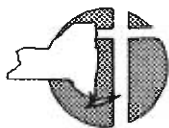




The Catechist

in the Third Millennium
Call, Mission and Formation

New York State Roman Catholic Bishops
in consultation with the
New York State Diocesan Directors of Religious Education



NEW YORK STATE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR, Archbishop of New York, President

My dear people,

It is with great pleasure that we present to you *The Catechist in the Third Millennium: Call, Mission and Formation*, our new document about catechist formation. Today there are more than 65,000 women and men serving as catechists in our parishes and schools, engaged in passing on faith to children, teens, and adults. All share the challenge of echoing the word of God faithfully and authentically in this place and time.

As we approach the new millennium, it is critical that we ensure that all catechists be well prepared and supported for this important ministry. Recent Church documents and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirm and reaffirm the priority of catechesis for the Church. To assure excellence in catechesis, these documents call for a systematic and thorough formation of catechists. Inspired by these statements of the Church, we publish this document to complement *Journeying Toward a Future Full of Promise*, our 1988 statement which called for an integrated, on-going process of catechesis. In this new document, we affirm the essential role of the catechist in this important work, and outline a standard for the formation and education of all catechists in New York State.

We are fully committed to implementing this document. The dioceses of New York State will provide parish and Catholic school catechists with the resources to fulfill the vision for formation and education that this document presents. All pastors, parish catechetical leaders and Catholic school principals should take seriously their role in assuring that catechists are aware of our expectations, and in providing catechists the appropriate means to meet the standards outlined in this document.

The writing of this document has been a collaborative work of the Bishops of New York State and the New York State Council of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education. We are grateful to the New York State Council of Catholic School Superintendents for their review and affirmation of this work. It will be the continued responsibility of the Diocesan Directors of Religious Education and the Superintendents of Catholic Schools to implement this document with our full support and cooperation.

This work will be a challenge. As we prepare for the Jubilee year, let us make every effort to see that the promise of this document becomes a reality.

May God bless you now and always.

John Cardinal O'Connor
Archbishop of New York

Most Rev. Paul S. Loverde
Diocese of Ogdensburg

Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark
Diocese of Rochester

Most Rev. Henry J. Mansell
Diocese of Buffalo

Most Rev. Thomas V. Daily
Diocese of Brooklyn

Most Rev. John R. McGann
Diocese of Rockville Centre

Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard
Diocese of Albany

Most Rev. James Moynihan
Diocese of Syracuse



I. Introduction

You are witnesses of these things. (Lk 24:48)

As we approach the third millennium, the Bishops of New York State share a great concern that the essential truths of our Roman Catholic faith and tradition be known, shared, and lived in our complex and challenging world. The Church has used the word "catechesis" to describe the ministry which seeks to make faith "...living, conscious and active..." through teaching, prayer and witness and which seeks to bring to maturity the seeds of faith sown by God. (*General Catechetical Directory* 17) The word catechesis is derived from an ancient word meaning to echo the word of God and is given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help all people believe in Jesus as the Son of God, to enable them to have fullness of life, and to build up the body of Christ. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 4) Those called to faithfully and authentically echo the word of God in each age and to each new generation are called "catechists." Although catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community, it is the catechist who is uniquely charged with the ministry of promoting and educating in faith every one "whosoever believes." (Mark 16:16) (*General Directory for Catechesis* 220)

The work of catechesis is inextricably bound to the work of evangelization. Evangelization itself is a complex, dynamic and ongoing process "...by which the Church, moved by the Spirit, proclaims and spreads the Gospel throughout the entire world." (GDC 48) Catechesis receives from the context of evangelization its missionary dynamic. Catechesis is "...a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus." (GDC 59) *The General Directory for Catechesis* follows the lead of earlier documents - *Catechesi Tradendae*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and *Redemptoris Missio* - in situating catechesis as a "moment" in evangelization. Catechesis "...lays the foundation for the building of faith." (GDC 64) It has a twofold objective of maturing initial faith and educating the newly initiated into discipleship and mission. (*Catechesi Tradendae* 19)

As the Church stands on the threshold of the new millennium, we are aware of the urgency of the tasks of both evangelization and catechesis and the challenges these present to those called to be catechists. In a rapidly changing world, our parish and school communities are being shaped and enriched by people new to our state and country who bring new languages, traditions, and cultures. We are called to work toward inculturation of the Gospel message and the Church's mission while respecting the gifts of culture and tradition of all peoples. (*Redemptoris Missio* 52) These are challenges for the Church and for all who serve as catechists.

