CATECHETICAL METHODS AND PROCESS

Catechetical methods

Genuine catechesis employs a methodology that:

- Emphasizes God’s loving initiative and the person’s free response
- Accepts the progressive nature of Revelation, the transcendence and the mysterious nature of the word of God, and word’s adaptation to different persons and cultures
- Recognizes the centrality of Jesus Christ
- Values the community experience of faith
- Is rooted in interpersonal relations and makes it own the process of dialogue
- Utilizes signs, which link words and deeds, teaching and experience
- Draws its power of truth, and its task to bear witness to the truth, from the Holy Spirit. National Directory for Catechesis p. 95

The various elements of human methodology that are to be used in the passing on of the Catholic faith are:

- Learning through Human Experience
- Learning by Discipleship
- Learning within the Christian Community
- Learning within the Christian Family
- Learning through the Witness of the Catechist
- Learning by Heart
- Making a Commitment to Live the Christian Life
- Learning by Apprenticeship National Directory for Catechesis pp. 95-105

The methods of catechesis must also be used in the context of modern communications and technology. The effective use of mass media is important for evangelization and catechesis in the modern world.

“all the various instruments of mass media should be employed to proclaim the Gospel message....Catechists must seriously commit themselves to learning how to use these media to bring people to Christ.” National Directory for Catechesis p. 106

Catechetical Process
The disciples of Jesus turned to the Old Testament to make sense of their experiences of Jesus of Nazareth. In this process, they discovered new meaning for these sacred scriptures.

Catholic catechesis and spirituality grew out of the process of interpreting and integrating the signs of God’s word within the community and the life of individuals.

“Through all the ages of the Church, the study of Sacred Scripture has been the cornerstone of catechesis. ...Catechesis should take Sacred Scripture as its inspiration, its fundamental curriculum, and its end because it strengthens faith, nourishes the soul, and nurtures the spiritual life. Scripture provides the starting point, foundation, and norm of catechetical teaching.” National Directory for Catechesis  p. 70

The signs of God’s saving activity are discovered through various signs: biblical, liturgical, ecclesial and natural. Through interpretation and integration of these signs we come to discover God’s presence in our daily lives and the Christian community.

The catechetical process used today is not new. It finds its roots in the gospel story of Jesus and the disciples on their way to Emmaus. In this story Jesus approaches the disciples, asks what is happening, they tell their story, then, Jesus relates the scriptures to himself and they will discover Jesus in the breaking of the bread. This story provides the framework for bringing others to discover the Good News and its meaning in their lives.

This catechetical process involves three basic movements:

- Human experience
- Message- Scripture/Tradition
- Response- Application

Most textbooks today reflect this catechetical process taught to us by Jesus. Although the terminology in different textbook series may vary, the structure of the lesson plan and the process are essentially the same.

- **Human Experience- Exploring Life**
  
  What is the human experience of the participant as related to the message of the lesson?

- **Message- Sharing the Tradition/Scripture**
  
  How does this human experience relate to some aspect of Scripture, Catholic Tradition, liturgical symbol, doctrinal teaching or Christian witness?

- **Response-Integration of Life and Tradition**
How can life experiences be integrated and interpreted in the context of the Christian message/tradition so that the participant is challenged to respond to this message/tradition by choosing ways to reflect and live its way of life in their daily lives and world? This answers the question “So what difference does this teaching make?”

**Learning**

Catechists are called to establish an environment where learning can take place. Learning is a process of increasing intellectual awareness or insight that results in a change in how a person decides values and acts. Learning is more than coming to know something. Learning is a profound event, a real change in how a person lives their life.

St. Thomas Aquinas said, “learning occurs according to the needs of the learner, not the teacher. You must adapt teaching methods to the ways students learn best. “

Catechists must understand how their students learn, know learning methods, developmental stages of the students, and student needs so that they can be a catalyst for a meaningful learning experience. Catechist must lead students into a dialogue about a subject in the context of their experience until they reach a new way of thinking, doing and living their Catholic life.

The results of learning are reflected in the behavior of the learner. Catechists must determine the desired learning outcomes at the beginning of each lesson. These learning outcomes must be determined in terms of:

- Cognitive-assimilation of knowledge-content-information
- Affective- feelings attached to beliefs-experience-formaton
- Behavior-actions that will reflect behavior-actions-transformation

In developing a lesson plan, catechists need to determine the learning objectives for the student in each area by asking the question, *what learning outcome do you hope the student will be able to demonstrate at the end of the lesson?* These learning outcomes are to be determined in the context of the textbook series, needs of the student and the local Catholic community of faith.

**DIOCESAN RELIGION CURRICULUM**

Most dioceses have developed a Religion Curriculum for grades K-12 in parishes and Catholic Schools based on national guidelines from the Bishops of the United States. This curriculum presents grade level expectations and how to be implemented in all parish/school programs for children/youth.
“School-age children should receive formal and systematic catechesis in a parish-based catechetical program, a Catholic school, or a program of home-based catechesis in which the content of the faith and the experience of Christian life is presented authentically and completely.” National Directory for Catechesis p.204

“Adult catechesis should be the organizing principle, which gives coherence to the various catechetical programs offered by a particular Church…this is the axis around which revolves the catechesis of childhood and adolescence as well as that of old age.” National Directory for Catechesis p. 188

TEXTBOOKS

From the early days of the Church, there has been a systematic approach to presenting basic beliefs and practices of Christian faith to believers. These basic beliefs and practices were expressed in a text so that they could be shared with others more faithfully. This systematic approach has included the four pillars: Creed, Sacraments, Commandment/Beatitudes and Prayer.

Textbooks are valuable resources for catechists, because they present the fundamental teachings, practices and values of Catholicism at a particular age level, based on the developmental needs of the learner. Today each textbook series has a catechist manual that contains essential information for the catechist, including background information on the teaching/scripture, learner development, catechetical methods and supplementary materials for each lesson.

The textbook is a tool that:

- Assists the catechist in implementing the Diocesan Religion Curriculum for a particular age group
- Assists students in learning about God and God’s revelations according to their age and readiness
- Encouraged students to learn about their Catholic faith in such a way as to live their faith and bring about the reign of God in their lives and the world.
- Provides ways to involve parents and the community in the learning process

Since textbooks are written for the entire US, and there are many different cultural needs, all textbooks need to be adapted to the culture of the local faith community.

“The principle formulations of the faith; basic prayers; key biblical themes, personalities, and expressions; and factual information regarding worship and Christian life should be learned by heart. These ensure an accurate exposition of the faith and foster a common language among the faithful…..Receiving the formulations of the faith, professing and internalizing them, and, in turn, sharing them with the community, encourage the individual’s participation in the received truth.” National Directory for Catechesis p. 102