

Your Call to Be a Catechist or Teacher

Goal, Objectives, and Skill

The goal of *The Call to Be a Catechist or Teacher* is to help deepen your understanding of your calling, which means knowing and following Christ and leading others to him.

Your objectives are

- to better understand the nature of catechesis;
- to emphasize and teach that discipleship is the outcome you seek in catechesis;
- to take the catechumenate as a model for fuller initiation into the life of Christ and the Church.

Skill

- Sacrifice yourself as a catechist or teacher, working selflessly for your learners.

Preparation

- **Step One:** Experience the *Spiritual Exercises* for this session, and write your reflections about your experience.
- **Step Two:** Read booklet #1 *What Does Your Heart Desire?* of the *Growing Faith Project* and do the reflections and exercises, recording your reflections.
- **Step Three:** Read *The Tools for Teaching* section carefully. It is important to articulate your reflections and applications in writing or verbally, whether alone or working as part of a group. If you are studying with a group, you will also enjoy the opportunity to share your experiences in learning sessions.

Step One: Setting the Tone

This optional section introduces you to a discussion of catechesis. Read the story on your own.

To Know Christ

A dialogue between a recent convert to Christ and an unbelieving friend developed like this.

“So you have been converted to Christ? Then you must know a great deal about him. Tell me, what country was he born in? How old was he when he died?”

“I don’t know.”

“How many sermons did he preach?”

“I don’t know.”

“You certainly know very little for a man who claims to be converted to Christ.”

“You are right. But this much I do know. Three years ago I was a drunkard. I was in debt. My family was falling to pieces. But now I have given up drink and am out of debt. Ours is a happy home. All this and more Christ has done for me. This much I know of Christ!”

To *really* know means to be transformed by what or whom one knows.



The Christian faith is, above all,
conversion to Jesus Christ.

GDC 53

Step Two: Importance of This Session

This section outlines and comments on the ways you can deepen your understanding of your calling. Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

How can you grow in your knowledge and practice of your vocation as a catechist or teacher?

- Gain a better understanding of the nature of catechesis itself.
- Deepen appreciation of the principle that discipleship of Christ is the outcome we seek in catechesis.
- Take the catechumenate as a model for fuller initiation into the life of Christ and the Church.

God has loved us and called us to share that love as a catechist or teacher, to help others realize that they have a deep longing for God and will find happiness in returning that love. Our vocation as teacher or catechist is rooted in our baptism. We are ministers of the Word of God. We are specialists of the Word, direct witnesses to God's amazing action in human history.

Our baptismal consecration makes our proclamation and witness to Christian discipleship sacramental. In other words, our ministry is a living sign of Christ's presence. The Church commissions us to carry out this ministry in her name. When the parish community appoints or commissions us as teachers or catechists, it is the Church sending us forth to proclaim the word.

As we fulfill our ministry, we are like instruments chosen by the Spirit to play the music of God's love for us in Jesus. When we grow in our prayer life, formation, and attentiveness to God and to our brothers and sisters, the music—the gospel message of conversion to Christ—that God wants to communicate through us will be as authentic and clear as possible.



Integrating What You Have Just Learned

- *Reflect and discuss: What can you do to better understand your vocation and ministry? Write down your reflections and ideas.*

Notes

A series of horizontal blue lines for writing notes.

ON YOUR OWN

- What does it mean to you to say your vocation is rooted in your baptism?



Step Three: What Is Catechesis?

Part three helps you reflect on the nature of catechesis. Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

When the first disciples began to share the good news, they proclaimed their experience of the person of Jesus Christ, living, healing, saving, teaching. Jesus revealed to each one the very life of God and God's plan for his people. Jesus didn't come just to *tell* us about God. He came to show us God, to put us in touch with God in his own person. That's the reality of the incarnation: that God walked with us, spoke with us, ate with us, dreamed with us, in the person of Jesus. This loving plan of salvation revealed in the person of Jesus and handed on to the Church is the very heart of catechesis.

All catechesis includes much more than instruction (GDC 104). It is about a guided encounter with the *entire Christian life*, a journey toward ongoing conversion to Christ (GDC 105). As important as good content is, catechesis involves a lot more than content. Catechesis brings content to bear on our lives such that we celebrate our faith in prayer with the community of believers, such that our entire lives are converted to lifelong growing into discipleship of Christ, and such that we learn to share this conviction with all those who turn to us as we share faith with them. We are called to acquire the attitudes of Jesus, attitudes found in the gospels. We are to incarnate our faith daily, to become "living editions of the gospel" for our learners. All of this is nothing less than a gift of the Holy Spirit.

ON YOUR OWN

■ When did you first feel the call to be a catechist or teacher? Who or what was instrumental in helping you realize and follow that call?

In this journey we are not alone. Just as the Church sends teachers and catechists forth for this ministry, so the Church is the setting for our ministry. Catechesis is a key element of the Church's pastoral activity. The word you live and proclaim, the sacraments you celebrate and teach belong to the life of the Church, the body of Christ of which you are a member.



Integrating What You Have Just Learned

■ Discuss with others in your group what catechesis means to you—not theoretically but practically. Reflect on your own experiences. Write down your reflections and ideas.

