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**CATECHETICAL
LEADER**



**INCARNATIONAL
CATECHESIS**

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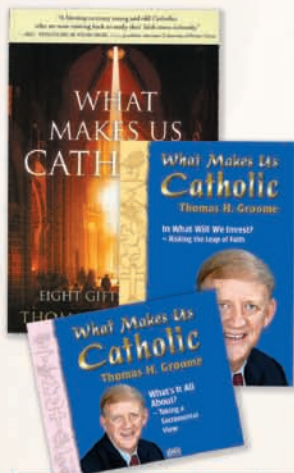
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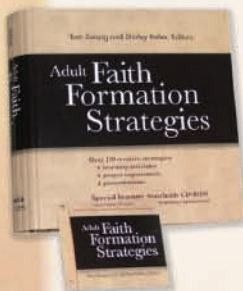
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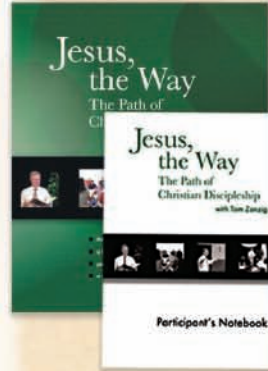
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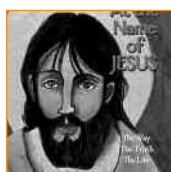
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CONSIDER THE RISKS WE NEED TO TAKE

Mary Ann Ronan

In the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus Christ is the human face of God, the divine face of humanity. (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*)



In 1997 I accepted the Diocese of Phoenix Catechetical Leadership Award. I remember that I accepted the award not for myself but first for the people of St. Paul's Parish who had allowed me to come and be church with them, to laugh, to cry, to celebrate, to reconcile.

The award is a Phoenix bird rising out of the ashes. I look over at the award when I need to challenge myself with what it means to be a catechetical leader. I stand with you now and ask you to consider the risks we need to take for catechesis.

We must press for the continual development and updating of Vatican II theology. We need to clarify our own image and be women and men of prayer. We must be committed to being creative with the Father, building the reign of God with Jesus, and trusting that the Holy Spirit is leading us.

We need to think beyond institutionalism. Our vocation as catechetical leaders requires more than performing a function in the church. We must bring principle, presence, and prophecy to the proclamation of the Gospel.

As prophets we receive the message and we don't always understand what the ramifications are. We go to places of mystery and we suffer for telling the truth. If the Gospel is to be preached in our day, we cannot be catechetical leaders

doing business as usual, hoping against hope that the Gospel will come about without changing our lives. You and I must ask ourselves: Will the future be different because of us?

We must reject the fear that leads to polarization; it stops the church from growing. The relationship between Peter and Paul is the finest example: The Holy Spirit spoke through both of them and they learned to collaborate.

We have present choices that affect the future. We can withdraw or we can dig in.

We have present choices that affect the future. We can withdraw or we can dig in. We can take catechesis to new issues and new needs or see it with new eyes. We can do this with the same sacrifice and discipline that motivated catechetical people on whose shoulders we stand today.

I write today with anguish and hope. In the midst of true horror around and in us, we have the incarnational God, the relational God, the suffering God, the God who is the future and the unknown, and the hidden God of mystery. In our searching, we may glimpse enough to be grateful and let ourselves be found in forgiveness. Jesus preached and embodied the God of life. We can do no less as catechetical leaders. ■



BECOMING MORE HUMAN

Neil A. Parent



On Monday, October 2, Charles Clark Roberts IV entered a one-room schoolhouse in the village of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, and committed a horrible crime. He bound and shot ten young Amish female students. Five of them died, and at this writing, five of them remain in critical condition.

The Amish, who work hard to sustain their unique way of life, are understandably protective of their privacy. Even so, the news coverage of the tragedy has been extensive. Of particular interest to the media has been the way the Amish have responded to the violence that befell them with nary a word of hatred for their children's killer. Indeed, quite the opposite.

When friends of the Amish began to be set up funds to help grieving Amish families deal with funeral and medical expenses, they asked that a fund also be set up for the widow and children of the assailant. One of the Amish families who lost a child even invited the widow and her children to attend their daughter's funeral.

"At a very young age, our parents teach us to forgive like Christ did, not man-made forgiveness," said one of the Amish women, as reported in the *Washington Post*. "We have to forgive. If we give it [the hurt and wrong committed] to God, he'll take it and make something good out of it."

In reflecting on these and similar remarks, an NCCL staff member said, "Now there's incarnational catechesis!" The Gospel message of forgiveness was so clearly demonstrated in the way the Amish dealt with their suffering and loss. We can learn a lot from them.

This is a far cry from the vindictive attitudes that have driven much of American foreign policy stemming from the attacks of 9/11. No wonder the press has been so taken with the gentle, forgiving sentiments of the Amish. There is something in their response that touches us at our core. Deep down we know that this is right; this is of God; this is what makes us most human.

Incarnational catechesis is about helping believers understand that when they act like Christ, when they choose Gospel values over basic, self-serving instincts, they become more reflective of the divine life. At the same time, their humanity becomes more of what God intends it to be. As Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

To do God's will is to be become more human. And to become more human is in fact to become more divine-like. St. Athanasius went so far as to say that God become human so that humans could become divine. *Incarnation* means that the divine and the human come together. In Jesus we see that union expressed uniquely, powerfully and mysteriously.

The mystical union of the divine and human is at the core of our faith. When we say that we see the face of Jesus we also believe that we are looking at the face of God. And when we model ourselves after Jesus, seeking to act as he did, we, too, incarnate the divine. Yes, mysterious, but none the less real. To hear the Amish or anyone else speak of forgiveness is to hear the divine voice.

There is, however, another level to incarnational catechesis to which we must attend. The incarnation is not only about the divine life extending through Jesus to us in the Spirit. It is also about our extending the divine life to the very systems of society. When social systems, policies and laws dehumanize some of us, they dehumanize all of us. And whatever dehumanizes deincarnationalizes.

The incarnation is also about our extending the divine life to the very systems of society.

When minorities are discriminated against, when people with disabilities are overlooked, when illegal immigrants are deprived of basic human services, when politicians cave in to the gun lobby and the slaughter of innocent children continues as it did in Nickel Mines, at Columbine, and at other schools, dehumanization occurs and God's incarnation into human history suffers. Incarnational catechesis looks at all aspects of life and has us ask, as did Mary and the saints before us, how we can help make God's kingdom come here and now. ■

Incarnational Catechesis: The Word Becomes Flesh

Robert J. Hater

In the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus Christ is the human face of God and the divine face of humanity. The incarnation of the only Son of God is the original inculturation of God's word. The mystery of the incarnation is also the model of all evangelization.

(National Directory for Catechesis, No. 21 A)



The incarnation of the Son of God is the central event of all history. It is the eternal manifestation of God's love, which is brought to fruition in Jesus' death on the cross. His death points to the evil of sin and indicates the nature of an all-loving Creator.

CENTRALITY OF INCARNATION

Church documents after Vatican II reiterate the centrality of the incarnation in all catechetical efforts. They stress that Jesus is the Good News (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, No.7) and that catechesis is a "pedagogy of the incarnation..." (*General Catechetical Directory*, No. 143). They show Jesus as the most perfect incarnation of God's love.

The documents refer to revelation in passages like, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1-3). From creation's inception divine love poured itself out into a blessed, yet fallen world. God's promise of a savior in the Hebrew Scriptures climaxed in Jesus' incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.

Catechesis, seen as an aspect or moment in the evangelization process, was clarified with the publication of *On Evangelization in the Modern World (EN)* in 1975, *On Catechesis in Our Time (CT)* in 1979, *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* in 1997, and the *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)* in 2005. *EN* stresses that evangelization is ...the vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity (No.14). *CT* indicates that catechesis is a central aspect of the "rich, complex, and dynamic reality of evangelization" (No. 18). These documents say that the chief content of catechesis is the person and message of Jesus. They also point to the multi-dimensional methodology used by Jesus in proclaiming the Word of God.

The *NDC* summarizes different forms of catechesis, including initial proclamation of the Gospel, biblical catechesis, doctrinal catechesis, moral catechesis, liturgical catechesis, and sacramental catechesis (p. 86). In reflecting on such ways to share the mystery of God's

Word, the question arises, "Is there a fundamental catechesis that underlies all of them?" Hints at an answer to this question can be gleaned by reflecting on Benedict XVI's encyclical, *God Is Love*.

Catechetical insights derived from Benedict's words suggest to me an orientation for all catechesis. I propose *incarnational catechesis*, described in this article, as a fundamental perspective that serves as the groundwork for all catechesis and catechetical methods.

GOD: INCARNATED IN JESUS

Jesus is sent by the Father to save us (John 6: 38-39). The unique incarnation of the Son of God, the Word made Flesh, is a sign of God's love. Jesus carries out the mission that his Father gave him, namely, the salvation of humankind, through his being, actions, and words. His mission climaxed on the cross.

God Is Love (DCE) provides theological insights for incarnational catechesis in the section entitled, "Jesus Christ — the Incarnate Love of God." Here, Benedict says that the real originality of the New Testament is found not so much in new ideas but "in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to these concepts — an unprecedented realism" (No.12). He expands on this statement by using parables, (e.g., the shepherd) to make a central point. He says, "these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity." Jesus' *being* is the main focus. In other words, his basic nature is to shepherd, to forgive, and to be anything else that the parables disclose.

The pope specifically refers to the parable of the good shepherd. He indicates that Jesus is a shepherd in his very being. His nature is to shepherd with all this entails. Jesus is attentive to his sheep. He seeks out strays. He never gives up on them.

Jesus also reveals his nature as a forgiving God in the story of the adulterous woman. It is Jesus' nature to forgive. Even as others condemn her, he forgives the woman and tells her to sin no more. When we sin, Jesus stands at our side, because he loves us and never abandons us.

The parables revealing Jesus' being are climaxed in Jesus' crucifixion. He accepts this gruesome death precisely because he is God. The same Word, who moved over the waters in creation, hangs thirsting for water because he is God. This is love incarnate. The ultimate expression of God's love is revealed only in Jesus' story.

Benedict in *DCE* refers to Jesus' death as the climax of God's love "in its most radical form" (No.12). He says that meditating on the radicality of God's love, revealed in Jesus' crucifixion, is the starting point of his encyclical, *God Is Love*.

The Holy Father next focuses on the enduring presence of Christ's act of oblation, as manifested in the Eucharist. Jesus is the *ultimate logos*. The pope says that this logos "becomes food for us — as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' self-oblation...as we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving" (No. 13). Christians now share "in his body and blood" (No. 13). They do not merely stand in his presence.

I propose incarnational catechesis as a fundamental perspective that serves as the groundwork for all catechesis and catechetical methods.

The pope indicates the communal nature of holy Communion, for by it we "become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants" (No.14). He continues, "Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus towards unity with all Christians" (No.15). When this happens, "We become "one body" completely joined in a single existence" (No.15).

All Christians who participate in the Eucharist are commissioned to carry on the mission that Christ initiated. Since they are members of his body, they are to serve as shepherds, teachers, forgivers of sins, and prophets.

This unity of all communicants creates a communal context and relates to the church as the body of Christ. It manifests in a new way the necessity of inculturation of the Word into church ministry, especially catechesis and liturgy.

RISEN CHRIST: INCARNATED IN THE CHURCH'S STORY

Insights gleaned from *God Is Love* allow us to put into new focus the significance of *story*. During Jesus' time, his life and teachings incarnated the Father's designs. After the Resurrection and Pentecost, his presence continues in the lives and actions of believing Christians through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christian stories reflect Jesus' continued incarnation in their lives. Stories describing the lives and missions of Mary and the saints illustrate this connection between faith and life.

The New Testament reveals Jesus' incarnate story. The church's story and the stories of Christians manifest the continuing presence of the incarnate Lord. In this sense, their stories are Jesus' stories, as the risen Lord continues to live through them. Even though God is

present in all nature, the most perfect expression of his divine presence is found in Jesus and the Christian story. Thus, the story is a fruitful ground for proclaiming the catechetical message.

The same Lord who hung on the cross to reveal God's love continues to pour out himself through the lives of faithful Christians, like Father Bill, whose story follows. His story and the story of every Christian manifest Jesus' incarnate presence.

One hot summer afternoon, Bill, a seminarian, dug a grave at his religious community's headquarters for a missionary who suffered martyrdom in a far off land. He was a year from ordination. As Bill worked, he thought, "Lord, each missionary must be prepared to accept death as one's ultimate fate. I must be prepared to take up my cross, ready to die for what I believe."

After ordination, Father Bill was sent to China as a missionary. After he arrived in 1939, the Japanese airforce began bombing his village. Eventually, he fled with some parishioners into the mountains. No one heard from him for about a year. One day, word arrived that he was in a dingy lock-up in India. Bill had suffered a serious mental breakdown. Eventually, he returned to the United States, but never fully recovered. He spent the next fifty years mostly doing menial tasks for his religious community.

Twenty years after he came home, his sister received a call from a pawn shop operator in Boston. He said that someone pawned a priest's chalice with Father Bill's name on it. How it got from China to this shop, no one knows. It was eventually returned to Father Bill, who used it until his death. This chalice has come to be known as the *resurrection chalice*, symbolic of a missionary's sacrifice and his faithfulness until his death.

At Father Bill's funeral Mass, his family and religious community wondered why many ordinary, unknown people from the neighboring town attended his funeral. This priest, considered as incapable of doing priestly ministry because of his condition, spent years walking through the city, getting to know other broken, vulnerable people. He became their spiritual advisor.

continued on page 6



Little did Father Bill realize that as he stood at the missionary’s grave before his ordination that his cross and death would not be a bodily one but a mental torture that lasted the rest of his life. His deep faith led Father Bill to a mysticism and commitment that few people experience. His holiness, won by accepting his cross, became a source of blessing for many ordinary people that he met along life’s path.

