

Guidelines for the Catechesis of Adults

Since Vatican Council II, the documents published by the Catholic Church have emphasized the centrality of adult catechesis.

To promote the centrality of adult catechesis, the diocese has developed guidelines for adult catechesis. It is our hope and expectation that parishes will commit to implementing adult catechesis in the light of the content and recommendations The General Directory for Catechesis, *Catechesi Tradendae*, and “Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan on Adult Faith Formation in the United States.”

The Centrality of Adult Catechesis in Church Documents

Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it. CT #43

As has been already mentioned, the organizing principle, which gives coherence to the various catechetical programs offered by a particular Church, is attention to adult catechesis. This is the axis around which revolves the catechesis of childhood and adolescence as well as that of old age. GDC #275

Along with the provision of initiatory programs, which are absolutely indispensable, the local Church must also provide diversified programs of permanent catechesis for Christian adults. GDC #275

Adults do not grow in faith primarily by learning concepts, but by sharing the life of the Christian community, of which adults are members who both give and receive from the community. ACCC #28

Adults in the Church, that is, all Christians - men and women, lay people, priests and religious - are people who have a right and an obligation to be catechized, just like everyone else. (CT, 217, 774; CL 34) Only by becoming an adult in the faith is one able to fulfill his or her adult duties towards others, as is required by the vocation given to each at baptism. ACCC #21

The Church needs a well-educated, inquiring, and vocal laity if the new evangelization is to achieve its full potential. CGTM

Key Concepts in Adult Learning

The most important understanding for adults is the knowledge that none of the formulations or symbols used to talk about God can fully express the depths of the reality of God. For this reason the single most valuable outcome for the mature adult is hunger for more life-long learning. Some characteristics of adult learning are the following:

- **Adult learners are self-directed**
Adults are autonomous and self-directed. They need to be free to direct themselves. It is best to involve adult participants actively in the learning process and to provide a model of group process offered with facilitation. Adult participants want to be involved in covering topics and projects that reflect their interest.
- **Adult learners set the goals and time lines for the learning experience**
Adults are goal-oriented. They appreciate a program or process that is organized and has clearly defined elements. They want to know how this event will help them to attain their goals.
- **Adult learners will learn when they experience a desire to learn the topic/material**
Adults are practical; focusing on the aspects of what is most useful to them at this time. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake.
- **Adult education is a process of developing increased self-actualization**
Adult learners need to be shown respect and encouragement and as they share knowledge from their life experience freely with others.
- **Educational techniques for adult learners are experiential and respond to the adult's readiness and desire to learn**
Adults are relevancy oriented; they must see a reason for learning something. It is important that objectives be clear to adult learners in the beginning in order for them to become fully engaged in the process.

Adult Learning and Motivation

Motivation is another aspect of adult learning. "When it comes to learning and attendance at educational programs, adults are primarily motivated by needs stemming from their life tasks. These challenges or tasks are also key means by which the learner hears God's voice. For this reason, adult religious education should be life-centered." (SLF 117) Some factors that serve as sources of motivating adult learning are social relationships, social welfare, cognitive interest. Adults have many responsibilities that they must balance against the demands of learning. Because of these responsibilities, adults have barriers against participating in learning. Some of these barriers may include: lack of time, money, confidence, or interest, lack of information about opportunities to learn, scheduling problems and problems with child care or transportation.

Stages of Adult Development and Implications for Catechesis

As individuals develop, they pass through various life stages, each with its own tasks and challenges, each with implications for effective catechesis, linking faith and life. These are generalized descriptions of aging and change with individuals. Shows general trends and is not exhaustive.

Ages 20 - 30: Putting it Together

- romantic stage: dreams of selecting and building successful careers and/or creating the loving family
- time and energy spent on relationships with peers and career
- time of change and movement in jobs and location, movement toward realizing and integrating ideals
- Integrating idealism and optimism of late teens with decisions about life in the real world
- Less centered on family of origin

Ages 30 - 40: Settling Down

- Developing a sense of security in finding one job and occupation
- Desire for stability, leads to organized religion and ritual
- Seeking a community base for sharing and mutual growth
- Events shape faith response; mid-to-late 30's experience either a renewal of faith, withdrawal from faith, or rededication to their faith

Ages 40 - 50: Crisis of Limitations

- Increased sense of mortality
- Critical stage of faith development- facing the challenge of self acceptance with limitations, weaknesses, apparent failures
- Facing the dual role of being parent to children with changing needs and changing needs of their own parents
- Fear of failure as early dreams may remain unfulfilled
- Recognition of limitations - putting faith to the test
- Need to accept what Jesus reveals: we are loved unconditionally

Implications for Catechesis:

- Need for deeper and more integrated sense of church teaching
- Sacramental Preparation: Matrimony and Baptism (infant)
- Opportunities for peer communities to share
- Addressing life and work and faith issues
- Parenting skills

Implications for Catechesis

- Family life and catechetics: prayer as individuals and as a family
- Sacramental Preparation update: Eucharist and Reconciliation
- RCIA (sponsor or candidate), small Christian Communities, Bible Study, Parish Outreach Programs, Social Justice

