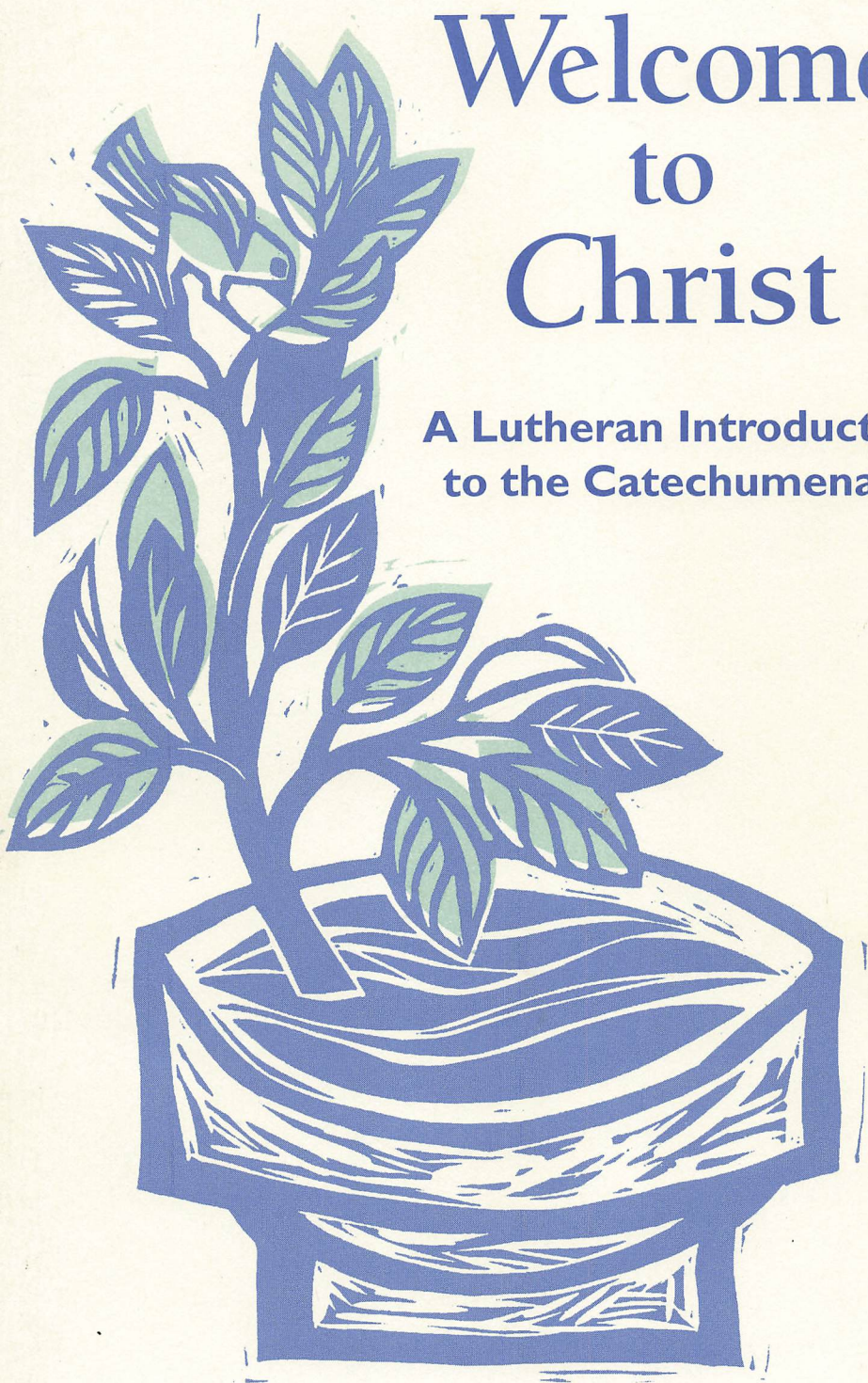


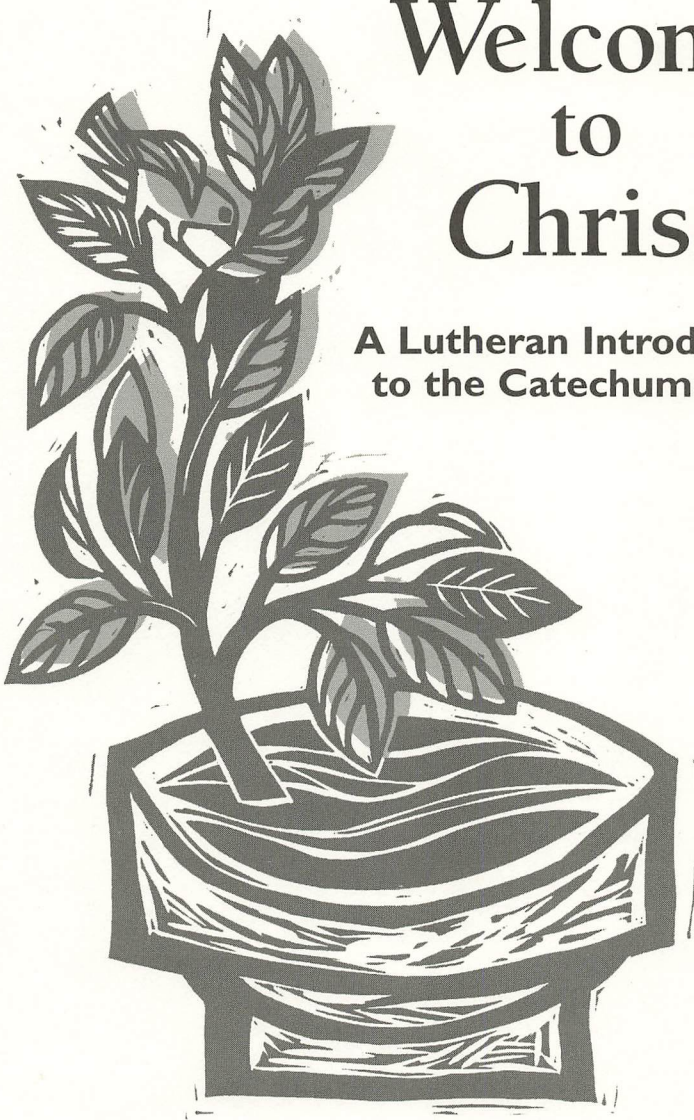
Welcome to Christ

**A Lutheran Introduction
to the Catechumenate**



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Introduction



How can adults who do not know the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ be invited, welcomed, and encouraged to come to know that good news in a way that transforms their lives? Is there a process by which the church can listen and speak to them with integrity? What questions and longings do unbaptized people bring to people of faith? How does faith grow and develop in adults who were not raised in the church? What is distinctively Lutheran about bringing people to faith? These are among the fundamental questions addressed in *Welcome to Christ*, a series of resources designed to help introduce the adult catechumenate to a variety of Lutherans in North America.

The church of Jesus Christ is enlivened by God's word and the Holy Spirit. The church's energy and mission flow from a fundamental commission and promise that comes from Christ:

... Jesus came and said to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Christ's commission to his followers is to make disciples of all people by baptizing and teaching them. It is this mandate that moti-

vates the church's honest desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all who have not yet heard the story of God's love for humanity or who have been unable until now to hear that story in a way that draws them to Christ and the church. This great commission joins baptizing and teaching. It rests on the promise that Christ will be with us—not only in the sacramental celebration of baptism, but throughout the entire Christian life and the age in which we live. This, then, is the biblical foundation for Christians to invite others to find Christ in the church.

Over the centuries, Christians have offered the unevangelized a manageable path to faith in Christ through a process called the *adult catechumenate*. This approach offers the unevangelized a reliable and describable set of times, relationships, and public moments of prayer in the congregation to help them respond to the Holy Spirit's call to faith in Jesus Christ. It also offers the church a way to organize its life and mission around this fundamental commission of Jesus: to baptize and teach.

The *catechumenate* (“sounding in the ear”) is, at root, a word-centered concept which uses the human relationships of speaking and hearing, telling and listening, conversation and reflection, as a model for teaching. This teaching is closely associated with baptism, not only as a sacramental act of water and word, but as a life-long call to be transformed daily by the Holy Spirit. The teaching described in Matthew's gospel is not only intellectual. “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded” locates the teaching associated with baptism in the primary practices that shape and mark Christian life: worship, study of scripture, prayer, and Christian ministry in daily life.

The term *catechumenate* can also be used to describe a historic pattern among Christian churches of baptizing and teaching which is being reclaimed for our time. It is a helpful term for a process of spiritual growth that extends from one's initial inquiry into the faith of the church to a committed life of Christian discipleship. This pattern consists of four different times in the conversion of a person to Christ:

- ⌘ **Inquiry:** an open-ended period during which unbaptized persons make an initial inquiry into the Christian faith;
- ⌘ **Catechumenate:** an open-ended period during which catechumens explore more deeply the church's story of faith;
- ⌘ **Preparation for baptism:** a period of intense preparation prior to the celebration of Holy Baptism; and
- ⌘ **Baptismal living:** a life-long period during which the newly baptized grow more deeply into the practice of faith and Christian life.

Public prayers and blessings mark the transition points between each of these times. Central to each of these different times are human relationships with baptized Christians who serve as companions (sponsors) and teachers (catechists) to the unbaptized. It is in the context of this process and through the relationships with these various people that the word of God unfolds for the unbaptized and enfolds them in God's love. Each person needs the freedom to move through these times at a pace which reflects their actual growth in faith.

The catechumenal process relies on four basic disciplines of the Christian faith throughout its various times and celebrations: corporate worship, the study of scripture (especially the Sunday readings for worship), personal prayer, and ministry in daily life. These disciplines are the working patterns to which those involved in the catechumenate return again and again. They are also the disciplines of Christian life to which the catechumenate calls the entire Christian community to be faithful and vigorous.

The catechumenate, then, is a model for organizing a Christian congregation's life and ministry around the great commission to baptize and teach. It is a model that does this in ways that are intentional, integrated, and public. It is *intentional* because it provides structures that foster human relationships between those who are already converted to Christ and those who God is calling to that conversion but who are outside the congregation's circle of care. It offers a pattern of church life that is focused not on the self, but on the care and growth of others.

The catechumenate is also an *integrated* model because it reorders a congregation's life toward mission to the outsider. The focus of standing ministry responsibilities in evangelism, education, and worship are changed from the task of maintaining membership needs to addressing the questions and needs of the unbaptized. It is about God making new Christians through the life of the church.

Finally, it is a *public* model because, while it values personal and sometimes private elements of the Holy Spirit's call to faith, it celebrates within the public worship of the church various moments in the times associated with baptism and teaching. This public aspect helps to build and strengthen the relationship between individuals and the Christian community.

Why does this mission-oriented model of congregational life commend itself to the church here and now? While the Christian churches in Europe and North America once held a privileged place in the social order, the present culture in the United States and Canada is very similar to the pluralistic political and religious world of the early Christians. The church at the beginning of the new millennium finds itself feeling much like the Israelites who, living in Egypt for generations, one day awakened to the reality that their welcomed and valued place in society was changing. As the book of Exodus reports: "Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8).

Today we live in an environment where the Christian church must argue and witness and compete for its place in the life and culture of human beings. Unlike established folk churches from the time of Constantine in the fourth century through the Reformation of the sixteenth century and through the religious revivals of the nineteenth century, the church in North America today has no social and economic privilege and prerogative to extend to its members. Rather, it can offer only Christ and the fellowship of his suffering and the power of his resurrection. As in earlier centuries, what makes this credible to unbelievers is that the Spirit of God is working through the real witness and relationships of baptized believers

reaching out to those do not yet know Christ. Once again the church is called to be organized first around God's mission to the world and then to the faithful care of its membership.

Lutherans have long been committed to the belief that God uses external means to communicate grace to the world, the church, and individuals. This commitment has preserved an emphasis on God's gracious sovereign acts in the sacraments. The call today is to refocus the eyes of faith to see the means of grace—word, holy baptism, holy communion, confession and forgiveness—in ways that do not narrow God's gracious activity but expand our appreciation of it. Jesus' words in Matthew remind us that baptism and teaching belong together.

Baptism is more to Christian life, however, than the moment of water and word in one public celebration. On the contrary, it is an invitation to daily conversion: dying and rising with Christ in the water and throughout our common life and witness in the world. Worship, study of scripture, prayer, and ministry in daily life—these are the tools by which the Holy Spirit brings people to faith and prepares them for the waters of baptism. They are also the tools by which God, through the transforming love of Christ, empowers each Christian to daily conversion. Martin Luther reminds us that our turning to Christ never ends, but remains God's lifelong promise of renewal. He writes:

This life is, therefore,
not righteousness, but growth in righteousness
not health, but healing
not being, but becoming,
not rest, but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be,
but we are growing toward it,
the process is not yet finished
but it is going on,
this is not the end,
but it is the road.

All does not yet gleam in glory,
but all is being purified.

Defense of All the Articles
Martin Luther (1521)

The essays in *Welcome to Christ*, then, outline a shape and method to the process of conversion which has a certain logic. This logic does not dictate what the experience of conversion will be for every unbaptized adult. Rather, the order of its logic will have exceptions. Inquirers will come with different questions and levels of exposure to the word of God and the church's witness. Helping the unbaptized to use the times and celebrations of the catechumenate is the work of the human beings who act as sponsor, catechist, and pastor. The catechumenate recognizes various ingredients in the way God calls women and men to conversion. It does not bind the Spirit to a single recipe for the Christian life. Rather, the catechumenate provides a rich pattern of congregational life that keeps the church focused on God's mission to the world by welcoming people to Christ.

