

Formation of Catechists

Catechist Formation in the Directory for Catechesis

The specific vocation of the catechist therefore has its roots in the common vocation of the people of God, called to serve God's plan for salvation on behalf of humanity. (110)

The catechist is a Christian who receives a particular calling from God that, when accepted in faith, empowers him(her) for the service of transmission of faith and for the task of initiating others into the Christian life. (112)

By virtue of faith and baptismal anointing, in collaboration with the Magisterium of Christ and as a servant of the action of the Holy Spirit, the catechist is:

- a. **A witness of faith and keeper of the memory of God;** *in experiencing the goodness and truth of the Gospel in his or her encounter with the person of Jesus, the catechist keeps, nourishes, and bears witness to the new life that stems from this, and becomes a sign for others. The faith contains the memory of God's history with humanity. Keeping this memory, reawakening it in others, and placing it at the service of the proclamation is the specific vocation of the catechist. The testimony of life is necessary for the credibility of the mission. Recognize his or her own frailty before the mercy of God, the catechist does not cease to be the sign of hope for his brothers and sisters.*
- b. **A teacher and a mystagogue** *who introduces others to the mystery of God, revealed in the paschal mystery of Christ; as an icon of Jesus the teacher, the catechist has the two-fold task of transmitting the content of the faith and leading others into the mystery of faith itself. The catechist is called to open others to the truth about human beings and their ultimate vocation, communicating the knowledge of Christ and at the same time*

introducing them to the various dimensions of the Christian life, unveiling the mysteries of salvation contained in the deposit of faith and renewed in the Church's liturgy.

- c. **An accompanier and educator** *of those who are entrusted to him or her by the Church; the catechist is an expert in the art of accompaniment, has education expertise, is able to listen and enter in the dynamics of human growth, becomes a traveling companion with patience and a sense of gradualness, in docility to the action of the Spirit and through a process of formation helps his(her) brothers and sisters to mature in the Christian life and journey toward God. The catechist, an expert in humanity, knows the joys and hopes of human beings, their sadness and distress (Gaudium et Spes 1) and is able to situate them in relation to the Gospel of Jesus. (113)*

*Formation sets as its goal, in the first place, making catechists aware that as baptized persons they are true **missionary disciples**, meaning active participants in evangelization, and on this basis are enabled by the Church to communicate the Gospel and to **accompany** and **educate** believers in the faith. The formation of catechists therefore helps to develop the skills needed to communicate the faith and to accompany the people in their growth. The Christocentric goal of catechesis shapes the entire formation of catechesis and asks that they be able to conduct the catechetical journey in such a way as to bring out the centrality of Jesus Christ in salvation history. (132)*

Criteria for Formation

In the formation of catechists several criteria must be kept in mind that serve as inspiration for programs of formation . . .

- a. **Spirituality of mission and evangelization:** *it is vital that the whole formative process be permeated by the centrality of spiritual experience in missionary perspective . . .*
- b. **Catechesis as integral formation:** *this is a matter of “forming catechists so as to be able to transmit not only a teaching but also an integral Christian formation, by developing the ‘tasks of initiation, of education, and of teaching.’ Catechists must be able to be, at one and the same time, teachers, educators, and witnesses of the faith. . .*
- c. **Style of accompaniment:** *the Church feels the duty of forming its catechists in the art of personal accompaniment, both by proposing to them the experience of **being accompanied** in order to grow in discipleship, and by enabling them and sending them to **accompany** their brothers and sisters.*
- d. **Consistency among formative styles:** *“As a general criterion, it is necessary to underline the need for a coherence between the general pedagogy of formation of catechists and the pedagogy proper to the catechetical process. It would be very difficult for the catechist in his(her) activity to improvise a style and sensibility to which he(he) had not been introduced during his(her) own formation.”*
- e. **And attitude of docibilitas and self-formation:** *In the first place, it necessary that the catechist develop docibilitas, meaning the willingness to be touched by grace, by life, by persons in a serene and positive attitude toward reality in order **to learn how to learn**. Moreover, the willingness for self-formation is what enables the catechist to make a method of formation his(her) own and to be able to apply it to himself(herself) and to his(her) ecclesial service. In concrete terms, this is a matter of understanding oneself as a participant who is always in formation . . .*

- f. **The dynamic of the laboratory in the context of the group,** *as a group formative practice in which faith is **learning by doing**, which means valuing the experience, contributions, and reformulations of each one, in view of transformative learning. (135)*

