

THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
OF NORTHAMPTON



# Our Mission as Catechists



## Foreword by Bishop David Oakley

Every disciple is called to be a witness to Jesus. We can do this in a number of different ways. Being a catechist in the life of our Diocese is a particularly important way in which we share in the mission Christ has given His Church. For some you will be working with, there is an echo of the Greek-speaking Jews in John 12 - "we wish to see Jesus". There are probably more of these people than we appreciate, not least amongst the young people we are preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation. And then, there are those who are unsure why they are seeking catechesis. So how are we going to sustain our own energy for this important ministry? First of all, by spending time with Jesus. Hopefully we will be able to provide opportunities around the Diocese for catechists to meet together for a day of prayer and reflection. Secondly, by reading good material. I have been a priest for over forty years and have taught theology for more than thirty of those years. And still, I try to find time in a busy life to read documents, articles and books which will nourish my own enthusiasm to be a catechist. Please be assured, my dear collaborators in the ministry of catechist, that you are held in prayer and very much appreciated by me. Your pastoral care of those preparing for sacraments and seeking to grow in faith is indispensable for the future wellbeing of our diocesan family.

Yours devotedly in Christ,  
+David

## Introduction

In recent years we have been blessed with a number of significant initiatives aimed at supporting and developing the ministry of catechesis. The new Directory for Catechesis, building on two previous versions, was given to us in 2020 and a year later Pope Francis Instituted the Ministry of Catechist by means of his Apostolic Letter *Ancient Ministry*<sup>1</sup>.

Both of these important Church documents speak about the ministry of catechesis in the light of the missionary transformation that the whole Church has undertaken. In his letter *Ancient Ministry* Pope Francis recognises and reflects on the specific form of service played by catechists within the Christian community insisting that catechists are all the more urgently needed in our world today<sup>2</sup>.

He asserts that if we are attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who is unfailingly present and fruitful, we will see an awakening of personal enthusiasm and a new awareness of this specific vocation in the life of the Church.<sup>3</sup> In our Diocese we are on our own journey of missionary transformation as we seek to make missionary disciples together. As catechists it is essential to recognise that we have a valuable, irreplaceable and specific contribution to make to this task.

The purpose of this booklet *‘Our Mission as Catechists’* is to share some key ideas, themes and resources that will help us to better understand and live out that mission and so make our unique contribution as effectively as possible.

*“Today, too, the Spirit is calling men and women to set out and encounter all those who are waiting to discover the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Christian faith.”*<sup>4</sup> Since the Spirit is calling us today let us continue to listen and respond to the One who calls us to this ancient and noble ministry, allowing the Lord to bring fruitfulness and new life to all that we offer in service as catechists.

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1 Antiquum Ministerium, Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio by Pope Francis instituting the Ministry of Catechist

<sup>2</sup> Antiquum Ministerium 5,6

<sup>3</sup> Antiquum Ministerium 5

<sup>4</sup> Antiquum Ministerium 5

## 1. Relationship With Jesus Christ

### *Focussing on our essential encounter with the Lord and discipleship*

*“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>5</sup>*

These words of Jesus are an anchor for us all, and especially for those of us called to any kind of ministry. They are a clear reminder that our ongoing encounter with the Lord and our following of Him as disciples are the essential foundation for our mission. Without this everything we do will ultimately be ineffective and fruitless. If, however, we remain in Him and respond daily to that call to follow Him there will be much fruit.

During an International Congress on Catechesis, Pope Francis said that “to start anew from Christ means being close to him...the first thing for a disciple is to be with the Master, to listen to him and to learn from him. This is always true, and it is true at every moment of our lives.” He asked “do I find time to remain in his presence, in silence, to be looked upon by him? Do I let his fire warm my heart? If the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we...warm the heart of others?”<sup>6</sup>

In our mission as catechists it is good to pause from time to time, to take stock of our discipleship and to seek His presence anew. Since the goal of catechesis is the “living encounter with the Lord who transforms life”<sup>7</sup> it is good for us as catechists to begin to reflect on our own living encounter with the Lord.



*“The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: ‘It was about four o’clock in the afternoon’”<sup>8</sup>*

*When did you last experience the Lord touching your heart?*

*How would you say your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ is going at the moment?*

*Are you finding the time to remain in his presence, to be looked upon by Him?*

*Do you let the fire of His love warm your heart?*

<sup>5</sup> John 15:5

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis Address at the International Congress on Catechesis, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at the Vatican

<sup>7</sup> Preface, Directory for Catechesis

<sup>8</sup> John 1:39, Evangelii Gaudium 13

## 2. Mission

### *Understanding how catechesis fits within the Church's mission of evangelisation*

*“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

*When he had said this he breathed on them and said to them, ‘receive the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>9</sup>*

Many of us know from our lived experience that our encounter with the Lord and our life as disciples flows naturally into mission for “we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”<sup>10</sup> We are members of a Church which is missionary by her very nature because the mission of the Church flows from the mission of God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit and so each of us, as members of the Church, are impelled by love to share the life of God with all people:

“The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from the ‘fountain-like love’, the love of God the Father.”<sup>11</sup>