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How does the catechumenal process work?



After worship one Sunday morning, a visitor shakes hands with the pastor and asks a simple question: “How do I become a Christian?” The pastor, in the press of time, does not have a simple answer. But in the awkward silence that follows, a watershed moment unfolds. It can be an occasion for embarrassment or it can be the prelude to a new beginning. Sometimes it is both. And it is an event which is becoming increasingly familiar to pastors. We might ask: Does the church, from its rich history, have a word to speak to us in this situation? Is there a precedent to offer assistance? Can we call upon the experience of Christ’s church to guide us in our day when this situation arises? What follows is one answer to these questions.

A new cultural situation

We live in a changing world. Clearly our cultural situation is not the same as it was a generation or even a decade ago. As Christians we live among people who are increasingly unchurched. No longer can we assume that our friends or colleagues have a Christian memory. Being a Christian means having both a faith and a worldview that may not be shared by our neighbors and coworkers. Many of the guests and visitors who walk through our church doors on Sunday mornings do not know the language of the church; they are unfam-

miliar with the language of faith so many Christians take for granted. Many have never had a firsthand experience of Christian worship. In this new situation, what are we to do?

In the past, when inquirers came asking questions, we “knew” what to do. We offered inquirers’ classes. We recommended an adult Bible study. We steered them toward an adult confirmation class. But this involved a critical assumption: we assumed that those who came asking questions spoke the language of the church—that they were asking questions *we* would ask. But what happens when they do *not* ask those questions? What happens, for example, when the questions being asked do not have to do with specific teachings of the church or with the differences between Christian denominations? What happens when the questions are much more basic—when *primary* questions are being asked? Questions such as this: Who is God? Who is Jesus? What is prayer? How do I join this community? How do I live in a culture that does not seem to answer my questions and yearnings?

At this point we are faced with a dilemma. Our inquirers’ classes are not sufficient. A class for those reaffirming the Christian faith is not appropriate. In the midst of theologically nuanced questions, the primary questions of the faith may get lost. They may seem embarrassing. They may not even be asked at all. And so they can be forgotten. What then, is the alternative? Here the church can look to something very old, yet very new. Here pastors and congregations can set forth a process that welcomes the basic questions and yearnings and leads newcomers on the path of faith. It is called the catechumenate.

An apprenticeship in faith

The catechumenate is an apprenticeship in the Christian faith that may lead the unbaptized to the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, to life in a Christian community, and to the church’s mission. It is not the recent invention of contemporary Christians, but has its roots deep in the history of the church, even

in biblical accounts such as Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8). The word “catechumenate,” as imposing as it may sound, shares the same roots as more familiar words such as “catechism” and “catechize.” It means simply a “sounding” or “resounding,” as when the word of God sounds in the heart, mind, and ear of a believer. And it begins when the word of God, for whatever reason, begins to resound within an unbaptized person.

The catechumenate focuses on adults who have not yet been joined to Christ in Holy Baptism. At the same time it involves an entire Christian congregation—the body of Christ—since the catechumenate is not a private journey. It is an apprenticeship in the faith; at its heart are the fundamental disciplines of the Christian life—worship, prayer, scripture reading, and ministry in daily life. Both before baptism and after, an individual comes face to face with the reality of evil in this world and the saving power of God in Jesus Christ by participating firsthand in—practicing, if you will—these basic disciplines of the faith. Fundamental to the catechumenate is the assumption that being joined to Christ involves changes both in how one lives and in what one knows. Dying to Christ in the waters of baptism means rising to a new life. The disciplines of the faith—the tools of apprenticeship—are fundamental to this new life in Christ, and these disciplines guide the footsteps of this journey in faith.

In this apprenticeship, many members of the Christian community play vital roles. Pastors lead worship and provide guidance. Sponsors are essential, both as mentors and as examples of the faith. Catechists provide structure to learning as well as to the faithful practice of the disciplines. The congregation as a whole bears responsibility for providing the rich soil in which individuals can grow and be nourished in their new life. While this apprenticeship is flexible and adaptable, the process possesses an order that reflects the patterns of coming to faith found in scripture and the catechism.

There are four distinct times in the catechumenal journey: inquiry, the catechumenate proper, Lent: Baptismal Preparation, and

Easter: Baptismal Living. These times are punctuated by liturgical rites celebrated publicly within the context of worship. These rites include a Welcome to the catechumenate, an Enrollment of those preparing for baptism at the Vigil of Easter, the celebration of baptism and communion at the Vigil of Easter, and the Affirmation of the Vocation of the Baptized in the World. One variable element is time. For some, this journey may be relatively brief. For others it may be a matter of many months. The decision is made by the one seeking baptism together with his or her own family, sponsors, catechists, pastor, and other members of the local Christian community.

We should be clear on one point: the catechumenate is not simply a program whereby a Christian congregation adds to its list of members. Rather, it is a way of welcoming, nurturing, and supporting those who are new to the Christian faith. For those not yet joined to Christ, it is an encounter with Christ's dying and rising—the cosmic struggle between God and the powers of darkness—an encounter which takes on life and breath in the faithful participation and practice of the Christian life. The catechumenate is not a necessary prerequisite to the gracious gifts of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Understood rightly, it is a welcoming—an opportunity to grow in the faith as one makes adult choices about the Christian faith and about being joined to Christ and to his body, the church. So where do we begin?

For everyone who knocks, the door will be opened

Why do adults come to Christian worship for the first time? We know it is most often the result of a simple, yet genuine, invitation from a friend, neighbor, colleague, or family member. Why is that invitation accepted in the first place? Experience answers: because there is some unfulfilled need, a question yearning for an answer, a perceived hole in the fabric of life. This may be the result of some personal tragedy—a death, the loss of a job, a broken relationship, an injury or illness. The timing may coincide with one of the great passages of life—marriage, the birth of a child, a new beginning. But

whatever the reason, there are basic and fundamental questions being asked, questions about life's meaning and value: life and death questions.

People who are asking these questions may be called *inquirers*. When inquirers come to worship for the first time, it is vital that we listen to their questions—not our questions; not the questions we think they should have, but their questions. Inquirers need to be listened to in an atmosphere that is safe—where they will not be laughed at—where they can ask their questions without embarrassment. The catechumenal process provides a small group setting where basic and fundamental questions can be asked confidently. In this small group, the inquirer is joined by a sponsor and welcomed by the pastor or a congregational member who is a part of the catechumenal team. The group meets on a regular basis.

The sponsor is one who makes the commitment to walk beside his or her charge throughout the entire journey. The sponsor is a companion, a fellow traveler in the path of faith. Any baptized Christian may act as a sponsor. The essential ingredient for sponsorship, however, is a commitment to model the disciplines of the Christian life—worship, prayer, scripture reading, and ministry in daily life—in a one-to-one relationship.

When the small group meets, it is the *inquirers'* questions and experience, in dialogue with the faith of those who walk with them, that shape the discussion. In this place of open conversation, the Bible—especially the Sunday lectionary—holds a central place. Gatherings of inquirers may be held weekly. They can take place on Sundays or during the week, at church or in homes, in the evening or during the day. The key is flexibility. When can inquirers make a commitment to meet regularly? In these regular gatherings, inquirers are given the opportunity to ask basic questions, tell the story of their lives, and reflect on the biblical readings that are proclaimed in public worship. When appropriate, they are introduced to the practice of prayer and called to reflect on the meaning of faith for daily life. They are also free to withdraw from the process at any time.

There can be no coercion here. In time the inquirer, the pastor, and the coordinator of the congregation's catechumenal team meet. Does the inquirer want to continue in his or her exploration of the Christian faith?

My sheep hear my voice and they follow me

When it is the appropriate time, the inquirer and sponsor are prepared for the public welcome into the catechumenate. Normally the catechumenate, a period of more focused formation in faith, will lead to full incorporation into the church through the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Yet the shift from general inquiry to catechumenal formation should not be construed as an irrevocable decision to receive baptism. The flexibility and openness that characterize the time of inquiry continue during the time of catechumenal formation.

When the decision to continue has been made with family, sponsor, and pastor, inquirers are welcomed publicly by the congregation into the catechumenate by way of a liturgical rite celebrated in Sunday worship. The Welcome of Candidates can be celebrated at various times during the year, and may be timed differently for each inquirer. This Welcome makes public and formal that which may have been private and informal up to this point. The decision as to the timing involves the inquirer, his or her sponsor, the pastor and other members of the catechumenal team as the journey of faith now continues in a more intentional way.

Following this public welcome, the *catechumen* (as one is called following the welcome) joins other catechumens with their sponsors for regular gatherings. The catechumenate group, consisting of pairs of inquirers and sponsors, is led by a catechist. Like sponsors, catechists are chosen as models of the faith disciplines. In addition they also serve as teachers, mentors, and group facilitators. Their purpose is to help the catechumens enter more fully into an exploration of faith. Here the emphasis shifts from inquiry to proclamation, from a generic sense of faith to faith in Jesus Christ, from gen-

eral spiritual questions to Christian theology. While an inquirer, a seeker, might rightly ask the question, What does it mean to be a spiritual or religious person? the catechumen would need to hear the question, What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to live a Christian life? Here the Bible remains the basic textbook, and the Sunday lectionary provides the framework for study, discussion, and prayer. In Lutheran congregations, catechumens are introduced to Luther's Small and Large Catechisms.

During this time the catechumenate group gathers regularly to study, to reflect, and to pray. At the same time, its members are surrounded, embraced, and strengthened by the entire worshiping community—the church. Since catechumens have been publicly received by the congregation as those who are considering entrance into the church through Holy Baptism, catechumens are continually brought before the eyes and ears of the congregation, and so kept present in its heart and mind. Catechumens and sponsors worship together regularly. They are prayed for in the prayers of the worshiping assembly.

There is the option, for Christian communities who so choose, to dismiss catechumens and sponsors from Sunday worship after the prayers, just prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper since catechumens do not receive communion until they are baptized. When dismissed, the catechumenal group has the opportunity to meet together—to study and digest more thoroughly the biblical readings that have been proclaimed in worship. They are able to use the sermon as an initial exploration of the lectionary readings. Other communities or congregations may choose instead to have the catechumens and sponsors remain until the final blessing. In this case, catechumens may receive a blessing at the time of communion. The decision regarding these practices rightly involves the entire congregation as well as the catechumens.

Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out
The third time of the catechumenal process is the period of Lent, a time for baptismal preparation, since those preparing for reception

into the church will be baptized and receive their first communion at the Vigil of Easter. On or near the First Sunday in Lent, catechumens participate in the rite of enrollment of those preparing for baptism at the Vigil of Easter. This third phase of the process is not different than the second; it is a matter of degree rather than kind. To use the analogy of birth, if inquiry is a conception of faith, and the catechumenate its gestation, then Lenten preparation for baptism is like the weeks before birth—more visible and involving more growth.

While Easter, with its proclamation of death and resurrection, is the most significant time of the church year for adult baptisms, it is not the only time. The festivals of Pentecost, the Baptism of the Lord, and All Saints are also appropriate days because the church's baptismal theology embraces these celebrations. These baptismal celebrations would be preceded by a time of immediate preparation which is fitting—Advent or the Sundays after Pentecost, for example. Here, as with other elements of the catechumenate, the decision is rightly made by the catechumen together with the pastor, sponsor, catechist, and other members of the worshipping community. We should be cautious, however, and not allow the inherent flexibility of the catechumenate to be an excuse for minimalism. The fullness of proclamation and the liturgical celebration of the dying and rising of Jesus Christ should be allowed to unfold and blossom, no matter what the season.

Entry into the time of baptismal preparation during Lent assumes a commitment on the part of the catechumen to be joined to Christ in baptism—the choice has been made. Therefore, the Enrollment of Candidates includes a question to the catechumen: “Do you desire to be baptized?” This third time of the process turns the attention of catechumens, sponsors, and congregation to the life-changing event that is Holy Baptism. The catechumens are rightly called *baptismal candidates*. This is a time to face, in a more profound way, the juxtaposition between good and evil in our world. It is an opportunity to confront the reality of evil and of the Evil One with open eyes. The images of Lent, which encompass the great polarities

of life—light and darkness, sin and obedience, temptation and faithfulness, alienation and reconciliation, blindness and sight—give flesh and blood to this confrontation. These images of our human condition are encountered repeatedly in the scripture readings, the prayers, and the liturgies of the Lenten season.

One of the possibilities during this time involves the use of blessings for the catechumens during the Sunday liturgies of Lent. These are occasions for confronting the darkness of life within a community of faith and hope. The gospel readings for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent set forth the call to faith in Christ in a world that can be dangerous and frightening. At the same time, these Sundays can serve as the public occasions at which the oral and written traditions of the faith are passed on to those preparing for baptism. The Creed, the church's book of worship, and the Bible, if not already given, can be publicly presented to the candidates in worship—gifts from the family of faith to those about to join the body of Christ in Holy Baptism.

All of this is for the purpose of preparing both baptismal candidates and congregation for the celebration of baptism and communion at the Vigil of Easter. In this liturgy, the church celebrates the Lord's death and resurrection. The church also welcomes new brothers and sisters who die and rise with Christ in the waters of the baptismal font. Here the baptized renew their baptismal promises and so are united to the newly-baptized in a common profession of faith. In this liturgy, those who have been born of water and the Word of God come to the table where they receive for the first time the body and blood of the crucified and risen Lord. This is a joyful celebration for everyone who is joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The water that I give will become a spring gushing up to eternal life

The Easter Vigil is a rich experience for catechumens and the baptized alike. The visual experience of a passing over from darkness to light, the joyful Easter proclamation, the narration of salvation history, the flowing water and gracious word of Holy Baptism, and the

bread of life and cup of salvation flood the heart, mind, and soul of all who participate. For baptismal candidates—now the *newly baptized*—the celebration of baptism and communion can raise questions which may have gone unrecognized beforehand. There may come an overflowing thankfulness for the gifts of God graciously bestowed upon them, and at the very same time a consuming desire to know and experience more.