In response to these challenges we echo the words of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II who has said:

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and by events - each of them a call from him - to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel. (CT 15)

As Bishops of New York State, we are grateful for the generosity and dedication of women and men who have served and who continue to serve as catechists in our parishes, schools, institutions, agencies, and other programs. We know how challenging it is to articulate the message of the Gospels and the doctrines of faith to a culture that speaks a very different message. We are well aware of our primary responsibility to assure excellence in catechesis so that all the faithful may grow in their knowledge of and response to the challenge of the Gospel message in today's world and so to build the kingdom of God. (*Lumen Gentium* 25, *Christus Dominus* 12, 14, *Evangelii Nunitandi* 68c, CT 12, 63) It is because we take this responsibility seriously and value the ministry of the catechist who carries on this mission at the local level, that we call for a dedication to and renewal of the formation of catechists in the State of New York. The catechist is called to witness to the Word in all areas of life. If the message of faith is to be heard and lived, the catechist must be given ongoing formation in the faith in order to understand it more fully and to speak it clearly, skillfully, and faithfully.

Therefore, we recommend that the recruitment, formation, and support of catechists be given the highest priority and the following initiatives be taken in the dioceses of New York State by the year 2000:

- New catechetical ministers will receive initial orientation and training before or during their first year of ministry;
- Catechists will participate in ongoing training and formation;
- Catechists will be certified or will be working toward certification (or have attained certification) according to the guidelines and processes of their own dioceses;
- Parishes, schools, and diocesan offices and agencies will provide adequate staffing and resources to accomplish this goal of formation and certification.

We look forward to the support and affirmation of all those in pastoral leadership in New York State as we undertake this task.



II. What Is Catechesis?

Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!
(Mt. 28:18-20)

*W*ith these words Jesus empowered the Church to continue His mission. This great commission has been handed to women and men, whom God has called, generation to generation, to proclaim the Good News. *Catechesi Tradendae* places catechesis firmly within the Church's mission - stating that "... her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis." (CT 13)

Catechesis, as a moment in evangelization, is foundational to the mission of the Church. It includes the process of initiation for adults, youth, and children as well as the intentional and systematic effort to enable all to grow in faith and discipleship. Catechesis seeks to make "...faith become living, conscious and active through the light of instruction." (GCD, 17) Its essential tasks include:

- promoting knowledge of faith;
- liturgical education;
- moral formation;
- initiation and education in community life and mission. (GDC 85)

Catechesis is a life-long process of initial conversion, formation, education, and ongoing conversion. Through word, worship, service and community, it seeks to lead all God's people to an ever deepening relationship with God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

...the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ. The Church has not ceased to devote her energy to this task. (CT 1)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* strongly affirms that catechesis is essential for developing a personal relationship with Jesus:

At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, ...To catechize is "to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person..." Catechesis aims at putting "people ...in communion... with Jesus Christ..." (CCC 426)

The importance of catechesis calls us to hold catechesis, and the preparation and support of those given responsibility for it, as one of our greatest priorities.



III. Who is the Catechist?

But those sown on good soil are the ones who listen to the word, take it to heart, and yield at thirty- and sixty- and a hundredfold.
(Mk 4:20)

This document is dedicated and written to all women and men in the dioceses of New York State who serve as catechists. Catechists are those who are called to serve through teaching, witness, prayer, service, and building community. Catechists minister to adults, youth and children in a variety of locations and programs: parish faith formation programs, Catholic schools, youth ministry programs, sacramental preparation, Christian initiation processes, family programs, and ministry formation programs. Those who are called catechist are also all pastoral leadership who serve the catechetical ministry of our Church at the parish, diocesan and national levels. While we acknowledge the role of parents as the primary catechists of their children and the essential partnership of the family in catechesis, this paper concerns primarily those who are called and formed as catechists.