Jesus’ life, suffering, death, resurrection, presence in his risen body in the church, and the Eucharist are rooted in the incarnation and must be seen in light of it. It is manifested in Father Bill’s life and should be disclosed in the life of every Christian. The risen Lord worked though his brokenness in a way that he never envisioned before ordination. His life gives testimony to the dying and rising of Jesus that continues in the body of Christians, especially the poor and disenfranchised.

Incarnational catechesis is sharing God’s Word in light of Jesus’ incarnation, which continues in the Christian community. Taking its starting point from the theological perspectives contained in Benedict XVI’s *God Is Love*, it grounds all catechetical efforts.

INCARNATION: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESPONSES

The fruits of Jesus’ incarnation extend through his life and beyond. The theological themes listed here are gleaned from reflecting on *God Is Love*. The suggested responses offer suggestions for catechists personally, as they consider the event from Jesus’ life and each theological theme. Catechists, too, can come up with their own responses.

The ongoing dynamic of Jesus’ incarnation, reflected in this schema, is the foundation of incarnational catechesis. *Jesus’ life events* and the *theological themes* are the pillars for all catechetical methods. Catechists are to give high priority to these basic Catholic beliefs.

INCARNATION: CATECHETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESPONSES

The paschal mystery reveals God’s incarnate love. Catechists enfold it through their Christian witness and catechesis. The following catechetical perspectives invite their response.

Focus on the being or nature of Jesus.

This perspective helps catechists reflect on the importance of becoming “other Christs.” They concentrate on Christ as a *subject*, by reflecting on the awe-inspiring truth that this man of flesh and blood who walked the earth is the Son of God. He is true God and true man, like us in all things except sin. In so doing, catechists can see themselves as other Christs in *who they are and what they do*. They can recognize *who they are as other Christs in their very being*. Jesus lives and ministers through them. This is a basic starting point of incarnational catechesis. It indicates the importance of spiritual formation and invites catechetical leaders to plan retreats and days of prayer to help catechists better recognize themselves as other Christs. This spiritual orientation sets the groundwork for the way catechists teach.

See the crucifixion as the culmination of divine love.

Father Bill recognized this in his life. So does every Christian of deep faith. This perspective helps catechists recognize the role of Jesus’ crucifixion in God’s plan of salvation and the need to suffer in union with Christ. It also helps them witness by word and example that Jesus’ dying and rising continues through them.

Connect Jesus’ radical love on the cross with his ongoing presence in the Eucharist and the world.

This perspective requires an appreciation of God’s presence in life and a firm belief in the centrality of the Mass as Jesus’ ongoing sacrifice on account of sin — the supreme act of God’s love for us. The Eucharist celebrates our connection with the entire church, the

Jesus’ Life Event	Theological Theme	Suggested Responses
Incarnation	Jesus’ Being or Nature	Faith — Gratitude (God with Us)
Last Supper	Eucharist	Wonder — Connection (Ongoing Presence)
Crucifixion	Love Poured Out in Sacrifice	Conviction — Love (This is the Son of God)
Resurrection	Presence (Change)	Conversion — Hope (New Life in Christ)
Pentecost	Body of Christ — Church	Commitment — Mission (Call to Discipleship)

body of Christ, and our responsibility to continue Christ's mission of service. Father Bill's chalice, symbolizing his life of suffering, is a powerful reminder that every Christian must take up his or her cross to follow Christ. Catechists introduce and explain this belief by living it themselves, serving others, and using good catechetical methods.

Recognize that all faithful Christians are to live as other Christs, in union with each other as the body of Christ.

This puts Jesus' resurrection in a new light. As Father Bill walked the streets ministering to ordinary people, he must have realized this. So does every disciple who sees in the needy and poor the face of Christ. This becomes more real when catechists realize that Jesus lives through their life and ministry.

Incorporate the catechetical message into appropriate cultural contexts.

The Pentecost experience led the early Christian community to proclaim Jesus' message boldly, as Father Bill did on his walks through the city. This, too, is the Holy Spirit's invitation to every Christian. The need to inculturate Jesus' message invites catechists to proclaim God's word so that it is understood and appreciated. Catechists are to stress Scripture, teach the basic beliefs of the Catholic faith, and use appropriate catechetical methods. The Spirit of the risen Lord lives in all peoples and nations. (See, for example, Achiel Peelman's *Christ is a Native American*.) As John Paul II said in 1984 at the Canadian Martyrs Shrine in Midland, Ontario, "Thus the one faith is expressed in different ways. There can be no question of adulteration the word of God or of emptying the Cross of its power, but rather of Christ animating the very center of all cultures. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to the Indian peoples, but Christ, in the members of his body, is himself *Indian*." A profound statement like this one can be made about everyone who catechizes and who is catechized.

The church's story and the stories of Christians manifest the continuing presence of the incarnate Lord. In this sense, their stories are Jesus' stories, as the risen Lord continues to live through them.

Incarnational catechesis invites catechists to appreciate the dignity of their calling. They share in word and deed the profound truth that Christ's presence continues. *The Word became flesh* two thousand years ago. Because of God's love, *the Word still becomes flesh today*. This is a great source of Christian hope.

Father Robert J. Hater is a Cincinnati diocesan priest and professor of pastoral and systematic theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio. He is a national theological consultant for Harcourt Religion Publishers. His most recent books are Tell Me a Story — The Role of Narrative in the Faith Life of Catholics (Twenty Third Publications, 2006) and When a Catholic Marries a Non Catholic (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006).

Several people offered me suggestions while I was writing this article. I thank them. I especially thank Daniel S. Mulhall (USCCB) and Rev. Benedict D. Cinnsealaigh (Athenaeum of Ohio) for their written comments. ■



God Has Come to Dwell Among Us

Embodying Hope in an Incarnational Catechesis

By Lucinda Nolan

For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him...

Colossians 2:9



While the church celebrates Christ's life throughout the rhythmic cycles of the liturgical year, there is no season that turns our hearts to the mystery of the first starry and silent night as does the season of Advent. Today, a very solemn world awaits its Savior. But the liturgical season that marks the beginning of the cycle of sacred time does more than herald the coming of God in human form. The Advent season is also about waiting *in hope* for Christ to come again bearing the blessings God holds for the faithful. This same inaugural season is a time when the church remembers Jesus' offer of God's salvation through his death and resurrection and hopefully awaits the Parousia.

The fact that we wait *with hope* for the Second Coming of Christ belies the fact that we know something about that for which we wait. Emmanuel. God has dwelt among us. It is a quiet yet somewhat joyful time of waiting because we do not wait alone. "I will send you an Advocate." Come, Holy Spirit. The patient quality of our waiting expresses the deep love we hold for the object of our longing. Christ will come again. Maranatha.

All authentic catechesis is incarnational.

All authentic catechesis is incarnational. The *General Directory for Catechesis* states "catechesis is eminently christological in presenting the Christian message" (No. 117). Furthermore, in the mystery of the incarnation lies the theological motive for adapting catechetical content to its hearers so that "the Gospel "is transmitted as genuine, satisfying, healthy and adequate food" (*GDC*, No. 169).

This hopeful waiting is the context of an incarnational catechesis. Incarnational catechesis is a life-long process whose activity belongs to the whole of the church. We wait in hope together. At the heart of an incarnational catechesis is God's self-communication, radically Trinitarian at every point. The incarnation is the foundation for the evangelizing mission of the church and the context of all catechesis.

NO SEPARATION

While in the past there has been a certain differentiation in theological studies between a theology of the incarnation and a theology of the cross (see *Introduction to Christianity* by Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI), there can be no such separation in catechesis. The faith must be passed on in its completeness — leaving nothing that is essential untaught. As Augustine, in *The First Catechetical Instruction*, instructed Deogratias, Deacon of Carthage, "The narration is full when each person is catechized in the first incident from what is written in the text, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth,' on to the present times of the Church" (No. 5).

At various points in history, catechetical method has tended to emphasize Christ's humanity over his divinity or vice versa. The catechetical renewal movement brought forth renewed attention to scriptural and liturgical catechesis, and later, experiential and incarnational catechesis took human experience for its starting point. Today the church challenges us to present revelation as an organic whole through the processes of a life-long, ongoing catechesis. The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that all catechesis is geared to the primacy of Revelation, God's self-communication to God's people, completed and perfected in Jesus Christ (No. 16 A). And so, while it is appropriate during this season of Advent to ponder the mystery of God becoming human in Jesus, it is always most properly presented in the context of God's desire to "bring about our participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity, something so wondrous that it is impossible for us even to imagine" (*NDC*, No. 16A).

How might catechists present the incarnation so as to help people fully rejoice in the message that the divine became human, like us in all ways but sin, and at the same time *awaken the hopeful sense* that the outcome of Christ's death and resurrection is the possibility of life eternal? "For Christians, the principle of hope is the person of Jesus Christ and his message," says the Jubilee Year commission in *Jesus Christ: Word of the Father*.

Though my list is far from exhaustive, I would like to offer some characteristics of an incarnational catechesis that embodies Christian hope. In such a catechesis, several important dimensions of our

Christian faith will be explicit. When pushed to its fullness, an incarnational catechesis will embody the Gospel message in its entirety.

HUMANITY AND DIVINITY

First, an incarnational catechesis will stress both the humanity *and* divinity of Christ. In taking on human form, Jesus graced humanity with respect and love, revealing to humankind both the meaning of all life and its final destiny. While an incarnational catechesis may tend to emphasize God's becoming one with us, it also teaches that our hope is based on the knowledge that in Christ the Redeemer the human *and* the divine are most perfectly one. In other words, an incarnational approach to catechesis aims at presenting the Christian message in its entirety by bringing the hearer into intimate communion with Jesus the Christ in the fullness of both his humanity and divinity.

Today the church challenges us to present revelation as an organic whole.

INCARNATION AND CROSS

Second, an incarnational catechesis will center on Christ's incarnation *and* his cross and resurrection. These events are part of God's one saving act in Jesus Christ through which the hope and promise of Christ's return proceeds and in which our salvation rests.

In his 1968 *Introduction to Christianity*, Pope Benedict XVI identified the incarnation as God's decisive act in history, but also as one that cannot be separated nor neatly synthesized with the death and resurrection of Christ: the former has to do with God's *being* and the latter with God's *activity* in the world (p. 171). The incarnation, along with the death, resurrection and return of Christ together form the context of a unified and complete incarnational catechesis.

The official catechetical text in preparation for the Holy Year 2000, *Jesus Christ, Word of the Father — Savior of the World*, states:

Every year, the Church's liturgical calendar concentrates the central Mysteries of the faith in two major celebrations: Christmas and Easter. In reality, there is just one saving event, the incarnation of the Son of God, which begins with his birth in Bethlehem and comes to completion in his passion, death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL

Third, an incarnational catechesis will be about temporal existence *and* eternal life. Christian hope lies in the tension of the already present and future realization of God's reign in human history. This tension has been present throughout the church's history. Therefore, an incarnational catechesis will avoid an overly this-worldly or otherworldly spirituality of Christian hope. "The gulf between heaven and earth, between the eternal and the historical, between the divine and the human, between the sacred and the secular, between the natural and the supernatural have been overcome in Christ as the Word incarnate," says Dermot Lane in *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology*.

ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

Fourth, an incarnational approach will emphasize the *sacramentality* of all creation. It will take seriously the ecological and environmental concerns of today's world. The incarnation is the embodiment of God in a finite human being. This gracing of creation extends to all created matter, giving all the world revelatory potentiality. In a special way catechists are called to holiness in their worldly lives. Their proclamation of the message brings hope to the world and their lives bear witness to the incarnation of the Gospel in all of life's experiences (*NDC*, No. 54).

Fifth, an incarnational catechesis is an inculturated catechesis. "The incarnation of the only Son of God is the original inculturation of God's word" (*NDC*, No. 21). Such a catechesis will pay close attention to the cultural environment in which it is being presented (*NDC*, No. 25). An incarnational catechesis is a liturgical catechesis, tied closely to the rituals and symbols of the worshipping community in which the gospel message and Christ himself are inculturated.

TRINITY MADE PRESENT

Finally, such a catechesis will always be grounded in the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. That is, it will be profoundly Trinitarian in nature. Moreover, an incarnational catechesis will not only echo that Jesus became human to bring the light of God's love to the world, but will also give full reference to Christ's place in the Holy Trinity. Humanity's hope of eternal life with God is bound to the relational quality of the Trinity made present to the world in the Advent of Jesus Christ.

All of this is accomplished through a catechesis that is inspired by God's own pedagogy — a pedagogy of hope and love (*NDC*, No. 28B). An incarnational approach to catechesis reflects God's own gradual revelation and perfect timing in history. Saint Augustine in his *First Catechetical Instruction* tells us, "The great reason for the Advent of Christ was the commendation of love" (No. 4). An incarnational catechesis is taught in love so that all who hear "may believe, on believing may hope, and on hoping may love" (No. 8). In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI writes, "[Love] transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands ..." (No. 39).

The message of the incarnation is one of God's unbounded love and the human response in hope. Christians are invited each Advent into the mystery of the incarnation and are called to be signs of hope and love in today's world. An incarnational catechesis can do no less.

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Celebrating Confirmation: By Order or by Age?

By Linda Khirallah Porter



The diocesan Christian initiation team was meeting one Wednesday afternoon in March 2005. The bishop had been invited to attend the gathering. The concern arose that we seem to have two theologies of initiation: one for Catholics and one for non-Catholics. Bishop Alvaro Corrada paused, head cocked, and smiled. Then he said very assuredly: “We should consider offering confirmation prior to first Eucharist for baptized Catholics. What do you all think about that?” As director of faith formation for the diocese, I had to pick myself up from the floor, realizing that this would become an uphill battle.