Notes

Step Four: Discipleship

Your ministry is a sign of Christ's presence, a sign that you are a disciple of Christ. Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

The definitive aim of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ (cf. GDC 80). Teachers and catechists—as well as our learners—need to know him better, to know his mystery, to know the kingdom of Christ, and the “paths he has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow him.”¹

How is this communion with Christ realized? Jesus told his disciples, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:5–6). The way you will reach and teach others about union with Jesus is to accept him as your way, truth, and life, that is, to know, celebrate, and live the mystery of Jesus Christ, to die and rise with him, and to gradually lead your learners to do the same.

Your search for God takes you on a lifelong journey of discipleship. When you each say “yes” to Jesus, you hand your lives over to him and affirm your belief in what he has taught and continues to teach through the Church. You come to realize that you are not saved because of your own efforts but because of God's grace, which comes to you through Jesus and in the Church. And you recognize that discipleship has deepened your bond with the community of believers, the Church.

Means for Growth in Discipleship

What are some practical means for growing in discipleship and as a catechist or teacher? Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

- On the spiritual level, develop union with Christ through an intense sacramental and prayer life, especially by celebrating as often as possible the sacraments of Eucharist and reconciliation. Pray Morning and Evening Prayer in union with the Church and meditate frequently on the Word of God. Foster Marian devotion and, whenever possible, participate in

prayer groups and days of renewal or retreat. Having a spiritual director, a person trained to guide you along the path of prayer, is also very helpful.

- In daily living, engage in acts of faith, hope, and love for God and others, as well as honesty, integrity, perseverance, good judgment, openness of mind, and sensitivity.
- On the intellectual level, make the most of your catechist/teacher formation program to develop your understanding and experience of all the aspects of the Catholic faith and its practices and to learn ways for sharing this knowledge and experience with others.



Integrating What You Have Just Learned

- **Talk with others in your group about your efforts at progressing in the journey of discipleship. What did or did not work for each of you? Or reflect on your own experience. Record your ideas and reflections.**

Notes

¹ *Catechesi Tradendae*, 20c

tips

- Good teachers and catechists always keep on learning.
- An educator's knowledge of the subject is not as important as the enthusiasm with which he or she shares it.

ON YOUR OWN

■ Where do you need to grow in your personal relationship with Jesus (for example, in prayer, in participation in the liturgy, in following Jesus' example of love, and so on)?



Step Five: The Catechumenate as Inspiration for Catechetical Ministry

The baptismal catechumenate provides inspiration for lifelong catechesis. Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

We need patience with everyone
but first of all with ourselves.

St. Francis de Sales

The process of the catechumenate is a model for the initiation and ongoing faith formation of those being catechized in the life of Christ and of the Church. The baptismal catechumenate involves a journey. This journey involves passing through steps in which the catechumen first accepts the gospel and is signed with the cross, is buried, and ultimately rises to new life with Christ in the sacraments of initiation. Similarly, catechesis is for catechists, teachers, and learners a journey with Christ through his paschal mystery, ritually experienced in the celebration of the liturgy.

The word catechesis
has its roots
in the Greek word *katecheo*,
which means to resound or echo.

The catechumenate includes several rites and rituals, such as the signing with the cross, blessings, anointing, the Scrutinies, the presentations of the Creed and the Our Father. Catechumens break open the Word through a deep faith sharing that flows from their daily lives. Like the catechumenate, lifelong catechesis enables you and your learner to experience the Church's rites and symbols and unfolds their meaning. It provides ever deeper insight into the Scriptures and the faith of the Church through reflection, instruction, and formation. It draws you and your learners more deeply into the life of the faith community, especially in the Sunday Assembly. One of the vital aspects of liturgy is service, so ongoing catechesis encourages and motivates persons of all ages to acts of loving service to others, meeting the needs of the faith community as well as the larger community of the neighborhood, the country, and the world.



Catechesis aims to bring about
in the believer
an ever more mature faith
in Jesus Christ,
a deeper knowledge and love
of his person and message,
and a firm commitment
to follow him.

NDC 19A

Strategies for Making the Catechumenate Your Own Model

- Whatever season of the year you are in at this moment, try to enter more deeply into the spirit of that season: through reading and sharing of the Sunday readings; through traditional seasonal practices (if applicable); by observing the major feasts and solemnities of the season.
- Listen carefully to the homily at Sunday Mass and apply it to your own life.
- Use the Morning and Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours (there are simplified versions for those unable to pray the complete hours).
- Choose specific acts of service to carry out.
- Make an effort to know the other catechists or teachers on your team better. This will help build community and communion.

As You End This Session

During the coming week remember that you are called to be a “living edition of the gospel,” and look for one or two ways you can put this into practice.



Integrating What You Have Just Learned

- Share with other members of your group your efforts in making the catechumenate your model in your own lifelong catechesis. If you are studying on your own, reflect on your own experiences. Afterward write about your difficulties and successes.

Notes

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ON YOUR OWN

Choose one of the signs, gestures, or rituals used at Mass (for example, the breaking of the bread, the sign of the cross, the sharing of communion). Then reflect on what it means to you.