

CHAPTER 1

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## ► A New Approach to Faith Formation

Since the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965, the Catholic Church has offered a comprehensive and compelling vision of faith formation and lifelong learning for people of all ages and generations. This vision is firmly rooted in the life of the Church. The wonderful image of catechesis from the *General Directory for Catechesis* (#59), that “the model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate...” (1977 *Synod Message to the People of God* [MPD]), reflects an approach to faith formation and learning that immerses people into the life of the Church.

Finally, the concept of the baptismal catechumenate as a process of formation and as a true school of the faith offers post-baptismal catechesis dynamic and particular characteristics: comprehensiveness and integrity of formation; its gradual character expressed in definite stages; its connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs; its constant references to the Christian community. (GDC #91)

Yet catechesis across the United States and Canada is still struggling under the burden of an outdated model of faith formation. Embracing the vision of faith formation laid out in the *General Directory for Catechesis* requires moving beyond a school paradigm to a community or “whole Church” paradigm of faith formation. This shift requires a series of significant changes:

- moving from a focus on only educating children (think of all the time, energy, and resources we still commit to children) by implementing lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, including and especially adults;
- ending “start and stop” catechesis (think graduation at confirmation; think preparation for sacraments) by implementing lifelong and continuous faith formation, learning through involvement in the events of Church life;
- overcoming age segregation (think grade levels, youth groups, etc.) by implementing intergenerational faith formation that connects all the generations in learning programs and parish involvement;
- moving beyond a focus on textbooks as the only means of forming a curriculum by utilizing the events of Church life as the curriculum for all ages and generations, providing catechesis that prepares everyone to participate in the events of Church life;
- not blaming families for the failures of current faith formation practices, instead encouraging the faith of the family as integral to faith formation;
- implementing a more collaborative and integrated approach that involves all of the parish’s ministries in faith formation and that views catechesis in its connection with liturgy, sacraments, the Church year, justice and service, and prayer.

The Generations of Faith approach equips the parish to become a community of learners by creating lifelong faith formation that is centered in the events of Church life, embraces all ages and generations, and promotes faith growth at home, through parish preparation programs, and, most importantly, through participation in Church life.

## ► A Story of Faith Formation

Imagine a parish that is embracing this vision of faith formation and preparing the entire faith community for Lent:

Lent is coming and the entire community of Holy Family Parish is preparing to immerse themselves in the lenten season through liturgy and prayer (Ash Wednesday, the Sunday liturgies, Holy Week, Stations of the Cross), justice and service (food and clothing collection, Operation Rice Bowl), and community life activities (lenten meals)—in the parish and at home.

The Holy Family catechetical ministry has designed a variety of ways to prepare all of the generations for their participation in the lenten season. Their goal is to prepare everyone in the parish community for Lent focusing on the theme for the year: “The Three Practices of Lent: Fasting, Praying, and Almsgiving.” Preparation programs guide people of all ages to understand the meaning of Lent and the three practices, to appreciate the significance of Lent and the three practices in our Catholic tradition, to participate actively in the lenten season, and to live the three practices at home and in the world. When people are prepared for an event they feel confident, comfortable, and competent to participate in the events of church life.

The lenten lectionary readings will be a primary resource for preparation. The music director has selected special lenten songs, one for each week of Lent, that express musically the lenten theme. These songs will be used in parish programs and at Sunday worship.

The week before Ash Wednesday, on a Wednesday night, Friday night, or Saturday morning, all ages—from families with children through older adults, arrive at the parish center for a light dinner or continental breakfast, followed by the feature activity—learning how to live the three practices of fasting, praying, and almsgiving. The program moves through several stages of activities:

- Everyone gathers together for a meal—a great time to build community.
- The program begins with prayer and song inspired by the lenten season and the three practices.
- An all-ages opening experience introduces everyone to the focus of preparation—the three practices of Lent.
- The in-depth learning component of the program helps everyone to explore the meaning of the event through age-appropriate learning groups. Families with children explore the lenten practices through three activity centers—praying, fasting, and almsgiving/service. The adolescents explore the lenten practices and create contemporary ways to live the three practices today. A guest speaker presents an overview of the lenten lectionary and a contemporary interpretation of the lenten practices for adults.
- The entire group gathers again to share their learning from the in-depth sessions.

- ▶ One of the leaders reviews how to use the Lenten Home Kit, which provides resources for families and individuals to experience Lent at home: a lenten calendar with daily activities and Scripture passages; a lenten journal for teens with daily readings, prayers, and activities; a daily lenten prayer guide for adults; placemats with weekly table prayers; suggested local service projects and Operation Rice Bowl; several learning activities on lenten themes; and a copy of the parish's lenten calendar.
- ▶ In family groupings and adult groupings, everyone develops a Lenten Pledge to live the three practices at home and in the world.
- ▶ The program closes in prayer and song.

