

NATIONAL DIRECTORY for CATECHESIS

In December 2004, the Vatican approved the new National Directory for Catechesis, which was developed by the bishops of the United States. The National Directory for Catechesis, which is beginning to circulate throughout this country, provides new energy and sharper focus in catechesis. This brief handout answers some questions that people might be asking about this important book.

1. What is catechesis?

Catechesis is sharing the teachings of Jesus Christ in such a way that a person comes to know about God, to believe in him and his teachings, to enter into a relationship with God, and to be transformed by him. Catechesis involves teaching about doctrine as well as about the living practice of the faith. Catechizing and being catechized are lifelong responsibilities for every Catholic.

2. Is “catechesis” another word for “teaching”?

Yes and no. While catechesis does involve instruction about God and what he has told us, it also involves helping us to become the type of people the Lord intended us to be when he created us. Through catechesis, we learn more about our faith and also deepen our relationship with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. Is catechesis something that involves just children?

No. While many people think of catechesis only in terms of religious education for children, catechesis is really a lifelong activity for every Catholic. A way of living as well as learning, catechesis helps us to grow in faith and to grow closer to God throughout our entire lives.

4. What is the *National Directory for Catechesis*?

The *National Directory for Catechesis* outlines general principles and guidelines for formal catechesis. It is to be used in conjunction with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, another important catechetical text, which serves as the definitive reference for the content of catechesis that is authentic and complete. The *National Directory for Catechesis* follows the *General Directory for Catechesis* released in 1997, which presented catechetical principles and guidelines for the universal Church. The *National Directory for Catechesis* adapts the content of the *General Directory for Catechesis* in such a way as to address the particular catechetical needs of the Church in the United States.

5. Who will use the *National Directory for Catechesis*?

It will be used by those who have responsibility for catechesis. This includes those who oversee catechesis on a diocesan level as well as those actively involved in catechetical activities

in parishes and in all levels of Catholic education. The *National Directory for Catechesis* will also be a source of guidance for those who prepare materials used for catechesis. Finally, it will be used by those who want to learn more about the catechetical mission of the Church.

6. What does the *National Directory for Catechesis* say?

The *National Directory for Catechesis* is more than three hundred pages long. It explains the meaning of catechesis, looks at the context in which catechesis occurs in this country, identifies the sources and content of catechesis, and addresses practical issues involved in directing and taking part in catechetical activities.

7. What should I remember about catechesis?

Both the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the new *National Directory for Catechesis* remind us that catechesis involves six basic tasks that must take place if catechesis is to be authentic and complete: (1) to promote knowledge of the faith; (2) to promote meaningful participation in liturgical worship and the sacramental life of the Church; (3) to integrate moral formation into a Christian way of life; (4) to teach Christians how to pray with Christ, in Christ, and in communion with the Church; (5) to initiate the Christian into the life of the local church community and foster active participation in the mission of the Church; (6) and to promote a missionary spirit that prepares Christians to witness to Christ in society.

8. What other major points from the *Directory* should I understand?

Both the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *National Directory for Catechesis* stress two points worth remembering. First, what we believe as Catholics and teach in catechesis has been taught to us first by God. We need to remember that the content of our faith is not the result of personal judgment or some kind of vote. The doctrine we believe is true and reliable because it comes to us from God. The second point is that catechesis is a lifelong responsibility. We never reach a point where we have learned everything, and at no point can we stop sharing the teaching of Jesus Christ with others.

What is in the *National Directory for Catechesis*?

Here is a brief overview of each chapter.

CHAPTER ONE explores the **context** in which we live and worship in the United States—including particular challenges to catechetical efforts.

CHAPTER TWO explains the **meaning of catechesis** and the various **types of catechesis**. It also explains how catechesis is related to Revelation and to evangelization.

CHAPTER THREE gives an overview of the **content of catechesis**—the truths that have come to us through Revelation as found in Scripture and Tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR presents the **methods** used in catechesis. This includes an understanding of how God has taught us, as well as the various human methodologies that can and should be employed to continue this teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE focuses on **liturgy**. Every liturgy is catechetical because we learn about aspects of our faith through prayer and sacramental celebrations.

CHAPTER SIX focuses on **moral teaching**. Catechesis teaches us how we are to live, as well as what we are to believe. This chapter explains how to live and act as disciples of Christ.

CHAPTER SEVEN explores the various **settings and circumstances** in which catechesis takes place. It deals with issues such as teaching the faith to people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and abilities who live and work in differing contexts and situations.

CHAPTER EIGHT focuses on **those who catechize**. Although catechesis is a responsibility shared by all the baptized, those such as bishops, priests, deacons, Catholic school teachers, and parish catechists have special roles.

CHAPTER NINE presents the ways in which catechetical efforts are organized and supervised, by both **dioceses and parishes**.

CHAPTER TEN focuses on **resources** for catechesis, including traditional materials such as books and other printed materials, as well as electronic and computer related materials.

FINALLY, the text concludes by entrusting the catechetical efforts of the United States to the **intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, our national patron under the title of the Immaculate Conception.

Prayer to Mary, Star of Evangelization

O Blessed Virgin Mary,
we ask you who prayed to strengthen the faith of the first disciples
to obtain for the Church in the United States an outpouring of the Holy Spirit,
to guide us in a new evangelization.
Help us teach the faith in such a way that the members of the Church today
will truly be Christ's disciples of this new millennium
drawing people throughout the world to the saving message and power of Christ.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord. Amen

Mary, Star of Evangelization, pray for us.

Adapted from the *National Directory for Catechesis*, p. 302.

The document *National Directory for Catechesis Bulletin Insert* was developed as a resource by the Committee on Catechesis of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was reviewed by the committee chairman, Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein, OSB, and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

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