The question: At what age does your diocese confirm candidates?

The answer: Adolescence

The question: Why adolescents?

The answer: To keep them in formation longer

That is the usual response we received in researching dioceses around the world. As we began to approach this decision from an initiation standpoint, we chose a road much less traveled but more navigable.

THE REALITY:

Parish hopping, sacramental filling stations, misguided theology...

Our first step was to survey and evaluate the current practices for sacramental preparation in the diocese. In doing so we realized there were as many programs as we had parishes. Despite guidelines, resources, curriculums, policies, every parish seemed to be “doing its own thing.” And if parishioners didn’t like the hoops their parish required then to get through for sacraments, they would parish-hop until they found a program to their liking.

Another survey finding was that the sacrament of confirmation was seeking a theology. The church has given us the meaning of the sacrament in our documents, our catechisms, our tradition, yet the general Catholic population understands the sacrament as a “sacrament of choice, a time for choosing the church, a sacrament of maturity, a sacrament that makes us soldiers of Christ.”

THE PLAN:

A Pastoral Reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation

With the survey information the team set out a plan to present to the presbyteral and diaconal councils for input on how to proceed. The result was a request by the councils to the bishop to articulate a “theology of confirmation” from which they could proceed. I think they expected a paragraph. Instead Bishop Corrada presented in October, 2005, a “Pastoral Reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation” which runs to thirty-seven articles on eleven pages. This reflection can be accessed at our diocesan website www.diocese-of-tyler.org. The theology focuses on a close connection between the sacraments of initiation, not on order or age of celebration:

The Sacrament of Confirmation completes the baptismal grace. That is, the Holy Spirit, first received in Baptism, now strengthens the Christian, binding him more perfectly to Christ and the Church so that, as a true witness of Christ, he might spread and defend the faith by word and deed (see CCC 1285). Thus it is not accurate to connect Confirmation to maturity in the psychological sense so that it would best given at an age of social maturity. *The Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens the person to bear witness, rather than expresses the person’s determination to bear witness, to his faith.* This strengthening is something that can be fittingly given at any age. By the reception of Confirmation, the Christian is given the grace to take his place in the life and apostolic mission of the Church. That mission is, first of all, to go out to all the world and witness to the Gospel of Christ. For a Christian publicly to take his place in the Eucharistic assembly is the greatest participation in the apostolic mission of the Church that is imaginable (No. 17).

THE IMPLEMENTATION:

Sacrament notebooks, information sessions...

Our first step was to organize handbooks for households of faith, for candidates, for priests, for catechists. As we organized these materials we were conscious of the importance of the role of reconciliation prior to preparation for these other sacraments as reconciliation often becomes only a stepping stone to receiving first Eucharist.



We should consider offering confirmation prior to first Eucharist for baptized Catholics.

Information sessions were held around the diocese to present the history, the theology, and the implementation. All of our handbooks are available also on the website.

THE RESULT:

Parish renewal, whole community catechesis...

- Families are becoming more involved in the process of faith formation.
- Among all individuals there is a renewed appreciation of reconciliation not just prior to first Eucharist but on a regular basis.
- Sacraments are not seen as filling stations and celebrations are not viewed as graduations but ongoing nourishment in the life of the community.
- If families are involved in the preparation, children do not leave formation after sacraments —whether they are eight or sixteen.
- Youth programs become more focused on theological reflection, social justice, and relationships instead of being primarily confirmation preparation.
- There is one theology of initiation for Catholics and non-Catholics that becomes an enriching experience for the parish community.
- Adult faith formation becomes more widespread as parents seek ways to teach their children about sacraments.
- Parishes and pastors are challenged to provide whole community catechesis for sacramental sessions that reaches more PIP (people in the pew).

CATECHETICAL LEADER

THE CHALLENGES:

Although we have managed to avoid the ditches, I would be amiss if I did not admit that on this road less traveled there have been bumps:

- Parents are reluctant to take on the responsibility of handing on the faith.
- There is a need for better understanding by clergy and catechists.
- First communion liturgy as a ceremony is seen as more important than the beginning of a lifelong nurturing of the faith.
- Parishes without strong youth programs have been challenged to begin something more.

As I look back on that first meeting almost two years ago and at what has been accomplished since that time, I thank God for the wisdom of our bishop, Alvaro Corrada, who knows the teachings of the church, articulates those teachings with grace and style, and has the courage and vision to support them so that our practices, our preparation, our rituals indeed show what we believe. *Lex orandi lex credendi!* In the future when we come upon another road less traveled, we'll smile, and maybe cock our heads too, and embrace the journey with faith, hope, and love.

Linda Khirallah Porter, MTS, has been director of faith formation for Diocese of Tyler for twelve years. She is responsible for Christian initiation, faith formation for all ages, and catechist formation. Contact her at lporter@dioceseoftyler.org. |

Adolescent Catechesis Today: On the Road to Transformation

By Michael Theisen

If the faith formation of adolescents is going to change, parish and school leaders must work together across ministerial boundaries to keep their collective eye on the end result.

This is the sixth article in a series on adolescent catechesis sponsored by the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis, a collaborative effort by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) with support from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), to enhance the quality of adolescent catechesis in parishes and schools.

“And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” (Lk 24:15-16)

That road to Emmaus must be a popular one. It seems that many of our young would-be disciples are still walking it, their backs to Jerusalem, seemingly clueless to the Jesus in their midst and wondering what the meaning and direction of life holds from this moment forward.

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) certainly supports this idea of a generation of potential disciples lost along the roadway. This extensive research study conducted through the University of North Carolina between 2001 and 2005 by Dr. Christian Smith and colleagues set out to study the spiritual and religious lives of American teens and “found the vast majority of [teenagers] to be *incredibly inarticulate* about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives” (Soul Searching, p. 131).

Often the first stumbling block to effective adolescent catechesis is our own grip on ‘territory.’

In summarizing the results of this contemporary study, Dr. Smith laments, “for very many U.S. teens, religion is important but not a priority, valued but not much invested in, praised but not very describable.” Dr. Smith then challenges those of us who take this work seriously with the conclusion “that very many religious congregations and communities of faith in the United States are failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating their youth” (Soul Searching, p. 262).

Like the hopeless disciples on the road, those involved in the faith formation of adolescents may want to turn around and walk in the other direction, pointing fingers and assigning blame for this contemporary tragedy, lamenting “What do we do now?” We mustn’t let this remain simply a rhetorical question.

ANSWERING THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The data from the NSYR is not surprising for anyone who has been engaged actively in adolescent catechesis for any length of time, but it now provides the evidence we need to address better the issues that have been festering below the surface of adolescent catechetical programming for some time. In her documents, the church consistently has raised these issues and offered guidance with which to transform adolescent catechesis. The church’s vision combined with the passion, commitment and creativity of all involved in faith formation can help in redefining the reality of forming the faith of young people. But where do we start? What are the next steps we should be taking to change course? Specifically, there are five areas that parish and school leaders should be focusing on at the local level:

- Begin and end with the vision.
- Create empowering and engaging catechetical models.
- Employ intentional and systematic methodologies.
- Form catechists to reach outside the box.
- Partner with parents.

BEGIN AND END WITH THE VISION

If the faith formation of adolescents is going to change, then parish and school leaders must begin working together across ministerial boundaries to keep their collective eye on the end result. Often the first stumbling block to effective adolescent catechesis is our own grip on “territory.” More time is spent guarding turf and time-

honored structures than tending the garden of faith that is our collective charge. Moving present paradigms from “mine” to “ours” must start with finding common ground, a vision that we can all embrace and work toward.

The more often we engage and involve young people in their own learning, the more fully formed these young disciples will become.

The *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* says that “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch with, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (No. 80) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that “the totality of the church’s efforts is to make disciples...” (No.4). This primary task of catechesis in forming disciples is echoed in the *National Directory for Catechesis [NDC]* (No. 20) as well as the USCCB youth ministry document, “Renewing the Vision” (p. 9).

If these guiding documents agree that formation of disciples is our ever-present goal, our all-encompassing task with teenagers, then together we must question how well our present methods and models give birth to this reality. This self-examination of our overall structure and programming for young people is a crucial and often overlooked step in acquiring a new paradigm for adolescent catechesis.

In assessing parish or school adolescent catechetical programming, faith formation leaders must ask (and answer) five key questions that will keep efforts focused on the primary goal of disciple making:

- How is God made more visible through this (activity/program/model)?
- How will this (activity/program/model) bring young people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ?
- How can I more fully involve young people in this (activity/program/model)?
- How can I more fully partner with parents in this (activity/program/model)?
- How can I model and share my own faith journey through this (activity/program/model)?

These questions should be imprinted into the beginning, middle and end of all that we do with adolescent ministry, whether it be through school, religious education, or youth ministry programming.

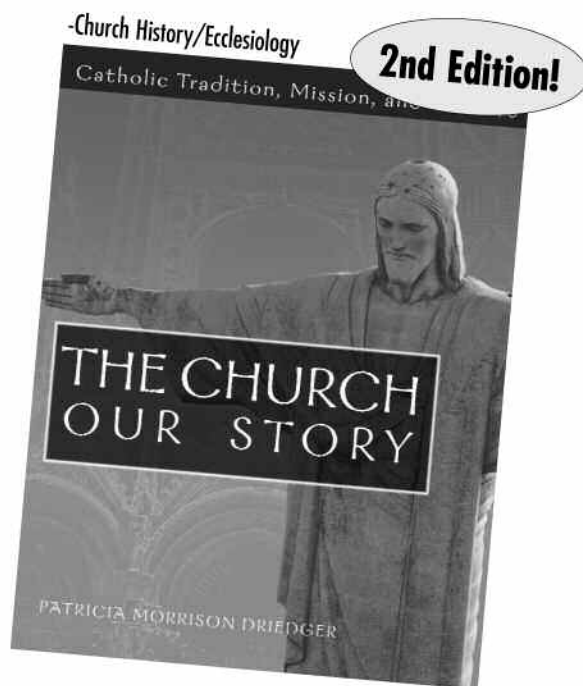
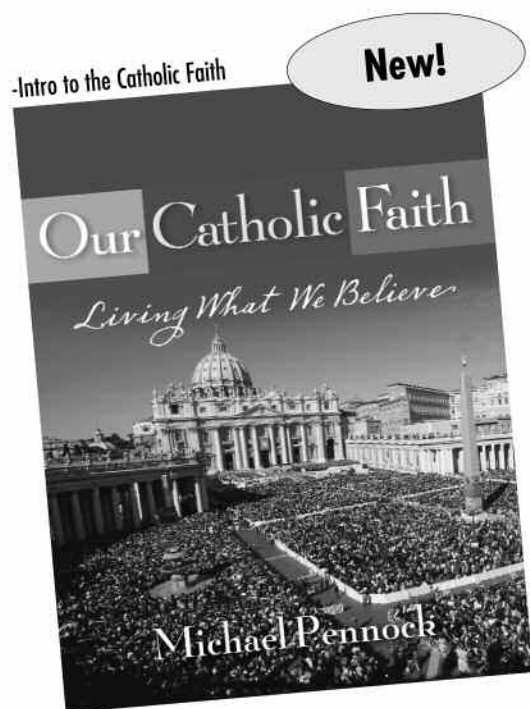
CREATE EMPOWERING AND ENGAGING MODELS

He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” (Lk 24:17-19a)

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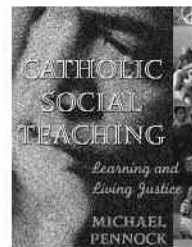
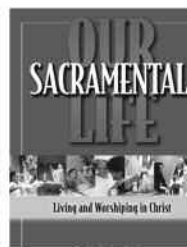
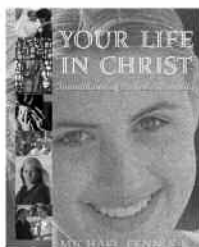
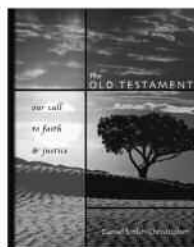
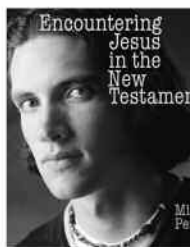
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Five Focus Areas

- Begin and end with the vision
- Create empowering and engaging catechetical models
- Employ intentional and systematic methodologies
- Form catechists to reach outside the box

In the Emmaus journey Jesus illustrates what is required to lead young disciples to the threshold of transformation today: a methodology of empowerment. Jesus' empowering approach begins where the struggling disciples are, not where he is. He listens to their questions, to their concerns and struggles. Not until their present reality has been laid out before him does he begin to fan the dying embers of faith still alive in their hearts with the story of salvation history, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets" (Luke 24:27).

This walking-with-Jesus approach is relational at heart. It respects the individual's unique journey by starting where the person is and rightfully assumes that leader and learner share a relationship of faith. Unfortunately, too many models and methods in adolescent catechesis lean toward an overpowering approach.

The *GDC* reminds leaders that "young people cannot be considered only objects of catechesis..." (for example, where the leader distributes knowledge as a commodity), they need also to be "active subjects and protagonists of evangelization and artisans of social renewal" (No. 183). In examining current methods and models of faith formation, how often are we, like Jesus, empowering those

Show me a successful catechist and I'll show you an adventurer, someone who is not afraid to reach beyond the boundaries of traditional methods.

with whom we share the road? Do we use techniques and strategies that respect the ability of the young people to take ownership of the learning process by involving them actively in their faith formation? Do we engage them fully in the teaching and learning process or have they become passive pupils whose minds are objects to be filled with as much information as allotted time allows?

