

The Need for Catechetical Standards

From the Magisterium

The Second Vatican Council, our guide for modern day faith, recommended that a “directory for catechetical instruction of the Christian people” be drawn up. As a result, Pope Paul VI, approved the *General Catechetical Directory* in 1971. From this document stemmed many other documents promulgated by the Magisterium and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Some of these documents include: *Catechesi Tradendae* (Pope John Paul II, 1979), *Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics in the United States* (1979), *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), *General Directory of Catechesis* (1997) and *National Directory of Catechesis* (2005).

Each of these documents, going back to the original in 1971, emphasizes adult faith formation and that catechesis is a life-long activity. Striving to emulate this call of faith, these documents then provide an outline for the formation of our adult catechists. They emphasize that “any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel.” (NDC 234) Therefore, the bishop of the diocese is called to ensure that there is catechist formation that helps catechists to effectively communicate the Gospel message.

Wisconsin Catholic Conference

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) was founded in 1969 by the Bishops of Wisconsin. The Conference seeks to fulfill the vision of Vatican Council II, which called upon the Church to be more involved in the world. With the message of the Gospel and the social teachings of the Church as its foundation, the WCC offers a specifically Catholic contribution to state and federal public policy debates. The Conference also offers a statewide response to issues common to its five dioceses. It achieves this in several ways:

- Serves as an advocate on matters related to the interests and values of the Church;
- Provides decision makers with studied positions on social and moral issues;
- Offers a forum for diocesan personnel to meet, exchange information, deliberate and recommend policies or actions;
- Formulates and publishes opinions and positions on legislation and public policy.

From the Wisconsin Catholic Conference website, August 2014

Background for Standards

In the early 1970's, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference formed the Christian Education Commission (CEC). The purpose of this commission was to assist the five dioceses in Wisconsin to plan for total Christian education. In March 1975, after two years of study and a statewide survey, the Policy Board of WCC adopted a series of policy statements which dealt with the professional standards for those teaching in Catholic schools and religious education programs in the dioceses of Wisconsin. This project had been initiated in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Pastoral *To Teach As Jesus Did* which stressed the importance of the total educational mission of the Church.

The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin addressed catechesis and the ministry of catechesis in *Discipleship from Age to Age: A Call for Renewal in Catechesis* in 1994, following the publication of the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. The Wisconsin document continues to guide catechesis. Some excerpts follow:

The Place of Catechesis in the Mission of the Parish

A parish's catechetical ministry lies at the very heart of its mission. The mission of the parish is the mission of Christ: to form a people for God, to make disciples of all nations, to establish peace and justice among all peoples. The parish accomplishes this mission through its many ministries, but especially through evangelization, liturgy, prayer and catechesis . . . Catechesis is the growth, the development, the nourishment of the faith. If a parish is to be truly viable, it must have an active, vibrant catechetical program. Catechesis is foundational to the mission of the parish.

The Goal of Catechesis: Discipleship

The goal of all catechetical efforts, in the words of the “Decree on the Bishop’s Pastoral Office in the Church,” is to make a person’s “faith become living, conscious and active through the light of instruction...”

The Context of Catechesis: Instruction and Experience

Catechesis is accomplished in two complementary ways: through systematic instruction and through the experience of the faith community. A parish’s catechetical ministry, be it the religious education program, the Catholic school, or adult religious education, must provide quality systematic instruction in the teachings of the Church for persons at all levels, from early childhood through adulthood. All Catholics should be able to articulate the basic beliefs of the faith in a way that is appropriate to their age level.

The Ministers of Catechesis: A Partnership

There is no question that parents exercise the primary influence on the faith formation of their children. The family setting more than anywhere else is the place where faith formation takes place...Responsibility for catechesis, however, extends beyond the home and the family. All Catholics need to see themselves as catechist, sharing the faith by their example, their interest and their support. A parish needs to see itself as a catechizing community...

Catechists and teachers of formal religious education programs have the responsibility to prepare themselves to teach effectively...Directors of religious education programs and school principals have the responsibility of securing the most competent catechists and teachers available, and providing the necessary training and materials for them to do their work effectively. The pastor, as the chief catechist in the parish, has the obligation not only to oversee the catechetical program, but also to be intimately involved in every aspect of its operation...

The Call for Renewal and Rededication to Catechesis

As the English edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is published, the Catholic Bishops in the State of Wisconsin call for a renewal of catechesis in every Catholic parish in the state. As the chief catechists of our dioceses, we urge each parish to reflect deeply upon its catechetical mission and ministry:

- 1. Each parish should review its catechetical goals.*
- 2. Each parish should evaluate the effectiveness of its catechetical programs.*
- 3. Each parish should renew its dedication and resolve to provide the highest quality catechesis.*
- 4. Each parish should put forth its best efforts to provide ongoing Christian formation for each person in the parish.*
- 5. Each parish should resolve to make full use of all catechetical resources its diocese has to offer.*

The need for a renewal in catechesis is great; the hearts of believers are open; the time is now.

Since catechists nurture the faith that was implanted by the Holy Spirit in those being catechized, their formation should also include training in catechetical methodology. Catechists do not merely instruct their students about Christ; they lead them to him. Consequently, their formation should be inspired by God’s own original methodology of faith: his gradual Revelation of the truth that is Christ. Their formation should help them grow in their capacity as genuine teachers of that truth, keenly aware of both the authentic Gospel message and the circumstances of those for whom the message is intended.

USCCB, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005