



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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The Catechumenate as Model: What Does It Mean for Adult Faith Formation?

Many years ago (1978), Fr. Aidan Kavanaugh (1929-2006) anticipated the all-encompassing influence of the then-new document, *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*: “Theological discourse, canonical reform, religious education, ministerial training programs, and even the practical day-to-day running of dioceses and parishes will find it impossible not to take the present document (*RCIA*) as their starting point. (*The Shape of Baptism*, page 145)

As we turn the clock ahead nearly twenty years (1997), the *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* gives direction for all faith formation:

- “Given that the mission ad gentes (*mission to the nations*) is the paradigm of all the church’s missionary activity, the baptismal catechumenate ... is **the model** of its catechizing activity.” (#59, 90)
- The catechumenate should “**inspire**” all forms of catechesis (68, 91).

Sometimes today people hesitate to answer affirmatively when asked if their pastoral plans for parish (and diocesan) faith formation, their programs and processes for catechesis, use the catechumenate as their model.

- Might it be because we do not yet understand the principles of the catechumenate and how they can be the inspiration for all catechesis, especially adult faith formation?
- Perhaps we do understand, but have not yet taken the time and the changes that are necessary to ensure that our adult faith formation programs/processes are grounded in these principles?
- Could it be that we *are* using the principles of the catechumenate, but just don’t realize that we are?

What does it really mean?

Perhaps, too, there has been, at times, a confusion regarding exactly what we are called to by the *GDC* (as well as the *NDC* and *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*).

The *GDC* (#91) specifically expresses that a post-baptismal catechesis draw **inspiration from the baptismal catechumenate** “**without slavishly imitating the structure of the baptismal catechumenate.**”

The *Directory* (#90), just as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (#400), carefully distinguishes between catechumens (those not baptized) and those already initiated (the baptized).

The catechumenate, the way newcomers are formed in faith, is the “inspiration” for the faith formation of all believers. What does inspiration mean? One dictionary definition of “inspire” is “to fill with an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence.” This reality of “inspiration” reminds us that the catechumenate **energizes and informs all other methods** of faith formation.

Just as the sweet aroma
of a simmering crockpot filters through a home,
so does the catechumenate
affect parish catechesis.

- Dr. Gerard Baumbach,
Evangelizing Catechesis: New Vision, New Directions.
NCCL.

All of our church documents articulate that the baptismal catechumenate and post-baptismal catechesis are interrelated, intertwined, and interlaced.

The two, however, are not the same.

- Pre-baptismal catechesis leads to conversion and initiation.
- “The basis of the conversion for post-baptismal catechesis is the Baptism already received and whose powers must be developed.” (GDC #90)

The *GDC* does not envision post-baptismal catechesis to be a cookie-cutter model, a replica of the catechumenate. The *GDC* challenges us to draw **inspiration from the catechumenate** rather than create an imitation. For instance, we easily realize that the rituals of the catechumenate are not a part of postbaptismal catechesis e.g., the *Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens*, the *Sending of the Catechumens for Election*, etc.

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, in describing the principles for conducting adult faith formation, says: “Use the catechumenate as an inspiring model for all catechesis. The baptismal catechumenate provides for an apprenticeship in Christian living and believing. It ‘seems the most appropriate model’ for adult faith formation and, though it cannot be considered the exclusive model, should be encouraged everywhere. ... adult faith formation should always actively challenge participants to get involved with their own faith journey – passive listening is never enough; **the goal is always conversion.**” (#81)

Michael Horan reminds us “The catechumenate should not be replicated in a literalist way, nor can its surface elements be held up as the only way to effectively catechize adults. The catechumenate **does not provide so much a blueprint as an impression**, and its inspiration derives more from its values and its effects on the Christian community than in its ability to exhaust the specifics of adult learning in faith.” (“Egeria Revisited: Adult Catechesis in a New Time” in *The Baptismal Catechumenate: An Inspiration for All Catechesis* edited by Joseph P. Sinwell. National Catholic Education Association, 2002)

In a similar manner, Tom Groome says: “I don’t believe **any one program or approach** will ever again be able – if one ever was – to provide ‘the permanent catechesis’ required by every Christian person and

community, from womb to tomb. So:

- The *program* or *school* alone cannot fulfill all the church’s responsibilities of catechetical education, although ... trained catechists, ... sound theology and good pedagogy are indispensable to education in Christian faith;
- The *parish* alone cannot do all catechetical education, though a vibrant faith community is vital...
- The *family* alone cannot be the sole catechist, though it is ever the ‘first educator in faith’...
- The *liturgy* alone cannot be the anchor for catechetical education, though likely nothing is more effective in fostering people’s faith than good liturgy...
- The *lectionary* alone cannot provide the scope and sequence for the whole story of Christian faith, though lectionary-based curricula can encourage the correlation of liturgy and catechesis...
- The (published) *curriculum* alone cannot provide the complete guide to learning...
- *Catechist-educators* alone cannot bear all responsibility for faith education, though well-informed and well-formed catechists who are credible witnesses ... are vital ...
- The *catechumenate* alone cannot offer total preparation, although it is powerfully effective for initiating neophytes ... and **its values inspire all catechetical education.**” (“Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always” in *Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education* edited by Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell. Paulist Press, 2003)

Living the vision

Thus, the reality is that the catechumenate serves as **the invigorating model** for all we do in faith formation. Not a replica, not an exact duplication, but **the animating inspiration.** The central elements and

principles of the catechumenate enrich our efforts of how we do all catechesis in our parishes and (arch)dioceses.