A. The Call of the Catechist

At the origin of the catechist's vocation, therefore, apart from the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, there is a specific call from the Holy Spirit... (*Guide for Catechists*, 2)

The *General Directory for Catechesis* affirms the documents of the Second Vatican Council that the entire Church is called to participate by their baptism in the "...priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ..." (LG, 31) Within this common vocation, some members of the community are called by God to be catechists.

The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize. The Lord Jesus invites men and women, in a special way, to follow him, teacher and formator of disciples. (GDC 231)

The vocation and mission of the catechist is deepened in the loving knowledge of Christ which motivates him/her to proclaim, to evangelize, and to lead others to the 'yes' of faith in Jesus Christ. (CCC 429)

The call and response to become a catechist is recognized in the local Church by the bishop. The response to this call includes willingness to give one's time and talent, not only to catechizing others, but to one's own growth and understanding of the faith. (NCD 206) The call to this ministry is often articulated through another person such as the pastor, Catholic school administrator, catechetical leader, or youth minister. Although the need for catechists is great, care and sensitivity must be used in the recruitment and selection of those called to this ministry. Application, discernment and selection processes according to diocesan norms must be carefully followed. References must be checked thoroughly by those in pastoral leadership.

B. Qualities and Characteristics of the Catechist

To serve effectively as a catechist in the Church, a person must possess and exhibit qualities or characteristics necessary to give credible witness to the Gospel. Human qualities of compassion and kindness, common sense, a sense of humor, an open and understanding heart, and a sense of one's own self-worth are among the basic requirements for this pastoral ministry.

Beyond these basic human qualities, a catechist must exhibit a real and vital Catholic Christian faith based on a personal relationship with Christ that is nourished in and through the Church. This spirituality includes a commitment to prayer, Scripture reading and reflection, and an openness to the movement of the Spirit in his or her life. A catechist must be committed to the Eucharist, communal worship, the living tradition of the Church and its teachings, and have an ecclesial sense lived out through the practice of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love in conformity with Catholic Christian moral standards. (NCD 205-211) A "...solid spirituality and transparent witness of life..." are foundational to this ministry. (GDC 156) The new *General Directory for Catechesis* affirms that the catechist

...is essentially a mediator. He [she] facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community. For this reason, [the catechist's] cultural vision, social condition and lifestyle must not be obstacles to the journey of faith.

...[the catechist] ensures that his [her] activities always draw support from faith in the Holy Spirit and from prayer. (GDC 156)

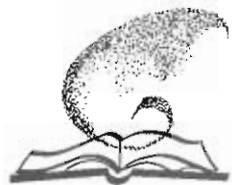
To be an effective minister of the Word, the catechist must already have or show the potential for developing certain characteristics specifically significant to that ministry. One must understand and care for the community with whom she or he ministers - adults, youth, and children. One must demonstrate patience, flexibility, openness and ability to listen. Those called to the ministry of catechesis should be generous with their time and talent, open to deepening their understanding of the theology and methodology necessary for teaching, and be able to communicate faith and knowledge effectively in both word and deed.

C. Responsibilities of the Catechist

A catechist must be willing to accept and fulfill to the best of his or her ability the following responsibilities associated with the catechetical ministry:

- to be a model of Catholic Christian faith and lifestyle;
- to participate in the spiritual, theological and methodological training provided by parish, Catholic school, and diocesan formation and certification programs;
- to know and abide by the parish, Catholic school, and/or diocesan guidelines and policies promoting effective catechesis;
- to give sufficient preparation time for the catechetical task;
- to contribute to and support, by one's presence, a spirit of community with other catechists, and the people whom one catechizes.

It is the responsibility of the pastor and those in parish/school leadership to invite catechists to understand and take ownership of their responsibilities and to hold catechists accountable for them.



