

## **I. FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of catechesis is to make a person's "faith become living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction" (Vatican Council II: Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church, 14). In a continuing effort to teach authentically the Gospel, the bishop, assisted at all levels by parents, priests, directors for religious education, and catechists, ensures that catechetical goals and priorities are established by the Church community, that the necessary structures exist, and that appropriate programs are designated, carried out, and evaluated (NCD #218, CCC #5, CCC - Apostolic Constitution p. 5 #3).

### **PHILOSOPHY OF THE DOCUMENT**

Catechesis speaks to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples of all people, to help them "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, thus building up the body of Christ" (CCC #4; see also CT #1,2). Catechesis imparts the doctrine of the faith in an "organic and systematic way with a view to initiating the learners into the fullness of Christian life" (CCC #5).

In this formative process that begins at birth, parents are given the profound privilege and serious obligation of being the child's first and best teachers of the faith. Most of the religious attitudes and values children acquire come from their parents and the home. The family is the first place where faith is learned, interpreted, and lived. It is the right of all children to have loving parents to support them in their development. "Parents communicate values and attitudes by sharing love for Christ and His Church and each other, by reverently receiving the Eucharist and living in its spirit, and by fostering justice and love in all their relationships" (NCD #212, CCC #2225-6). To help parents in this important responsibility, the Church understands its obligation to support and assist these parents in their family's faith journey.

The Diocese of Duluth, in an effort to be faithful in its mission to teach, understands that the "aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ" (CT #19, CCC #426). This document provides catechetical curriculum standards for parents and catechists concerning the religious formation of children preschool through eighth grades in parish religious education programs who attend parochial and/or public schools.

These standards have been developed in light of the special needs and circumstances of this distinct community within our parishes. Religious education for children who attend parochial and/or public schools presents special challenges. The limited amount of time for catechesis our children experience in a formal setting maximizes the need for quality catechesis. Faced also with

the reality that a number of our children have limited contact with our parish community outside this formal setting, it becomes a matter of extreme importance that they are nurtured in an atmosphere of welcoming and acceptance. Due to family circumstances, children sometimes attend religious education in a parish that is not their worshipping community. This can lead to further isolation and an inability to claim an identity as a Catholic. These children are often enrolled in programs which share physical space with others, whether in a parish or public facility. This can also lead to a sense of non-belonging in their parish community. Finally, their catechists, who have a deep sense of their vocation to this ministry, are often not professionally trained educators. There is a great need, then, to equip these volunteer catechists with the professional skills necessary for classroom management and developmental sensitivities.

To address these particular needs and concerns, parishes have developed various formats for religious education. In addition to the usual classroom setting in a parish school of religion model, other models for catechesis are emerging: family centered catechesis, lectionary-based catechesis, small faith sharing communities, Liturgy of the Word for children, and family neighborhood clusters. These alternative models are being studied closely to determine their effectiveness in fulfilling the catechetical mission.

These standards are intended to provide a basic set of expectations for each grade level. It is important to note that these guidelines state the minimal requirements of a student at a particular grade level. Although parish religious education formats vary, it is the expectation of the diocese that by the stated grade level a student would be able to articulate the foundational beliefs expressed.

The National Directory for Catechesis and the General Directory for Catechesis offers us an integrated vision of catechesis. "This ministry is trinitarian and christocentric in scope and spirit, consciously emphasizing the mystery of God and the plan of salvation which leads to the Father through the Son, in the Holy Spirit...The most important task of such catechesis is to provide, through the witness of committed adults, an environment in which young people can grow in faith" (NCD #47, CCC #426).

The four dimensions of catechesis provided in the National Catechetical Directory remind us that the formation of a Catholic person is the privilege and responsibility of the entire community. Thus, every religious education program should include:

## **THE MINISTRY OF WORD**

The source of catechesis, which is also its content, is one: God's word, fully revealed in Jesus Christ and at work in the lives of people exercising their faith under the guidance of the magisterium (GCD #45, CCC #5, CCC #2688). "At the heart of catechesis we find the Person of Jesus of Nazareth" (CT #5). The primary and essential object of catechesis is the mystery of Christ.

