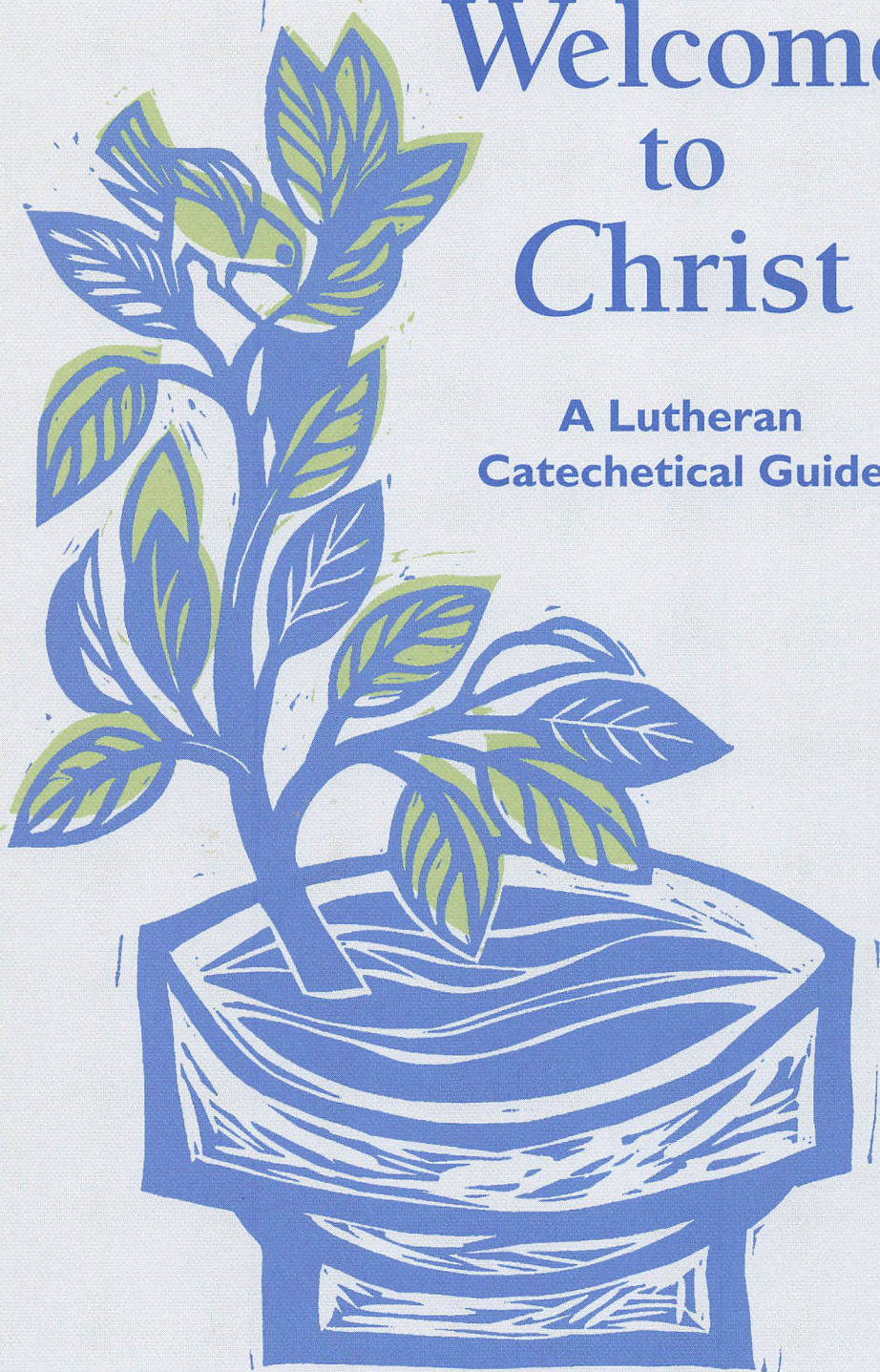


# Welcome to Christ

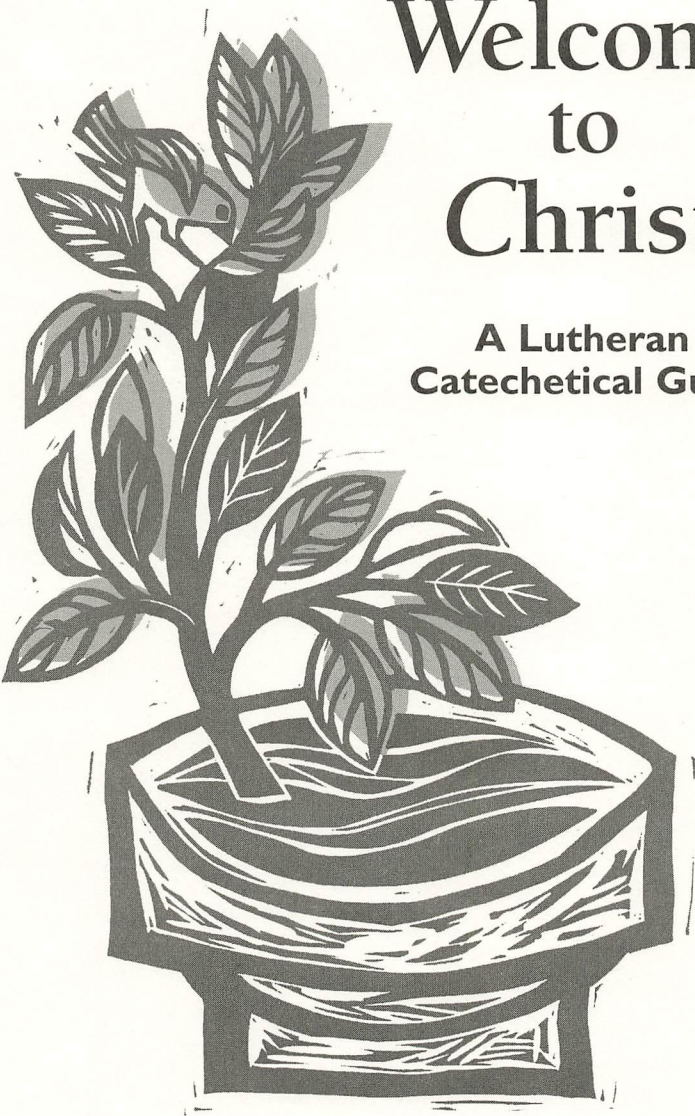
**A Lutheran  
Catechetical Guide**





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Augsburg Fortress

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*Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Catechetical Guide*

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## What is “catechesis” in the catechumenal process?



**K**nowledge is important—but knowledge alone is not the essence of the Christian faith. A thorough process of teaching the faith will involve all the senses and more. Although classes and meetings conducted for the purpose of learning about the faith do have an important place, these are not the only ways in which faith is received. The life of faith is communicated and learned in a variety of ways in diverse settings.

### Catechesis through home and congregational life

Young children often have an opportunity to grow gradually into an entire congregation that lives the Christian faith. The youngster who goes to Sunday school is also invited to take part in other dimensions of the church’s life—worship, activities, and informal gatherings. Sometimes these activities take place only among others their own age, at other times they are part of a much larger group.

In families that participate regularly in congregational life, the family itself is frequently the most influential teacher of the faith. A youngster has the opportunity to learn each day from a parent or another significant adult what faithful living is about. Meal prayers, bedtime prayer, scripture reading, and the practice of religious customs and rituals communicate the faith through speaking, hearing,



smelling, touching, tasting, and seeing. The home provides the daily context through which the faith is experienced.

Growing up in the faith means coming into contact with a wide network of believers as children enter into the faith community. Here is an important parallel: what is accepted as a given for young children who enter the faith (i.e., the importance of family and congregational life) also needs to be provided for people who come into contact with the church at later points in life. Older youth and adults also need the many contacts the Christian parish provides as they enter into Christian community themselves.

### **Catechesis toward affirmation of baptism**

Many pastors and teachers are familiar with a catechetical process geared for youth (i.e., confirmands). Let us look there for a holistic model of teaching the faith before considering an appropriate catechesis for adults. “Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear his Word and share in his supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?”<sup>1</sup> Through this question, the order for Affirmation of Baptism in *Lutheran Book of Worship* envisions that a mature Christian life will involve regular participation in the life of a Christian community, and that each person will accept responsibilities for serving and giving witness to Christ. In this instance, the catechists’ goal would be to help affirmers appreciate the various aspects of this question *before* the day of affirmation occurs. At a minimum, catechists would explain what it means 1) to belong to a Christian congregation, 2) to worship regularly, 3) to proclaim the good news of Christ in daily life, 4) to serve the needs of the world, and 5) to strive for justice and peace. Increasingly, though, Christian educators want to expose affirmers to hands-on learning experiences prior to the moment of affirmation. Confirmation camp, retreats, youth ministry programs, a variety of service projects, and

being paired with adult mentors all serve to enrich the process leading to affirmation of baptism/confirmation in many congregations.

Although scriptural and doctrinal teachings may play an important part in Christian catechesis, the goal of such catechesis is not merely an enlightened mind but an enlightened *life*. Opportunities to integrate cognitive learning with daily living have proven to be increasingly effective in the learning process. Without diminishing the need to acquire a certain degree of basic knowledge, especially as centered in the scriptures and the catechism, congregations have frequently planned for a variety of experiences which help young people put into practice the beliefs of the Christian community. All of these experiences can be viewed as “catechesis.” Internships and contextual education assignments are considered necessary components in virtually all professional training programs these days. It stands to reason that the most effective forms of Christian catechesis combine learning through study and discussion with learning through daily experience. Both modes of learning complement each other and provide opportunities for Christian growth and enrichment.

People responsible for the preparation of adults for baptism, or for affirmation of baptism, have also discovered that forms of catechesis that integrate study of the scriptures and Christian doctrine with congregational activities and daily life are the best types of preparation. The catechumenate is essentially a process of becoming one with Christ and his church. This requires being able to view and at the same time enter into the body of Christ from a wide range of angles.