A national research project conducted on effective youth ministry practices in Catholic parishes ("Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry," St. Mary's Press, 2004) revealed that "effective faith formation with adolescents has to be engaging and connect faith to youth's life experience" (p. 44-45). It goes on to highlight three vital ingredients for effective adolescent catechesis:

- It has to be integrated into all the activities and components of youth ministry, not just weekly classes.

- It has to connect the content and doctrine of faith to the life experiences of young people.
- It has to be innovative.

A few years ago in the Diocese of Rochester, parishes and schools were sent a survey on adolescent catechesis that contained a list of twenty-five models that could be used to help form the faith of adolescents (see sidebar.) They were asked to rate the effectiveness of the strategies they were using currently. When the results were compiled, there was some surprise at what emerged as the top five most effective delivery systems:

1. Summer intensive programs such as vacation Bible school
2. Drama and acting programs including those for liturgy, Stations of the Cross, and classroom skits
3. Retreat programs, including day, overnight or weekend events
4. Youth as teacher/learner where young people learn by serving as catechists and aides
5. Service learning programs such as work camps and service activities that include process reflections

At the top of the list was a program designed for young children in elementary school. So why was it rated most effective for adolescent catechesis? Vacation Bible school leaders explained that it fully engaged teens as teachers, aides and activity leaders while involving many parents in the process. In reviewing the top strategies, several telling similarities can be found:

- They creatively and fully engage young people in the learning process, often as teachers or peer leaders.
- They are intense and necessitate relationship building among the participants.
- They often offer something back to the community.
- They utilize the gifts of young people and actively involve the whole person (head, heart and hands).

Certainly the more often we engage and involve young people in their own learning, the more fully formed these young disciples will become and this effort includes preparing youth to teach and share their faith with others. But how do we move from the vision to new models that engage and empower?

INTENTIONAL AND SYSTEMATIC METHODOLOGIES

The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that lifelong faith formation "is accomplished through a great variety of forms: 'systematic and occasional, individual and community, organized and spontaneous.'" (*GDC* No.51, cf *General Catechetical Directory* [1971] 19d). This should not be interpreted to mean that adolescent catechesis is equivalent to a recipe for stone soup. Rather than tossing together whatever comes along or appears to be the "program of the moment," we must return to our task of disciple-making and stay focused on the specific themes and content that comprise the core of our Catholic faith and identity.

The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

A Gift for All Catechists

By Donald W. Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, DC



One of the most significant events this year in the ongoing action of passing on the faith was the publication of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. This is the work of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, which turned its attention in a particular way to the catechesis of many young adults, participants in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and those in parish and diocesan adult faith formation programs. The bishops set out to produce a catechism that would be inviting, engaging and instructive. The goal was to have a catechism for adults that would be complete but not necessarily encyclopedic, authentic in its content and, at the same time, presented in a format that would appeal to young adult readers and learners today.

The new catechism does more than just present the faith. It strives to invite the reader into the particular element of faith treated in each specific chapter and assist in the reader's faith journey with appropriate reflections, prayer and an application of the faith to some special aspect of our culture that today challenges what we believe. The layout of the book is not only inviting, but it is a useful tool for helping the learner experience a living faith — the church's faith.

In entitling this article "The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*: A Gift for All Catechists," I reflect my own conviction that the bishops achieved their goal of providing a truly useful instrument for all of us engaged in the work of passing on the faith. I have also been greatly heartened by the many comments I have received from people "in the field" who tell me they find this a truly helpful tool.

The need for the new *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is something I believe we have all experienced. There is both a negative, or downside, and a positive, or upside, to what we find in our culture today. Both aspects cry out for a catechetical renewal, particularly among our young adults, and an appropriate tool to help with this catechesis.

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Without belaboring the negative side, it is important to mention some of the challenges that we perhaps all have faced. For example, our culture

is aggressively secular. This is true to such an extent that the environment actually can be hostile to Christian faith. Social mores, particularly in large urban centers and as reflected in the means of social communications that reach the entire country, have so changed in the past years as to produce a climate that is not only secular, but almost entirely focused on the material world. Commentators often speak of a generation that has lost its moral compass.

However, our experiences are not all darkness and gloom. On the brighter side is a sense among some of our young people that the secular, material world does not provide them sufficient answers for

I find a willingness in many young people to explore what the church brings to our world and the human condition.

their lives. Over and over, the phenomena of youth gatherings as large as World Youth Day and as modest as small parish programs reflect a search for values and direction that characterizes a growing number of our faithful. There is a hunger for God and the things of the Spirit, but it needs to be encouraged, informed and directed.

In reaching out to the young, I have experienced their openness, sense of searching, and desire for a clear affirmation of the faith. The basic truths of the faith often evoke in them a positive and affirmative response. In meeting with young people, whether in a university class setting, an RCIA discussion, or a simple conversation about the faith, I find a willingness in many to explore what the church brings to our world and the human condition that no other voice provides. This openness suggests that it is not a time for any of us to be hesitant to speak about our faith and explain our beliefs. It may even entail on our part a more thorough study of the teaching of Christ and his church. In this context, there is a welcome place today for the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.

THE RIGHT TOOL

Essentially a catechism is a means to an end. God gives us the gift of faith, and the church nurtures and sustains that faith through her teaching and sacramental ministry. A catechism is a tool or instrument for those involved in teaching the faith, and we all know how important it is to have the right tool. Whether we intend to work in the yard, kitchen, or workshop, if we have the right tool, the task is a lot easier.

Even the best tool, however, depends on the skill of the person using it. The breaking open of the message contained in the new catechism will always remain the work of dedicated and inspiring catechists. Whether it is in an adult faith formation program, an RCIA process, some form of sacramental preparation, or simply a group discussion about the faith, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* in the hands of faith-filled catechists can be a formidable instrument.

Why is the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* the right tool for the task of teaching the faith today? First, it is complete. In this long, yet fairly concise, book we find a survey or digest of the whole body of Catholic teaching on faith and morals.

In an age that has come to think of the teaching of the church as a cafeteria line where one picks and chooses what one wants to believe, the catechism is a reminder that the whole meal is necessary for a well-balanced spiritual diet. The catechism provides completeness.

It is also authentic. Its content is not someone's opinion about what the church believes or should believe. It is the true teaching of the Catholic Church proclaimed with authority by those who are responsible for guarding the integrity of the faith. The new adult catechism represents the efforts of the United States bishops, together with the pope, to present a complete and authoritative proclamation of the faith of the Catholic Church today in our country.

THE CONTENT

What is in the book? What will you find when you open this catechism? Basically, you will find what Jesus Christ came to teach and what the church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over twenty centuries, has nurtured, applied and articulated — the Catholic faith.

For all of us familiar with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the structure of the new catechism comes as no surprise. It follows very carefully the format of the catechism on which it is based. Thus, we find that the new catechism also is divided into four sections. The first deals with the creed or profession of faith. Here we find the revelation of Jesus that illumines and gives meaning to life. The second section is devoted to the sacramental life of the church or, as it is called, the celebration of the Christian mystery. Here we consider how we sustain and nurture our faith through the sacramental presence of Christ. The third part is devoted to how we live out in our daily lives the moral obligations of being a follower of Jesus Christ. How do we live in a way that pleases God? How do we become true followers of Jesus? This section unfolds the moral teaching of the church and our vocation to live in the Holy Spirit. The final section is devoted to prayer. Here the catechism uses the petitions of the Our Father to guide us through an understanding of how we should pray and for what we should pray.

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is designed primarily for adult, particularly young adult, readers who seek a fuller, richer understanding of the great gift of faith. However, this book provides for every believer a summary of what we believe, of the faith that we so dearly cherish. It is a wonderful gift to each one of us.

AUTHENTICITY

One of the adjectives used to describe the new *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is

(continued on page 20)



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CATECHETICAL UPDATE

A publication of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

WRITING HOME...

ABOUT ADULT CATECHESIS AND THE NEW CATECHISM FOR ADULTS ...AN EXERCISE IN PRAXIS

by Michael P. Horan



Pope John Paul II chose October 11, 1992, the thirtieth anniversary the Second Vatican Council, to promulgate the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, a choice that was both timely and wise. Both the church and world witnessed great change in the years since the Council; they continue to do

so, forming a varied landscape in the United States that houses many cultures, faith perspectives, and concerns about spiritual growth. Like the members of all churches, Catholics in the United States have participated in, and shaped, the very society and culture that its members seek to evangelize. U.S. Catholics live in, and contribute to, a culture whose members need help in making many complex religious, relational and moral decisions. A catechism that addresses the particular questions of the U.S. church and society appears now in the trajectory of the Council and the wake of the *CCC*.

The publication of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA)* is an important moment in the larger story of contemporary catechetical practice. This essay offers the reader an exercise in praxis, allowing us to imagine the practices of catechesis using this new catechism uniquely addressed to adult Catholics in the United States. Throughout this essay we ask the following questions:

- What are some potential uses for the *USCCA* as a resource for the practice of catechesis?
- What are the historical and cultural contexts in which the practices of catechesis, using this catechism, can flourish in this nation?
- What are the unique features, contributions, and challenges to the catechism genre that are represented by the *USCCA*?

That the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is modeled on the content and sequence of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* is clear. Equally clear is the difference in style between these two works. The *USCCA* contains content and stylistic additions that are not found in the *CCC*, carrying a particular emphasis on the American character of the church, displaying a decidedly U.S. personality. The lives of saints and heroes of the church in the United States are featured in the lead pages of the thirty-six chapters that comprise the text. Also included in its 542 pages (not including an index that spans 84 pages) are specific meditations from the Catholic spiritual tradition and prayers from the Sacramentary. Discussion questions to be pursued in groups or in journal-writing and reflection are found near the end of chapters and will serve to promote critical and sustained thought.

What are the potential uses of a decidedly American catechism in a church informed by specific cultural and catechetical achievements?

It should also be noted that the *USCCA* follows upon the publication of two other U.S. documents that need to be considered in concert with this one. The *National Catechetical Directory* and *Our Hearts were Burning Within Us* each address the primacy of adult faith formation either in theory (enunciated in the *NDC*) or in practical terms for constructive action (in *OHWB*). Both documents draw inspiration from the catechumenate, offering ways that the renewed rite of initiation might invigorate all efforts to catechize, especially breathing life into the catechesis of adults. What, then, are the potential uses of a decidedly American catechism in a church informed by specific cultural and catechetical achievements?

We begin with the practice of catechesis as it might be observed throughout the United States by an informed traveler. The exercise is imaginative and speculative; the *USCCA* is rather new and therefore it remains to be seen how it will be received and employed.

part 1

“OBSERVING” CATECHETICAL PRACTICES USING THE USCCA

Egeria, the Spanish nun and pilgrim, “wrote home” about the ancient catechumenate that she observed on her travels to Jerusalem during the height of the catechumenate under the leadership of Bishop St. Cyril (d. 386). In doing so Egeria informed not only her sisters in the convent; future generations of scholars who studied the catechumenate and helped to shape its renewed iteration in the RCIA also gained from Egeria’s observations.

If we were to imagine a modern day Egeria who writes home to current catechetical leaders about the use of the Catholic Catechism for Adults, what might she observe? The following are scenes that a contemporary Egeria might narrate about some best practices that flow from interesting uses of the *USCCA*, taking seriously the context of the catechumenate as an inspiration for all catechesis.

FOR CATECHIST FORMATION

In a small town in the Southwest, a catechist formation program meets for one full day each month. Over the course of three years these catechists have gained competence and confidence for exercising their ministry of catechesis. On that special day each month, catechists meet in the pastoral center connected to the parish. There they begin with prayer that they have planned (the catechists have worked together and they know one another fairly well). Inspired by the catechumenate, they practice a welcome to the participants, a proclamation of the Gospel for the day, and a reflection on that Gospel. Their “curriculum” for the first year of their time together was the *USCCA*, so as they have moved into years two and three of the program, they have often referred to the catechism in connection with their discussions of the topics they are covering in the certification program. Their native language is Spanish, and so they have been using the catechism in Spanish, but they plan to start an English-speaking group for others in one central parish that is convenient to many people.

FOR WHOLE COMMUNITY

A parish in a mid-sized town in Minnesota has employed a “whole community catechesis” approach by linking the entire parish by its web site to the Scripture readings. The web site includes a daily suggestion for adults to read a portion of the catechism. It points out pages in the catechism text that correspond to readings from the meditation sections that the *USCCA* contains, prodding the adults to dedicate time to prayer and meditation as well as doctrinal learning.

IN INFORMAL GROUPS

In the suburbs of Cleveland a group of women gather one morning each week. They welcome each other and begin with coffee and a social, and then they pray, using the reading of the day from the Lectionary. After reflecting on that reading, they discuss the life of the person whose biography leads each chapter of the *USCCA* (they have read and prepared the chapter ahead of time). They consider the connection between the story and the content of the chapter that follows the biography. The questions that structure their conversation are these:

Where do you see the challenges in the person’s life, and how do those challenges relate to the challenges in your life? What was the person’s response and how can that response shape your responses in your life? What questions do you want to pursue as a result of reading the chapter?

FOR A TEACHING COMMUNITY

Teachers in the Catholic elementary and high schools located on the grounds of a parish in a northeastern city are meeting once a month to talk about their faith lives and to discuss their understanding of the Christian creeds. On one day their reading includes the first section of the *USCCA*, but they read it in light of the following considerations:

In the life of faith, how do you incorporate your belief in God as Trinity and unity? How does knowing that God is in relationship (three divine persons) help you to sustain your own relationships?

The teachers conclude their discussion with a pledge of prayer for each other in their dual role in the school: disciples in faith and ministers of the Word as teachers in the Catholic school. Each one draws the name of a person at random, and they promise each other prayer for the month to come.

