

July 2006 | Volume 17, Number 4 | \$6.00

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Catechetical Dimensions



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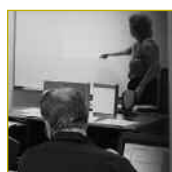
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DIOCESAN DIRECTORS ENCOURAGE US TO THINK BIGGER

Mary Ann Ronan



The broad concerns of this issue of *Catechetical Leader* touch a topic near and dear to my heart: the work of diocesan directors of catechesis. As a parish catechetical leader I have felt both supported and challenged in my parish ministry as I have worked in the dioceses of Grand Rapids, Gaylord, Saginaw, and Phoenix. I have been a co-worker in catechesis, encouraged to share my gifts and talents, to think bigger than “my” parish or teachers for the good of all God’s people.

Coming to Phoenix in 1990, I recognized that John Meyer, as diocesan director, saw his ministry in partnership with parish catechetical leaders, calling out the best in each of us. He promoted the themes of the bishops’ conference so there was a cohesive flow in adult faith formation, sacramental programs, youth ministry, children’s programs and generational catechesis. John’s membership in NACARE (National Advisory Committee on Adult Religious Education) and his leadership in implementing the document *Our Hearts Are Burning Within Us* challenged all of us in Phoenix to expand our vision to adult catechesis. I believe we became a richer church community in both adult catechesis and the baptismal catechuminate because adult catechesis became integral to our efforts, not an add-on consideration.

It was John Meyer’s mentoring that brought me to NCCL. He and Anne Marie Smith, OSF, asked me to join the Representative Council to represent parish catechetical leaders from the Santa Fe Province. Chris Anderson invited me to serve on the Annual Meeting Planning Committee, on which I worked for three years securing breakout speakers. I became Treasurer of NCCL when Anne Comeaux invited me to serve with her slate of officers and presently I serve as your president while working hand in hand as a parish catechetical leader with diocesan directors and diocesan staff to further the mission of the church. There have been many other diocesan directors that mentored me, bringing me insights to make me a better person and catechetical leader. I am going to mention a few others by name; Carol Augustine; Maribeth Mancini; Jim Tucker; Margaret Kuntz, ASCJ, Cathy Shannon; D.J. Florian; Harry Dudley; Fr. Tony Salim; and Don Kurre. I have learned from each of these leaders and I ask you to think of your diocesan director or a director you may have met at an

annual meeting, to pray for them and thank them. All diocesan directors share their gifts; we don’t know all the work they do, the tightrope they walk, but they love the church.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that catechesis is so basic to the life of every diocesan church “no diocese can be without its own Catechetical Office” (NDC 761). Our roots as an association began with *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 27 (1935) in which the diocesan catechetical office was instituted in every diocese. In 1971 the *General Catechetical Directory* affirmed that “The Catechetical Office, therefore which is part of the diocesan curia, is the means which the bishop as head of the community and teacher of doctrine utilizes to direct and moderate all the catechetical activities of the diocese” (GCD 126). The *National Catechetical Directory* of 1979 reaffirmed this statement (NDC 238) and the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997 confirmed what has become a common practice (GDC 265).

As parish catechetical leaders we know the importance of our diocesan catechetical office. We look for it to provide excellent catechetical training in theology, methodology, spirituality and professional leadership development. We are also aware that dioceses are closing catechetical offices, downsizing them or replacing them with a different emphasis. This saddens us, hurts us, and makes us angry. We know we need good and competent leaders that will support and challenge us in our call to work in the parish. Keeping catechesis as a cornerstone in the diocese and having well-educated diocesan directors ensures the mission of the church.

Having well-educated diocesan directors ensures the mission of the church.

The NDC states, “National, regional, diocesan and parish catechetical structures embody Christ’s apostolic commission to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach in practical forms, functions, organizations, policies and procedures. They are essential if the Church is to be faithful to her mission in the world” (NDC 277).

Thank you for your service to the church and to us. NCCL continues its mission of sustaining and assisting diocesan and parish leaders as we work together make a difference in Christ’s mission. ■

DIOCESAN DIRECTORS' IMPORTANT AND LASTING LEGACY

Neil A. Parent



It is virtually impossible to imagine what NCCL would be like today without the vision and creativity of its diocesan members. Indeed, would NCCL even exist?

In 1934 Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara of Great Falls/Billings Montana invited the nation's diocesan directors of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine to join him at that year's Catholic Rural Life Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, for a conversation about the CCD movement in the United States. O'Hara had responsibilities with both the Catholic Rural Life Conference and the fledgling Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Given the difficulties of travel in the depression-era mid-thirties, only sixteen diocesan directors were able to join O'Hara. But their numbers were adequate for accomplishing what he had in mind. He presented them with the idea of establishing a national CCD center and a bishops' CCD committee, which would operate under the aegis of the bishops' national office in Washington, then known as the United States Catholic Welfare Council. The directors enthusiastically endorsed the idea.

With the directors' backing, O'Hara placed before the bishops at their November meeting that year proposals to establish an episcopal committee for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and a national CCD center. Both initiatives were approved. In 1936 the new National Center for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine convened the first gathering of diocesan CCD directors, an event NCCL marked for the seventieth consecutive time at its national conference in Chicago.

Over the years, diocesan directors as a group have experienced multiple changes in their ranks, in their roles as catechetical leaders, and in the organization that they were instrumental in founding. For example, when they petitioned the Bishops' Committee for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in 1966 to form their own independent organization (NCDD/CCD), they were virtually all priests. Today, women hold the vast majority of diocesan directorships. When the directors launched NCDD/CCD in 1967, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was still the mantle under which most of them operated. By contrast, today's directors are known by a variety of titles, many of them indicative of the menu of responsibilities directors carry in addition to catechesis, from

As their numbers shrink in proportion to other sectors, it is vital that the voices of diocesan directors remain loud and clear.

evangelization to youth ministry to lay ministry development. And under the directors' leadership, NCCL has expanded into an association that now includes diocesan staff, parish catechetical leaders, academics and publishers of catechetical resources.

Although NCCL's membership is far more comprehensive today than when the association began, diocesan directors necessarily remain at its center. The Catholic Church is by nature diocesan, and each director is responsible for implementing the catechetical vision and initiatives of her or his bishop. It is therefore incumbent on NCCL, which seeks to support the catechetical agenda of the US bishops, to strive to meet the needs and aspirations of its diocesan director members.

In recent years, efforts within NCCL to enhance its membership forums have helped to bolster the unique role and identity of diocesan directors within the organization. As their numbers shrink in proportion to the growth of other membership sectors, it is vital that the voices of diocesan directors remain loud and clear in helping to guide NCCL into the future.

In the past, diocesan directors exercised their leadership in the organization mainly through elected office, especially that of the role of board president. As this year's and previous elections have demonstrated, NCCL membership understands that role alone is not a prerequisite for leadership. Still, no matter what combination of roles and gifts are brought to elected office, the founding vision and guiding inspiration of diocesan director members must continue to be at the forefront of how NCCL determines its strategic directions and services. ■

Cord of Catholic Identity Is Entwined with Justice

by Donna Grimes



A few years ago a church friend shared with me an experience he had with the older of his teen daughters. My friend has done well, as a widower raising two lovely children. The girls had been enrolled in the parish religious education program and were active with their father in parish ministries, including youth ministry. On a trip to Atlanta to explore colleges my friend chose to park the car and explore the city using public transportation. While seated on the bus his daughter pointed toward the window and asked, “Daddy, what’s that cord for?” At that moment my friend panicked a bit and prayed, “God, what else didn’t I teach her?”

I have no doubt that my friend continues to teach his young adult daughters effective ways to signal their desire to stop and get off the bus, so to speak. His realization in Atlanta clearly reflects the sentiments of many who minister in religious formation programs of the church. There is so much of God’s truth that catechetical leaders and religion teachers want and need to share with others. Yet, this need is balanced against compressed time, shriveled budgets, local priorities, and at times, a personal understanding of aspects of church teaching that rest beyond one’s comfort level for bringing it to others.

The church’s social doctrine often is squeezed out of the curriculum or presented in ways that don’t encourage it to flourish.

For such reasons, the church’s social doctrine often is an aspect of faith formation that either is squeezed out of the curriculum or is presented in ways that don’t encourage it to flourish in the lives of the faithful. What would happen to Catholics in the United States if diocesan and parish faith formation programs integrated the fullness of the Catholic Church’s social doctrine? In what ways might the intentional inclusion of Catholic social doctrine help shape diocesan and parish catechetical programs?

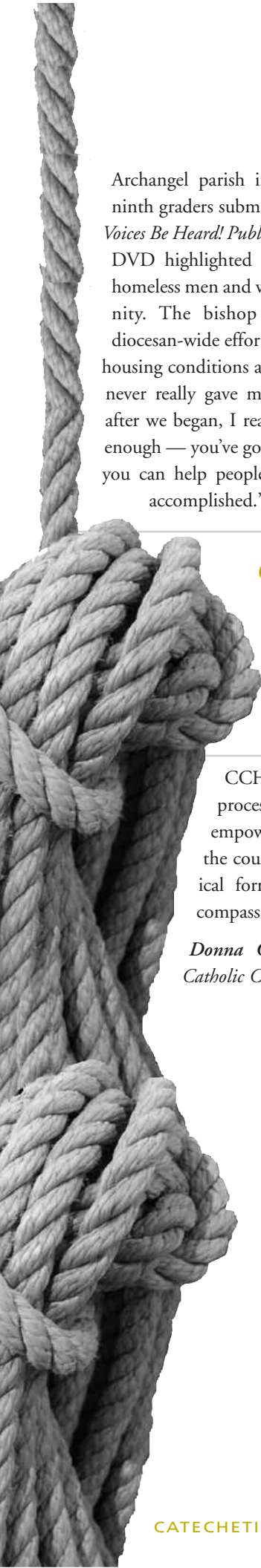
MOVING FROM CHARITY TO JUSTICE

Charitable outreach and concern for those in need may be as strong an element of Catholic identity as making the sign of the cross and praying the rosary. Compassion in the form of justice or social action, however, is not as familiar a mandate of the Catholic faith as charity and direct service. How might catechetical formation programs that infuse a broad, solid understanding of faith and social justice impact parish life and strengthen the faith of individuals? How can catechetical leaders and religion teachers weave Catholic social justice principles into their formation sessions on liturgy, the sacraments, holy Scripture, church history, the lives of the saints, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and so on?