Implications for Catechesis

- Increased time of seeking through education, reading and personal development on spiritual topics
- Developing sense of stewardship through time, talent and treasure
- Seeking reflective formation

Ages 50 - 65: Fulfilling Potential

- Sense of fulfillment, freedom from basic insecurities
- Increased ability to take more risks, acceptance of others
- Seeks unity in religion of personal faith and institution, experience of God is shared
- Deep sense of revival in life if self acceptance has occurred

Implications for Catechesis

- Seeks retreats and reflective formation
- Service on committees becomes more selective
- Bible and ritual sought after
- Small Christian Communities and faith sharing
- Special health needs

Ages 65 - Death

- Increased time of integration
- Deeper development of inner self and spiritual growth
- Share time with family and friends, church becomes more a focal point
- Death seen as movement to fullness of life

Implications for Catechesis

- Seeks reflection, retreat and prayer experiences
- Small group experiences
- Special needs due to increased frailty
- More time available to serve as volunteers
- Facing loss, death and grief on a regular basis

The Content of Adult Catechesis

Catechesis is one moment or part in the total process of evangelization. Faith Development makes explicit in the life of adults the reality of God's message (Kerygma), taking into consideration concrete human situations and translating it into the cultural language of the people. Catechesis goes to the core of the doctrinal content of our Catholic faith, presenting the fundamental beliefs of the Creed in a way that relates to the life experience of people, instilling in them a faith mentality. It calls for a structure and organized faith journey, which is expressed and sustained by listening to the work of God in celebration (liturgy), by charitable service (diakonia), and by a forthright witness in the various situations in which adults find themselves.

The primary sources of the content for adult catechesis are found in Scripture, the Creed, the Documents of Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In keeping with an adult's development, his/her primary task is to synthesize and integrate the teaching and practice of Jesus Christ as found in the Catholic Christian tradition into the fibre of his/her being and living. All catechesis aims at transformation and conversion, not merely information.

It is understood that individuals continue to grow and develop throughout life. Being engaged in a lifelong process of faith development leads to mature discipleship. This listing is intended to provide an overview and is not intended to be comprehensive. More specific topics and issues are detailed in the [Guidelines for Catechesis for Children and Youth](#). A complete listing is found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#).

The content of adult catechesis is presented as Word/Message; Worship/Liturgy; Community; Service.

Word/Message

A mature disciple understands and appreciates:

- that God reveals self in Scripture, in creation, in history, in Jesus, in life experiences
- that God's self revelation and our response is ongoing
- Jesus as the fullness of God's revelation
- the origins and format, the literary genre, the historical and literary development, and structure of the Bible
- how the major themes of the Bible intersect with his/her life story and the life story of the Church
- how to read, interpret, pray and proclaim the scriptures
- the centrality of the mystery of the Trinity and Incarnation in the hierarchy of truths
- the central elements of the message of salvation: Trinity, Creation, Jesus, Church, Sacraments, Life of Grace, Moral Life, Mary and the Saints, Death, Judgment and Eternity

Worship/Liturgy

A mature disciple appreciates and lives:

- a life rooted in a vibrant, meaningful celebration of our sacraments as an encounter with God within the Catholic Christian community
- Eucharist as a person gathered in community for Word and Sacrament and then sent to be light and leaven
- a mature, personal spirituality based on Christian traditions of prayer and worship practiced personally and communally
- the liturgical seasons as forming and informing his/her prayer, worship, daily living

Community

A mature disciple understands and lives:

- his/her baptismal call and commitment actively in the context of a parish community
- as a faithful member of the Catholic Christian community, knowledgeable of its story, mission, ministry, beliefs, practices, key moments and movements in its history especially Vatican II
- a life of ongoing conversion
- with a vision of being fully human, facing life's struggles in the context of the Gospel, developing and integrating his/her expression of sexuality in the light of Church teaching
- in honest, loving, respectful, trusting, and nurturing relationships

Discipleship

A mature disciple responds to being a follower of Jesus by:

- living a life of service
- recognizing, accepting and valuing the dignity of the human person at all stages and conditions of life
- acting and praying at all levels out of a consciousness and desire for social justice rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the teachings of Jesus, and in Catholic social teachings
- integrating the moral teachings of Jesus in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount and the development of these teachings in the life of the Church
- reflecting critically on the values of society and culture in the light of the Gospel
- forming, making decisions, and living by a mature, Christian conscience
- valuing all Christian lifestyles as a vocation and an opportunity to live his/her baptismal call
- engaging in a discernment process to develop a Christian lifestyle responsive to witness and service

Methods of Adult Catechesis

A central feature in working with adults is to establish a friendly and dialogical rapport to be integrated into a broader and more developed faith journey. "Practically speaking, under the term "adult catechesis" a variety of programs can be grouped. Some are traditional; others are new. They can be structured or more spontaneous, permanent or temporary, widely used or restricted in number or frequency. In order to ensure unity in faith and life, when there are a number of different catechetical opportunities within the same community, all the programs need to contain certain common elements; namely, communion centered on the Word, participation in the liturgy, charitable service, and attentiveness to the Church's life" (ACCC #59).