The beautiful image used here is one of a fountain where water is drawn up from the source and impelled outwards. As we are drawn ever deeper into the life and love of God we are also drawn more deeply into the missionary impulse of God’s love that is always pouring itself out upon the Church and the world, seeking to draw others to share in that life and love. So the “Church exists to evangelise”<sup>12</sup> and “the mandate of evangelising all people constitutes her essential mission.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus Christ makes this same point very clear to us in his Great Commission<sup>14</sup> that we are sent to “go and make disciples”, in short we are to be in a permanent state of mission.<sup>15</sup>

### Every Form of Authentic Evangelisation is Always ‘New’<sup>16</sup>

Although the Church has always been called to mission and evangelisation, since its very beginnings, at the same time it recognises that we now find ourselves at a new missionary stage one where the Spirit is bringing about an evangelisation with “a new fervour, new methods and new expressions for the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup> So, while the message of the Good News is and always will be the same; Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever<sup>18</sup> yet “whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.”<sup>19</sup> As catechists we are called to be part of this new evangelisation and witness to the new fervour and creativity in evangelising that the Lord is inspiring in the Church.

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<sup>9</sup> John 20:21-22

<sup>10</sup> Acts 4:20

<sup>11</sup> Ad Gentes 2

<sup>12</sup> Evangelii Nuntiandi 14

<sup>13</sup> Directory for Catechesis 28

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>15</sup> Evangelii Gaudium 20-33, Directory for Catechesis 40

<sup>16</sup> Evangelii Gaudium 11

<sup>17</sup> Directory for Catechesis 38-39

<sup>18</sup> Evangelii Gaudium 11, Heb 13:8

<sup>19</sup> Evangelii Gaudium 11

## What Is Catechesis And Why Is It Important?

Catechesis is an activity of the Church which flows directly from the missionary mandate of Jesus. As such it is a vital part of the Church's Mission of Evangelisation<sup>20</sup> Its purpose is to make "the proclamation of his passion, death and resurrection continually resound in the heart of every person"<sup>21</sup> so that lives may be transformed. Ultimately the definitive aim of all we do in catechesis is to "put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: [for] only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity."<sup>22</sup>

The Directory for Catechesis spells out what our mission looks like in practice showing us that catechesis is "a dynamic and complex reality at the service of the Word of God, it is accompaniment, education, and formation in the faith and for faith, an introduction to the celebration of the Mystery, illumination and interpretation of human life and history."<sup>23</sup>

As catechists we are part of this great missionary endeavour and have a particular gift and contribution to make. The word catechesis (like catechumenate) comes from the Greek word '*katechein*' which means 'to instruct or teach by word of mouth'<sup>24</sup> to echo or resound. So catechists have a role to play in enabling the Word of God to echo, be passed on and transmitted to others.

The Directory tells us that catechesis is "generally directed towards persons who have already received the first proclamation<sup>25</sup>, within whom it promotes the process of initiation, growth, and maturation in the faith."<sup>26</sup> However it asserts also that we shouldn't be over-reliant or stress the conceptual distinctions and differences between the various stages of faith development (pre-evangelisation, first proclamation, catechesis and ongoing formation).

For example, the experience of many catechists on the ground in our parishes demonstrates the fact that many who present themselves for sacramental preparation are often in need of evangelisation and formation as disciples. This is a vital opportunity in our mission and we have a duty to ensure that everyone who we encounter as catechists is able to clearly hear the Gospel message and are provided with opportunities to grow in becoming missionary disciples. The demands of our mission require that we seriously reflect on the way we offer catechesis and pursue strategies to strengthen the formation of all people, including families and young people.<sup>27</sup>

In our vital mission as catechists we all have our part to play<sup>28</sup>. As members of the Body of Christ each of us, according to our particular vocation and state in life can make our own

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<sup>20</sup> Directory for Catechesis 48-50

<sup>21</sup> Directory for Catechesis 55

<sup>22</sup> Catechesi Tradendae 5, Directory for Catechesis 75

<sup>23</sup> Directory for Catechesis 55

<sup>24</sup> YOUCAT p.117

<sup>25</sup>The initial or first proclamation of the Good News, the *kerygma*, see Chapter 3

<sup>26</sup> Directory for Catechesis 56

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 4 for more information about some practical strategies to respond to these challenges and opportunities.

<sup>28</sup> Directory for Catechesis 110

unique contribution. Our different and complementary vocations as clergy, religious and lay people is a powerful force when we collaborate in this catechetical mission<sup>29</sup>. The Directory tells us that we need to foster a “family centred catechesis that starts from the families themselves.”<sup>30</sup> We are called to draw in, equip and empower parents as active participants in catechesis and so help them to fulfil their mission to become the first and best educators of their children in the ways of faith, the first catechists of their own children.<sup>31</sup>

All of this is only possible in the power of the Holy Spirit. In catechesis, as in every area of the Church’s life and mission the Holy Spirit is at work<sup>32</sup>. As missionary disciples serving in the field of catechesis we are called to be Spirit-filled evangelisers, open to the Spirit’s presence and power. The renewal and dynamism that we need and hope for are possible if we maintain a firm trust in the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to enlighten, guide, direct and lead us.<sup>33</sup>

Writing to the Church at Corinth St Paul asserted that “the love of Christ impels us...”<sup>34</sup> Our mission, as we have seen, has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, that fountain-like of God the Father<sup>35</sup>. We are impelled by that same love today.



