

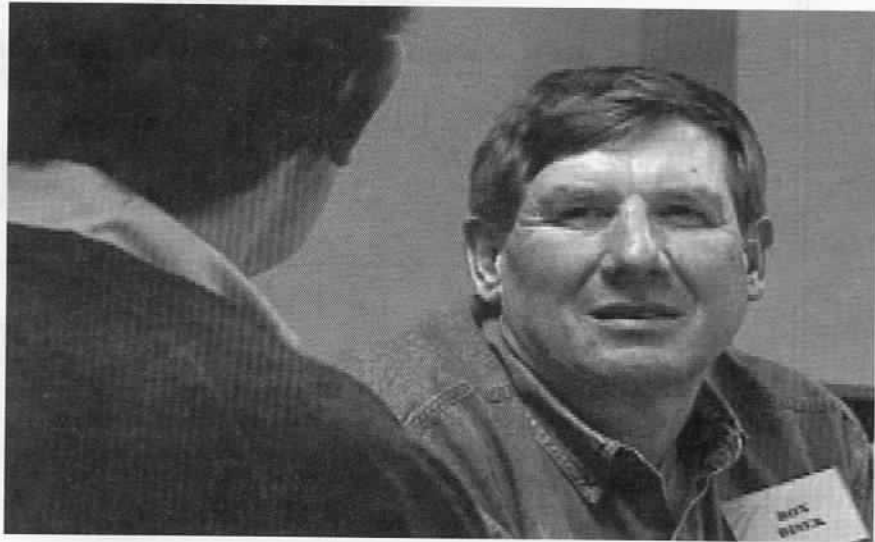
The On Good Soil Process

Step 1 Identify the people

As the meeting organizer, you must decide who to invite. What six or eight people in your parish or school have ideas and opinions about your religious education program that could help you most? Among these will be the pastor, in most cases, possibly other staff people, lead catechists, some parents, and maybe some students. It's OK if not everyone in the group has the same level of familiarity with all aspects of the parish program and its materials.

Step 2 Make the invitation

Invite these folks to an evening or weekend meeting to talk about your program. Stress that the purpose of this meeting is to raise good ideas, to strengthen and expand present approaches, and to implement the *General Directory* more closely. To help set the right tone for the meeting, you may wish to include the meditation on page 34 as part of your invitation.



Step 3 Organize the meeting itself

We suggest you keep it simple. A comfortable room, a round table, refreshments, and enough materials for everyone are all you'll need. For each Conversation you'll be covering, provide the participants with photocopies of the three worksheets "Getting Ready to Talk," "Understanding Catechesis," and "Imagining the Future." So that everyone is ready to work when you meet, you may wish to send "Getting Ready to Talk" beforehand. For background material, include in the packet a photocopy of the corresponding meditation (see pages 35–58).

The On Good Soil Process



Step 4 Begin with prayer

We provide one on pages 10–11 of this manual, or you may want to develop one of your own. Again, we suggest simplicity should rule. Each Conversation you are about to go through is already a prayer — a prayer for the parish or school ministries of passing on the Faith.

To help keep the meeting moving, follow the same procedure with each of the four Conversations. You want the participants to concentrate on content, not process.



Step 5 Start the conversation



CONVERSATION GUIDE Prepare Your Folks

- Decide beforehand whether to tackle all four Conversations at one meeting or to limit each gathering to one or two of them.
- Give the participants photocopies of the worksheets for each Conversation you have chosen for the meeting.
- Invite the group to pray with you.

FOCUS

1 *Pose the Focus question.* If possible, display the question on a large sheet of newsprint. This will help you keep the group on track during the discussion.

2 *Pause* to let people think. Point out that the worksheet “Getting Ready to Talk” will help them think concretely about the Focus question. Give the participants a few minutes to jot down their ideas. (*Note:* If you have provided the worksheet before the meeting, go directly to the discussion.)

3 *Talk.* We suggest your discussion follow the outline below.