The time of baptismal living begins during the Fifty Days between Easter Sunday and the day of Pentecost. This time provides the opportunity, particularly through preaching, to explore the mysteries of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion and to form all the baptized in baptismal faith and life. For the newly baptized the vantage point has now changed. Before baptism, the catechist may have said, “You have heard . . .” in reference to the proclamation of scripture in the liturgy. Now the catechist or pastor may say, “You have seen . . .” in reference to the celebration of the sacraments. The event of Holy Baptism, as a life changing event, also changes one’s relationship to the Christian community. Joined to Jesus Christ and his church in Holy Baptism, the newly baptized now participate fully in the life of the community. They remain in worship throughout the entire service, receiving communion at the Lord’s table, and being sent out into the world with the mission and ministry of all the baptized.

For this reason, the Fifty Days from Easter to Pentecost afford the opportunity for the newly baptized to discern the ministry/ministries of the congregation through which they will serve the Lord. In what specific ways does faith in Jesus Christ enlighten the ministry of daily life? During this time opportunity can be offered for individual members of the congregation to share with the newly baptized their struggles of faith and life and their day-to-day decision making—all with an eye toward encouraging all the baptized in their own daily life. In other words, this initial time of baptismal living is intended to place baptism in its proper perspective: as a beginning to life in Christ, rather than as the end of inquiry. This is made

clear in the Affirmation of the Vocation of Christians, which both affirms the ongoing nature of the catechumenal life and, at the same time, brings the catechumenate to an end for the newly baptized. This rite can be celebrated at Pentecost, but also at other appropriate times during the year.

Flexibility and adaptability

The marking of times during this process ought not overshadow the inherent flexibility which is central to the catechumenate. The catechumenate needs to serve catechumens in their journey of faith, not the other way around. This means that the catechumenate must be flexible enough to meet individual needs and adaptable to specific communities and cultures. There is ample room for inculturation of the liturgical rites. When local customs can be harmoniously adapted to the ebb and flow of the catechumenate, without violating either, that is to be encouraged. When members of the community serve in roles which easily complement those of the catechumenate, that is all the better. And when being flexible with the process encourages catechumens in their faith journey rather than hindering it, that serves only to strengthen the reality of baptismal preparation.

Repentance and conversion

Let us take seriously the matter of repentance and conversion. In the journey of the catechumenate, those preparing for Holy Baptism are in the process of becoming Christians. That is, their journey is one of repentance and conversion. Through the hearing and receiving of the Word of God, catechumens wrestle with matters of life and death—not only the life and death of Jesus Christ, but their own as well. And as they struggle, catechumens come face-to-face with the reality of being joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At its heart, the catechumenal process is a repenting of all that keeps us from being so joined, and a journey of conversion to a new life.

If repentance is rightly understood as a “turning,” then it is both a turning from and a turning toward. Catechumens are turning from

their former life and turning toward new life in Christ. Such a turning does not, in most instances, take place instantaneously. It is a matter of both time and distance—time in which the turning takes place, and distance as catechumens begin to see their lives more clearly in the light of faith.

All of this is true since conversion involves the whole person—intellect, emotions, spirit, actions, and more. Various words try to capture the reality of conversion: transformation, passage, reformation, and journey. All of these describe a movement of the whole and entire person. Otherwise there is not, in fact, a true and genuine conversion. As both theology and experience tell us, conversion does not end at Holy Baptism. The event of baptism may, in fact, be closer to the beginning of the journey than to its end. Nonetheless, the turning toward life in Christ also begins before water is poured, and both repentance and conversion are essential to the baptismal preparation of adults. Indeed, the New Testament uses various images to describe the movement of conversion in Christ, stories that are prominent during Lent: Israel's wandering in the wilderness, the recovery of sight to the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus.

In the midst of all this, silently unfolding like a delicate impulse, the realization grows that as the community helps to shape the identity of the catechumens, so the catechumens also shape the identity of the community. The congregation begins to understand and see itself as a baptizing community. Its mission and ministry are shaped by this calling. As catechumens come face-to-face with their own dying and rising, so does the community. For the community, the presence of catechumens is transformative, life-giving, and redemptive in the sense that the catechumens lead the baptized back to the place of their origin. In the water and word of Holy Baptism—as well as in the daily practice of worship, prayer, scripture, and ministry—we are the body of Christ, bearing gifts of healing and compassion for our world.

A gift rather than a requirement

Not unlike an inquiry class or a confirmation program, the catechumenate can be distorted into a way to obtain favor: the favor of God or of the congregation or pastor, or even one's spouse or family. The catechumenal process can be an occasion for works-righteousness. If this misunderstanding becomes the subtle, unspoken motivation for the catechumenate, then the evangelical principles which undergird it will be distorted, if not lost. The different times of the catechumenate coincide with the natural shape of the human journey rather than as merit badges to be earned. The various rites and blessings are public announcements and affirmations of those being joined to Christ rather than requirements to be obeyed. The disciplines of the faith—worship, prayer, scripture reading, and daily ministry—are the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the basic tools that equip one for new life in Christ rather than stars in one's heavenly crown. Understood properly, the catechumenate is a generous gift of God—a gift offered graciously to those seeking baptism, and to members of the body of Christ as well.

The catechumenate is a gift that can lead one into the Paschal Mystery—the mystery of the Lord's passage from death to eternal life with God. It is this mystery that begs for understanding and exploration in the catechumenate: baptism is grounded in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. It is from Christ's death and resurrection that Holy Baptism receives its power and life. Baptism is our passover from death to life. The purpose of the catechumenate is to welcome all who seek God with sincere hearts into this passing over from death to eternal life, from a life filled with requirements to a life filled with the riches of grace.

The catechumenate is a gracious gift. It is the gracious gift of a loving community—a community that surrounds, upholds, and encourages the members of the body of Christ throughout their journey of faith. It is the gracious gift of passing over from darkness to light. And above all, it is the gracious gift of becoming a child of God, a brother or sister in Christ, and a coworker in the

kingdom of God. There can be no requirement here, only the gift of our risen Lord.

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Who is involved in catechumenal ministry?



Who is involved in catechumenal ministry? The most accurate answer to that question can be stated in one word: everyone, all the baptized. The catechumenate presents the church with a vision of faith formation and disciple-making. While the catechumenate nourishes adult seekers who are preparing for baptism, it also challenges the entire congregation to a renewed commitment in Jesus Christ. Reflecting this emphasis on community, gifted and willing people are responsible for important leadership roles.

Since the reintroduction of the catechumenate in the contemporary church, a variety of ministries has developed. In communions where the catechumenate is thriving, many people participate intentionally in catechumenal ministries as prayer partners, musicians, ministers of evangelism, ministers of social justice, ministers of hospitality, sponsors, and catechists. Every congregational group has a part to play in guiding and surrounding the catechumens with care and support as they journey toward new life in Christ. Ushers and greeters are sometimes the first contact visitors have with the community. Men's, women's and youth groups, choirs, council committees, and other organizations can share their particular service with catechumens. To be sure, one gift of catechumenal ministry is the

invitation to the entire parish, welcoming widespread involvement in this baptismal ministry.

Here we will focus on building and nourishing a catechumenal team of coordinator or director, pastor, catechist, sponsor/godparent, and catechumen. These primary roles admit to appropriate variations given the size and gifts of a particular congregation. In the initial stages of this ministry, for instance, the pastor may serve as coordinator. In a small congregation, the lay coordinator may serve as a catechist. Here we will discuss the gifts that promote this important ministry.

The catechumenal coordinator

For generations the responsibility for bringing children and adults to baptism has been the task of pastors. Yet the tendency to concentrate outreach and educational ministries in the pastor alone contradicts a strong Lutheran emphasis on the priesthood of *all* believers. Today, in almost every major Christian tradition, we are being reminded that worship and ministry belong to the whole people of God. Like other members of the catechumenal team, the coordinator serves as a sign of the congregation's call to care for those who are preparing for baptism in this community of faith.

The coordinator is someone who enjoys the trust and respect of the congregation. Perhaps this person has served on the parish council, as a church school teacher, or leader of other activities. He or she is a credible witness to Jesus Christ, someone who has a mature understanding of the faith and leads a life consistent with that faith. The coordinator works closely with the pastor as well as other members of the team. Resident in this person must be the ability to discern the gifts of team members and coordinate their ministries.

The coordinator is a person of prayer, someone who would not hesitate to pray for the Spirit's guidance, for the catechumenal team and its ministry of outreach, worship, catechesis and apostolic ministry. It is through this ministry that the Holy Spirit—the church's

catechist—uses Christian disciples to help others follow in the way of Jesus Christ. Personal and communal prayer enables the coordinator and the catechumenal team to entrust their concerns and their ministry to God. When it is possible, the catechumenal team finds time for day-long or weekend retreats where the order of the day is prayer for God's help and blessing.

While this may be a new ministry in many of our congregations, we know people who are wise and effective mentors. It is good to remember that we learn by doing. The North American Forum on the Catechumenate (Roman Catholic) as well as the North American Association for the Catechumenate (Protestantx), offer a variety of training institutes for coordinators and all those involved in catechumenal ministry. The churchwide offices in Canada and the United States provide opportunities for growth and information. Neighboring parishes with established catechumenates represent another resource. Networks of parish catechumenal coordinators meet on a regular basis to offer each other support, to discuss questions, to share new resources, and to pray.

The pastor as presiding minister

When one moves into a truly collaborative style of ministerial leadership, there can be cause for joy as others bring their gifts to a common labor. To join with other catechumenal ministers does not mean that the pastor ceases to meet with those who wish to explore Christian faith or to be deeply involved in their growth. The pastor continues as the primary advocate and facilitator of this ministry. Especially in the initial stages, pastors are instrumental in training and equipping catechists, sponsors, and others for their ministries.

It should become clear to pastors, however, that the catechumenate is not one more program of adult education with a set curriculum. Rather, the catechumenate is a careful and deliberate apprenticeship in the faith. Lutherans can rejoice that this movement is focused on the recovery of baptism as the central act by which the church's identity is formed and its mission empowered. No other

movement in the history of the church so clearly integrates evangelism, catechesis, and worship within the life of a congregation's ministry and mission.

Here we refer to the pastor as "presiding minister." Integral to the effectiveness of the catechumenate is the role the pastor plays as the preacher and the leader of congregational worship. Ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament, the pastor serves the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens the people of God. And it is through the means of grace, the ministry of word and sacrament, that adults become disciples of Jesus Christ.

When inquirers decide to continue the exploration of the faith in a more focused way, they are publicly welcomed into the catechumenate at the principal Sunday service. The pastor presides at this liturgy where the new catechumens are presented to the congregation, marked with the sign of the cross, and receive the Holy Scriptures. In time and through prayer, study of scripture, and discussion with their sponsors and pastors, catechumens discern their readiness for baptism and the responsibilities of living the Christian life. As they begin their immediate preparation for baptism, they are publicly enrolled for baptism, again at the principal Sunday service. When this occurs on the First Sunday in Lent, the preacher is able to point the entire congregation toward Easter when the enrolled catechumens will be baptized, and the community itself will renew its baptismal promises. After the Vigil of Easter, the public worship of the church enables the preacher to explore the meaning of baptism for ministry in daily life.

Speaking of the pastor as the presiding minister reminds us that this ministry needs many other participants. The presider guides the liturgical action and contributes significantly through a gracious service to all who are present. The pastor ensures that those who are preparing for baptism and their sponsors and families are remembered in the community's prayers. Provision is made in the catechumenal rites for the presiding minister to speak God's blessing over

the catechumens. At the same time, the pastor yields to others who share their gifts with the worshiping assembly. The catechumens, coordinator, catechist/s, and sponsors are welcomed by the presiding minister to the liturgies of baptismal formation.

The catechist

Martin Luther ends one of his earliest essays on worship with the exhortation: “And this is the sum of the matter: let everything be done so that the Word may have free course. . . . We can spare everything except the Word” (*Concerning the Order of Public Worship*, 1523). In the contemporary idiom, “free course” could be translated as making room for the Word to move wherever and whenever it will. That Word—Jesus Christ dead and risen for the life of the world—is the center of our proclamation in word *and* sacrament. All Christians are called to listen attentively so that they might hear this word. All Christians are called to open their eyes, so that they might see this word.

The term “catechist” comes from the Greek root “echo” and refers to one who *echoes* the gospel or lets it loose in peoples’ lives. That is the chief role of the catechist, to ensure that there is a wide-open space in which the word can be received.

It would be easy to think of a catechist as a Bible study leader or church school teacher. But echoing the gospel is not primarily concerned with passing on information, even biblical information. The word is spoken, received, and reflected on, so that people are formed in the image of Christ, dead and risen for us and for our salvation. The catechist is a Christian who can listen well, be silent, guide patiently, encourage when needed, lead people in prayer, and help unearth the riches of scripture. The catechist loves the scriptures, is familiar with the deep meaning of the catechism, and leads a mature life of faith. At the same time, the catechist is one who invites others to help the catechumens both practice and come to a deeper understanding of life in Christ. The catechist thus welcomes the gifts of others in this ministry.