*“A spirit-filled evangelisation is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel... I once more invoke the Holy Spirit. I implore Him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelise all peoples.”<sup>36</sup>*

*Does your encounter with Lord and life as a disciple flow out naturally into mission?*

*Do you experience being impelled by the love of Christ to share your faith with others?*

*What is your understanding and experience of being a Spirit-filled evangeliser?*

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<sup>29</sup> Directory for Catechesis 114-129

<sup>30</sup> Directory for Catechesis 124

<sup>31</sup> Directory for Catechesis 124

<sup>32</sup> Directory for Catechesis 166,39

<sup>33</sup> Directory for Catechesis 39 Evangelii Gaudium 280

<sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:13

<sup>35</sup> Ad Gentes 2

<sup>36</sup> Evangelii Gaudium 261

### 3. The Message

*Catechists should be expert in the different stages of transmitting the faith*

*“On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over...”<sup>37</sup>*

In Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter on catechesis *Ancient Ministry* he makes it clear that “catechists are called first to be expert in the pastoral service of transmitting the faith as it develops through its different stages.” He goes on to highlight these different stages for us which go “from the initial proclamation of the kerygma to the instruction that presents our new life in Christ and prepares for the sacraments of Christian initiation, and then to the ongoing formation that can allow each person to give an accounting of the hope within them.”<sup>38</sup>

Diocesan training courses in catechesis go into more detail about these different stages of instruction and how as catechists we can be equipped to provide the systematic and solid instruction that is required in catechesis.<sup>39</sup> We begin this reflection on the message by giving our attention to the initial proclamation of the Gospel, the kerygma. This word *kerygma* may be new for some of us. Because it is so important, particularly in our current context, we will focus on unpacking what it is and why as catechists we need to be experts in understanding and announcing it. In the next chapter we will also devote some attention to the catechumenate as a source of inspiration for catechesis since, as the Directory makes clear, this is another of the distinctive characteristics of a missionary catechesis.<sup>40</sup>

#### What is the kerygma and why is it important?

‘Kerygma’ means ‘proclamation’ or ‘to proclaim’. In a Christian context it refers to the proclamation of the central message of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the core Gospel message, the initial proclamation which stirs up faith in those who hear and respond to it. The Directory for Catechesis, with its focus on presenting catechesis in the context of the Church’s mission of evangelisation, underlines the importance of the kerygma. It says that we are in need of a “catechesis that in a consistent way can be called kerygmatic, meaning a catechesis that is ‘an entering more deeply into the kerygma.’” It stresses that the proclamation of the kerygma is the “essential dimension of every moment of catechesis”<sup>41</sup> Pope Francis too, in his landmark Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) gives his attention to the kerygma and explains why it is so important in catechesis. He writes:

“In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the centre of all evangelising activity and all efforts at Church renewal. The kerygma is Trinitarian. The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father’s infinite mercy. On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over:

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<sup>37</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* 164

<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* 6, 1 Peter 3:15, cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, 113

<sup>39</sup> Please see the *Catechist Brochure* for details of the Bishop’s Certificate in Catechesis

<sup>40</sup> *Directory for Catechesis* 2, 35, 61-65

<sup>41</sup> *Directory for Catechesis* 57, *Evangelii Gaudium* 165

‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’

This first proclamation is called ‘first’ not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment...

We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more ‘solid’ formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis...[The kerygma] is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart.”<sup>42</sup>

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa has also highlighted the power of the kerygma and expressed very clearly why it is necessary:

“Faith blossoms in the context of the kerygma not in ...the context of theology, apologetics, and morality. These things are necessary for the ‘formation’ of faith and bring it to the perfection of charity, but they are not able to generate faith. Christianity, unlike every other religion, does not begin by telling people what they need to do to save themselves; it begins by telling them what God has done in Christ to save them. It is the religion of grace.”<sup>43</sup>

The Directory for Catechesis, quoting St John Chrysostom, describes the kerygma as the beautiful news we are called to share with others:

“Precisely because it unveils a new life- life without sin, life as his children, life in abundance, eternal life- this proclamation is beautiful: ‘The forgiveness of sins, justice, sanctification, redemption, adoption as children of God, the inheritance of heaven, kinship with the Son of God. What news is more beautiful than this?’”<sup>44</sup>

As we have seen ‘kerygma’ means ‘proclamation’ or ‘to proclaim’. As Christians we are called to go out and proclaim the Good News. But what is the Good News that we share? If you were asked in a few short sentences to explain what the Good News (Gospel Message) is what would you say?

(You may at this point wish to find some paper and a pen and write down what you understand the Good News to be before reading on and then compare your answer to what is written below).