Upon close reflection we also realize that we were incorporating many of the catechumenate practices and principles into our programs and processes even before the *General Directory for Catechesis* was published. **They're the best of catechesis.**

At the same time, in faithfulness to the *Directory*, it is advantageous to periodically return to the document (the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) and its principles, becoming more deliberate in how we incorporate its wisdom into all we do.

Have you ever heard lifelong Catholics remark how they envy catechumens? Perhaps they can't always put it into words, but they have an innate sense that this journey, this process, responds to heart-centered longings, enlivens faith, and calls forth transformation and new life (conversion).

A Look at Some of the Catechumenal Principles

What, then, are the characteristics of the catechumenate that are to inspire all forms of catechesis? These principles and characteristics are drawn from the early church's catechumenate as well as today's document, *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

Taking a broad overview, the catechumenate is the process in which the church transmits the Gospel in a threefold way:

- as it is *known in scripture* and tradition
- *celebrated* by the assembly in its liturgy, especially the Eucharist
- and *lived* by the Christian community through conversion and the social consequences demanded by discipleship to Christ
(GDC #84, 85, 105)

As the inspiration for all catechesis, the catechumenate calls us to reexamine our catechetical structures. Let us explore **some (of the many) principles** flowing from the catechumenate and a few ways – through some questions – that they might be lived out in each parish today:

Catechesis focuses on conversion as a lifelong process.

RCIA #1, 4, 5, 6, and 37; GDC #66, 89 and 90

At the heart of the catechumenate – and all catechesis - is **conversion to Jesus Christ**. Catechesis urges individuals to continually recommit themselves to their baptismal promises and to living the Gospel way of life.

Parish efforts to facilitate conversion
need to center on what meaning Jesus' teaching
can have on people's lives,
for our relationship with God roots our meaning.
Although conversion involves a
personal search, community is central to it.
In community, God is disclosed
and a person is supported. ...

Conversion happens between God
and individuals within a Christian community.
Conversion is always communitarian,
for we learn our deepest values from others.
Even when conversion occurs
in solitary moments, it happens because
we live in a family, communicate with friends,
work with associates, and worship with other people
who influence us.

- Fr. Robert J. Hater.
The Parish Guide to the New Evangelization.
Our Sunday Visitor, 2013.

What is conversion? Conversion involves a turning, a radical change, a reorientation of life.

- Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904-1984) noted three aspects of conversion: intellectual, moral and religious (*Method in Theology*, 1971).
- Mark Searle (1941-1992) reflected on several categories of conversion: affective, intellectual, moral, religious, theistic, Christian, ecclesial, and gospel ("The Journey of Conversion," *Worship*, January 1980).

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- Tom Zanzig helps us to look at conversion as a cyclical (or spiral-like) reality, which happens continually – even daily - in our lives:
 - Hunger
 - Search
 - Awakening
 - Response

http://www.tomzanzig.com/Site/Conversion_essay.html

Catechesis enables those who have heard the mystery of Christ proclaimed to “consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of **faith and conversion** as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts.” (RCIA #1)

- *What actions can our pastoral staff and our parish leadership take to facilitate conversion for/among the members of our parish?*
- *How do we, as a parish, cultivate frequent opportunities to experience conversion (e.g. prayer groups, retreats and days of reflection, sacramental experiences, service and outreach)?*
- *What role does our parish community play in facilitating conversion?*
- *How does the pastoral plan for our parish focus on conversion?*
- *Do we realize that people are experiencing faith and on-going conversion in many ways, many venues – not just when they “come to us?” How are we affirming and enabling that reality?*
- *How does our pastoral plan address ways to sustain conversion throughout people’s entire lives, all the various ages and stages?*
- *Do we talk about the RCIA and all our catechetical endeavors in the language of “program” or “process?” Is there a difference? What might each imply?*

Catechesis emphasizes formation and transformation, rather than only information.

RCIA #36, 75; GDC #68, 80 and 84

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (#75) reminds us that a complete catechesis includes not only the doctrines of the Church but also an apprenticeship in prayer, participation in the liturgical life of the Church, and extraordinary love and care for our neighbor. These are the pillars of catechesis which can lead us to an intimate encounter Jesus Christ.

