



# 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:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth. In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy Spirit, which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.*

(Ephesians 1: 3-4, 8-10, 13-14).

# Article 7

## Divine Pedagogy and Methodologies

by Judith Dunlap

Based on paragraphs #139-162 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. What does divine pedagogy mean to you?
2. How has your image and awareness of God changed through the years?
3. What type of catechetical methods have challenged or deepened your experience of God's presence in your life?

Pedagogy, the art or science of teaching, is quite suitable when working with subjects like math or social studies. Catechesis, however, is not a subject to be taught. Catechesis focuses on continual conversion. Its aim is "to put people not only in touch, but in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ" (CT, #5). The process of catechesis, while availing itself of modern pedagogy, goes far beyond the methods and techniques of this secular science. The pedagogy of catechesis is modeled after God's own self-revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures, the person of Jesus, and the sacrament of Church. Effective methods and techniques in catechesis are drawn from this divine pedagogy.

**Divine Pedagogy** God's self revelation serves as the original model for catechesis. It is a gradual process, initiated by a loving and patient teacher who walks with his people. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures God takes the initiative, teaching his people through the events of an individual's life and through the life of the community, always respecting the natural process of human growth and development. God constantly gathers a people in loving covenant, inviting them to grow closer to him and to each other in community. God, never sacrificing the truth, revealed himself in and through the culture of each generation, offering liberation from the evil and bondage encountered within that culture. "To this end, as a creative and insightful teacher, God transforms events in the life of his people into lessons of wisdom (see Dt 4:36-40; 11:2-7), adapting himself to the diverse ages and life situations" (GDC, #139).

Jesus is the continuation and perfection of this "pedagogy of God." In Jesus, Emmanuel, we have God with us in person. The ultimate catechist, Jesus, lived the pedagogy. Who he was, what he said, how he acted was catechesis. He invited all into intimate communion; none were excluded. He walked with them as teacher and friend. He formed community and sent them out to witness. With infinite patience he taught in plain language, and in parables, and always by example. He healed and forgave, becoming the servant and wash-

ing their feet. He taught with authority: confident of the truth within himself, faithful to the Scriptures he knew by heart. He taught his disciples to pray alone and together in community. He took time to be alone with his father and to pray. Finally, he commissioned his followers to go out and bring the Good News to all people. "Inviting his disciples to follow him unreservedly and without regret (see Mk 8:34-38; Mt 8:18-22), Christ passed on to them his pedagogy of faith as a full sharing in his actions and in his destiny" (GDC, #140).

### From the General Directory for Catechesis

"Jesus Christ is the living and perfect relationship of God with man and of man with God. From him the pedagogy of the faith receives 'a law which is fundamental for the whole of the Church's life,' and therefore for catechesis: 'the law of fidelity to God and of fidelity to man in a single, loving attitude' (CT, #55).

Genuine catechesis therefore is that catechesis which helps to perceive the action of God throughout the formative journey. It encourages a climate of listening, of thanksgiving and of prayer (cf. DCG (1971) 10 and 22). It looks to the free response of persons and it promotes active participation among those to be catechized" (# 145).

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church began her mission as the visible continuation of the pedagogy of God and Christ. The Church, the body of Christ, is called to be catechesis alive in the world today. She is the primary and essential center ("locus") of catechesis (GDC, #141). We bring others to the faith through, with, and in the community of the Church. Throughout her history, the Church has handed on the faith by proclaiming, celebrating, and living the truth discovered in Scripture and tradition. She has remained faithful to this truth while constantly renewing her methods and language, adapting to the culture and needs of her people.

**Divine Pedagogy and Catechetical Methods** When we step back and look at how God chose to reveal himself, we discover

a number of lessons we can apply to our own efforts in catechesis today. First, like our divine teacher, we need to take the initiative, reaching out to all people. Second, we understand that catechesis is realized in human experience and that faith is both discovered and lived out in the events of everyday life. Third, we realize that catechesis is a gradual process, and we adapt our methods to people's needs and cultures while remaining committed to the truths of our faith. Fourth, we recognize that catechesis is rooted in the community through shared experiences and interpersonal relations. And fifth, the ministry of the catechist is patterned on Jesus, the model for all catechesis.



**Catechesis Takes the Initiative** Catechesis and conversion are the work of the Spirit. Our job is to till the soil, creating an environment that allows the Spirit to flourish. An important part of catechesis is providing a welcoming environment where people feel comfortable and accepted. It is creating an atmosphere where the Good News can be proclaimed and accepted. When we reach out in hospitality and fellowship, we are modeling Jesus' invitation to "Come, and you will see" (John 1:39). Through our witness of love in word and action, we are called to extend God's invitation of communion to all people, the uninitiated as well as the faithful. All of this is part of evangelization, the primary mission of the Church today.

