

Catechist's Companion to the National Directory for Catechesis



Catechetical Leader's Supplement

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ABOUT THE *CATECHIST'S COMPANION TO THE NDC*

The *Catechist's Companion to the National Directory for Catechesis* is a tool for formation and reflection, developed primarily for catechists and catechetical leaders. It is not intended to be a summary of the document, but as the title states, a “companion” guide. The *Catechist's Companion* provides a brief history of catechetical directories and the implications of the new *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) and provides an overview. It also includes discussions on eight major themes of the NDC that are directly applicable to volunteer catechists, divided into the following sections:

Catechesis and American Culture — This section discusses the values of American culture that present both opportunities and challenges to the ministry of catechesis. Also discussed is the cultural, political, and social diversity of the United States and how this relates to catechetical ministry. Catechists are encouraged to reflect on the diversity they see (or have seen) in the individuals they catechize as well as their feelings about their own backgrounds and individuals who are different from themselves.

We are Sent: Catechesis and Evangelization — This section discusses the stages of evangelization, and encourages the catechist to reflect on his or her own history of evangelization and conversion. Notes on the relationships between evangelization and catechesis and between evangelization and ecumenism are also included.

The Ministry of Catechesis — This section discusses the goals, aims, and tasks of catechesis, as outlined in the *General Directory for Catechesis* and expanded upon in the NDC. Catechists are encouraged to understand the scope of their call, as well as what the Church teaches is most important about this ministry.

Catechetical Methodology — This section discusses inductive and deductive approaches to catechesis and encourages catechists to reflect on ways to use multiple senses in catechetical activities.

The Recipients of Catechesis: Life Span Development and Faith Formation — This section presents a brief overview of various age groups and how development relates to the needs and gifts of the catechetical audience. Catechists are encouraged to reflect on the needs and gifts shared by the particular group with whom they work.

Special Needs and Circumstances — The NDC calls for inclusion of individuals with special needs in the larger community unless it is absolutely impossible. Some practical ways of including individuals with special needs are discussed, as are other circumstances that may warrant adaptations of catechetical programs.

Nurturing Your Spirituality as a Catechist — This section discusses the process of “continuing conversion” and how catechists can grow in their faith, encouraging catechists to reflect on activities and experiences that help them grow spiritually, as well as new ways in which they might cultivate their spirituality.

Catechesis in the Media Age — This section discusses the importance of familiarity with modern technology and media to catechists in our country. Using the media as both a topic and tool for catechesis is discussed.

Each section of the *Catechist's Companion* includes references to the document itself, relevant reflection questions, and a prayer for catechists on the topic discussed. The guide can be used in a number of ways: as a tool for personal study, a framework for a retreat day, or a text for regular catechist formation sessions.

This supplement contains brief reflections on additional topics directly relevant to catechetical leaders: the formation and spirituality of catechetical leaders, selection and formation of catechists, resources for catechesis, and the organization of catechetical ministry.

The NDC provides us with a wonderful opportunity for catechetical renewal in that its publication will highlight the importance of the formation of catechists, and will place catechesis in general in the limelight in our national Church. Of particular importance is the document's emphasis on adult faith formation, which has been a challenging task for many catechetical leaders in this country. Let us unite in hope and prayer that the new NDC will inspire others to invest both time and resources to the field of catechesis, which lies at the heart of the mission of the Church.

THE FORMATION OF CATECHETICAL LEADERS

The well-formed catechetical leader is the most important element of a parish program of catechesis, according to the NDC (no. 54). Only Catholics who are faithful to the Church's teachings in the areas of faith and morals, and who offer strong examples of the Christian life, are qualified to serve. This echoes, in some ways, the statements made in the *General Directory for Catechesis* regarding the importance of the person of the catechist:

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 [the catechist] by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method. Only [the catechist's] own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other work instruments (no. 156).

These words are applicable to catechetical leaders as well, for they are, first and foremost, catechists (NDC, no. 54).

■ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- In what ways would you like to grow spiritually?
- What are some areas of practical knowledge in which you would like to grow? How can this growth be accomplished (e.g., reading, retreats, seminars, continuing-education classes, distance learning)?

■ PRAYER FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

Dear God,
Leading others in catechetical ministry can feel like such an awesome responsibility. Give me confidence that you are with me. Fill me with your Spirit so I can go where you lead. Amen.

■ READ ALL ABOUT IT!

