



EVANGELIZING New Vision - New Directions CATECHESIS

2016 Reflections

Article 4. Catechumenal Model as GPS for All Evangelizing Catechesis by Lori Dalhoff

(Based on section 35.D (pp115-116) and 61.A.6 (p265-266) in the *National Directory for Catechesis*)

Pope Francis noted the singular importance of the catechumenate “whereby growing numbers of adults, even in societies with ancient Christian roots, now approach the sacrament of baptism—for the new evangelization. It is the road of preparation for baptism, for the transformation of our whole life in Christ” (Lumen Fidei, no. 42).

In 2000 Jerry Baumbach described the catechumenate as a navigational aide for catechesis. While the societal landscape has changed in the last fifteen years, the essential guideposts in accompanying seekers on their journey with Jesus Christ and the Church remain the same. Like a GPS—global positioning system—that so many now rely on for communication and travel, the catechumenate depends on sufficient connectivity and real-time feedback on local conditions to navigate the various opportunities and roadblocks in the journey of faith

Sufficient Connectivity = Multiple Relationships

Regularly at local diocesan celebrations of the Rite of Election, the presiding bishop asked the newly elect what first brought them to consider becoming Catholic: a book, a course, a lecture, someone they knew. Almost all raised their hands to indicate that a relationship with someone who was already Catholic was the main reason they walked the path toward full initiation. Connections with God and others brought the elect this far and will sustain them in a life of discipleship.

The catechumenate describes the essential interactions involved in forming a living, explicit and fruitful relationship with Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (105) points out that the Christian community is to receive, understand, celebrate, live, and communicate the Gospel. All of these activities involve encounters with God, self, and others. Weaving a strong web of relationships that are experientially and culturally diverse provides both the person being initiated and the members of the faith community connections capable of working with

the Holy Spirit and the universal Church to guide one another in following the Way, the Truth, and the Life which is Jesus Christ. As Baumbach said “We never stop sponsoring one another” as we build up the body of Christ.

Real-time Feedback = Encounter, Listen, Walk

One of the things I find most beautiful about the catechumenate is that it is most fruitful when responding to the particular lives of those involved as part of God's incarnational pedagogy (White, 2014). Much like the GPS, it relies on being aware of the real-time conditions of the person asking for directions as well as the community or communities in which the journey will occur in order to provide accurate directions. “It [the baptismal catechumenate] reminds the Church that her catechesis accompanies a continual conversion to Christ and an ongoing initiation into the celebration of the sacraments and the life of the Church” (NDC, no.35.D, p 116).

The catechumenate challenges parish leaders to be open to encountering people in the process of listening to God and finding a community with and through whom to walk the journey of faith; they are not enrolling for a course that graduates at Easter. For instance, the *National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry* found that the RCIA is the most common space for faith formation for Hispanic adults (as reported by parishes with Hispanic ministry). If we recognize the initiation sacraments as markers in a life long walk with Christ, not isolated destinations captured in pictures, how would we engage all adults in apprenticing each other in the Catholic way of life.

Navigating with Joy

Our catechetical GPS map is framed by the parameters of the catechumenate. Through sufficient connectivity and real-time feedback we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to guide one another toward the ultimate happiness: the fullness of life in Christ. Pope Francis, during the Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate that concluded the Year of Faith, expressed it well when he said, “Dear catechumens, today you begin the journey of the catechumenate. My wish for you is to follow it with joy, sure of the entire Church’s support, who is watching over you with great trust. . . . I invite you to guard the enthusiasm of that first moment in which he opened your eyes to the light of faith; to remember, like the beloved disciple, the day, the hour in which for the first time you stayed with Jesus, felt his gaze upon you.”

Further Reading

National Directory for Catechesis. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.

Ospino, Hofsmann. *National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2014.

Pope Francis. *Lumen fidei* (2013) (<http://www.vatican.va/lumen-fidei/en/html/files/mobile/index.html#1>)

Pope Francis. “November 23, 2013 Address during Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate and Meeting with Catechumens at the Closing of the Year of Faith” (www.annusfidei.va/content/novaevangelizatio/en/eventi/EventiPassati/23-11-2013.html)

Wagner, Nick. *The Way of Faith: A Field Guide for the RCIA Process*. New London: Twenty-third Publications, 2008.

White, Joseph. *The Way God Teachers: Catechesis and the Divine Pedagogy*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2014.

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