

Those Who Catechize

Catechesis takes place in the many settings and all levels that make up the Church: family, parish, diocese, and nation. Catechists are called from a wide variety of backgrounds and talents. These catechists and these settings reflect life in the Holy Spirit. Nourished by prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the building of community, they make catechesis ring true in the hearts and minds of those to whom the catechist is sent.

Although all members of the community of believers in Jesus Christ participate in the Church's catechetical mission, Chapter 8 of the *National Directory for Catechesis* focuses on the roles and responsibilities of those who are called to more specific catechetical roles and provides principles, guidelines, and criteria for their formation as catechists.

Differing Roles of Those Who Catechize

Since the proclamation and transmission of the Gospel are central to the episcopal ministry, the *bishop* has primary responsibility for catechesis in the diocese. The bishop sees that the ministry throughout his diocese is supported by competent personnel, effective means, and adequate financial resources. He must also ensure that the catechetical materials used in the diocese transmit the faith completely and authentically. The bishop might consider designating a diocesan director and staff to aid him in this work.

Since *pastors* are the bishop's closest collaborators in ensuring that the goals of the diocesan catechetical mission are achieved, they have a special responsibility. Pastors need to ensure that catechesis is provided for the parish celebration of the sacraments and that the parish offers ongoing, age-appropriate catechetical formation.

Priests, parochial vicars, deacons, and seminarians, in collaboration with the pastor, have the responsibility of

forming the Christian community and fostering the ministry of catechesis by providing catechists with training and support. The parish priest should play an active role in the catechetical program, being available to celebrate the sacraments with classes or groups and assisting catechists in carrying out their responsibilities. In order to enrich their ministry as catechists, priests and deacons need to give careful attention to their own catechetical formation. Seminarians need a clear understanding of the nature, goals, and methods of catechesis as well as the processes of human growth, development, and faith formation to prepare for their future ministry as parish catechetical leaders.

By virtue of their vocation, *those in consecrated life* catechize by the witness of their vocation and their apostolic work. Throughout the history of the Church, religious have committed themselves to catechetical ministry and are particularly suited to serve as parish or diocesan catechetical leaders.

The single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a *professionally trained parish catechetical leader* who works under the direction of the pastor. Parishes must allocate essential resources to obtain a competent and able parish catechetical leader. *Coordinators of youth ministry* need theological formation as well as competence and experience in catechesis. Dioceses should provide training for youth ministers as well as

catechists in general, including a certification program when possible.

While all members of academic communities have the opportunity to build up the Church on the university and college campus, the *campus minister* has a unique and important role. Campus ministry provides catechesis to students, faculty, and staff alike.

The Catholic school not only provides academic instruction of high quality but is also an effective means for Christian formation. Under the direction of the pastor or school board, the *principal* plays a critical role in meeting the catechetical objectives of the parish. In order for the Catholic school, as a center for evangelization, to have a distinctly Catholic identity and character, a catechetical program must be an essential part of the school. *Religion teachers* must have a thorough knowledge of the Christian message and the ability to communicate it. They also need to give personal witness to the truth of what they teach. The Catholic school is a particularly favorable setting for catechesis because it provides daily opportunities for proclaiming and living the gospel message.

Parents and guardians, as well as *families*, are the most influential agents of catechesis for their children. They catechize primarily by the witness of their Christian lives and by their love for the faith. Parents or guardians are catechists for their children precisely because they are parents or guardians, not because they have developed any specialized skills. When children are baptized, parents accept the responsibility to bring up their children in the practice of the faith. At the same time the Church promises to help parents foster their children's faith. Parish life with its celebration of the Liturgy, vibrancy of the community, adult catechesis, the parish school, and catechetical programs for children and preparation for sacraments is an aid to parents and guardians.

Preparation and Ongoing Formation of Catechists

In the Church's catechetical ministry, many catechists are volunteers who bring a wide variety of talents and abilities to the vocation of catechist. The call to be a catechist is not arbitrary but is instead a process of discernment involving the catechist, pastor, and parish catechetical leaders. When the pastor invites an individual to become a catechist, some form of commissioning ceremony should be held (preferably on Catechetical Sunday, typically held in September) to express the Church's call and the catechist's generous response. Those who have a specific ministry to catechize should strive to develop their human and spiritual qualities as well as their catechetical skills. The *National Directory for Catechesis* offers guidelines for catechetical formation, both in the initiatory stage and in the ongoing formation of the intellectual, spiritual, and apostolic life of catechists.

The formation of catechists takes place most effectively within the local parish. Parish-centered programs remind the catechists that their call comes from the Church, that they are sent by the Church, and that they hand on the faith of the Church. Parish-centered programs offer opportunities for the formation of a local community of prayer, mutual support, and learning.

Opportunities for catechist formation are also provided by the diocese. The development of comprehensive catechist certification programs, institutes, workshops, and seminars are within the purview of the diocese. Some dioceses work closely with Catholic colleges or universities to set up training and certification programs. Productive use of distance-learning models can be another means of assistance for dioceses and parishes.