For more information about the formation of catechetical leaders, see Chapter 8, section 54, of the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

SELECTION AND FORMATION OF CATECHISTS

Catechesis is an essential ministry of the Church, and those called to catechesis have been given a charism from the Holy Spirit to do this work (NDC, no. 54, B. 8.). Because of this, catechetical leaders should take special care in how they recruit individuals to serve in this ministry. The NDC strongly cautions against implying that "anyone can be a catechist" (NDC, no. 55, B). The *Guide for Catechists*, by the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, lists several characteristics that should be observed in those who will serve as catechists. This list is cited in the NDC:

...faith that manifests itself in their piety and daily life; love for the Church and communion with its pastors; apostolic spirit and missionary zeal; love for their brothers and sisters and a willingness to give generous service; sufficient education; the respect of the community; the human, moral and technical qualities necessary for the work of a catechist, such as dynamism, good relations with others, etc." (*Guide for Catechists*, no. 18).

The NDC adds that a catechist should rise from within the parish community, and be invited by the pastor in consultation with the parish catechetical leader.

According to the NDC, initial formation of catechists should: help them understand "the social, cultural, ethnic, demographic, and religious circumstances of those whom the new catechist will serve"; be respectful of their time constraints while still providing a structured and systematic overview of the ministry; develop their human, spiritual, and apostolic qualities; facilitate the catechist's prayer life and communication with the local church; encourage new catechists to connect with others in the ministry, perhaps even forming mentoring relationships; encourage catechists to seek out a spiritual director; "remain within the context of the community of faith" (NDC, no. 55, D).

Ongoing formation is also necessary, as it is for all Christians. For catechists especially, this means ongoing development of human qualities (emotional growth, communication skills, etc.) as well as growth in spirituality and knowledge of the faith. Catechetical methodology and social science (e.g., psychology, education, and communication) are also topics for continued study by catechists.

A variety of settings exists for catechist formation, and each has its own benefits. Parish-based formation, diocesan events, retreats, and seminars, and trainings and classes sponsored by Catholic universities can all be beneficial in different ways. For example, formation in the parish setting helps catechists working together to get to know one another and can be useful for discussing issues that are particular to a given parish, while diocesan and regional events can help catechists appreciate their own work within the context of the catechetical mission of the Church worldwide.

■QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How are catechists currently selected and formed in your parish? What suggestions from the NDC may enhance this process?
- What challenges can you foresee in implementing the suggestions outlined in the NDC for catechist selection and training?

■PRAYER FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

Dear God,

Thank you for the privilege of leading others in the ministry of catechesis. Grant me wisdom as I help others discern their call. Guide me with the Holy Spirit as I assist in their formation. Amen.

■READ ALL ABOUT IT!

For more information on the selection and formation of catechists, see Chapter 8, section 55, of the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

Also recommended:

Guide for Catechists, by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, DC, 1993).

Seven Secrets of Successful Catechists, by Joseph D. White, Ph.D. Our Sunday Visitor (Huntington, IN, 2002).

What Every Catechist Should Know, by Joseph D. White, Ph.D. Our Sunday Visitor (Huntington, IN, 2003).

RESOURCES FOR CATECHETICAL MINISTRY

The Word of God, as revealed in Scripture and Sacred Tradition, is the primary source for catechesis (NDC, no. 18). According to the NDC, it follows that catechesis is primarily based on the Old and New Testaments, interpreted in the context of the sacred deposit of faith. Use of Scripture in catechesis is emphasized in the NDC, particularly use of the Gospels to facilitate an “encounter with Christ.” The Church provides guidance on the interpretation of Scripture:

1. Take into account the time period, culture, and kind of writing (CCC, 110).
2. Read parts of Scripture in the context of the whole message (CCC, 112).
3. Read Scripture within “the living tradition of the whole Church” (CCC, 113).
4. Pay attention to the truths of faith expressed in Scripture. Great truths are always consistent with one another. For example, both the Old and New Testaments present love for God and love for one’s neighbor as guiding principles of God’s law.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents a standard for catechesis. It is a summary of our Sacred Tradition presented in the context of the contemporary world (NDC, no. 67). However, this universal catechism makes no attempt to

adapt catechesis to particular cultural situations and other special circumstances. This is the role of local catechisms. The *Catechism for Adult Catholics in the United States* is the local catechism for our country.