The character of catechesis has the two-fold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciples of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and mission of our Lord Jesus Christ (CT #19). All good catechesis inspires the disciple to

search for even greater knowledge. It is vital to hand on to our children a knowledge of the faith that is reasonable and provides for them a source of meaning for their lives. It must deal with all the essentials in a systematic way.

### **THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY**

“Such a community catechizes its members by its very life and work, giving witness in a multitude of ways to God’s love as revealed and communicated to us in Christ” (NCD #45, CCC #7). In the formation of a disciple, the community by its very nature teaches and models what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The community supports a child’s faith journey by offering an atmosphere of acceptance and welcome. In public worship the community expresses its desire to become more and more the visible sign of the presence of Jesus in this world. In this family the child sees, and therefore seeks, a love of the Word, a dedication to the life of service, a reverence for the living presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Practically, a community financially is called to support religious education by providing qualified personnel and resources necessary for teaching the faith. Finally, a community must always be in the process of discernment that calls forth those individuals who are given the authority to teach in the name of the parish, as well as providing the many volunteers it needs for various programs.

### **THE MINISTRY OF WORSHIP**

“The liturgy and sacraments are the supreme celebration of the paschal mystery. They express the sanctification of human life. As efficacious signs which mediate God’s loving, saving power, they accomplish the saving acts which they symbolize” (NCD #44, CCC #1074). Catechesis necessarily flows from and leads to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist which is the “summit toward which all the activity of the Church is directed” and “the font from which all her power flows” (SC 10). The deepening of faith consequently leads one to a more profound appreciation of the sacraments and the need to live a full sacramental life in the Church.

### **THE MINISTRY OF SERVICE**

“Concern for and ministry to the poor, disadvantaged, helpless and hopeless are signs that the Church is a servant” (NCD #45, CCC #2443-4, 2448). The work of catechesis is to offer the vision that service to our brothers and sisters is not an option of the Christian life, but integral to the Gospel. As the 1971 Synod of Bishops reminded us, “social justice is a constitutive element of the Gospel message.” All catechetical activity should include opportunities for serving the Church, at the local, national, and the universal levels, as well as serving the needs of our brothers and sisters everywhere.

## A. CHALLENGES CONFRONTING CATECHESIS

### FAMILY LIFE

God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution and dignity. “A man and woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family” (CCC #2202). The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. As such it has been named “the domestic church” (Lumen Gentium #11), “the privileged community” (CCC #2206) and “the original cell of social life” (CCC #2207). Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church makes clear: “The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute” (CCC #2221)

A faith filled family, then, is the primary foundation upon which any religious education program must be built. Unfortunately, not all families are aware of the importance of their role as the primary educators of their children. The parish must do all within its power to bring families to this awareness. Especially in light of this role, the parish must recognize that there exists in the world today family structures that include single-parent, extended, or blended families which combine two previous systems into one. As noted in Sharing the Light of Faith, “There is a particularly urgent need for analysis of the current status of the family, the roles of men and woman within the family and society generally, and the alterations brought about by social and economic changes” (NCD #29). Family breakdown, marital tension, poverty, drug or alcohol abuse, financial pressures, illness, death or relocation, and other difficulties can, at least temporarily, weaken a family’s ability to nurture faith.

At these times it is important for the parish community and especially the catechists to find effective means of communication with the parents. Parents should be encouraged to take an active part in the everyday religious experience of their children. Opportunities must be presented for the parents to make them more conscious of their role and more effective in fulfilling it. This can happen if the family has an understanding of what is being taught, the methods used in teaching, and the programs available which assist and support the family in its roles. Parents should have a direct role in planning programs for their children “realizing that they have an obligation to catechize according to the teaching authority of the Church” (CCC #2223-2226, 2229; cf. NCD #212, GDC #226-227, 255).

