to live a charitable lifestyle. The word *mystagogy* refers to this nourishing catechesis and reflection on the mysteries and experience of the sacraments within the community.

As a partner along the way, the parish DRE realizes that people's hearts as well as heads are to be engaged in this search. Thus, various approaches and methods serve both initial and ongoing catechesis. People see that the catechist is not just one person or a parish team but the entire parish (See *GDC* #91). And as relationships emerge, people see more clearly that the key relationship is with Christ.

How fortunate we are to have the navigational aid of the catechumenate for experiencing firsthand the Christian life. Truly, we have a message to proclaim, savor, and hand on.

Some Fundamental Points

Ongoing conversion takes time, as does catechesis. One person's experience, itself a key element for catechesis, may be vastly different from another's. And navigating on the river of life takes time. So initiation into the Christian life ordinarily occurs gradually.

The catechumenate beckons the parish DRE to take time to turn the catechetical prism, thereby seeing through "catechumenal eyes" a variety of perspectives for catechesis perhaps not considered before.

Let's start turning the prism now! Four ways a catechumenal model might inspire catechesis follow. Your review of the *GDC* and continued turning of the prism surely will yield more.

From the *General Directory for Catechesis*

"Faith, moved by divine grace and cultivated by the action of the Church, undergoes a process of maturation. Catechesis, which is at the service of this growth, is also a gradual activity. 'Good catechesis is always done in steps.'" (#88)



1. *The baptismal catechumenate fires our parish to craft for all the baptized a transforming catechesis.* Simply put, transforming catechesis changes us. Our Christ-centered commitment to the Gospel and the Church becomes our standard.

The catechumenate fosters the gradual character of initiation, with key moments celebrated periodically. This helps to shape our catechetical approach as well. The paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, resurrection, and ascension is central to and indispensable for this formation. Providing a catechesis that is authentic and complete and developing a lifestyle of Christian service are other essential characteristics of a transforming catechesis. The entire parish community is responsible for this formation.

The parish DRE who shapes catechesis this way promotes the catholicity of the Church and affirms that people of every culture are called to life in Christ. We become one people as we witness to the Spirit-filled life of the kingdom of God. In a sense, we never stop sponsoring one another; we never stop building up relationships of life in Christ.

2. *"Catechesis begins in the profession of faith and leads to a profession of faith* (emphasis added). It makes it possible for the community of believers to proclaim 'Jesus the Son of God, the Christ, lives and is our Savior'" (*Message to the People of God*, #8) (See *GDC* #82). Does our catechesis promote a living faith? Does it present Catholic teaching clearly? Does it result in people's willingness to live each day confident in the truth that Jesus, Son of God, lives among us? We need to explore questions such as these in professing faith and developing a catechesis rooted in Baptism.

A catechumenal model for catechesis fosters a living profession of faith. In the fourth century, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem urged catechumens to memorize a summary of the truths of faith, "engraving it by memory on the heart" and keeping "it as a provision for the way" for the rest of their lives. Such a profession of faith demonstrates the close relation between Baptism and catechesis.

Some ways the parish professes faith today are through its worship and ministries that reach outward and inward, its work for justice, and its ministry to the surrounding community. The profession of faith, rich in the communion of the Trinity, is a gift for those seeking to be baptized and a treasure for

those already baptized. Together, we profess faith proclaimed, celebrated, and lived.

3. *The baptismal catechumenate provides a natural framework for relying on "the principal sources of catechesis"* (emphasis added) (*GDC*, #96) as we minister. Basing ourselves on tradition, Scripture, and the magisterium, we shape a catechesis rooted in the faith journey. Over time, biblical, doctrinal, and mystagogical catechesis enriches a developing, lively faith (See *GDC* #89). Scripture, tradition, creed, liturgy and worship, reflection on the experience of the sacraments, the moral life, the way of prayer and the Our Father, and Christian witness: All help to form the experience of faith and the life of the Christian.