### **Involving the whole person in the catechumenal process**

Entering into Christian faith is a multi-dimensional experience. Christian catechesis at its best will involve the entire person: body, mind, and spirit. Consider the rite of Welcome into the catechumenate. The rite itself is an appropriate model of catechesis for adults. After a time of initial inquiry, an inquirer may decide to enter more fully and publicly into the catechumenal process. The rite of

Welcome signals this intention. In the rite, the adult learner may receive multiple signings of the cross on his or her body from a sponsor or catechist in order to indicate the ways in which Christ’s mission seeks to envelope the whole of human life. It is a gesture of evangelization: the entire person—body, mind, and spirit—is claimed for Christ. Each of the individual signings can be seen as a door into a dimension of catechesis.

### *Knowledge in the catechumenate*

*“Receive the cross on your forehead, a sign of God’s endless love and mercy for you. Learn to know Christ and to follow him.”<sup>2</sup>*

Adult catechumens very likely come with some thoughts about who God is. Throughout the catechumenate, catechists will present central Christian teachings about God, many of which may be new and challenging for catechumens. Certainly the catechumenate is a time to ask questions. It is not an opportunity to give quick and easy answers to such questions, but rather a time for honest dialogue. In one way or another, God has already been active in the catechumen’s life.<sup>3</sup>

While the catechumen will eventually need to affirm for him- or herself major points of Christian doctrine (especially as given in the creeds, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer), catechesis need not be done in a way that suggests there is a single way of thinking about or experiencing the presence of God. Questioning—even doubting—is to be encouraged along the way, because living with some ambiguities and unanswered questions is what faith is all about.

In his preface to *Luther’s Small Catechism*, Timothy Wengert notes that the simple questions of the catechism are quite likely the questions of Hans Luther (Martin Luther’s three-year-old son)<sup>4</sup>. It should come as no surprise that those who are new to the faith will have many questions to ask. The answers given them are steeped in the church’s tradition and especially in the lives of people who have come to live the faith.

### *Hearing in the catechumenate*

*“Receive the cross on your ears, that you may hear the gospel of Christ, the Word of life.”*<sup>5</sup>

The primary learning of the faith for catechumens actually comes through the scriptures. Catechumens gather for Sunday worship with the congregation each week so they may reflect upon the meaning of the scriptures and the preached word in their lives. Though actual Bibles may be given to catechumens, the hearing of the scriptures is of primary importance. Catechesis in the catechumenate invites adults to read the scriptures to one another, to retell them in their own words, and to let these words shape their daily living. In “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels,” Martin Luther wrote: “The gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word which brought forth the scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to hearing the scriptures of the Christian community, catechumens will be guided into caring for one another and for the needs of the world by hearing the congregation’s prayers and the prayers of the catechetical group.

This sense of hearing the faith should not be minimized. Hearing the gospel has a great immediacy. In some traditions both the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer are publicly “handed over” to the catechumens through the congregation’s speaking of those primary summaries of faith. These are gifts the contemporary church has received from its predecessors in the faith. They are gifts now spoken to those who are young in faith.

### *Catechesis through seeing*

*“Receive the cross on your eyes, that you may see the light of Christ, illumination for your way.”*

One way of seeing Christ is by watching others in the Christian community as they act out their faith. Sponsors and mentors may provide “testimonials” of how they live the faith in their daily lives. Christian catechesis will provide a number of opportunities for the catechu-

men to witness others acting out the faith. What are people doing to proclaim the love and reign of God? How is the faith of the Christian community made visible to the community? Perhaps some of these very actions have drawn newcomers into the sphere of the congregation to begin with. Many catechumens will be looking for specific examples of how faith is put into action, whether through organized activities of the congregation, or in the daily lives of its members.

### *Catechesis through speaking*

*“Receive the cross on your lips, that you may sing the praise of Christ, the joy of the church.”<sup>8</sup>*

Catechumens are expected to join each week in the worship of the Christian community. If a catechumen has never before participated in public worship, then the actual practice of singing hymns, using a worship book, and learning to pray with a congregation will be new experiences. Sponsors play a vital role here in helping catechumens participate actively in the congregation’s work of the liturgy. When catechumens gather regularly to reflect on scripture, they are also reflecting on the New Testament pattern of Christian worship. Here the introductory pages to the Lutheran worship supplement *With One Voice* will be of assistance to catechists and catechumens: the foundations and basic shape of Christian worship are clearly set forth and explained. In the regular meeting of catechumens, catechists and pastors can offer guidance that will help the catechumens participate with understanding in the congregation’s worship.

At the same time that the catechumen is learning how to exercise a voice in public worship, he or she will be learning how to pray each day, particularly at mealtimes and at the start and end of each day.<sup>9</sup> Sponsors and catechists can demonstrate how a daily devotional practice can meet the needs and interests of each individual, while at the same time serving as a powerful connection to the whole Christian community.

In addition to finding his or her voice within the context of Christian worship, the catechumen also learns that Christians ask

how they might speak of God in the context of daily life. How do people of faith become a sign of hope to those who are suffering? How do Christians speak out against injustice? Through their own speech, their own voice, and their own stories, catechumens will begin ministering themselves (even challenging worn-out values they find in the church). Catechumens can also be important evangelists in their own right (consider the woman at the well in John 4 who went back to her community to tell of her encounter with Jesus).

#### *Catechesis through faith*

*“Receive the cross on your heart, that God may dwell there by faith.”<sup>10</sup>*

No matter how well-connected our exterior actions are to our faith, one aspect of faith is felt more than it is seen or witnessed by others. As much as anything else, the catechumenate needs to be a time for learning to listen to the *inner voice*, which, with the word, assures us of God’s constant presence. The catechumenate is a time for building trust in this inner voice of faith which has the power to motivate, to affirm, and to correct us in our thoughts and our behavior.

Meetings of the catechumenal group and sessions with sponsors are really about the task of building faith. Ultimately the Christian faith needs to enlighten and transform our core values and most firmly held convictions. Where does sin reside within us? What are the inner struggles in our lives? At the same time as a person is coming into greater “knowledge” about the Christian faith, he or she needs to come to an awareness that faith is more than mere intellectual assent; it is a way of living that involves the essence of who we are as human beings.

#### *Catechesis through bearing the cross*

*“Receive the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.”<sup>11</sup>*

Although faith is first and foremost a gift of God, it is also a commitment of the individual believer. Catechumens are eventually

expected to bear the cross of Christ, just as every believer is expected to do. Is Christ visible in their lives? Has Christ become the pattern of their lives? Where is Christ's death and resurrection in the life of the catechumen? How has Christ made a difference in the person's life? These are questions for discernment that need to be asked by the candidate for baptism, as well as by his or her sponsors, catechist, and pastor as the time for baptism approaches.

#### *Catechesis through daily work*

*"Receive the cross on your hands, that God's mercy may be known in your work."<sup>12</sup>*

Just as the Christian gives voice to faith in a variety of ways, actions also proclaim the faith. In the early centuries of the church, a number of occupations were considered to be incompatible with the Christian faith (for example, military service, teaching). While people today might create a different list of occupations they think are incompatible with Christian faith, it is faith that brings us to question the meaning of what we do with our lives. For many people this kind of examination will involve careers or jobs. How does our work serve God's purposes? Is God creating something with us? Through our work, is God restoring or redeeming something that was lost? Is God renewing something by our actions? In short, are we participating in the trinitarian life of our God who creates, saves, and renews, or are we thwarting it? Perhaps we will discover that we are probably doing a little bit of each. But at some moment in the catechetical process we should be asked to examine the chief occupations of our lives and to discern whether or not they are compatible with a Christian sense of vocation and service in the world. The person who discovers that major changes need to be made in his or her life will need tremendous support from others in the Christian community.

*Catechesis through walking in the faith*

“Receive the cross on your feet, that you may walk in the way of Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

Virtually all of life is about making choices. Even failing to decide is itself to decide for the status quo. Is Christ with us, especially in making the significant decisions in life? Does our faith really define the essence of what we are about or not? Although it is true that no Christian has ever fully *arrived* in this journey until death, sponsors, catechumens, and pastors rightly ask if the ability to deal with such questions is discernible prior to adult baptism. Following Christ rather than other voices or leaders is something we can choose to do or not.

Although Lutherans have always been careful to assert that we are saved by God’s grace apart from our works, we also believe that good works are a natural outgrowth of our faith. Our purpose is to serve others and to give witness to our faith.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

If the catechumenal process has attended to the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—as represented by the signings in the rite of Welcome, catechesis will no doubt have been a life-changing event. That is as it should be, for baptism itself is a life-changing event for the Christian. By itself the water can do nothing, but when it has been connected to a living encounter with the word of God, it will truly be a momentous occasion.<sup>15</sup> The ancient baptismal hymn of Saint Patrick speaks of the living encounter this way: “I bind unto myself today the pow’r of God to hold and lead.”<sup>16</sup> The goal of Christian catechesis is quite simply to allow people to be bound to Christ. In order for such a binding to be complete and long-lasting, catechesis will need to become a holistic approach to the entire person. Catechists who take care to do so will no doubt be reinvigorated in their own faith and commitment to Christ.

*Dennis Bushkofsky is a Lutheran pastor who lives in Bloomington, Minnesota.*



1. *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1978), p. 201.
2. “Rite of Welcome,” *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate*.
3. In the third article of the Apostles’ Creed, Lutherans confess that it is the Holy Spirit which gives faith and gathers people into the life of Christian community. See *A Contemporary Translation of Luther’s Small Catechism*, study edition, trans. Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 29.
4. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
5. “Rite of Welcome,” *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate*.
6. Martin Luther, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels,” *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols., American edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1960), 35:123.
7. “Rite of Welcome,” *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate*.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Luther’s Small Catechism*, 51-55.
10. “Rite of Welcome,” *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate*.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. See “Salvation unto us has come,” *Lutheran Book of Worship* 297.
15. *Luther’s Small Catechism*, 41-42.
16. “I bind unto myself today,” *Lutheran Book of Worship* 188.

## What is the call of the catechist in the catechumenal team?



**T**he catechumenal process is designed primarily to prepare adults for the rite of Baptism. It may also be adapted for those baptized but uncatechized adults who seek to affirm their baptism in the rite of Affirmation of Baptism. This process is a ministry of the whole congregation into whose corporate life of worship, witness, and service this movement of conversion ultimately leads. Indeed, congregational life itself, as the concrete model of ongoing communal life in Jesus Christ, is called to function here as the primary “catechist” in this process, the primary way in which “new-comers” are initially attracted to the Christian faith and to a particular congregation.

