

Guidelines for Catechesis

The catechetical ministry has been nurtured and renewed in recent years with the publication of three important Church documents, namely, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *General Directory for Catechesis*, and the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, first published in 1993, provides a systematic presentation of the content of Catholic doctrine that catechists are to teach based on the four pillars of the faith. These are Creed, Liturgy and Sacraments, Morality, and Prayer. *Faith First Legacy Edition* uses a similar four-unit structure to address the four pillars of our faith every year at every grade level.

The *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)*, published in 1997, defines catechesis, its goals, principles, and guidelines. The *GDC* states this goal for all our catechesis: “Catechesis is that particular form of the ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith” (*GDC* 82).

In May, 2005 the *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)* was published. It is a resource for catechesis in the United States. The *NDC* applies general principles from the *General Directory for Catechesis* to catechesis in the United States. The *NDC* echoes the emphasis on a new evangelization and calls us to conversion to Christ and discipleship—“making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple” (*NDC* 17B).

Both the *GDC* and the *NDC* acknowledge that this new evangelization requires parishes to work toward a new conversion of heart by Catholics who may have never been catechized or who have faltered in their faith commitment. Because both evangelization and catechesis occur within culture and in a particular time and place, a unique feature of the new national directory is its emphasis on inculturation of the Gospel message within the United States, which is described in chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 4 of the *NDC* deals with methodology, a topic of interest to every catechist. First, it focuses on divine methodology—God’s self-revelation to us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. This section emphasizes God as revealer of everything we know and believe about our faith. Second, this chapter focuses on eight elements of human methodology—the ways in which all people come to faith (see *NDC* 29A–H). Catechists who reflect on these eight methodologies will understand more clearly their own role in the total faith formation process of their learners. *Faith First* incorporates all of these eight methodologies in its learning design.

- 1. Learning Through Human Experience.** We begin our teaching in the human experience of the learner, because it is only through our experience that we can come to know ourselves, one another, and God. Every chapter of *Faith First* begins in this way.

2. Learning by Discipleship. We recognize that the best way to learn about Jesus is to follow in his footsteps and become his disciple. For this reason, *Faith First* emphasizes the life and teachings of Jesus throughout each grade level.

3. Learning Within the Christian Community. We understand that the witness of the Christian community teaches children in both explicit and implicit ways as it incorporates them into the Body of Christ. That is why *Faith First* provides resources to help children connect with the whole community of faith.



4. Learning Within the Christian Family. The Christian family is the first and most important place in which faith is born and nurtured. *Faith First* provides a number of support options for

families to help them feel more confident in this most important work.



5. Learning Through the Witness of the Catechist. Catechists are a powerful influence on those they catechize. That is why *Faith First* catechist guides offer “front-to-back” catechist formation to assist them. In addition, RCL makes available to you the *Echoes of Faith* video-assisted resource for catechist formation so that catechists can be effective witnesses of the Gospel.

6. Learning by Heart. The *NDC* speaks of the value of memorization as a part of catechesis. As children learn the prayers and doctrinal formulations of their tradition, they build a stronger Catholic identity to carry with them throughout life. The faith vocabulary and summaries

in every chapter of *Faith First* will assist them in achieving this goal.

7. Making a Commitment to Live the Christian Life. Faith has not really taken root in us until we decide to live what we have learned. Every chapter of *Faith First* asks young people to make a concrete faith choice.



8. Learning by Apprenticeship. Apprentices walk with mentors as they seek to know more about their faith. Through projects and activities throughout the program *Faith First* provides opportunities for older students to mentor younger ones and assist in their faith formation.

FOR REFLECTION

- *How powerful a witness are you to the good news of Jesus Christ? Why?*
- *To which of the eight methodologies would you like to give special attention this year? How might you do this?*