IV. Selection, Formation and Ongoing Training of Catechists

Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.
(Mt 28:20)

*T*he fundamental tasks of catechists are to proclaim Christ's message, to participate in efforts to develop community, to lead people to worship and prayer, and to motivate them to serve others." (NCD 213) Therefore, the careful selection of women and men called to be catechists and their initial and on-going formation are the greatest factors in assuring the quality of catechesis in the parish, school, and diocese. Formation will help the catechist to grow in maturity as an adult, a believer and an apostle. (GDC 238) Catechists must have sufficient knowledge and background to carry out their ministry effectively. They are charged with bringing others to a fuller understanding of the challenge of the Gospel message and the Church's living out of that message. To do that well, they must be formed themselves.

A. Initial Conversation or Interview

The ministry of the catechist is critical to the very life of the Catholic community. Therefore, great care must be exercised in the selection of catechists. Once the pastoral leader or members of the Catholic community have surfaced candidates for the ministry of catechist, the candidates should participate in a discernment of gifts. This would normally take the form of a conversation or interview between the catechist and the catechetical leader of the parish or the Catholic school.

The initial dialogue should include:

- the catechist's commitment to the Church and the Church's teachings;
- the place of faith in the life of the candidate;
- the importance of the Eucharist and communal worship;
- an assessment of the candidate's background and catechetical experience;
- discussion of mutual expectations;
- the role and responsibilities of the catechist mentioned earlier in this document;
- policies and procedures of the parish or school program;
- diocesan requirements for initial and ongoing formation;
- completion of parish/Catholic school/diocesan application form with references.

Not every candidate will be suitable for the ministry of catechist. This discernment will help determine how the gifts of the candidate may best serve the Catholic community. After the initial conversation, discernment of gifts and mutual consensus that the candidate will minister as a catechist, the candidate and a representative of the parish catechetical community or Catholic School should sign an agreement outlining the responsibilities of each. The community may acknowledge this agreement in a rite of commissioning, possibly on Catechetical Sunday or in the context of a parish or school celebration.

B. Orientation

Prior to the beginning of his/her ministry, each catechist should participate in an introductory formation program that will:

- introduce this ministry as a vocation;
- introduce the curriculum;
- teach age-appropriate faith formation processes;
- introduce ways to maintain an effective catechetical environment;
- introduce lesson planning skills;
- acquaint the catechist with resources;
- review the policies and procedures for catechesis in the parish, Catholic school or diocese;
- introduce the process for continuing catechist formation and certification in the diocese.

C. Ongoing Formation and Training

Parish and diocesan personnel need to work together to ensure that there are opportunities for catechists to develop their own personal and communal faith, their spiritual life, their knowledge and understanding of Church doctrine and tradition, their skills, abilities and competencies. Only through fully developed courses, diverse teaching/learning experiences, classes, seminars, retreats, study groups, etc.--at parish, regional, diocesan levels—will we be able to realize the vision of quality religious education for all. (*Journeying Toward a Future Full of Promise: Catechesis in New York State: Reflections and Challenges, p.7*)

Catechists need not only introductory, but also ongoing formation in theology, catechetical methodology, and spirituality for this ministry. They are expected to comply with diocesan certification policies, and, even after completing certification, to continue with annual ongoing formation. Catechist formation should offer diverse opportunities for growth in knowledge and understanding and be presented in a variety of ways that honor the experience and lifestyles of the catechists.

The curricula for the formation of catechists in the *General Directory for Catechesis* includes background in the Old Testament, the life of Jesus, the history of the Church, a deepened understanding of the Creed, the moral life, liturgy and prayer. "... Sacred Scripture should be the very soul of this formation." (GDC 240)

In addition, catechists need to be familiar with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as an important compendium of Church teaching and as a rich resource for their ministry. Because the first step in catechesis is initiatory catechesis - that is preparing people to celebrate the paschal mystery - and because the catechumenal model is the primary model for this catechesis, the *General Directory for Catechesis* also emphasizes that all catechists must have a basic understanding of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and of how this process is linked to catechesis. (GDC 91)

Theological formation should include the following topics:

- Evangelization
- Catechism of the Catholic Church
- God and Trinity
- Scripture and Revelation

- Christology
- Ecclesiology
- Eastern Catholic Churches
- Sacraments
- The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
- Morality
- Social Mission of the Church
- Prayer and Liturgy
- Vatican II
- Mary and the Saints
- The Christian Vision of Human Sexuality
- Ecumenism and Relationship with other Faith Communities

Catechetical methodology should include:

- Creating the Climate for Catechesis
- Catechetical Methods for Different Age Groups and Abilities
- Psychology of the Learner
- Learning Styles
- Psychological, Moral and Faith Development
- Introduction to Catechetical Documents and Resources
- Family Perspective
- Multicultural Perspective
- Use of Media and Resources

Opportunities for Spiritual Growth for catechists might include:

- Retreats
- Days or Evenings of Reflection
- Prayer and Reflection on the Scriptures
- Eucharistic Celebrations



V. Partnerships in Catechesis

Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized but also brings the community itself to maturity.
(GDC 221)

Catechesis is not accomplished in isolation but requires the collaboration and partnership of many people and ministries who provide invaluable support. It is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. It arises from the particular context of relationships so that all who are catechized are welcomed into the life of the community and can live as fully as possible what they have learned. (CT 24)

A. The Parents and Family

For children, parents are the first and foremost catechists who plant the seeds of faith long before participation in any formal catechetical programs. "This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable." (GDC 226) Parents teach powerfully by the way they live and practice their Catholic Christian faith. It is within the family setting more than anywhere else that faith formation takes place. It is here that attitudes toward God, the Church, self and others are first learned. It is in the family that the first steps of prayer, the development of moral conscience, and the formation of Christian love which reflects the love of God is taught. The family is the place where Christian education is "...more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going than structured..." (GDC 255)

The Christian community must help parents assume their responsibility of educating their children in the faith. (GDC 227) Parish communities and schools are in partnership with families and build on the foundation laid by parents. They must take seriously their responsibility to support parents as the primary catechists and the most constant teachers in their children's lives. Parishes and schools do this by providing opportunities for adult education, spiritual enrichment and growth. Catechesis for children and youth takes root and deepens "...when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive...and help them to appropriate it." (GDC 226)

First and foremost, the parish must itself be a believing, worshipping and loving community. It will be very difficult for catechesis to have a lasting impact on young people if the example and support of the adult community is not present. Parents need to ensure that catechesis is a priority in the parish and insist that the best resources in persons and materials are provided for this critical ministry. Parents should discern their own call to be catechists and should work for the on-going development and improvement of catechetical programs.

B. The Parish Community

Although catechesis is rooted in the home and family, the parish is the most important locus in which the Christian community is formed and expressed. (GDC 257) The entire parish community catechizes by its faith, prayer, witness, and service. The parish is called to be a "...welcoming family where Christians become aware of being the people

of God." (GDC 257) Although the parish is undergoing change and transformation, it is still the "...prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis."(CT 67b) A vibrant and faithfilled community is an essential component of our catechetical efforts. It is, therefore, imperative that a parish never cease its own renewal efforts and uphold catechesis as a vital and essential priority of parish life. For most Catholics, the parish is the single most important aspect of the Church. It is here that they live their faith and experience the support of community. It is here that they offer worship and praise to the Father through Jesus in the power of the Spirit and go out in service to all in need.

The parish makes catechesis real by ensuring that the commitment to and the resources for catechesis are a priority. The parish calls members of the community to be catechists and provides for the environment and support needed for people of all ages to grow in faith. The parish needs to assist the catechist in developing the knowledge and skills for catechesis. (NCD 213)

C. The Pastor and all Priests

The function proper to the presbyterate in the catechetical task arises from the sacrament of Holy Orders, ...the ministry of the priest is a service which forms the Christian community and coordinates and strengthens other charisms and services. (GDC 224)

The sacrament of Holy Orders constitutes priests as "educators of the faith." (GDC 224) By virtue of his office, the pastor is to provide catechetical formation for adults, youth, children, and catechists. (*Code of Canon Law, 776, 777*) The pastor and all priests are called to foster the vocation and work of catechists and to assist the catechist to live out his/her baptismal call and unique role in the mission of the Church. (GDC 224)