The whole congregation plays an important role in receiving and supporting those who seek Baptism or Affirmation of Baptism. Members of the congregation may be the evangelists who first invite an inquirer to come and see what God promises to those who believe. They may be ushers or greeters who are there at the door when an inquirer first comes to church. Other members of the congregation extend hospitality and welcome the stranger in their midst. The congregation is the community that lives together by faith, and, as such, offers the catechumen a model of Christian life. . . . The catechumenate involves the whole congregation in supporting catechumens. The congregation is invited frequently to pray for the catechumens publicly and by name. In the casual and structured events of the congregation’s life,

members meet and get to know persons who are newly exploring the call to faith.<sup>1</sup>

Within a congregation, a catechumenal team is called, prepared, and commissioned for the purpose of assisting in the intentional formation of those who, in response to the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, now seek either to be baptized or to affirm their baptism into Christ and his church. This catechumenal team is precisely that—a “team” of congregational ministers, both ordained and lay, who work collaboratively throughout this formation process. Such a team regularly includes a catechumenal coordinator or director, sponsors for the individual catechumens, the pastor/s of the congregation, and, of course, catechists. After a period of training, catechumenal coordinators, sponsors, and catechists themselves are blessed or commissioned in their ministries either through the use of the occasional service called “Recognition of Ministries in the Congregation”<sup>2</sup> or some other appropriate rite.

### The catechist in historical context

Within the congregation’s overall catechumenal ministry, and as part of this catechumenal team, catechists are called to play an extremely important and influential role. From early on in the church’s history, catechists have been crucial leaders within the catechumenal organization and ministry of various Christian communities. Although some of those who functioned as catechists were undoubtedly ordained clergy, lay catechists or teachers were also known from the very beginning. St. Paul himself, in fact, seems to be referring to the existence of such catechetical ministers in the early communities when he writes: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Cor. 12:28). And again, “The gifts [Christ] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

Beyond the New Testament witness, the active involvement of lay catechists in the baptismal preparation of adult catechumens is well known to us from an early church order called the *Apostolic Tradition*, ascribed to Hippolytus, a bishop of Rome in the early third-century (ca. 217). Chapters 18-19 of this influential document state: “When the teacher has finished giving instruction, let the catechumens pray by themselves, separated from the faithful. . . . After their prayer, when the teacher has laid hands on the catechumens, he shall pray and dismiss them. Whether the teacher is a cleric or a layman, let him act thus.”<sup>3</sup>

In the late fourth-century church order known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, from the region of Antioch in Syria, explicit reference is likewise made to the continued existence of lay catechists. Evidence for their existence is found also in mid third-century North Africa as well as fifth-century Gaul.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a number of influential authors in early Christianity whose significant writings shaped the thought of the church, and are still studied carefully today, were lay teachers, that is, catechists. Among these are included such famous Christians as Justin Martyr from mid second-century Rome, Tertullian from early third-century North Africa, Clement of Alexandria from late second-century Egypt, and, of course Clement’s own student at the once prestigious Alexandrian Catechetical School, Origen of Alexandria, who although eventually ordained in Palestine, actually preached a series of sermons, while still a layperson, to the bishops of Caesarea and Palestine gathered in Jerusalem.

We are not completely certain about the overall contents of catechetical instruction provided by catechists to catechumens within the churches of the first three centuries. From scattered references throughout early Christian writings, however, it is quite clear that some kind of explanation of the scriptures in relationship to salvation in Christ along with ethical formation in the life of the Christian community were essential components of this process. The first six chapters of the late first-, or early second-century

Syrian document called the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, for example, describe what is called “The Two Ways,” that of life and death.<sup>3</sup> Many view these chapters as a primitive Jewish-Christian manual of catechesis leading to the brief description of baptism itself in chapter 7. Significantly, the contents of these first six chapters are not concerned with Christian doctrine but focus on the Ten Commandments and the type of ethical life expected from those who are to be members of Christ through baptism. Similarly, chapter 20 of the *Apostolic Tradition* refers to an examination of those who have completed the catechumenate and now desire to enter the next stage of the process leading more immediately to baptism. Again, the questions asked at this point are not questions about doctrine but about living the Christian life. Chapter 20 says: “And when those who are to receive baptism are chosen, let their life be examined: have they lived good lives when they were catechumens? Have they honoured the widows? Have they visited the sick? Have they done every kind of good work? And when those who brought them bear witness to each: ‘He has,’ let them hear the gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

As this catechumenal process continued to develop in the fourth and fifth centuries, a more explicit *doctrinal* instruction became a part of catechesis in addition to the earlier emphasis on scripture and ethical formation. A late fourth-century Spanish pilgrim to Palestine named Egeria describes, in her travel diary, the Lenten catechumenal period in the Jerusalem church at that time (ca. 381-384). After discussing the enrollment of those who were to be baptized at Easter, a process that included examination questions similar to those noted in *Apostolic Tradition*, Egeria writes that the bishop himself:

during the forty days . . . goes through the whole Bible, beginning with Genesis, and first relating the literal meaning of each passage, then interpreting its spiritual meaning. He also teaches them at this time all about the resurrection and the faith. And this is called *catechesis*. After five weeks’ teaching they receive the Creed, whose content he explains article by article in the same way as he explained the

Scriptures. . . . Thus all the people in these parts are able to follow the Scriptures when they are read in church, since there has been teaching on all the Scriptures from six to nine in the morning all through Lent, three hours' catechesis a day. At the ordinary services when the bishop sits and preaches . . . the faithful utter exclamations, but when they come and hear him explaining the catechesis, their exclamations are far louder . . . ; and when it is related and interpreted like this they ask questions on each point.<sup>7</sup>

And, as we know from elsewhere during the fourth and fifth centuries (e.g., Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom in Antioch, and Augustine in Hippo, North Africa),<sup>8</sup> not only was the Creed included as an important catechetical element but the Lord's Prayer came to receive significant emphasis as well. In some places, at least, both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer were presented as "gifts" of the church to those in the final stages of their baptismal preparation and, of course, those baptismal candidates were expected to learn and be able to recite them at the appropriate moments during the baptismal liturgy. Similarly, explanations of the meaning of baptism and eucharist were given either as part of pre-baptismal catechesis or, as at Jerusalem and Milan, only during Easter week after people had first experienced these sacraments at the Vigil of Easter.

On the basis of this short historical survey, it is important to underscore that the elements of catechesis—scripture, ethical formation, prayer, the church's faith as it is expressed in the creeds, and the meaning of the sacraments as celebrated within the Christian assembly—were the "texts" used by catechists in this process. Such "texts," including the "living text" of the worship, witness, and service of the Christian community itself, were the building blocks of what eventually, through Martin Luther and others, became known as the "catechism" itself. Still in our day, the explicit contents of the catechumenate are derived from these traditional catechetical elements and thus are the basis for what the catechist is called to do within the catechumenal team.

### The call of the catechist in general

Beginning with the Roman Catholic *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults* in 1972<sup>9</sup> and as adapted by the Episcopal Church in the USA,<sup>10</sup> the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada,<sup>11</sup> and currently in process among Lutherans<sup>12</sup> and other Protestant church bodies in the United States, the adult catechumenate leading to baptism is normally understood as a journey of conversion consisting of different times and rites. Although terminology differs among the various churches, the four times of this apprenticeship in faith are those of Inquiry, the Catechumenate, Lent: Baptismal Preparation, and Easter: Baptismal Living. In public worship, the congregation witnesses to the intention of the catechumens and affirms its responsibility to those who are beginning to follow Christ. The rites are public occasions at Sunday worship that accompany the catechumens and point them and the congregation toward the next time in the process. After a period of initial inquiry, inquirers who have expressed their intent to continue in an intentional process of exploring the faith are welcomed into the catechumenate. When the time is right, they may then be enrolled for a focused period of preparation, usually coinciding with Lent, that leads to baptism. At the Vigil of Easter, these enrolled catechumens are received into the church through baptism (or Affirmation of Baptism, if already baptized) and their first eucharist with the community of faith. At the completion of the time of Easter: Baptismal Living (normally coinciding with Easter's Fifty Days), the newly baptized may celebrate the rite of Affirmation of the Vocation of the Baptized in the World.<sup>13</sup>

In these various phases or times of the catechumenal journey, catechists are directly involved in a teaching, supportive, and relational manner with the catechumens and their sponsors. During the time of initial inquiry, the call of the catechist will be to "help inquirers grapple with the questions: 'What is the place of faith in my life?' and 'Am I ready to reorder my life through worship, prayer, reflective study and community life in order to hear and follow the call of God in Jesus Christ?'"<sup>14</sup> During the time of the catechume-

nate proper, the call of the catechist will be to lead and assist catechumens in reflection on the Sunday lectionary readings, a time for prayer based on those readings, and discussion of how the lectionary readings lead to Christian witness and service. During the weeks of Lent (or perhaps Advent), the call of the catechist will be to lead the catechumens into a more intensive preparation leading to baptism or affirmation of baptism at Easter or at the festival of the Baptism of our Lord. During this time, and again with the Sunday lectionary as the primary “text,” the catechist will lead catechumens and candidates to “reflect on how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus transform relationships to home and family, work and co-workers, church, and brother and sister Christians. There will be emphasis on what must die in us in order that God’s new life might burst forth in our lives.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, during the time of Easter: Baptismal Living, after the actual celebration of baptism or affirmation of baptism, the call of the catechist will be to assist the newly baptized in exploring the implications of baptism and eucharist for their continued relationship to and active participation in the Christian community, and for their life of mission and service in the world as members of Christ’s own body.

In particular, however, the call of the catechist throughout the catechumenate may be defined by three specific tasks or duties. That is, the call of the catechist is to 1) open the word of God, the scriptures, with the catechumens; 2) help catechumens learn to pray; and 3) articulate the Lutheran character and understanding of life in Jesus Christ. Each of these three tasks or duties calls for some extended comment.

### **The call to open the Scriptures with the catechumens**

The scriptures, primarily those read and proclaimed in the Sunday worshiping assembly by means of the lectionary, constitute the basic “textbook” for regularly scheduled catechumenal gatherings. Catechists, therefore, must not only have a knowledge of the overall content of the scriptures but must be able to articulate for those



who may have little knowledge of them how these scriptures contain and proclaim the very living word of God, a word that addresses the whole community in its worship, catechists and sponsors in their own faith stories, and the catechumens or candidates in their journey of conversion. Such shared reflection on the scriptures in relationship to life experience and faith stories is a central component in the teaching methodology of the catechist. Examples of how this lectionary-based catechesis may be done are available to catechists from various sources.<sup>16</sup> Above all else, of course, is the importance of catechists modeling the integral relationship between the scriptures and their own lives, that is, how they live, pray, witness, and serve in fidelity to the biblical word.