Other resources for catechesis include textbooks, catechist guides, and supplemental materials. In the United States, most catechetical textbook series for children and teens follow a scope and sequence based on development. For example, in the third grade, around the time when developmental theorists say peer relationships become much more important, the main focus of study is the community of Christians, the Church. In fourth grade, when children are becoming more capable of internalizing moral standards, conscience formation is a primary topic.

Section 68 of Chapter 10 in the *National Directory for Catechesis* lists several guidelines for the selection of catechetical textbooks. One primary consideration is conformity to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. A list of textbooks found to be in conformity with the *Catechism* can be found on the USCCB website at www.usccb.org.

The NDC also points out that merely translating catechetical texts is often not enough to facilitate a bilingual program or provide catechesis to persons who speak other languages. Catechetical textbooks in other languages should be written by native speakers of those languages, who understand the nuances of the language and cultural factors that may impact communication.

While selection of textbooks and other resources is important, we must also remember that formation is, first and foremost, an apprenticeship in the Christian life. Individuals being formed in the faith learn best by living out their faith and interacting with individuals who are good examples of Christian living.

■QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How are Scripture and the *Catechism* used in your catechetical program?
- What other resources do you find helpful in your ministry?
- In what ways can a textbook help to foster a living faith? What are the limitations of books and similar resources in faith formation?

■PRAYER FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

Dear God,

Your word is the source of everlasting truth. Help us as we seek out your will. Lead us to resources that will help us understand what you would say to us. Help us not only to know, but also to live out your message in our lives. Amen.

■READ ALL ABOUT IT!

For more information about resources for catechetical ministry, see Chapter 2, section 18 of the NDC, titled “Source and Sources of Catechesis,” and Chapter 10, titled “Resources for Catechesis.”

ORGANIZING CATECHETICAL MINISTRY

Drawing heavily from the first National Catechetical Directory, *Sharing the Light of Faith*, the new *National Directory for Catechesis* offers several principles for the organization of catechesis in the United States, with particular applications to local Churches (no. 58). First, the NDC points out the importance of a “comprehensive pastoral plan” based on the Church’s mission of evangelization. This plan should help to guide catechesis at the national, diocesan, and parish level, with each level of organization respecting the competence of the other levels.

A second principle mentioned in the document is the “person-centered” quality of organization for catechesis. Those who are catechized and their families should be included in organizational structures.

A third principle offered by the bishops is that all Christians are responsible for catechesis. This is particularly true because of the responsibility of every Christian for evangelization and mission. This principle echoes the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which states:

In the Diocese catechesis is a unique service performed jointly by priests, deacons, religious and laity, in communion with the Bishop. The entire Christian community should feel responsible for this service.

Fourth, we are asked to develop a “statement of philosophy, goals and basic beliefs underlying those goals.” In other words, catechetical leaders should develop a mission statement for their programs so the program’s guiding principles are explicit.

According to the NDC, when making policy decisions, organizational bodies should respect the autonomy of groups and persons most directly affected by those decisions.

The NDC calls for an equitable distribution of resources for the ministry of catechesis, with more affluent parishes sharing their resources with parishes in need. Catechesis should be organized in a way that is consistent with the needs assessed and the goals stated. Assessment, planning, development, and evaluation should be continuing processes (NCD, no. 221; NDC, 58).

In its discussion of diocesan catechetical ministry, the NDC points out that collaboration is necessary not just so catechesis will be well-coordinated, but also because it “ensures a unified and coherent presentation of the faith” (no. 59). The same could certainly be said of catechesis within the parish, because the parish is the most important locus of formation (GDC, no. 257). Consequently, it is vital that parish leaders collaborate with one another in catechetical activities at all levels, and collaborate with parents and families in their work with children and youth, for parents are the first educators of their children (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2223).

■QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is the “mission statement” for your ministry?
- What are some practical ways in which catechesis can be “person-centered”?
- Discuss your experiences of effective collaboration in ministry settings. What are some barriers to collaboration?

■PRAYER FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

Dear God,

Thank you for the ministry of catechesis. Help me to make your mission my own, and guide me as I make decisions in my ministry. Help me to pay attention to the personal qualities of those with whom I work, and help me to collaborate with others who are working for your kingdom. Amen.

■READ ALL ABOUT IT!

For more information on the organization of catechetical ministry, see Chapter 9 of the *National Directory for Catechesis*, titled “Organizing Catechetical Ministry.”