

SECTION B: CATECHISTS

“No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to him by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method. Only his own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other work instruments.

The catechist is essentially a mediator. The catechist facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community. For this reason, his cultural vision, social condition and lifestyle must not be obstacles to the journey of faith. Rather, these help to create the most advantageous conditions for seeking out, welcoming and deepening the Christian message. He does not forget that belief is a fruit of grace and liberty. Thus, he ensures that his activities always draw support from faith in the Holy Spirit and from prayer. Finally, the personal relationship of the catechist with the subject is of crucial importance (GDC 156).”

“While the entire Christian community is responsible for Christian catechesis and all of its members bear witness to the faith, only some receive the ecclesial mandate to be catechists. Together with the primordial mission which parents have in relation to their children, the Church confers the delicate task of organically transmitting the faith within the community on particular, specifically called members of the people of God (GDC 221).”

“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).”

“The vocation of the laity to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism. It is strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation they participate in the ‘priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ.’ In addition to the common vocation of the apostolate, some lay people feel called interiorly by God to assume the service of catechist. The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize. The Lord Jesus invites men and women, in a special way, to follow him, teacher and formator of disciples. This personal call of Jesus Christ and its relationship to him are the true moving forces of catechetical activity. ‘From this loving

knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to “evangelize,” and to lead others to the “Yes” of faith in Jesus Christ.’ To feel called to be a catechist and to receive this mission from the Church acquires different levels of dedication in accordance with the particular characteristics of individuals. At times the catechist can collaborate in the service of catechesis over a limited period or purely on an occasional basis, but it is always a valuable service and a worthy collaboration. The importance of the ministry of catechesis, however, would suggest that there should be in a Diocese a certain number of religious and laity publicly recognized and permanently dedicated to catechesis who, in communion with the priests and the Bishop, give to this diocesan service that ecclesial form which is proper to it (GDC 231).”

“I am anxious to give thanks in the Church’s name to all of you, lay teachers of catechesis in the parishes, the men and the still more numerous women throughout the world, who are devoting yourselves to the religious education of many generations. Your work is often lowly and hidden but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal, and it is an eminent form of the lay apostolate, a form that is particularly important where for various reasons children and young people do not receive suitable religious training in the home. How many of us have received from people like you our first notions of catechism and our preparation for the sacrament of penance, for our first communion and confirmation! The Fourth General Assembly of the Synod did not forget you. I join with it in encouraging you to continue your collaboration for the life of the Church” (CT 66).”

“It is Christ alone who teaches - anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ’s spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips....Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: ‘My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me’ (CCC 427).”

“Whoever is called ‘to teach Christ’ must first seek ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus’; he must suffer ‘the loss of all things...’ in order to ‘gain Christ and be found in him,’ and ‘to know him and the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible he may attain the resurrection from the dead’ (CCC 428).”

“From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to ‘evangelize,’ and to lead others to the ‘yes’ of faith in Jesus Christ. But at the same time the need to know this faith makes itself felt (CCC 429).”

Response to a Call

“As important as it is that a catechist have a clear understanding of the teaching of Christ and His Church, this is not enough. He or she must also receive and respond to a ministerial call, which comes from the Lord and is articulated in the local Church by the bishop. The response to this call includes willingness to give time and talent, not only to catechizing others, but to one’s own continued growth in faith and understanding.

Witness to the Gospel

For catechesis to be effective, the catechist must be fully committed to Jesus Christ. Faith must be shared with conviction, joy, love, enthusiasm, and hope. The summit and center of catechetical formation lies in an aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel message. This is possible only when the catechist believes in the gospel and its power to transform lives. To give witness to the gospel, the catechist must establish a living, ever-deepening relationship with the Lord. He or she must be a person of prayer, one who frequently reflects on the scriptures and whose Christ like living testifies to deep faith. Only men and women of faith can share faith with others, preparing the setting within which people can respond in faith to God's grace.

Commitment to the Church

One who exercises the ministry of the word represents the Church, to which the word has been entrusted. The catechist believes in the Church and is aware that, as a pilgrim people, it is in constant need of renewal. Committed to this visible community, the catechist strives to be an instrument of the Lord's power and a sign of the Spirit's presence.

The catechist realizes that it is Christ's message which he or she is called to proclaim. To insure fidelity to that message, catechists test and validate their understanding and insights in the light of the gospel message as presented by the teaching authority of the Church.

Sharer in Community

The catechist is called to foster community as one who has learned the meaning of community by experiencing it. Community is formed in many ways. Beginning with acceptance of individual strengths and weaknesses, it progresses to relationships based on shared goals and values. It grows through discussion, recreation, cooperation on projects, and the like.

Yet it does not always grow easily; patience and skill are frequently required. Even conflict, if creatively handled, can be growth-producing, and Christian reconciliation is an effective means of fostering community. Many people have had little experience of parish community and must be gradually prepared for it.