There will come the time when a catechumen may express the desire to be baptized. The catechist, sponsor, and pastor will meet with the catechumen to pray and discuss this important movement in the life of faith. Here the catechist, sponsor, and pastor will encourage the catechumen to speak honestly about his or her desire to be united with Christ and his church. In turn, the catechist, sponsor, and pastor will be free to speak about their own hopes for the catechumen. When all have agreed that it is the appropriate time to continue, the catechist will explain to the catechumen the significance of the enrollment for baptism.

The sponsor

Perhaps the church can learn something from the countless number of twelve-step programs that help people recover their lives. In these programs, the sponsor plays a vital role in ministering to people who suffer with various dependencies. Those who are recovering—reclaiming a healthy life—need assistance and encouragement. They are strengthened by a community that gathers daily or weekly, by people who are simply willing to be with them and for them. They need someone who will be a friend and companion on their journey to new health. The sponsor is a vital key to the establishment of a healthy new life.

In the church's catechumenal ministry the *community itself* sponsors catechumens by offering guidance, prayer, and the witness of its own life of service to Christ. At the same time, an entire community cannot minister to an individual in the same way that one other person can. An individual sponsor embodies the Christian faith to those who are exploring the Christian faith. One could say that sponsors, therefore, serve as representatives of the church to individuals who are initially exploring the faith or are actively involved in the catechumenate proper.

A sponsor is someone who lives the faith. From the sponsor, the candidate will catch a vision of the Christian way of life in a way that far exceeds the acquisition of information. Such a living witness gives

its own kind of knowledge to another person. A sponsor is a companion who is able to listen to questions and speak from his or her own experience of living the faith. The sponsor is a friend, a fellow walker on the journey of faith to which all Christians are called.

Members of the congregation may become interested in catechumenal ministry because they are encouraged by a pastor or congregational leader. Some people become sponsors because they invited a friend to join them for worship, and the friend has expressed a desire to know more about the Christian faith. Some parishes encourage baptized members to join in the congregation's catechumenal ministry. Here the coordinator of the catechumenal team can assist in the appropriate training of new sponsors. And yet, sponsors also need sponsors. A sponsor coordinator or catechumenal director needs to minister to these people who will share their own needs and concerns with another. Often sponsors, intending to encourage others and share their faith with catechumens, discover that they are receiving the ministry of the catechumens: they are being challenged and strengthened in their own faith. For them, the riches of their baptism begin to appear in ways previously unexpected.

The catechumen

The catechumenate is an apprenticeship in the faith. Like a pilgrim or a novice, the one who seeks after God begins this journey, only to discover that it is God who has been seeking the seeker. The movement toward Christ, instilled through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit, is a journey toward a new home, a new way of seeing, a new way of believing. As the catechumen begins to catch the vision of life lived with Christ through common worship, personal prayer, and reflection on scripture, there emerges a new sense of being in the world, of openness, and growth. Eventually, this person will carry fresh insights into the rhythm and structures of daily life. Inevitably, those structures will be influenced and invigorated by these new members of the community. In catechumenal terms, the

newly baptized bring to the entire community the gift of their new-found love of Christ, the gift of their questions, the gift of their holy experience.

One of the hallmarks of catechumenal ministry is the renewal not only of the catechumens but of the whole community. As preaching and singing, as gathering in common worship, as catechumenal rites and blessings set forth to these members-in-process what it means to be the church, they also reawaken congregational members to a heightened sense of their own baptismal identity. The catechumens stand as a profound witness to the church's apostolic ministry and mission. Indeed, the baptism of new members signals the opportunity for all the baptized to reaffirm their baptism into Christ.

The catechumen ministers not only to his or her sponsors, catechists and the entire assembly of believers, but is called to minister to the world. One aspect of expressing the baptismal life is a willingness to share the mission of the church in spreading the word and serving others. The great goal of catechumenal ministry is to ensure that the Holy Spirit has room and opportunity to form Christian disciples who live out the gospel in their lives.

Conclusion

The catechumenate demands a significant investment of time and energy by those who lead it. As a congregation stands on the threshold of this new ministry, members of the catechumenal team are instrumental to its development and success. Regular meetings of this team are important for personal growth and support. Some areas that need to be emphasized in such gatherings would be the exploration of biblical models for this ministry, an opportunity for faith sharing among the team members, assistance in improving leadership and communication skills, and ample time for communal prayer that is attentive to the will of God.

To become a Christian disciple is a fateful decision! Those who participate in a congregation's catechumenal ministry will help the

church welcome new Christians who have been formed in scripture, prayer, and service for the sake of Jesus Christ. Catechumenal team members are our pioneers in seeking new ways to support and lead those who would enter this apprenticeship in the faith. They are part of the strategic effort to envision our congregations as vital centers of Christ-like love and service for the sake of our world.

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How does contemporary culture yearn for God?



The church, the community of faith, can form us all—both the seeker and the long-baptized—to be a people who drink exuberantly of the satisfying Water of life, that water which alone can quench our deepest thirst.

Everyone has deep within himself or herself a profound, unquenchable yearning—at root a yearning for God. Around forty years ago, C. S. Lewis used the German term *Sehnsucht* to name this pressing, restless longing for fulfillment that nothing can satisfy more than temporarily. Lewis suggested that human beings try to handle this hunger in three different ways.

The “fool” thinks that if she can reach a particular goal, she will be satisfied. After dedicating herself to achieving it, she discovers in the end that it doesn’t satisfy her for long. Consequently, she spends her life jumping from one inadequate goal to another. The “sensible” person, in contrast, recognizes that the yearning cannot be stilled, so he tries instead to ignore it and push it under. This isn’t successful either, for the longing keeps surfacing, and his attempts to repress it must constantly be renewed. Lewis proposed a third way which truly deals with *Sehnsucht* and the roots of the longing itself. If we heed this intense yearning and know that nothing in the world satisfies it, and nothing in the world can push it under, then we must realize that we are made for another world.¹

Lewis was not the first to recognize this fierce human hunger. The early church father Saint Augustine wrote, “O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Long before him, the book of Ecclesiastes illustrated the vanity of

trying to satisfy or repress one's longing. Now, at the turn of the millennium, several elements of our society aggravate this profound yearning, accentuate the despair many experience in trying to fulfill it, and thus call for fresh insight, new compassion, and a return to a process that helps people discover the One in whom they may at last rest.

As Christians, we know that the other world for which we are made is God's presence in God's Kingdom, to be fully experienced only at the end of time. To some extent that world can be tasted now in the Christian community, which incarnates God's truth in its worship and life together. However, the post-Christian society of North America leaves many people bereft of the basic Christian understandings that once could be assumed in our culture. Therefore, if we want in these times to help people enter the new creation, the alternative society of the Christian community, we must understand their attempts to appease or still the *Sehnsucht*. Then by a deep process of formation, we can incorporate them into the Body that will truly gratify their desire by nourishing their relationship with God.

Goals which do not satisfy

By which goals do persons in our culture try to appease their spiritual hunger? Actually these inadequate goals are, to use the biblical term, idolatries, for anything that takes the place of the one true God is an idol—whether or not the worshipers consciously claim it as a god and whether or not they recognize that they are worshiping it. Some of our idolatries begin with genuine care for things that are important, but we let that devotion get out of hand. In fact, some of the conflicts over worship in the churches are caused by none other than idolatrous esteem for certain forms or styles.²

What makes idolatries so intense in the present age is that so much of life is becoming ambiguous, chaotic, fearsome, unmoored. As a result, people cling more desperately to whatever seems capable of freeing them from pain, confusion, emptiness, or

meaninglessness. Their ultimate concerns are often trite, violent, enslaving, or flimsy. Never do they ultimately satisfy.

The Idolatry of Ease

Certainly one of the ringing cries of contemporary culture is for ease, comfort, the total absence of any kind of suffering. Consequently, many of our major social controversies—abortion, euthanasia, or the convenient availability of divorce—are argued on the basis of a false compassion that “eases suffering” in the short run, but causes long term consequences that are only beginning to be recognized. Social analysts perceive, for example, that fatherlessness in the home is the root of more social problems than violence and crime.

To put one’s own coziness as the goal of existence can never result in a fulfillment of one’s spiritual yearning, for suffering is inevitable since we live in a broken, corrupt world. We often undergo tribulations as the natural consequences of our bad choices. Many of our afflictions are undeserved, caused by the evils of others. Some arise from the simple fact of bodily aging, the presence in the world of disease—all because our sin brought death. Since the death ratio is the same—one per person—we can never escape suffering on earth, but people go to great lengths to try.

In the midst of anguish, those who suffer often look to a church. But we must ask the important question, What will our churches give them? We will not respond to their yearning with easy answers or the guarantee of ease. The Christian community does not promise an end to suffering in this life, but trains its members in the truths of faith which enable them to recognize its source in sinfulness and its meaning in the grace of God. God’s people can even “boast” in our suffering, for we know that it produces perseverance, then character, and then a hope that will not disappoint us (Rom. 5:3-5). What people need is not the illusion that they can escape from suffering, but the purpose to endure it. Rather than chasing after an endlessly elusive comfort, we all need to be immersed in a faithful

community that supports us in our suffering, that works to alleviate what can be eased, that embodies the presence of the God who genuinely comforts the afflicted and also afflicts the comfortable.

Materialistic consumerism

Some of the suffering experienced in our culture is brought on by the perpetual pursuit of material possessions—even as those treasures are sought as an escape from suffering. The interminable spiral discloses the impossibility of extinguishing our innate yearnings with human solaces or stuff.

The idolatry of possessions has plagued us since the beginning of human existence, as reflected biblically in the stories of Adam and Eve, Jacob and Esau, and Jacob's wives, who wanted to possess wisdom, the birthright, and sons, respectively. The impossibility of possessions ever quenching our hunger for more possessions is recorded in Isaiah 55, where the LORD asks why we continually waste our money on what is not bread and our labor for what will not satisfy.

The twentieth century, however, has specialized in inflaming the endless lust for possessions with advertisements that constantly convince us we need more (especially to create the ease we have never found). The marketers don't tell us much about their products, but they spend all their energies and enormous amounts of money appealing to our fears and dreams. Thus, the idolatry of possessions plays to the deeper idolatry of our selves—and, in an endlessly consuming society, persons are always remaking themselves with new belongings. Without their knowing it, a consumer society turns human beings into objects, merely reflecting the latest fads.

These ongoing refabrications make the person's character increasingly pinched, more "inward-turned" as Martin Luther would say. Narcissistic attention only to one's own well-being leads to stinginess and an inability to understand life as service to others.

In such a world, the generosity and self-sacrifice of the people of God must be deliberately nurtured in a community that understands

itself as an alternative culture and that resists society's materialism and greed. If Christian churches truly manifested the gracious self-giving of Jesus, that love would draw many persons whose still-unfulfilled yearnings have driven them to seek a deeper and lasting satisfaction beyond possessions. Then, by a life-forming process, such searchers can be helped to discover their deepest yearnings gratified as God fashions them to be selfless and truly themselves in relationship with the Trinity.

Experiential consumerism

The aspiration to possess more things seems especially to characterize what is called the "boomer" generation (those now in their 40s and 50s). Younger people, those called the "busters" or "Generation X" or "the blank generation," seem instead to have as their goal the accumulation of experiences or adventures. This is the generation abandoned by their parents and raised by television. As a result, many of them seek only the next entertainment, the immediacy of fun. Experiential consumerism is typified by those younger persons whose only interest is their next ski trip or the concert for which they will fly halfway across the country.³ Attempts at deeper conversation with such people, however, often reveal an inability for any sort of spiritual contemplation or reflection about existential questions. Those who do yearn for something more are often at a total loss as to where to find it. Churches who make worship merely entertaining do them a severe disservice by fostering a consumerist stance toward faith and depriving them of what they truly need.

Instead, Christian communities that reject the superficial diversionary amusements of the world around them for the sake of earnest study and spiritual growth, for the pursuit of godly wisdom, will offer genuine meaning to those tired of their idolatry's fruitlessness. Instead of immediate gratification, they will cultivate—by a life-transforming process—what Eugene Peterson called "a long obedience in the same direction: discipleship in an instant society."⁴

Information consumerism

The word *wisdom* is the appropriate word in the previous paragraph because one of the disenchanting goals of our present society is the accumulation of information. The churches teach details about God, to be sure, but that knowledge is rooted in a lived faith that acts on what it knows.

The society in which we live, by contrast, is overloaded with much useless or contextless (though often interesting) information. As Neil Postman demonstrates, television—as it has developed—has trained us to hear and see incredible and overwhelming amounts of information about which we do not or cannot do anything.⁵ We have learned to receive such data without really learning from it or acting on it. This disposition causes us to have what Postman names a “Low Information Action Ratio.” Information we receive is not attended to thoughtfully and critically. Imagine what this learned perception does to those who gather for worship. And think how that tendency is becoming aggravated by the World Wide Web.

To those who chase after more and more information, only to discover in the end that they can never accumulate enough to satisfy the longing that burns within them, a vital Christian community has great gifts to offer in introducing them to the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To those who seek a truth greater and more enduring than any multitude of sound bites, the Christian community can welcome and immerse them into a Way that brings wisdom out of knowledge, into a Truth that infuses everything with meaning and hope, and into a Life that acts on the knowledge of faith. Imagine the difference between receiving information on an inanimate screen and receiving a word of truth from a living human being.

Autonomy and power

Part of the reason that so many people in our society chase after information is that they think its accumulation will ensure more control of their lives—and perhaps the lives of others. The modern liberal

state has fostered the idolatry of autonomy, that all individuals possess a right to pursue their own personal happiness with little, if any, regard for others, for the common good. The cultural rebellions of the 1960s added a new dimension to this notion of independence in their rejection of all authority imposed on the person from the outside. Never before in the history of the world has there been such a visionless repudiation of the wisdom of elders, of the past, of living traditions. When they became parents, many baby boomers, influenced by the rebellions of these years, relinquished their role as mentors, as purposeful guides, and left their children to their own devices and to the destructive influence of the media.