IN A DIOCESAN PROGRAM

The diocesan staff for adult faith formation in a north central region of the country has designed a three-year study of the contents of the *USCCA*. They have invited a theologian for each of the public sessions, focusing on a topic contained in each chapter of the catechism. The staff members have crafted a few different formats for reading and discussing the catechism in groups; these formats are printed in the bulletin of each parish in the diocese. Members of all the parishes are encouraged to attend the lecture series held at the local Catholic university.

WITH A FAITH-AT-WORK GROUP

A dozen young professionals in a west coast city gather at lunchtime each Friday for a discussion about the challenges of living their faith at work. As a point of reference and departure for their discussion, they pre-read a portion or a chapter of the catechism. They extend the conversation from Friday’s lunch by agreeing to use electronic mail. Their email conversation throughout the week helps the facilitator of the group, a graduate of a Catholic university with a double major in theology and international business, to shape the forthcoming Friday meeting and to suggest appropriate pages from the catechism for their reading. She also offers them a bibliography on web sites and books in theology that will elaborate the topic.

IN PUBLISHING

A publisher of religious books has prepared a paperback series addressed to adults who voice questions about a variety of topics. In designing the series, the publisher has consulted the *USCCA* and has cross-referenced the pertinent catechism pages in an index of the topics covered by the series of texts.



IN A SCRIPTURE GROUP

In a working class neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, a group meets to discuss the Scriptures for the week. But their discussion often leads to areas beyond the Scriptures. They regularly agree to read an area of the *USCCA* for the follow-up to their session, selecting the chapter of the catechism that treats their area of questioning/concern. In the subsequent meeting they include a discussion of this chapter.

WITH A PARISH TEAM

When the parish team members in the northwestern region of the nation gather to consider their work, they begin in prayer and reflection on the Gospel of the day, but they also include a reading from the meditation section found in the *USCCA*. Using a quote from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola found in the *USCCA* (pp. 437-438), they evaluate their own interactions as a team in light of St. Ignatius' instruction:

Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another's statement than to condemn it.

This leads to a very interesting examination of conscience and discussion about sincere listening and truth-telling as strong components of pastoral team-building.

FOR A LITURGY COMMITTEE

The liturgy committee of a parish in the mid-Atlantic states convenes with a discussion of chapter seventeen on the *USCCA*. The committee has studied various documents on the liturgy, starting with *Sacrosanctum Concilium* from Vatican II. As they gather for a retreat in October to plan the new liturgical year, they begin with discussion questions from chapter seventeen of the *USCCA*:

What has been your experience of Mass at various times in your life? What has helped you to become a more active participant in the celebration of the Eucharist?

This conversation leads the liturgy team members to identify the important expressions of active participation that they wish to inculcate in the parish celebrations of the Eucharist. The conversation leads naturally into the planning of Advent and Lenten catechesis about the Eucharist.

part 2

OBSERVATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF A CATECHETICAL CULTURE

How would a catechetical leader “write home” and analyze these scenes in a way that would serve to illumine the best practices of adult faith formation? And how would she account for these practices that rely on the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*? What is the historical context for the practices, and how might she situate the scenes she observed and described above in some meaningful way?

First, she would note the dynamics of the catechumenate at work in the scenes, pointing out that the *USCCA* does not stand alone but is part of the trajectory of catechetical renewal since Vatican II. Second, she would note the existence and the central messages of the two other documents that precede and contextualize the use of a catechism for adults in the United States: The *National Directory for Catechesis*, and the United States bishops' pastoral plan on adult faith formation, entitled *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. Finally, in an attempt to make sense of the theoretical and practical gains associated with these two documents, she would need to rehearse the familiar and foundational story of the movement that gave rise to them and to the catechumenate. As a descendent to Egeria, she might “re-tell the story” to her younger colleagues in this way:

CATECHESIS AFTER VATICAN II

If the modern catechetical movement in Roman Catholicism can be associated with any one event as expressive of its energy and force, that event is the Second Vatican Council. So it is interesting that Pope John Paul II chose the thirtieth anniversary to promulgate the Catechism of the Catholic Church. At Vatican II, held in Rome in four sessions each autumn from 1962-65, the leaders of the Catholic Church validated the principles of historical consciousness that the previous generation of church leaders had held with some suspicion.

The leaders at Vatican II exhorted the readers of the sixteen conciliar documents to “return to the sources” of Scripture and the early church's traditions in order to effect real renewal. This was seen in several aspects of the council documents; these documents aimed at internal renewal as well as external adaptation. The documents on the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and on religious life (*Perfectae Caritatis*) did this in ways that captured people's attention, especially in the external and observable aspects. The use of the vernacular in worship and the restructured liturgy that drew people into more active participation in their native languages could hardly be missed by the most casual observer. Even non-Catholics noticed the “changes” that occurred when women religious returned to the sources of their early founders' intentions. Once they became clear on the historical context and originating intentions of their founders, many contemporary religious congregations made

Some adults may be cavalier and dismissive of the catechism, while others may cut off conversation and adult learning in favor of catechism fundamentalism.

decisions to engage in new and different ministries, and to cease wearing the dress of another era in favor of following the founders' intentions to be people of their own respective eras and cultures.

These moves are but examples of the many more that coalesce around the idea of historical consciousness guiding a transposition of timeless values into a different key for the modern age. The *Ressourcement* movement, the movement to return to the scriptural and patristic sources, challenged scholars and practitioners to study afresh the original texts of the early tradition and, in a sense, to privilege that era as expressive of the core of Christian faith. This principle of historical consciousness resulted in the renewal of catechesis by a *ressourcement* to its ancient roots.



DRAWING ON ANCIENT ROOTS

In describing the work of sharing faith across several generations, the bishops at Vatican II returned to the early sources of Christian tradition and employed terms that derived, not from education language, but from a more ancient language of *catechesis*. The ancient-yet-new vocabulary initially sounded strange to Catholic

ears, though the words (catechesis, catechumenate, catechetical) were hardly inventions of the twentieth century. Associated with ancient practices in the early Christian churches, these words carried a world beneath them, revealing a language as well as a culture.

That Catholics adopted the language of catechesis was important for several reasons. In itself, the adoption of the language of catechesis connoted a particular and startling understanding of the church's processes of welcoming and forming members. The language of *catechism* and its accompanying metaphor of *instruction in the faith* were well known to Catholics before the Council. In the imaginations of American Catholics and their instructors, the *Baltimore Catechism* loomed very large as the prototype for religious instruction. The text, commonly understood as a "small catechism" because of its simple style and intended audience of children, helped to shape the Catholic imagination about the very genre of a catechism and the tasks associated with it: the preparation of children for reception of sacraments, an activity carried out ideally in the Catholic schools. For those children who were not enrolled in Catholic schools, there were "after school" programs or "released time" instruction (here the released time was from public school classes). So the term "catechism" connoted an activity aimed at children in or around schools. But the terms *catechesis* and *catechumenate* were not nearly as well known or widely used by most Catholics before the Council.

The words and their use at Vatican II signaled a serious and sustained commitment on the part of the bishops as leaders in forming the church's faith. *Catechesis* and its linguistic cousin, *catechumenate*, recapitulated as well as promoted a different kind of thinking about the goal of forming members and the processes that would promote their growth. If language recapitulated that thinking, adoption of the catechumenate as a process helped to promote it. Religious education personnel (eventually called catechists and catechetical leaders) embraced both the language and the culture in surprising, fresh and sometimes confusing ways.

The language drew peoples' imagination back to the era of the early Christians, at the time of Egeria's travels and reflections. Six years after the close of the Council the Congregation for the Clergy published the first *General Catechetical Directory*. The first international directory of its kind, it articulated the principles, goals, content, methods, and personnel for the ministry of catechesis. One year later, in 1972, the Vatican published the renewed version of the catechumenate aimed at adults, entitled *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Both the process and the rituals associated with it echoed the lines of the ancient catechumenate practiced in the Jerusalem church in the fourth century under the direction of the Bishop St. Cyril.

This new catechism will be successful to the degree that it serves to start faith conversation among adults, and not stop it.

Careful study of the ancient catechumenate by scholars in the first half of the twentieth century had revealed some clear patterns about religious education that, prior to the Council, were not at the forefront in the minds or practices of its leaders. It is not overstatement to claim that these practices revealed a different “culture” of welcoming and forming its members than the one known well by mid-twentieth century Catholic candidates (often called “converts” to Catholicism). Moreover, these practices presumed a different “culture” for the already initiated members who would welcome the new members. Some important components of the ancient-yet-new catechumenal process and its cultural messages:

- The catechumenate was/is addressed first to adults...
- whose decision to embrace Christianity was/is presumed to be free, responsible and at times, countercultural...
- with the candidates’ gradual integration (in stages) into a community of sponsorship and welcome...
- in a communal, liturgical and ritual context

Many contemporary Catholic parishes have adopted the renewed catechumenate since 1972, and in the process of doing so, have reshaped the culture of sharing faith in parish life. The result has been largely positive. The catechumenate has promoted the involvement of lay adults in many aspects of parish works and specific roles of service, including but not limited to welcoming the new members in sponsorship, integrating the rites of initiation into the larger liturgical life of the parish, and affirming the need for ongoing catechesis for adults beyond their initiation. In this sense, a “culture of catechesis” has been born, attentive to the lifelong nature of faith formation and the need to address the concerns of adults of varied stages of faith, circumstances and levels of readiness in the spiritual life. When the Vatican published the *General Directory for Catechesis* (in 1997), it made the claim that elements of the catechumenate function as the inspiration for post-baptismal catechesis of persons of various ages, situations and stages of spiritual development. (*GDC*, No. 91) The Catholic bishops of the United States consistently affirmed the importance of adult faith formation beyond the catechumenate; their statement entitled *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (1999) aids parishes in designing and executing a plan that places adult formation at the heart and center of parish life. Yet throughout these years it also became clear that adults often lacked and longed for the printed resources, mentors and experiences that could furnish a depth of understanding to their Catholic faith. The *USCCA* offers a response to fill that need.

The scenes considered in the first part of this essay are redolent of this catechetical “culture” described in the second part, for they include some of the following cultural elements well promoted by the catechumenate, while using the resources of the *USCCA* to enrich them. The catechetical practices include some or all of the following:

- A sense of welcome and community characterizes the scenes. Adults who gather do not simply presume community; they work to make it happen. They understand themselves as responsible and free to be welcomed and to welcome others, as the first disciples welcomed gentiles.
- The ownership for the direction of the groups belongs to the group. In the scenes we have considered, the adults participate by choice, and according to their limits, as schedules permit them to participate.
- The scenes recapitulate adult processes of learning in which people are active learners, not necessarily passive listeners hanging on the words of one speaker. Adults learn well when they discuss the things that truly concern their hearts and minds—matters that emerge from their real life situations.
- An observer of the scenes would also note how the use of the catechism illustrates its place in the context of adult catechesis. It functions in a variety of ways. While it surely can be read straight through, it is also a text that carries the potential to become a well worn reference, informing a variety of situations and topics.

part 3

RESPECTING THIS UNIQUE BOOK AND MOMENT IN HISTORY

In a sense, the *USCCA* is a hybrid version of past catechisms, at least since the Reformation era. According to the usual distinctions, a modern-day Egeria would point out to her friends that this catechism differs from past ones in its attention to culture (a section in each chapter) and in the other ways already noted. But it also differs from past catechisms in that it is neither large nor small, and that is accessible and creative in style, yet well known and predictable as a genre.

NEITHER SMALL NOR LARGE

The distinction between a small catechism and a large one lies with its users and their intentions. Small catechisms for the unlettered learner pre-dated Luther and the Catholic Reformation. While literacy was largely the purview of the clergy or the wealthy, simple placards and hand copied materials of learning aided the simple. The poorly educated could rely on lists and other formulas that they could learn aurally and by rote in order to memorize. Examples of these kinds of “small catechisms” that survived the era include the *ABC des sample*



gens” of Jean Gerson (d. 1429). Gerson, who was appointed chancellor of the University of Paris in 1395, composed a list of virtues, vices, prayers, sacraments, commandments and other items, all in French, presumably to be memorized. In the use of small catechisms the “ABC” of Gerson and others, the role of memorization would continue to occupy an important place for centuries to come, as witnessed by the use of the *Baltimore Catechism* in the United States.

Large catechisms were different. As the name suggests, they were longer works in prose style (neither lists nor questions and answers), full of explanation, nearly encyclopedic in length and tone. A large catechism was an essential item in the Reformation period. Martin Luther developed his large catechism as a tool for the clergy in his movement of reform. The large catechism was aimed at leaders in ministry in order to help them to guide the followers of Luther’s ideas.

The creativity of this move on Luther’s part should not be underestimated. The fairly new development by Johannes Gutenberg (d. 1468) of movable type eventuated in mass-produced books, an idea and product as novel to Luther’s generation as the Internet is now to us. Luther’s large catechism promoted his theological program among the clergy, therefore, at a time when the printing press could also expedite the process of learning through mass-produced texts.

Catholic reformers at the Council of Trent responded in kind to Luther’s challenge. The fathers of the Council of Trent called for the production of a large catechism that would aid the Roman Catholic clergy, as they were in need of guidance on the matters of faith and morals in order to teach the faithful. The *Roman Catechism* resulted. With its four pillars, the catechism was in draft form in 1564 and available in several languages within a few years.