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<sup>42</sup> Evangelii Gaudium 164,165

<sup>43</sup> Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, Address at the Inauguration of CHARIS in Rome, Paul VI Audience Hall, June 8, 2019

<sup>44</sup> Directory for Catechesis 13, St John Chrysostom

During Jesus' ministry he proclaimed the Good News in this way: 'The time has come and the Kingdom of God is very near, repent and believe the Good News'<sup>45</sup>. The Good News that Jesus was sharing was centred around the reality of God's Kingdom (God's reign) which was breaking into the world through Jesus' arrival.

After Pentecost and in the early Church we see the Apostles proclaiming the Good News in this way: 'Jesus has died, is risen and has been glorified'<sup>46</sup>. Because of his saving death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father, Jesus Christ is the Saviour, the Lord and Messiah (Christ, or one anointed with the Holy Spirit). Jesus is the King who embodies the Kingdom. The Good News then is Jesus himself. If we look at the whole plan of salvation that unfolds throughout the Old and New Testament we see that everything leads up to and is fulfilled in the person of Jesus and his saving work.

Here is a useful scheme which can be useful as a guide to proclaim the Good News today. It expresses some central themes of the Good News and can be used to guide us as we proclaim the saving love of Jesus:

- **God loves you today**
- **Sin separates us from God**
- **Jesus has saved you**
- **Believe and Convert**
- **Receive the Holy Spirit**
- **Join and be an active part of the Christian Community**

There are many creative ways to proclaim the kerygma, this is just one way to summarise and express the themes. However we share the kerygma we should do so using scripture and our own personal faith testimony to reach people's hearts. The message we share is direct (addressed to the person) and for now, not abstract or for some vague time. The message needs to be direct because it calls for a personal response, it involves a call to conversion.<sup>47</sup>

### The Kerygma Unpacked- Some Practical Examples

The Diocese of Northampton has produced a series of short kerygmatic videos that catechists can make use of in their work. These short videos unpack the central themes of the kerygma by means of simple teaching and personal testimonies. These can be viewed via the catechesis page of the Mission Northampton section of the Diocesan website.<sup>48</sup>

Below is another practical example of how the kerygma may be shared. It is taken from a Church document called Christ is Alive (Christus Vivit) by Pope Francis.

Although it is addressed to young people there is much here for all of us that can help us understand the kerygma more deeply. An edited section is quoted below, Pope Francis' full proclamation of the kerygma can be found from paragraphs 111-132 in Christ is Alive (Christus Vivit) which is available from the Vatican website.

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<sup>45</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>46</sup> c.f. Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2

<sup>47</sup> c.f. Redemptoris Missio 46, Catechesi Tradendae 19

<sup>48</sup> Due for release autumn 2022

## The Kerygma in *Christ is Alive* by Pope Francis

“Putting all else aside, I now wish to speak... about what is essential, the one thing we should never keep quiet about. It is a message containing three great truths that all of us need constantly to keep hearing.

### *A God who is love*

The very first truth I would tell each of you is this: ‘God loves you’. It makes no difference whether you have already heard it or not. I want to remind you of it. God loves you. Never doubt this, whatever may happen to you in life. At every moment, you are infinitely loved. Perhaps your experience of fatherhood has not been the best. Your earthly father may have been distant or absent, or harsh and domineering. Or maybe he was just not the father you needed. I don’t know. But what I can tell you, with absolute certainty, is that you can find security in the embrace of your heavenly Father, of the God who first gave you life and continues to give it to you at every moment... For him, you have worth; you are not insignificant. You are important to him, for you are the work of his hands. That is why he is concerned about you and looks to you with affection.

### *Christ saves you*

The second great truth is that Christ, out of love, sacrificed himself completely in order to save you. His outstretched arms on the cross are the most telling sign that he is a friend who is willing to stop at nothing...The Lord’s love is greater than all our problems, frailties and flaws. Yet it is precisely through our problems, frailties and flaws that he wants to write this love story. He embraced the prodigal son, he embraced Peter after his denials, and he always, always, always embraces us after every fall, helping us to rise and get back on our feet. Because the worst fall, and pay attention to this, the worst fall, the one that can ruin our lives, is when we stay down and do not allow ourselves to be helped up. His forgiveness and salvation are not something we can buy, or that we have to acquire by our own works or efforts. He forgives us and sets us free without cost. His self-sacrifice on the cross is so great that we can never repay it, but only receive it with immense gratitude and with the joy of being more greatly loved than we could ever imagine.

### *He is alive!*

Finally, there is a third truth, inseparable from the second: Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged, it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive. He is the Christ, risen from the dead, filled with supernatural life and energy, and robed in boundless light... Alive, he can be present in your life at every moment, to fill it with light and to take away all sorrow and solitude. Even if all others depart, he will remain, as he promised... He fills your life with his unseen presence; wherever you go, he will be waiting there for you. Because he did not only come in the past, but he comes to you today and every day, inviting you to set out towards ever new horizons. See Jesus as happy, overflowing with joy. Rejoice with him as with a friend who has triumphed.

They killed him, the holy one, the just one, the innocent one, but he triumphed in the end. Evil does not have the last word. Nor will it have the last word in your life, for you have a friend who loves you and wants to triumph in you. Your Saviour lives.