Catechists will be persons who possess a love and an understanding of scripture, as well as a recognition of the way in which scripture functions within the Lutheran tradition. They will also need to help catechumens understand the role of the liturgical year and the liturgical life of the church in determining the particular passages of scripture that are read in the Sunday assembly and thus reflected upon in catechumenal gatherings. Indeed, along with other ways of reading and interpreting scripture, it must not be forgotten that the location of a particular passage on a given Sunday, season, or festival also helps opens up the meaning of that reading for people here and now. For example, one cannot adequately interpret the complete meaning of the Gospel readings on the five Sundays in Lent in Cycle A, without paying attention to the fact that this entire set of readings actually reflects the catechumenal process as it came to exist within the early church itself.<sup>17</sup> That is, the story of the temptation of Jesus (First Sunday in Lent; Matt. 4:1-11) is read on the day when catechumens are enrolled for their “forty days” of preparation for baptism. The story of the raising of Lazarus (Fifth Sunday in Lent; John 11:1-45) is read as a way to speak about the conversion of the catechumen to Christ, the catechumenal process itself, what happens in baptism, and the life of the church. The Gospel readings for these Lenten Sundays constitute an entire “catechetical series”

on the meaning of baptism. Each Sunday in Lent sheds new light on preparation of catechumens for baptism and the preparation of the congregation for baptismal renewal at Easter. On the Second Sunday in Lent (John 3:1-17), Nicodemus is told that one must be born from above through “water and the Spirit.” On the Third Sunday (John 4:5-42), the woman at the well of Samaria is promised “living water,” and on the Fourth Sunday (John 9:1-41), the man born blind is told to “wash” in the pool of Siloam. It is certainly for this reason that Cycle A of the *Revised Common Lectionary* is the recommended Lenten cycle for *any* year when adult candidates are being prepared for baptism within a congregation. Similarly, the twelve Old Testament readings assigned to the Easter Vigil, together with their interpretive prayers, constitute an entire catechetical series on the meaning of baptism.

Paying attention to the context of scripture means, among other things, paying attention to its interpretive *liturgical* context as these passages come to address the living word of God to catechumens. Such seems to have been one of the primary goals of this process even within the early church. As noted above, the pilgrim Egeria writes that because of this kind of lectionary-based catechesis in fourth-century Jerusalem, “all the people in these parts are able to follow the Scriptures when they are read in church.” We know as well from the numerous extant pre- and post-baptismal catechetical sermons of Cyril of Jerusalem, undoubtedly the bishop there during Egeria’s visit, that even when speaking on something like the Creed, the lectionary readings of the previous Sunday often served as the foundational basis for his comments.<sup>18</sup> Catechists need to understand the liturgical context of the scriptures if they are to fulfill their call of “opening the word of God” with catechumens. Newcomers are not welcomed into the scriptures apart from a community nor are they welcomed into a community apart from the scriptures. The catechumenate is an ordered way of welcoming people into the rhythm of congregational life rooted in the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

### The call to help catechumens learn to pray

If the call of the catechist, in part, is to provide catechumens with a model of life rooted in the promises of God as contained in the scriptures, then another part of the catechist's call is to help catechumens learn how to pray. "The catechist invites participants to learn and receive the gift of prayer, and models a variety of prayer forms and styles in catechumenate sessions."<sup>19</sup> Among this "variety of prayer forms and styles" will certainly be included the Lord's Prayer, together with its traditional interpretation from Luther's *Small Catechism*, as well as other biblical prayers (e.g., psalms and canticles), and the whole structure of Christian prayer provided by the liturgy itself: morning and evening prayer and compline, hymns, and, chiefly, the Sunday liturgy of word and sacrament. Although personal or group prayer shaped by the Sunday lectionary readings will always be an important aspect of catechumenal gatherings, a most fitting context for the location of such prayer would be within the church's own order of evening prayer.

Classically understood as the church's great "school for prayer," the various liturgies in Lutheran worship books provide concrete examples of diverse prayers of petition or intercession, adoration and praise, repentance and sorrow for sin, confession and thanksgiving. The great gift of the church's liturgical tradition is that it provides both a language and structure for the Holy Spirit who teaches the individual and the community to pray (see Rom. 8:26-27 and Gal. 4:6-7). In other words, the way to learn and teach Christian prayer is to learn from the way in which the church actually prays together in the liturgy, the Holy Spirit's gift to the community. While part of this will happen simply as the result of the catechumen's ongoing participation in the worship life of the congregation, the call of the catechist here is to assist the catechumen in making some explicit connections between communal, public worship and personal, private prayer. They are not antithetical activities, but two complementary aspects of one continual rhythm. Here, in particular, the catechist will want to draw attention to the central prayers

of the liturgy: the prayer of the day, the great thanksgiving/eucharistic prayer, and the prayer of thanksgiving over the baptismal waters in the baptismal liturgy. It is both the structure and content of these great prayers of the church which provide a model for all of Christian prayer that is trinitarian in structure and focus. Christian prayer is addressed to God, “our Abba, Father,” through Jesus Christ the Son, our great high priest and mediator, in the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Counselor, who leads us by word and sacrament to confess that Jesus is Lord (see 1 Cor. 12:3).

There is another reason, however, why catechists and catechumens need to pay particular attention to the liturgical prayer of the church in their overall formation. An ancient Christian principle states that the “rule of praying establishes the rule of believing.” That is, the “faith” of the church is both constituted and expressed by the way in which the church prays. Indeed, the liturgy is not only the “school for prayer” but also the “school for faith” and, as such, serves as a most fitting “text” for the catechumenate. Long before there was an Apostles’ or Nicene Creed, or an explicit “doctrine” of the Trinity, there was the church gathered in worship on the Lord’s Day. There was the trinitarian prayer of the church: a prayer of thanksgiving over the baptismal waters and the great thanksgiving prayer over the bread and cup of the Lord’s Supper, each prayer a proclamation of the Trinity: *praise* to God for the work of creation and redemption, *thanksgiving* for the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and *invocation* of the Holy Spirit. It was in the great prayers of thanksgiving that ordinary Christians learned of the gracious work of the Holy Trinity in their lives.

As the “school” for both prayer and faith, then, participation in the liturgy itself is an extremely important aspect of the catechumenal process. Part of the catechist’s call is to articulate clearly this relationship. Here, in the context of the living liturgical tradition and prayer of the church, is where catechists find the appropriate sources to begin their reflection on the meaning of the creeds and the sacraments of the church.

### The call to express the Lutheran understanding of life in Christ

The restoration of the catechumenate within the contemporary churches has been an ecumenical endeavor and, as such, is largely the result of the ecumenical liturgical convergence brought about by the common study of scripture, the historic sources of the Christian liturgical and doctrinal traditions and, not least, by the commonly recognized pastoral need for the formation of committed adult Christians in today's churches. Since baptism itself is *Christian* and not denominationally specific, however, the primary goal of this catechumenal process cannot be to make "Lutherans," "Roman Catholics," or "Episcopalians," but to lead adults toward a public commitment and confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, because the rites of Baptism and Affirmation of Baptism take place within particular congregations of specific Christian denominations, the unique aspects, spiritualities, emphases, and traditions of those denominations will assist in shaping the specific focus of the catechumenal process within individual congregations. Part of the call of the *Lutheran* catechist, then, is to be able to articulate the *Lutheran* character and understanding of life in Jesus Christ.

The catechumenate is not a program or curriculum of classroom study which seeks to force newcomers through a series of mandatory steps leading to adult church membership. On the other hand, the catechumenate is not a "dumbing down" of the rich and distinctive character of the church's central practices and beliefs. Rather, those adults who seek entrance into the life of Christ and his church through the rites of Baptism or Affirmation of Baptism enter the catechumenal process because they are responding *already* to God's call to conversion, to a call that has been extended to them in a variety of ways by the activity of the Holy Spirit. Through the various times of the catechumenate, it is the Holy Spirit who leads the catechumens into the life and faith of this particular Christian communion.

Because the catechumenate tends to be quite relational in nature with a great deal of opportunity for individual sharing of faith stories and for the experiential formation in discipleship that comes from interaction with a wide variety of people in the congregation, it is extremely important that catechists not neglect the role of the intellect or the mind. Conversion to Christ is a conversion of the whole person—the affective or emotional dimensions of human life as well as the intellectual or cognitive dimensions. Through the Holy Spirit, God enlightens the entire person, not simply one aspect of the person. One of the potential dangers of the catechumenate is that the positive and affirming experiences of warmth, welcome, and acceptance by the community can tend to exclude the importance of the intellect. On the other hand, one of the potential dangers of an adult study class of few weeks duration is that although much information may be imparted to individuals, there can be little opportunity to reflect on the Spirit-inspired change of heart that leads to authentic Christian living.

The Lutheran tradition was born in an intellectual, university context. For Lutherans, the call of the catechist will be to assist catechumens to come to an intelligent and faithful understanding of the Christian faith as it is understood in the Lutheran tradition. While Luther's *Small Catechism* will guide the catechist's understanding of the fundamental elements of faith formation, catechists will be strengthened in their ministry to the degree that they become knowledgeable in Lutheran theology and skilled in their communication of that knowledge to newcomers. That is, they will present clearly the distinctive character of Lutheran spirituality as one which is centered at all times in the "gospel," that is, in the word and sacraments, in God's gracious and unconditional "justification" of sinners, for Christ's sake, through grace alone, resulting in an identity characterized by the classic Lutheran focus on the Christian as "simultaneously saint and sinner." Similarly, the Lutheran catechist must be able to lead catechumens to understand

that life in Christ is nothing other than a daily death to sin and resurrection to newness of life which flows from baptism itself, and that this life is constantly nourished in the word and the Lord's Supper, and that this baptismal and eucharistic life is characterized by nothing else than the cross of Christ. Nothing should be articulated more clearly than the Third Article of the Creed with Luther's explanation, where he speaks of the absolute necessity of continued human dependence upon the Holy Spirit, who alone "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies" the church, and who, in so doing, makes all conversion and faith possible as sheer gifts of grace. In short, catechists are "pastoral theologians" formed by the Lutheran theological tradition.