The pastor is primarily responsible for assuring that the catechetical needs, goals and priorities of the parish are identified, articulated, and met. The *General Directory for Catechesis* lists the following catechetical tasks proper to pastors and priests:

- to foster a sense of *common responsibility* for catechesis in the Christian community ... and a recognition and appreciation for catechists and their mission;
- to care for the *basic orientation* of catechesis and its planning by giving emphasis to active participation of catechists and by insisting that catechesis be well structured and oriented;
- to promote and discern *vocations* to the service of catechesis, and, as catechist of catechists, attend to their formation by giving the greatest attention to this duty;
- to integrate catechetical activity into...*community evangelization*; and foster the link between catechesis, sacraments and the liturgy;
- to secure the bonds between the catechesis of their communities and the *diocesan pastoral program* by helping catechists become active cooperators in a common diocesan program. (GDC 225)

It is imperative that all priests continue to grow in faith and knowledge through study and prayer in order to enrich their ministry and provide witness for the parish. (NCD 217) The preaching ministry of the pastor and all priests is one of his most important opportunities for catechesis in the parish. The pastor is called to be a cooperative and collaborative leader working with the parents, parish/school catechetical leaders and catechists to ensure fidelity to Catholic tradition and quality in catechesis. The pastor often delegates the responsibility for the over-all planning and direction of the catechetical program to the catechetical leader or Catholic school principal. In collaboration with these leadership persons, the pastor has a unique opportunity to set the tone and create a spirit of enthusiasm, commitment and support for catechesis. The pastor and the parish/school

catechetical leader are called to work collaboratively and cooperatively to guide and direct the catechetical mission of the parish/school. The pastor is called to give catechesis his best effort to assure that the parish community grows in faith. (CT 64)

Experience bears out that the quality of catechesis in a community depends very largely on the presence and activity of the priest. (GDC 225)

D. The Parish/School Catechetical Leader:

The parish/school catechetical leader is responsible for planning and directing the formation process of catechists in cooperation with the pastor and in accordance with diocesan guidelines. He or she realizes that although the quality of the parish/school faith formation is determined by many factors, it is the training and support of the catechist that is the ultimate key to the effectiveness of the entire mission and ministry. Because many who respond to the call to become catechists do not have knowledge and skills adequate for this ministry, the formation of catechists becomes the prime responsibility of the parish/school catechetical leader and must always be a priority.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* strongly reminds us that "... the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel." (GDC 234) Therefore with the support of the pastor and community, the parish/school catechetical leader provides for the recruitment and selection of potential catechists, an orientation process and initial training. To provide for on-going formation and training, the parish/school catechetical leader plans regular in-service formation opportunities which comply with diocesan standards and certification policies. The parish/school catechetical leader is also called to supervise and evaluate those called to this ministry to assure that the doctrines and traditions of our faith are taught with fidelity and clarity in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. (NCD 218)

E. The Diocesan Office

The diocesan catechetical office 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) Catechesis is so basic to the life of every particular Church, that "no diocese can be without its own catechetical office." (GCD 126) Diocesan Offices and programs "...must give absolute priority to the *formation of lay catechists.*" (GDC 234) Assisting the Bishop and serving parish/school catechetical programs, the diocesan catechetical office helps to form and articulate the diocesan vision of catechesis. The *National Catechetical Directory*, *General Catechetical Directory*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Directory for Catechesis* have set forth the following responsibilities for diocesan offices:

- encouraging and motivating all involved in the catechetical ministry;
- discerning the catechetical needs of the diocese;
- establishing criteria for effective catechetical programs;
- providing guidelines for comprehensive catechist formation;
- offering training opportunities for leaders and volunteers;
- establishing certification standards for catechetical leaders and catechists in parishes and Catholic schools;
- offering alternative models for programming and training;
- establishing policies and guidelines for sacramental catechesis;
- recommending curricula and resources;
- keeping catechetical personnel current on initiatives and Church documents which pertain to catechesis;
- collaborating with Liturgical Offices in areas of initiatory catechesis and other

offices in areas of social justice, ministry development, formation, and pastoral planning;