- **Information** (head) about our faith is certainly crucial, yet catechesis always needs to go deeper and further.
- **Formation** (heart) calls for the cementing of a relationship with Jesus, whom we have learned about.
- **Transformation** (hands) calls for a change of the heart and a commitment to now live that which we have intellectually learned.

Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) distinguished between **notional knowledge** (e.g. **knowing about** the historical Jesus) and **real knowledge** (abiding in a **personal relationship** with the living Christ).

Because the goal of catechesis is “to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (GDC #80), all that we do in catechesis needs to lead participants not only to a knowledge of doctrine, but to a personal response in love, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deepening a person’s spirituality is essential. Catechesis assists people in growing in relationship with God and the Christian community. This takes time. It is a life-long journey.

Since adult faith formation is about information, formation and transformation, we need methodologies which are positive, affirming, and move individuals and communities forward.

- *How are our catechetical programs/processes helping to bring participants into relationship with Jesus Christ (the primary goal of catechesis), helping them turn to him with their whole hearts?*

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- *How do our adult faith formation processes touch the head, heart and hands, which calls for a change of attitude and life-style?*
- *Are the resources we use designed to be informational, formational or transformational? Do we use resources and processes which incorporate all three? How do they accomplish that?*
- *When we think of resources, what comes to our mind, what are we utilizing? Do social communications and all the resources in our digital world play a part in fostering information, formation and transformation?*
- *Are our parish website, communications, and the Sunday bulletin designed for formation and transformation as well as information?*

Catechesis is always evangelizing catechesis.

RCIA #36-39; GDC #46-49

Evangelizing catechesis is all about conversion, about entering a way of discipleship that lasts a lifetime, always including continuing formation and transformation.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975), Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation on evangelization, can motivate us to move from a maintenance mentality to a faith community compelled to share the love of God which is revealed in Jesus.

The "circle of evangelization" described in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is complete only when the evangelized become the evangelizers. That is the task of ongoing catechesis.

Evangelization is emphasized,
as we move from a "caretaker" notion of the parish
to a proactive presence in our society.

- Monsignor Thomas P. Ivory,
"Family Centered Catechesis: The Catechumenate
Model." Church, Winter 2008.

- *How do our programs, and our entire life as a parish, communicate to people that the reason for the existence of a parish is to spread the Good News, not only to nurture and support its current members?*
- *In Evangelii Nuntiandi, Pope Paul VI says, "At this turning point of history, does the church or does she not find herself better equipped to proclaim the Gospel and to put it into people's hearts with conviction, freedom of spirit, and effectiveness?" How would our parish answer that for our local community?*
- *How do we, as parish staff and parish leadership, define "evangelizing catechesis" in today's digital world? Does the reality of today's technology affect our processes, our methods?*

Catechesis is gradual.

RCIA #4; GDC #67-72, 88-89; NDC #19.D-E

Genuine learning, like genuine conversion,
is a constant process rather than
an occasional one.
It is transformative, not incremental;
lifelong, not a childhood phenomenon.

- Thomas R. Hawkins,
The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership.
John Knox Press, 1997.

Just as the initiation of catechumens is gradual, all adult faith formation is also step-by-step, continual. Formation (for all of us) continues to build on what has come before. Having it "all at once" would probably mean that we would miss a lot. Continuing catechesis for adults is a lifelong process with numerous and varied opportunities, both formal and spontaneous.

The GDC (#66-68) reminds us that **initiatory catechesis** needs to be orderly, comprehensive and systematic. **Continuing faith formation** uses many forms of catechesis: the study of Scripture, a Christian reading of

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events, liturgical catechesis, occasional catechesis, spiritual formation, a systematic deepening of the Christian message (GDC #71).

Catechesis is gradual.

- It is also lifelong and continual.
- It is never terminal.
- *Do our actions illustrate (“teach”) that we believe we have to cram everything there is to know into the elementary years or in one year of adult programming?*
- *Who in our communities – in addition to RCIA catechumens and candidates – needs initiatory catechesis? How do we provide it?*
- *How are we helping our adults realize that formation/growth in faith is gradual and lifelong?*
- *In what ways do we provide continuing catechesis? Are there additional ways we might offer it in the future? Are we using face-to-face as well as virtual opportunities?*

Catechesis involves and is nurtured within and by the whole community of faith.

RCIA #9 and 75; GDC #77-78, 90-91, 141, 217, 219.b, 253-264

Catechesis is an ecclesial activity, the responsibility of the entire Christian community, not just a few of the members (the pastor, DRE, catechists, etc.)

Disciples are not manufactured in ... warehouses.
They are formed on the muddy potter wheel
of following alongside other followers.

- Leonard Sweet

Long before the *GDC*, Maria Harris wrote that today’s education in faith presumes that the whole community is “empowering the whole community to engage in ministry in the midst of the world.” (*Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*. John Knox Press, 1989)

The *GDC* (#141) identifies the Christian community as a “living catechesis” which is interactive. If we are to be a growing, vibrant faith community, parishioners will be responsible disciples, rather than observers or spectators. Each and every person is invited, encouraged and supported in sharing their gifts.