### The call to work with others

The call of the catechist in the catechumenal team, like all calls or vocations to any form of ministry, is one that flows from baptism itself, from that Holy Spirit of baptism, who gives numerous and various gifts to different people in order "to equip the saints for ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). The recognition of such a "vocation," however, calls for a process of discernment on the part of the potential catechist, who may somehow perceive a call to this ministry, and on the part of the congregation as a whole in coming to affirm, deny, or even suggest to someone that such a call exists. "Once the catechumenate is in place, individuals who have served as sponsors in the past and who have the experience of 'walking with' others in a companionship of faith and support are excellent candidates for the role of the catechist."<sup>20</sup>

Because of the specific "calls" of the catechist (reflecting on scripture, teaching prayer, and articulating the Lutheran manner of baptismal life), it is necessary that catechists be adequately trained and constantly supported by the catechumenal team, the congregation, and the local synod or district. Without such training and ongoing support, the responsibilities of the catechist can become confusing or overwhelming. Here, then, it must be underscored that

catechists are part of the ministry of the congregation, a special ministry that works in close collaboration with the ministries of the pastor/s, coordinator, sponsors, and others in the congregation.

While the catechist has a primary responsibility in leading the catechumenal gatherings, the call of the catechist is not to be a substitute for the congregation who welcomes newcomers and offers its communal life as a witness to the faith. The catechist is the one who enables or facilitates the process of uncovering the great springs of faith that make such a life possible. This means, concretely, that catechists have at their disposal all the ministries and resources of the local parish. The pastor/s, representatives of the various congregational committees (for example, social ministry, stewardship, education, and worship and music), and other members engaged in a variety of local ministries (for example, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and health care facilities) can and should be called upon by catechists to share their gifts with the catechumens. Here the priesthood of all believers becomes a living reality as various members share in the task of “building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). Indeed, the catechumenate is not only an apprenticeship in the faith for newcomers, but also a significant means through which the congregation as a whole grows into him who is the head of the church (Eph. 4:15).

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1. *Living Witnesses: The Adult Catechumenate. A Manual for the Catechumenal Process* (Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1992), 4.2.
2. *Occasional Services* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1982), 143-146.
3. Geoffrey Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students*, Grove Liturgical Study No. 8 (Bramcote/Nottingham: Grove Books, 1976), 16-17.
4. See Paul Bradshaw, *Liturgical Presidency in the Early Church*, Grove Liturgical Study No. 36 (Bramcote/Nottingham: Grove Books, 1983), 18-20.



5. For a text of the *Didache*, see Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 171-179.
6. Cuming, op. cit., 17.
7. John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (London: SPCK, 1971), 144-145.
8. A helpful resource for the catechumenal process in this period is Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994).
9. *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, vol. 1 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, Pueblo, 1990), 15-358.
10. See the *Book of Occasional Services* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991).
11. In addition to the *Manual for the Catechumenal Process* above, note 1, see also Gordon Lathrop, *Living Witnesses: The Adult Catechumenate. Congregational Prayers to Accompany the Catechumenal Process* (Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1992), and Frederick P. Ludolph, *Living Witnesses: The Adult Catechumenate. Introduction: Preparing Adults for Baptism and Ministry in the Church* (Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1992).
12. Cf. the rite for "Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism" and the brief description of the catechumenal process in *Occasional Services*, 13-15.
13. *Ibid.*, 147-149.
14. Frederick P. Ludolph, op. cit., 5.
15. *Ibid.*, 6.
16. See the bibliography here and note Appendix B in the ELCIC *Manual for the Catechumenal Process*.
17. Cf. Maxwell E. Johnson, "From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent," in idem. (ed.), *Living Water; Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press/Pueblo, 1995), 118-136.
18. On Cyril of Jerusalem, see Yarnold, op. cit., pp. 65-95.
19. *Manual for the Catechumenal Process*, op.cit., p. 4.5
20. *Ibid.*, p. 4.6

## What are the qualities of a catechist?



*But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without some to proclaim him? (Romans 10:14)*

*By water and the Holy Spirit we are made members of the Church which is the body of Christ. As we live with him and with his people, we grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God. (The Liturgy of Holy Baptism)*

**B**orn out of water and the word into the community of the church, we are called to welcome others into that same community. The words of the baptismal liturgy assure us that by living with God and the people of God, we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out our baptismal covenant and grow in our response to God. With that baptismal assurance we can boldly respond and offer support to others who are not baptized.

Many of us have experience supporting or sponsoring infants and children in baptism. Few of us have accompanied another adult to the waters of the font. Yet that is the call of catechumenal ministry: to offer support to those who have heard the word of life and now want to explore the invitation to new life in Christ. This ministry offers a process with a purpose: life in Christ with the community of God's people. It is a process which may be messy at times, marked by introspection, and challenged by struggles as newcomers to the faith

begin to focus on their relationship with God and the community of faith.

Catechumenal ministry involves the entire community, with some members accepting specific responsibilities. One catechumenal ministry is that of the catechist. Here we ask the question: What are the qualities the church seeks in a catechist? Let us first meet a few catechists.

Laura is a medical secretary who serves on her congregation's altar guild and leads a small group Bible study. Jim serves as a cantor and usually attends his congregation's mid-week Bible study. He is a forestry teacher. Greg is an attorney whose educational background includes some theological studies. He is married and has one young son. Pat taught Sunday school classes for adults and children, coordinated Vacation Bible School, and regularly leads the Bible study for her women's group. She is a part-time banker and the mother of two teenage daughters. Each one of these individuals was invited by her or his pastor to serve as a catechist in the congregation's catechumenal ministry team. What qualities did the pastor see in these individuals? What qualities do they possess which enabled them to serve?

### **The catechist is a baptized child of God**

A catechist is a child of God. As with any ministry in the church, catechumenal ministry arises out of one's baptismal consecration to Christ and his mission in the world. The catechist is a member of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, baptized, called to service, and growing in faith. A firm sense of this baptismal identity allows the individual to enter into this ministry with the assurance of God's presence. As a baptized child of God, the catechist carries the mark of the cross which promises the presence of Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. The child of God walks on this way, trusting that Christ will speak the truth that leads to new life.

The catechist is a Christian who practices the disciplines of faith. Gathering with others in worship, praying regularly, reading

scripture, and participating in ministries of justice and service will be marks of a catechist. The catechist models the disciplines of faith in his or her own life, taking time for personal and communal prayer, reflection on God's word, corporate worship, and finding ways to serve those in need. Practicing these disciplines enables the catechist to be attentive to the voice of God, the signs of the Creator's presence in his or her own life. What is sung or said in worship is confirmed through one's actions in daily life. The disciplines of Christian faith enable the catechist to walk in the truth.

It will be helpful for the catechist to remember the words of the prayer that are spoken during the baptismal liturgy. After the washing in water, the presiding minister asks God to pour the Holy Spirit upon the newly baptized: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord, and joy in God's presence. This prayer expresses for the newly baptized and the baptized faithful the promise of God to pour forth these gifts on all Christians so that they might be used in a variety of ways to serve the community of faith. And yet each congregation must discern what members are best suited for this particular ministry. The scriptures remind us of the variety of gifts and blessings that are given in great diversity. This simply means that some congregational members are well-suited for this ministry. They need to be called forth, encouraged, and guided.

## A servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God

### *A faithful layperson*

The catechumenate is an apprenticeship in faith that offers adults an introduction to prayer, Bible study, and worship in a setting where they are free to ask any question and reflect with others on the struggles and joys of living the faith every day. Since the catechumenate emphasizes formation in Christ for daily living, any reflection on the daily life of a layperson will help catechumens see that this apprenticeship in faith offers a clear focus on how one lives in addition to

what one knows. The wisdom gained from regular reflection on the word of God and ongoing participation in the life of the church is essential. The catechist's teaching is primarily by example. One does not need a theological degree nor the gift of ordination to be a catechist. One does need the word of God, the practice of prayer and participation in communal worship, the desire to serve those in need, and a conscious awareness of God's promise to lead and to guide. By inviting the baptized faithful—the laity—to serve as catechists, their ministry of service to Christ is affirmed and lifted up as a model for all Christians.

#### *A trustworthy friend*

In our ministry, we are accountable to God and to the people of God. We enter into the work honestly and sincerely with this responsibility to one another. Recognizing that a catechist is communicating a way of life rather than information, we must be trustworthy. No one will follow another person without trust. Integrity and consistency are important to anyone who seeks to be trusted. We travel on this journey in the name of Christ. We seek healthy interdependent relationships.

#### *A team player*

A catechist is a servant who is willing to share in this ministry. A catechist welcomes a collaborative model of ministry. Catechists do not serve alone; they are team players. We have companions on this journey, persons who are working with us. Of course, the composition of a catechumenal team will vary from congregation to congregation. Three primary team members, however, are the pastor, catechist, and sponsor. It is important to give thoughtful attention to team relationships. Work collaboratively. Take time to discuss issues and concerns. Encourage and affirm one another. Pray regularly for one another.

*A welcoming presence*

A catechist does not hesitate to be welcoming. Indeed, hospitality to strangers is not only an ancient biblical practice, but one of the primary ways in which the congregation manifests its ministry of evangelization. Along with the rest of the catechumenal team, the catechist welcomes others with the good news of God's grace. This welcome is expressed, however, in very practical ways; initial greetings, the small group setting (the room, its arrangement, the temperature), the invitation to conversation, and the farewell all contribute to the expression of sincere hospitality in the name of Christ. The catechist is a welcoming presence, a host to those pondering the stirrings of the Spirit within their lives.

*One who respects others*

A catechist is trusting and respectful. In baptism, the Holy Spirit sets us free to accept ourselves and others. The Holy Spirit is recklessly inclusive and binds us together with all believers. The catechist is called to respect the dignity of each participant, to respect each one as an adult "learner." As the catechist facilitates reflections, the group will be challenged to move beyond safe and polite conversation while maintaining a respectful and civil discussion. The catechist is called to honor each person with trust and respect, to face difficult issues with integrity, and to strive for honest and authentic communication.

