

Catechist Formation: Catechetical Ministry

Theme

Jesus formed his disciples by making known to them the various dimensions of the Kingdom of God.

Catechist Competencies

1. Will understand the tasks of catechesis.
2. Draw a connection between the personal qualities of a catechist and the tasks of catechesis.
3. Will understand certification requirements.

Catechism References

#12; 425-429; 2663-2669



Focusing the Study

“And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love.”
(Ephesians 4:11-16)

Introduction

The apostolic work of the catechist springs from the Sacrament of Baptism through which all believers come to share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and the evangelizing mission of the Church. It is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. The call to the ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call, the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Catechetical Ministry

The catechist plays an integral role in the ministry of the Church at the service of the Word of God. “At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, ‘the only Son from the Father...full of grace and truth,’ who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever. It is Jesus who is ‘the way and the truth and the life,’ and Christian living consists in following Christ” (Catechesi Tradendae, 5). Catechists teach the faith, pointing always to Christ and His truth, and form their students in knowledge and practice of our religion, through which we worship God.

“Catechesis is that particular form of the ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith” (National Directory for Catechesis, p. 54).

Tasks of Catechesis

Jesus formed his disciples by making known to them the various dimensions of the Kingdom of God. He entrusted to them “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”:

- He taught them how to pray;
- He opened his “meek and humble heart” to them;
- He sent them “ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.”

Christ’s method of formation was accomplished by diverse yet interrelated tasks. His example is the most fruitful inspiration for effective catechesis today because it is integral to formation in the Christian faith. Catechesis must attend to each of these different dimensions of faith; each becomes a distinct yet complementary task. Faith must be known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer. So catechesis comprises six fundamental tasks, each of which is related to an aspect of faith in Christ. All efforts in evangelization and catechesis should incorporate these tasks. (National Directory of Catechesis, p.59)

Catechesis comprises six (6) fundamental tasks to achieve its objective of formation of disciples of Jesus Christ:

1. ***It promotes knowledge of the faith.*** The first time a person hears the Gospel it invites him/her to conversion. In this encounter the Holy Spirit elicits in the hearer a desire to know about Christ, his life and his message. Catechesis responds to this desire by giving the believer knowledge of the message of God which is found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and introduces them to the meaning of the Creed.

2. ***It promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the Sacraments.*** Christ is present in the sacraments and the believer comes to know Christ in the liturgical celebrations of the Church. Christ's saving action in the Paschal Mystery is celebrated in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist where the closest communion with Jesus on earth is possible as Catholics receive his living Flesh and Precious Blood in Holy Communion. Besides explaining the liturgies, catechesis should promote an active participation in the liturgy of the Church "by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for a community spirit, and for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds" (General Catechetical Directory, no. 25).

3. ***It promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.*** Jesus' moral teaching is an integral part of his message. Catechesis must transmit both the content of Christ's moral teachings as well as their implications for Christian living. The aim is to conform the believer to Christ, to bring about his personal conversion and transformation. It encourages one to give witness to Christ in both one's private as well as everyday life. Such a living out of Christ's commands demonstrates the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel (Catechesi Tradendae, 29).

4. ***It teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ.*** Conversion to Christ and communion with him lead the faithful to adopt his disposition of prayer and reflection. Jesus' entire life was an offering to his Father. His prayer was always directed to the Father. Catechesis should invite the believer to join Christ in the Our Father. Prayer should be the ordinary environment for all catechists, so that prayer will lead to a greater knowledge and living out of their Christian life.

5. ***It prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate in the life and mission of the Church.*** (p. 61) Jesus said to his disciples, "Love one another, as I have loved you..." This command provides the basis for life in community. Catechesis encourages an apprenticeship in Christian living that is based on Christ's teachings about community life. It should encourage:

- a. a spirit of simplicity and humility,
- b. a special concern for the poor, particularly for the alienated,
- c. a sense of fraternal correction,

- d. common prayer,
- e. mutual forgiveness, and
- f. a fraternal love that embraces all these attitudes.

Catechesis encourages that we make our daily lives a shining and convincing testimony to the Gospel. Special graces are always distributed among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (1 Cor 12:7). (National Directory for Catechesis, p. 62)

6. ***It promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society.*** The world becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation. Catechesis seeks to help the disciples of Christ to be present in society as believing Christians who are able and willing to bear witness to their faith in words and deeds. Catechesis nourishes the attitudes of Jesus in the faithful:

- a. To be poor in spirit
- b. To be compassionate,
- c. To be meek,
- d. To hear the cry of injustice,
- e. To be merciful,
- f. to be poor of heart,
- g. to make peace,
- h. to accept rejection and persecution.

Catechesis recognizes that other religious traditions reflect the "seeds of the Word" that can constitute a true "preparation for the Gospel." (National Directory for Catechesis p. 62)

These six tasks of catechesis constitute a unified whole. While each task realizes the goal of catechesis, all of the tasks are interdependent. For catechesis to be effective, no task should be separated from the rest.

The Church, the community of believers, continues the mission of Jesus to bring about God's kingdom. This mission proclaims and teaches God's word, celebrates the sacred mysteries and serves the people of the world.