- *How is a sense of community fostered within our parish?*
- *How is community fostered through virtual opportunities?*
- *How do we identify, deal with, and heal divisions when they occur within our parish?*
- *Within all parish activities, as well as our faith formation opportunities, how do we help people to understand that “It’s not Father’s church,” but the People of God, all of us together?*
- *How are we connecting those being catechized (no matter who they are: second graders, eighth graders, couples preparing for marriage, those who are grieving) with the entire parish and the parish with them?*
- *What do we have in place to help parishioners discern, and then use, their gifts and strengths? (See [GEMS #19](#) for one idea.)*
- *Have we attempted types of intergenerational catechesis, whole community catechesis, to bring everyone in the community together, supporting each other, learning together? How might we do – or continue to do – this?*

This principle of the role of the community also places the emphasis on **the faithful gathered each Sunday**, recognizing that this Sunday Eucharistic community has an unquestionable and vital catechetical role.

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- *How do we help everyone at our Sunday liturgies realize their connection with, their responsibility to, and their influence on one another?*
- *What about our people who are unable to be present with us? Are there ways we might use today's technology to include and connect them?*

Just as the many and varied ministries within the catechumenate process call for **collaboration**, in parish catechesis there are many, diverse roles. Wide collaboration makes things more successful.

- *How are the various faith formation efforts within our parish integrated? Within this integrated approach, how do we utilize both “on-site” and digital opportunities?*
- *Think about how many people it takes for the catechumenate (pastor, pastoral associates, RCIA director, RCIA team, catechists, sponsors, liturgy planners, ministers of hospitality, the entire parish, even the catechumens and candidates). Applying this to all catechesis, who are we collaborating with? How?*
- *Shared responsibility brings forth new ways of imagining catechesis. What are we imagining?*
- *Who participates in the various roles for adult faith formation? Who are the others who might also collaborate?*

One of the most valid criteria in the process of adult catechesis, but which is often overlooked, is the *involvement of the community* which welcomes and sustains adults.

Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community.
The International Council for Catechesis, 1988.

Another principle flowing from this reality of community is that people learn with others, often with a **sponsor, with a mentor, with a companion.**

- *Are there ways we can encourage and support companions and mentors within our various adult faith formation offerings?*
- *As people utilize (with or without our initiative) more and more digital resources, are there ways to connect people in this type of learning and growth?*

Catechesis respects and supports the faith journeys of each individual.

RCIA #5; GDC #89, 90

Catechesis is a process of inculturation linked to the background and particular needs of the individuals being catechized.

So whatever the expressions of catechesis for adults in the twenty-first century, those expressions will vary according to the needs of the community in its particularity. ...

In considering the catechesis of adults, catechetical leaders need always to gaze upon other communities with respect and admiration while avoiding the temptation to simply graft onto their particular part of the Body of Christ the specific practices of another local church.

Mere replication is not the goal of the catechumenate, nor can it be the goal of effective adult catechesis in the twenty-first century.

- Michael Horan, “Egeria Revisited: Adult Catechesis in a New Time” in the *Baptismal Catechumenate: An Inspiration for All Catechesis.* National Catholic Educational Association, 2002.

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People don't live their faith lives in a vacuum; they are influenced and formed by the concrete realities of their everyday lives, their families, their relationships, their work, their neighborhood and society. How people see and experience the world and live their daily lives in all parts of their world determines how they think, feel and act.

At the same time, people are at different places on the faith journey; each and every one is respected in catechetical endeavors. Nowhere in our liturgy, in our tradition, is the idea that becoming a Christian is exactly "the same" for everyone, or is ever complete and finished.

To walk with people where they are requires that we know well:

- the culture in which they are living and working
- the dreams, hopes, and fears of their daily lives
- their journey of faith

In paying attention to these realities we discover new opportunities for opening up the privilege and challenge of discipleship. This calls us to consider several things:

- We must take the idea of **readiness** seriously. Catechesis is best when the people are ready to hear the message, not just because the teacher is ready to teach it.
 - **Creativity and adaptability** are necessary; one size doesn't fit all. Each person has particular needs.
 - **Multiple efforts and approaches** are needed if we are to meet the diversity of needs and situations found in our communities.
 - As Michael Horan states in the next column, all that we do needs to **fit our parish**.
- *How do we do continual needs assessment for adult faith formation?*
 - *Adult faith formation is for all, no matter where they are on the journey. How are various needs, differing learning styles, all cultures, provided for in our parish?*

- *Because of people's schedules and time commitments today, how are we using all the resources of technology to help them learn at home, in small groups, etc. (without always needing to come to an offering in a designated time slot at the parish)?*
- *How do our catechetical efforts instill in our parishioners a respect for, as well as a joy for, the various cultures in our community and neighboring communities?*

Catechesis and Liturgy are intimately connected.