We see the results of this often subtle abandonment of children in the classroom. We find children, having been given the impression that just about anything goes, trying to figure out who they are, yet they have no “web of reality” in which to locate their experiences and come to a healthy understanding of their identity and values. Many young people have no rooted story to give their lives meaning and, consequently, have no core of character out of which they act. The supreme demonstration of this amorphous incoherence is MTV, which has no plot, but only feelings and images endlessly spun out to entertain. Psychologists have recognized that this lack of a basic personhood is a major reason why so many young adults cannot make commitments—to jobs or to someone in marriage. They have no self to give to another. Yet many people in our society do not realize that the very thing they need—trustworthy authorities beyond themselves who will nurture their moral and character development—is what they have disdained and ignored. They keep chasing after a false freedom that actually enslaves them in their narcissistic selves.

Closely related to the idolatry of autonomy is the lust for power, for to find and be in control of one’s own life is usually not enough to satisfy. Society has known for a long time that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely, but in our time the drive for power is expressed with a new twist. Now power is frequently

obtained by accentuating one's role as the "victim." Sometimes—and certainly this is a strong temptation in churches—power is accumulated in the guise of servanthood.

Contrarily, the authentic Christian community enfolds seekers in a gracious narrative, the story of God's loving care that has been passed on by a people ever since Abraham. This is a Word which enables persons to find themselves truly by giving themselves first to God and then to others. Instead of clamoring for more dominating influence, those who crave power can dwell in, and be trained by, a community that practices vulnerability, consensus, and authentic servanthood after the model of Jesus. Instead of a desperate grasping for more autonomy to satisfy one's longings, those who idolize independence can find the intensive mentoring care they need and the genuine home they most desperately want.

Intimacy

Perhaps the word *home* summarizes best the various goals we have considered here as people in our culture scramble unsuccessfully to relieve the haunting restlessness of *Sehnsucht*. The longing for the other world for which we were made is aggravated in our culture because so many persons have not experienced loving homes, familial support, genuine social intimacy. Too many have not been the beloved of anyone totally committed to them as spouse, parent, friend—much less have they known that they are the beloved of God.

In obvious ways the other idolatries discussed thus far contribute to this lack of true intimacy. The endeavor to avoid suffering causes some people to betray their commitments. It is easier for parents to place their children in front of a television set than to spend time answering their constant questions. Extra hours of work to accumulate possessions often substitute for time spent with family and friends. The quest for diversionary amusements is contrary to the tedium of parenting. Selfishness about one's own rights negates the responsibility of genuine caring.

For all kinds of reasons, then, a large percentage of people living in North America are starved for genuine intimacy, which is a leading factor in our increasingly distorted perceptions and experiences of sexuality. Since the media so lopsidedly displays genital sexual involvement as the only way to acquire intimacy, young people especially who are desperate for true love know nothing better than to jump into bed with someone to try to quench their longing for a deep and lasting love. Of course, genital union taken out of the context of God's design for it within the protected covenantal commitment of marriage will only intensify their voracious yearning for love.⁶

Each person's deep longing for love was implanted by a God who loves us perfectly and wants by our yearning to draw us to himself. The love of the Christian community, therefore, is the primary means by which churches can inspire persons in our society to follow Christ. For those who grope for a love that lasts but they are never filled, God's love incarnated in a people is an irresistible gift. Because our culture desperately needs a process of adult formation in faith, the Christian community can patiently and lovingly point seekers to the simple but life-giving truth that they are the beloved of God and of God's people. Then the community can train them in the way of selfless love, grounded in the freedom of grace. The church teaches that genital union is a sign of the intimacy of God's love for us; thus Christian marriage symbolizes the ultimate fulfillment of our deep yearning for an even higher love. Furthermore, the Christian community imparts to and nourishes in searchers many other kinds of love—intelligent, purposeful love which does not require return; brotherly/sisterly love; friendship-family love.⁷ It dares to do this because the imperfect church dwells in the forgiveness and love of God.

Repression of our longing

The previous sections have identified aspects of our contemporary culture that display individuals' efforts to achieve some fulfillment for the deep yearning within them. However, we have also suggested

that this yearning cannot be assuaged by human means: it is, at root, a longing for God, a longing which only God can satisfy. Many give up striving to satisfy that yearning; some never try. Then the yearning, the restlessness must be repressed—and a wide assortment of methods are explored. In the end, none of them can work because sooner or later the alcoholic stupor is over, the high bottoms out, the truth of oneself must be faced, the questions must be asked, or death will underscore the futility.

C. S. Lewis's schema is helpful for recognizing that people don't deal with their *Sehnsucht* in the same way, but their tools to satisfy it and their means to repress it frequently overlap as the same idolatries. For example, the same erotic involvement can be an attempt to satisfy one's longing or, at other times, can serve as the means to deny and repress one's desire for intimacy.

Techniques of repression are accentuated in the present world by the growing postmodern despair. This is not a reference to postmodern philosophies or academic descriptions, but to the postmodernism that has hit the streets, our homes, and our children with its rightful rejection of the modern myth of progress. The world around us, however, has offered no hope in the place of that myth. Instead, young people especially believe postmodern slogans such as these: there is no such thing as truth except what you create for yourself; there is no meaning to life; all is random; everything must be mistrusted (the philosophers would say deconstructed) since it all is a power play; there is no story that is universally true; you only go around once, so do it with gusto.

Consequently, those whose lives are perilously fraught with despair—and with devastating painkillers of all sorts—need a genuine and vital community with a compensatory process of life-formation in order to survive and thrive. Does the church take seriously the profound pain of the culture in which it ministers?

Repression by what is harmful

When people cannot satisfy that deep, restless yearning of which they do not understand the roots, postmodernism tells them only to push it

under with whatever appeals to them. Sadly those means are usually destructive, so that increasing numbers of North Americans are caught in deadly courses of drugs, alcohol, promiscuous sexual involvement, and violence.

What do we expect when so many young people cannot find meaning or a home? Drug users often say that they are bored. Gang members participate in vicious crimes in order to belong to a community that will care for them. And the situation will get worse. Hard liquor manufacturers have decided to end their self-imposed ban against advertising on television. People of all ages will more readily see one more way to ease the pain of living. Our culture will never solve the problem of drugs and alcohol as long as we fail to address the spiritual issues that drive so many to use them—the hopeless attempt of many to repress their longing for God.

Who but the Christian community offers hope, healing, and a home to those in the bondage of addictive lifestyles? Social analysts recognize that rehabilitation programs centered on faith have the highest success rate—which the Scriptures made clear to us long ago in all the passages that speak of God as the one true liberator. From this perspective, the congregation's catechumenal process can be seen as a form of evangelical rehabilitation, a nurturing in an entirely new way of life. When churches embody and extend God's deliverance, those who follow Christ can bring those in captivity to the only One who can set them free from the ravages of their attempts to silence the profound yearning.

Repression by what is good

Some people use the good gifts of God's superb creation to muffle their restless yearning. Here the problem is that these excellent things are used to replace God as the true Stillness for our yearnings, instead of as pointers to his sufficiency. Truth, beauty, and goodness—wherever they are found—are means God uses to draw people to himself; they give a foretaste of the presence of God. They are signs that participate in God's love and grace, but they are not God.

Consequently, not only will they never entirely quiet our deep longing for more, but instead they will also stir up our *Sehnsucht*. Films, for instance, often convey great truths, the archetypal myths which lead to fundamental understandings. They can also distract us with brutal violence and narcissistic eroticism. Thus, they may provide insight or an attempt at escape, but they will never quench or repress the thirst. Beauty in music, art, architecture, or dance haunts us with its echoes of the eternal, so instead of subduing our yearning, it whets our appetite for the One who abides in perfect beauty. Some people even try to suppress their innermost restlessness with goodness, religious piety. They busy themselves with honorable Christian activities in the futile attempt (usually subconscious) to avoid facing and responding to their longing for God.

The Christian community makes its worship and communal life as full of truth, beauty, and goodness as possible in order to usher participants into the presence of God. These foretastes are not meant to satisfy our longing or to push it under, but to intensify it so profoundly that we search for its fulfillment only in the other world for which we were made, the kingdom of God.

We are made for another world

Of course, all these descriptions of the Christian community are ideal—but they are not blind optimism, for they summarize the biblical vision of God's design for churches. The needs and false goals and repressive techniques of the contemporary culture call for a gracious and challenging process to nurture those who yearn for God in the life of faith. Such a catechumenal process also calls congregations truly to be genuine communities of welcome, truth, and hope. The vocation of God's people is to recognize the source of our deepest yearnings and to offer the presence of God embodied in ways that draw seekers into hope and a home, a foretaste of the world for which we were all made. In a culture that chooses many idolatries to try to assuage its restless hunger or to repress it, Christian communities stand as an alternative society, incarnating—though imper-

fectly—the Kingdom of God for which everyone most deeply yearns. The church, the community of faith, can form us all—both the seeker and the long-baptized—to be a people who drink exuberantly of the satisfying Water of life, that water which alone can quench our deepest thirst.

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1. This notion of human longing in relation to God is elaborated more thoroughly in Marva J. Dawn, “The Cry of Human Sehnsucht,” chapter 6 of *To Walk and Not Faint: A Month of Meditations on Isaiah 40* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
2. To pursue this issue more deeply, see chapter 3 on Idolatries in Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
3. For an excellent description of, and plea for, this generation, see Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in the Language of Xers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995).
4. See Eugene H. Peterson’s study of the Psalms of Ascent, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980).
5. See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985).
6. To explore these themes more thoroughly, see Marva J. Dawn, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).
7. The Greek words for these three kinds—*agapé*, *philadelphia*, and *philstorgé*—all occur in verses 9 and 10 of Paul’s description of the Christian community in Romans 12. See Marva J. Dawn, *The Hilarity of Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

How does the Lutheran tradition illuminate the catechumenal process?



The catechumenate is not new. What is more, its deepest themes and characteristics are not new to Lutherans. Of course, there is a certain newness. We are newly aware that the churches of the earliest centuries developed a process for teaching the faith and leading adults and their families to baptism and to communal life in Christ. We are ourselves newly excited about the strengths of this catechumenal process when we understand that our congregations are mission churches surrounded by people greatly in need of basic formation in the faith. And we are newly challenged to rethink current Lutheran parish practice as we compare what we have been doing recently with the shape of this ancient missionary process. But the process itself is not new: it has a depth of history behind it, a rooted sense of the seriousness of baptizing, which was alive especially in the early years of Christianity and in every place of Christian mission. And the strengths of the catechumenal process are not new to Lutherans: many of its key elements have long been cornerstones of Lutheran theology and practice.

Water flowing into our cultural landscape

If Lutherans have not always enacted these “cornerstones” in patterns that looked like the “adult catechumenate,” that is probably due to the absence of an awareness of mission. The Lutheran church

has often understood itself—especially in North America and in the European lands of its origin—as a “folk church,” wedded to the culture of a particular land or of a particular group of immigrants. In such a church, the faith is passed on by the baptism and subsequent formation of the children of the community itself. And in such a church, the surrounding culture is expected to do its part in the “formation” of the children. But there is no such help from the surrounding culture today. Instead, we are freshly aware that the worlds of North America—and we ourselves—are in profound need of the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, held out in word and sacrament and enabling men and women to trust the grace of the triune God and be incorporated into communities of faith and witness. We are aware that the churches of the Lutheran confession have a gift to give to our neighbors and that in giving that gift, we ourselves will be invited again and again to faith. We are coming to see that the catechumenate is an important way to give this gift. Indeed, we are realizing that something like the catechumenate is implied by our theology and is being practiced by many of our congregations already.

Say it this way: The water of the gift of Christ is flowing. We did not invent that water, but we can share it. That water is present already in our communities in word and sacrament, in sharing the scriptures and in listening to newcomers, in adult education and baptismal sponsors and Lenten renewal. The water is flowing, as if from a wonderful spring. What needs to happen, in each of our places, is the clearing out of the spring, so that the water might flow with more strength and clarity. Some central Lutheran ideas may help us to do such clearing. Indeed, these ideas might help us to see that the catechumenate is a very “Lutheran” thing to undertake.

Speaking the word of God

For example, such an idea is the doctrine of *the word of God*. Lutherans have long held, with St. Paul, that “faith comes from what is heard” (Romans 10:17). For Luther, the church was to be not a

“pen-house,” a place of writing and reading, but a “mouth-house,” a place for speaking and hearing the word of Christ, for mutual conversation and comfort in the gift of Christ. The catechumenate takes that scriptural and Lutheran idea seriously. The very word from which the process is named—*katecheo*—means “to speak so that the word echoes deeply in ears and heart,” and so, “to instruct orally, by word of mouth.” Catechumenal groups are, then, little “mouth-houses.” The center of the discussion is the scripture, the ways it speaks the gospel and brings us to faith in the forgiveness and presence of the triune God. But this is a real discussion, a “mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters” (*Smalcald Articles* III:4). For the catechumenate, Paul’s counsel that “faith comes through what is heard” is conjoined also with his urging: “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you” (Romans 15:7). For the stories of each inquirer or catechumen who is coming to Christ are also *listened to and welcomed*, so that those stories might be gathered up into the story of the word of God.