One channel for integrating and enlivening Catholic social doctrine that is available to all dioceses in the United States is the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). For more than thirty-five years, CCHD has been working to break the cycle of poverty in the United States by raising awareness of domestic poverty and helping to build solidarity in this country between poor and low-income people and those who are not poor. Through the generous support of parishioners and the approval of diocesan bishops, CCHD helps Catholics to express their faith by working with empowered poor and low-income people to achieve justice in the form of living wages, affordable housing, and access to health care for working families, and to otherwise help poor and low-income people to help themselves and uplift their communities.

Most Catholics connect with CCHD through an annual second collection that is taken up in many dioceses during the weekend before Thanksgiving. Yet many are not yet familiar with CCHD’s emphasis on transformative education, which offers practical, faith-based opportunities for integrating Catholic social doctrine and practice. CCHD’s Multi-Media Arts Contest (see box) provides a good example.

The national grand prize winners of the 2004-2005 contest were ten students from the confirmation preparation program at St. Michael the



Archangel parish in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. The eighth and ninth graders submitted a ten-minute DVD entitled *Let Their Voices Be Heard! Public Housing and Homelessness in Hawaii*. The DVD highlighted what they learned from discussions with homeless men and women and public officials in their community. The bishop plans to use the DVD to launch a diocesan-wide effort to petition the state legislature to improve housing conditions and end homelessness. One student said, “I never really gave much thought to homelessness before, but after we began, I realized that even just thinking about it isn’t enough — you’ve got to try to do something. I also learned that you can help people, but it’s a long process to get anything accomplished.”

Compassion in the form of justice or social action is not as familiar a Catholic mandate as charity and direct service.

CCHD education resources, faith reflection processes, and relationships of solidarity with empowered poor and low-income people around the country can be a vital component of catechetical formation that helps Catholics to grow in compassion by experiencing their faith in action.

Donna Grimes is an education specialist at the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. |

HERE ARE SOME WAYS THAT CCHD EDUCATION IS CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND FAITH FORMATION TODAY:

- 1. PovertyUSA Campaign** provides a wealth of statistics and resources. Visit www.povertyusa.org and you will find data about domestic poverty plus suggestions for action and stories of hope and empowerment. There are also ideas for raising awareness and action by observing January as Poverty in America Awareness Month.
- 2. Youth and Young Adult Program** has lesson plans and other resources. Among them are:
Ending Poverty in Community (EPIC): A Toolkit for Young Advocates is a high school resource that can be accessed from www.usccb.org/cchd.
Student Action Program (SAP), a series of lesson plans for school and parish programs, Grades K-8, is also available online at www.usccb.org/cchd.
Multi-Media Arts Contest is a learning tool for grades 7-12. Participants such as this year’s winners from the Diocese of Honolulu (see story) afford good examples of religious educators helping young people act on justice. See contest details at www.usccb.org/cchd.
- 3. JustFaith Ministries**, a national social justice organization, provides formation programs for adults and older teens. National partners include CCHD, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Relief Services. To learn more go to www.justfaith.org.
- 4. Collaborations** with Catholic textbook publishers and seasoned catechetical leaders and practitioners are underway to develop appropriate formation support for diocesan and parish catechetical leaders, directors of religious education, and adult faith formation team leaders who help to form catechists, religion teachers, and RCIA and adult faith formation teams.
- 5. National and local grants** for community organizing and economic development provide success stories about ending poverty and building community. Many Catholic parishes are members of or working closely with these community-based organizations.

CCHD would appreciate hearing any success stories showing how your connections with us nationally or locally have strengthened faith formation. For more information contact the CCHD education staff: at 202-541-3210 or www.usccb.org/cchd.

Nurturing Wonder and Awe

Homily for the Celebration of the Eucharist NCCL Conference, April 30, 2006

by Richard Malone, Bishop of Portland, Maine



How appropriate it is that our meeting takes place during the great fifty days, the high season of Christian initiation! Your parish Eucharistic assemblies buzz with the new life of neophytes' faith. We bishops are traveling the Chrism Trail, our thumbs fragrant with the perfume of Holy Oil.

In Maine, we confirm at second grade. I know that the Holy Spirit surely comes with gifts to strengthen the early faith of the children. But I always wonder what they *really hear* as I offer the prayer for the laying on of hands:

All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding. Give them the spirit of right judgment and courage. Give them the spirit of knowledge and reverence. *Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence!*

Wonder and awe are, I believe, the fuel that keeps the fire of faith and the passion for mission burning! Rabbi Abraham Heschel writes brilliantly about the biblical view of reality. Biblical faith, for Heschel, is the fruit of one's exposure to the sublime power and presence of the Holy. The person truly formed in the faith has the capacity for *radical amazement* at encountering the divine presence...you see it on the face of young Miriam of Nazareth in the great painting of the Annunciation. And here it is in the Gospel, in the eyes of the apostles as they experience the risen Christ. You see it in the gaze of Harvard students at Eucharistic adoration...in the look of a young father holding his newborn daughter: "Look what God has created!"

Christian religion is not all that it can be when the elements of *wonder and awe* are absent. Everything, even for the committed disciple, tends to become a task to be accomplished, a plan to be executed, sometimes even joylessly. We ministers can then turn into technicians rather than poets, philosophers, artists, and prophets. We become consumed with worries. Sometimes we get bogged down in what someone has called "analysis paralysis," and we start to lose hope and energy for our mission.

Wonder is a way of seeing deep reality, a way to knowledge of what truly counts. It is what leads to reverence. Heschel reminds us that awe "is an act of insight into a meaning greater than ourselves...A way of being in rapport with the mystery of all reality...An intuition for the creaturely dignity of all things and their preciousness to God; a realization that things are not only what they are but also stand...for something Absolute."

Just imagine the amazement of the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, or of those who met him in that room back in Jerusalem...when it finally dawned on them that this one, eating broiled fish with them, was their teacher, leader and friend, now risen and radiant with divine glory! Luke emphasizes Jesus' flesh and blood here. This is about bodily resurrection (in reaction to the Gnostic denial of such)-all the more startling! And remember, adding to the awe-for them and for us-is the fact that the Risen One is standing in the midst of those closest to him, who had just let him down, abandoned him in his most desperate hour. Yet there he stands, radiant in resurrection light.... and says "Peace be with you!"

This same Christ, risen and triumphant stands here, now in our midst, we who in our own ways have let him down, not trusted enough, not surrendered fully. Here he is with us his disciples of the third millennium, and his greeting is the same: Peace be with you! It is in our communion with this risen Jesus that we are able to know that deep peace, that abiding hope, that courage to go on that we can find nowhere else...even as we fall again and again into the trap of looking for love and peace and meaning in all the wrong places.

As he stands in our midst, healing us, transforming us, reassuring us, embracing us, he invites us to step out of the fear that cripples, the doubt that numbs. And he sends us, commissions us, to be witnesses to Easter! Imagine...you and I, chosen by the Risen One, gifted with his peace, and sent out to do his saving work! Is not all of this enough to spark amazement and awe in our weary minds and hearts? "The religious person is ever marveling," said Cardinal Newman. Resurrection is the reason of all reasons to marvel!

And as we come together to Chicago to rejoice in our solidarity as catechetical leaders, and to sharpen our insight and enhance our

“We teach the children how to measure, how to weigh. We fail to teach them how to revere, how to sense wonder and awe.”

skills...and as the flame of our own capacity for marveling, amazement, and awe is turned up, might we commit ourselves anew to the holy work of evangelizing catechesis, of life-long formation, of culture transformation, in a way that helps to ignite this same wonder in all who've been entrusted by God to our pastoral care.

If you have read Christian's book, *Soul Searching*, a comprehensive study of the religious lives of American teens, you know that we in the ministry of catechesis have many challenges, much work to do, much to teach. And as we think and share about our ministry this week, we might do well to remember Heschel's wisdom when he warns us, "We teach the children how to measure, how to weigh. We fail to teach them how to revere, how to sense wonder and awe. The sense for the sublime...is now a rare gift." Let's make it a whole lot less rare!

Let me conclude with a fond mystagogical memory of a young woman named Melanie, newly baptized, a law student when I was Catholic chaplain at Harvard. It was Low Sunday, and I gathered our neophytes in the darkened sanctuary, sitting about the baptismal pool in the light of the Easter candle. I asked them to share their reflections on their experience of the Easter sacraments. Seeing her own face reflected in the Easter water, illuminated by the soft

glow of the great candle, Melanie softly uttered the most beautiful and poignant words a Christian could ever say: "I know that I have met the risen Lord. And I know, finally, who I am!"

Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Es* wrote: "Being a Christian is never the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."

Thus it was for the disciples in Jerusalem. So it was for Melanie. May it be the same for us, his disciples now. We are part of that great company called to witness through the ages, companions of the Risen One, heralds of hope.