RCIA #6, 76; GDC #30, 88, 90

For transmitting a purely doctrinal content, an idea might suffice, or perhaps a book, or a repetition of a spoken message.

But what is communicated in the Church, what is handed down in her living Tradition, is the new light born of an encounter with the true God, a light which touches us at the core of our being and engages our minds, wills and emotions, opening us to relationships lived in communion.

There is a special means for passing down this fullness, a means capable of engaging the entire person, body and spirit, interior life and relationships with others.

It is the sacraments, celebrated in the Church's liturgy.

- Pope Francis in *Lumen Fidei*

Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* teaches that the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows" (#10). Liturgy is who we are, all we are. Faith grows from liturgy and its rootedness in the liturgical year.

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Catechesis leads to liturgical and sacramental life as well as being supported by prayer and liturgical celebrations. The relationship between the two is always mutual; it is a both/and. Catechesis should always lead to full, conscious and active participation in liturgical life; participation in liturgy ideally should lead all to seek more catechesis. We catechize about liturgy; we are catechized by the liturgy.

Liturgical celebration is not simply an add-on, a periphery; it is central to expressing what we believe. Quality celebrations lead to effective catechesis and vice-versa. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us: the liturgy “is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the people of God” (#1074).

As the catechumenate again testifies, within our liturgical and sacramental celebrations **lavish and expressive symbols and rituals** have enormous formative impact upon prayer, formation, and our relationship with God and the community. Water, light, oil, liturgical colors, gestures, blessings, etc. speak to us of the realities that are foundational to our faith life.

Likewise, **the liturgical life of the Church**, following the life of Christ, forms who we are. It is easy for catechetical sessions to include a focus on the particular liturgical season through the prayer, the color of cloth on the prayer table, the practices of the faith community in that season. In this way, too, the **Gospel can serve as the starting point** for areas of catechesis, prayer and reflection for the coming week.

- *How do we use liturgical symbols, rituals and gestures within our adult faith formation settings?*
- *The GDC (#30) reminds us that often there is a marginalization of liturgical celebrations in catechetical programming. How can we use celebrations of the Word, Morning or Evening Prayer, blessings, etc. not just as opening or closing prayer, but as integral formation?*
- *What symbols or rituals can we use throughout the year which speak to the uniqueness of our parish?*
- *How do we encourage and support the use of symbols and rituals within the homes of our parishioners?*

Catechesis is grounded in the Word of God, presents an appreciation of the mysteries of faith and an acquaintance with dogmas of the faith.

RCIA #75; GDC #90

In the catechumenate and in all catechesis, the Word of God shapes the life of each person as well as the vision and priorities of the community. Scripture, especially as it unfolds through the lectionary during the liturgical year, leads learners to an appreciation of the mysteries of faith and the church’s core teachings.

In understanding the mysteries of faith and the church’s core dogmas, as discovered in Scripture, the *GDC* (#85-86), and *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us* (#88-96), guides us in incorporating the six tasks of catechesis in a comprehensive and systematic way within our faith formation:

- Promote Knowledge of the Faith
 - Liturgical Education
 - Moral Formation
 - Teaching to Pray
 - Educate for Community Life
 - Equip for Mission
-
- *How do we continue to deepen – for each and every person – the skills of listening to, understanding, and living the Word?*
 - *Do we take the time – in all parish meetings and gatherings – for faith-sharing based on a reflective listening to the Word?*
 - *How could the practice of “Question of the Week” enhance the living of Scripture for our adults, for the families in our parish?*
 - *How do we acquaint adults with the various ways to pray with Scripture (Liturgy of the Hours, guided meditation, Lectio Divina, etc.)?*
 - *Do we alert people to the many Scriptural and lectionary resources available on the web?*

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In the catechetical process, the Sacraments of Initiation are of fundamental importance.

RCIA #206-217; GDC #65-66, 91, 235

The catechumenate continually reminds the whole Church of the central magnitude of initiation and the basic factors which constitute it: evangelizing catechesis and the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

Baptism is not a diploma, a membership card; it is not a one-time happening. It never fades or moves to the background of our lives because it's a "past event."

The *GDC* (#66) says explicitly: "The link uniting catechesis and Baptism is true profession of faith, which is at once an element inherent in this sacrament and the goal of catechesis."

In the 4th century St. 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. This type of profession of faith illustrates the close relationship between baptism and catechesis of which the *GDC* speaks.

- *How do we profess faith today? How does our worship, our ministries that reach outward and inward, our work for justice, and our ministry to the surrounding community proclaim our profession of faith?*
- *How does our parish make all sacramental preparation an opportunity for family catechesis and an opportunity for parish involvement?*
- *What would need to occur in our parish, in our catechesis, so that all would understand that baptism changes us permanently and forever so we might live the Good News?*

The Paschal Mystery, the focal point of liturgy, permeates all catechesis.

