

Baptismal Catechumenate— Characteristics for All Catechesis

This study document was prepared by Deborah Stollery, consultant to the Office of Faith Formation, Diocese of Richmond, and Dennis Beeman, former director of the Office. It is reprinted here, with permission and thanks.

Both the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the U.S. *National Directory for Catechesis* see intrinsic connections between the Church's renewal of the catechumenate and the experience of catechesis in all aspects of parish life: "The baptismal catechumenate is the source of inspiration of all catechesis" (*NDC*, p. 115; *GDC*, nos. 90-91). Both initiatory catechesis and ongoing catechesis have the following characteristics.

1. **Conversion.** They are about forming an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ that calls for a commitment to follow him. This will mean changing ways of thinking, believing, and acting that are not aligned with what Jesus preached and lived.
2. **Gradual pace.** Forming a relationship and then undertaking the changes that relationship calls for takes time. The Church says that time is not to be pre-determined for any individual. The pace is determined by the journey of faith of the individual, witnessed by outward signs. These changes are marked with liturgical rites.
3. **Based on Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium.** The Word, as we understand it in the Catholic tradition, includes all these components. St. Jerome said that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. To that aspect of the Word, we incorporate the rich tradition that is Catholicism, and we hand on the teachings of our Church.
4. **Linked to Sunday liturgy.** The way in which the Word is presented is to be tied to the most formative event in our lives: the Sunday liturgy. Catechumens are nurtured during the Mass of Catechumens, or what we know as the first two parts of Mass: the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word. They are then kindly dismissed for immediate catechesis on that word. This is followed by extended catechesis in which they are offered scriptural exegesis and related doctrinal truths to illumine the word, leading to application to their daily lives and a missioning to carry out this word.
5. **Systematic.** The system used to present Jesus Christ and the truths of the faith completely is the Paschal Mystery as prayed, proclaimed, and preached in the Sunday Liturgy. This means paying ample attention to the liturgical year in all its communal manifestations. It means helping catechumens see the different emphases of the Gospel writers in each liturgical year. It means joining the community as it births, lives, dies, and rises with Christ.
6. **Utilizes Catholic prayer and rituals, and culminates with sacraments.** The apprenticeship of faith that is the catechumenal process helps catechumens appropriate Catholic ways of praying, Catholic rituals and practices, and hands on our understanding of Christ, really present in our sacramental system. It helps reveal the meaning of our symbols through their use and then reflection upon their power, thus revealing them as mystery: never fully understood.
7. **Sees people as unique.** God knows us all as individuals and loves us individually. A catechumenate echoes that part of the nature of God by not programming a faith journey for catechumens. There are no fixed timetables. Each person takes an individual journey of faith within the community's living of the Paschal Mystery, and the community companions them while they come to know Christ at their own pace.
8. **Respects baptism.** Those who come seeking reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church are already in partial communion and members of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Those seeking reception who are uncatechized are offered a journey

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