The Dimensions of Formation

Being and “Knowing-How To Be With:” Human and Christian Maturity

*In the dimension of **being**, the catechist is formed to become **a witness of faith and a keeper of the memory of God**. Formation helps the catechist to reconsider his(her) own catechetical action as an opportunity for human and Christian growth . . . the catechist is called to grow constantly in affective balance, critical sense, inner unity and freedom, living relationships that support and enrich the faith. “The formation, above all, nourishes the spirituality of the catechist, so that his(her) activity springs in truth from his(her) own witness of life.” Formation therefore sustains the missionary awareness of the catechist, through the internalization of the demands of the Kingdom that Jesus has manifested . . . (139)*

*On the basis of this level of interiority there sprouts the **knowing-how to be with**, as a natural ability necessary to catechesis understood as an educational and communicative act. It is in fact on relationality, which is inherent to the very essence of the person (cf. GN 2:18), that ecclesial communion is grafted. The formation of catechists is careful to reveal and encourage the growth of this relational capacity, which is made concrete in a willingness to live human and ecclesial relationships in a way that is fraternal and serene. (140)*

Knowledge: Biblical-Theological Formation and the Understanding of Human Beings and the Social Context

*The catechist is also a **teacher** who instructs in the faith. In fact, while making witness his(her) main virtue he(he) does not forget that he(he) is also responsible for the transmission of the ecclesial faith. His(her) formation therefore makes room for the exploration and study of the message to be*

transmitted to the cultural, ecclesial, and existential context of the hearer . . . The assimilation of the content of the faith as **wisdom of the faith** takes place above all through familiarity with Sacred Scripture and with the study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church . . . (143)

Because of this it is necessary that the catechist should know:

- ◆ the main divisions of salvation history: Old Testament, New Testament, and Church history, in the light of the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ;
- ◆ the essential core of the Christian message and experience: the Creed, the **liturgy**, and the **sacraments, moral life, and prayer**;
- ◆ the principal elements of the ecclesial Magisterium concerning the proclamation of the Gospel and catechesis. (144)

Savoir-Faire: Pedagogical and Methodological Formation

In the dimension of **savoir-faire**, the catechist is formed to grow as an **educator** and **communicator**. The catechist, recognizing that his(her) hearer is an active participant in whom the grace of God is dynamically at work, will present himself(herself) as a

respectful facilitator of an experience of faith of which he(she) is not in charge. (148)

The pedagogical formation of the catechist should develop several attitudes in him(her), including:

- a. the **capacity of inner freedom and gratuitousness, of dedication and consistency** in order to be a credible witness to the faith;
- b. expertise in the **communication and narration of the faith** as the ability to present salvation history in a vital way so that persons may feel part of it;
- c. the maturation of an educational mentality that implies the willingness to build mature relationships with persons and the capacity to guide group dynamics, fostering the activation of learning processes for both individuals and the community;
- d. the serene **handling of educational relationships** in their affective capacity, getting in tune with the inner world of the other and disposing oneself to express one's emotions;
- e. the **capacity to prepare an itinerary of faith** that consists in considering socio-cultural circumstances; to utilize languages, techniques, and tools with creativity; to make an assessment. (149)

Envisioning Catechist Formation

#1. What it be like if catechist formation was designed around the three-fold identity of the catechist...

1. The Catechist is a witness of faith and keeper of the memory of God.
2. The Catechist is a teacher and a mystagogue.
3. The Catechist is an accompanier and educator.

The catechist is a missionary disciple, who communicates the Gospel and accompanies and educates believers in the faith.

#2. What it be like if catechist formation was designed around the three dimensions of formation...

1. *Being*: the catechist is formed to become a witness of faith and keeper of the memory of God; and to “knowing-how to be with” relational ability.
2. *Knowledge*: the catechist is a teacher who instructs in the faith and should know: salvation history, the core of the Christian message (Creed, liturgy, sacraments, moral life, and prayer), and Church teaching.

3. *Savior-Faire*: the catechist is an educator and communicator who is formed in pedagogical and methodological attitudes: in inner freedom and gratuitousness and dedication and consistency; in the communication of narrative of the faith; in building relationships and guiding group dynamics; in handling relationships in educational settings; and preparing an itinerary of faith responsive socio-cultural circumstances and utilizing languages, techniques and tools with creativity.

#3. What would it be like if catechist formation was designed using adult learning principles and methods...

