



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#257 - March 2026

A Best Practice: Catechist Formation Possibilities

The *Directory for Catechesis* (#79 – 89) enumerates the five tasks of catechesis:

- Task One: Knowledge of the Faith
- Task Two: Initiating into the celebration of the Mystery {understanding the importance of the liturgy and sacraments in the Church's life}
- Task Three: Forming for life in Christ {the Christian formation of the moral conscience}
- Task Four: Teaching prayer
- Task Five: Introduction to community life

During a recent workshop with catechetical leaders, various groups proposed a new initiative in the practice of **catechist formation** that addresses the five tasks.

- Which one might be helpful for your parish and/or (arch)diocese?
- How might you tweak what is being currently offered for catechists?



“Living the Five Tasks Retreat Series”

This would be a year-long program where catechists gather once a month to focus on one of the five tasks in a practical and prayerful way. For example, a session on knowledge of the faith could include a guided Bible study with theological reflection, while liturgical education could be experienced through a walk-through of the Mass, highlighting how each part draws us closer to Christ.

For moral formation, catechists could work through real-life case studies, discussing how to help learners make choices rooted in virtue. The teaching to pray session could include time for personal and communal prayer practices, such as Lectio Divina or the Liturgy of the Hours.

Finally, the introduction to community life could be celebrated by serving together in a parish outreach project, experiencing firsthand what it means to live faith in community.

This initiative would not only give catechists knowledge and resources but also immerse them in lived experiences of each task. By encountering Christ through study, prayer, liturgy, community, and moral reflection, catechists would be formed holistically and better equipped to witness the faith to others.

It would also create a strong sense of community among catechists themselves, reminding them that they are not working in isolation but as part of the greater mission of the Church. In this way, catechist formation becomes more than training—it becomes an invitation to deeper discipleship that naturally overflows into their teaching.



A Cohort within a Retreat Setting

Borrowing from our recent experience with "Christ Renews His Parish," we imagine launching a formal catechist formation initiative in the form of a cohort but in a retreat setting.

The initiative would be over 5 weekends, spread out over a year. While each weekend would focus on a catechetical task, the task instruction would follow and flow from reflection and story rooted in one's relationship with Jesus Christ.

This new initiative would be for both aspiring and current catechists, that way there is a mix of new and old. The cohort would be comprised of catechists from across the archdiocese. Each weekend, the cohort would be equipped with knowledge, resources, and tools to “evangelize catechesis” within their own parishes.

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The reasoning for the “cohort” format is so that the catechists develop relationships with one another, which would then give rise to a support network.

Each weekend would feature seasoned catechists as guest speakers who could kick off the segment with a talk on their experience in catechesis and a focus on the task to be covered that weekend.

Weekend 1: Leading to Knowledge of the Faith

- Reflection and Story: Your Faith Experience
- Workshop
 - Sacred Scripture
 - The Church’s Living Tradition
 - Creed

Weekend 2: Initiating into the Celebration of the Mystery

- Reflection and Story: Your liturgical life
- Workshop
 - The Mass
 - The Sacraments
 - The Liturgical Year

Weekend 3: Forming for Life in Christ

- Reflection and Story: Your Identity in Christ
- Workshop
 - Formation of Moral Conscience
 - Vocational Calling
 - Joyful messengers and Guardians of Goodness & Beauty

Weekend 4: Teaching Prayer

- Reflection and Story: Your prayer life
- Workshop
 - Personal prayer
 - Liturgical prayer

Weekend 5: Introduction to Community Life

- Reflection and Story: Your life in community
- Workshop
 - Belonging to the Church
 - Ecclesial communion
 - Ecclesial co-responsibility

Each Cohort “graduation” would be memorialized with a certificate. Over time, as more people complete the retreat and workshops, those individuals can help lead and support the follow-on catechist formation cohort initiatives.



A Multi-Faceted Approach

A new initiative should be an initially short-term test run, say a year or two, within a particular diocese. That way, if it isn’t effective for that diocese, you can scrap the initial plan and alter it. If it is a success, however, you can keep everything the same and make it a long-term solution or make minor or certain adjustments where they’re needed.

A new initiative should incorporate various means of evangelization and education. Such as utilizing online resources, community service, group projects, and pilgrimages. It should incorporate mentorship in some way, incorporate some digital aspects to teach ourselves and others how to use technology to the benefit of our faith, and it should be made clear that the journey of faith is a lifelong one.

A new initiative should incorporate and drive home the five tasks of catechesis. There should be take-home exercises or questions of the day to reflect on until the following Sunday that promote intentional reflection and taking charge of one’s personal faith life; this ties into the first task, Leading to Knowledge of the Faith.

With such exercises we are leading our catechists on their journey of faith while allowing them to retain a sort of independence and encouraging them to form habits that will be long-lasting and beneficial to their faith in the long term.

For the second task, Initiation into the Celebration of the Mystery, we could take a similar approach to the Liturgy of the Word or some aspects of a children’s Mass. It’s important to engage the faithful in discussions about the liturgy and the symbolism and sacrifice taking place before us.

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Another way to engage catechists would be having them shadow Mass coordinators as they set up for Mass; this will get them engaged with what is happening behind the scenes that makes the liturgy possible, or at least run smoothly. It also draws on aspects of the fifth task, Introduction to Community Life, by having them engage in discussion and team preparation with other Catholics.

Other ways we can incorporate and address this task are by creating plans for specific events or group activities where catechists actively participate in the faith, outside of the catechetical role specifically, and thus, be an example to our learners on how one can achieve spreading the faith through community life.