The catechist is able to keep a confidence. In catechumenal gatherings, people will share the stories of their own journeys in faith. A commitment to confidentiality ensures an atmosphere that is both safe and open. Here the catechumen must be free to speak the darkest struggle and the greatest hope without fear of being scorned or ridiculed. The catechist will establish "ground rules" for catechumenal gatherings. Let the community develop a common understanding of what information may be shared outside the small group. The group norms will reflect the trust and respect modeled by the catechist.

*One who first serves the common good*

An effective catechist confidently focuses on the needs of the catechumens. She or he is able to serve the common good of the group and carry the primary responsibility for its needs. Commitment and service are modeled by the catechist who is other-centered. The actions and attitude of a catechist reflect one's commitment to a life of service in the name of Christ.

*A group leader*

Everyone has a voice in this process of listening for God's voice. Group facilitation skills will enable a catechist to ensure that all voices are heard. The catechist will invite the participants to share their life stories as everyone reflects on the story of God's people. This is probably not a task for those who shun complexity or who are uncomfortable with ambiguity. Many of us are comfortable with the familiar and fear the unknown. New life in Christ is something unknown for the unbaptized. The catechist will facilitate reflections which seek to make sense out of ambiguous or contradictory messages. Some participants will approach their reflection on faith from the left brain, thinking and expressing themselves in a linear and analytical manner. Other catechumens will manifest a preference for thinking from the right brain, expressing themselves in an intuitive and holistic fashion. The catechist will seek to facilitate a dialogue which balances and unites the group.

Catechumens are being welcomed into the community of God's people. As members of that community, catechists are called to welcome and nurture the presence of Christ in each individual and to be a presence that encourages others. The catechist also fosters community among the participants in this formation process. An open and trusting environment will facilitate communication, which is built on accepting relationships. Nurturing these relationships will involve some personal vulnerability as the catechist shares with the participants his or her own beliefs and values.

*An effective communicator and good listener*

Active listening and strong speaking skills are important for a catechist who is called to create a climate that enables open and honest communication. An effective communicator is able to read the gestures and expressions of others and sense their feelings. The catechist needs to be a good listener. The catechist listens with the heart and creates a safe environment for the responses by neither judging nor evaluating. Relationships which seek God in community require patient, prayerful listening. The catechist is not uncomfortable with silence. An able catechist knows when to stop talking and searches for the voices inadvertently left out or purposely excluded. He or she clearly communicates that the catechumens are free to express openly their thoughts and feelings or to express divergent views.

Another communication consideration is our language. The “language of the church” that many long-time Christians may take for granted can be a foreign tongue to many newcomers. Within the community of faith, more than one dialect is spoken. The catechist learns to carefully choose his or her words and to assist in “translation.” It is easy to understand that some theological terms need explanation. Here are some words, among others, that need to be explored: “God,” “faith,” “church,” “scripture,” “liturgy,” “hymn,” “bulletin,” “altar.” The catechist needs to open the words of faith and church practice in a manner that is simple and direct. While attending to new words, the catechist remembers that the meaning of the words is what gives life to their use.

*A curious person who welcomes questions*

Participants in the catechumenate bring questions. The catechist will have questions, too—questions from her or his own journey in faith and questions for group discussion. Yet the catechist will never allow these questions to dominate, to become the questions that others must answer. The questioning nature of a mature faith will be modeled by a catechist who is comfortable with probing



questions which move beyond the surface issues of life. The questions are as important as the answers.

The catechist is a lifelong learner, a curious person. Some people ask questions and have no interest in struggling for answers. The catechist has been on the road a while and brings to the journey of faith a commitment to growth as well as a sense of humility. Indeed, the church is continually learning how to be people of the gospel, people of good news. Catechumens will probably ask questions the catechist can't always answer. The catechist is not offering a question and answer class, but rather an opportunity to gain an understanding of the meaning of life in Christ. Catechists are not people filled with information and quick responses. Yet some questions will have answers. Through reflection, the catechist will introduce the participants to an understanding of the liturgy of the church, scripture, and the catechism. Preparation for these reflective discussions may include personal study and conversation with the pastor.

#### *A person of discernment*

Readiness or resistance on the part of a catechumen to respond to God's invitation is discerned in community. The catechist is called to be a person of discernment. The catechumenal process is a journey of exploration. Participants are discovering and discerning God's presence in their lives. The catechist alerts the participants to God's presence and call and shares the story of our faithful God who keeps calling in spite of our deafness. He or she helps participants recognize that God has been in our midst all along and assists them in the process of sifting through the messages to respond with faith in action.

#### *One who welcomes diverse expressions of faith*

Part of the gift of discernment is the ability to recognize that there are diverse approaches to faith and spirituality. Catechumens gather with a catechist to engage in a dialogue between their lives and the word of God, and to discern in that dialogue the presence of the liv-

ing God calling them to faith in Christ. They bring their questions, their insights, and their experiences to a gathering facilitated by the catechist, the teacher. One participant will seek clear direction, and another will prefer self-direction. Faith in action may be the primary focus of one and spiritual meditation the other. This is a sacred journey that welcomes a variety of faith expressions rooted in the unique gifts and practices of a Lutheran understanding of the gospel.

*A person who can adapt to new situations*

What works one week in a catechumenal session, may not work the next. What worked with one group, may not work again. The catechumenate focuses on scripture and an experience/reflection model for learning. A variety of techniques or tools may be used by a catechist to facilitate the reflection. The catechist is a person who can adapt to new situations and remain flexible within the general pattern and order of catechumenal gatherings. Differences such as experience, personality, and culture will call for adaptation in the group process. The catechist who listens and is eager to learn will wisely discern the need to be flexible. The qualities of adaptability and flexibility will enable the catechist to care for the changing needs of the participants.

*Strong in God and aware of one's limitations*

The catechist exhibits a spirit of courage that reflects a reliance on God's strength. The courageous one remains faithful to his or her convictions and thus reveals the authentic self. The catechumenal process seeks to move from a world of facades where people wear masks to a place of courage where Christ shines through our transparent selves.

Being vulnerable is a sign of strength; it is not a liability nor a weakness. The vulnerable catechist is the one who takes the risk of speaking and acting in Christ's name, even though one may be misunderstood. Being vulnerable is being open to others, revealing the

love of God by becoming transparent. It is the surrender of personal ambition so that God might work through the baptized servant.

### Conclusion

Each catechist brings natural and acquired abilities to this ministry and serves as a living example that people from all walks of life live in relationship with God and one another. A catechist is one who knows who he or she is and where he or she is going, yet doesn't force personal values on others. A catechist is called to teach by speaking with candor, listening with compassion, and faithfully sharing God's promises. Consider the catechists who were introduced at the beginning of this reflection on catechumenal ministry. Laura's warm and gracious nature creates a trusting environment for others. Jim is a lay leader who understands his work in forestry education as God's call to care for creation. Greg is a person of integrity who welcomes the opportunity to reflect on God's call to discipleship in daily life. Pat nourishes and fosters the community by actively participating in its life. They have found participation in the catechumenal process to be a blessing and a privilege. They have discovered that the process of supporting persons who seek to live in Christ has helped them return to the meaning of their baptism into Christ. They have discovered that their baptismal—that is, their catechumenal—ministry is not only a blessing for catechumens, but a sure sign of God's grace in their own lives.

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## What catechetical methods are appropriate in this process?



**T**he catechumenate is a ministry of the congregation to individuals who are called by the Holy Spirit in faith toward a relationship in Christ through baptism and discipleship. As an apprenticeship in faith, the catechumenate is not geared to the accumulation of knowledge *about* faith. Rather, participants in the catechumenate are being called to a relationship in faith with Christ, and every participant, including catechists, sponsors, and catechumens, engage in the catechumenate as people of God involved in the life-long process of being shaped and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Participants in the catechumenate engage in faith-building through worship, in mutual conversation between catechumens and sponsors, and in reflection and prayer through study of the scriptures and the catechism. It is this third opportunity for engagement that is the focus of this essay on methods.

### Catechumenal gatherings

In addition to weekly worship and regular contact with a sponsor, each inquirer or catechumen is invited to participate in reflection and prayer with a catechist, other inquirers or catechumens, and their sponsors. In this gathering the group uses the primary resources of the faith to help participants hear the word of God in

their lives. Here the catechumens are enabled to respond in faith to God's call to baptism and life in Christ.

The scriptures, Luther's *Small Catechism*, and the church's worship book are the primary "texts" of the catechumenal gathering. When gatherings are held on a weekly basis, the Sunday lectionary becomes the framework for hearing the word of God in a way that is integrated with the worship life of the congregation. The catechist has the option of using the Sunday texts during the week before or the week after the worship when the texts are heard through the readings and the preacher's sermon. Methods of scripture study chosen by the catechist should be consistent with the faith-building nature of the catechumenate. Methods will be discussed later in this essay.

Use of the catechism as a "text" is encouraged only *after* the enrollment of the catechumen for baptism. Following the enrollment and during the time of preparation for baptism, discussion and reflection on the catechism is added to reflection on the scriptures. Incorporating the catechism provides catechumens with a "primer" in the basics of the Christian faith. However, the principles of the catechumenate as a faith-building ministry apply to use of the catechism as much as to the scriptures. The catechism is not "taught" in the catechumenate as much as it is used by the catechist to engage participants in reflection and prayer about what the church believes and how it shapes us for life in Christ. Catechists can encourage a prayerful use of the catechism, showing catechumens how to pray the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sections on the sacraments.<sup>1</sup> Catechists can use the *Small Catechism* as it was intended, as a guide to help persons understand the scriptures and the faith we profess as baptized people of God.

The worship book of the church is used by catechumens in communal worship and as a resource for daily prayer. In the catechumenate gathering the catechist may use parts of the worship book as focus for discussion in response to questions posed by cat-

echumens or as a secondary resource for group discussion on scripture or the catechism.

These three resources—scripture, catechism, and worship book—engage catechumens in reflecting on the call of God in Christ, and provide them with the framework through which the church has come to hear that call most clearly. As catechumens are encouraged to pray and discuss God’s word in their lives, they will be encountered by God’s call and be enabled to respond in faith to the relationship Christ offers.

## Methods

Participants in catechumenal gatherings are called inquirers and catechumens. They have expressed interest in exploring God’s call in their lives. The catechist who guides the gatherings is aware that each person comes with his or her unique history and set of questions about what it means to be a child of God and disciple of Jesus. It is important that the catechist be adept in helping persons draw on their own experiences, knowledge, and beliefs as they reflect upon the call of God. It is equally important that the catechist also be reflective on the nature of faith and the call of God in his or her own life. A working knowledge of scripture, the catechism, and the history of the church will assist the catechist as he or she guides reflection on faith and life.