RCIA #4, 8; GDC #91, NDC #35.D

The Easter Vigil, the focal point of the Christian liturgy, and its spirituality of Baptism inspires all catechesis.

Because of this celebration and its reality in our lives, catechesis is focused on the Paschal Mystery, the basis for all faith formation. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus provides the center of all catechesis and spiritual formation.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is not something that happened only to Jesus. Jesus lived and experienced human life, suffered and was raised to life because that is the life to which we are called: a life of

- human experience and relationship
- sufferings, disappointments, losses and grief
- as well as the experience of peace-filled new beginnings, dreams, joys, precious moments and glorious new life

God, through the resurrected Christ and the Holy Spirit, is always with us throughout this journey of the Paschal Mystery. Adult catechesis is always an invitation to name the Paschal Mystery at the heart of everyday life.

- *Do our catechetical efforts focus passionately on revealing the Paschal Mystery that we celebrate in its fullness in the Easter Vigil every year? How?*
- *Do our Lenten prayer, programs, and processes (both on-site and virtual) help people go deeper into understanding and living the Paschal Mystery? How?*
- *What types of opportunities do we offer, what kinds of questions do we pose, to help adults name the Paschal Mystery in their own lives?*

An undergirding principle of all catechesis is welcome and hospitality.

RCIA #38; GDC #69, 253-258

The welcome called for in the catechumenate radically proclaims that there are no outsiders; we are all sisters and brothers. Everyone is welcome always and all the time.

Welcome and hospitality are about much more than ministers of hospitality at the doors of church (as important as they are).

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What is welcoming and hospitality? At times, perhaps, we presume it is the added little touches that we do; the extras to make things a little warmer and friendlier. It is much more than that. It is the bedrock, the **grounding of who we are**, everything we do. (See [GEMS #3-9, #15-18](#).)

Evangelization involves three basic attitudes:
welcome, hospitality, and witness.

- Joseph P. Sinwell,
"Use the RCIA to Inspire your Parish."
Today's Parish Minister, March 2010.

A parish of welcome and belonging is patterned on the life of Jesus who welcomed the children, the sinner, the healthy and unhealthy, the doubter, the searcher, the outcast, the repentant and unrepentant.

- *Do we (parish staff, Parish Pastoral Council, Commissions, Adult Faith Formation Committee) realize that all the facets of parish life, the reality of parish life itself, all that we do, has the potential to be welcoming, to prepare the way for belonging, to be hospitable?*
- *In what ways is our parish website welcoming?*
- *What is our parish's theology of welcoming?*
- *How is it practically lived out?*
- *How is everything about our catechetical programs/processes providing welcome and hospitality?*
- *How is everything about each individual catechist and his/her group welcoming? Does each person/each family "feel" it?*
- *In what ways are we welcoming of all people who come to our parish?*

- *Are there ways we are welcoming – through virtual realities and outreach – to those who can't or won't come to the parish?*
- *How do we welcome the stranger, the foreigner, the homeless?*
- *How effective are we at inviting people to parish events, to adult faith formation?*
- *What are the things we do so that adult faith formation opportunities are welcoming and hospitable? (Put yourself in the place of a person coming for the first time.) For some ideas, see [GEMS #15 - 18](#).*
- *How do we help parishioners spend time with each other before and after liturgy? Before and after various meetings? At parish celebrations and events?*
- *How does our parish hospitality spill over to nursing homes, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, hospitals, hospices, and other places of service in our community?*
- *How are we involved, as a parish, in neighborhood and community events, in community outreach?*
- *How do we gather with other Christian churches in our area? How do we join with other major world faiths for prayer, study, and/or outreach?*

Prayer and spirituality are deepened in the catechetical process.

RCIA #40, 75, 138-140, 147-149, 185; GDC #84-85, 88-89, 142, 145

While there is information to be shared in catechesis, time is needed for prayer, reflection and conversation. Prayer is at the core of the catechumenate process; the center of who we are; the foundation of our relationship with God and should permeate all catechesis.

Catechesis leads to a gradual and lifelong process that nurtures participants into an **ever deeper, more mature Christian spirituality**.

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While there are many expressions of spirituality, the Second Vatican Council's emphasis on the primacy of baptismal grace and the centrality of the Word are the foundations for discipleship to the person of Christ.

As it (the catechumenate) inspires total parish catechesis, we will see more intentional, small, faith-based communities, more emphasis on the Scriptures, more opportunities for prayer and reflection, more dialogue on how one is living his or her baptismal commitment in the world, more spiritual companionship, richer and more vibrant liturgies and homilies, and a deeper commitment to apostolic witness and social justice.