The proclamation and teaching of God's word are present in evangelization, catechesis, liturgy, and theology in a manner appropriate to each. Catechetical ministry is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship, which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament, and supports the ministry of

service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice. The purpose of catechesis is to make a person's "faith become living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction" (National Directory of Catechesis) While aiming to enrich the faith life of individuals at their particular stages of development, every form of catechesis is oriented in some way to the catechesis of adults, who are capable of a full response to God's word. Catechesis is a lifelong process for the individual and a constant and concerted activity of the Christian community.

Catechesis takes place in many settings, including parish and school, and in a variety of ways – liturgical celebrations, community building endeavors, outreach programs, and educational programs. Each baptized Catholic is called to minister – to heal, teach, serve and affirm others in Jesus' name. Some are called as catechists to minister by proclaiming and teaching God's word.

Personal Qualities of a Catechist

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully taught will be like his teacher."

(Luke 6:40)

The faith of a community is nourished through the living example and through the instruction of catechists. Therefore, catechists need certain personal qualities, in addition to preparation and study, for their important ministry.

Every teacher of the faith must follow the example of Christ Himself, the Good Teacher (cf. Mark 10:17, Luke 18:18). We are called to proclaim Christ to our students, to witness Christ to our students, to share the teachings of Christ with our students, and to guide our students to union with Christ. To be effective in the catechetical ministry, the catechist must:

1. Be a Catholic in good standing, called by Christ to this ministry;
2. Believe deeply in Jesus and the teachings of the Catholic Church, and desire to share that belief with others;
3. Strive always to grow in holiness, receiving frequently the Sacraments, devoting time to prayer and to the ministry of catechesis;
4. Commit themselves to their own religious education, growing in their knowledge of the Faith, teaching methods, Scriptures, and teachings of the Catholic Church;
5. Commit themselves to the teaching ministry of the Church;
6. Give active witness to their faith in word and deed both inside and outside the classroom;

7. Have a love for and sensitivity toward the students they desire to catechize;
8. Have the ability to communicate effectively with those they catechize;
9. Be willing to spend the necessary time for training, lesson preparation and the teaching of classes;
10. Be willing to teach the required texts under the direction of the pastor.

Catechist Formation

"You then who teach others, will you not teach yourself?"
(Romans 2:21a)

The Bishop, as the chief catechist in the diocese, is responsible for seeing that effective catechesis is provided for all people in the diocese. Pastors and Pastoral Associates exercise a uniquely important role and have a special responsibility for the success of the catechetical ministry. Parish Catechetical Leaders, school principals and catechists assist parents in their unique role as educators of their children.

Besides the necessary personal qualities, catechists should seek to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to communicate the Gospel message effectively. They must have a solid grasp of Catholic doctrine and worship, familiarity with Scripture, communication skills, and the ability to use various methodologies, understanding how people grow and mature, and how persons of different ages and circumstances learn.

To learn the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities for the catechetical ministry, catechists need a certain amount of formation and study for competence in their role. This certification process is offered to guide the development of catechists in parishes and schools in the Diocese of Grand Rapids.

Levels of Certification

The catechist, with assistance from their local Parish Catechetical Leaders, will work towards levels of Catechetical Certification.

Local and diocesan courses, workshops, institutes, conferences and online (internet-based) classes will be offered to assist catechists in attaining certification. Courses and workshops should ideally take place in a community atmosphere with other catechists, so learning becomes experiential, and leads to a deeper personal spirituality. Through modern technological advances, other educational opportunities can be offered to meet the various needs of catechists, allowing for group experiences and interactive learning opportunities. Catechists should strive to attain Diocesan certification in a timely manner, in order to grow in their faith and best serve in their ministry.

All catechetical employees, e.g. teachers of religion in diocesan schools, directors of religious education and volunteer catechists must work towards certification from the time they begin their employment. During the first year as a catechist, the catechist must acquire 8 hours (**Level 1**) towards Basic certification and complete **Protecting God's Children**. The eight hours must include 2 hours in each of the four dimensions (Catechist, Learner, Methods and Content)

Each "hour" is a "clock hour"

Another 16 hours of study must be completed to achieve **Level 2** and **Level 3** certification. There must be at least 2 hours in each of the dimensions each year with the additional hours in any of the four dimensions.

Upon completion of Level 3 or 40 hours of formation a catechist needs to complete 10 additional hours in order to apply for **Diocesan Catechetical Certification**. Diocesan Catechetical Certification has a cumulative total of 50 clock hours of formation.

Once Diocesan Certification is achieved, directors of religious education, teachers/catechists are encouraged to work towards **Advance Certification** with a cumulative total of 80 hours.

Renewal of Certification

Level 1 Basic Certification is not renewable. It is good for one year.

Basic Certification Level 2 and Level 3 must be renewed every two years with an additional 10 hours of formation.

Diocesan and Advanced Certification

Every three years certification must be renewed by an additional 15 hours. Three hours in each dimension. This applies to both the Diocesan and the Advanced Certification. Renewal extends certification status for three additional years.