- collaborating with colleges, universities and institutes of pastoral formation to provide opportunities for further study;
- advocating for a multi-cultural and family perspective in catechesis;
- insuring that all children, youth, adults and persons with disabilities or special needs receive quality and comprehensive catechetical formation;
- providing assistance in the planning, implementation and evaluation of catechetical programs; and
- overseeing accountability that the vision and policies of the bishop and diocese are understood and implemented. (NCD, GCD, GDC)

F. The Bishop

The bishop is the chief catechist in the diocese and is responsible for providing sound catechesis to all. Bishops are " ... beyond all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis..." (CT 63b) The Bishop ensures that catechetical goals and priorities are established, that the necessary structures exist, and that appropriate programs are designed, executed, and evaluated. He takes every opportunity to preach and teach personally and utilizes parish visitations, pastoral letters, and all avenues of communication. He is assisted in this ministry by parents, pastors, catechists, school and parish catechetical leaders, youth ministers, and all in pastoral ministry. He is responsible for choosing qualified leaders for catechetical ministry, for assuring catechesis "... that catechists are adequately prepared for their work..." and that continuing formation is made available to them. (NCD 218, CD 14b, CIC 780) It is the responsibility of the Bishop to ensure that catechists are

...duly prepared to fulfill their task correctly, namely, that continuing formation is made available to them, that they acquire a proper knowledge of the Church's teaching, and that they learn in theory and in practice the norms proper to the pedagogical disciples. (*Canon 780*)

It is of great importance that the bishop support this ministry by assuring that adequate staffing, budget, and resources are provided for quality catechetical training in his diocese. (CT 63c, CIC 775) It is also important that he work with pastors to assure that this vision and priority is met on the parish/school level. The bishop is called to

...bring about and maintain... a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a permanent and effective organization, putting into operation the necessary personnel, means, and equipment and also financial resources. ...If catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do. (CT 63c)

Conclusion

The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings...the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church. As the 20th century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and events - each a call from Him - to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel. (C T 15)

This Millennium paper is written with great gratitude and with affirmation for those women and men within the dioceses of the state of New York who accept the call of God to be catechists in the Church of today. This vocation has never been more critical and it has never been more difficult. Societal changes, family structures, the stress of time and culture, difficulty in recruitment and maintaining those who volunteer to be catechists, lack of knowledge of the faith and skills for ministry, diminishing resources, and the constant change and pace of contemporary life could well be seen as roadblocks to the implementation of our vision. We acknowledge these as challenges, but our hope and confidence to meet them comes from deep within our hearts. God has called women and men in every generation. As we greet the new Millennium, the call of God to renew the ministry of catechesis echoes throughout every city, suburb, town, and village of our state.

There is an urgency to the call to renew catechesis. There is a need to know the rich treasure of our faith and to perfect the skills to share this with others. There is the need to understand catechesis as a step in the process of evangelization. There is a need to see the essence of catechesis and the ministry of the catechist as critical to the mission of the Church. There is a need to teach for mission and discipleship. At the heart of all catechesis is the Person of Jesus in whom is revealed God's eternal design for us. Catechesis puts us in communion with our Lord Jesus Christ and send us forth to bring the Good News to all peoples and all nations. (CCC 426) Although we are confident that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the ministry of catechesis and those called to this ministry, we know that the mission of Christ, entrusted to the Church, is far from completion. We join in solidarity with our sisters and brothers throughout the world as we dedicate ourselves - bishops, clergy, religious, laity - to a renewal of catechesis and the ministry of the catechist in the dioceses of New York State. May God's Spirit fill us with hope, commitment, faithfulness, generosity, and passion for this mission. May the vision of our Holy Father, John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* give clarity to our ministry and passion to our hearts.

As the second Millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service... (RM 1) Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel by witness and word, to all people and nations.

I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young Churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time. (RM 92)

Resources

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