CONVERSATION

Part One: Getting Ready to Talk

Let people talk about the notes they made on their “Getting Ready to Talk” worksheet. Go through the questions one at a time, but be careful not to spend too much time on any one question or on one person’s opinion. Encourage the natural give-and-take of an informal and spirited conversation. Remember that at this point in the discussion, you are not looking for consensus but for a variety of viewpoints. Don’t be afraid to join in the discussion yourself. Keep a record of the discussion by writing only keywords on the newsprint.

Part Two: Understanding Catechesis

Look at the *General Directory for Catechesis* and draw guidelines from it for your parish situation. Be sure each participant has a copy of the worksheet "Understanding Catechesis." If necessary, have a brief discussion on the nature of the *General Directory* itself and its importance to all in the Church who work in catechesis. Then read the passage on the worksheet aloud. If you wish, use the questions listed on the Focus page to guide your discussion of the passage. The "Notes" in the box at the bottom of the worksheet will help the group summarize the guidelines for your parish situation. As the guidelines are identified, write them on the newsprint.

Part Three: Imagining the Future

Let people share their ideas for the future of your program. Begin by drawing the group's attention once again to the Focus question. Invite the participants to use the knowledge they have gleaned from parts one and two of the Conversation to brainstorm actions you can take to improve the catechetical ministry in your parish or school. The worksheet "Imagining the Future" will guide your brainstorming. Have each group member keep track of the actions on their worksheets. As a group, rank the actions and transfer the top four to the newsprint.



Step 6 **Collect the data**

After the discussion is finished, review everything that has been written on the newsprint. Check to make sure that every voice has been heard and that there are no loose ends. You may want to ask someone to transcribe the newsprint data. Distribute copies to all the participants. You can do this at the next meeting or as soon as possible after the process is complete.

Personal Commitment After all four Focus questions have been discussed, have each participant fill out a copy of the "Personal Mission Statement" found on page 28. The statement expresses how they plan to help improve catechetical ministry in the parish in each of the four areas that have been discussed.

The section "Parish Involvement," found on pages 29–31, provides strategies for involving the whole parish in the *On Good Soil* process.

Conversation One + The Children

FOCUS: Reaching Our Children

How can we as a parish community most effectively reach our children with the message of the Gospel so that they will meet Christ and offer him their lives?

Getting Ready to Talk Spend some time quietly preparing to join in this conversation by responding to the questions on the "Getting Ready to Talk" worksheet. Try to enter into this work as prayerfully as possible. During the conversation, be open, honest, loving, and kind.

Understanding Catechesis In order to be helpful to your parish, it's necessary to take some time to reflect on what the larger, universal Church is asking of you. Read the short passage from the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Then use the following questions to reflect on what you have read:

Which phrases of the text caught your eye?

What new ideas did you discover?

What questions arose for you?

What principles for religious education does this passage suggest?

Use these same questions to guide your group discussion.

Imagining the Future Based on what's happening now (revealed in the first part of your discussion) and what the Church teaches (revealed in the second), what innovations or ideas do you have that would improve the religious education program in your parish or school? Use the questions on the worksheet to help you prime the pump.



Conversation One + The Children

Getting Ready to Talk

Spend some time thinking about these questions as you prepare to talk with us about them. In preparing them, be honest and open about your views. In discussing them, be loving and kind. It helps if you jot down your thoughts for your own use during our conversation. *Note:* You may not be able to answer every question. That's OK.

Reaching Our Children

- 1) What part of our religious education program do the children seem to like the most? Why do they like that part? What portion of our program does that part comprise?
- 2) How do our children learn about being Christians? How do they actually meet Christ? Who exerts the greatest influence on their formation as Christians?
- 3) What is the most effective way we currently help our young people learn to pray?
- 4) How does our program provide for the moral development of our children? Does it equip them to live in today's society?
- 5) How well do we use the language of today's children in the materials of our program? What is the balance between "the Church's official language" and that which the children use in their everyday lives?
- 6) What elements of our presentation of the Faith (texts, handouts, liturgical aides, media) do the children relate to most?

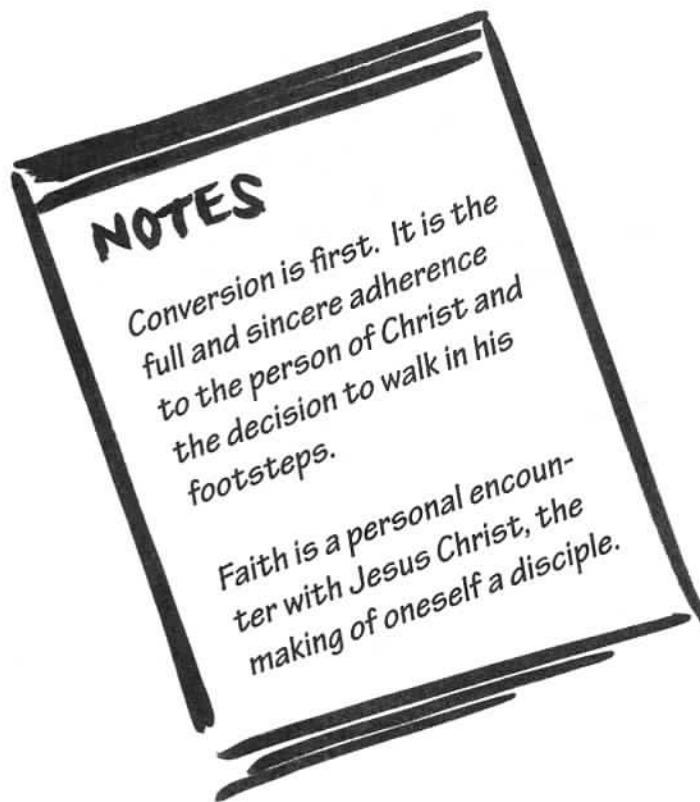
Conversation One + The Children

Understanding Catechesis

From the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

Conversion and faith

[53] In proclaiming the Good News of Revelation to the world, evangelization invites men and women to conversion and faith. The call of Jesus, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," (Mk 1:15) continues to resound today by means of the Church's work of evangelization. The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making of oneself a disciple of him. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him and to live as he lived. In this way, the believer unites himself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church.



Conversation One + The Children

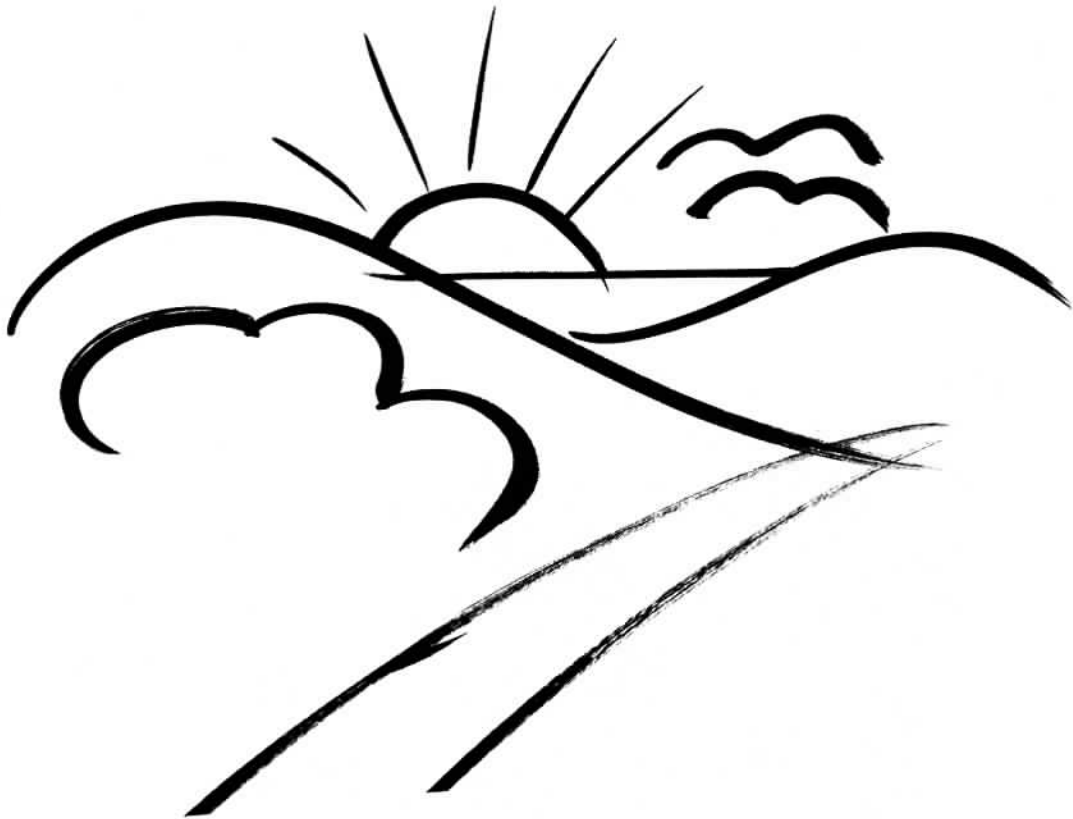
Imagining the Future

How can we offer the children in our program more of what touches them most in religious education?

How can we help our children actually *meet* Christ and come to think, judge, and live like him?

How can we more effectively help our children learn to pray?

How can we use more of the language of today's kids in of our program?



Conversation Two + Catechists

FOCUS: Forming Our Catechists

How can we as a parish community best form our catechists so that they clearly communicate the message of Christ and give personal witness to their faith?

Getting Ready to Talk Spend some time quietly preparing to join in this conversation by responding to the questions on the "Getting Ready to Talk" worksheet. Try to enter into this work as prayerfully as possible. During the conversation, be open, honest, loving, and kind.

Understanding Catechesis In order to be helpful to your parish, it's necessary to take some time to reflect on what the larger, universal Church is asking of you. Read the short passage from the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Then use the following questions to reflect on what you have read:

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What new ideas did you discover?

What questions arose for you?

What principles for religious education does this passage suggest?

Use these same questions to guide your group discussion.

Imagining the Future Based on what's happening now (revealed in the first part of your discussion) and what the Church teaches (revealed in the second), what innovations or ideas do you have that would improve the religious education program in your parish or school? Use the questions on the worksheet to help you prime the pump.



Conversation Two + Catechists

Getting Ready to Talk

Spend some time thinking about these questions as you prepare to talk with us about them. In preparing them, be honest and open about your views. In discussing them, be loving and kind. It helps if you jot down your thoughts for your own use during our conversation. *Note:* You may not be able to answer every question. That's OK.

Forming Our Catechists

- 1) What is the most effective method we use to prepare our catechists for the classroom?
- 2) What are the main characteristics we should look for when inviting people to *the vocation* of being a catechist?
- 3) What do our catechists need most to undertake this ministry?
- 4) How well do our catechists "proclaim Christ"?
- 5) Have our catechists, by and large, experienced a Christian conversion prior to their work? If so, how? If not, how can we help?
- 6) Which classroom techniques that our catechists presently use are most effective in reaching the children?
- 7) In your observation, how often do our catechists witness to their own experience of faith during their classroom presentations?

Conversation Two + Catechists

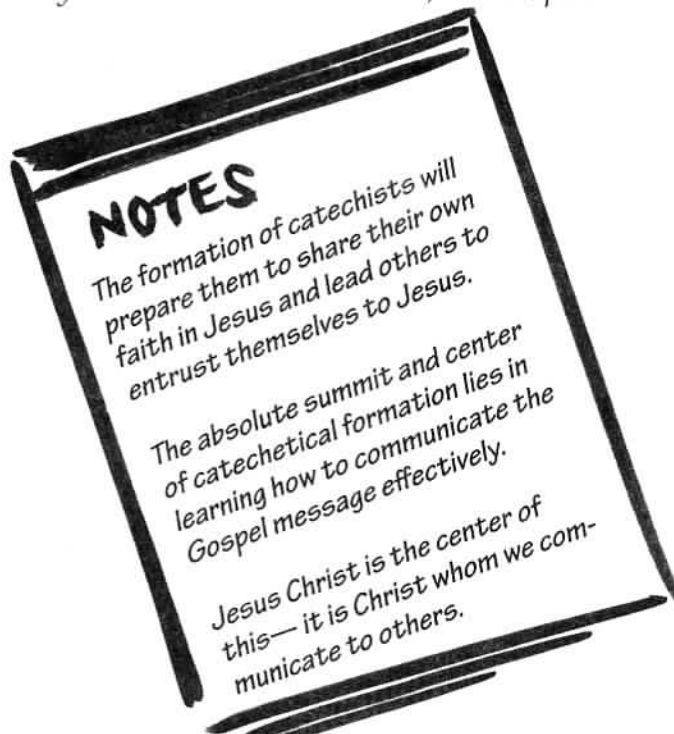
Understanding Catechesis

From the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

Nature and purpose of the formation of catechists

[235] Formation seeks to enable catechists to transmit the Gospel to those who desire to entrust themselves to Jesus Christ. The purpose of formation, therefore, is to make the catechist capable of communicating: "The summit and center of catechetical formation lies in an aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel message."

The christocentric purpose of catechesis, which emphasizes the communion of the convert with Jesus Christ, permeates all aspects of the formation of catechists. This aim is nothing other than to lead the catechist to know how to animate a catechetical journey of which the necessary stages are: the proclamation of Jesus Christ; making known his life by setting it in the context of salvation history; explanation of the mystery of the Son of God, made man for us; and finally to help the catechumen, or those being catechized, to identify with Jesus Christ through the sacraments of initiation. With continuing catechesis, the catechist merely tries to deepen these basic elements. This christological perspective touches directly upon the identity of the catechist and his preparation. "The unity and harmony of the catechist must be read in this christocentric light and built around a profound familiarity with Christ and the Father, in the Spirit."



Conversation Two + Catechists

Imagining the Future

What more can we do as a parish to help prepare our catechists for their work?

What additional resources can we offer our catechists as they undertake this ministry?

How can we help our catechists be more and more converted to Christ?



Conversation Three + Families

FOCUS: Involving Our Families

How can we as a parish community most effectively involve our families in their children's catechesis?

Getting Ready to Talk Spend some time quietly preparing to join in this conversation by responding to the questions on the "Getting Ready to Talk" worksheet. Try to enter into this work as prayerfully as possible. During the conversation, be open, honest, loving, and kind.

Understanding Catechesis In order to be helpful to your parish, it's necessary to take some time to reflect on what the larger, universal Church is asking of you. Read the short passage from the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Then use the following questions to reflect on what you have read:

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What questions arose for you?

What principles for religious education does this passage suggest?

Use these questions to guide your group discussion.

Imagining the Future Based on what's happening now (revealed in the first part of your discussion) and what the Church teaches (revealed in the second), what innovations or ideas do you have that would improve the religious education program in your parish or school? Use the questions on the worksheet to help you prime the pump.



Conversation Three + Families

Getting Ready to Talk

Spend some time thinking about these questions as you prepare to talk with us about them. In preparing them, be honest and open about your views. In discussing them, be loving and kind. It helps if you jot down your thoughts for your own use during our conversation. *Note:* You may not be able to answer every question. That's OK.

Involving Our Families

- 1) Which element of our present program do parents find the most important?
- 2) What events of everyday life at home would be most likely to affect a child's religious development? What can we do to affirm those events through our program?
- 3) What would help extend the work of the classroom into the home and what would help bring the experiences at home into the classroom? What privacy and safety issues are at play in this question?
- 4) How do we support our families in their role as the primary ones responsible for the religious formation of their children?
- 5) Would you say most of our households have experienced Christian conversion prior to enrolling their children in our program? If so, how? If not, how can we help?
- 6) What are the chief experiences of faith for the households of the parish?
- 7) When do most families pray? How do most families talk about their faith as it affects everyday life?

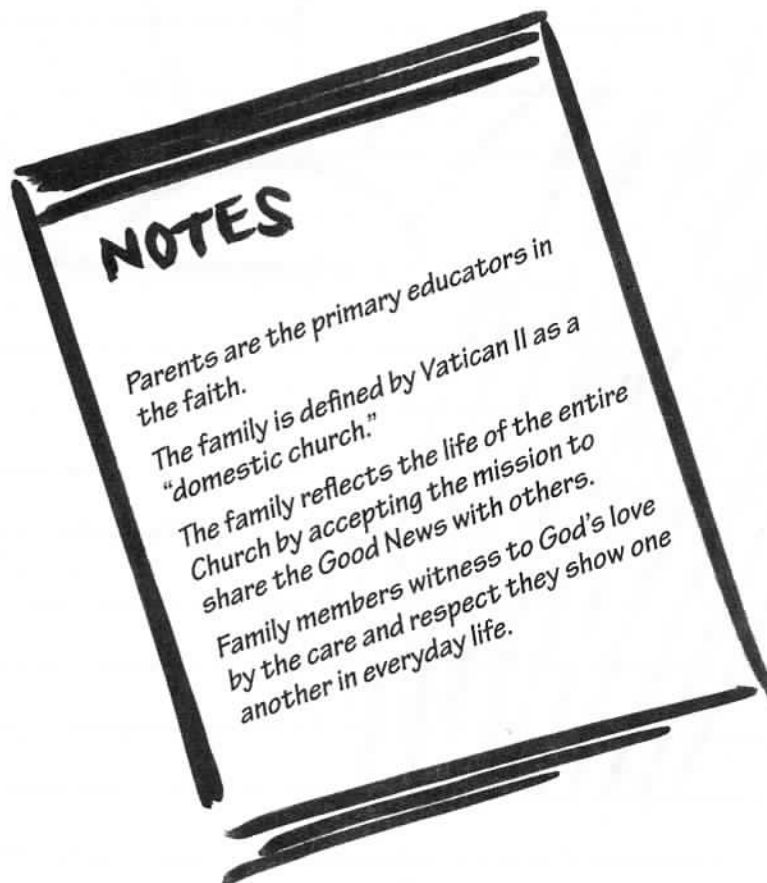
Conversation Three + Families

Understanding Catechesis

From the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

The family as an environment or means of growth in faith

[255] Parents are the primary educators in the faith. Together with them, especially in certain cultures, all members of the family play an active part in the education of the younger members. It is thus necessary to determine more concretely the sense in which the Christian family community is a *locus* of catechesis. The family is defined as a "domestic Church," that is, in every Christian family the different aspects and functions of the life of the entire Church may be reflected: mission; catechesis; witness; prayer, etc. Indeed in the same way as the Church, the family "is a place in which the Gospel is transmitted and from which it extends." The family as a *locus* of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator.



Conversation Three + Families

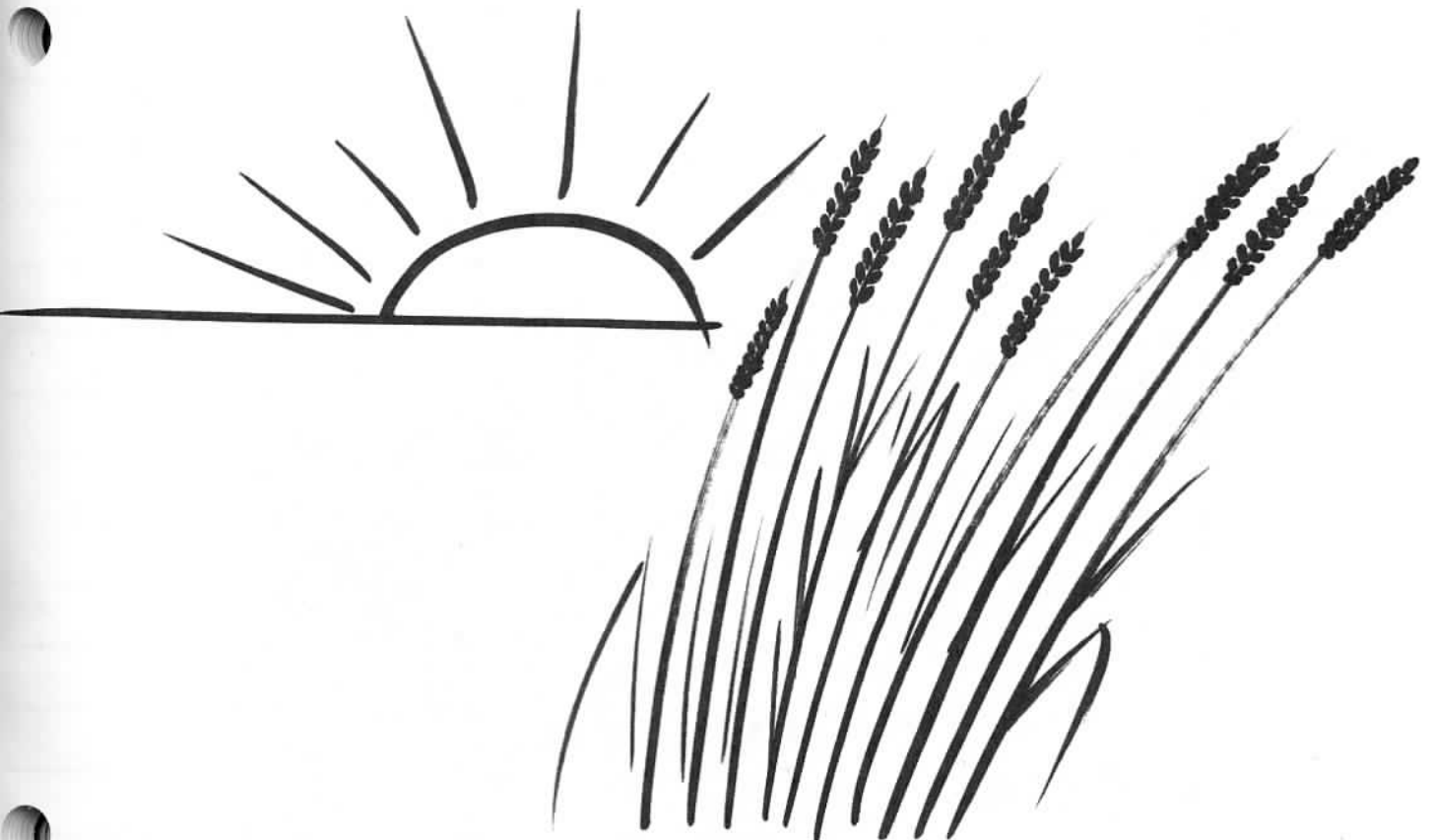
Imagining the Future

What could we add to our present program that would help parents talk with their children about Christlike values, beliefs, and lifestyle?

How can we strengthen and affirm the everyday home life of our children in a way that would most affect their religious development?

How could we offer more support to our families in their primary responsibility for the religious formation of their children?

How might we help the families of our children meet Christ and mold their lives after his?



Conversation Four + Whole Parish

FOCUS: Teaching Our Whole Parish

How can we as a parish community develop the practice of providing catechesis to the total parish—children, youths, and adults?

Getting Ready to Talk Spend some time quietly preparing to join in this conversation by responding to the questions on the “Getting Ready to Talk” worksheet. Try to enter into this work as prayerfully as possible. During the conversation, be open, honest, loving, and kind.

Understanding Catechesis In order to be helpful to your parish, it’s necessary to take some time to reflect on what the larger, universal Church is asking of you. Read the short passage from the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Then use the following questions to reflect on what you have read:

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What principles for religious education does this passage suggest?

Use these same questions to guide your group discussion.

Imagining the Future Based on what’s happening now (revealed in the first part of your discussion) and what the Church teaches (revealed in the second), what innovations or ideas do you have that would improve the religious education program in your parish or school? Use the questions on the worksheet to help you prime the pump.



Conversation Four + Whole Parish

Getting Ready to Talk

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Teaching the Whole Parish

- 1) What catechetical tools, publications, or events have worked in the past to provide catechesis for the parish as a whole?
- 2) What are two or three catechetical topics that most people in this parish need?
- 3) What do we do in our present program that most effectively communicates the role of the parish in the Church's mission to spread the Good News?
- 4) How does our parish community show through its attitudes and actions that we take seriously Jesus' call to care for those most in need of care?
- 5) With what aspects of the catechumenate (RCIA) do most parishioners connect?

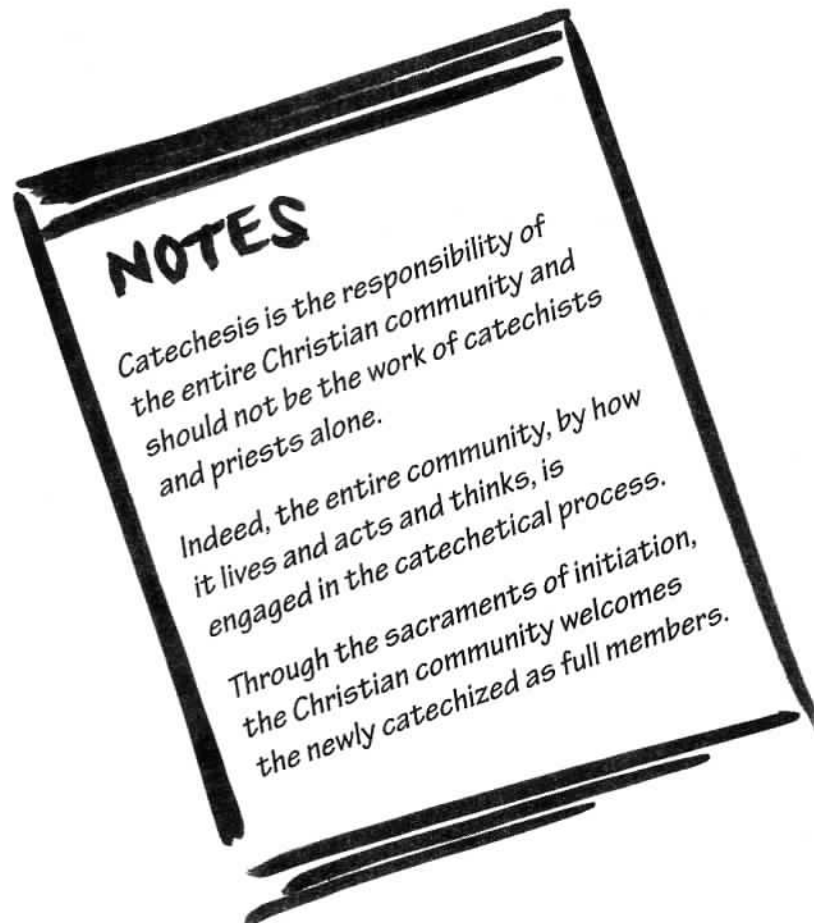
Conversation Four + Whole Parish

Understanding Catechesis

From the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

The Christian community and responsibility for catechesis

[220] Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. Christian initiation, indeed, "should not be the work of catechists and priests alone, but of the whole community of the faithful." Continuing education in the faith is a question which concerns the whole community; catechesis, therefore, is an educational activity which arises from the particular responsibility of every member of the community, in a rich context of relationships, so that catechumens and those being catechized are actively incorporated into the life of the community. The Christian community follows the development of catechetical processes, for children, young people, and adults, as a duty that involves and binds it directly. Again, at the end of the catechetical process, it is the Christian community that welcomes the catechized in a fraternal environment, "in which they will be able to live in the fullest way what they have learned."



Conversation Four + Whole Parish

Imagining the Future

What are some tools we can use to catechize the adults of the parish?
How can we connect adult catechesis to what's happening in the children's program?

What topic would we recommend be included in our adult catechetical program?

What are some creative ways we can urge adults in the community to participate in the program of religious education offered in the parish or school?

How can we show by our actions that catechesis is the responsibility of the whole parish community?

How can we help adults in this parish live their faith in the workplace?

How can we use the catechumenate (RCIA) to encourage lifelong learning for both the adults and the children in the parish?