- Maureen Kelly,
"Initiation: Inspiration for All Catechesis"

- *How do our catechetical sessions incorporate a myriad of prayer forms from our church's tradition?*
- *Are there ways we are helping people to enhance their personal prayer lives, to understand, appreciate and use the many forms and methods of prayer?*
- *How are we promoting community prayer experiences in addition to our Sunday worship?*
- *How do the prayer experiences offered at our parish and in catechetical sessions reflect the various needs and styles of prayer of our parishioners?*
- *How do we help people understand the connection between their personal and family prayer lives and the prayer of the community?*
- *Retreats are a core way of deepening one's spirituality. Are retreats and days of reflection offered frequently by our parish? How do we*

alert people to these opportunities available in other parishes, retreat centers, etc. in our area?

- *How do we encourage our people to use the many opportunities for prayer that are provided via the internet?*

The importance of storytelling in catechetical programs respects the value of life experience in conveying the Gospel message.

RCIA #5; GDC #71; NDC #29.A

The **questions and the concerns of the participants and their life experiences** are central within any catechetical setting, not secondary.

"We need to really know people as human beings. We have to give all the opportunity to share their story, creating a relationship that goes beyond just waving to them at Mass."

- Tom Zanzig

www.patersondiocese.org/page.cfm?Web_ID=2114

- *How do we invite and encourage people to reflect on their experiences?*
- *How do we (how might we) provide safe places and times for people to share their stories with others?*
- *How do we help our parishioners connect their story with Our Story?*

Discernment is key to growing in relationship with Jesus Christ.

RCIA #38, 75, 120-121, 139; NDC #29.G

Within the catechumenate itself, parish teams and sponsors journey with the catechumens, supporting them in determining their readiness to continue the process of deep commitment to discipleship.

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On-going catechesis supports adults in continuing to make the decisions and commitments encountered daily in living a Gospel-oriented life.

In a recent post (June 16, 2013) on his blog, [REAL Ministry](#), John Rinaldo explains that “discernment consists of 4 very important elements. These are in no particular order:

- *Make a list of Pro’s and Con’s:* I literally make a list of pro’s and con’s for each option in my discernment process. Facts make things clearer for me and assist God in showing me the way.
- *Listen to Advisors:* Discernment is not something that takes place in a vacuum. The community of friends and family help make clear what God is communicating to me around a particular decision. Discernment must include talking to others to hear their wisdom.
- *Listening to God:* Just as discernment takes place in the community, it also takes place in solitude and quiet. Removing myself from the distractions of everything around me allows God to communicate with me more clearly.
- *Live in the Decision:* Pretend for 24 hours that you made a certain decision. How does that make you feel? Are you at peace and ease, or, are you feeling agitated, uncomfortable, and uneasy? Now, take the next 24 hours to pretend you made the other choice. Ask yourself the same questions. If a certain decision is of God, there should be a sense of peace and ease. If you are feeling otherwise, that might possibly be the wrong decision. God speaks through my emotions; this has served to be a powerful aspect of the discernment process for me.

I consider each of these as an essential part of my prayer experience. Each of these aspects of discernment are prayer.”

- *How do we incorporate discernment into our formation opportunities?*
- *How do we surround people with enough time for quiet and reflection, opportunities to ponder their on-going commitment to live as Jesus did?*

- *Are there people with whom parishioners can talk when they are engaged in discernment, critical thinking, decision-making?*
- *How might we teach the skills for discernment, so that adults (as well as children and youth) become aware of the need for discernment in their day-to-day lives as well as the confidence to use the skills?*

Catechesis enables faith-sharing; faith-sharing expands faith.

RCIA #5; GDC #71

Normally, the moment of conversion is linked to faith sharing. Somehow in talking about our faith with others, the Spirit touches our own hearts.
... it is not private.
Faith is shared, not hoarded.
It is abundant, not scarce.

- Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Visions: Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation*.
Twenty-Third Publications, 2007.

- *How does each of our adult faith formation gatherings provide time for faith-sharing?*
- *What processes might we use in faith-sharing so that people are not threatened or feel uncomfortable?*
- *Do we provide a regular and predictable schedule of adult gatherings in which parishioners can support each other, sharing their faith journey? Do we provide various opportunities, using many methods: face-to-face and online?*
- *How do we help and support families in faith-sharing?*

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Special moments should be celebrated during catechetical experiences for persons of all ages.

RCIA #41, 118, 141, 206; NDC #29.C

Just as catechesis is presented in stages, it can be celebrated in stages

Even though the rites and celebrations of the RCIA do not belong to the baptized, there are countless other moments that can be (perhaps should be) celebrated. To name a few:

- Rites of passage, e.g. retirement
- Anniversary of baptism
- Reconciliation of returning Catholics
- Commissioning of ministers for parish ministry
- Commissioning of parishioners for ministry in the world

...those who truly share their faith journeys and seek to grow and learn together become a caring community of pilgrims.

Teaching and learning opportunities need to develop and incorporate ritual acts that strengthen a feeling of oneness.

Ritual acts reflect and reinforce the care we offer to one another.

A learning community's sense of identity and continuity grows out of its ritual life...