May the Eucharist we celebrate this night and throughout these next days amaze us with the power of Christ's presence. May we be formed anew, and energized to live this peace, this love, this life that, even beyond our imaging, is as real as a risen rabbi, Son of God, who encounters his friends around a broiled fish dinner ...and even more remarkably, in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup that is his body and his blood.

Bishop Richard Malone of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, is NCCL's episcopal advisor. |



On Ten Years of Conformity Reviews

by Alfred C. Hughes, Archbishop of New Orleans



The summer of 2006 will mark ten years since the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism undertook the first conformity review of catechetical materials. Such a milestone offers an appropriate moment for reflection on the process and its results. Those who have participated in this effort over the ten years know the achievements that the bishops and publishers have accomplished together. A constructive partnership has developed. Both bishops and publishers have learned a great deal and together have made a significant impact on catechetical efforts in the United States.

When the process was initially suggested and then undertaken, it is probable that many thought of it as a temporary measure to accomplish two things. One was to help the bishops assess how closely extant catechetical materials were in doctrinal conformity to the teaching of the church as found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Secondly, the expectation was that the process would also help publishers appreciate how to use the *Catechism* as an authoritative resource in developing catechetical materials. However, as the years have progressed, bishops and publishers alike have come to recognize that a great value of the process is the bishops' direct involvement in the preparation of catechetical materials. Rather than a temporary measure, this engagement needs to be ongoing. The number of reviews taking place shows a sense of commitment to the process. During the early years, there was an average of eight to ten reviews each year. Now, the Committee is averaging thirty reviews annually. There is no reason to think that this volume will change any time soon.

DOCTRINAL CONTENT

After completion of the first year of conducting conformity reviews, the Catechism Committee determined that it would be helpful to identify recurring major deficiencies found in the materials reviewed. As those familiar with the history of this process know,

these deficiencies included inadequate treatment on the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ and his central role in salvation history, the church and her teaching responsibility, Christian anthropology and God's saving initiative, the role and effects of grace, the sacraments, original sin and sin in general, Catholic moral teaching, and eschatology. Naming these deficiencies proved to be a deciding moment for catechesis in this country. The recognition of specific problems in catechetical materials signaled the importance of the conformity review effort and offered guidance in the development of new catechetical materials.

The doctrinal content of catechetical materials cannot and should not be minimized. The development and use of texts and materials which communicate the doctrine of the church in a complete and authentic—that is, correct—fashion provides the best foundation for successful catechetical efforts. It is for this reason that from the onset of the conformity review process, the Committee made a decision to accept for review only those materials in which the doctrinal content appeared in the student portion of the text, series or program.

Within three or four years of conducting conformity reviews, the Committee recognized that there had been significant progress in strengthening the doctrinal content of catechetical materials, particularly with elementary materials. It was for this reason that in June 2001 the Catechism Committee reported to the body of bishops that working with publishers of catechetical materials for elementary age students had proved so effective that the Catechism Committee saw no need for the bishops to consider developing their own catechetical series. In that same report, however, the Committee reserved judgment on the question of the bishops'

Subjectivism about revelation leads to a relativistic teaching. Ultimately, it can undermine faith in and commitment to Christ.

It is the aim of these committees to ensure that catechesis be not only organized and systematic but also authentic and complete.

developing their own high school age materials. This was for two reasons. First, at that point relatively few high school texts had been submitted for a conformity review. Second, of those which had been submitted, many were judged inadequate for consideration of a declaration of conformity.

As a result of the June 2001 report, more publishers of high school materials began submitting them to the Committee for a conformity review. The outcome was mixed. While many texts and materials received a declaration of conformity, a significant number of texts were found inadequate. Because a number of these texts were (and still are) in use in many schools and parishes, in November 2003 the Catechism Committee made a new report to the bishops, this time on the state of some high school materials.

HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS

During the course of this report, bishops were told that some of the texts in use in high schools were relativistic in their approach to the church and to faith. This could lead some students to believe that

one religion or church is as good as another and that the Catholic Church is just one church among many equals. The report went on to state that some high school texts continue to exhibit inadequate treatment of the Trinity and that the doctrinal and moral teaching of the church is sometimes presented in a tentative context. Other problems in some texts surfaced in the area of ecclesiology through an overemphasis on the role of the community and the church sometimes presented as democratic or congregational in nature.

The report also alerted the bishops that in some high school texts the treatment of the sacraments is flawed. It is not always clear that the seven sacraments were instituted by Christ, that they are more than celebrations to mark special moments in life, and that the priest has a special role in sacramental ministry. In areas dealing with Catholic moral teaching, some texts evidenced a reluctance to name immoral behavior as sin, implied at times that moral right or wrong is a matter of personal decision, and encouraged practices of virtue and goodness primarily in order to make the world and one's life better, thus blurring the relationship between the moral life in

continued on page 36



this world and life in the world to come. Finally, bishops were told that some high school texts taught Scripture with too much reliance on one particular scientific method of interpretation which resulted in the implication that the Scriptures, to a large degree, are merely human texts. While these problems are now much less frequent in new texts submitted for conformity review, they are still common in many older texts currently in use.

PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES

The Catechism Committee continues to recognize ways to strengthen a text's conformity. When the Catechism Committee first began conducting conformity reviews, publishers were told that the review would concern only the doctrinal content and not matters of pedagogy or methodology. Gradually, the Committee recognized more clearly that some pedagogical and methodological approaches actually undermine the authentic presentation of doctrine.

For example, one common problem is a pedagogical approach designed to avoid offending non-Catholic students enrolled in Catholic schools. It became obvious to us that even though the texts and materials were presenting and explaining doctrine and morality correctly, it was done within a context which made it sound as if the doctrine was a matter of opinion and not based on truths revealed by God. Allowing doctrine or moral teaching to be understood as a matter of opinion, even if only implicitly, undermines its authentic presentation. Such an approach is even more problematic in a society in which our children and young people receive the message that each person must make up his or her own mind about what they believe and what is right and wrong.

Another methodological approach that can compromise an authentic presentation of doctrine and morals is one that relies primarily or even completely on what some call an anthropological experiential approach to catechesis, that is, one which relies too heavily on

the human person and his or her own experiences. When a person's own experience becomes the foundational starting point of catechesis and sometimes also the measure against which authentic catechetical teaching is to be judged, the truth and objective reality of God's revelation becomes blurred. God's revelation is not subjective. The relativism common in our society can also be re-enforced through an anthropological experiential approach. Catechetical understanding can and should be enriched through reflection on human experience but it should never become the lens through which revealed faith is presented or judged. God has taken the initiative in revealing the truth about himself and his involvement in the history of salvation. He has sent his son to redeem us. Subjectivism about revelation leads to a relativistic teaching. Ultimately, it can undermine faith in and commitment to Christ.

There continue to be doctrinal issues with which the Catechism Committee works to strengthen the conformity of catechetical material. One area concerns Trinitarian language. The Committee is trying to develop helpful suggestions to insure that catechetical materials teach about the nature and revealed name of the first person of the Trinity, God the Father, without losing a traditional understanding that the name God is also sometimes synonymous with God the Father. Another area involves materials that treat church history. The Committee is developing guidelines to help publishers know how to create a text that is not merely a history, but a responsible catechetical treatment of the history of the church.

CONTINUING OVERSIGHT

A significant by-product of the work of the bishops on the Catechism Committee has been a renewed conviction and commitment on the part of all the bishops in this country in the oversight of catechetical teaching. Once the Catechism Committee began its work, other bishops, members of their diocesan staffs and catechetical publishers began bringing questions and concerns to the Committee which fell beyond the scope of the mandate entrusted to them. This led to the recognition of the need for a standing bishops' Committee on Catechesis, the proposal for which was approved by a vote of the bishops in 2000 and formally established in 2002.

The Catechism Committee, focused on the implementation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the Committee on Catechesis, charged with the broader issues of catechesis, have been working to refine catechetical efforts so that all involved may understand better

It is only fair to admit that not everyone involved in catechesis agrees with the work and expectations of the bishops over the last ten years.



that they are meant to proclaim the faith in such a way as to lead others to want to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to know the teaching of the Lord and the church. The committees strive to offer bishops the tools and direction they want in order to fulfill their role as the chief catechists in their dioceses. It is the aim of these committees to ensure that catechesis be not only organized and systematic but also authentic and complete.

All the work of these two committees takes place within the larger context of the catechetical efforts of the church both here in the United States and throughout the world. Their work reflects the call for a new evangelization, proclaiming the teachings of Jesus Christ in the modern world in such a way as to elicit a deeper understanding and commitment to Christ on the part of believers and to bring about conversion and faith on the part of those who do not yet believe. In this work of new evangelization, the committees work to help bishops and the faithful rely on the tools for catechesis that the universal church has given them in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In fulfillment of this mandate, these Committees have also overseen the development of the *National Directory for Catechesis* and the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, tools developed by the church in the United States to give further support and direction to catechetical efforts in this country.

It is only fair to admit that not everyone involved in catechesis agrees with the work and expectations of the bishops over the last ten years. But the vast majority of those involved in oversight or development of texts or in the day-to-day work of catechesis seem to appreciate more and more the work of the Catechism Committee and the Committee on Catechesis. They have come to trust the insight and direction provided. It is a reasonable hope that this collaborative work will continue to foster the renewal of catechesis and enable all involved to find the best ways, faithfully and responsibly, to hand on the faith to the present generation as well as those of the future. ■

Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of New Orleans is the chair of the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism.



