



***HANDBOOK
FOR
PARISH CATECHESIS***



**Office of Religious Education
Diocese of Springfield
2000**

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Acknowledgments

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The idea of a handbook, which would offer parish leadership guidance, direction and ideas to grow with, has long been a dream of mine. I dedicate this to all of you who have accepted the Spirit's call to "Go and make disciples of all Nations." May your ministry be blessed and your parish alive with possibilities.

Sr. Paula Robillard, SSJ
Director of Religious Education
Diocese of Springfield, MA
September 23, 2000

PREFACE

"Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

(Mt. 28:19&20)

Quality systematic catechesis contributes to the vitality of the parish community. All aspects of parish life benefit from well planned catechesis which is designed to meet the needs of all its members, both adults and children. The parish that recognizes and responds to the value of quality catechesis becomes, itself, a catechizing community.

This handbook will offer guidance and direction to parish catechetical leadership in carrying out the mandate of Jesus to make disciples. Drawing from significant documents on catechesis, the handbook outlines a vision that calls the Church, both universal and local, to form and initiate people into the life and Body of Christ. The catechetical work of the universal Church and the mission of Jesus Christ take place primarily in the local parish.

This handbook will benefit all catechetical leaders in our diocesan parishes. These include: pastors, pastoral administrators, priests and deacons; directors, coordinators and administrators of religious education; religious education boards and parish pastoral council education commissions. Catechists on all levels, pastoral and youth ministers, parish pastoral councils, and all other parish ministers and adults will also find it helpful.

As well as setting forth a vision of catechesis, practical guidance offered in the handbook enables that vision to become a reality in each parish of the diocese. Recommendations will be provided for over-all planning, sacramental preparation programs, adult education, and other elements of a successful catechetical program. Practical help such as useful samples, and relevant bibliographies contribute to the user-friendly approach of this document. Finally, this text serves as a single reference source for diocesan guidelines and standards for catechesis and sacramental preparation.

Each parish is a unique community of believers. The size and economic and cultural dimensions of the parish may require adaptations and creativity in keeping the vision. Also, new models are emerging from the consolidations of resources on all levels of diocesan and parish life. The contents of this handbook will assist all parishes in creating and maintaining quality religious education for children and adults in various settings.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

The following are abbreviations for documents cited in the text:

ACCC	<i>Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community</i> , USCC, 1992
CAC	<i>The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis</i> , USCC, 1986
*Can	<i>Code of Canon Law</i> , Canon Law Society of America, 1983
*CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , Vatican, 1994
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae: On Catechesis in Our Time</i> , John Paul II, 1979
DMC	<i>Directory for Masses with Children</i> , Congregation for Divine Worship, 1993
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , John Paul II, 1981
FPCS	<i>Family Perspective in Church and Society</i> , USCC, 1988
GCD	<i>General Catechetical Directory</i> , Congregation for the Clergy, Vatican, 1971
GDC	<i>General Directory for Catechesis</i> , Congregation for the Clergy, Vatican, 1997
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church</i> , Second Vatican Council, 1964
LMC	<i>Lectionary for Masses with Children</i> , NCCB, 1992
NCD	<i>Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory</i> , USCC, 1978
OHWB	<i>Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us</i> , USCC, 1999
RCIA	<i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i> , ICEL & USCC, 1988
RBC	<i>Rite of Baptism for Children</i> , ICEL, 1969
SLF	<i>Serving Life and Faith: Adult Religious Education and the American Catholic Community</i> , USCC, 1986
TJD	<i>To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education</i> , NCCB, 1972

USCC United States Catholic Conference

NCCB National Council of Catholic Bishops

ICEL International commission on English in the Liturgy

* Latin text Libreria Editrice Vaticana

WHAT IS CATECHESIS?

"The Church continues the mission of Jesus, prophet, priest, and servant King. Its mission, like His, is essentially one - to bring about God's Kingdom - but this one mission has three aspects: proclaiming and teaching God's Word, celebrating the sacred mysteries, and serving the people of the world."
(NCD 30)

Considered most broadly, catechesis is the totality of the Church's effort to make disciples (CCC 4). "It is a lifelong process for the individual and a constant and concerted pastoral activity of the Christian community" (NCD 32). It includes arousing people to the presence of God in their lives, as well as bringing those people into contact with the life and message of Jesus as understood in the context of the Catholic community. That life and message are celebrated in the Church's liturgy and prayer and made manifest in service to the Church and the wider world.

The aim of systematic catechesis is to help people internalize the Word of God in all stages of life in order to bear fruit which will transform the world (CCC 2688). The catechetical Mission of the Church then centers on four fundamental tasks: "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" (NCD 213).

Additional important characteristics of catechesis are reflected in a variety of documents. They can be outlined as follows:

- Catechesis is a life-long process with the continuing education of adults at the center of the Church's educational mission (TJD 43). All recent catechetical documents emphasize the priority of adult education. Our relationship with God needs nurturing throughout our lives.
- Catechesis is formational, aimed at training in the Christian life (GDC 68, RCIA 75). While the passing on of information is a necessary and important part of catechesis, its ultimate goal is formation for Christian living.
- Catechesis is a communal activity of the Church. The parish community has a two-fold responsibility: providing for the training of its members and welcoming them into an environment where they can live as fully as possible what they have learned (CT 24).

- Catechesis is both formal and informal. Although "initiation, education and formation pertain especially to catechesis, every pastoral activity has a catechetical dimension" (NCD 39). The formation of both adults and children is greatly affected by parish attitudes and activities such as: the quality of liturgical celebrations; how well parish staff and leadership work together; the priority of outreach and service; and the overall sense of the community as the Body of Christ.
- Catechesis must be a systematic endeavor to reach a precise goal (CT 21). A well planned, organized structure that encompasses every aspect of parish catechesis provides the foundation for quality catechesis. The essential elements of the Christian message are presented gradually, but completely.
- Catechesis and evangelization are closely linked (CT 18). Catechesis has an evangelizing character in that it is invitational. It cannot be presumed that those adults and children who come to us for catechesis have already heard and responded to Christ's invitation to "come follow me". Thus, while constantly calling people to conversion to the Christian way of life, catechesis builds on initial faith and conversion by more fully developing the Christian message in the context of the Catholic Faith.
- Finally, catechesis must be culturally sensitive. To this end, catechesis will seek to know the culture and its expressions as well as to respect its unique values and riches: "To bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought" (CT 53).

The purpose then of catechesis is:

- "To make one's faith living conscious and active" (NCD 32)
- To develop initial faith and to continue to nourish the Christian life of the faithful (CT 20)
- To foster mature faith (NCD 33)
- "To bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures" (CT 53)
- To help people believe in Jesus as the Son of God which leads to life in His name (CCC 4)

Catechesis encompasses a broad scope and is a lifelong endeavor. It is evangelizing in nature, bringing people to Christ. It nourishes faith in Christ and leads people to continue the mission of Jesus in the world. It is more than the transfer of information about Jesus and the Church. Catechesis for both adults and children aims for the conversion of the heart and mind toward a gospel way of life that ultimately transforms the world.