Master Catechist Certification

Must have an Advanced Certification (80 hours) plus at least 18 Academic hours (minimum of 12 credit hours in theology, with the other 6 credit hours in theology or other disciplines related to catechetical ministry).

Renewal of Master Catechist Certification

Cumulative total of 25 clock hours of effective formation. Renewal must be completed within 5 years of achieving this level of certification. Renewal extends certification status for five additional years.

Areas of Growth

As persons called to nourish the faith of the community in a formal way, catechists themselves investigate and respond to opportunities for their personal growth, deeper understanding of the children and adults they teach, and continued appreciation of the process and message of catechesis. Catechists are to receive a balanced formation in each of the following areas of growth:

Area A – Catechist as a Person of Faith – the Spirituality of the Catechist

This area refers to those experiences which foster the catechist's personal growth as an adult believer. Examples of formation topics include: understanding and use of Scripture for prayerful reflection, growth in prayer, and reflection on one's faith-life, personal spirituality and communication/listening skills. In addition to these and related topics, retreats and days of recollection are two way to experience clock hours in this area.

Area B – Understanding the Person Being Catechized

This area refers to those experiences which assist the catechist in understanding the development of the whole person. This includes the stages of one's spiritual, moral, intellectual, psychological, social, emotional and physical development; multiple learning intelligences; various learning styles; and the impact of family, society, and culture.

Area C – Context and Process of Catechesis - Method

This area refers to those learning experiences which assist the catechist in understanding and using catechetical skills, e.g., learning environment, catechetical methodologies, group/classroom management skills, lesson planning, use of media and resources in catechesis, the use of technology for both home and classroom. This also includes an understanding of the catechetical documents that give meaning and direction to catechesis along with an acknowledgement of the role of the church, family and parish community in the catechetical process.

Area D – Message or Content of Catechesis

This area of growth refers to those learning experiences which provide knowledge and understanding of the elements of the Christian message according to the *Documents of Vatican Council II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the General and National Directory for Catechesis*. Some specific topics are: doctrine, creed, liturgy, sacraments, the content of Scripture, study of the church, church history, moral living, social justice, Mary and the saints and the various methods and types of prayer and spirituality.

Hours may be attained from:

- Participation in organized retreats or missions for the parish

- Workshops and presentations at diocesan conferences or in-services
- Deanery Days of Reflection
- Catholic Universities or Colleges
- Diocesan recognized online classes
- Classes sponsored by Catholic Information Center
- Parish Scripture Studies
- Talks/presentations at Parishes
- Study with Parish Catechetical Leader

- Teaching methods for special needs

AREA D – Message of Catechesis (content)

- Exploring various church documents
- Study of Scripture – various books of the Bible, Hebrew Scriptures, Christian Scriptures
- Morality
- Liturgy
- Church history
- Basic Church Doctrine
- The Creed: Trinitarian and Christocentric
- Prayers of the Church
- Sacraments – Initiation, Healing and Service
- Ecclesiology
- Jesus Christ
- Catholic Social Teaching
- Mary and the Saints
- Paschal Mystery
- Liturgical Year

Suggested Topic Areas for Ongoing Growth

AREA A - Catechist As A Person of Faith

- Retreats – Parish, retreat houses, school retreats, etc. Indicate subject covered
- Applying the Scriptures to everyday life
- Parish Missions
- Learning and experiencing various prayer styles
- Growth in communication/listening skills
- Talks on Spirituality, Vocation, Living out our Christian lives
- Opportunities for reflection on one's faith life and personal spirituality
- Catholic bible study and reflection

AREA B – Person Being Catechized

- Faith development of children
- Process of adult, young adult, adolescent and child learning
- Physical, psychological, moral and spiritual development
- Multi-Intelligences
- Right brain learning and spirituality
- Learning disabilities
- Special needs education
- Impact of family, society and culture and environment
- Looking at family life from various perspectives

AREA C – Context and Process of Catechesis (methods)

- Church documents on catechesis
- Effective lesson development
- Learning environment
- Classroom management
- Discipline
- Use of media and resources in catechesis
- Catechetical activities for various levels
- Understanding the role of family and community in catechesis
- Instruction on leading prayer in the classroom
- Instruction on how to prepare liturgies
- Use of technology in the classroom
- Instruction on meaningful service and outreach activities
- Catechetical and formational field trips
- Teaching the message

Examples of experiences that are not part of catechetical certification include but are not limited to:

- Volunteer experiences, i.e., Eucharistic Minister, TECH retreat counselor; social justice volunteers, Youth rallies
- Taking part in sacramental retreats with students
- Reading of magazines or books when there is no indication of how the material was discussed or how it impacted the way a person taught.

Each year the catechist completes the necessary hours of coursework, and the catechist certification application form, submitting it to the Parish Catechetical Leader or School Principal for signature. The signed form is then forwarded to the Diocesan Office of Catechesis. Letters of Certification will be sent to local Catechetical Leaders/Principals for distribution to their catechists. The catechists are thus affirmed for their continued growth and competency as they further the mission for the Church in the Grand Rapids diocese.