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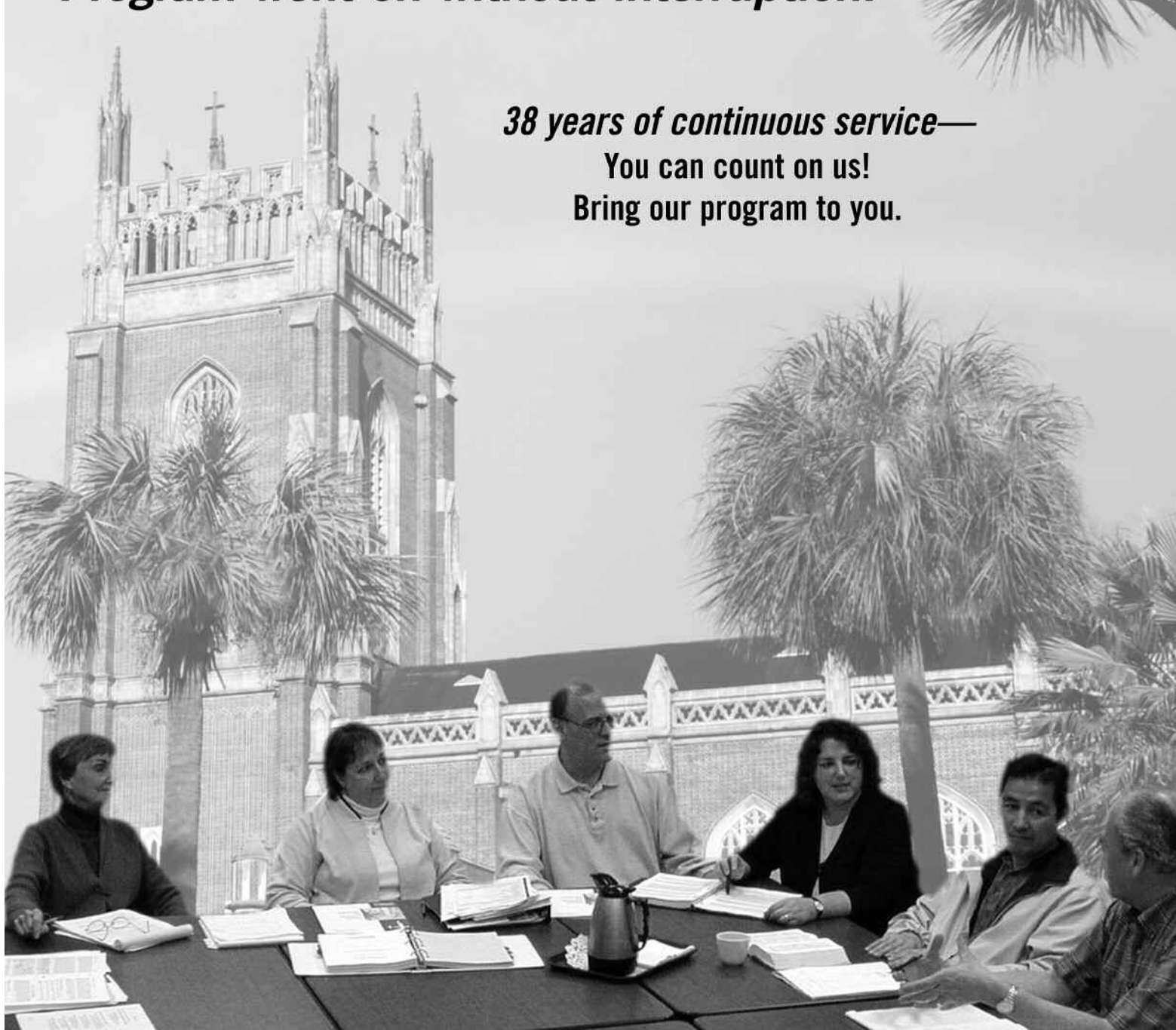
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CATECHETICAL UPDATE

A publication of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

ONLINE DEGREES FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

going_the_distance@catholic_distance_university

by Carol Ann Cirbee

This year at our annual conference in Chicago we invited colleges and universities to showcase their catechetical and pastoral programs. In this *Update* we are featuring three of those institutions that offer distance learning programs for catechetical leaders.

—Editor



Without a doubt, catechetical leaders are some of God's most over-tasked workers. As well as nurturing their families and bearing responsibility for the faith formation of the people entrusted to their care, they must also meet twenty-first century expectations for their own education. Because the work schedule of a parish catechetical leader may be as varied and irregular as it is long, distance education is an ideal way to earn the academic credentials that professional competence requires.

ONLINE ADVANTAGES

There are a number of distinct advantages to distance education. It removes the need to travel to site-based schools at certain times on specific days each week. There are no transportation costs, worries about driving in bad weather, concerns about finding parking spaces, or fears about crossing campus areas late at night. There are no childcare expenses, and no complicated baby-sitting or elder care arrangements to be made. There is global access to courserooms from wherever a student may be — at home, on a business trip, or while spending time caring for relatives in a distant city. There is no need to withdraw from one university and transfer enrollment to another if a student moves across the country or around the world. Because of this, distance education is immensely successful for military families. Students who relocate are able to complete degree programs begun elsewhere. Distance learning allows students to schedule their coursework into the daily rhythms of their workweek tasks and their own natural preferences for day or night work. In an online posting, one student at The Catholic Distance University in Hamilton, Virginia, explained why online learning suited her:

This format is perfect for me. I am not able to be in a classroom setting because of the size of my family, the ages of my children, and my work and volunteer obligations. The flexibility of online learning serves me well. I am free to access the class materials at any time of day or night, so I can easily tailor my studies to fit my busy schedule. I can always reread my lecture materials, as well as go back and reread the courseroom discussion. I have the advantage of the permanency of the written word; the information isn't simply my notes, but the actual lectures and student discussion, which would evaporate in a classroom setting.

CHOOSING A UNIVERSITY

There are many things to consider in deciding which university will best suit the needs of an adult learner. This is true whether it offers a distance program or is site-based. Always begin by determining that the institution has proper educational accreditation. Charlatans operate in every field, and education is not without unscrupulous moneymakers. Beware of 'diploma mills' that offer to sell degrees and that will accept a resume of life experience in place of all earned course credits for degree completion. While some accredited universities and military institutions do grant limited credit for life experience, they also require students to earn course credits through the completion of class work.

A catechetical leader who has an undergraduate degree in theology or religious studies may be looking for a program that will balance that background with a master's degree in education or in one of the human services fields. If so, he or she will find that the nation's large, secular distance universities can provide convenient degree pro-



GOING THE DISTANCE *continued from page U1*

grams. These schools will all have the regional accreditation with which most people are familiar.

Conversely, a director of religious education whose bachelor's degree is in a field outside of religious studies may need a master's degree in theology. The Catholic distance education schools he considers may have national, rather than regional, accreditation. The important thing to verify is that the U.S. Department of Education recognizes the accrediting agency of the school being considered. A prospective

Coursework can fit the daily rhythms of a student's workweek and natural preference for day or night work.

student should ask questions until she is comfortable. Because earning a degree requires a significant commitment, the investment of time, hard work, and money needs to be protected.

In choosing a distance education university, it is helpful to learn as much as possible about its history in delivering courses across time and space. Is distance education the main focus of the university, or is the distance education department an adjunct to the bricks-and-mortar program that makes up its main offering? Distance education, to be well done, needs a wealth of resources and experience devoted to it. If distance education is a sideline offering, a prospective student may need to ask more questions to understand what he would experience as a distance student at that school.

REAL-TIME VS ONGOING

Online distance courses typically operate in either a synchronous or asynchronous pattern. Synchronous courses schedule times for professors and class members to gather at their computer keyboards each week for real-time discussions of the material set for the current course lesson. Synchronous classes have the advantage of being able to use live audio and video streaming so that class members may be present to one another in several dimensions. They have the disadvantage of having to gather people in many times zones to meet at one specified hour.

Asynchronous classes offer an ongoing posting format for each lesson's work, and the discussion forum usually remains open for a week. People are able to respond to their instructors' discussion questions and to other students' comments throughout the week by adding their own contributions to a growing discussion thread. In addition to weekly discussions, online courses include the same kinds of reading assignments and written work (submitted electronically) that university students will find in site-based schools. Students in asynchronous classes have the advantage of never worrying about being late for class. They post when it is convenient for them to do so.

One of the advantages of classroom discussion in an online format is the development of precise language. Students have opportunities to edit the text responses they make, and are able to return to postings to refine their thoughts after some consideration. One Catholic Distance University student noted, "Online, you can see all the text. It causes one to think about what one is typing, as words in print tend to be more carefully chosen than spoken words."

A special gift for theology students is the ability to reflect on what others have said before having to immediately respond with comments of their own. "Wow!!! Thank you all for your postings. They are such an inspiration. I was glued to my computer screen. I particularly loved the suggestion of..." is a typical distance student response in a posting thread. Students and faculty are present to each other in ways that may encourage more class participation than students have encountered in other learning formats.

PERSONAL CONTACT

Personal contact is a hallmark of all phases of well-designed adult learning programs. Because distance learning is an evolving educational adventure, it offers opportunities for personal interaction through a variety of communications media. Telephone contact tends to be strong, prompt, and friendly in distance education schools. Some of the courses taught in Catholic distance universities (such as Latin) are best learned when weekly phone sessions between

One of the advantages of classroom discussion online is the development of precise language.

A significant measure of an online university's value is the supportive learning community it creates.

individual students and their professors support the online and text-book experience. Having one's instructor to oneself for a designated period each week builds confidence and a personal relationship that motivates students to succeed. Personal contact with a variety of staff members through telephone, e-mail, and online postings makes distant people very real for distance education students. Additionally, some distance universities incorporate regional seminars into their yearly schedules, allowing students and faculty to gather together for short periods of time in locations across the country or around the world.