The *CCC* and the new *USCCA* follow a four-pillar structure established at Trent but they do so with considerable latitude and, in the case of the *USCCA*, a much more reader-friendly approach. Like the *CCC* before it, the *USCCA* is a large catechism in the line of the post-Tridentine works that guided the clergy. But its readership is much larger and less focused than the readers following Trent. As with the *CCC*, it is no longer the case that only clergy or some leaders will access the *USCCA* as a reference guide. This new American catechism will be in the hands of anyone who wants it. In that sense it serves the entire population, but especially curious and creative adults.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

As a new catechism attentive to American culture, the *USCCA* is quite different from the catechisms of the sixteenth century. It is accessible in style and tone, supported by the biographies at the beginning of the chapters, the prayers, discussion questions and

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meditations at the end of chapters, and the writers' consistent attempt to connect faith and culture throughout the text.

While it is well written, clear and more engaging than the *CCC*, the *USCCA* does not represent quite the exciting genre that the sixteenth century large catechisms represented for their readers. For American Catholic adults, the printing press is hardly a novelty. The mode of learning that now takes its place for novelty is the Internet, the World Wide Web of information that is only a click away. It would be naïve to imagine that this catechism or any other will serve to close conversation and research; it will be an important tool in American adults' quest to understand and to articulate faith, but it will not be the only resource that curious adults will consider.

Because of the enormous changes in the ways people access knowledge, this new catechism will be like the *CCC* in that it will be the point of departure, rather than the point of arrival, for adult conversation. It will be successful to the degree that it serves to start faith conversation among adults, and not stop it. Ideally, the act of reading it will spark new questions; reading it will be regarded as one part of

a larger process of learning. The creative work of adult catechesis, as described, for example, in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, can be the context for these conversations.

This new catechism can play an important role as a reference work for adults; in this regard, too, it is instructive to note the distinctions between a small and a large catechism. The potential readership of the *USCCA* clearly fits neither category, as the adults who read it will do so with various levels of readiness and theological sophistication, and various pre-understandings of the role of a catechism. Some adults may be cavalier and dismissive of the catechism, while others may cut off conversation and adult learning in favor of catechism fundamentalism. Whatever the pre-understandings of its learners, the future of this rather creatively written catechism depends on the openness of its readers and the skill of catechetical leaders who guide them.

Michael P. Horan, PhD, is professor of religious education and director of the graduate program in theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California |

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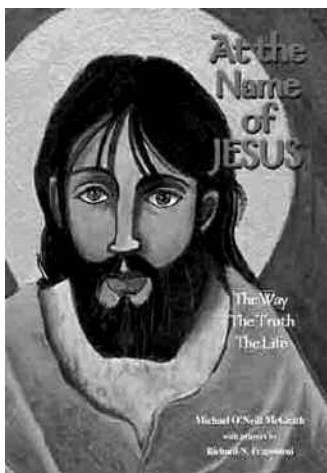
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MORE THAN PRETTY PICTURES

At the Name of Jesus: The Way, The Truth, The Life by Michael O'Neill McGrath with prayers by Richard N. Fragomeni. Franklin Park, IL: World Library Publications, 2006. Hardback, \$39.95. Spiral-bound paperback.

Reviewed by Andrea Schellman



In 1981 our first child ushered my husband and me into fifteen years of daily contact with the golden realm of picture books — stunning artwork, poetic narrative, honest emotion, stories searching for truth, without moralizing sentimentality. *At the Name of Jesus* is an art book for adults with those same qualities; until I read it, I didn't realize how hungry I was for pictures.

Twenty-one paintings by Brother Michael McGrath tell the story of salvation, each accompanied by Father Richard Fragomeni's prayer or meditation and McGrath's commentary. *At the Name of Jesus* is organized around the names of Jesus: for example, "Son of Mary" captures the presentation in the temple; "Rock of Ages" a sudden storm in a small boat; "King of the Jews" the crucifixion.

This is a feast for the eyes and the spirit. More than pretty pictures, McGrath's paintings ravish, soothe, amuse, console, exhilarate, sadden, and challenge, by turns. The images draw on traditional artistic forms — icon, stained glass, altar piece, and portrait — yet freshly made, in touch with human nature, and pushing us to find new symbols for the world in which we live. Two examples must suffice. Sporting halo, soccer ball, and uniform, "Holy Child" stands in some Middle East spot, gazes straight into our eyes, and challenges us to make the world a field where children can safely play. In one panel of "Fountain of Wisdom," which depicts Jesus with the women in his life, a tight-jeaned, skanky-topped hussy bathes his feet and dries them with her bottle-blonde tresses while prim on-lookers scowl and Jesus smiles at her gift. Repetition of colors, borders, and partial images unify artwork and text.

Beyond looking, how does one use this book? Fragomeni's good advice is to contemplate each image, praying your own prayer before reading the printed prayers or commentary. Generally, Fragomeni's contributions take second place to McGrath's paintings, as we naturally gravitate toward the visual. Some are familiar prayer styles — praise, thanksgiving, and petition using traditional language and verse form; others are meditations; still others are hybrids — part prayer, part meditation. All seem suited to reading with the artwork rather than independently. The best employ visual language, fresh metaphor, repetition and variation, rhythm, and meter. There are fine twists of phrase such as "Into our hands, O Lord, you place your spirit" and "Into our hands, O Christ, you place your Body." Or Christ the student "mantled in the word," "dazzling the elders," and "puzzling your parents." A few of the written pieces verge on explanation — too prosaic for my taste; their worthy ideas would have been more memorable in more finely-tuned language. Despite these missed opportunities, the reader will find value in each prayer and meditation; this is a starting point for prayer, not an end.

Storytelling skills shape McGrath's commentary on the background, themes, and artistic influences of each painting, and his personal narratives lead to universal applications for the reader, thus offering another avenue for prayer and reflection.

This lovely book is sure to replace some tired and worn pictures from your childhood. Many of the images in *At the Name of Jesus* already spring to mind as perfect companions to my daily prayers. And while this is a book for adults, some of these paintings offer the kind of treasure hunt that primary grade children enjoy. I can picture kids, snuggled with parent or grandparent, studying the rich detail the way they pour over Richard Scarry's "best books ever." Finally, this would be a valuable resource in parish ministries for candidates and catechumens and a fine gift to those newly initiated or received into the church. Slow learner that I am, I never "got it" about the Sacred Heart until I opened these pages.

Andrea Schellman is the editor and communications consultant for the National Council of Catholic Women and assistant editor for the National Association of Pastoral Musicians as well as a Sunday painter. |

“authoritative” or “authentic.” Both of these words have the same Latin root, *autoritas*, which means that the teaching is more than opinion — it has authority. The bishops continue to be the teachers in the church today. It is in and through this teaching that God’s revelation reaches us. Hence, it is called authentic or authoritative teaching.

Authentic Catholic faith is never partial or selective. It is always universal. We say yes to the whole mystery of the faith and to each of its elements because of our personal faith in God. We believe the truth that God reveals because we believe God, and we believe that God is still teaching in and through the church. When Peter came to recognize that Christ was God’s son, he was prepared to believe any word of Christ, for it was clear to him that God is always to be believed. “You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69).

Catechetical activity today, as always, can rely on the truth of the Gospel message and the uniqueness of what we bring to those who turn to us for the wisdom of God. Perhaps it is for this reason that all of us engaged in catechesis bring enthusiasm and commitment to our work. We recognize that in our catechetical initiatives something more is transpiring than the communication of information.


We share a vision and encourage a way of life and thus actually participate in the manifestation of God’s kingdom coming to be in our world. In providing all of us a new catechism for adults, the United States bishops underline that they are active partners with all catechists in the task of telling the story of Jesus.

My hope for catechists throughout our country is that this new *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* will provide that welcome tool which so many of us have asked for as we look to the future. This catechism can provide the frame of reference for all of the teaching,

Authentic Catholic faith is never partial or selective.

discussion, conversation and formation in which so many of us are engaged today as we try to pass on to this generation, this age, this culture the truly exciting truth that comes to us in Jesus and his Gospel.

Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl, STD, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ editorial oversight board for the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, is the Archbishop of Washington. |

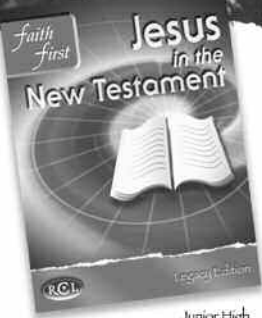



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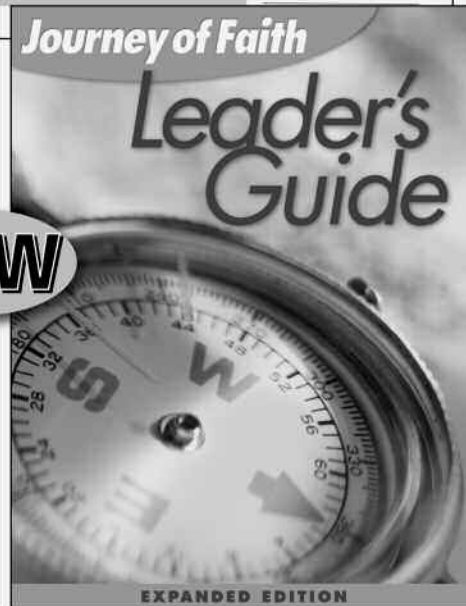
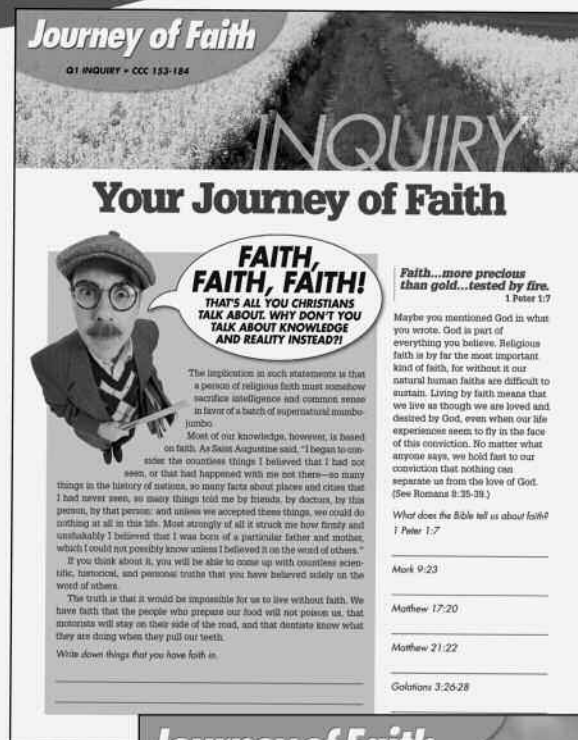
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Tenacity and Technology

Distance Education in the Eye of Katrina

By Mark S. Markuly



Throughout much of the twenty centuries of Christianity, catechists and religious educators have passed on their Christian faith while standing in the midst of one storm or another. Wars, depressions, famine, pestilence, political upheaval, natural disasters and the periodic unraveling of the fabric of civilization have not deterred women and men from their call to share the Gospel. While standing in boats rocked by treacherous seas, these educators have managed to remain focused and committed to their task. Their tenacity has been one of the secrets of the church's ability to endure as civilizations have risen and crumbled around it.

But an equally important factor has been the creativity of these educators in employing every technology at their disposal to aid in their mission of “delivering” their Good News to the world. The unending storms of life always come with an invitation: “Look at the resources around you and make better use of them.” History has shown over and over again that the wedding of tenacity with technological innovation can rob even the most debilitating storms of their ability to destroy.

This truth is deep in Christianity's roots. Compelled to share a radical message in an oppressive Roman Empire, the ever tenacious St. Paul used the church's first distance education technologies — the letter and the Roman road system — to share his transforming encounter with the Risen Christ. Paul's epistles allowed him to educate fledging churches like Corinth, Colosse, Thessalonica, and Galatia — not to mention us, over a distance of centuries rather than miles.

Throughout the generations as new technologies developed, committed and creative catechists and religious educators placed them in service of the Gospel: styles of art and new architectural designs, organs, printing presses, maps, chalk boards, microphones, 8 mm film, filmstrips, overhead projectors, and video each had a transformative moment in which it morphed from a new technology to a new tool for passing on the faith.

There are millions of untold stories about tenacious catechists encountering storms and using a technology to circumvent obstacles. A once in five-hundred-year storm known as Hurricane Katrina offered just such an opportunity to our Catholic distance education program at Loyola University New Orleans.



University dean Frank Scully, with the help of a Marine, retrieves his computer from campus after Katrina. (Photo credit: Harold Baquet, New Orleans, Louisiana)

A PRODUCT OF TENACITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) is the nation's oldest and largest distance education graduate program in ministry and religious education in the United States. The program began in the storms of change following the Second Vatican Council, when bishops in rural dioceses of Louisiana approached the university with a request for Catholic higher education in each of their localities. Loyola had few resources for a response, but created a graduate program on a shoestring over a three-year period. The new program had a unique

structure, breaking in some ways with the seminary model that had set the template for theological study for centuries. The Loyola program was built around the lifestyle, schedules, and demands of lay men and women working jobs, raising children, and already committed to various ministries in the church.

The curriculum was a rich instructional matrix, one creating adult learning cohorts of twelve to twenty-five people gathered locally around the faith tradition, keeping their ministries and personal spiritualities in constant dialogue with all the new learning material they encountered in the fields of Scripture, systematic theology, spirituality, history, and several social science fields that offered insights critical to effective ministry in the contemporary world. The students' education occurred in the context of an intentional adult learning community, bound together by a passion to grow personally and spiritually in the Catholic tradition, and to support and challenge one another along the way.

The curriculum had the primary learning outcome of helping students to develop an authentic, humble, constantly inquiring theological voice within the many contexts of lay life, and the social and emotional skills necessary for effective ministry and discipleship. The intention of the curriculum was to achieve what educational theorist and researcher Jack Mezirow has called "transformational learning."