Statistics indicate that the number of religiously indifferent parents seems to have grown in the United States in recent years and the interaction between parents and children in all spheres has decreased significantly.

In view of the intrinsic importance of parents and family in transmitting cultural and religious attitudes and values, this isolation of infants, children, and youth poses major problems for catechesis....Catechists can at least make parents aware of the problem and its consequences, and encourage as much interaction as possible between them and their children (NCD #197).

## **CHURCH LIFE**

“At every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all ... into the unity of his family, the Church” (CCC #1). As the Second Vatican Council made clear, the deepest vocation of the Church is to draw all God’s people into communion and unity in Christ Jesus (LG #51).

The definitive aim of catechesis is “to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (CT #5) and with his body, the Church. However, a particular challenge that the Church faces in its catechetical ministry today is the lack of community which exists in the human family. The causes of this problem are many.

The post Vatican II Church is still perceived as a paradox by many believers and even more by non-believers. Believers who react too simplistically are scandalized when they cannot reconcile the human frailty and weakness within the Church with their idealized image. Others at the opposite end of the spectrum stumble as a result of their education when they allow individual and secular moral views to replace the message of Jesus Christ. Unresolved tensions still exist which have left some at the parish level marginalized, alienated, confused, and apprehensive.

In this environment, it is essential to recall that the General Catechetical Directory understands adult catechesis as the summit of the entire catechetical enterprise (GCD #20). “This is the principal form of catechesis because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form” (CT #43).

Every possible effort must be made to encourage and to facilitate the ongoing task of evangelization and adult education. This is particularly necessary with regard to young adults, those preparing for marriage, and pre- and post-baptismal catechesis with young parents.

## **COMMUNITY LIFE**

Catechesis continues to be confronted by many challenges emerging from within contemporary society. A growing secularism, an aggrandized personal freedom and egoism, increasing moral relativism, the disarming forces of the media, a growing mobility of peoples which disintegrates family life, a sense of apathy and complacency among some - all these challenges work against the journey toward holiness and unity.

With its ability to produce immediate news from around the globe, the media has desensitized us to the pain of poverty, the anguish of war, or the desperation of those who rely on us for aid. In many instances the media has replaced parents as the primary communicator of values to our children. Television programming, movies, music, and other multi-media sources continue to portray sexual immorality, violence, drug abuse, and alcoholism as an accepted and sometimes sought after part of society.

Computer technology and software have given our children command of a tremendous amount of information with little or no value base. Entertainment has replaced education in the

lives of many in our society. All of these issues affect the formation of our children and need to be taken seriously if we truly seek to teach the heart and mind of Jesus. The ability to provide quality catechesis in the face of these realities is a constant challenge.

## **CATECHESIS AT THE PARISH LEVEL**

### **THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR**

The bishop has the primary responsibility for catechesis within the diocese. He entrusts pastors with preaching the gospel and sharing in the responsibility of catechesis. In his role as the principal teacher of his local parish community, the pastor must first be sensitive to the needs of the parish. He must challenge his people to live their baptismal call to a lifelong conversion, a lifelong journey in faith (CCC #2033). The pastor needs to be a visible presence, who fosters the vision that religious education is the work of the whole community (CCC #2038). It is his attitude of hospitality and welcome that shapes the hearts and minds of those he shepherds.

Because the pastor may find it impossible to be solely responsible for this work, he must often provide the parish with qualified personnel such as a director for religious education or coordinator for religious education who can assist him in this catechetical work. The pastor empowers all catechists: catechetical administrators, parents, and teachers of the faith in every aspect of the life of the parish (CCC #904, 906). These catechists include those in formal religious education such as the RCIA, the Catechumenate for Children, the formal school setting, the parish program of religious education, and those in all other forms of catechesis as noted above.

