

Catechesis of Adolescents

Excerpt from the *National Directory for Catechesis*

I. Background

Significant physical and emotional changes characterize the period of pre-adolescence and adolescence. While home and family remain the more powerful forces in the development of pre-adolescents and adolescents, their peer groups begin to exercise increasing influence on attitudes, values, and behavior. They learn to live the Christian faith by observing the good example of others they admire and trust.

Catechesis for pre-adolescents and adolescents should take into account their physical, social, and psychological conditions. Since adolescence is the age of hero worship, it is helpful to present the words and example of Jesus as well as the lives and deeds of the saints in ways that appeal to young people. Such catechesis should present Christ as the Son of God, friend, guide, and model who can be not only admired but also imitated. It should also present the basic content of Revelation.

Since their minds are increasing in capability, catechesis for adolescents should make clear the rational bases for faith, the inner coherence of the truths of the faith, and their relation to one another. It should also help adolescents to articulate the beliefs and teachings of the Church and to apply them to their lives. The study of Sacred Scripture, the Church, the sacraments, and the principles of Christian morality—both personal and social—should characterize the catechesis of adolescents. Since they are better able to experience faith as a deeper relationship with God than are younger children, prayer and service to others in the name of Christ become more meaningful to them. This is an opportune developmental time to stress their baptismal commitment to evangelization. Because the example of adults is so important to them, their participation in the Mass, the sacraments, and other rituals alongside adults incorporates them further into the life of the Church. They may be invited to take a more active part in planning and celebrating liturgical experiences, especially the Eucharist. They should be given frequent and regular opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Catechesis for Christian initiation, catechesis on special themes, group activity, membership in youth associations, the personal accompaniment of young people, retreats, and spiritual direction are useful approaches for the effective catechesis of adolescents. Adolescence is a time to learn how to pray vocal and liturgical prayers, to read and meditate upon the Sacred Scripture texts, and to evangelize their peers and invite them into the Catholic Church. Adolescence is also a time for developing ecumenical relationships, since it is an age when friendships are especially important and inquiry into the faith and traditions of others is lively.

II. Challenges

A special concern in the catechesis of adolescents is catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation. In many dioceses in the United States, adolescence is the period in which the Sacrament of Confirmation is received and the process of Christian initiation is completed. The Church must make every effort through a revised and revitalized catechesis to ensure that adolescents do not view their preparation for and reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation as the end of their formal catechesis. They must be encouraged to continue to participate in catechetical programs, the celebration of Sunday Eucharist, and the practice of Christian living. As fully initiated Christians, they must be given the opportunity to serve the community in a variety of liturgical ministries.

A special challenge in the catechesis of adolescents is catechesis for Christian vocations. The catechesis of young people “prepares [them] for the important Christian commitments of adult life.” The foundation for accepting the call of Christ to marriage, chaste single life, priesthood, consecrated life, or lay ecclesial ministry is laid within the family and nurtured throughout childhood. Careful and serious consideration of these Christian vocations becomes even more important in adolescence. Parents, pastors, teachers, and catechists should help adolescents to address the vocational question directly and study the possibilities thoroughly. They should

provide the best examples of each of the distinctively Christian vocations to young people and be willing to become personally involved with them as they struggle with their choice. They should encourage adolescents to listen carefully to the voice of the Holy Spirit within them and to respond generously to God's call to service in the Church and in the world.

The most effective catechetical programs for adolescents are integrated into a comprehensive program of pastoral ministry for youth that includes catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, and prayer and worship (*Renewing the Vision*, 26). Such programs aim to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today; to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community; and to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person (*Renewing the Vision*, 9–17).

III. Features

The ministry of catechesis with adolescents has several distinct features that give direction to catechetical programming. Specifically, catechesis with adolescents

- teaches the core content of the Catholic faith as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*—the profession of faith, celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ, and Christian prayer—in order to provide a solid foundation for continued growth in faith
- recognizes that faith development is lifelong and therefore provides developmentally appropriate content and processes around key themes of Catholic faith that respond to the age-appropriate needs, interests, and concerns of younger and older adolescents
- integrates knowledge of the Catholic faith with liturgical and prayer experiences and the development of practical skills for living the Catholic faith in today's world
- utilizes life experiences of adolescents, fostering a shared dialogue between the life of the adolescent—with his or her joys, struggles, questions, concerns, and hopes—and the wisdom of the Catholic Church
- engages adolescents in the learning process by incorporating a variety of learning methods and activities through which adolescents can explore and learn important religious concepts of the Scriptures and the Catholic faith—a variety of learning approaches, including music and media, keeps interest alive among adolescents and responds to their different learning styles
- involves group participation in an environment that is characterized by warmth, trust, acceptance, and care, so that young people can hear and respond to God's call (fostering the freedom to search and question, to express one's own point of view, and to respond in faith to that call)
- provides for real-life application of learning by helping adolescents to apply their learning to live more faithfully as Catholic adolescents—considering the next steps that they will take and the obstacles that they will face
- promotes family faith development through parish and school programs by providing parent education programs and resources, incorporating a family perspective in catechetical programming, and providing parent-adolescent and intergenerational catechetical programming
- promotes Christian attitudes toward human sexuality
- recognizes and celebrates multicultural diversity within the Church's unity by including stories, songs, dances, feasts, values, rituals, saints, and heroes from the rich heritage of various cultures
- incorporates a variety of program approaches, including parish and school programs; small-group programs;