1. Adults learn best when they are treated as self-directed persons who are always learning.
2. Adults learn best when they feel the need to learn and have input into what, why, and how they will learn. They perceive the goals of a learning experience to be their goals.
3. Adults learn best when the learning experience is meaningfully related to their past experience, and their experience is effectively utilized as a resource for learning.
4. Adults learn best in a life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) orientation to learning. Adults are motivated to devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations.
5. Adults learn best when the learning experience is controlled primarily by them. They can set their own pace and time for learning.
6. Adults learn best when the learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences. They learn best in an environment that encourages self-esteem and interdependence; and is safe, relaxed, and comfortable environment.
7. Adults learn best when their learning styles are taken into account and there are a variety of learning activities.
8. Adults learn best when there is attention to the emotional and intuitive as well as

intellectual and rational, to the communal and social as well as the individual and personal.

9. Adults learn best when they have a sense of progress toward their goals and can see the results and rewards of the learning experience. Adults learn best when they can evaluate themselves.
10. Adults learn best when they have an opportunity to apply the new knowledge to practical situations immediately in their own lives. They are motivated to learn when they have the opportunity to do something they could not do before.

#4. What would it be like if catechist formation used a variety of formats for learning...

Parishes and dioceses can design catechist formation in multiple formats to provide ways for catechists to engage in formation that are conducive to effective learning and the busy lives of catechists today. Multiple formats provide choices for adults to learn the same content.

Approach #1. On Your Own, Self-directed Learning

The abundance of online catechist formation courses and online content in the form of video and audio programs make possible independent, self-directed learning.

Approach #2. Mentoring: 1-1- Learning

Experienced (veteran) catechists can serve as mentors or guides to those who are engaged in self-directed learning. Mentor and catechist can meet to discern learning needs and create a plan for learning. The catechist engages in self-directed learning; and mentor and catechist meet to review learning and its application.

Approach #3. Small Group Learning

The small group approach works best when several catechists are engaged in learning on the same topic. The small group is a blend of individual learning and small group experiences. For example, a catechist completes the learning independently; the small group meets to discuss the content and its application; the catechist completes an application project; and the small group meets to

share application projects and assist each other in creating projects to implement in their classes and programs.

Approach #4. Whole Group Learning

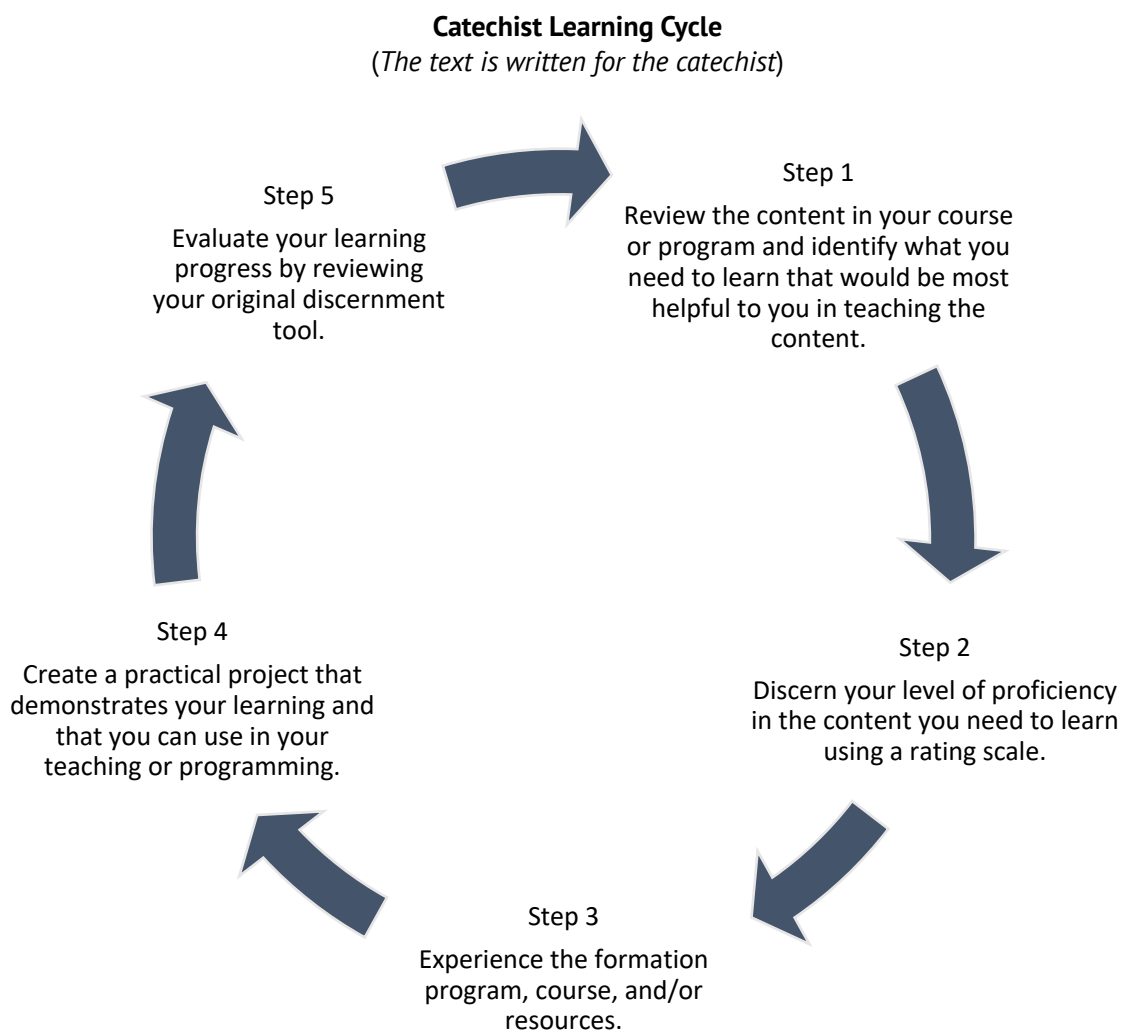
The whole group approach works best when all of the catechists have a similar learning need or