### **THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (DRE) OR COORDINATOR FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CRE)**

The director for religious education (DRE) or coordinator for religious education (CRE) assists the pastor in forming and implementing a vision of religious education for the total community. Some of the responsibilities of the director for religious education or coordinator for religious education can include:

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES**

- administers the religious education program
- calls and presides over regular and special meetings of the staff of the parish religious education program

## **EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- empowers parents in their role as primary educators of their children through family catechetical and sacramental preparation programs
  - raises the consciousness of the entire parish with regard to the ministry of catechesis, the required support of and participants in this ministry, and its particular need for commitment to adult catechesis
  - works to provide excellence in the quality of the catechetical program
  - recruits, forms, and supports volunteer catechists, aides, and helpers for various levels of religious education either directly or indirectly
  - provides opportunities to deepen the spiritual life of catechists and students
  - insures the implementation of all diocesan and Church guidelines and regulations with regard to catechetics
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### **1. RESOURCE RESPONSIBILITIES**

- coordinates the use of effective resources: text materials, reference texts, supplies, audio visuals, and equipment
  - resources the content of programs, implementation of texts, and teaching techniques in cooperation with catechists, other necessary people at the parish level, and the appropriate diocesan offices
  - researches and provides guidance for the initiation, direction, and organization of various programs
  - advises the Education Committee of the Parish Council
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### **SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES**

- supervises and evaluates the operation of the programs, personnel, activities, and facilities
- supervises the keeping of records and the work of the religious education office
- sends periodic reports to the appropriate diocesan offices

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## **PUBLIC RELATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES**

- meets regularly and establishes a rapport with the Pastor, and/or his delegate(s), to inform them of matters concerning the parish religious education program and to discuss the same with them
- meets regularly and communicates with the school principal(s), where applicable
- assumes responsibility for promoting good public relations with the local parish organizations, and especially with public schools, in matters pertaining to religious education
- serves as a liaison between the parish and deanery, diocesan, and regional personnel in the area of parish religious education

In many parishes a person who is not a professional director for religious education has been given the catechetical responsibilities in their community. While these dedicated persons are committed to deepening the community's life of faith, they may not have been given the opportunity to develop the professional skills necessary for this essential work. It is the policy of the Diocese of Duluth that every parish staff would include a professional trained director for religious education, to the extent that financial resources and circumstances allow.

<b>B. THE ROLE OF CATECHIST</b>
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A catechist is anyone who participates formally or informally in a person's religious formation. Some, however, are called to more specific roles.

A catechist who teaches in the name of the Church, however, is one called and commissioned by the Church with a special responsibility. For it is not the catechist who teaches but Christ who teaches in him or her.

“Whatever be the level of his responsibility in the Church, every catechist must constantly endeavor to transmit by his teaching and behavior the teaching and life of Jesus. He will not seek to keep directed towards himself and his personal opinions and attitudes the attention and the consent of the mind and heart of the person he is catechizing. Above all, he will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ's teaching and the lessons of his life. Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: ‘My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.’ Saint Paul did this when he was dealing with a question of prime importance: ‘I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.’ What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church's Magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say: ‘My teaching is not mine!’ ” (CT #6).

A person who is called to teach in the name of the Church is someone who speaks from the depths of their own personal faith journey. This presupposes a deeply spiritual and religious life. A life of prayer, an openness to the Word of God in the Scriptures, an intense love for the Church and her teachings, and a commitment to the Church that includes a full sacramental life are the “pearls of great price” a teacher is called to share with their students.

While these qualities are at the core of a catechist’s life, “the summit and center of catechetical formation lies in an aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel message.” A catechist must possess the unambiguous commitment to convey the truths of the faith in a clear and consistent manner (GCD #111). Also needed are the skills necessary to effectively teach the heart and mind of Christ as proclaimed in the teaching of the Church. Training in theology as well as classroom management and pedagogy are essential elements in a catechist’s preparation and formation (CCC #906).

Equipped with the necessary skills, a catechist is able to proclaim the Good News with a conviction and joy that can help inform the mind, affect the will, and shape the heart of every student.