home-based programs, activities, and resources; one-on-one and mentoring programs; and independent or self-directed programs or activities

- explicitly invites young people to explore the possibility of a personal call to ministry and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the kingdom (*Renewing the Vision*, 29–30) based on prayerful reflection within the celebration of the sacraments (e.g., Holy Eucharist, Penance, and Reconciliation)

(From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* [Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005].)

Directions

1. Read through the document as instructed by your teacher.
2. Put checks (✓) next to sentences or passages you agree with and question marks next to sentences or paragraphs that (a) you don't understand; (b) given your own experience, you don't agree with; or (c) you have further thoughts about.
3. Bring three examples of sentences or passages with which you agree and three examples of sentences or passages that you question. Be able to explain your questions.

Learning about John's Gospel through the Prologue

Several themes appear in the first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John, the prologue to the Gospel. The themes are lettered A through L below. Place the letter of a theme you recognize in the prologue in the space provided. There may be more than one right answer. Themes can be used more than once.

Themes in John's Gospel as a Whole

- A. The term "Word," or *Logos* in the Greek, referred to the wisdom and presence of God.
- B. Preexistence of *Logos/Word*
- C. References to life, light, truth, and the world
- D. John's Gospel is more symbolic and literary than the synoptic Gospels.
- E. John's Gospel does not follow the same order as the synoptic Gospels, nor does it contain the same stories.
- F. Incarnation
- G. John's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' divinity from the opening words.
- H. The author refers generally to the Pharisees (i.e. religious leaders) as "the Jews"
- I. The author's audience includes followers of John the Baptist, some of whom were trying to make John more important than Jesus.
- J. The Gospel can be understood as a defense, as if Jesus were on trial.
- K. People are God's adopted children.
- L. Jesus' life glorifies him.

John's Prologue (1:1-18)

¹In the beginning was the Word [1. A] [2. E],
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God [3.].

²He was in the beginning with God [4.].

³All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be ⁴through him was life [5.],
and this life [6.] was the light [7.] of the human race;

⁵the light [8.] [9.] shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶A man named John was sent from God. ⁷He came for testimony [10.], to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light [11.], but came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. [12.]

¹⁰He was in the world [13.],
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.

¹¹He came to what was his own,
but his own people [14.] did not accept him.

¹²But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God [15.____], to those who believe in his name, ¹³who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh [16.____]
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory [17.____],
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth [18.____].

¹⁵John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" [19.____] ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, ¹⁷because while the law was given through Moses [20.____], grace and truth came through Jesus Christ [21.____]. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him [22.____].

(The information about John's Gospel comes from "John—Introduction" and the notes for "John, Chapter 1," <http://usccb.org/bible/john/0> and <http://usccb.org/bible/john/1> in the online version of the *New American Bible, Revised Edition* at the USCCB website and Mary Coe, "Introduction to the 'Gospel according to John,'" *The Anselm Academic Study Bible, New American Revised Edition*, ed. Carolyn Osiek [Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013], 1716–1722.)

Name _____ Date _____

Handout 3-C

What Are the Gospels?

First of all, here is what the Gospels *are not*: they are not simple biographies that invite us to read about Jesus and admire him. Rather, they summon us to pay attention to him, to believe in him, and to follow him.

The Gospels *are* . . .

- proclamations of Good News
- encounters with that Good News—Jesus himself
- challenges to believe

Read each of the Gospel passages below.

- Describe what image the evangelist uses to portray Jesus and the Good News.
- Describe how the person in the passage responded to Jesus.

Mark 1:40-45

Image of Jesus and the Good News

Response of the Healed Man

Luke 10:38-42

Image of Jesus and the Good News

Response of Mary

Mark 8:27-30

Image of Jesus and the Good News

Response of Peter

Jesus challenged his listeners to believe and to make a commitment. Today, the Gospels continue to challenge us to believe in Jesus and to follow him. Read each of the Gospel passages below. After each reading,

- describe what you think it challenges you to believe about Jesus and
- describe how you could meet that challenge.

John 20:24-29

The Challenge

My Response

Luke 6:37-42

The Challenge

My Response
