

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 *Directory for Catechesis* (DC).

The DC leaves no one out when it talks about the responsibility for the ministry of catechesis: bishops, pastors, priests, parents and family including grandparents, godparents, 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 DC 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 DC: 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 DC states that parents are the primary educators in the faith: "The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission' to become above all the first catechists of their own children." (#124)

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?

All that we do as Church - as parish - needs to empower, encourage, and support parents to be what they already are: "the domestic Church." Parents need to hear that what they are already doing is holy.

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.

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

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?

Pope John Paul II, in *Catechesi Tradendae*, said: "Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis." (#68) 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 *DC* and in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* as well as through the writings and dreams of the prominent catechetical leaders of the last 40 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 *DC* quotes the 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis*: "The Christian community is the origin, locus and goal of catechesis. Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community and invites [all] to conversion and the following of Christ."

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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