But the doctrine of the word of God is deeper yet. Lutherans believe in the *presence of Christ in the scriptures*. The Bible is not just a book of instruction. Its words, read aloud in an assembly of hearers, are an actual means for the encounter with God. As Luther says, “When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him” (*Luther’s Works* 35:121). The Sunday lectionary used so widely in North American Lutheran congregations is exactly a system of scripture-reading based upon the conviction of the presence of Christ in the readings. Then a lectionary-based catechumenal group will be focused not only on telling and hearing personal stories in the light of the scriptural story. It will be a gathering in the presence of Jesus Christ, a continued echoing of that Living Word which is present in the assembly of the church.

The gifts of grace

But then it will be clear that the catechumenal process is making use of *the means of grace*. Lutherans believe that God continually brings us to faith in Jesus Christ through certain very concrete, very material means: the word of the scripture, read aloud and preached orally, the water of baptism, the bread and wine of communion, and the word of forgiveness in the mouth of our brother or sister. We have these wonderful gifts, gifts which form the church when they are exercised. In fact, these means are *all* we have to call ourselves or others to true faith. But these means have the promise of God in their use. And here is one lively use of these very means of grace: A catechumenal group discusses the Sunday *scriptures*, the readings which have been read and preached in the congregational celebration of the *eucharist*, doing so in the manner of *mutual conversation*, while the catechumens in the group are moving toward *baptism* and the catechist and sponsors are being refreshed in their baptismal life.

Obviously, the discussion of such a group will not only be about scripture. It will sometimes turn to elucidation of the formal, systematic propositions of doctrine as they are alive in the church. But the classic Lutheran approach to these propositions will need to be much in evidence: the approach marked by *the existential significance of doctrine*. The *Small Catechism* makes this clear. There Luther helps us not only to discuss the abstract ideas of “creation,” “salvation,” and “sanctification,” but to confess, “I believe that God has created me and all that exists . . .,” and “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God . . . and also true man . . . is my Lord, who has redeemed me . . .,” and “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel . . .” The great doctrines of the church always include *me*, are known especially as marking *my life*. The strength of the Lutheran approach is the strong reception of traditional communal formulation combined with the strong interest in its meaning for the person in daily life. That is an interest shared by a healthy catechumenate where doc-

trinal discussion will always be based in a real intersection between scripture and daily life.

The catechumenate in the catechism

The *catechism* has relevance for the catechumenate in yet another way. Its very order, in the pattern recovered by Luther himself, is a summary of the process of an adult coming to baptism and to the communal life in Christ. In the *Small Catechism*, Commandments lead to Creed followed by prayer, baptism itself, and the supper. *The catechism is the very order of the catechumenate*: first we are warned that our life will be changed by this process; then we learn the faith in the triune God; we are taught to pray and led to the baptismal bath and, through baptism, to the supper. Then there follow the matters of the Christian life: confession and absolution, morning and evening prayer, meal prayers, and the table of duties. In fact, a catechism is none other than symbolic texts which sum up the whole process of being formed as a Christian, the content of the hearing and speaking, the conversation, which is the catechumenate.

It is no wonder, then, that Lutherans speak of a *lifelong catechumenate*, just as Luther described himself as one “who must read and study the catechism daily” (*Large Catechism*, preface). The Lutheran conception of Christian faith recognizes our constant need to be awakened to trust in God and to hear the word of forgiveness. Luther’s “lifelong study” could lead him at last to see that the order of the catechism is never something from which we “graduate.” Indeed, the baptized person may experience that the life of faith often involves going forward and backward through the “order” of the catechism throughout the Christian life. Because we cannot obey the commandments of God or even believe or pray, God gives us the remembrance of baptism and the participation in the eucharist to restore us to the body of Christ, so incorporating us into prayer in and through Christ, and so bringing us again to faith and so to obedience. Those who are accompanying inquirers and catechumens in the catechumenal process—catechists, sponsors, pastors, the whole congregation—are no less always beginners than are the can-

didates for baptism. They are beggars telling other beggars where there is bread.

Grace poured out for daily living

That is also the implication of yet another Lutheran insight: the doctrine of *justification by grace through faith*. Indeed, this insight is none other than the principal cornerstone of the edifice of the Lutheran confession. Working through the catechumenate or being a catechist cannot be understood as a “work” we do in order to “climb up” to God. Understood in this way, the catechumenate will be deceptive and profoundly disappointing. But when the catechumenate functions as it is intended, when it involves needy people together gathering around the word of God as the church reads that word in Christ, it will be very helpful. The catechist and the pastor—as well as the catechumens—continually need both the lively word of the scripture read in community and the witness and word of others in order to hear and trust the promise of Christ. The faith-creating, justifying word is always coming to us from outside ourselves. For that word we need our sisters and brothers. At its best, the catechumenate is an institution formed by this conviction.

Of course, the process of the catechumenate is moving toward baptism and toward identification with the mission of the community in Christ. It is in the seriousness of *baptism* itself that the catechumenate has its strongest Lutheran echoes. For Lutherans, baptism happens once but takes a lifetime to live out. For Lutherans, baptism is active in our lives again and again: in every word of absolution, as we creep back to the astonishing grace of the font; in every Lord’s Supper, as Christ receives us anew in “the repeatable part of baptism” which is the holy supper; in every word full of Christ’s presence, as the water lives and speaks in our very hearts; in every new beginning, every discovery of courage to start anew, in spite of death and loss. For Lutherans, baptism is for children, who are baptized with dignity, being addressed, as if they were adults, as our sisters or brothers in Christ. Baptism is also for adults, who are welcomed, immersed, and clothed, as if they were newborn. It is no

wonder that the process which leads to this event-for-a-lifetime, then, should be taken with all the seriousness of the catechumenate. In fact, it will only be *after* the water bath that the Christian will be led, again and again, to reflect on the lifelong significance of what he or she has undergone. The way *toward* the bath will be marked, especially, with the discovery of the importance of the scriptures, the nature of faith in the triune God, and the significance of justification by grace for daily living. But the words which are full of these things are the very words which are joined with the water in the bath of baptism. In baptism, all the scriptures are poured over the baptized who are gathered into the life of the triune God and into faith in the justifying Christ.

Made priests for the life of the world

Beyond the water bath, the catechumenate should lead to communal reflection on the meaning of the sacraments for daily life and mission. That is, the catechumenal process will be engaged in forming a *priesthood of all believers*. This Lutheran idea ought not be read in the way so common in North America: each individual has his or her own access to God; no “priests” are needed! Rather, each baptized member of the church functions as part of “the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, Holy Baptism), the purpose of which is to “proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world.” The baptized are made into priests not for themselves, but for the sake of all the needy world. We are priests for our neighbors. Baptism leads the baptized somewhere: to the assembly of the church, telling the truth about God for all the world to hear, Sunday after Sunday, in gatherings around the word and the holy supper. And baptism leads the member of that assembly to mission.

The gift of paradox

At least one other Lutheran idea is significant for the catechumenate: *paradox*. We have already seen this idea at work in our consideration of a Lutheran view of the catechumenal process. Baptism, we

have said, is a one-time event, meant for a lifetime. Adults, we have said, are baptized like children, and children, like adults. But there is more: Baptism, for the catechumen, is that one-time, astonishing, grace-filled event, perhaps on Easter Eve, at the Vigil, gathering the newly baptized into Christ's own resurrection. But in another, paradoxical sense, baptism is the whole process, for however many months or years it takes. As soon as one hears the word of Christ, gathers in the company of Christ, one is already "in" baptism, because one is in the word which, conjoined to the water, makes baptism to be baptism. One form of this paradox is the catechumenate. And more: Baptism actually gives grace, Lutherans believe. But, Lutherans say, it is addressed to faith. It needs to be trusted. Both things are true. Not the one instead of the other. Both. So, it is not true that baptism is just a "symbol" of our faith in God. God really works in baptism. But it is also not true that it does not matter if we believe in God or not, as long as we are baptized. One form of this paradox is the catechumenate. And more—Lutheranism believes that a healthy church can have the characteristics of a settled, catholic church—sacramental in form; baptizing and raising its children; linked to folk cultures—and still be a movement in mission—reaching out to new people; forming, converting, and baptizing adults. Both are true; both need to be true. One form of this paradox is the catechumenate. This devotion to paradox, as the only way to tell the truth about God or the church or baptism or faith, is a profoundly Lutheran gift.

So these ideas—the doctrine of the word of God and of the presence of Christ in the scriptures, the means of grace, the existential significance of doctrine itself, the form of the catechism, lifelong catechumenate, the importance of baptism, the priesthood of all believers, the role of paradox, and the very doctrine of justification—cast a great light on the catechumenal process. Or, to use another metaphor, they are tools we can use to clear the spring which is running in all of our congregations. If we believe these things—and these ideas are central to our confession—then the catechumenate

gives us a form to put them into motion. The catechumenal process is not a new “program” put out by headquarters for our churches! It is simply adult baptism, with Christ’s presence in the word and the centrality of the means of grace and justification taken seriously.

Of course, it would be possible to do the catechumenate without these accents. But there are dangers: that the word which would give a center to catechumenal groups might be only “my story” or only the local church’s concern for membership growth, not the word of God, full of Christ’s presence, or that catechists and pastors think of themselves as professionals with something to give to the “unlearned” who come, rather than as fellow beggars. Or there is the danger that the whole process could be conceived as a spiritual achievement, “earning” more insight into God, forming “real” disciples. There is the danger that the process be dealt with rigidly, requiring certain hurdles always, rather than understanding that the formal catechumenate may sometimes be only a few hours (as with the Ethiopian eunuch [Acts 8:26-39]), sometimes more like years. And there is the danger that baptism will not lead to community nor to further mission.

These classic Lutheran concerns may help us avoid or transform these dangers. Indeed, if a congregation is considering deepening its baptismal practice, doing the kind of adult catechumenate we have been imaging here, it is considering doing a very old, very new, very Lutheran thing.

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What resources are available to assist catechumenal ministers?



Primary resources

The catechumenate is an intentional and graceful means by which God's people, the church, accompany those who are on the journey of faith to baptism and Christian discipleship. Yet the primary resources available to catechumenal ministers cannot be purchased in a book store, found on a library shelf, or downloaded from a Web browser. The foundational and primary resource needed to bring people to the church is the church: the church doing what it does, being what it is, and becoming what it is to be. Thus the primary resources for the catechumenal process are fourfold: scripture, corporate worship, prayer, and ministry in daily life.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we are given a basic blueprint for what makes and nourishes the church. Acts shows us that the original communities of Christian believers were constituted, identified, and sustained by their actions. As far as we know, the only "evangelism program" undertaken by the early church, was this: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). As they did these central things, "day by day God added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

When contemporary congregations devote themselves to these same apostolic practices—the fellowship of the community, the

teaching, the prayers, and the breaking of the bread—they already possess the primary and indispensable resources needed to carry forth the catechumenate. If communities are not devoted to these things, catechumenal instruction books and manuals will be of little use. The contemporary catechumenal parish needs to be constituted, identified, and sustained by these apostolic practices, the foundations of faith: *the gathering around the word read and preached, the prayers, and the holy supper*—all of which lead to *ministry in the world*.

Congregations, by their very existence, possess the basic resources needed to become centers of disciple-making. And yet these fundamental resources can be overlooked until a congregation becomes aware of their tremendous evangelical potential. As noted Lutheran theologian Martin Marty writes, “Baptism is the hidden dynamite of Lutheranism.” The power of baptism and the ministry of the baptized is “unleashed” as congregations take up the catechumenate and welcome newcomers into its gracious formation in Christ.

Catechumens learn the faith—catch the faith—not primarily from books, pamphlets, or lectures, but by walking side by side with baptized Christians who listen to the word of God, receive the sacraments, rely upon prayer, and minister in daily life. This catechumenal practice assumes that lay Christians are the primary evangelists, an assumption that is totally consistent with the Lutheran understanding of our common baptismal priesthood.

Scripture

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly

In the rite of Welcome, new catechumens are given a Bible and are told by the community of faith to treasure its contents, for within its pages the gospel is made known and Christ is revealed. The Holy Scriptures, which reveal the Word of God, Jesus Christ, are the primary “curriculum” for the catechumenate. As catechumens discover and contemplate the scriptures, they are brought into a dynamic

encounter with the one who will bring them “out of darkness and into light.”

The catechumens’ encounter with Christ through the scriptures is enriched and deepened by interaction with their sponsors and participation in a small group. Here the Gospel of Luke provides us with a model for encountering Christ, a model that is dialogical. “Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them” (Luke 24:13-15). On the Emmaus road, the travelers encountered Christ who “interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27).

When the catechumens gather to read and reflect on scripture, the church believes that Christ comes near. Individual study and contemplation of the word is important, but it cannot replace the dialogical encounter with scripture that takes place when seekers contemplate the word with one another.

Corporate worship

Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there

Catechumens are encouraged to attend and participate in the weekly eucharistic liturgy of a congregation, especially the liturgy of the word. This regular gathering around the word on the Lord’s Day is a primary way in which the catechumens are formed in the Christian faith, as the church’s liturgy is the primary school of theology for the baptized.

Some communities may have catechumens participate in the liturgy of the word and then, after hearing the sermon and being prayed for during the intercessions, are sent forth to a small group session during the liturgy of the eucharist. Others may have catechumens attending the entire eucharistic liturgy, receive a blessing at communion, and then meet to reflect on the Sunday lectionary readings at another time. In either case, as the catechumens seek to

understand the faith and practice of Christians, they need to see and participate in the church being itself in communal worship. As they participate in the Sunday liturgy, catechumens learn how to worship by rubbing elbows with the true experts on the liturgy—the baptized.