The methods used by catechists in catechumenal gatherings assist faith-building when they are engaging, reflective, integrative, holistic, and faith-centered. In discussing methodologies this essay will consider each of these descriptors in turn.

### *Engaging*

The skillful catechist guides discussion, reflection and prayer in ways that engage every participant in exploring his or her own life as it is addressed by God’s word through scripture, the catechism, worship, and conversation in the faith community. To do this, the catechist uses methods that invite everyone to participate in sharing.

Using a variety of techniques for sharing will accommodate the different nature of each participant and engage all the group members. The catechist and the group could consider using some or all of these avenues to reflection: discussion, silence, writing, sketching, drama, music, sculpture, guided meditation, or walking.

Engaging the participants also means that when individuals are missing from a session, the catechist or sponsor of the individual will inquire about the absence and encourage the individual to come again. The catechumenate is a ministry that is hospitable and welcoming in the fullest sense and the catechist is in a key position to extend that welcome to catechumens and inquirers through the ways sessions are conducted.

### *Reflective*

A catechumenate session is about faith-building. Faith isn't built by knowledge or works. Faith grows in response to God's grace. The catechumenate session is not for the purpose of imparting knowledge about the Bible, or Jesus, or the church to newcomers. Our theology understands that God comes to us. In the catechumenate the catechist helps participants to reflect on God's coming to them and what that means in their lives. Because the catechumenate is about faith-building in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, catechumens are invited to reflect on that relationship in the context of their own lives. Therefore, the catechist is not a teacher in the usual sense of the word. Rather, the catechist is a guide who helps the group welcome the words of the living Christ.

As a guide the catechist is knowledgeable about the territory being explored—the Bible, the catechism and the collective story of our faith. But the catechist isn't expected to teach the Bible or the catechism to the group. The scriptures are opened to the group to find how the text speaks God's word to them. Textual study isn't usually necessary. Historical background about a passage might be appropriate if it will help the group read the text for themselves. But teaching is not the aim. Rather, the aim is to let the catechumens

hear the word of God in their lives. It is also appropriate for the group to recognize that the catechist is one like them—a person growing in the understanding of faith.

Some methods that will help the process of reflection include reading and listening to the text, silence, sketching out the story, and writing in a journal. As the group leader, the catechist will encourage an atmosphere of trust and respect so that each person's reflection is honored and that questions can arise without fear of judgment or ridicule.

### *Integrative*

The catechumenate is about persons being called to baptism and discipleship. The ministry of the catechumenate involves the whole person. It is the evangelization of the mind and the heart, the intellect and the affections. Catechumenal gatherings are “integrative” when the catechist helps it to move in two important directions.

First, the catechumenate session must be integrated with the life of the catechumen. No persons are able to isolate their life in faith from the rest of their life, including home, family, work, neighborhood, school, friends, or society. The catechist will guide the sessions so that each catechumen is encouraged to consider how God's call to faith in Christ addresses them in every aspect of their life. The sponsor is key in helping the catechumen begin to recognize the integration of faith and life through the ongoing dialogue that they have throughout the catechumenate.

It is important for the catechist to be aware of the life-changing quality of the call of God to baptism and discipleship. Each inquirer and catechumen will experience the radical call in a different way. Relationships inside and outside of the faith community may be changed because of the faith stirred up in the catechumen. Catechist, sponsor, and pastor are all in a position to help the catechumen deal with the repercussions of changed relationships.

Second, catechumenal gatherings must be integrated with the life of the congregation. This means that the catechist works with



others in the congregation to help catechumens participate in the communal life of the congregation. The catechumen participates in the community of faith through worship, fellowship, service opportunities, and conversation with the members of the congregation, including the pastor. The catechist may also invite representatives of the congregation to the catechumenate session from time to time in response to questions raised by the catechumens. Yet such visits are not a substitute for the ongoing catechumenal task of engaging the word through reading, reflection, discussion, and prayer.

### *Holistic*

The catechist conducts the sessions in ways that engage the whole person—body, mind and spirit—because the call to baptism and discipleship engages the whole person. The catechist helps people see the faith relationship in their lives through a variety of avenues including the five senses, the intellect, and the emotions. Methods that employ all these avenues, singly or in combination, will help catechumens recognize the way that faith involves every aspect of human life.

An example of using the senses together with intellect might be to invite catechumens to see, touch, and taste water while discussing the many biblical stories of how God uses water to save people. Catechumens can be asked to recall times when they have experienced the emotions of grief, anger, joy or sadness as they hear a text such as the death and raising of Lazarus. A guided meditation can lead catechumens to a place of communion with God.

Reflection on the call to faith may even include going outside the reflective circle of the catechumenate gathering to visiting, for example, places of work or sites where the community of faith is active in service to others. By using his or her imagination, the catechist can invite the group to examine the call to faith from a multitude of vantage points.

### *Faith-centered*

It is important that the catechist and the group as a whole allow all participants to be themselves while they are in the catechumenate process. Each person needs the opportunity to speak honestly about where they find themselves in the journey of faith. At the same time, the catechist can help catechumens look at their lives, feelings, and thoughts in light of God's promises to humankind through Christ Jesus. The catechumenate session is faith-centered in that catechumens are helped to recognize the relationship in faith that God offers to all people. The catechist is the guide that helps each participant recognize the transforming power of God's word that chooses us, changes us, and sends us out as new and renewed people of God.

The catechist chooses methods for discussion, reflection, and prayer that will turn the participants toward the good news of the gospel that stirs up faith. Catechumens are encouraged to reflect deeply, ask questions, and seek understanding of the biblical readings so that they can experience the relationship in faith that God offers in Christ.

### **Two catechetical models**

Thus far we have discussed a variety of methods that can be used in catechumenal gatherings. Many resources are available for the catechist to consult in planning approaches to the scriptures and catechism. In addition, a catechist might find it helpful to read literature in the areas of adult learning, small group process, and Christian spirituality.

Let us now look at two specific examples of methods that are currently used by catechists. The first—African Bible Study, or *collatio*—comes from the general body of materials for catechumenate and faith study. The second—visualizing the text—is an expansion of some of the ideas suggested earlier in the essay.

### *African Bible Study or Collatio*

This method of scripture study is known in different circles by two names. The term *collatio* is derived from the Latin and refers to the process of “collecting” or gathering thoughts, reflection, prayers through the hearing of a passage of scripture read multiple times. Another name for this method is *African Bible Study*, a reference to this practice among base-Christian communities in South Africa. This method has been used with a great deal of satisfaction, especially when participants may have a limited reading ability. No matter what it is called, this method turns Bible study away from the intellectual pursuit of knowledge about the text and toward an attitude of listening to what God is saying through the text.

The outline of the process is adaptable at the discretion of the catechist or the group, but it is important that the group share an understanding of the “ground rules.” In a society that takes little time to listen, it may take some practice for people to learn to listen carefully to the scriptures. Sharing of insights is encouraged. Debate or arguing points of interpretation is discouraged. Respecting the offerings of each individual is important. The group should agree to maintain trust and confidentiality with one another.

- ☞ The catechist begins with an opening word that reminds the participants that Christ is present where we are gathered in his name. The catechist then invites each person to listen carefully to the word as it speaks to them.
- ☞ The catechist speaks a short prayer of invocation.
- ☞ The selected passage is read slowly, distinctly, with pauses that allow hearers to dwell on the text.
- ☞ The group keeps silence for a few minutes of reflection.
- ☞ Participants are invited to share briefly a word, a phrase, or an image from the text that catches their attention and speaks to their life at this time.
  
- ☞ The passage is read a second time, slowly and deliberately.
- ☞ Silence is kept for a few minutes.

- ☞ Participants are invited to share about how the text speaks to a place in their lives that is deeper or wider. “Deeper” means reflecting more deliberately about some aspect of self that is challenged, questioned, or affirmed by the text. “Wider” means reflecting on how the text speaks about the person’s relationships with others including family, work, world.
- ☞ The passage is read a third time.
- ☞ Silence is kept for a few minutes.
- ☞ Participants are invited to speak a prayer that grows out of the text and their reflection on it. Sometimes the catechist might encourage individuals to pray for themselves, and other times they might pray for others in the group.
- ☞ The catechist closes the session with prayer or a hymn.

### *Visualizing the text*

In addition to hearing and reading a scripture passage, the catechumens can visualize the text. Seeing a text acted out or drawn on a flip chart can take the passage out of the two-dimensional words and into a three-dimensional picture. A text portrayed visually or by persons acting it out takes on new life. Dialogue or ideas take shape, literally! Relationships implied in the words of a text show up in visual relief. The group can even have fun by stretching a text into caricature in order to find the word that God addresses them in the passage.

Almost any passage of scripture can be drawn or acted out. The parables of Jesus, the stories from Acts, or the Old Testament provide a ready script. But the catechist can help the group go beyond the initial impressions of the story by inviting them to stretch their perception of the passage. Notice the relationships and interplay of characters in the story. Then portray them using present-day language or with parallel images in today’s society. Pay special attention to juxtaposition of characters. Draw the story in several frames in a cartoon format with “thought balloons” that express what is only implied in the words.

Other sections of scripture also lend themselves to visual expression. The psalms, the prophets, and many of the Pauline texts can be portrayed in drawing, acting, or sculpting as the story line of the passage is identified one phrase, image, or sentence at a time.

The point of visualizing a passage is to help catechumens see the word of God as it is: lively, active, and speaking to their lives here and now. They might find themselves in a character of the story, or in several characters. They might picture a truth about their own life that is illuminated by the acting out of the story. Because the catechumenate is about recognizing the call to faith and life in Christ, catechists can help the group find where the cross shows up in the story, either in fact or by asking what the story has to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Methods will vary according to the background, knowledge, and skills of the catechist. Each catechumenal group will develop its own sense of being together. Appropriate catechetical methods will help the group turn their attention to the word God is speaking to individuals and to the community of faith, to hear God's call to baptism and discipleship, and to respond affirmatively in faith.

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1. Donald W. Johnson, *Praying the Catechism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: ELCIC, 1995), sets forth a pattern for praying the catechism. While it can be used at any time of the year, it is especially useful during Lent and Easter.

