



Parish Ministry Reflection Guide

Based on the *Directory for Catechesis*

“The need for a renewed impulse of evangelization justifies the decision to rethink in a missionary vein all the pastoral activities of the Christian community, even the most ordinary and traditional ones. Catechesis as well is touched by the demands of missionary conversion to which the parish is called.” (*Directory for Catechesis*, § 303)

Released in June of 2020, the new *Directory for Catechesis* came at a time when leaders were already being challenged to minister in unprecedented ways during the pandemic. While this alone required great imagination and flexibility, the new *Directory for Catechesis* calls parishes to continue to be flexible to the changing needs of the Church by practicing self-renewal and constant adaptivity even outside of the pandemic. It charges parishes to begin “a process of missionary conversion... that is not limited to maintain the status quo or guaranteeing the administration of the sacraments but presses forward in the direction of evangelization.” (§ 300)

This guide is designed to help parish leaders consider faith formation ministry in new and creative ways by reflecting on excerpts from the new *Directory for Catechesis*. While offering these areas for reflection as a path to envisioning renewed and adaptive ways to provide kerygmatic catechesis in the parish, this guide will support leaders as they strive to continue to make the parish “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.” (§ 300)

This guide provides an opportunity for parish leaders to dive into the new *Directory for Catechesis* and examine how they can continue or begin the work of building the new reality in their parishes through the process of “rethink[ing] in a missionary vein” elements of their everyday ministry.

The Directory for Catechesis

“The new *Directory for Catechesis* offers fundamental theological-pastoral principles and some general guidelines that are relevant for the practice of catechesis in our time.” (§ 10) Written in three parts: “Catechesis in the Church’s Mission of Evangelization”, “The Process of Catechesis” and “Catechesis in the Particular Churches”, the directory offers ample opportunity to reflect on various aspects of parish catechetical ministry. While much time could be spent in reflecting on each of the three parts of the directory, this guide is offered as a tool for reflection on “Catechesis in the Particular Churches.” When reflecting on the various areas of parish catechetical efforts in the particular church, we recommend that you keep in mind the following as a framework:

- **“Kerygmatic Catechesis**, which goes to the very heart of the faith and grasps the essence of the Christian message, is a catechesis which manifests the action of the Holy Spirit, who communicates God’s saving love in Jesus Christ and continues to give himself so that every human being may have the fullness of life.” (§ 2) Through the lens of kerygmatic catechesis, the proclamation of the kerygma is no longer simply the first stage of faith, but it is “the essential dimension of every moment of catechesis.” (§ 57)
- **“Catechesis participates according to its own nature in the effort of evangelization**, in order that the faith may be supported by an ongoing maturation and express itself in a way of life that must characterize the very being of the disciple of Christ.” (§ 1) To help facilitate this, catechesis must be “willing to seek out the glimmers of truth that are already present in various human activities, trusting that God is mysteriously active in the heart of the human being.” (§ 50)
- **“Catechesis, being at the service of ongoing education in the faith**, exists in relationship with the different dimensions of the Christian life.” (§ 74) These dimensions include knowledge of Sacred Scripture, orientation to the liturgical celebration and active charitable living. Together, these aspects of catechesis gradually strengthen the believer’s ability to share salvation history, live as witnesses to the Gospel and to deeply encounter Christ in the mystery of the sacraments. Thus, fostering the internalization of the Christian message.

What is the Kerygma?

The first announcement which proclaims, “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”

This first proclamation is called “first” not because it exists at the beginning but because it is the principal proclamation.

This proclamation is the central message which constantly illumines catechesis.

The kerygma should be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts of Church renewal.

Catechesis in the Particular Churches

Chapter IX of the directory highlights parishes and the distinctive roles and ministries within these communities that share the responsibility of introducing and forming new members in the faith and to the life of the community. This chapter also invites us to reflect on the way that all members of the entire parish community, by virtue of their baptism, are called to evangelize. This evangelization effort calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized where “everyone contributes according to his state of life and the grace he has received from God.” (§ 288)

As parishes continue their renewal process assessing with openness to a missionary creativity, this guide provides areas for reflection within our ministries and as a community. The vitality of the parish does not depend on the many programs offered but in the intention of forming missionary disciples that commit to a missionary conversion. “The dynamic of missionary conversion implies

that the parish should examine the catechesis that it presents, above all in the new social and cultural contexts. The parish community is to enter into dialogue with these realities, recognizing their value and coming to pastoral discernment on new forms of evangelizing presence on the ground.” (§ 302)

The directory suggests the following areas for reflection for “*a renewal of the presentation of catechesis in the parish*” (§ 303): **community of missionary disciples, missionary mentality and formative offerings inspired by the catechumenate.**

COMMUNITY OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

“At the heart of a parish’s presentation of evangelization is not a pastoral strategy, much less an elite and exclusive group of the perfect and of experts, but a community of missionary disciples, people with a living experience of the risen Christ who live out new relationships generated by Him.”

(§ 303) Catechesis within this community of missionary disciples boldly proclaims the Gospel and “has the task of developing a sense of belonging to the Church.” (§ 89) Working toward this goal, the community of disciples offer their multitude of gifts, along with their limitations and weaknesses, to the building up of the ministries and faith experiences of the parish.