**Catechesis Is Realized in Human Experience** Often the fears, anxieties, sorrows, and jubilation of human existence are catalysts of faith. Sometimes life events force us to look for answers beyond the limited world in which we live. At other times it is our faith that offers hope and gives meaning to those life events. In either case faith is grounded in the everyday experience of being human. When we discover God in our lives and respond to God's love, the tenets of faith become relevant to us. The job of the catechist is to create opportunities that help others make those faith/life connections.

There are two means for connecting faith and experience: the kerygmatic approach and the existential. With the kerygmatic approach we first proclaim the message of faith (Scripture, liturgy, or doctrine) and then apply it to life. The existential approach begins with a life situation and then applies the wisdom of faith (*GDC*, #151). Both means can be effective if we help facilitate the process by building trust and providing a setting where life stories can be shared and reflected upon.

**Catechesis Harmonizes Content and Method** The content of catechesis is threefold: cognitive, experi-

ential, and behavioral (*GDC*, #35). It is the faith known, experienced, and lived. Care must be taken that the methods we use in catechesis do not minimize, distort, or distract from that content. At the same time we must make sure that the methods we use to transmit the faith are respectful to the individual.

People need to be literate in their faith and so the cognitive is important. They need to know the major themes of the Bible, of dogma and the liturgy, as well as traditional prayers like the Our Father and the Creed. But memory work always needs explanation (*GDC*, #154) and has value only if it is viewed as part of the broader catechetical process that includes not only the cognitive but the experiential and behavioral.

If we are to reach others on an experiential and behavioral level, we need to think beyond the classroom approach to catechesis. We need to be creative in our methods, orchestrating and facilitating a variety of approaches in numerous and varied settings.

Catechesis happens at liturgy, in soup kitchens, on the playground, in homes, in classrooms, and even in the living room as families watch television. Catechesis should avail itself of the advantages within the culture, using the best that the technological world offers while at the same time teaching media literacy. Finally, we must honor the individual process of growth and development, remembering that catechesis is a gradual, progressive, life-long endeavor. Particularly regarding the cognitive, the materials we present as well as the way we present them must be appropriate to the age and circumstances of those being catechized.

**Catechesis Is Rooted in Community** God chose a people, and Jesus gathered the Twelve. Catechesis is

## 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 about divine pedagogy and catechetical methods that relate to your own spiritual journey did you gain from this article?
2. The aim of catechesis is "to put people not only in touch, but in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ" (*CT*, #5). What are some ways that this happens in your parish for all ages and life situations?
3. What lessons can we learn from divine pedagogy for our own efforts in parish life-long catechesis? What would these lessons mean if implemented in your parish?
4. How does your parish incorporate the idea that parish/Church life is the curriculum: through the liturgical year, service endeavors, liturgy, parish celebrations, and events?
5. What are the characteristics of catechesis that are modeled by Jesus? Which of these characteristics are done well in your parish and which need further development?
6. How has this article challenged your understanding of catechesis: of where and how it happens in a parish?
7. How does God's revelation through Scripture serve as a model for catechesis (*GDC*, #139)? What are the implications for relating life experiences and stories to the stories and events of Scripture?

always centered in community. This is where we come to know, experience, and live out the faith. Church life, in all its aspects, is the curriculum of catechesis. We discover what it means to be a Catholic by praying, studying, celebrating, and serving together.

A faith community can be envisioned in any number of ways. Within the parish there are two forms of community that are particularly important for catechesis: small groups and the family. Small groups are important for all ages. Children, adolescents, and adults need to meet in peer as well as intergenerational settings.

For young people, small groups "are practically a vital necessity for personality formation. The same is true of adults where they promote a sense of dialogue and sharing as well as a sense of Christian co-responsibility" (GDC, #159).

Finally, the Christian family reflects and lives out the mission of the larger faith community. Parents play an essential role in the faith formation of their children. "Family catechesis precedes . . . accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis" (CT, #68). Helping families to network and providing families with practical resources for faith sharing are an essential part of catechesis.

**The Ministry of the Catechist Is Modeled after Jesus**  
 Whether the catechist is an individual, the family, a small faith group, or the entire congregation, Jesus is the model. His relationship with his disciples and with his father is the prototype of catechesis today. He was inclusive and gathered others in community. He taught in plain language and parables and always by example. He was teacher and friend. He taught his disciples about ministry by sending them out to learn by doing. He was well-versed in Scripture and the faith. He taught his friends to pray by gathering them in prayer.

And finally, he took time himself to pray, alone in communion with his father. It is through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that we not only give glory to God but also find communion with God. "In the school of Jesus the Teacher, the catechist closely joins his action as a responsible person with the mysterious action of the grace of God. Catechesis is thus an exercise in 'the original pedagogy of the faith (CT 58)'" (GDC, #138).

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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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