LIM integrated into its theological program the most cost-effective educational technologies available at the time: telephone, print, video and audio. All of the learning materials were delivered to students through the ground mail system. This new program met a desperate unmet need in the U.S. church and student enrollments climbed to nearly 1,200 students within its first five years. Throughout the 1990s and into the first years of the twenty-first century, Loyola's program continued to mature in content and delivery. Student evaluations and input, as well as input from sponsoring agencies became part of each professor's on-going revision of coursework. In addition, LIM carefully chose adjunct faculty from around the nation who had both backgrounds in academic theology and demonstrated and sustained abilities in pastoral ministry. By the time Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the Loyola program had received the benefit of curricular input from more than one hundred of these practical theologians.

As the curriculum has matured, new technologies have been added to the Loyola course offerings. With the help of a web developer, the Institute's web presence has become more sophisticated and visually engaging, growing to more than 180 web pages, many offering distance education students additional learning resources. Repeated requests for more connection between learning groups led to the piloting of an international videoconference with Rev. Fred Kammer, SJ, the former president of Catholic Charities U.S.A. Ten sites participated, as far east as Edinburgh, Scotland, and as far west as Monterey, California. Cyberspace prayer included readers from

Scotland and Ohio and musical accompaniment from New Orleans, allowing students to experience the global, transcultural nature of the universal church in ways impossible only a few years ago.

THE STORM COMETH

But, like many of its predecessors in Christian history, LIM took another step in technological innovation only because of a storm. As Hurricane Katrina bore down on the southeastern Louisiana coast in late August of 2005, most of the population in the greater metropolitan area of New Orleans evacuated, shuttering the doors of hundreds of thousands of homes and thousands of businesses, including the city's many universities and colleges. When the faculty and staff of Loyola left town, LIM's more than eight hundred students were about to begin a fall semester of study. Most were registering for classes and had not received their course materials. Along with the rest of the city, LIM personnel fled in such a hurry that there was no time to take data on students, sponsoring sites, or even copies of course materials. Not having this information was of no great initial concern to anyone. Hurricanes are a part of life in the Gulf South, and evacuations rarely last more than three or four days.

No one could have guessed that the worst engineering disaster in the history of the United States, a catastrophic failure of the levee system built by the Army Corps of Engineers that had protected the city of New Orleans for more than four decades, would keep the university shut down for more than three months. Massive electrical failures throughout the city knocked out the university's web presence, so students and sponsoring agencies of the LIM program had no way of finding out what was happening at the university. To make matters more challenging, the hurricane's destruction of many cell phone towers literally wiped out the New Orleans 504 area code for weeks, making it almost impossible for LIM's faculty and staff to find each other.

USING TENACITY AND TECHNOLOGY TO TRANSCEND A STORM

Although a total technology crash crippled Loyola's distance education program, this same technology, mixed with tenacity, provided a means for offering a relatively normal semester for LIM students. The situation also forced the Institute to move forward more aggressively in integrating technology into its curriculum and daily operations.

Several years prior to Katrina, LIM's educational technologist had moved from New Orleans to Tampa, FLA. The unique requirements of his job — video production, computer and web development, and consultation on the integration of new technology into the LIM curriculum, made it possible for him to continue working for Loyola while living in another city. The move became an unexpected blessing. The educational technologist became the connecting point for the scattered LIM employees. By the end of the first week after the storm, everyone knew their co-workers were

safe and preliminary plans were made by phone and email for ways to serve Loyola students until people could return to campus.

Without records, faculty and staff initially re-built data bases of names from memory, and then contacted those people to surface other names and contact information. The need to connect with nearly a thousand people made the task formidable. But, within a week and a half an emergency web page was constructed for any one involved in the Loyola program. A quickly constructed blog, which was a new technology for most people associated with Loyola, became an Internet café, a place to share information and locate people and course materials. Hundreds of messages crisscrossed the Internet over the next few weeks, and email replaced the phone as the preferred technology for communicating needs and requests. Thanks to tenacity and technology, LIM students had a fairly normal semester, finishing their course work only a week or two later than they would have without the interruption of the storm.

LIM is a different educational establishment because of Katrina. The staff meets regularly by videoconferencing and recently conducted a job search with this technology. Course work is now sent in an electronic format, allowing for the faculty's on-going revision of materials to be shared almost as soon as it is revised. Student testimonials, in compressed video and audio, have been added to the LIM web site, to allow future students to hear first hand the experience of others as part of their own discernment on whether to commit to a graduate degree in pastoral studies or religious education at Loyola University New Orleans. (See <http://lim.loyno.edu>.) Teleconferencing events with Loyola distance education students are now annual events, and over the course of the next few years, student papers will be delivered not by snail mail, but electronically. They will be graded by faculty with special software applications that allow professors to write and highlight text on a computer screen with a stylus, and send the paper back to students in a drastically reduced turn-around time. But perhaps the greatest change in the organization is the greater comfort nearly everyone now has with technology. There is greater sensitivity to the possibilities the next technological breakthrough will have for improving Loyola's program.

LESSONS FROM THE LOYOLA PROGRAM

In the twenty-first century, as the fields of catechesis and theological education search for their place in a high-tech, multi-cultural, fast-paced, rapidly changing, and increasingly complex world, the technologies available in distance education are playing an important and critical role. Some in the church are suspicious of these tools for education, much as many Americans were reticent of the telephone in the early twentieth century, fearful the technology would destroy community.

There are legitimate fears about providing catechesis and theological education through distance education technologies. Research into

the strengths and weaknesses of distance education have challenged many traditional assumptions about how teaching works and how learning occurs. The latest technologies, such as DVDs, videoconferencing, MP-3s, and cyberspace gatherings like MySpace.com will force a critical analysis of the craft and art of teaching and the necessities of designing and implementing an effective educational program of any kind.

Faith seeking understanding requires an engagement of the entire person — heart, soul and mind. This is a difficult accomplishment in any educational venue, and it has unique challenges in educational efforts from a distance. We feel that one of the reasons Loyola has been able to remain a leader in distance education is that the program had the foresight to build its curriculum using the insights of instructional design — a field emerging from nearly a century of learning research in the educational field. Such professional input added the input of educational specialists to the content expertise of the theology professors in charge of each course. The best of adult learning theory and curriculum development methodologies became a conversation partner in the development and on-going renewal of the program. Within a few years of its creation, Loyola began the tradition of keeping at least one person on faculty with advanced coursework in instruction design.

How shall the next generation of catechists and religious educators put the latest technologies in service to the reign of God? We shall see. One thing is for sure. If St. Paul was still with us, at the first sign of a storm he would set aside his letters and stand at the head of the line to see how tenacity might find new ways to join with technology.

Loyola University New Orleans has graduated more than 3,500 students through LIM's distance education program. The vast majority of these graduates are members of the laity, many providing leadership at the parish, school, and diocesan levels in more than fifty dioceses in twenty-six states, as well as other dioceses in Canada, Scotland, England, and the Central American nation of Belize. But a significant number of LIM graduates have chosen over the years to explore the Catholic tradition at the graduate level with no desire to work for ecclesial structures. Rather, they have been motivated in placing their more sophisticated knowledge of the tradition at the service of transforming their professional lives as counselors, physicians, nurses, hospital administrators, social workers, lawyers, police officers, judges, K-12 educators and university professors, and business leaders.

Mark Markuly, PhD, is an associate professor at Loyola University New Orleans and the director of the Loyola Institute for Ministry. Prior to joining the faculty at Loyola he served as the diocesan director of religious education for the Diocese of Belleville in Illinois. |



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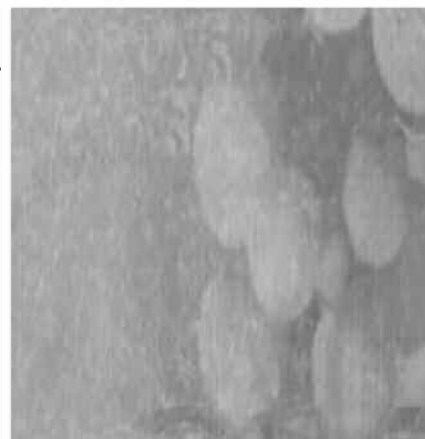
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JANUARY JUMP START FOR CATECHISTS

By Jo Rotunno

This past October we released the first module in the new Echoes of Faith Plus “Adult Faith Formation: An Introduction for Facilitators.” Production of Echoes Plus continues, with three new modules due to release by January. These modules — the Catechist series — offer you a midwinter opportunity to encourage catechists to begin or continue the essential process of their own formation.

Gather your catechists for a community — building workshop experience and choose one of these modules for their enrichment. The Echoes process works best in this group setting where catechists have the opportunity to share their insights and brainstorm the application activities together. You’ll need one complete module so you can show the DVD, plus a booklet for each catechist. Use the community prayer in the back of the booklet to conclude the gathering.

All three modules have been renewed to include important principles of both the General Directory for Catechesis and the new National Directory for Catechesis. The first of these modules, “Getting Started,” reminds catechists of four essential elements in good catechesis — a good physical environment, a social environment that respects the person and needs of all learners, creativity, and planning. Catechists learn and grow through their reflection on the principles they learn through the video interviews and demonstration by seasoned catechists.

The second module, “Roles of the Catechist,” focuses on the tasks of catechesis, particularly four key roles that every good catechist must fill—telling the story of the Christian faith with enthusiasm and conviction, serving as both teacher and spiritual companion to those we catechize, giving witness to justice, and assisting those in our care in developing a life of prayer.

The final module in this series, “The Person of the Catechist,” deals with the vocational call of the catechist. This module may bear the most fruit when it is used by a catechist who has first gained a little experience. Many of us came gradually to a sense of our catechetical vocation, and today’s catechists are probably no exception. All catechists, however, whether new or seasoned, can gain from reflecting on the video interviews with men and women about the catechetical vocation.

Each module’s booklet begins with a spiritual reflection by Fr. Louis Cameli of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Each DVD has been enriched by the addition of a bonus video interview with Dr. Tom Groome of Boston College. Catechists will benefit from the reflections of this leader in the catechetical movement as he shares insights related to each of the three module topics. A second bonus interview by another expert also has been added to each DVD.

With Echoes of Faith Plus, you have an accessible, effective, and complete catechist formation resource. Its multi-media format makes it easy for any catechist to grow in the knowledge and skills they need. While a group setting is best for Echoes, catechists who are unable to attend a session can participate at home. The module booklet includes a CD-ROM that contains the four video segments in a compressed format for use on a home computer. Every catechist in your parish can be empowered to become a more effective echo of faith.

Jo Rotunno is director of creative development at RCL — Resources for Christian Living, which produced the Echoes of Faith project for NCCL. She has worked in catechist formation for the past twenty-five years. Her column on catechist formation using Echoes of Faith appears in each issue of Catechetical Leader. ■

Coming Next Issue...

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The Diocese of Rochester survey results can be viewed at <http://www.dor.org/eclyouthministry/infoforleaders/catechesis.htm>

Our role as faith formation leaders is to oversee the healthy marriage of content and creative methodology so that it can give birth to an owned and lived faith. If we are unfaithful to either the core content or creative methods we end up in an unhealthy marriage.

Being systematic in our presentation of the faith does not preclude being creative in our methodology. A systematic strategy of faith formation is like a series of extension ladders that rely upon the section beneath it in order for the climber to reach her or his goal. In the process of adolescent faith formation, each extension covers a

specific faith theme; each rung offers another possible method of delivering the content of that section.

The faith-formation leaders’ role is to make sure those extensions and each individual rung are strong and solid and fit together in such a way that the end result — a well-formed disciple of Jesus Christ — can be reached. The “Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis” summarizes this end result well when it defines adolescent catechesis as a “systematic, planned and intentional pastoral activity directed towards the kind of teaching and learning which emphasizes growth in Christian faith through understanding, reflection and transformation”(p.5).

The documents that guide catechetical and youth ministry leaders to embrace the fullness of adolescent catechesis are clear that “the most effective catechetical programs for adolescents are integrated into a comprehensive program of pastoral ministry for you that

If the faith formation of adolescents is going to change, then parish and school leaders must begin working together across ministerial boundaries to keep their collective eye on the end result. Often the first stumbling block to effective adolescent catechesis is our own grip on ‘territory.’

includes catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care and prayer and worship” (NDC, p.201 cf: *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, p 26). This comprehensive approach also is reflected in the six tasks of catechesis outlined in the NDC (pp. 60-62). No matter how it is said, the reality is that catechesis and comprehensive ministry are inseparable partners and must co-exist in all that we do with our young people. Surely we can find a way to assist catechists at all levels to combine creativity with intentionality, engagement with systematic planning so that every ministry effort with young people contains a catechetical dimension that leads them closer to the God who calls them by name.

Transforming a lesson, a retreat or lock-in, a youth night, or an out-reach effort into an engaging and meaningful catechetical experience is not done simply because we hope it turns out that way. We need to be proactive in our planning and development by having a firm grasp of the specific faith theme and learning objectives we want to accomplish through the activity and then finding ways to involve young people in the process.

Consider the often-used strategy of the lock-in. Instead of spending countless hours planning an all-night social event to build community among the youth, what might happen if an adventuresome leader gathered a small group of adults and youth to help transform it into an intentional and creative experience of faith formation? By spending a few moments at the beginning of the planning process reflecting on the five key questions outlined earlier, the leader intentionally can direct the planning toward one of the themes that make up the content of our faith, for example justice and service.

The leader facilitates a dialogue that focuses on serving those in need, Scripture is brought into the discussion, and the reading of the sheep and goats from Matthew 25 is highlighted. The group begins framing the lock-in around that reading, developing hourly segments involving skits, games, videos and activities that highlight each of the corporal works of mercy.