Reflection Questions

- 1.** As you reflect on your relationship with Christ, what feelings and emotions do you experience? Have you taken time to share with your colleagues and fellow catechists about how your relationship with Christ has changed your life?
- 2.** Do your ministries encourage people to see themselves as missionary disciples? What are some different methods to incorporate this into your curricula?
- 3.** Does your parish offer formation that considers the diversity of your community? Think about the different abilities, learning styles, levels of knowledge, family structures and cultural backgrounds of your parishioners. Have you considered being open to inviting others to share their gifts in ministry?
- 4.** How do the different ministries in your parish work together to promote a “community of missionary disciples?” Make a list of the biggest ministries in your parish. When is the last time you met with their leaders to see how your missions overlap and can strengthen each other? Do you have any challenges in building relationships with other parish ministers? What help do you need in this area?
- 5.** How can you invite and encourage others to do their part in the evangelizing mission of the Church that is the responsibility, not of a few, but of all the baptized in the Christian community? Brainstorm how you can engage other members outside of your leadership team.
- 6.** How do incorporate the essence of kerygmatic catechesis in your religious education program and other formative experiences in your ministry? What resources do you consider for this purpose?

MISSIONARY MENTALITY

Working with a missionary mindset requires us to first develop a new vision of reality, one that calls us “to an openness to the action of the Risen One and of his Spirit who always leads the way for his people.” (§ 303) The missionary mentality encourages dialogue and new styles of communicating with those you serve. This shift in mindset prompts catechesis to “decentralize” by listening to the life experiences of people, building around their reality and illuminating those experiences with the Gospel message. Within this missionary mindset, we recall the heart of our identity and vocation as catechists, to bear witness to the faith, introduce others to the mystery of God and become experts in the art of accompaniment, “constantly going forth” to communicate Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some ways you are open to the Holy Spirit? How does your reliance on the Holy Spirit influence your planning and vision for your program?
2. Think about your planning process for your year: environment outside of the classroom, sacramental requirements, resource selection, catechist formation, support from other ministries, etc. How do you invite the Holy Spirit into the process? List some places where you/your staff can prayerfully discern as a community these more routine procedures.
3. The directory invites us to “go forth toward the life experiences of people, illuminating them with the light of the Gospel.” (§ 303) How can we incorporate listening to our parishioners into our planning? What areas of their lives need to be illumined by the Gospel? How can you ensure that you hear diverse voices in your congregation?
4. How often do you provide time and space for families and catechists to share their faith experiences with one another? How might you equip catechists to become more comfortable with evangelizing?
5. What are the challenges that you face as you work to accompany families in all their various complex and non-traditional situations? How can you better accompany families of all kinds to be living witnesses of the Gospel? What are some practices you can strengthen or put in place today?
6. How does your faith formation ministry support, engage and encourage a kerygmatic catechesis *in, with and of* the family? Identify one challenge with engaging families in faith formation in your parish community and consider possible solutions to overcome that challenge.
7. How do you affirm the vocation of your catechists? How does your parish recognize and support catechists as lay ministers called by God (e.g., Catechetical Sunday commissioning)? Think about some ways you can help catechists feel more supported.

FORMATIVE OFFERINGS INSPIRED BY THE CATECHUMENATE

When the parish offers catechesis that is inspired by the catechumenate, they provide opportunities for participants of all ages that “makes it possible to accept and to explore the kerygma...tasting its beauty.” (§ 303) Catechesis that is inspired by the catechumenate does not mean that faith formation programs should be completely changed to mirror the catechumenate model. Rather, by finding inspiration from the pedagogy of initiation of the catechumenate, faith formation programs are called to consider the ways in which they offer *catechesis of initiation into Christian life*. This “is a pedagogical journey offered in the ecclesial community, which leads the believer to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the word of God, liturgical action, and charity, integrating all the dimensions of the person so that he may grow in the mentality of faith and be a witness of new life in the world.” (§ 65) Through this vision of catechesis of initiation into Christian life, catechetical ministry serves and accompanies young people, families and adults while inviting them all to experience faith growth as a lifelong journey that is both personal and communal.

Reflection Questions

1. How familiar are you with the catechumenate process? Take some time to talk to people in your parish who are part of that ministry and read through the Rites. How can you incorporate some of the spirit of the catechumenate into your formation programs?
2. A key component of the catechumenate is accompaniment. What could accompaniment look like in your program? What new opportunities might you offer to encourage engagement in the life of the parish and a renewed sense of living and celebrating the sacraments?
3. Formation should not focus solely on the mind or intellectual development but include components of the body and the heart. Think about ways you can address the totality of the people you form.

What traditional Catholic practices and devotions can you incorporate that engage the body, the senses or the heart?

4. The Kerygma is central to all that we do and must be repeated over and over again. How often do you incorporate this first proclamation into your plans? Does each teaching or activity have an explicit moment of acknowledgment?
5. The directory states that catechists need to be continually evangelized and formed, starting with their own experience of God. Do you offer opportunities for continued growth, knowledge and understanding of the faith? How often do you gather for spiritual reflections or retreats with your catechists?
6. Faith is not a linear process. What types of formation do you offer that encourages a lifelong journey of faith? What are the ways that you respond to the different needs of your participants? Do you recognize your faith formation ministry as an entry point for the community?

Parish Ministry Reflection Summary

After considering the ministry reflection questions, summarize the strengths and challenges of your parish ministry. Then work with your parish leadership team to create goals and strategies for the coming year that support your strengths and prioritize your challenges as you consider pathways for “a renewal of the presentation of catechesis in the parish.” (§ 303)

For a deeper review of these ministry reflection questions and the new emphases which the **Directory for Catechesis** proposes as fundamental theological-pastoral principles for the ministry of catechesis, we recommend you spend some time with the USCCB’s **Video Series on the New Directory**. Each video in the series includes Spanish subtitles, and questions for further reflection and discussion in both English and Spanish.

The “Catechist’s Guide to the Directory for Catechesis” (**English, Spanish**) by Joseph D. White, PhD, is a meaningful resource to help parish leaders and catechists gain a deeper understanding of the new *Directory for Catechesis* and to reflect and act on the “demands of missionary conversion to which the parish is called.” (§ 300)