BALANCING THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

In any university program — site-based or online — it's wise to look for balance in program offerings. Catechetical leaders who need (and want) to earn advanced degrees to develop their professional competence may want a program with course offerings that will help them in their daily practical tasks as well as in their theological understanding. Ask if the school offers a credit-earning practicum that can be jointly supervised by a university professor and an onsite parish supervisor, such as a pastor. Weekly telephone conferences with a faculty member, who can help a catechetical leader to sift through and evaluate what has happened 'on the job' that week, make good directors of religious education even better at managing the people and the tasks for which they are responsible. Realize, however, that while degree programs may include coursework that reflects the practical realities of busy church work duties, a bachelor's or master's degree program should offer ample course credits in theology and philosophy.

As well as helping catechetical leaders to earn degrees for their own educational needs, distance education may assist them by providing training for the parish catechists they supervise. If your diocese gives volunteer religion teachers the continuing education option of earning adult faith formation certificates via distance education, then certificate programs from a Catholic distance university may encourage them to complete a series of short courses designed specifically for volunteer catechists. While many dioceses have their own programs for catechist formation, a growing number also give their volunteers the option of certification through coursework with an approved distance university.

DISTANCE LEARNING COMMUNITY

A significant measure of an online university's value is the supportive community of faculty, students, administrators, and other staff members that it creates. The existence of an online campus staffed daily by both a faculty discussion facilitator and an online technology manager can provide gathering places (in virtual rooms) for students to read school announcements, access online materials, enter courserooms, post photographs, get answers to student advising questions, sign up for courses, offer prayer intentions for one another, and talk about all of the kinds of things that people discuss in student union buildings at bricks-and-mortar campuses. Casual conversation forums online enable students in Australia, Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Germany to talk with classmates in Nebraska, New Jersey, and Louisiana as though they were sitting side by side. There should be plenty of opportunities for humor and for friendship — both in and outside of courserooms — that will allow students to encourage one other and to travel as companions on the journey.

Each year an increasing number of students in almost all fields of study choose to learn through distance education. Shared scholarship and informal discussions with people around the world have done much to increase global understanding between people of differing cultures. As one student noted, "It's harder to hate what a country does (when it does not agree with what you think it should do) when you really know someone good who lives there." Catechetical leaders are both called and sent to live the good news — and distance education gives them one more way to fulfill both these missions. ■

Dr. Carrie Cirbee is the dean of students at The Catholic Distance University in Hamilton, Virginia. Before coming to CDU she spent many years as a classroom teacher in Catholic schools and as a parish catechetical leader. She welcomes responses to this article at ccirbee@cdu.edu.

* Quotations in this article are taken from postings made by online students of The Catholic Distance University, located in Hamilton, Virginia.

interaction@university_of_dallas

The Institute for Religious and Pastoral Studies (IRPS) is part of the University of Dallas, a Catholic university that also includes a graduate business school, a graduate college of liberal arts and undergraduate colleges of business and liberal arts. IRPS was established in 1987 to teach applied theology for ministers, teachers and leaders in the Catholic Church of North Texas and surrounding dioceses. IRPS offers masters degrees and certificates in theological studies, religious education, pastoral ministry, Catholic school teaching and Catholic school leadership. In 2005 IRPS began offering courses online as part of a project of offering entire masters programs online.

MEETING CHALLENGES

The greatest challenge for IRPS was teaching a traditionally hands-on subject in an online environment. Dr Matthew Ogilvie, IRPS's coordinator of online education, said, "When I took on this project I saw distance programs that worked well, and some that were disasters. I learned from both. I realized very quickly that if online theological education was going to work, we'd have to do something that was equal to, if not better, than the traditional on-site class experience."

IRPS uses technology that equates as closely as possible to the classroom experience. By using Microsoft Producer software, IRPS courses are delivered with video lectures that are accompanied by synchronized PowerPoint slides. In the words of one IRPS student, the video medium means that "we can see and hear our professor, and get not only the information he's communicating, but also 'feel' what he is saying." IRPS courses also use Blackboard software that

Blackboard software provides an easy-to-navigate interface through which students engage in online discussions, do assessment quizzes, participate in live chats and download readings and texts for the course.

provides an easy-to-navigate interface through which students engage in online discussions, do assessment quizzes, participate in live chats and download readings and texts for the course.

Preparing all these online facilities explodes the myth that online education is easier or cheaper for universities than traditional education. Dr. Frank Lazarus, president of University of Dallas observed that well-presented and thoughtfully conceived online courses take twice the workload of a regular class. Ogilvie agrees, saying that as far as the university is concerned, an online course involves far more preparation, more planning and more thought than a traditional class. From the students' perspective all this work seems to pay off. Says one IRPS student, "I had done distance education before and hated it. I was sent printed notes, a set of readings and a tape recorded lecture if I was lucky. I felt I'd have learned more by reading a book. But I've enjoyed the immersive online experience at IRPS that combines audio-video and PowerPoint slides. It seems to bring everything together. I guess that while nothing can ever beat being in the same room as a professor, this online experience is the next best thing."

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

When IRPS began online education, they made a policy decision — all classes were to be taught and led by a fully qualified professor. Dr Brian Schmisek, director of IRPS, explained that students complained that in some distance education classes, a professor wrote the course but that classes were led by an under-qualified assistant. Schmisek said, "We decided that if our online classes were to be equal to traditional classes, each class, each lecture and every discussion group and every tutorial would have to be led by a fully qualified professor." Students agree that this policy helps. If the professor who writes the course also teaches the course, then the professor is on hand to lead discussions, answer questions and guide students with maximum expertise.

When IRPS began online education, they made a policy decision — all classes were to be taught and led by a fully qualified professor.

TECHNOLOGY THAT HELPS

Another challenge facing IRPS was using technology that would not overwhelm students, and not require them to spend lots of money on new equipment. Using Producer and Blackboard, students have an easy-to-use interface and most often they do not need to spend money on new computer equipment or software. Ogilvie explained that when the right platforms are chosen for the courses, any new software that students need is available for download without charge. Nor do students need to have the very latest hardware to successfully access the courses. Most PCs in use today can be used for the courses and while high-speed internet access is helpful, students are able to access the courses using dial-up if necessary.

UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

While it can seem daunting to coordinate the myriad facets of online education, Ogilvie explained that it need not be so. “What helps,” he stated, “is that we have a stated policy of being student-driven and flexible in our programs.” The goal is that students, instead of being “shoehorned” into a program that may or may not suit them, get to participate in a study program designed for them. “I like the whole thing to a jigsaw puzzle,” said Ogilvie. If the students’ needs are at the center of everything, all the different pieces, the lecture videos, the live chat, the online discussions, they all fit together naturally — but the students need also tell us what parts may be missing.”

THE FUTURE

At IRPS students can now do an entire masters degree online. But what of the future? Ogilvie says he can see new possibilities in many areas. One such possibility is live video conferencing for students who want to talk via video-link with their professors or fellow-students. However, there are more “human” projects developing. IRPS is making relationships with different dioceses to provide programs relevant to their needs. At the same time, IRPS is developing partnerships with agencies such as the Center for Ministry Development that allows students to do courses geared towards youth ministry while they also work on a masters degree from IRPS.

In the final analysis, the future is wide open. “We’re here studying a two-thousand-year-old-year old faith,” said Ogilvie, “with twenty-first century technology that is developing at an amazing rate.” ■

Details on the IRPS masters and certificate programs and the IRPS Catholic Biblical School can be found at <http://www.udallas.edu/irps> or email ministry@udallas.edu



DISTANCE LEARNING

live_and_on-line@st_mary_of_the_woods

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College is the nation's oldest Catholic college for women in the undergraduate programs; it serves women and men in the external degree programs. The College maintains a 67-acre wooded campus located five miles northwest of Terre Haute, Indiana. The peaceful and beautiful campus features a fitness trail, lake, and stables amid the stately academic buildings. Founded in 1840 by the Sisters of Providence, the college boasts an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students in campus-based, undergraduate distance-learning, and graduate distance-learning programs.

DISTANCE (NON-TRADITIONAL) PROGRAMS

Those who enter the graduate program at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College seek to cooperate with their call as ecclesial ministers through the echo of their lives. The desire, the pull to resound the Word of God in their lives and ministries is strengthened and supported through their pursuit of a graduate degree at "The Woods." Their echoes are heard from across the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Guam. The Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology (MAPT) degree is designed for women and men who are or plan to be engaged in ministry and for those seeking personal enrichment in theological study. The program is a non-traditional approach to graduate study designed for men and women who cannot take the time off from professional and family responsibilities to pursue graduate studies in a traditional classroom situation. Thirty-six semester hours of graduate credit are required for the master's degree. Graduates of accredited colleges who have completed a baccalaureate degree are eligible for admission.

MISSION STATEMENT

The graduate program in pastoral theology prepares women and men personally and professionally for service in pastoral ministry. The program is also useful for persons not in professional ministry who desire a theological foundation for the Christian life. Rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition, the program welcomes all who seek a deeper understanding of the integration of Christian texts and tradition, contemporary culture and personal experiences.

GOALS

- Provide instruction, experience and resources for serious theological inquiry.
- Integrate personal spirituality and pastoral action.
- Develop appropriate skills for ministerial service.
- Foster independent learning, critical thinking, ability for theological reflection, clear and coherent expression, and commitment to the Christian lifestyle.
- Participate in a community of worship, learning and mutual support.

DISTANCE LEARNING FORMAT

The graduate programs at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, now in their twenty-third year, employ the distance learning format similar to that used by the College as an option for undergraduates since 1973. The distance learning format developed at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College is recognized as an innovative approach to graduate study. The Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology program is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The graduate format requires that students spend one weekend on campus three times a year, at the beginning of each course. Students complete readings and assignments at home and send their work to the assigned course professor who will return the work with comments. In addition, one week is spent on campus for each of the two required intensive courses. The intensive courses are offered in alternate summers.