when the parish wants to provide formation for all catechists. Whole Group Learning can be designed in a variety of models, such as a one-time in-service program, a multi-part in-service program, and a one-day enrichment program or one-day retreat program.

An Example of Catechist Formation using Adult Learning Principles

Here is an example of an approach to catechist formation that is designed using adult learning principles and methods. In this example catechists discern their learning needs based on the content in the courses or programs they are teaching and then select the learning programs, courses, and/or resources (print, audio, video) to match with their

learning needs. They select their learning path in order to develop their proficiency in a particular aspect of the Bible, Catholic theology, or educational methods. Catechists move through a five step process of discernment, learning, and application as illustrated in the diagram below.



The Learning Cycle Described

Step 1. Identify the content of what you will be teaching.

Review the content in the classes or programs that you are teaching. For example, most children's catechetical programs include four or five major themes in the curriculum for grades 1 through 6: what we believe (Creed), how we celebrate (sacraments), how we live (morality and social teachings), how we pray, and how we celebrate the Church year seasons and feasts. Grades 7 and 8 often have one theme, such as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus or Church history or Bible. Identify the content themes in your curriculum that you need to learn more about.

Step 2. Discover your level of proficiency in the content of the module you have selected.

Discern your level of proficiency on the topics you selected by using the learning assessment. Rate your knowledge and ability on a scale from 1-5.

- 1 = I am a beginner and need to develop my understanding of this topic.
- 3 = I am familiar with this topic and need to grow in my understanding so that I can teach and share my knowledge.
- 5 = I am able to teach and share my knowledge of this topic with others.

At the completion of the course or program, and your practical project, return to this initial assessment to identify how you have grown in each area.

Step 3. Engage in your learning.

Select the course, program, and/or resource that would be most helpful to you in teaching the course or program. This can include online formation courses, diocesan courses or workshops, independent learning (books, audio, videos), and much more.

Engage in the learning experience.

Step 4. Design your practical application.

Create a practical project that demonstrates your learning and that you can use in your teaching or programming.

Step 5. Evaluate your learning.

Evaluate your learning progress by reviewing your original discernment tool. Identify new learning needs and begin the process again .

Example of Proficiency Discernment (Topic: Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus)

To determine your current knowledge and practice on this topic, complete the following learning assessment using the scale from 1-5 with 1 = beginning, 3 = familiarity, and 5 = proficiency. At the completion of your learning and your practical project, return to this initial assessment to identify how you have grown in each area.

- 1 = I am a beginner and need to develop my understanding of this topic.
- 3 = I am familiar with this topic and need to grow in my understanding so that I can teach and share my knowledge.
- 5 = I am able to teach and share my knowledge of this topic with others.

Understanding the birth of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke	1 2 3 4 5
Understanding the characteristics of the ministry of Jesus as presented in the Gospels	1 2 3 4 5
Understanding the key teachings of the message Jesus proclaimed as presented in the Gospels	1 2 3 4 5
Understanding the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection as presented in the Gospels	1 2 3 4 5
Ability to integrate the meaning of Jesus' life and message into my life as a Christian	1 2 3 4 5
Ability to teach the life of Jesus – message, ministry, death and resurrection.	1 2 3 4 5