- Linda J. Vogel, *Teaching and Learning in Communities of Faith: Empowering Adults through Religious Education*

- *What events in the lives of our parishioners – and our parish - could be celebrated and ritualized?*
- *Are there events that could be celebrated in the home? How might we encourage the celebration of these moments for our families?*

Mystagogy is the very essence of catechesis.

RCIA #244-251; GDC #88, 91

“Mystagogy” means reflecting on the mysteries. We pause after an experience (of any kind - certainly our sacramental and faith experiences - but also all experiences can reveal God’s touch). In recalling the experience, we walk with people as they reflect on what touched their heart, what remains in their memory, and what this means for their days ahead.

Mystagogy challenges us to value the crucial importance of ongoing formation and growth. We’re never finished.

Following the catechumenate model means including

- opportunities for reflection
- pondering (wondering for young children)
- guiding questions for integrating learning, especially following the reception of a sacrament or experiencing a liturgical rite in the midst of the faith community

- *Do any of our programs/procedures give the idea that catechesis is primarily about preparation for sacraments and the rest of life (discipleship/living the sacraments) isn't that crucial?*
- *How does mystagogy take place after the celebration of sacraments – for the candidates, for the parish?*
- *Do we watch for opportunities to invite people into reflection on their experiences, on experiences of the parish?*
- *Is mystagogy – reflection on the experience – included with every work for justice and service in which the parishioners participate?*
- *Do we give parishioners the skills to engage in mystagogy after significant life events, in their everyday experiences?*
- *How are we utilizing online and digital opportunities to enable people to continue mystagogical reflection and learning?*

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Catechesis is a process of formation and a true school of faith.

RCIA #1-2; GDC # 84-86, 90-91

A faith-filled, receptive journey through the catechumenate gradually introduces the participant to the entire spectrum of church life and practice. In the Rite the catechumenate is not understood as a textbook to be gotten through, nor a series of meetings to attend, nor a required number of service projects to be completed.

It is a **comprehensive formation, gradually accomplished in stages, marked and celebrated** in “meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs (GDC #91). All of this – this way of life – is a formation for and by all, the Christian faithful, the Body of Christ.

This catechumenal inspiration gives us the guideline that all catechesis is much more than formal programs of instruction. Catechesis is **connected with every dimension of life, every dimension of parish life**. Every activity in which the parish engages, every opportunity for

- deepening community
- participating in liturgy, rituals and prayer
- reaching out in service and care

are opportunities for catechesis.

The community itself, the life of the parish itself, is a learning community, a school of faith.

- *How do our catechetical opportunities (virtual and face-to-face) offer people experiences that connect what we believe with the way we celebrate, live in the world, and pray?*
- *What might be some ways to be very intentional in remembering and acting that all that we do within the parish (diocese) is “teaching,” is a school of faith?*

Catechesis is an apprenticeship for discipleship, apprenticeship for living a Gospel life for others.

RCIA #7, 75; GDC #30, 67, 88, 90

All of our church documents remind us that people are evangelized and catechized not only for themselves, but **primarily for the role of sharing**

the Good News with others. Catechesis forms us into a way of life that always takes us outward, in care for others, in building the Kingdom of God.

... we have to stop making scholars
and start making disciples.

- Nick Wagner

<http://www.teamrcia.com/2013/07/five-things-every-catholic-parish-must-do-and-how-rcia-matters>

Catechesis calls us to discipleship, not just membership. Discipleship implies commitment, lifelong learning and, most of all, service, a life for others. **Rooted in Baptism, our lives are always lives for others.**

- *How do our adult faith formation processes and programs form disciples?*
- *How do our catechetical efforts empower our parishioners to be responsible for the success of the parish mission – within the parish and within the wider community among which we live and work?*
- *How does our parish community reach out beyond itself? How do we invite and enable all parishioners to be a part of this outreach?*
- *In our parish life and our adult faith formation processes, how are people enabled to discern their gifts and empowered to use them for the common good, for the coming of the Kingdom?*
- *Do our facilitators and leaders of our adult gatherings have time for learning and retreat opportunities, supporting them, equipping them for their role as they lead learners to Christian discipleship?*

The baptismal catechumenate requires
a faith formed in community, accepts differences,
encompasses personal story,
and leads to interaction with the world.

- Diana Macalintal

<http://www.rpinet.com/pressroom/mk-ilc.html>

To continue exploring this reality of the catechumenate as a model for adult faith formation (all faith formation):

- Read about the experience of the diocese of Tyler, TX: [using the catechumenate as a model for all catechesis](#).
- [Five things every Catholic parish must do — and how RCIA matters](#)
- [RCIA as the Model for All Parish Formation](#)
- For some thoughts which coincide with this theme: [Pope Francis' ecclesiology rooted in the Emmaus story](#)
- Watch for a soon-to-be-scheduled webinar on the catechumenate as inspiration for all catechesis sponsored by the Adult Faith Formation Committee of [NCCL](#) .



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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 at:

- <http://ecatechist.com>. Click on e-books for: *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*.
- www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.