This also ties into the third task, Forming for Life in Christ. Catechists should be part of their own group activities outside of their role as a catechist; that way they can be sure they are exercising their faith “muscle” so they can be the best teacher for their learners. They continue to foster our relationship with Christ and the church by participating in things like an adult bible study, keeping in touch with their own spiritual mentors, and making prayer life a priority.

Each catechist could be assigned to a retired catechist, if they’re willing, and they could have bi-weekly(ish) discussions with them about their previous teaching/learning sessions, how they used to teach their students, what methods they found to be effective in certain ways, or how they managed to prioritize their personal faith and prayer life.

With task number four, Teaching Prayer, a catechist could incorporate novenas or hourly prayers, as well as prayer before and after each session. Catechists can lead prayer, so as to be an example, while still letting their learners take the leadership so they can learn to be engaged on their own.



“Encounter: Forming Hearts for Mission”

This program would center around monthly gatherings where catechists come together to deepen their relationship with Jesus through prayer, learning,

reflection, and shared experiences. Each session would highlight one of the five tasks of catechesis, knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching to pray, and community life.

These sessions would help to connect each task to real-life teaching practices. For example, one month might focus on teaching prayer by leading catechists through different forms of prayer such as Lectio Divina or mediation, helping them experience before they teach.

The initiative would also integrate beauty, community, and mission into the formation process. Catechists would be encouraged to find “God moments” in their meeting spaces or ministries and share them during meetings, fostering mutual support and inspiration.

Workshops could include things like using music and art in lessons (via *pulchritudinis*), exploring the liturgical year through hands-on experiences, or discussing ways to foster moral decision-making in young learners. Through guided reflection, catechists would learn to see how every task of catechesis leads both themselves and their students closer to Christ.

“Encounter” would include a service or missionary component, where catechists put faith into action by organizing community outreach or family prayer events. This ensures formation is not just about learning but living the faith as missionary disciples.

By blending prayer, learning, creativity, and community, this initiative would help catechists embody the five tasks in their ministries, forming hearts that teach from a place of authentic encounter with Jesus.



Catechist Formation via Technology

As catechists, in this digital age it’s important to merge the 5 tasks with modern technology. We propose a learning program that equips catechists to evangelize and teach effectively in a digital world - where much of our communication, learning, and community-building happens online.

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- Task 1 – knowledge of the faith: This program can help catechists understand the basics of the Catholic faith through easy-to-follow online lessons, videos, and guided reflections. Built around Catechism and Scripture, and they help catechists explain the faith clearly and faithfully.
- Task 2 - Initiating into the celebration of the Mystery: Catechists can take part in virtual workshops that explore the Mass, sacraments, and Church traditions, helping them connect digital resources with real-life worship and liturgical celebrations.
- Task 3 – Moral formation: Catechists can have discussions about case studies that focus on issues people face today, especially in the digital world—like how to use social media responsibly, how to handle online conflict, and how to live with honesty and charity online. These sessions guide catechists in forming their own conscience and helping others do the same.
- Task 4 – Teaching to Pray: Catechists are introduced to different ways of praying - traditional prayers, online Rosaries, prayer apps and even moments of silent reflection. The course helps catechists build a daily prayer habit and shows them how to lead others in prayer both in person and online.
- Task 5 - education for community life and missionary discipleship: Catechists can join small online groups where they share, support, and grow together in faith. Catechists and learners can also work on a group project to create a digital evangelization tool, like a short video, a social media campaign, or an online event to share the Good News in a creative way.

Programs focusing on the digital age work for catechists who want to grow in their own faith, learn how to use technology in ministry, and become modern-day missionaries. It's accessible, practical, and designed to meet the needs of today's Church.



A Peer-to-Peer Opportunity

The proposed program may be a cycle of 10 sessions, with two sessions for each task:

- Session 1: focusing on the Christocentric aspects
- Session 2: focusing on the Missionary aspects

This will give 10 catechists in the team the opportunity to prepare and present one session, and would also invite working together in pairs, in order to avoid too much overlapping (though some will naturally come).

Also, this will be one of the commitments to be requested from existing catechists and new catechist volunteers, as part of their role as catechists.

To facilitate this project for the catechists, sufficient support will be provided by the “Senior Catechists” as well as the following minimum resources and guidelines:

Resources:

- A copy of the booklet *The Scope and Tasks of Catechesis* by Carole M. Eipers, D.Min.
- A copy of the book *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis* by Catherine Lavecchia, John Roberto, and Janet Scherffler, OP.

Guidelines:

- The presentation should be made around a true-life experience of the presenter and should address how that aspect of the task addresses:
 1. The head (knowledge)
 2. The heart (faith/relationship)
 3. The hands (missionary discipleship)
- Wherever possible the presenter should showcase relevant aspects of Scripture, Tradition (and tradition), or Church Teachings, for example:
 - How the personal experience could be related to Sacred Scriptures
 - How did any of our Sacred Rites trigger an action or a solution

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- How the case may showcase the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament
- Whether the Eucharist specifically or other sacraments moved their lives into a certain direction
- Did it result in increased spirituality of communion?

Although we recommend the use of digital resources, like YouTube videos or mini movies, for catechetical sessions, these catechist formation sessions need to be presented based on true-life personal experiences, from which any presentation aids can be developed, but fictional scenarios and third-party materials (of the sort video case studies or alike) are not allowed.

This approach is meant to really encourage ourselves as catechists to find those kerymatic and mystagogic moments that have enriched our journeys, take the courage to share them, and learn from them while improving our “technical” knowledge of the catechetical role and the vision of the Five Tasks.



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis: Transforming the Vision and Practice of Parish Catechesis*
<https://twentythirdpublications.com/products/guided-by-the-directory-for-catechesis>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <http://adultfaith.weebly.com/>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf