

Appendix A: The Role of Catechesis within Evangelization

Christ gave us a great call when He gave us the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew, “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 observe all that I have commanded you.”(Matthew 28:19-20) It is this very call that we are seeking to live out when we offer catechesis or any program at our parish. We are seeking to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Church with the whole world. In fact, “The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.” (On Catechesis in Our Times, 5). Ultimately, in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Church, we are seeking to invite people into real relationship and intimacy with Jesus.

It is important to note, however, that the work of catechesis – the handing on and teaching of the faith – is actually a step within a larger process known as evangelization. Evangelization is meant to accomplish this very goal of inviting people into real relationship, intimacy, and communion with Christ in His Church. Evangelization is not a program or something that happens and is done, but is rather an ongoing process in every believer’s life. Evangelization can only be accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. We get to participate in the Holy Spirit’s work when we work in our parishes, but ultimately He is the one who brings about the fruit; He is the one who brings about the relationship.

Evangelization is sometimes a scary word for us as Catholics, as we mistakenly see it as something that “other Christians” do, not us. However, in truth, as Pope Paul VI said, “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.” (Evangelii Nuntiandi 14) This is not something optional for us who are part of the Catholic faith, but in fact, our deepest identity. We are called to invite people into relationship with Christ, and we are able to do this throughout the different steps of evangelization, as outlined in the diagram on the last page.

When it comes to catechesis, it is important to realize that this important work of teaching and handing on the faith is only one aspect of the process of evangelization. We do not teach for the sake of teaching, but rather, we teach in order to invite people into this relationship and mission of Christ in His Church. This can look like offering good hospitality and a welcoming environment at a catechetical setting. This can mean offering people an opportunity to go to Confession and Adoration after a catechetical session. And when it does come to the teaching and ensuring students are being given what is laid out in the curriculum standards, this should not be something that is constricted to merely intellectual exercise or study. This is not something that is done in order to check the boxes. It is important that our teaching engages the hearts of our students. It is the heart where Christ truly comes close to us and touches our lives. Intentional effort should be made to engage the heart as topics are being taught in our catechetical settings, with special attention being given to prayer and the liturgy of the Church. We want to give people a chance to truly come into contact with Jesus Christ and *know Him* through the power of the Holy Spirit, not simply learn about Him.

Sherry Weddell in her book, *Forming Intentional Disciples* outlines five thresholds of conversions that people typically go through in their journey into relationship with Christ. This can be helpful in understanding the journey people take into this relationship and intimacy with Christ. They are as follows:

1. Initial Trust -

A person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.

2. Spiritual Curiosity -

A person finds himself intrigued by or desiring to know more about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some aspect of the Christian faith. This curiosity can range from mere awareness of a new possibility to something quite intense. Nevertheless, a person at the threshold of curiosity is not yet open to personal change. Curiosity is still essentially passive, but it is more than mere trust.

3. Spiritual Openness -

A person acknowledges to himself or herself and to God that he or she is open to the possibility of personal and spiritual change. This is one of the most difficult transitions for a postmodern nonbeliever. Openness is not a commitment to change. People who are open are simply admitting that they are open to the possibility of change.

4. Spiritual Seeking -

The person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know the God who is calling him or her. It is, if you will, ‘dating with a purpose’ but not yet marriage. Seekers are asking, ‘Are you to the one to whom I will give myself?’ At this stage, the seeker is engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he or she can commit to Christ in his Church.

5. Intentional Discipleship -

This is the decision to ‘drop one’s nets,’ to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder one’s life accordingly.

May God bless you in your efforts to make disciples in our Diocese of Duluth. Remember the great blessing that it is to be able to participate in Christ’s mission in this great work of evangelization!

Diocese of Duluth

Model of Discipleship-Making