During both the initial and the return residency weekends at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, students meet with faculty and graduate staff. The students become familiar with the methods of individual, self-directed, long distance learning that characterizes the program. They also complete the first unit of the new course under the direction of MAPT faculty and meet with the faculty member who will be their assigned course professor for the remaining units of the course. The academic contract between the professor and the student begins with the residency and continues throughout the course. The professor's role is to present the introduction to the course material, to assist the student in understanding the assignments and responsibilities involved and to evaluate student achievement. The

Most graduates and current students are involved in some form of pastoral ministry in parishes, schools, hospitals, diocesan offices, youth ministry, social service centers and prisons. Several graduates have pursued doctoral studies or have earned doctoral degrees.

successful completion of the course depends upon the ability of the student to meet the stated requirements, utilizing to the full the expertise and advice of the professor.

Most graduates and current students are involved in some form of pastoral ministry in parishes, schools, hospitals, diocesan offices, youth ministry, social service centers and prisons. Several graduates have pursued doctoral studies or have earned doctoral degrees.

ACCELERATED DEGREE FOR DEACONS AND THEIR WIVES

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College awards twelve transfer credits for persons who have completed the educational component of an approved Diaconate Formation Program. At matriculation into the college, they are placed on a “fast track” and can complete their degree in just four visits to the campus, usually in less than two years. Deacons from the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, and the Archdiocese of Chicago are among recent graduates of this program.

GRADUATE CERTIFICATES

Students may earn a graduate certificate in pastoral theology by completing twenty-one hours of course work. The youth ministry certificate is detailed below. Certificates will be available soon in church leadership, spiritual companionship, and catechetics.



ON-LINE YOUTH MINISTRY CERTIFICATE

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, in partnership with Ministry Training Source, offers an on-line national certificate in youth ministry. The key program elements and characteristics are these:

- The program is designed to meet the unique needs and realities of today’s lay ecclesial minister by providing access to ministry formation utilizing a blended educational format, which includes primarily online training with limited face-to-face training.
- The recently approved National Competency-Based Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers form the basis for the entire twelve-course curriculum, as well as key church documents such as *Renewing the Vision* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Participants have the opportunity to receive a national certificate in lay ecclesial ministry studies with a youth ministry specialization, local certification through partner dioceses, and the option of receiving twelve hours of graduate credit or eighteen hours of undergraduate credit.

“The best thing I ever did was get my degree from The Woods. I could be home with my kids, minister at the parish, and get my degree. S. B.

Awesome community building with my on-line cohort. We met at a Youth Rally and were like old friends. P. H.

One of the Church’s best-kept secrets. I was able to continue to my chaplaincy training with no difficulty. The scholarship is rigorous and solid. A. H.

Retirement has made me look at my contribution to the world. My studies have opened my heart and my mind to the meaning of service. F. B “

continued on page U8

You Can Purchase Copies of *Catechetical Update*

As in the past you can order additional copies of *Catechetical Update*. Many of our membership find it a valuable resource for use in their ministry. To order call the NCCL office (202) 884-9753 or email Sr. Kathy Kandefer, BVM, at kkandefer@ncl.org. *Catechetical Update* reprint costs: 1–49 copies \$1.29 each, 50 or more \$0.79 each (plus shipping).



LIVE AND ONLINE *continued from page U7*

- The focal point of all learning activities is the enhancement of ministry skills in participants' current ministry setting, including providing a foundation in applied Roman Catholic theology.
- The program has outstanding faculty with extensive ministerial experience, theological education, and experience and education in providing effective online learning.
- The summer theological intensive onsite at the campus of our higher education partner is designed to provide an opportunity for spiritual formation and theological education.
- The collaborative learning experience is designed to enable participants to interact with and learn from youth ministers from all over the country in rural, urban, and suburban settings.
- The program is designed for adults working with adolescents in parish or school settings, including volunteers and paid professional staff.

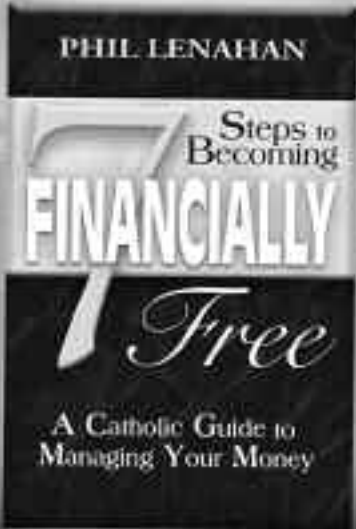
- A 360 Assessment process will be used to enable participants to establish personalized learning goals based upon their past ministry knowledge, experience, and skill level, and the needs of their current ministry setting.

Of special note is the recent canonization of the foundress of the Sisters of Providence, Mother Theodore Guerin. It is by her example of excellence in education and service to the community that Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College shines as a beacon for quality-driven ministry programs.

For more information, please contact the Department of Graduate Studies 1-812-535-5206 or mapt@smwc.edu or www.smwc.edu.

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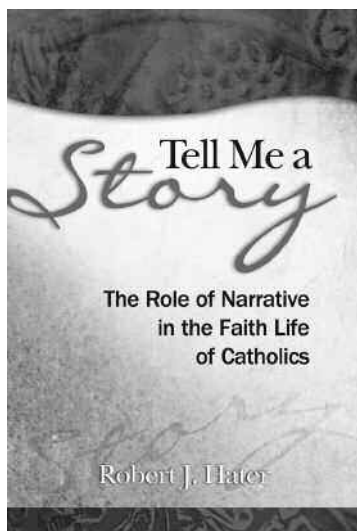
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Our Sunday Visitor

OUR STORY IS OUR SERMON

Tell Me a Story: The Role of Narrative in the Faith Life of Catholics by Robert J. Hater. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006. Paperback, 144 pages, \$13.95.

Reviewed by Mary Kay Cullinan



We come to share our story.

We come to break the bread.

We come to know our rising from the dead...

These words to “The Song of the Body of Christ” by David Haas kept ringing through my head as I read Fr. Bob Hater’s most recent book, *Tell Me a Story: The Role of Narrative in the Faith Life of Catholics*. Hater has a true gift for telling a heartfelt story. What one does not expect is the catechesis so skillfully woven throughout the book. This is not for those looking for a book on “how to tell a story.” This book is both a theoretical treatment and a breathless romp through the field of basic Christian beliefs. It shows how those beliefs begin with stories — and how those stories begin with experiences. The book engages, provokes, and teaches all at once.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part he shows the connection between our personal stories and basic beliefs. Here the most compelling material is the exploration of the “defining moments” (a touch phrase used throughout the book) in church history. I found the treatment of salient “moments” connected with such topics as early Christianity, Gnosticism, Augustine, scholasticism, the Council of Trent, and Vatican II rather enjoyable in this abbreviated form. While the defining moments chosen are not intended to be exhaustive, nor could they be from a practical perspective, these moments serve as examples showing that a lifetime of practice of and witness to the faith is the most important part of each story. The struggles, the joys, the birthings and the dyings that have brought us to this point make us all part of the story. Once again, we find ourselves standing on the shoulders of giants.

The design of the book, with “reflection questions,” “biblical reflections,” and “action steps” at the conclusion of each chapter, prompts much thought. If I could identify a weakness to this book, it would be the overwhelming number of these reflections and suggestions. My desire for logic and consistency got the better of me and I cried out for a more limited and consistent number of each of the above. On the other hand, this abundance and variety permits this book to be used for a self-directed retreat (in installments), a three-day group in-service workshop, or a year round “process” resource for adults.

In the second part of the book Hater synthesizes Jesus’ story and the story of the church with a deeper look at story and belief. While the subject matter has the potential to be exhaustive, he chooses to focus on the Greatest Commandment and the theological virtues. These are masterfully intertwined into the narrative without the loss of a personal perspective. Our stories of our own experiences “refresh” these basic beliefs and we find that at the heart of each of our own stories is God’s love. This brought to mind the opening and closing songs of the musical *Aida* — “Every story is a love story.” According to Hater, the Christian story, community, and basic beliefs all spring forth from God’s love. While the concepts and quotes may seem simplistic, the depth of meaning (that is Hater’s hallmark), will inspire parents, parish ministers and theologians to share their own stories.

Do not enter into these pages lightly. Enter with the desire for introspection. Enter with the desire to unpack your own story and discover your defining moments. Enter these pages with your journal and favorite writing implement in hand. This book will help you uncover that which is within you and yearning to venture forth in story. You will want to revisit and refresh that story again and again.

Our story is our sermon to the world. How are you telling yours? ■

Mary Kay Cullinan, PhD, is the diocesan director for the office of religious education in the Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey.

INTERNET CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

By April Dietrich

On my desk sits a mug imprinted with the logo of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility. It serves as a constant reminder of Lake Wobegon, the setting for Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion." While this town "where the women are strong, the men are good looking, and the children are all above average" is fictional, the small-town lifestyle that is part and parcel of the popular radio show is not. Simpler days and places allowed for support networks of people who knew not only you, but also your kids and your parents, and would recognize you walking from two blocks down the street. To me, Lake Wobegon embodies the American communal spirit.

In direct counterpoint to this picture perfect Americana, a recent headline from Washingtonpost.com reported a trend that is a frightening indictment of the American social condition: "Social Isolation Growing in U.S." The article elaborated on study findings that Americans have fewer confidants and spend less social time with one another than in 1985. The Washingtonpost.com headline might lead us to believe that our communal spirit is dead and buried in the cemetery behind Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility. It may seem true, and could happen if we don't nurture our relationships. But for many of us the communal spirit is alive and well — on and through the Internet.