As they participate in the liturgy, catechumens will begin to see the world they live in from the perspective of the gospel. Some would call the church's liturgy an act of "gospel world-construction." Catechumens begin to see that Christ comes to people and feeds them from the table of the word and the table of his body and blood. This is how Lutheran Christians meet Christ, in the regular ongoing means through which God "calls, gather, enlightens and sanctifies" the church.

As Sunday is the center of the week for Christians, Easter is the center of the entire year. What leads to and follows from Easter is of great pastoral significance for the church today. The original and dynamic purpose of Lent was deeply evangelical and missiological. Lent was a time when the Christian community became an association of midwives who attended to the delivery of new Christians at their birth from the water of the baptismal font during the Vigil of Easter. The central task of Lent was to walk with catechumens toward that time when they would be fully immersed through baptism into the Lord's dying and rising celebrated at Easter. Consequently, Lent also served as the occasion for the baptized faithful to prepare for the renewal of their baptismal mission at the Vigil.

In this regard, a renewed understanding of Lent as the journey to the Vigil of Easter is a living, participatory resource for every congregation. Clearly, the annual celebration of the Vigil of Easter as the primary baptismal festival of the year can begin to shift the thinking and practice of a congregation toward the necessary link between worship and evangelism. The Vigil of Easter provides a new point of reference that grounds the congregation's identity in the place of its birth—the font—and in the source of its evangelizing mission, the

proclamation of the word and the sharing of communion. Even if there are no baptisms to be celebrated at the Vigil, the worshipping assembly affirms its baptismal inheritance before it comes to the table of the risen Lord.

Prayer

Lord, teach us to pray

One of the fundamental resources necessary for the Christian life to grow and flourish is the practice of prayer. Surveys have indicated that about eighty percent of North Americans say they pray to God in some form or another on a daily basis. Books on prayer and spirituality can be found in abundance in secular bookstores. The majority of newcomers in congregations want to pray, but do not know how.

Teaching new Christians to pray is as important as teaching a young bird to fly. Prayer is part and parcel of the Christian life. Catechumens will learn to pray as they participate in the public prayer of the liturgy and the small group prayers that begin and end regular gatherings of catechumens and catechists; and as they practice the intimate prayers shared with individual sponsors and the personal prayer that catechumens are encouraged to make a regular part of their daily life.

Ministry in daily life

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news

Of course, essential “resources” of the catechumenate are the very lives of both the catechumens and their sponsors. Each and every catechumen lives a daily life apart from the community of faith, a daily life that will be the primary place of their ministry in the world. Discussions about ministry in daily life are a critical component in catechumenal gatherings.

A “primary text” for these discussions are the lives of the catechumens, what they bring to the sessions and how their lives are being changed as they study the scriptures and discern their unique

call to mission in Christ's church. These discussions are also a part of the time that catechumens spend with their sponsors. And here, the primary resource sponsors bring to this apprenticeship in faith is the witness of their own lives. Whether they know it or not, each lay sponsor is a veteran Christian in the world and can share the experiences they have had trying to live as regular people of faith in the real world. The faith-related experiences sponsors and catechumens have with their families, at work and on the streets, provide a wealth of "material" for sponsor/catechumen discussions that help the catechumen and the church discern what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in a post-Christian culture.

Print and Video Resources for the Catechumenal Ministry

The catechumenal movement is ecumenical by its very nature. The Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations are presently involved in catechumenal ministries. Regardless of denomination and variations in terminology, the fundamental structure of the catechumenate remains discernible and constant among all these communions. In all of its denominational forms, the catechumenate is grounded in scripture, Sunday worship, prayer, and ministry in daily life. Thus many catechumenal publications from the various churches can be adapted and used by various denominations.

General Resources

Benedict, Daniel. *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources of the United Methodist Church, 1997. This resource presents the shape and movement of the adult catechumenate within the United Methodist Church. Catechumenal ministers will find its use of various images to unfold the catechumenal process enlightening and helpful.

Dawn, Marva J. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. Though not a book about the catechumenal process, this resource provides an insightful analysis of contemporary North American culture. The author discusses adequate and inadequate ways in which the church has tried to relate to the culture through worship.

She urges the churches to move beyond “worship wars” based upon styles and musical tastes and seriously consider the essential core of worship, worship that is biblically grounded, recognizes God at the center, forms and shapes believers, builds up the Christian community and enables its mission in the world.

Halmarson, Cynthia. *Living Witnesses: The Adult Catechumenate. A Manual for the Catechumenal Process*. Winnipeg: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1994. A practical, hands-on resource, this manual will be welcome in congregations. The author presents a sound theology and practice of catechumenal formation. This is a comprehensive resource that includes sections on model catechumenal gatherings, Bible study methods, introducing the catechumenate in the congregation, and lectionary study materials.

Huffman, Walter, and S. Anita Stauffer. *Where We Worship*. Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1987. A resource to help building committees and worship study groups reflect theologically on space and architecture for worship. This resource provides helps for designing new worship spaces and renovating older spaces. Available in leader and participant versions.

Kuehn, Regina. *A Place for Baptism*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992. A helpful guide book for parishes for preparing to install new baptismal fonts. It provides theological rationale for the need to build all new baptismal spaces large enough to immerse adults as well as children. Many photographs of state of the art baptismal pools and fonts are included as well as information on how congregations can design and construct their own fonts.

Journey of the Spirit. A video resource that outlines the roles and tasks involved in the catechumenate. Special attention is given to three catechumens in a Canadian Lutheran parish who are preparing for baptism. Available from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Lathrop, Gordon, ed. *What is changing in baptismal practice?* Volume 4 in *Open Questions in Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. Three authors discuss new movements in Lutheran baptismal thought and practice. A helpful bibliography and a summary of the discussion by the editor make this a useful tool for beginning a parish discussion of catechumenal ministry and the function of baptism in parish life.

McElligott, Ann E. P. *The Catechumenal Process*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990. This resource is a guidebook outlining the implementation of the catechumenate in the Episcopal Church. It discusses catechumenal leadership in a parish. This resource also includes helpful ideas for catechists who lead catechumenal gatherings.

Mead, Loren B. *The Once and Future Church*. Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 1991. The author discusses the secularized cultural world

that is emerging at the end of the 20th century and how that world provides a new missiological context for the church. Mead proclaims that the era of "Christendom" is over and that Christianity can no longer be assumed in our culture. He goes on to present strategies that the church of the future can employ to meet this challenge. Mead mentions the catechumenate as an important strategy because it provides the church with a baptized membership that is truly prepared for mission.

Merriman, Michael, ed. *The Baptismal Mystery and the Catechumenate*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990. A collection of papers from a 1988 conference of the same name, the authors discuss the various times, ministries, and rites of the catechumenate.

Webber, Robert. *Liturgical Evangelism: Worship as Outreach and Nurture*. Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1986. This book, intended for a Protestant readership, introduces the catechumenate as it originated in the early church. The author explains why and how a modern adaptation of the process can benefit the contemporary church. Webber calls the catechumenal process "liturgical evangelism" and summarizes the components of the process as employed in several denominations.

Welcoming New Christians. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press. This video resource offers an overview of the times in the catechumenal process. A Mennonite resource, this video introduces the rationale and general outline of the catechumenate. The video features small congregations engaged in catechumenal ministry.

Yarnold, Edward, S. J. *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 2nd ed. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994. For those who may think the catechumenate is something new or just one more program of evangelism or education, this significant work presents the emergence of the catechumenate among the early Christians. Relying on the sermons of the early preaching bishops, the author sets forth the sacramental and evangelical richness of the catechumenate. He shows how this process became the primary way in which the early church reached out to and welcomed new Christians.

Scripture

An African Method for Bible Study. This resource briefly outlines a method for using this popular reflective form of Bible study. The African Model is not exegetical or didactic, but draws upon the experience of those studying scripture, calling them to reflect upon how the scriptures are speaking directly to them and their lives. Available from the Evangelism Ministries Office of the Episcopal Church in New York.

Connell, Martin, ed. *At Home with the Word*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications. This dated, annual publication includes the full text of each Sunday's three lectionary readings, a reflection on the readings

with discussion questions, and three brief discussions of ministry in daily life: the practice of faith, hope, and charity. This paperback scripture workbook is geared toward both Revised Common and Roman Catholic lectionaries. It includes simple forms of daily prayer for use in the home that can be easily adapted to catechumenal gatherings.

Dunning, James B. *Echoing God's Word: Formation for Catechists and Homilists in a Catechumenal Church*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993. A resource from The North American Forum on the Catechumenate, this volume provides a method for conversing with the scriptures and outlines a scripturally grounded vision for evangelization and catechesis.

Powell, Karen Hinman, and Joseph Sinwell, eds. *Breaking Open the Word*. 3 vols. New York: Paulist, 1986–1988. This resource provides samples for the initial “breaking open of the word” during catechumenal gatherings. Keyed to Cycles A, B, and C of the Roman Catholic lectionary, this resource can be easily adapted by churches using the Revised Common Lectionary.

Worship

Do This in Remembrance of Me. This video resource offers an evocative, visual reflection on the intersection between the Sunday eucharistic liturgy (celebrated at a typical Episcopal parish) and the daily lives of parishioners. This resource is readily usable by Lutherans and others who share the Western pattern of worship. Available from Episcopal Church Parish Services in New York.

Erlander, Daniel. *Baptized We Live: Lutheranism as a Way of Life*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1981. An accessible exploration of the meaning of Lutheran Christianity with an insightful and engaging introduction to Lutheran worship.

Holy Communion Narrative for Adults: Lutheran Book of Worship. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1978. This pamphlet resource helps individuals and study groups explore the meaning of the rite of Holy Communion, complete with graphics and narration.

Huck, Gabe. *The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum*, rev. ed. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992. A guidebook giving ideas, suggestions, and advice on celebrating the Three Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday's Vigil of Easter. This book provides an outline of the structure of each liturgy with practical advice on preparing for the celebration of baptism at the Vigil.

Lathrop, Gordon. *What are the essentials of Christian worship?* Volume 1 in *Open Questions in Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994. The author discusses what is at the center of Lutheran worship, why it is at the center, and its implications for congregational life. An

- excellent resource for a parish worship committee and/or a catechumenal team.
- Liturgy on the Go*. This booklet allows the voices Lutheran lay people to speak about the relationship between worship and ministry in daily life. Ideal for small group reflection. Available from the ELCA Distribution Service and Augsburg Fortress Publishers.
- Ramshaw, Gail. *Every Day and Sunday, Too*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996. This lavishly illustrated book explores the fundamental pattern of Christian worship from a child's perspective that any newcomer to the faith will find helpful. At the back of the book, a brief glossary explains the various parts of the Sunday service.
- . *Words around the Fire*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990. The reading of the word of God at the Easter Vigil is an essential element of the liturgy. Here the author offers brief and insightful reflections on the Vigil readings that lead the community to the baptismal font.
- . *Words around the Font*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994. For personal reading or group discussion, the author weaves together memorable reflections on scripture, the catechumenate, Lent, and the Vigil.
- “The Three Holy Days: Jesus’ Passover from Death to Life,” *Worship '97* (January 1997). Outlines ideas and music for celebrating the liturgies of Holy Week within the Lutheran tradition and according to *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Available from the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries, Worship Office.
- This is The Night*. This video resource chronicles how a working-class Catholic parish in Oklahoma was transformed into a center of evangelism by placing the catechumenate at the center of its parish life. The video includes vivid scenes of how the parish richly celebrates the rites of the catechumenate and culminates in scenes of the baptism of candidates at the Easter Vigil. Available from Liturgy Training Publications in Chicago.

Prayer

- Johnson, Donald W. *Praying the Catechism*. Winnipeg: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1995. This resource has 90 devotional readings organized thematically around the outline of Luther's *Small Catechism*. The author reflects on Baptism, Eucharist, Confession, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. It is an ideal resource to use during Lent, Holy Week, and the Easter season.
- Face to Face with God: A Guide for Prayer Ministry*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. This comprehensive gathering of resources meets the needs of those who have never had an introduction to Christian prayer

as well as those who have questions about prayer or want to renew their understanding and experience of prayer. Individual components include a video, a prayer journal, and individual booklets on beginning to pray, guiding children and youth in prayer, intercessory prayer, and praying for wholeness and health.

Klug, Lyn. *Praying: Meeting God in Daily Life*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. Part of the *Intersections Small Group Series*, this volume explores the power of prayer and how it can address the spiritual hunger for God in our lives. It examines the ritual nature and lifestyle of prayer and outlines a variety of prayer styles and formats.

The Psalter. Translation by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995. The psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. They are the indispensable source for learning to pray with Christians and their ancestors in the faith, the people of Israel. Here is a new, fresh, and vivid translation of the Psalms.

Welcome Home: Scripture, Prayers and Blessings for the Household—Year of Mark, Matthew, Luke. 3 vols. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995–97. Published as three separate books for each cycle of the lectionary, each volume is organized according to the Sundays and seasons of the year, and provides practical resources for prayer in the home. It features a daily lectionary; daily prayers for waking, at work, and at bedtime; meal prayers, psalms, and short biblical prayers and refrains for use throughout the day.

Ministry in Daily Life

Henderson, Frank, Stephen Larson, and Kathleen Quinn. *Liturgy, Justice and the Reign of God*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989. Through a careful reflection on the order of worship shared by the mainline Christian churches, the authors ask important questions about the church's service to the world. Many practical suggestions are offered and discussion questions are scattered throughout this workbook.

Hughes, Kathleen, and Mark R. Francis, eds. *Living No Longer for Ourselves: Liturgy and Justice for the Nineties*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991. This book introduces readers to the inherent relationship between worship and the scriptural call to justice and reconciliation. The authors set forth the manner in which the eucharistic liturgy is a paradigm for Christian living in the world.