### *The Spirit gives life*

In these three truths – God loves you; Christ is your Saviour; he is alive – we see God the Father and Jesus. Wherever the Father and the Son are, there too is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who quietly opens hearts to receive that message. He keeps alive our hope of salvation, and he will help you grow in joy if you are open to his working. The Holy Spirit fills the heart of the risen Christ and then flows over into your lives. When you receive the Spirit, he draws you ever more deeply into the heart of Christ, so that you can grow in his love, his life and his power.

Ask the Holy Spirit each day to help you experience anew the great message. Why not? You have nothing to lose, and he can change your life, fill it with light and lead it along a better path.”<sup>49</sup>

### Training Catechists in the Kerygma

As well as offering kerygmatic videos and training courses in catechesis more generally Mission Northampton also provides specific training in evangelisation skills to help equip us to proclaim the kerygma including:

**Encounter (Gospel message), Emmaus (the Bible), Moses (Leadership), John (Discipleship), Secrets of Paul (Mission strategy) and James (Discernment) among others.**<sup>50</sup>

### An Encounter With the Lord

Clare Crockett was a worldly young girl. During Holy Week of the year 2000, at 17 years of age, she arrived at a retreat. On Good Friday as she joined others in adoring and kissing the Crucifix God’s grace changed her life. She was found later on crying and saying the following words:

*“He died for me. He loves me! Why hasn’t anyone ever told me this before?”*

That day she realised, deep in her heart, that her sins had nailed Jesus to the cross, that Jesus had died for her and that she was loved. Over time her life profoundly changed and she gave her life to God. While serving God as a Religious Sister in the missions she died during an earthquake at 33 years of age.<sup>51</sup> Sister Clare was known for her honesty and pulling no punches in her work with young people and adults. Because of what she had experienced and who she had encountered she was confident in proclaiming the Good News to others.

St Peter in his famous address to the crowd gathered at Pentecost also knew how to be direct with the Good News, he pulled no punches. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit he proclaimed to them all:

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<sup>49</sup> c.f. *Christus Vivit* 111-132

<sup>50</sup> Please contact the Mission Northampton Office for details of these courses. They are also advertised regularly through the Catechists Newsletter.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.sisterclare.com/en/her-life/biography>

“...let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” St Luke goes on to tell us that “when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”<sup>52</sup>

As catechists, like St Peter and Sister Clare and all who have gone before us, we have the immense privilege and responsibility to announce the Good News. Many are floundering on the stormy seas of the world and need to be presented with the light of Christ to guide them safely home to the love of God and their heavenly homeland.

Jesus, the light of the world, has commissioned us to proclaim the Good News, to let our light shine before others so that they too may encounter his saving love.<sup>53</sup>



“You, Lord, are my lamp;  
the Lord turns my darkness into light”<sup>54</sup>

“You are the light of the world.  
A town built on a hill can’t be hidden...  
let your light shine before others...”<sup>55</sup>

*When have you most powerfully encountered the saving message of the Good News in your life?*

*Who shared it with you and what was going on in your life at the time?*

*What difference did it make to you?*

*When and how have you most effectively shared the Good News with others?*

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<sup>52</sup> Acts 2:36-39

<sup>53</sup> Matthew 5:14-16

<sup>54</sup> 2 Samuel 22:29

<sup>55</sup> Matthew 5:14-16

## 4. Making Missionary Disciples Together

*“The agent of evangelisation is the people of God.”<sup>56</sup>*

The Lord calls us together, as part of His Body, and it is together that He sends us to make disciples. Catechesis, therefore, is a ministry that we engage in as members of and on behalf of the community of the Church and not on our own, it is “an ecclesial act”<sup>57</sup>.

By working together we discover our respective gifts, abilities and strengths and how they can work together. Some of us may be very gifted teachers or evangelists, others may be great at accompanying others, still others may be very creative or have great skill with digital tools.<sup>58</sup> By working together we witness to Christian community and to the joy of sharing our life in Christ.

### Catechesis for all the baptised

There can at times be a tendency to reduce the ministry of catechesis to preparing people to receive the sacraments. As central and vital as this aspect is the scope of catechesis is much broader and all encompassing:

“Every one of the baptised... has the right to adequate catechesis. It is therefore the Church’s task to respond to this in a satisfactory manner. The Gospel is...for each human being...it is therefore reasonable to offer pathways of catechesis that vary depending on the participants’ different needs, ages and states of life.”<sup>59</sup>

In addressing the issue of catechesis in the lives of people the Directory for Catechesis specifically considers the family, children and teenagers, young people, adults, the elderly, people with disabilities, emigrants and the marginalised among others.<sup>60</sup>

### Catechesis and the Family

Since “family catechesis . . . precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis”<sup>61</sup> the Church to foster a “family centred catechesis that starts from the families themselves.”<sup>62</sup> As such catechists we are called to draw in, equip and empower parents as active participants in catechesis and so help them to fulfil their mission to become the first and best educators of their children in the ways of faith, the first catechists of their own children.<sup>63</sup> In the last few years some of our parishes have begun to move some sacramental preparation towards a more family centred approach. For example some catechists have begun using the Growing up Catholic materials. These provide a framework and resources for parent led catechesis.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Directory for Catechesis 287