Community, while important to the weave of the whole fabric of America, is especially important in ministry: the connections we have with others who do what we do is essential. Without ongoing support, challenge, and refreshment from one another, without celebration and commiseration with one another, we can cloister ourselves in our parishes or offices. When a close friend and colleague moved halfway across the country, I wondered how we'd maintain our supportive, energizing friendship: Where would I work out new ideas? Whom would I bounce thoughts off of? Who could I laugh and cry with? How could I

keep my global perspective of ministry without talking regularly to someone outside my parish or diocese? My colleagues keep me informed, enlivened, and empowered to live the Gospel message.

Fortunately, communicating has become as quick as a mouse click...via the internet! IM (translation for newbies: *instant messaging*) is a communication that allows for conversations that are quick and to the point or, when necessary, longer messages in little bytes. No more long, drawn out emails, no cluttered inboxes, just a quick communication in a separate screen so you can keep working on other tasks — IM is faster and sometimes less intrusive than a phone call. Clarification of questions and ideas is, well, as the moniker implies — instant.

Another advantage of IM is the "recordability" of a conversation. When working out ideas with a colleague via IM, I copy and paste the responses to a word document and save it to a file. I don't have to worry about losing valuable recommendations! Files, pictures, web links, and audio can be embedded into an instant message, making it possible to have an online meeting. MSN Messenger (my preferred method of messaging) is also web cam friendly — so one can have an online conversation that incorporates video and audio, like a mini web conference. This service works wonderfully with colleagues who work from home (*telecommuting*, in today's language) or on the road. Did I mention it's usually free?

Email works well for sending pictures, fliers, longer explanations, and updates, and for communicating with multiple people at once. It's also necessary if the person you need is offline.

IM is faster and sometimes less intrusive than a phone call.

When a colleague moved halfway across the country, I wondered how we'd maintain our supportive, energizing friendship.

As a tool for supporting one another, emails are invaluable. One of our archdiocesan coordinators regularly sends out emails with uplifting stories, quotes or commentaries... many of us PCLs look forward to this brief connection! As I was writing this, I received an email from across the country inquiring about my parish work and reminding me to take time to breathe! I'm grateful that someone was thinking about me and took time to remind me about the important things in life. Many times when we forward jokes or other nonsense — we're saying, "I don't have a lot of time, but want you to know I'm thinking of you." (I know I'm not the only one who couldn't resist sending out the picture of the inflatable cathedral). While all tools have the possibility of being abused, online communication, when used with prudence, can help us be catechetical leaders who are dynamic, fresh and alive!

Websites, blogs and pod casts are other tools for keeping in touch with multitudes of people, although the communication is typically more one-sided. For a more formal two-sided communication,

there are message boards and chat rooms. The possibilities for networking, socializing and information sharing on the web are-virtually limitless.

While the Lake Wobegon days that call to mind gas lamps, quill pens, and Sunday afternoon parlor visits are long gone, we need not live in social isolation. With a little innovation and creativity, catechetical leaders can maintain a networking community — electronically. ■

April Dietrich is director of adult catechesis at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Frederick, Maryland and a self-professed geek in training. Please email insights, comments, and suggestions to Adietrich@stjohn-frederick.org

We all need support in our ministries. How do you stay connected? Please email your tech tips to: Adietrich@stjohn-frederick.org



CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2006


The theme of this year's Catechetical Sunday is "Who do you say that I am?" This will be the last year that a Catechetical Sunday theme will be based upon the Sunday readings. The bishops' Committee on Catechesis, which oversees the development of Catechetical Sunday materials, has decided to begin selecting themes in 2007 that more directly addresses the ministry of catechesis.


Jesus' query to Peter about his identify in Matthew's gospel may have been used by the author to address some of the differing opinions about Jesus that existed in the church to which he was writing. As we know from the gospels, even the apostles, Jesus' most intimate friends, struggled to understand who he was. It finally took the Council of Nicea in 325 AD to put an end to the discussions by defining Jesus' true identify.

Early Christian artisans were also ready to offer their insights into Jesus through symbols, many of which can be found in the clip art accompanying this year's Catechetical Sunday material. NCCL's own Catechetical Sunday pin combines two of the most classic symbols for Jesus, the fish and the *chi rho*.

Another special feature of this year's Catechetical Sunday is NCCL's catechist reflection booklet on the *National Directory for Catechesis*. Entitled *Sent Not Alone*, the booklet presents a weekly passage from the NDC accompanied by a brief but insightful commentary by Dr. David Thomas. It is a wonderful way to acquaint catechists and parents with the many riches of the new directory that offers invaluable advice to them as teachers of the faith. |

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Bearing Good Fruit Adult Faith Formation

A Love Beyond Imagining - Mark 10:46-51 Series A, Number 1

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Adult Faith Formation

Jesus Christ, our brother, friend and savior, is with us in our midst and must be our constant inspiration and hope. Each of us has to work at faith, just as we have to work at sports, business, family life, and managing our daily lives. Time spent with others studying a few verses of God's word, seeking its relevance for us today, and praying together will help our faith mature and bear good fruit.

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Comfortably gather in silence for a few moments.

Prayer
Jesus, our brother, our savior, be with us as we grow closer to you. We are blessed by your grace, shown to ourselves and to our world. Let your Spirit move within us to call us to an ever-deepening understanding of our complete dependence on you, Amen.

Scripture Reading
Mark 10:46-51
Listen as one of the group proclaims the passage aloud.

Listening
What Does It Say?
Reflect for a moment in silence, then share your thoughts.

Going Deeper
What Does It Mean?
Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus was on his way out of Jericho when his disciples Bartimaeus, Jericho is an oasis in the desert. Mark positions him on the edge of some, Bartimaeus literally sits between life and death.
Now listen as someone else in the group proclaims the same reading over again.

Spreading the Kingdom of God - Mark 4: 20-32 Series B, Number 1

Bearing Good Fruit

Adult Faith Formation

Jesus Christ, our brother, friend and savior, is with us in our midst and must be our constant inspiration and hope. Each of us has to work at faith, just as we have to work at sports, business, family life, and managing our daily lives. Time spent with others studying a few verses of God's word, seeking its relevance for us today, and praying together will help our faith mature and bear good fruit.

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Comfortably gather in silence for a few moments.

Prayer
Lord, there are some days that I do not remember you were often. Help me each day to give thanks in the morning for a new day of life, at noon for the people who stepped into my world, and in the evening for the support and forgiveness that I experienced all through this day.
Father, all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord, (Preface of the Mass)

Scripture Reading
Mark 4: 20-32
Listen as one of the group proclaims the passage aloud.

Listening
What Does It Say?
Reflect for a moment and then share your thoughts.

Going Deeper
What Does It Mean?
The sower of the mustard seed is parable. It is used for both sowing food and for healing. The mustard seed provides shade and a cooling place in scorching heat. Mustard seeds spread easily over a field whether farmers or nature's elements plant the seed.
Now listen as someone else in the group proclaims the same reading over again.

- **Bearing Good Fruit** is ideal for all adult groups who desire to draw on Scriptures, Shared Reflection and Prayer to enrich their spiritual lives.
- **Bearing Good Fruit** is simple, easy to use but powerful.



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ECHOES AND DISTANCE LEARNING

by Jo Rotunno



This month's *Catechetical Leader Update*, in its focus on distance learning, raises some interesting questions regarding the implementation of *Echoes of Faith*. Distance learning, in its broadest sense, refers to any number of ways that an individual might learn an organized body of material away from a school or parish campus. Some of these ways might be online courses or self-directed home study courses in a print and/or video format. For some people, such courses are the most efficient and convenient way to acquire new information. Work schedules or distance from the school or parish may make them the only viable alternative. But does the home study format work for catechist formation?

The answer is a very qualified "maybe." *Echoes of Faith* was designed with busy people in mind—those who might have trouble attending a group format parish-based program. The modular structure, with video and booklet wedded to each other in a self-directed format, can appeal to just this segment of your catechist population.

One of the goals of *Echoes* was to provide a baseline for catechist training that would be accessible to most catechists. But *Echoes of Faith* is more than a training program, and its goal is more than the acquisition of skills. It offers a process for catechist *formation*, and for Christians, formation always includes the presence and context of a community of faith. *Echoes* modules watched and processed

continued on page 19

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ECHOES OF FAITH *continued from page 18*

alone would be useful, but the process they contain could be used to better advantage. Let's look at some more formational ways of using *Echoes*...

Group Setting: If you can manage it, a group setting is absolutely the best choice. Video segments can be watched together. Then, in the processing of the segments, catechists have the benefit of the wisdom of the group as they reflect on the video input and choose ways to apply their new knowledge in their catechetical settings. Another advantage is the opportunity for participants to share prayer and reflection on their faith journeys. Catechists who are formed in such a way will consistently make a deeper commitment to their ministry.

Home/Parish Combo Setting: In some places, such as rural areas, it may work best to have individual catechists view the video and work through the booklet process alone at home. After all catechists have done so, you can gather them all at the parish for shared reflection, a discussion of some of the booklet application activities, and prayer.

Companion Approach: There may be times when individual catechists are unable to participate in any sort of regular group formation. In that case, you can offer them the option of pairing with another catechist companion with whom they can share insights and reflections. Together they can devise ways to apply new learning in the classroom.

Whichever way you choose to implement *Echoes of Faith*, just remember that a faith community counts if you wish to form capable, committed catechists.

