

What is Catechesis?

"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" (General Directory for Catechesis (1998) #105).

Jesus empowered the Church to continue His mission when He said:

Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of time. (Mt. 28:18-20)

This great commission has been handed to women and men, whom God has called, to proclaim the Good News. This ministry of teaching and forming has traditionally been referred to as *catechesis*.

The name of *catechesis* was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God...and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ. (*Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) #1)

The word *catechesis* comes from the Greek meaning "to echo the teaching" meaning that catechesis or the teaching of the faith is an interactive process in which the Word of God re-sounds between and among the proclaimer, the one receiving the message, and the Holy Spirit! Catechesis is a life-long process of initial conversion, formation, education, and on-going conversion. Through word, worship, service and community, it seeks to lead all God's people to an ever-deepening relationship with God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Catechesis takes many forms and includes the initiation of adults, youth and children as well as the intentional and systematic effort to enable all to grow in faith and discipleship.

Older adults may recall the phrase "Christian Doctrine" from their school days and persons with relations in the USA may have heard them speak of C.C.D., i.e. "the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine". C.C.D., there and elsewhere is frequently associated with "Sunday School", especially in parishes that are committed to providing religious education to child who attend public schools.

Today, in the USA and in many countries, including Ireland, we are retrieving the notion of *catechesis* to capture the broader mission of

the Church to proclaim the Gospel to adults, youth and children in order to "put people in communion with Jesus Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) #426).

Catechesis is a shared but differentiated responsibility. Bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay persons play their part, each according to their respective responsibilities and charisms (*General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) #216). The entire Christian community should feel responsibility for this service (*ibid* #219).

In the parish setting priests have a particular duty to promote and to discern vocations to the service of catechesis and, as catechist or catechists, to attend to their formation by giving the greatest attention to this duty (*ibid* #224). By honouring this duty they recognise and promote the dignity of the laity and their specific role in the Church's mission (*Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965) #9).

Lay catechists, both in school and parish settings, through sharing the same form of life as those whom they catechise, have a special sensitivity for incarnating the Gospel in the concrete life of the persons they serve. Persons who engage in programmes etc. with them can find in them a Christian model for their future as believers.

This paper has drawn from the following resources:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Dublin: Veritas, 1994.

Congregation for the Clergy *General Directory for Catechesis*, Dublin: Veritas, 1998.

Pope John Paul II *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae*, Vatican City, 1979 [online]. Rome: Vatican web site. Available <http://www.vatican.va> [1 May 2008]

Second Vatican Council *Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965) published in Flannery O.P., Austin (ed) *Vatican Council II Constitutions, Decrees & Declarations*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996.

Web site of *The Office for Catechesis and Youth Ministry of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago (USA)*. See : www.catechesis-chicago.org

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *National Catechetical Directory*, Washington: USCCB, 2003.

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