Young adults—those at home, in college, or in the military—receive, via e-mail, a special Lenten Journal with a daily lectionary reading, a reflection written by young adults, and a prayer. All of the adult faith sharing groups in the parish dedicate a session to the “Three Practices of Lent” by exploring the meaning of Lent and reflecting on the lenten lectionary readings. Each participant receives a booklet of daily lenten reflections to guide their journey through the season. All of the parish committees and councils that meet prior to or at the beginning of Lent open their meetings with a special prayer service on the lenten theme. All of the adult participants receive a Lenten Home Kit and a copy of the parish's lenten calendar.

In addition to the Lenten Home Kit, the parish's web site, Holy Family On-Line, features the parish lenten calendar, prayers and reflections for all ages on the lenten Scripture readings, and the entire Lenten Home Kit. A special bulletin insert for each week of Lent is distributed at all of the Masses.

Wherever you go in the Holy Family community people of all ages and generations are united in a common endeavor: to prepare for Lent, to experience Lent fully at home and in the parish, and to integrate their learning into their daily lives as Catholics.

Faith formation at Holy Family Parish is in the midst of a transformation. They are moving toward a curriculum that is centered on the formative events of the Church community and the participation of all ages and generations in the shared experiences of Church life. Holy Family Parish has embraced the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation.

## ▶ Foundations of Generations of Faith

The Generations of Faith approach is built on the Church's catechetical teachings over the past forty years and seeks to give expression to these teachings in a distinctive approach to faith formation. This section examines four important foundations for the approach, drawn from the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

- the goals of catechesis
- the parish as a community of learning
- the baptismal catechumenate as the model
- the six interrelated tasks of catechesis for all catechesis

## Foundation 1: A Living Faith

The Generations of Faith approach to faith formation is guided and inspired by goals that are as old as the Church itself.

Quite early on, the name catechesis was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men and women believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], #4)

The aim of catechetical activity consists in precisely this: to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith (cf. CCC 1229; *Christus Domini* 141). (GDC #66)

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ. Starting with the “initial” (*Ad Gentes* [AG] 13b) conversion of a person to the Lord, moved by the Holy Spirit through the primary proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis seeks to solidify and mature this first adherence. It proposes to help those who have just converted “to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his ‘mystery,’ the kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and comments contained in his Gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow him” (CT 20c). (GDC #80)

1. *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) 5; cf. CCC 426; AG 14a. In relation to this christological end of catechesis see part one, chap. I and part two, chap. I. “*Jesus Christ mediator and fullness of Revelation*” and that which is said in part two, chap. I “*Christianity of the evangelical mission.*”

Discipleship is the goal of all faith formation. Guided by this goal, faith formation seeks to *inform*, *form*, and *transform* individuals, families, and the entire community in the Catholic faith. This threefold aim includes nurturing people's minds and hearts with the wisdom of the Catholic faith so that who they are and how they live are deeply influenced by what they “know” (inform), shaping people's identity and lifestyle through Christian discipleship (form), and empowering people to live their faith so that the world is transformed by the Christian vision (transform).

Generations of Faith provides a comprehensive approach to discipleship that is rooted in the life of the Church, equips people to participate meaningfully in the life of the Church, and empowers them to live as disciples at home and in the world.

## Foundation 2: A Lifelong Learning Community

At the heart of the Generations of Faith approach is the development of the parish as a lifelong learning community, a congregation of learners. It is essential that we empower every member of our community to become both teacher and learner. In a learning community, learners are teaching, teachers are learning, and all activities—meetings, worship, service, and community events—include learning. Through this approach, parish communities can be revitalized and transformed.

The Christian community not only gives much to those who are being catechized but also receives much from them. New converts, especially adolescents and adults, in adhering to Jesus Christ, bring to the community which receives them new religious and human wealth. Thus the community grows and develops. Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized but also brings the community itself to maturity. (GDC #221)

A congregation of learners is a center for authentic Catholic learning, viewed as a life-long endeavor that grows out of the life of the community, which, in turn, strengthens the community. A congregation of learners creates a *culture of learning*.

In such a congregation, every activity of Church life is viewed as an opportunity for learning. Catechesis is seamlessly integrated with liturgy, justice and service, prayer and spirituality. Catechesis prepares people for active, conscious, meaningful participation in liturgy and in the Church year. It helps them reflect on the meaning and significance of their participation on their lives as Catholics. Catechesis prepares people for the work of justice and acts of service, and helps individuals reflect on the connection between their actions and their faith. This approach leads to a deepening of Catholic commitment and an increased Catholic practice. It contributes to the creation of a strong sense of community and develops a community's capacity to be self-renewing.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* echoes this understanding when it reminds us that catechesis is centered in the life of the entire community.