When the planning takes a detour over a new game someone wants to try out, the leader re-focuses the group by asking how the game can be adapted to help them achieve their goal of learning about justice and service and forming disciples. The last three key questions concerning the involvement of youth and parents and modeling

The more often we engage and involve young people in their own learning, the more fully formed these young disciples will become and this includes preparing youth to teach and share their faith with others.

faith are used to design how the lock-in event will be implemented. Through this process, what started out as simply a “community-building” event has been transformed into an intentional, creative and engaging approach to catechesis with adolescents.

Most catechetical leaders and youth ministers would agree that there is no shortage of creative and engaging activities and approaches with young people. The shortage often exists with our ability to connect these approaches to a systematic catechesis. Trying approaches and strategies that are new to us or to our preferred teaching style can be an occasion of conversion for the leader.

FORM CATECHISTS TO REACH OUTSIDE THE BOX

Most faith-formation leaders reading this may be nodding to the general truths implied through the five key concepts and questions, but feeling overwhelmed by the time required to adopt new strategies. The truth is that disciple-making is time consuming and

Show me a successful catechist and I'll show you an adventurer, someone who is not afraid to reach beyond the boundaries of traditional methods, who is eager to go to great lengths to echo the unfolding story of faith.

demands commitment and reorganization of how we do things in our ministry to and with young people, including whom we hire as teachers and whom we recruit as catechists and program volunteers as well as how we form them.

Show me a successful catechist and I'll show you an adventurer, someone who is not afraid to reach beyond the boundaries of traditional methods, who is eager to go to great lengths to echo the unfolding story of faith. If we are to change directions in adolescent catechesis today, we need to foster an attitude of healthy and holy risk-taking among our catechists and volunteers. This is not the same type of adolescent risk-taking in which an attitude of reckless abandon permeates decision-making. Rather, the church must develop adventurous adults who can transform a lesson or activity from a task to be completed into a moment of grace, where God is made more visible and present by the way in which the lesson is taught.

These creative approaches lead to the engagement of the whole person (head, heart and hands) as well as a relational sharing of faith among those present. To be successful in forming disciples, we must empower the formers of those disciples to teach as Jesus did with Scripture, simple stories, objects and, most importantly, teach

Five key questions to keep focused on disciple making

- How is God made more visible through this (activity/program/ model)?
- How will this (activity/program/model) bring young people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ?
- How can I more fully involve young people in this (activity/program/model)?
- How can I more fully partner with parents in this (activity/program/ model)?
- How can I model and share my own faith journey through this (activity/program/model)?

through their relationships. The more time leaders put into forming and fashioning teachers, catechists, and youth ministry volunteers with this mindset, the greater the yield of young faithful disciples who model that same vibrancy of faith.

PARTNER WITH PARENTS

The fifth key area for re-inventing adolescent catechesis today comprises the role and faith journey of the parents of teenagers. One of the strongest conclusions the National Study of Youth and Religion found was that “the best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents *do* look like” (p. 261). For good or bad, youth will mirror the faith their parents have, even though it may not show itself until later down the road. A 1992 Search Institute study (“What Teens Need from Adults,” March 1992) found that the three most important factors that empower the faith maturity among young people are family-based:

- Family faith conversations
- Family rituals and devotions
- Family outreach and service

Youth ministers, catechetical leaders, teachers, and catechists all know that faith is a lifelong process, but we have stumbled in our collective attempts to incarnate that with families. Current movements into whole community and multi-generational catechesis have begun to pick up steam across the country. No matter the method or model used, we must continue to ask how can we engage and involve parents (and grandparents) more actively in this lifelong process of faith formation. We need to equip parents with the tools to continue on their own journey of faith while modeling and sharing that journey with their growing children. At a time when some parents and teens distance themselves from one another, this will not be the easiest of tasks. Support and patience are required as we assist parents in taking their rightful role as primary educators of their children.

THE ANSWER IS IN OUR MIDST

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem...” (Luke 24:30-33a)

If our young people are going to make the long journey toward discipleship, the paths each ministerial area and institution chooses to take have to connect, eventually merging the young people onto a road that leads each of them toward the realization that Jesus is *in*

We need to equip parents with the tools to continue on their own journey of faith while modeling and sharing that journey with their growing children.

our midst. This is the road that leads young people back to Jerusalem, the same one the transformed disciples ran along to share the Good News that could not be contained within their burning hearts.

When change was needed in biblical times, God raised up a prophet (or two) whose job it was to call the faithful to accountability by asking the hard questions, questions that were designed to cajole and sting the public consciousness. Their collective cry was: change your ways and return to the Lord with your whole self (head, heart and hands). Might the cry of our “catechetical prophets” today be similar, re-directing us towards the formation of whole and holy disciples in heart, mind and body?

In the end, asking the five questions of vision and attending to the five action steps of adolescent catechesis leads to an examination of conscience, challenging the church to make the faith formation of teens a high priority in parishes and schools throughout our country. As the NSYR concludes:

...to achieve the huge religious potential that appears to exist for Catholic teens would seem to require that the church invest a great deal more attention, creativity, and institutional resources into its young members — therefore into its own life. Undeniably the future shape of the U.S. Catholic Church vitally depends on it (p. 194).

The hearts of the young are ready and receptive to hear the good news of faith that we are privileged to echo on God’s behalf. Let us not be afraid to be prophetic risk-takers in doing so.

Michael Theisen is director for membership services at the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry in Washington, D.C. He has worked in adolescent catechesis and youth ministry at the parish, diocesan and national levels for more than twenty years, publishing more than fifteen books in the process (michael@nfcym.org). |

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SEVERAL "INCARNATIONS"

by Megan Anechiarico

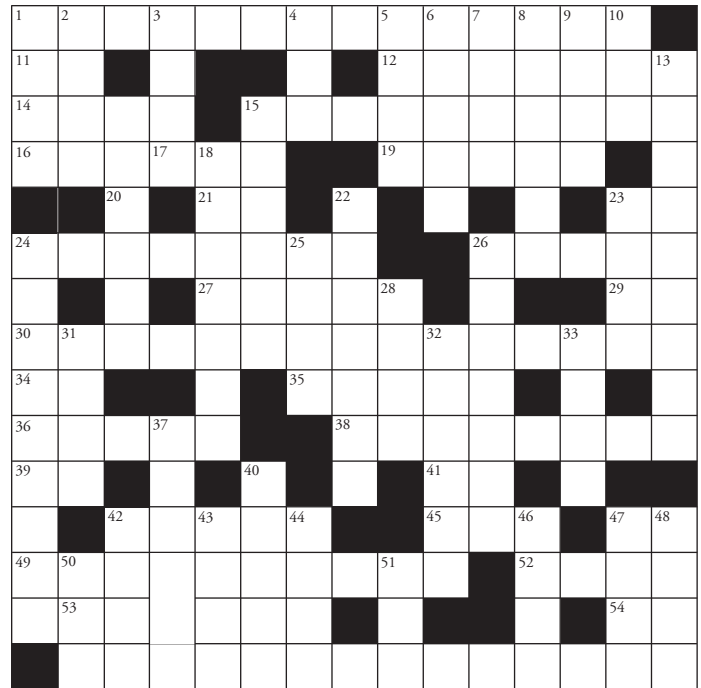
ACROSS

- 1 Incarnations
- 11 Hrs. before Noon
- 12 Key category of incarnational catechesis
- 14 Venture
- 15 Key characteristic of incarnational catechesis
- 16 Three ft.
- 17 Observe
- 19 Male name, minus the "c"
- 21 Address line, __ Box #
- 23 Men's magazine
- 24 Loyal follower of Jesus
- 26 Vowel list
- 27 Ruptures
- 29 Subsist
- 30 Incarnation
- 34 Med. prescription
- 35 Recreate a painting or sculpture, perhaps
- 36 High wave
- 38 Imaginative
- 39 Not as big as med.
- 41 Title for M.D.
- 42 Biotech solutions company
- 45 Exists as - 2 words
- 47 Masculine pronoun
- 49 Incarnation
- 52 Nourish
- 53 Actor and chef Dom

- 54 Do, __, mi
- 55 Incarnation

DOWN

- 1 Theotokos
- 2 Amongst
- 3 Pens
- 4 Take legal action
- 5 Slightly open
- 6 Private instructor
- 7 Egyptian goddess
- 8 Actor Peter
- 9 Numerical ABC drama, "The ____"
- 10 Acronym for assoc. for school counselors
- 13 Silver tongue
- 15 To provide access again
- 18 Incarnation
- 20 Consumer
- 22 Flawless
- 23 Patterned insert for stage lights
- 24 Melancholy
- 25 Den
- 26 Hindu Incarnations
- 28 African musician Claudy
- 31 Test
- 32 Attribute to
- 33 Part of the eye
- 37 Recover one's losses



- 40 Wake up
- 42 Skilled
- 43 Roller coaster or carousel, upwards
- 44 City in Iowa
- 46 What the prince exclaimed when Cinderella tried on the glass slipper, "It's ____!" (2 words)
- 47 Protagonist
- 48 Genesis garden
- 50 Sea - Fr.
- 51 Religious sister

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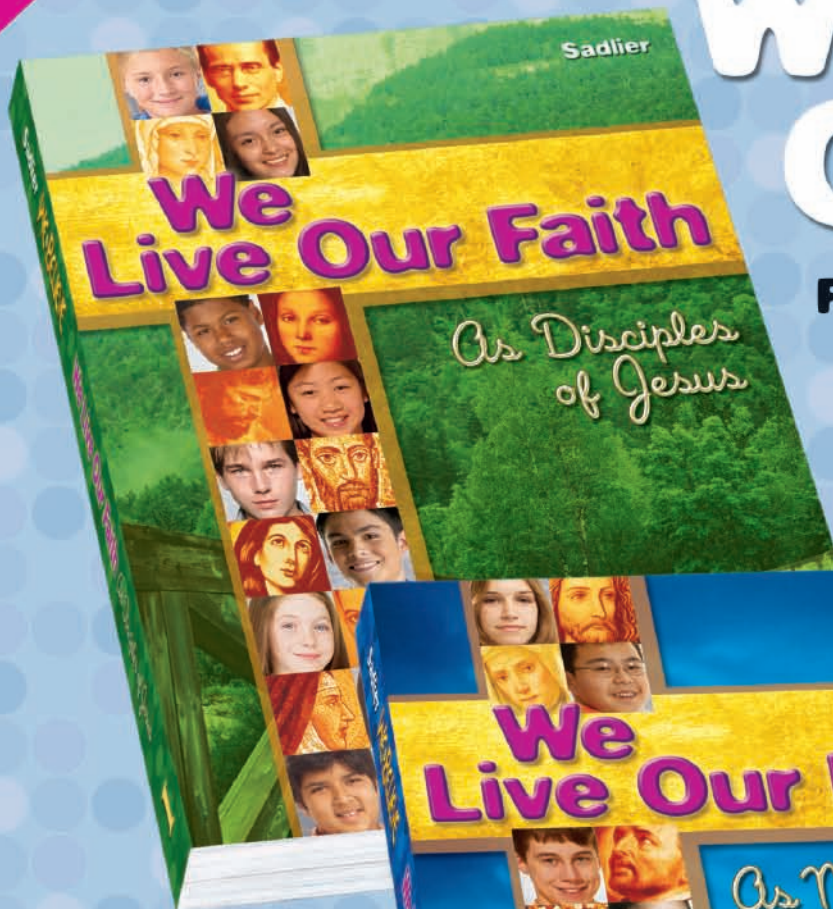
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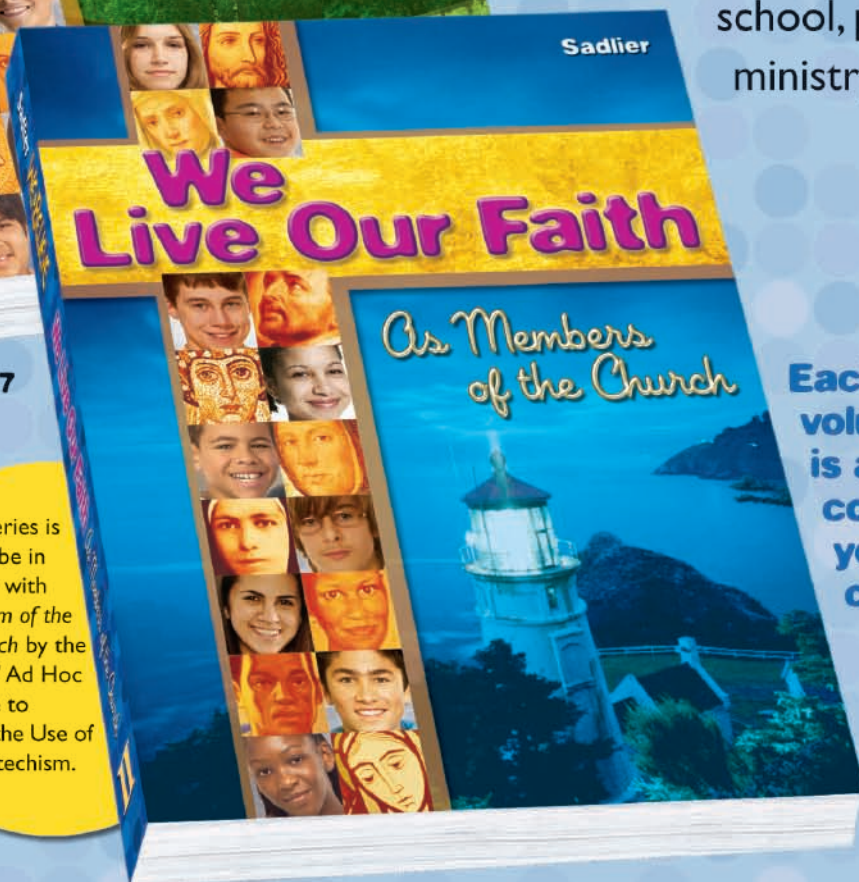
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