<sup>57</sup> Directory for Catechesis 55

<sup>58</sup> c.f. Antiquum Ministerium 6, Directory for Catechesis, 113

<sup>59</sup> Directory for Catechesis 224,225

<sup>60</sup> Directory for Catechesis chapter 8

<sup>61</sup> Catechesi Tradendae 68

<sup>62</sup> Directory for Catechesis 124

<sup>63</sup> Directory for Catechesis 124

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.growingupcatholic.com/sacrament-prep-sessions.html>

The Divine Renovation Ministry have also provided some very useful videos that explore ways that we can provide a more family centred catechesis.<sup>65</sup>

In considering the catechetical needs of the family; children, teenagers, young people and adults the Directory makes clear there are many issues for us to consider.<sup>66</sup> In all of these areas catechists can learn from others who are able to equip them with skills to reach out to particular groups.

The Diocesan Northampton Youth Ministry Office (NYMO) for example provide leadership and resourcing to help equip catechists and others in Youth Ministry skills.<sup>67</sup> Children's ministry is another important area where there are a variety of models and resources that catechists can consider being inspired by for example family days and conferences, summer camps and various forms of children's catechesis.<sup>68</sup>

### Ongoing Formation

The whole area of ongoing formation is also very important. There are many resources and opportunities now available that provide adults with an opportunity to explore and grow in their faith. This is an important dimension of the New Evangelisation as many baptised people are in need of evangelisation and more in depth formation.<sup>69</sup> This will become a focus of activity in the Diocese over the next few years as we seek to draw more adults in our parishes into missionary discipleship.

### Accompaniment

All of this activity requires of us a certain approach, it demands from us compassion and an ability to listen and build fruitful relationships with those we encounter and serve. Catechists must be formed in the art of accompanying others because to be a catechist is to be an accompanier as well as a witness of the faith and a teacher.

If we are to be disciples who make disciples this relational ability is essential. Within the process of making disciples we are called to listen to what the Spirit is saying and be discerning. This synodal style, being a church that listens and accompanies others on their journey of faith has been a major theme in much that has been given to us by the Church in recent years.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Divine Renovation Catechesis Videos 'From Courses to Conversions parts 1 & 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efCGmdsH6Og&t=1639s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2faeBfPiQDI&t=1258s>

<sup>66</sup> c.f. Directory for Catechesis 226-256

<sup>67</sup> c.f. [www.nymo.org](http://www.nymo.org)

<sup>68</sup> Sion community <https://sioncommunity.org.uk/family-and-children/> Fanning the Flame <https://www.fanningtheflame.co.uk/aboutus> Celebrate Conference <https://www.celebratetrust.org> Catechesis of the Good Shepherd <https://www.cgsusa.org>. There is also much good work going on in the area of Marriage and Family Life throughout the Church which is formative for children, young people and adults within a family context e.g. the World Meeting of Families and other initiatives.

<sup>69</sup> c.f. Ecclesia in Europa 47. Courses such as the Alpha, CaFE courses, the Sycamore course, the Bible Timeline, Called & Equipped Course by the Pastoral Ministry Office <https://pastoralministryoffice.org/called/> the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS) and others.

<sup>70</sup> c.f. Evangelii Gaudium 170-173 Directory for Catechesis 113, 135, 289

## Catechesis and Culture

As catechists we need to take into account the reality that faces us. “Catechesis has an intrinsic cultural and social dimension... it is situated within a Church that is incorporated into a human community.”<sup>71</sup>

The Directory lays before us some of the various cultural contexts in which we might find ourselves and the issues we may face. Among these are the urban and rural context, the religious context (e.g. ecumenism and how we relate to those of other faiths), as well as the scientific context.<sup>72</sup> It is useful for us as catechists to take some time to reflect on and respond to these where we are able to.

## The New Digital Culture

The Directory also gives particular attention to digital languages and tools and the implications of the digital realities we face.<sup>73</sup> Strikingly it states that “the digital, therefore, is not only a part of the existing cultures, but is asserting itself as a new culture: changing language, shaping mentalities, and restructuring value hierarchies... on a worldwide scale.”<sup>74</sup>

This reality provides both opportunity and challenge for us as catechists. Many parishes, during the various Covid lockdowns, began using virtual sessions and some have now supplemented their catechetical approach with a digital offering, offering a blended approach of both in person and virtual sessions. The Diocese has produced some guidance for parish groups online to assist with this.<sup>75</sup>

## The Catechumenate provides the Inspiration for the way we catechise

By reflecting on the scriptures, especially on the way the Lord teaches people, as well as how the Church over many centuries has passed on the faith there is much that we can learn about the way we catechise. We call this pedagogy, the way we teach and learn.<sup>76</sup> As catechists it is important that we are conscious of the various ways we can catechise.

