

## PHILOSOPHY

Jesus was sent to proclaim the Good News of God's reign. The church continues Jesus' mission and ministry and the chief focus of catechetical ministry centers on the mandate to proclaim the **word**, celebrate in **worship** and reach out in **service** to the people of God. As the General Directory for Catechesis says,

*“Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it, and communicates it in many ways”* (GDC #105).

### **The following guidelines developed by the Office of Religious Education offer:**

Vision, direction, and provide resources to help implement catechetical ministry on the local level in a variety of settings and situations. The priorities and motivation center on the kingdom of God and are rooted in the Church community.

The GDC reminds us that

*“catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community. Christian initiation, indeed, should not be the work of catechists and priests alone, but of the whole community of faith”* (GDC #78).

Inspired by this vision we move forward to involve the whole community in our catechetical efforts. We recognize that involving the **whole community** we are able to respond comprehensively to our Archdiocesan Synodal initiatives especially in areas such as: Evangelization, New Evangelization, Ongoing Education and Formation. (Gathered and Sent #3 Page 18).

Whole Community Catechesis is an approach to parish and school religious education through which adults and youth as well as children are invited to participate in faith formation together throughout the year.

- It is a process that is catechumenal in nature and provides a forum to address the needs of intergenerational and multicultural communities of faith.
- It affirms the centrality of adult formation as proposed in the pastoral Plan for Adult Formation, ‘Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us’.

*“Adult faith formation by which people consciously grow in the life of Christ through experience, reflection, prayer, and study, must be “the central task in this catechetical enterprise, becoming the axis around which revolves the catechesis of childhood and adolescence as that of old age. (Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, page 2 #5).*

Situated within the dynamic process of evangelization, catechesis finds its source in the word of God as expressed in Scripture and Tradition. An authentic catechesis is centered on the person of Jesus Christ as expressed in the General Directory for catechesis.

*“The Ministry of the Word is a fundamental element of evangelization through all its stages because it involves the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God”.* (NDC, page 49).

The Documents of the Archdiocesan Synod give special emphasis to a ‘new evangelization’ as called for by John Paul II. The ‘new evangelization’ is aimed at personal transformation and is focused on

evangelizing and re- evangelizing under catechized, inactive, and alienated Catholics, as well as reanimating those who already have discovered the presence of Christ in their lives.

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*“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus.”* (GDC #80, quoting CT).

The specific character of catechesis has a two-fold objective and the General Directory for catechesis distinguishes between:

- The primary proclamation of the gospel or initiatory catechesis, and
- Continuing catechesis.

The Directory asserts,

*‘Primary proclamation is addressed to nonbelievers and those living in religious indifference. Its functions are to proclaim the gospel and to call to conversion. Catechesis, distinct from primary proclamation of the Gospel, promotes and matures initial conversion...’*(GDC #61).

This ongoing formation implies education in the knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith in such a manner that the entire person in his/her deepest level feels enriched and transformed by the word of God (GDC #67).

A key to understanding catechesis today is to understand what we mean by *experiential catechesis*.

- It means more than experiential learning. Experiential catechesis describes that process by which the catechist leads the learners to a greater understanding of faith by beginning with the learners’ everyday experience and helping them interpret the meaning of that experience in light of God’s revelation.
- It is a process of deepening our faith, not just increasing our knowledge. We need to know not just words, but Jesus who is the Word. As catechetical leaders we are charged with the responsibility to lead people to maturity of faith. To do this we need to help them get in touch with their everyday life experiences and reflect how they encounter God there. The role of the catechist is to help the learners interpret their experiences in light of the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church.
- When the learners can see how God speaks to them and is revealed through their everyday life experiences, they will understand the close relationship between how they live and how they believe. Faith is not just what I know but also how I respond to God made present to me. This experiential approach to catechesis helps the learners to come to know Christ personally rather than simply know about Christ or about His message.

While we speak of experiential catechesis, our catechetical documents remind us that it should be systematic as well. Indeed communities of faith cannot exist without a strong, complete, and systematic catechesis for all its members.

*“By ‘complete and systematic’ we mean a catechesis that nurtures a profound, lifelong conversion of the whole person and sets forth a comprehensive, contemporary synthesis of the faith.”* (Were not our Hearts Burning Within Us, page 2 #4, GDC #121, #124).

Effective catechesis, of necessity, takes into account the level of maturity of the learners. For this reason, the approach to catechesis is not only experiential; it is also developmental. Our age has learned a great deal about effective catechesis through the empirical studies of developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Eric Erickson. Aware of the multiple intelligences and different learning styles of the learners, we have come to realize that the message of the Gospel needs to be proclaimed with understandable concepts and vocabulary suitable to the learners needs. What a five year old child is capable of understanding about faith is significantly different from that of a thirty year old adult.

Catechesis cannot be totally separated from culture.

- The ways people express their faith, while the same in essence, will often vary according to culture.
- Each of the evangelists, for example wrote this particular account of the Gospel in a way different from the other three because of the culture and background of the people for whom it was intended.
- A multi-cultural environment provides a particular challenge in catechesis. For if growth in faith is to be effectively facilitated, there must be an understanding and appreciation of the cultural backgrounds of the believers. It is no accident that the first chapter of the National Catechetical Directory speaks to this issue as it “presents some of the cultural and religious characteristics that affect catechesis in the United States”.
- Like the United States, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles finds an ethnic, cultural, linguistic and racial diversity amid its Catholic population.
- It is symptomatic of how diverse the Catholic culture is that within any given year the liturgy is celebrated in eighty one different languages within the borders of the Church of Los Angeles.

If the message of the Gospel is to be transmitted with clarity and integrity, the catechetical agenda must take into consideration the cultural context in which it is being proclaimed.

John Paul II states:

*The term inculturation expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation. Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived. This is the original “Incarnation” of the word of God and it is the model of all evangelization of the church. We can say of catechesis...that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. (GDC #109 and Catechesi Tradendae #53).*

Catechesis, culture, and social teaching are not just trendy phrases but integral parts of the Ministry of the Word. All forms of poverty not only economic but also cultural and religious are a source of concern for the church (GDC#103 Quoting Centesimus Annus 1991).

Catechesis for social justice is not an option; it is at the heart of the gospel message of Jesus Christ. “The Church’s social teaching seeks to apply the Gospel command of love to and within social systems, structures, and institutions.” (National Directory for Catechesis, page 171). In working for justice in society and in the Church we continue a long tradition of ministering to the disadvantaged

and striving to transform unjust structures. The eighty one languages spoken in the Archdiocese serve to remind us of the inter-relatedness, the inter-dependence of the world community. This inter-dependence is at the root of Catholic social teaching and ought to permeate all our catechetical efforts.

Ongoing catechesis is aware of the ecumenical and inter-religious scope of its ministry.

- It encourages dialogue and initiatives to foster unity of Christians and an awareness, respect and appreciation of other faith traditions.
- The General Directory for Catechesis calls us, "to recognize and celebrate the diversity within the community of faith, affirm the fundamental equality of every person, and acknowledge the need for charity, mutual respect, and justice among all groups in a pluralistic society ushering in the Kingdom of God" (NDC, page 216).

We trust that these guidelines will be an important reference point and resource for your ministry. They are given to you in a spirit of cooperation and support with the hope that they will provide a new and fresh commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel and enhance the work of catechesis in your parish and in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.