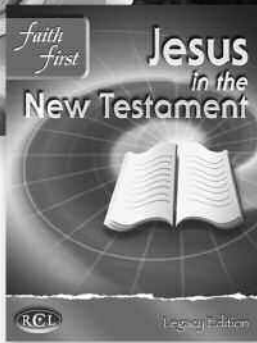
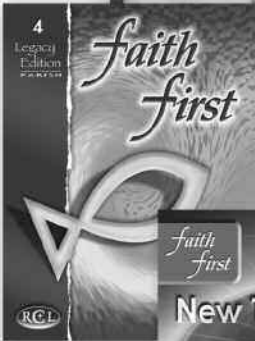
Jo Rotunno is director of creative development at RCL—Resources for Christian Living, which produced the Echoes of Faith project for NCCL. Jo has worked in catechist formation for the past twenty-five years. Her column on catechist formation using Echoes of Faith appears in each issue of Catechetical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

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EDITOR: Joyce A. Crider

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT: Mary Kay Schoen

DESIGN: Rings Leighton Design Group

PUBLISHER: Neil A. Parent

Catechetical Leader (ISSN: 1547-7908) is published six times a year by the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), 125 Michigan Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20017.

Authors' views do not necessarily reflect those of NCCL. Letters to the editor and submissions of news items are encouraged. Send to *Catechetical Leader* at the address above or email nccl@nccl.org. Phone: (202) 884-9753 Fax: (202) 884-9756. Contact NCCL for reprints.
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Subscription rates: (U.S. addresses): One year \$24; two years, \$42; three years, \$54. NCCL members receive *Catechetical Leader* as a part of membership. To subscribe, send name and address with check or credit card number to NCCL at address above.

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Operation Catechesis is a Catechetical Moment

by Patricia Vrabel

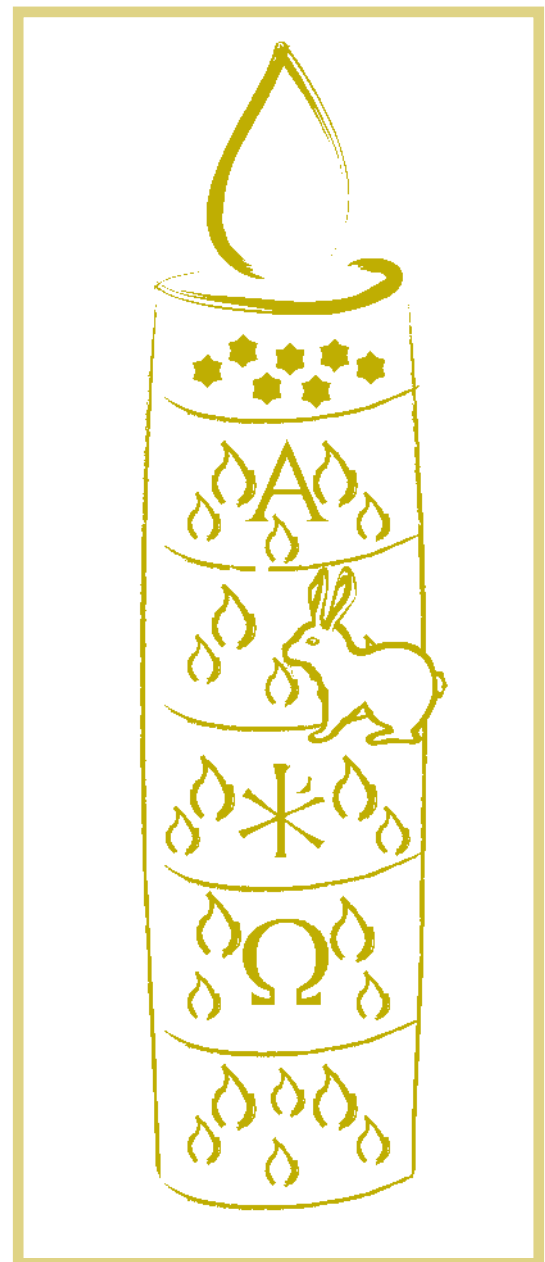
It is hard to believe that another hurricane season is underway and that it is nearly a year since the devastation in the Gulf Coast region. The feelings of helplessness, however, were overcome by members of NCCL who raised more than \$30,000 to date in support of colleagues in catechetical ministry.

Children and adults continue to create ways to raise funds for Gulf Coast catechetical programs. The youth of St. Anthony of Padua parish in Cortland, New York did a collection of coins during the Lenten Season. The director of faith formation, Bonnie Barker, created a paschal candle and each week that the children brought a coin for Operation Catechesis they could add a flame to the candle. They added a different color flame each week and by Easter the candle was filled with light. St. Anthony's has only thirty-five children in its faith formation program but their commitment to Operation Catechesis was not only a catechetical moment for each of them but an inspiration to us all.

As the project moves ahead we are pleased to report that the first installment of funds has been sent to each of the five dioceses. Little by little the affected parishes are rebuilding their programs. We encourage our members to check the list of impacted parishes and make direct contact to see if more can be done. Looking at the region and the devastation as a whole can be overwhelming but doing what you can do with the resources you have is what Operation Catechesis is all about. The youth of St. Anthony's did what they could and, as we all do the same, we join with those in the Gulf Coast in their ministry of rebuilding and recreating parish catechetical programs.

Check the NCCL website at www.nccl.org for more information about Operation Catechesis.

Patricia Vrabel is NCCL's Operation Catechesis liaison.



DISTANCE LEARNING

by Megan Anecharico

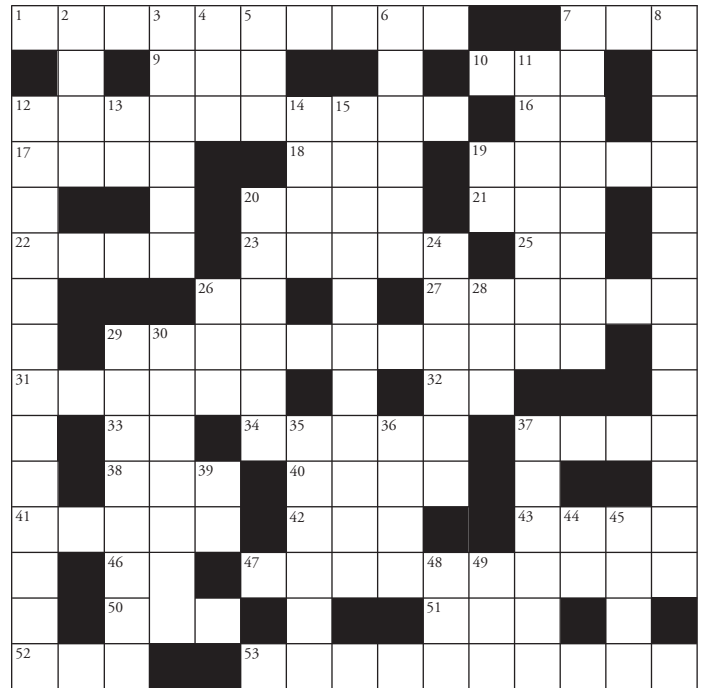
ACROSS

- 1 Professional benefit of distance learning
- 7 Tear
- 9 Driver's org.
- 10 Frozen water
- 12 Narrows
- 16 Derived from
- 17 Norway's capital
- 18 Arid, phonetically
- 19 Estuary
- 20 Swarm
- 21 Native - suffix
- 22 Distance learning on-line 47A, with 37A
- 23 Abode of the dead
- 25 Cooling unit - abbr.
- 26 Pine Tree State - abbr.
- 27 Spiny plants - var.
- 29 Distance learning requirement
- 31 Transpires
- 32 Books following OT
- 33 Muscular impairment disorder - abbr.
- 34 Meditative musical prayer form
- 37 Distance learning on-line 47A, with 22A
- 38 Gov. org. concerned with human health and the environment
- 40 Podium
- 41 Food company associated with chicken

- 42 Stringed instrument minus its vowels
- 43 Avowal of truth - 2 words
- 46 Member of the graduating class - abbr.
- 47 Conversation
- 50 Flight stat.
- 51 *Facts of Life* actress Charlotte
- 52 Conclude
- 53 Essential element for distance learning

DOWN

- 2 Selves
- 3 Used to be a year old - 2 words
- 4 Healthy grain
- 5 Rescue and recovery acronym
- 6 A busy person's lament - 2 words
- 7 Thinks about what one has learned
- 8 Essential from all parties for good 47A
- 11 Important interaction between student and professor in distance learning, personal _____
- 12 Characteristic of distance learning
- 13 Comprised of 16 MLB teams
- 14 Concept
- 15 Distance learning degrees or certificates
- 19 "2"



- 20 One who believes in the existence of a god
- 24 Play subdivisions
- 26 Montserrat country code
- 28 Picnic intruder
- 29 Logged-on to a web-site for distance learning
- 30 Distance learning peer goal
- 35 Type of distance learning interaction between student and professor

- 36 Metallic element
- 37 Carve marble
- 39 Indefinite article
- 44 Spanish affirmation
- 45 Melody
- 48 Vase
- 49 ____ Paolo, Brazil

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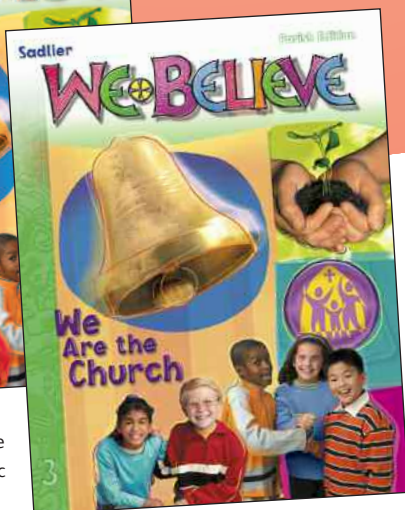
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