The Church is calling catechists to provide a catechesis that is both kerygmatic and inspired by the catechumenate.<sup>77</sup> The catechumenate is the ancient practice, restored after the Second Vatican Council, that the Church offers to unbaptised adult converts.<sup>78</sup> It “introduces the believer into the living experience of the Christian community, the true setting of the life of faith. This formative experience is progressive and dynamic; rich in signs and expressions and beneficial for the integration of every dimension of the person... catechesis should be inspired by the catechumenal model.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Directory for Catechesis 319, c.f. Gaudium et Spes 1

<sup>72</sup> Directory for Catechesis chapter 10

<sup>73</sup> Directory for Catechesis chapter 7

<sup>74</sup> Directory for Catechesis 359

<sup>75</sup> <https://pastoralministryoffice.org/home-copy/building-community/parish-groups-online/>

<sup>76</sup> c.f. Directory for Catechesis chapter 5

<sup>77</sup> Directory for Catechesis 65, 2

<sup>78</sup> Directory for Catechesis 61

<sup>79</sup> Directory for Catechesis 2

Having a catechesis inspired by the catechumenate also helps us to bring out the rich liturgical dimension of our catechesis.<sup>80</sup>

While some catechists may be directly involved in the catechumenate (R.C.I.A.) many will be involved in other areas of catechesis. It is important to note that the catechumenal inspiration of catechesis is about taking on the style and formative dynamism<sup>81</sup> of the catechumenate and not trying to simply copy and apply it as it is to our own particular area of catechesis.<sup>82</sup>

### We Are One Body in Christ<sup>83</sup>

The ministry of catechesis touches on all parts of the Body of Christ. Parishes, associations, movements and groups of the faithful, Catholic Schools are all parts of this Body and have a distinctive contribution to make in passing on the Faith<sup>84</sup>. To assist with this partnership and collaboration within our Diocese a series of catechetical gatherings has been established on the parish, Pastoral Area and Diocesan level.<sup>85</sup>



*“Just as for evangelisation, so too catechesis is an action for which the whole Church feels responsible. The responsibility concerns everyone. ‘In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples’<sup>86</sup>*

*How aware were you that catechesis is for all the baptised and not just for sacramental preparation?*

*How do the particular needs of various groups (e.g. youth, adults) shape your approach to catechesis? Do you feel called to serve a particular group (e.g. the elderly, youth, children)?*

*To what extent has the digital culture impacted your approach to catechesis?*

*Do you see yourself as an accompanier as well as a witness and a teacher?*

<sup>80</sup> Directory for Catechesis 95-98. The Bishop’s Certificate in Catechesis also covers the liturgical aspect of catechesis in more detail.

<sup>81</sup> Directory for Catechesis 64

<sup>82</sup> Directory for Catechesis 61-65. The Diocese also offers a training course on the catechumenate (R.C.I.A.) run jointly between Mission Northampton and the Diocesan Liturgy Commission. For more details please contact the Mission Northampton office.

<sup>83</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

<sup>84</sup> Directory for Catechesis chapter 9

<sup>85</sup> The Catechetical Gatherings are outlined in the Brochure for Catechists available on request from the Mission Northampton Office

<sup>86</sup> Directory for Catechesis 287, 288, Evangelii Gaudium 120

## 5. Making Our Catechesis More Mission-Oriented

*“Are we more attached to our model or to our mission?”<sup>87</sup>*

The field of catechesis surely represents one of the most significant areas of Church life where the potential for missionary and pastoral conversion still needs to be fully realised.

We now find ourselves at a favourable time. In view of the Church’s missionary vision for catechesis that we have surveyed we realise that now is the time to survey our own catechetical landscape and consider strategies for helping our parishes to make missionary disciples. Surely this is what the Lord through the Church is asking of us.

Of course this will require changes in how many of us have approached parish catechesis. Pope Francis alludes to the flexibility in parish life that is required for mission:

“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.”<sup>88</sup> He tells us that he dreams of a great effort to make the Church more mission-oriented, a missionary option. By this he means “a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation...to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth...”<sup>89</sup>

This will require some honest reflection on our part, or as the Directory for Catechesis puts it “the dynamic of missionary conversion implies that the parish should examine the type of catechesis that it presents.”<sup>90</sup>

To assist with this an annual series of gatherings for catechists on the parish, pastoral area and diocesan level have been established.<sup>91</sup>

### Now Is The Time to Rethink Parish Catechesis

The Directory for Catechesis is adamant in its call for a review of parish catechesis in the light of our call to evangelise:

“The need for a renewed impulse of evangelisation justifies the decision to rethink in a missionary vein all the pastoral activities of the Christian community, even the most ordinary and traditional ones. Catechesis as well is touched by the demands of missionary conversion to which the parish is called. Indeed, in permeating all of its processes with the first announcement, catechesis itself contributes to this.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Fr James Mallon, *Divine Renovation, Beyond the Parish*, p.61, The Word Among Us Press

<sup>88</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* 28

<sup>89</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* 27

<sup>90</sup> *Directory for Catechesis* 302

<sup>91</sup> Please see the *Catechist Brochure* for more details of these Catechetical Gatherings.

