

# The DC and Me

When a new document comes from Rome, each of us might ask, “What does it have to do with me?” The answer, when that document is the *Directory for Catechesis* (DC), is that it has a lot to do with you, with every catechist and catechetical leader, with every parent, and, in fact, with every baptized person.

All the baptized are called to be missionary disciples sharing the Good News through witness and word. Parents are the first heralds of that Good News for their children; catechetical leaders and catechists support and enhance that heralding through learning and experiences of faith.

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Since this is the mission of the Church, it is the Church who defines what that mission is and how it should be done. The DC continually refers to catechesis as being ecclesial, that is, belonging to the Church, taking place within the community, and leading to belonging (55, 176, 218, 219, 296).

The last document from Rome on catechesis was in 1997. What has changed in your life, in the lives of those catechized, in society, in the world since 1997? The list of changes and their impacts is enormous! The *Directory for Catechesis* identifies some of those changes and how best to catechize in our contemporary world.

Catechesis is inspired by the pedagogy of God and his Son, Jesus (157, 159, 160, 165). It is a relational process, inviting people into relationship with Jesus, with the Trinity, and with the Church community (140). Catechists, therefore, must understand both the message of faith and the lives of those who are being catechized (136, 145, 146).

What do you know about those you are catechizing? Do you know their joys, their struggles, their questions, and their hopes? The catechist has the awesome task of connecting the faith to people's real lives. Only then can the message truly be Good News and how to live the faith be clear.

The catechist is to both accompany and educate (113c). Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the catechist listens to where people are, what their story is, and then proclaims the message that relates to their experience. Just as God revealed slowly, and Jesus revealed patiently, so the catechist recognizes that understanding and living the faith is a gradual process.

At times this ministry, whether at home, in the parish, or in school, can seem overwhelming, but the catechist is one who trusts the Holy Spirit's guidance. Embrace your call; give thanks, for there are some who will live the faith because of you!

## For Reflection

### PARENTS

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*Connect your good deeds to living your faith. Explain to your children why you do service, and talk about what you can do together.*

### CATECHETICAL LEADERS

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*Write down what you know about each catechist's life. Address formation to their real lives.*

### CATECHISTS

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*When preparing your lesson, ask yourself how this content will connect with the lives of the catechized. Introduce the lesson with a story or example that makes the connection.*

# We Catechize

The ecclesial nature of catechesis is woven throughout the Directory. God's revelation to people is intended to call them into communion and unity. Jesus did the same: he called people into relationship with him and into community. Catechesis is part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, and it also prepares people to participate in that mission.

The sense of belonging to the Church community is deeper than relationships with organizations. We share an intimate relationship with the Trinity and one another. Unlike other groups we can join and then drop out of, we are baptized for life, and our very identity is as a member of the body of Christ.

Catechesis deepens this identity, not only through the cognitive dimension, but through experiences of faith with the Church community. There are many ways to enhance the experiences of faith beyond our homes and classes and with members of the community beyond those places.

How do we make the ecclesial reality an integral part of our catechizing? Sunday Mass is of primary importance and, for young and

seasoned members, participating in the liturgical ministries can be helpful. Whether they serve as lectors or altar servers or music ministries, the more we connect all ages of the community, the richer we will make catechesis.

In fact, it was the communal witness of the early Christians that was an initial evangelizing moment. The early Christian writer Tertullian wrote, “See how these Christians love one another.” And others joined the community despite persecutions.

There are many ways to develop relationships within the community. Social justice efforts and service outreach can provide a way for all ages to work together. When these are done in the context of prayer and with reflection afterward, we connect our communal work toward justice and service to Jesus.

The Directory references the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which summarizes the content of faith. The Catechism is organized around the dimensions of faith; catechesis attends to the Profession of Faith, the Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Life in Christ, and Christian Prayer (189). These are the dimensions that held the early Christian community together in faith, and these same aspects have continued in catechesis throughout the ages. The Directory calls for balance and harmony in these four areas.

Clearly, catechesis is to be multidimensional and always to strengthen the bonds of the community of faith. The Directory, therefore, states that the catechumenal model is to be the inspiration for all catechesis (64). But what does that mean?

Here are the ways the Directory suggests. All catechesis is focused on Jesus Christ and his life, passion, death, and resurrection. All catechesis provides knowledge and experiences of all di-

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**What do others say of our community? What do we do in catechesis to enhance our unity and love? Ask those you catechize where there are divisions and how together we can address those divisions.**

mensions of the Christian life and is rich in liturgical, ritual, and symbolic signs. All catechesis calls for conversion of heart, which leads to a new way of living and is a dynamic formative process that respects the maturity and life story of each person. How do you attend to these dimensions?

It is a tall order, unless we remember that catechesis is to be lifelong, not accomplished in a year or two. Perhaps the Directory's guidelines for proclaiming the saving work of Jesus Christ are helpful in assessing our ministry. The guidelines say we are to express God's saving love and invite a free response; this expression and response should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness, and balance (59). Are these the characteristics of your catechetical sessions?

Our proclamation of the Good News must also be appropriately inculturated, that is, attentive to the culture/s in which we proclaim. We can find in every culture the seeds of the gospel to be nourished. Every culture also has elements that the gospel, when accepted, will transform.

In and through all of this, "the work of the catechist consists in finding and drawing attention to the signs of God's action already present in the lives of persons" (179). For those catechized and for us, catechesis is indeed a gradual process that depends on the Holy Spirit. Each catechist is "a respectful facilitator of an experience of faith" of which the catechist "is not in charge" (148).

Throughout the ages, the Holy Spirit has inspired catechists to employ a variety of methods. We use human experience to relate the message to real life and to elucidate the presence of God today. We make use of language, narrative, art, music, digital resources, and appropriate memorization to both proclaim and invite responses.

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**What are the cultures present in those you catechize? What do you know about those cultures? The aim of knowing the cultures of the catechized is to ensure they can internalize the message and make it their own in order to live it.**

The entire Directory points to a new way of doing catechesis—not just with a lesson plan, although at some point those are necessary. The Directory speaks of preparing an “itinerary of faith” (149).

Itinerary means a planned route or journey. Have you ever planned a vacation? The itinerary might include the roads you want to travel, the places you want to see, people you want to visit, even where you want to eat or shop.

A catechetical journey should include many experiences and many people, since we catechize in many ways and it is “we” who do it. What experiences will you include? Who will you introduce to those you catechize? A basis for the itinerary is covered in the next chapters as we explore the tasks of catechesis presented in the Directory.

## For Reflection

PARENTS, CATECHETICAL LEADERS, AND CATECHISTS

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*How will you foster an ecclesial identity in those you catechize?*

*Do those you catechize know the pastor and the parish staff?*

*Are they familiar with the parish organizations and leaders?*

*Make a list of people will invite to give witness talks.*