## What resources will help catechists and catechumens?



Anderson, Jeffrey. "Preparing adults for Baptism: Consider the catechumenate." *Voices of Congregational Life*. Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 1996): 17-18. The article describes how the catechumenate has unfolded at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Durham, North Carolina. The various ministry roles needed for the catechumenate are identified. Faith development of catechumens and their involvement in the congregation's worship life are also explored.

*Catechumenate*. Published six times per year by Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago. For subscriptions: (800) 933-4213. This journal of Christian initiation is intended primarily for parish leaders, lay and ordained, who prepare persons for the rites of the catechumenate. Most of the authors are nationally recognized leaders in liturgy and the catechumenate, and they bring a wealth of experience to their articles.

Johnson, Donald W. *Praying the Catechism*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1995. This book is a series of 90 daily devotional readings and exercises organized around Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*. The 90 days are intended to cover the seasons of Lent and Easter, though the book could be used at other times as well. If used in conjunction with the catechumenal process, the book could serve as one way to reflect on some of the primary texts handed over during the catechumenate (the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer), in addition to exploring the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, and the rite of Confession and Forgiveness. The book might also serve as a guide to catechists in designing sessions built around the central symbols of the Christian church.

*Living Our Baptismal Covenant*. A resource series on the catechumenal process from the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee. Diocese of Milwaukee Christian Formation, 5008 Gordon Avenue, Monona, Wisconsin 53716. (608) 222-8980. The series includes a set of materi-

als for developing a catechumenal training conference on the local or regional level. A four-part videotape series is available, along with an introduction to the catechumenal process, a coordinator's planning guide, resource materials and handouts, a bibliography of additional resources, and a glossary of terms.

McElligott, Ann E. P. *The Catechumenal Process*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990. This book serves as a manual for implementing the rites and process of the catechumenate in parishes and dioceses of the Episcopal Church. It describes the various ministries and leaders who are essential to the establishment and oversight of the catechumenate. This book may be most helpful in providing resources for biblical catechesis and catechumenal training sessions in its several pages of appendices.

Palumbo, Paul, Alice Luney, and Marda Messick. "A Baptizing and Catechizing Congregation." *Lutheran Partners*. September/October 1996, 19-21. This article highlights the role of catechesis in the whole life of a congregation, particularly as it is employed in the service of the catechumenate. Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Durham, North Carolina serves as the setting for the article which was written by a team of its catechumenal leaders.

*Welcoming New Christians: A Guide for the Christian Initiation of Adults*. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1995. (For North American Orders: Mennonite Publishing House, 800/245-7894). This title is used for both a notebook of resources and a 14-minute videotape which together explain how a congregation might employ a four-stage process toward adult baptism. The stages of "Initiation, Decision, Baptism and Post-Baptism" are described. Instructions are also given for the services of "Welcome, Decision and Baptism." Though the material represents the Mennonite Church's theological and worshiping traditions, both the video and the notebook of resources might aid persons in other denominations who are looking for ways to adapt the processes and rites of the catechumenate to their own settings. The notebook provides several guides for catechumenal sessions and handouts for distribution to individual participants.

Yarnold, Edward, S.J. *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA*, 2nd ed. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994. The heart of this book is a presentation of some of the most significant sermons from the fourth century (by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia), which help contemporary readers to understand ancient teachings about baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist. The beginning of the book also presents an outline of the catechumenal process (ancient forms of the catechumenate, as well as a contemporary adaptation of it in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* of the Roman Catholic Church). Anyone wanting to learn

from some of the best teachers and preachers who guided new Christians into faith over 1500 years ago will probably come to value this book a great deal.

### Organizations

North American Association for the Catechumenate, 651 N. Berwick, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46222. A group comprising members from many Protestant denominations (a significant number are Episcopalians or Lutherans), officially organized in 1995. NAAC provides a regular exchange of resources, meetings, newsletters, and other forms of support for persons interested in the catechumenal process. The association also maintains a database of consultants in various regions of the country.

North American Forum on the Catechumenate (The Forum), 3033 Fourth St. NE, Washington, D.C., 20017-1149, (202) 529-9493. North American Forum provides several training institutes each year throughout the United States and Canada on the initiation of children and adults, and related issues. The organization is principally geared towards the needs of the Roman Catholic Church, although its sessions are open to persons from other denominations.

*This bibliography was prepared by Dennis Bushkofsky.*



# Catechumenal blessings and prayers

## Prayers before reading and praying the scriptures

### *Advent*

Open your word to us, Lord God.  
We wait for you and long to see your face,  
for you are our rock, our safety, and our refuge.

### *Christmas*

O Christ, enlighten my soul and heart with your never-setting light;  
guide me to reverence of you, O Lord,  
for your commandments are the light of my eyes.

### *Epiphany*

Almighty God,  
your Son has driven away darkness  
with the brightness of your grace.  
Enlighten all those who hear the word of life  
that they may be led by your truth and  
walk in the brightness of the Morning Star,  
Jesus Christ in whose name we pray.  
Amen

*Lent*

One thing I ask of the Lord;  
one thing I seek;  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life.

See *Psalm 27:4*

*Easter*

I love you, O Lord my strength,  
O Lord my stronghold, my crag, my haven;  
my God, my rock in whom I put my trust.  
My shield, the horn of my salvation and my refuge:  
You are worthy of praise.

*After Pentecost*

Open our ears, that we may hear your word.  
Open our eyes, that we may see your way.  
Open our lips, that we may declare your praise.  
Open our hearts, that your life may dwell among us.

*November*

As a deer longs for running streams,  
so longs my soul for you, O God.  
My soul is thirsting for you, O God,  
when shall I come to appear before your presence?

*Psalm 42:1-2*

## Prayers and thanksgivings after reading and praying the scriptures

### *Advent*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
who has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me  
and holy is his name.

God has mercy on those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

The Lord has shown strength with his arm  
and scattered the proud in their conceit,  
casting down the mighty from their thrones  
and lifting up the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,  
to remember the promise of mercy,  
the promise made to our forebears,  
to Abraham and his children forever.

### *Christmas*

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:  
your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation  
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:  
a light to reveal you to the nations  
and the glory of your people Israel.

*Epiphany*

I put my trust in you, O God.  
You grant your lovingkindness in the daytime;  
in the night time your song is with me.  
Send your light and your truth  
that they may lead me.  
Bring me to your holy hill  
that I may go to your dwelling  
and know the joys of your Son, Jesus Christ.  
Amen

*Lent*

We thank you, holy Father, for your Name  
which you have made to dwell in our hearts,  
and for the knowledge, faith, and immortality  
which you have made known to us through your living Word,  
Jesus Christ.  
To you be glory forever and ever.  
Amen

*Easter*

Your words are as sweet as honey.  
Your words are the delight of my heart.  
Alleluia

*After Pentecost*

Your rain and snow come down from heaven, O God,  
and they do not return until they have watered the earth,  
making it sprout and grow.

Grant that your holy word take root in our lives  
and accomplish in us your purposes,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

*November*

As a swallow seeking a nest to hatch its young,  
I am eager for your altar,  
O Lord, my God.

In you, O God, my soul finds rest.

*See Psalm 84*

## Prayers and blessings to conclude a gathering of catechumens

### *Advent*

Devote yourselves to prayer,  
and keep alert for the coming of the Lord.  
The blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
keep you in peace.  
Amen

### *Christmas*

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,  
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness,  
and patience.  
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.  
*Colossians 3:12, 16*

### *Epiphany*

Lord God of hosts,  
we look for the day when you will set a feast for all your people,  
a feast of rich food and well-aged wine,  
a feast where no one will hunger or thirst,  
a feast of grace and mercy in your Son, Jesus Christ.  
Amen

### *Lent*

O Lord, look with love on all who have been marked with the sign  
of the cross.  
Lead them through the waters of baptism  
and raise them up to new life with you,  
that they may sing your praise  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen

*Easter*

Lead a life worthy of your calling with all humility and gentleness,  
with patience,  
bearing with one another in love,  
making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit  
in the bond of peace.

*Ephesians 4:1-3*

*After Pentecost*

May God strengthen you in the power of the Holy Spirit,  
so that you may know the love of Christ, now and forever.

Amen

*November*

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances.  
May the God of peace keep you sound and blameless at the coming  
of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
The one who calls you is faithful,  
and he will do this.

*See 2 Thessalonians 5:16-17, 23-24*

### Additional prayers and thanksgivings for a gathering of catechumens

Your face, O LORD, do I seek.  
Do not hide your face from me.

*Psalm 27: 8-9*

Blessed Lord,  
you speak to us through the Holy Scriptures.  
Grant that we may hear, read, respect,  
learn and make them our own.  
May your word grasp us, help us,  
and hold us in hope.  
Amen

Almighty God,  
draw our hearts to you,  
guide our minds,  
fill our imaginations,  
and control our wills  
so that we may be wholly yours  
through Jesus Christ.  
Amen

O Jesus,  
be present with us  
as you were present with your disciples.  
Open to us the riches of your word  
and enlighten us with your truth.  
Amen



Good and gracious God,  
send your word as good seed  
into the fields of our hearts.  
Let the gentle rain of your Spirit  
bring to life the growth of faith within us.  
Amen

The LORD bless you and keep you;  
the LORD make his face to shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you;  
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you,  
and give you peace.

*Numbers 6:24-26*

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us.

*Psalm 67:1*

May the God of peace  
make you complete in everything good  
so that you may do his will,  
working among you that which is pleasing in his sight,  
through Jesus Christ.

*Hebrews 13:20, 21*

Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.

*James 1:22*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

*1 Timothy 3:18*

May the Lord of peace  
give you peace at all times in all ways.

*2 Thessalonians 3:16*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

*2 Corinthians 13:13*

May your love overflow more and more  
with knowledge and full insight  
to help you determine what is best,  
so that in the day of Christ  
you may be pure and blameless,  
having produced a harvest of righteousness  
that comes through Jesus Christ  
for the glory and praise of God.

*Philippians 1:9-11*

We give thanks to God for you,  
brothers and sisters, as is right,  
because your faith is growing abundantly,  
and the love of every one of you is increasing.

*2 Thessalonians 1:3*

Beloved,  
build yourselves up on your most holy faith;  
pray in the Holy Spirit;  
keep yourselves in the love of God;  
look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ

*Jude 20-21*

Peace be with you.

*John 20:21*



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