<sup>92</sup> *Directory for Catechesis* 303

Within this rethinking process the Directory highlights several aspects as being central for this renewal of catechesis:

- That parishes are formed into a community of missionary disciples
- That parishes help people develop a missionary mentality
- That parishes provide comprehensive pathways of formation, inspired by the catechumenate, that enable people to explore the kerygma and taste its beauty.<sup>93</sup>

### Forming Catechists & Finding Support

To be able to respond to this call catechists require formation and support.<sup>94</sup> This formation “sets as its goal, in the first place, making catechists aware that as baptised persons they are truly missionary disciples, meaning active participants in evangelisation, and on this basis are enabled by the Church to communicate the Gospel and to accompany and educate believers in the faith.”<sup>95</sup> .

In other words our formation is at its heart about forming us in missionary discipleship.<sup>96</sup>

As well as the specific training in evangelisation skills mentioned earlier<sup>97</sup> the Diocese of Northampton also provides foundational catechist training by means of the Bishop’s Certificate in Catechesis and other training opportunities. These provide catechists with a grounding in key catechetical principles and methodology, the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.<sup>98</sup> Full details of Catechist training are available in the Catechist Brochure which is available on request from the Mission Northampton office.

Much of our formation takes place in small groups as this provides an effective environment for faith sharing, prayer and growing in faith. We know that the process of making disciples and forming a missionary mentality is very relational and so our use of small groups and accompaniment is essential.<sup>99</sup> By utilising the power of small groups catechists and parishes more generally can come to recognise the parish as a community of communities. When parishes harness the flexibility that working with small groups provides, for example through the R.C.I.A or other sacramental preparation, the Alpha course, CaFE courses, the Sycamore course, the Bible Timeline or other courses offered by the Diocese or other providers they can experience great benefits.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Directory for Catechesis 303

<sup>94</sup> c.f. Directory for Catechesis chapter 4

<sup>95</sup> Directory for Catechesis 132

<sup>96</sup> Directory for Catechesis 132-150

<sup>97</sup> c.f. Chapter 3

<sup>98</sup> The Directory for Catechesis underlines the importance of formation in Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church for catechists so they can be suitably equipped for their ministry c.f. paras 143-145 and Chapter 6.

<sup>99</sup> Directory for Catechesis 218-220

<sup>100</sup> Directory for Catechesis 301

## Preparing to Enter the Promised Land

Fr James Mallon, who is one of the most influential leaders modelling what a re-envisioning of pastoral ministry from a missionary perspective looks like, has articulated a simple yet profound challenge: “Are we more attached to our model or to our mission?”<sup>101</sup>

As we enter this new phase of the development of catechesis we can reflect on what we are invited to leave behind and what we are invited to take with us as we move on to the next stage of our journey together.

In the history of salvation we have the striking story of the people of Israel at the border between the desert and the Promised Land. Like them we stand at the brink of new possibilities and a new fruitfulness. Though there will be challenges for us as we move forward there will also be many opportunities.

Let us ask in prayer for the graces that we will need to live out our mission as catechists faithfully and fruitfully, responding to our call to make missionary disciples together.

“Forty days later, they came back from exploring the land. They came back to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. They gave their report and showed them the fruit from the land.

This is what they reported to Moses: ‘We went to the land where you sent us. It really is a land flowing with milk and honey. Here’s some of its fruit. But the people who live there are strong, and the cities have walls and are very large. We even saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev. The Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the mountain region. And the Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and all along the Jordan River...’

Caleb said, ‘Let’s go now and take possession of the land. We should be more than able to conquer it.’”<sup>102</sup>



*“...the Church is called today to place herself in a permanent state of mission...to transform every one of her actions from a missionary perspective...the Church is also re-envisioning catechesis as one of her works as a missionary going forth.”<sup>103</sup>*

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<sup>101</sup> Fr James Mallon, *Divine Renovation, Beyond the Parish*, p.61, The Word Among Us Press

<sup>102</sup> Numbers 13:25-30

<sup>103</sup> *Directory for Catechesis* 49,50

*To what extent are the times and schedules, language and structures in your catechesis channelled for evangelisation?*

*How flexible would you say you were in your approach to catechesis?*

*Have you recently examined your catechesis? Are you willing to continually evaluate and rethink it from a missionary perspective?*

*Do you feel like you are wandering around the desert or on the brink of the Promised Land in your catechesis?*

## **Additional Resources**

### **Catechist Brochure**

The brochure outlines and explains the various training courses and support provided for catechists in the Diocese of Northampton. It is available from the Mission Northampton webpages and office on request.

### **Kerygmatic Videos**

A series of short teaching and testimony videos available for catechists. These can be included in catechetical programmes to help catechists with their proclamation of the initial Gospel message, the kerygma.<sup>104</sup>

### **Catechist Newsletter**

A monthly newsletter which is produced during the academic year carrying details of resources and upcoming events and training opportunities. To receive a sample or to subscribe please contact the Mission Northampton office.

## **Further Reading**

[The Joy of the Gospel \(Evangelii Gaudium\)](#), Pope Francis

[Directory for Catechesis](#), Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation

[Ancient Ministry \(Antiquum Ministerium\)](#): Instituting the Ministry of Catechist, Pope Francis

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<sup>104</sup> Available from 2023 on the Mission Northampton webpages.

Acknowledgments:

Calendar date photo by Towfiq barbhuiya: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-photo-of-red-pins-on-a-calendar-9810172/>

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