Christian community is fostered especially by the Eucharist, which is at once sign of community and cause of its growth. The catechist needs to experience this unity through frequent participation in the celebration of the Eucharist with other catechists and with those being catechized. Awareness of membership in a Christian community leads to awareness of the many other communities in the world which stand in need of service. The catechist seeks to cooperate with other parish leaders in making the parish a focal point of community in the Church.

Servant of the Community

Authentic experience of Christian community leads one to the service of others. The catechist is committed to serving the Christian community, particularly in the parish, and the community-at-large. Such service means not only responding to needs when asked, but taking the initiative in seeking out the needs of individuals and communities, and encouraging students to do the same.

Sensitive to the community's efforts to find solutions to a host of complex problems such as war, poverty, racism, and environmental pollution, which undermine community within and among nations, the catechist educates to peace and justice, and supports social action when appropriate. The Church often becomes involved in efforts to solve global problems through missionaries, who also carry out in a special way its mission of universal evangelization. The catechist should show how support for missionary endeavors is not only required by the Church's missionary nature but is an expression of solidarity within the human community.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

Although even the best preparation for catechetical ministry will have little effect without the action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of catechists and those being catechized, catechists should certainly 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; the ability to use various methodologies; understanding of how people grow and mature and of how persons of different ages and circumstances learn (NCD 206-211)."

Parish Catechists

“**P**arish catechists, many of whom are volunteers, may be engaged in catechizing adults, young people, children, or those with special needs. Theirs is a particular way of carrying out the promise which the Church makes at every Baptism: to support, pray for, and instruct the baptized and foster their growth in faith.

The fundamental tasks of catechists are to proclaim Christ's message, to participate in efforts to develop community, to lead people to worship and prayer, and to motivate them to serve others. To accomplish all this, catechists must identify and create "suitable conditions which are necessary for the Christian message to be sought, accepted, and more profoundly investigated. They recognize, however, that faith is a gift and that it is not ultimately their efforts but the interaction of God's grace and human freedom which lead people to accept faith and respond to it.

Parish and diocesan personnel and others involved in catechetical ministry should help catechists develop the qualities outlined here. Because catechists approach their task with varying degrees of competence, programs should be designed to help individuals acquire the particular knowledge and skills they need. Catechists typically participate in a variety of

teaching and learning programs, liturgical experiences, classes, retreats, service programs, study clubs, and similar activities. They carry on their ministry in parish catechetical programs, Catholic schools, and other settings. Their training should equip them to make effective use of the resources available for catechesis and to adapt materials to the age, capacity, and culture of those they seek to reach.

Men and women from all walks of life volunteer for parish catechetical programs. Parish and diocesan programs for the preparation and in-service training of volunteers should include the following elements:

1. Basic orientation and preparation, including instruction in theology, scripture, psychology, and catechetical techniques. They should be shown how to identify goals and achieve them in their particular circumstances.
2. Opportunities for liturgical celebrations, prayer, retreats, and other experiences of Christian community with others engaged in this ministry.
3. Continuing in-service educational opportunities.
4. Regular assistance, from more experienced persons, in planning and evaluating their performance.
5. Opportunities to evaluate not only their performance but the programs in which they are involved.
6. More specialized training for those who will work with physically or mentally handicapped persons.
7. Cultivation of a sense of community among the catechists during the entire formation process.
8. Some form of commissioning ceremony which expresses the faith community's call and the catechists' dedicated response (**NCD 213**).

“Formation seeks to enable catechists to transmit the Gospel to those who desire to entrust themselves to Jesus Christ. The purpose of formation, therefore, is to make the catechist capable of communicating: The summit and center of catechetical formation lies in an aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel message.

By virtue of the fact that formation seeks to make the catechist capable of transmitting the Gospel in the name of the Church, all formation has an ecclesial nature. The formation of catechists is nothing other than an assistance for them in identifying with the Gospel, in order to make them capable of transmitting it in his name.

In concrete terms, the catechist--in his formation--enters into communion with that aspiration of the Church which, like a spouse, keeps pure and intact the faith of the Spouse and

which, as “mother and teacher” desires to transmit the Gospel by adapting it to all cultures, ages, and situations. This truly ecclesial quality of the transmission of the Gospel permeates the entire formation of catechists and gives to that formation its true nature (**GDC 235, 236**).”

Section B: Principle

The bishop, along with his pastors, provides “...for the catechesis of the Christian people so that faith of the faithful becomes living, explicit and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living (**CJC, Canon 773**).” Pastors, with the assistance of catechetical administrators, carry out this teaching mission in the local parish church through a variety of educational ministries, one of which is the parish CCD program. Integral to this program is the the ministry of the volunteer catechist. This catechist teaches in a systematic way the Word of God to children, youth, and adults and proclaims the word by his/her own living witness of the faith.

A person who is called to teach in the name of the church is someone who speaks from the depths of a personal faith journey. A catechist helps others to name the movement of God in their lives in light of the Catholic faith. This presupposes a deep spiritual and religious life, one who practices his or her faith regularly and follows the teachings of Christ and his Church.

A life of prayer, an openness to the Word of God in the Scriptures and a commitment to the community that includes a full sacramental life are the “pearls of great price” a catechist is called to share with others.