Initiatory catechesis offers extensive faith formation in a systematic way (See *GDC* #67, 91). The *GDC* notes that such catechesis "comprises but surpasses mere instruction" (#68). This is no contradiction, however. The *GDC* emphasizes many dimensions of faith formation. It fosters what is essential for catechesis and affirms the clear and faithful presentation of the truths of faith. We need to remember Pope John Paul II's reminder of "the need for organic and systematic Christian instruction, because of the tendency in various quarters to minimize its importance" (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, #21).

An initiation approach to faith formation offers nourishment for ongoing catechesis. The entire parish community is called to live what it professes and celebrates. We do not turn our commitment "on and off" based on the day of the week or time of the year; we strive always to live together in Christ.

4. *All that we do and all that we are leads through many paths to the great vigil of Easter.* This is the preeminent experience of God with us. Here death is conquered, life changed, catechesis enriched.

Perceptions of being alone on a darkened night yield to a sweet communal glow as ordinary life becomes new life through fire, Word, water, oil, bread, wine, and sacrifice. The catechumenate moves toward the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—and leads from them to life in mission. The Church's celebration of the paschal mystery binds us to one another in Christ, who is "at the heart of catechesis" (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, #5). The catechetical agenda for the entire parish is fashioned by the sacred Easter mysteries and this movement from certain death to assurance of new life.

Reflection Questions for Individuals and Groups

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

1. What were some new insights on the catechumenate and catechesis you gained from reading this article?
2. How is the catechumenate a prism that will shed light on catechesis in the parish?
3. What is the role of the liturgical year on your journey of faith?
4. How might a deeper understanding of the catechumenate help you and those with whom you minister focus even more on a Christ-centered, Good News catechesis?
5. What would help people see and experience the Good News of Jesus Christ as a "way of faith and conversion"?
6. How do you foster your own ongoing conversion as a parish/diocesan catechetical leader?
7. Discuss one of the ways presented in the article in which the catechumenate might inspire catechesis in the parish. What would be some specific implications and changes?
8. What questions are raised by this article?

People already baptized, including the many baptized as infants, sometimes are surprised to hear of the power of their Baptism (See *GDC* #90). Yet the sacrament does not fade and remains essential to ongoing conversion. Whether baptized as infants or adults, we benefit from the transforming power of the sacraments propelling us to mission. We witness in just and loving service to the faith of the Church in embracing Jesus' call to discipleship.

Week after week we return to the altar, joining ourselves to Christ and offering ourselves with him to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, liturgy and catechesis enliven our faith on the way of life in Christ. Consider these words from a homily of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem on the Eucharist: "Whatever the Holy Spirit touches is hallowed and changed."

There is clear benefit in shaping a parish catechetical plan whose broad outlines are influenced by the rites and symbols of the catechumenate. Such catechesis aids our discernment of God's call in our lives. The same can be said of biblical and liturgical signs (See *GDC* #91). How could one structure a catechetical approach *without* such elements as the Exodus event, water, oil, journey, wilderness? Saint John Chrysostom's reminder to newly baptized adults centuries ago remains sound advice for us today: If we imitate Christ we will *always* be able to be called newly baptized.

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Endpoint

The busy DRE might be tempted to limit his or her leadership role to exploring program structures and outcomes. An insight of Saint Teresa of Avila, however, can broaden such a perspective. She used the image of ways of watering a garden in describing a way of prayer, calling people who place themselves in the presence of God "servants of love." We are nurturing DREs, watering the seeds of faith planted in our parishes. Parish catechesis inspired by the catechumenate promotes our harvesting all that has been sown by servants of love. In daring to accept Jesus' offer of life-altering love, we boldly make our own his prophetic affirmation: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18).

Conversion can sneak up on us, surprising us with models that demand new ways of turning the catechetical prism. After all, the Gospel sets no limits. And the prism might begin to turn on its own! So go ahead: Keep turning the prism of initial and ongoing catechesis, and in so doing view with fresh eyes all who "walk in newness of life" (RCIA, #244).

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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.

For Further Reading

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