Lathrop, Gordon, ed. *What are the ethical implications of worship?* Vol. 6 in *Open Questions in Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996. Each author discusses the relationship between baptism and mission in the world. All three essays examine the ways in which worship shapes a congregation for ministry in daily life.

Specific Concerns in Catechumenal Ministry

- Burns, William R. *A Modern Mystagogy*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991. A book offering a modern approach to the ancient Christian practice of mystagogy (reflection on the sacraments). Especially appropriate for the time after baptism.
- Intersections: Small Group Basics*. Andrea Lee Schieber and William Congdon, editors. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. With booklets written by various authors, this series is intended to encourage an informal and friendly atmosphere for Bible study and reflection. Of particular interest to catechumenal ministers: *Starting Small Groups—and Keeping Them Going*; *Following Jesus*; *Jesus: Divine and Human*; *Praying*; *Faith*; *The Bible and Life*.
- Lewinski, Ron. *Guide for Sponsors*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications. A classic resource that provides guidelines, activities, and prayers for sponsors who accompany, listen to, challenge, and share their faith with catechumens. Readily adaptable in Lutheran congregations.
- Marty, Martin. *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics*. Harold Eppley and Rochelle Melander, compilers and editors. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996. The compilers/editors of this resource have selected excerpts from many of Martin Marty's published works to create this book that introduces new and prospective members to the Christian faith and Lutheran practices. Topics include belonging, understanding, growing, worshiping, sharing faith, and telling.
- Morris, Thomas H. *Walking Together in Faith: A Workbook for Sponsors of Christian Initiation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992. This workbook outlines the sponsor's role and responsibility in the catechumenal process. Ideal for use in sponsor formation and training sessions.
- Nosterud, Rolf. *The Spiritual Quest in a Changing Culture*. Regina: Epiphany Books, 1996. Ideal for use in catechumenal gatherings, the author speaks directly to those who come to the church with questions about the purpose and meaning of life, but with no previous experience of Christianity. The author considers matters of faith and theology "from the street" in order to engage catechumens, sponsors, and catechists in deep and meaningful explorations of the call to faith in a post-Christian world. A supplemental leader guide is also available. Available from Augsburg Fortress, Canada.
- Powell, Karen Hinman. *How to Form a Catechumenal Team*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1986. This resource gives practical, step-by-step guidance on recruiting, training, and maintaining strong catechumenal leadership in a congregation.
- Ruth, Lester. *Accompanying the Journey: A Handbook for Sponsors*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources of the United Methodist Church, 1997. A resource for sponsors that helps them understand their role in

embodying the congregations welcome and disciple making work. The handbook discusses the qualities of sponsors and outlines the nuances of their ministry of listening to those who are moving toward baptism.

- Sorenson, Paul. *Sharing your Faith with Friends, Relatives and Neighbors*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. This resource includes six sessions on sharing faith in daily life. Christian faith is discussed from these perspectives: adventure, friendship, hospitality, caring, telling the story, and living courageously.
- White, Grant Sperry. *Echoing the Word: The Ministry of Forming Disciples*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources of the United Methodist Church, 1997. A resource for catechists and pastors. It introduces the work of catechists and gives ideas on how to organize catechumenal gatherings.
- Wilde, James A., ed. *A Catechumenate Needs Everybody*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988. This resource describes and outlines the different tasks and ministries related to the catechumenate and Christian baptism. Ideal for helping parishes develop catechumenal teams.

Organizations and Periodicals

- The North American Association for the Catechumenate (NAAC), 811A Indian Trails Road, Carmel, Indiana, 46032. A recently formed ecumenical organization for Protestant churches in North America who are involved in the catechumenal movement. The organization holds an annual gathering for those engaged in catechumenal ministries and sponsors training events across North America to teach parishes how to implement the catechumenal process. Membership in NAAC is available to individuals, congregations and denominations. Present membership includes Lutherans, Episcopalians, Reformed/Presbyterians, Methodists, and Mennonites.
- The North American Forum on the Catechumenate (The Forum), 3033 Fourth St. NE, Washington, D.C., 20017-1149, (202) 529-9493. A Roman Catholic organization that parallels NAAC. It offers numerous basic and advanced training events for the catechumenate. Membership is open to Protestants and Roman Catholics.
- A Vision of Discipleship*. Published quarterly by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1512 St. James St., Winnipeg, MB, R3H 0L2, (800) 665-7361. This newsletter features informative articles and helpful resources to support the catechumenal process in the congregation. The publication is available in the United States from the ELCA, Division for Congregational Ministries, Worship Office, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4188, (800) 638-3522.
- Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation*. Published by Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622-1101. A subscription journal, published bimonthly, featuring pastoral articles on the catechumenate.

Christian Initiation. A subscription newsletter published bimonthly by National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company, 115 East Armour Boulevard, Kansas City, Missouri 64111-1259. The newsletter is filled with articles, practical advice, and theological reflections on every aspect of the catechumenate. Available in quantities.

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Common terms of the catechumenate

General Terms

Catechumenate

An apprenticeship in the Christian faith for older youths and adults that leads to baptism. The catechumenate stresses the catechesis and formation of those preparing for baptism in a Christian community that is actively involved in the process of welcoming newcomers and sharing the faith with them.

Formation

Giving form and structure to the Christian life. Formation in faith involves the whole person—body, mind, heart, and soul. Acting through worship, scripture, the Christian community, prayer, and ministry in daily life, the Holy Spirit forms the attitudes and actions of the catechumen. There is an appropriate distinction between *initial* formation (for catechumens) and *ongoing* formation (for all the baptized). Baptism brings one into a community that is always being formed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Catechesis

From the Greek, meaning “to echo” or “to sound forth.” Formation in the Christian faith takes place through worship, reflection on scripture, prayer, and ministry in daily life. Catechesis also occurs, for instance, when catechumens and sponsors engage in mutual conversation and reflection on the practice of faith as well as through the study of scripture and the catechism.

Catechism

A handbook of the faith in summary form. Luther’s *Small Catechism* sets forth the movement of the catechumenate itself: Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, Sacrament of the Altar, Morning and Evening Prayer, Grace at Table, Duties.

Times

Inquiry

During this open-ended period of time, inquirers make an initial exploration into the Christian faith. This period of inquiry is shaped by the inquirer as well as parish leaders and the congregation.

Catechumenate

The Catechumenate is an open period of time during which catechumens explore more deeply the Christian faith through scripture, prayer, worship, and ministry in daily life.

Lent: Baptismal Preparation

During the season of Lent, those catechumens who will be baptized at Easter enter into a more intense and immediate period of preparation. They are welcomed by the congregation into this time through the rite of Enrollment of those preparing for baptism. This time includes a series of blessings for the catechumens. In some Christian communions, this time is referred to as a period of purification and enlightenment.

Easter: Baptismal Living

At the Vigil of Easter, catechumens are baptized and receive communion with the congregation. As new members of the church, they enter into the Fifty Days of the Easter season to reflect on the meaning of their baptism/communion and the implications of living their daily lives as members of the congregation. While the Vigil of Easter is a primary time to celebrate baptism, the church recognizes other significant days in the year when baptism is also appropriate: Pentecost, the Baptism of our Lord, and All Saints. In some Christian communions, the Fifty Days of Easter are spoken of as a time of *mystagogy*, an early Christian Greek word that refers to the “opening of the mysteries” of baptism and communion.

Persons**Seeker**

A person who is interested in aspects of Christian faith and life and is a casual participant in the congregation’s worship.

Inquirer

A person asking initial questions about the faith which may or may not include any reference to Christ, the church, or baptism. This name applies to those unbaptized adults who are involved in Inquiry, the first phase or time of the catechumenate.

Catechumen

An unbaptized adult who has been publicly welcomed into a time of more depthful and deliberate formation in the faith through the rite of Welcome.

Catechist

A teacher and model of the disciplines of the Christian faith. The term *catechist* is used of those who are recognized by a congregation as teachers or mentors of catechumens.

Candidate

In the catechumenal process, the term *candidate* refers to a catechumen who has been enrolled for baptism. The candidate is a catechumen who has made a public declaration to join this congregation through baptism. Usually this public declaration is made during the Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism. If the candidate will not be received into the church at Easter, then the enrollment may take place a few weeks before the time of baptism.

Sponsor

A baptized and active Christian who serves as a mentor and friend to the person involved in the catechumenal journey. A sponsor is frequently a friend or family member, but may be any baptized Christian who agrees to accept the role of guide and catechumenal participant throughout the journey to baptism and beyond.

Newly baptized

The early Christians referred to the newly baptized as *neophytes*, those who are newly enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the washing of baptism. During the Fifty Days of the Easter season, the newly baptized reflect on the meaning of their baptism/communion and their mission to be servants of Christ in daily life.

Uncatechized adult

A person who was baptized but received little or no formation in the Christian faith.

Rites

Welcome

When, after an open-ended time of inquiry, an individual decides to enter the catechumenate in consultation with a pastor, sponsor, and/or the catechumenal coordinator, he or she is welcomed by the congregation at its principal Sunday service. In the Welcome, the individual declares his or her desire to enter this time of initial formation in the faith, and the congregation declares its intention to support this person through prayer and witness.

Enrollment

On or near the First Sunday in Lent, catechumens who will be baptized at the Vigil of Easter are "enrolled," publicly recognized as preparing for the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Blessing

During the time of Lent: Baptismal Preparation, the gospel readings for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays set forth strong baptismal images. On these Sundays, the candidates preparing for baptism are invited to receive God's blessing and the prayers of the congregation.

Vigil of Easter

This service is the culmination of Holy Week, since it celebrates the death and resurrection of the Lord who now gives himself to the church through the means of grace, the word and sacraments. The proclamation of the history of salvation leads the community to the font where new brothers and sisters are born of water and the word, and the baptized affirm their baptismal promises. From the font, the entire community gathers at the table to celebrate the communion.

Affirmation of Baptism

This rite may be used at the Vigil of Easter (and other appropriate Sundays) when Christians from other denominations become members of a Lutheran congregation or when baptized persons who desire to participate actively in the life of the church are restored to membership through this affirmation of the baptismal covenant.

Affirmation of the Vocation of the Baptized

This rite, celebrated on Pentecost Sunday or any other appropriate Sunday, affirms the ministry in daily life of all the baptized. It is a fitting celebration for the newly baptized and an appropriate form of God's blessing on those who have entered fully into the life and witness of the congregation.

A summary of the catechumenate

An *inquirer* is an unbaptized adult who has initial questions about the faith. For an indefinite period of time, the time of initial **Inquiry**, this person may explore basic questions or issues related to faith without making any commitment to a congregation, the church's life, or baptism.

A *catechumen* is an unbaptized adult who has decided to continue the process of initial inquiry in a more depthful and deliberate manner. The inquirer is publicly welcomed by the congregation into this time of formation in faith through the rite of *Welcome*. During the time of the **Catechumenate**, which may last for a number of months or two or three years, the catechumen will explore the foundations of Christian faith and practice. During this time, the church safeguards the catechumen's freedom to continue or to leave the catechumenate.

A catechumen who intends to receive baptism enters a time called **Lent: Baptismal Preparation**. The catechumen, who is now a *candidate for baptism*, is publicly welcomed into this time through the rite of *Enrollment* which usually takes place on or near the First Sunday in Lent. During this time as the entire congregation prepares to renew its baptismal promises at Easter, catechumens are being prepared for the celebration of baptism and communion at the Vigil of Easter.

A candidate who receives *baptism and communion at the Vigil of Easter* enters the time called **Easter: Baptismal Living**. Now the *newly baptized* join the congregation in this time of reflection on the meaning of baptism and communion for daily life, a time that normally coincides with the Easter season.

On Pentecost Sunday, or on another appropriate Sunday, the newly baptized Christian is invited to receive God's blessing for the ministry of daily life and witness in the rite of *Affirmation of the Vocation of the Baptized in the World*. This rite, which may be used throughout one's life, is a fitting celebration for the newly baptized and a joyous celebration of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life of the congregation.



THE CATECHUMENATE

Welcome of Inquirers
to the Catechumenate

Enrollment of Candidates
for Baptism

Baptism and Communion
at the Vigil of Easter

INQUIRY Inquirers

Inquiry is an open-ended period of time during which *inquirers* make an initial exploration into Christian faith and life. This period of inquiry is shaped by the inquirer as well as parish leaders and the congregation.

Through a public *rite of welcome*, inquirers are received into the catechumenate. This welcome may be celebrated at any time during the church year.

CATECHUMENATE Catechumens

The Catechumenate is an open-ended period of time during which *catechumens* explore more deeply the Christian faith through the reading of scripture, prayer, worship, and ministry in daily life. This period of reflection and study may last from several months to years.

Near the conclusion of the catechumenate, catechumens publically express their desire to be baptized during a *rite of enrollment*. For persons who will be baptized at the Vigil of Easter, this enrollment normally occurs on the First Sunday in Lent.

BAPTISMAL PREPARATION Candidates

Lent is a six-week period of final Baptismal Preparation for *candidates* who will be baptized at the Vigil of Easter.

Since the Vigil of Easter is the center of the church's year and life, it is an especially suitable time for candidates to receive Holy Baptism and partake of Holy Communion for the first time.

BAPTISMAL LIVING Newly Baptized

Easter ushers in the life-time of Baptismal Living for the *newly baptized*. This period extends throughout the Fifty Days of Easter and beyond.

Affirmation of Vocation of the Baptized

A *rite of baptismal affirmation* may be celebrated during which the newly baptized affirm their vocation in the world. For those who were baptized at The Vigil of Easter, it is particularly appropriate to celebrate this affirmation on The Day of Pentecost.

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