### **The role of the faith community**

Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act.<sup>2</sup> The true subject of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and, therefore animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith. The Church imitates the Mother of the Lord in treasuring the Gospel in her heart (cf. *Lumen Gentium* [LG] 64; *Dei Verbum* [DV] 10a). She proclaims it, celebrates it, lives it, and she transmits it in catechesis to all those who have decided to follow Jesus Christ. (GDC #78)

2. As has been stated in chapter I of this part in "The transmission of Revelation by the Church, the work of the Holy Spirit" and in part II, chapter I in "The ecclesial nature of the Gospel message." Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) 60 which speaks of the ecclesial nature of any evangelizing activity.

Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways. (GDC #105)

In giving attention to the individual, it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it. If indeed it is from the whole life of the Church that catechesis draws its legitimacy and energy, it is also true that "her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis (CT 13)." (GDC #168)

### **The intimate connection between catechesis and the other ministries**

To fulfill its tasks, catechesis avails of two principal means: transmission of the Gospel message and experience of the Christian life (cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici* [CIC] 773 and 778 §2). Liturgical formation, for example, must explain what the Christian liturgy is, and what the sacraments are. It must also however, offer an experience of the different kinds of celebration and it must make symbols, gestures, etc., known and loved. Moral formation not only transmits the content of Christian morality, but also cultivates active evangelical attitudes and Christian values. (GDC #87)

### **The Church as the primary faith formation curriculum and catechist**

Catechetical pedagogy will be effective to the extent that the Christian community becomes a point of concrete reference for the faith journey of individuals. This happens when the community is proposed as a source, *locus* and means of catechesis. Concretely, the community becomes a visible place of faith-witness. It provides for the formation of its members. It receives them as the family of God. It constitutes itself as the living and permanent environment for growth in the faith (cf. AG 14; *General Catechetical Directory* [DCG] [1971], 35; CT 24). (GDC #158)

The Christian community is the origin, *locus* and goal of catechesis. Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community and invites man to conversion and the following of Christ. It is the same community that welcomes those who wish to know the Lord better and permeate themselves with a new life. The Christian community accompanies catechumens and those being catechized, and with maternal solicitude makes them participate in her own experience of the faith and incorporates them into herself (cf. CT 24). (GDC #254)

From this perspective it becomes clear that *the Church is both curriculum and catechist*. As Maria Harris states so clearly in her book, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, “. . . the Church does not have an educational program; it is an educational program.”

### **Foundation 3: A Comprehensive Framework**

The *General Directory for Catechesis* provides a comprehensive framework for catechesis that is rooted in the life of the Church.

The duties of catechesis correspond to education of the different dimensions of faith, for catechesis is integral Christian formation, “*open to all the other factors of the Christian life* (CT 21b).” In virtue of its own internal dynamic, the faith demands to be known, celebrated, lived and translated into prayer. Catechesis must cultivate each of these dimensions. The faith, however, is lived out by the Christian community and proclaimed in mission: it is a shared and proclaimed faith. These dimensions must also be encouraged by catechesis. The Second Vatican Council expresses these duties as follows: “. . .“catechetical instruction, which illumines and strengthens the faith develops a life in harmony with the Spirit of Christ, stimulates a conscious and fervent participation in the liturgical mystery and encourages men to take an active part in the apostolate (*Gravissimum Educationis* 4; cf. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* [RCIA] 19, CIC 788.2).” (GDC #84)

The comprehensive vision proposed by the *General Directory for Catechesis* includes six essential and interrelated tasks for catechesis (see GDC #85):

- *Promoting knowledge of the faith.* Catechesis fosters “the gradual grasping of the whole truth . . .” through a study of Tradition and Scripture. This task is realized by deepening one’s knowledge of the Creed, “. . . a compendium of Scripture and of the faith of the Church . . .”
- *Liturgical education.* Catechesis teaches the meaning of the liturgy and sacraments, aiming to bring the faith to a “. . .full, conscious, and active participation . . .”
- *Moral formation.* Catechesis fosters conversion of life by transmitting the spirit of the beatitudes and values of the Decalogue, and witnesses to “. . .the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel.”
- *Teaching to pray.* Catechesis calls the disciples to pray with sentiments of Jesus’ prayer: “. . .adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication, and awe. . .” The Our Father is a “. . .summary of the entire Gospel . . .” and handing it on is “. . .a true act of catechesis.”
- *Education for community life.* By means of an apprenticeship (the catechumenate) that witnesses to 1) a spirit of simplicity and humility, 2) solicitude for “the least,” 3) concern for alienated, 4) fraternal correction, and 5) mutual forgiveness.
- *Missionary initiation.* By equipping the faithful, especially the laity, “. . .to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives.” (*Sowing the Seeds*, 24–25)

The *Directory* emphasizes that all of these tasks are essential.

The tasks of catechesis, consequently, constitute a totality, rich and varied in aspect. ...“All of these tasks are necessary. As the vitality of the human body depends on the proper function of all of its organs, so also the maturation of the Christian life requires that it be cultivated in all its dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development.” (GDC #87)

In *Fashion Me a People*, Maria Harris presents a similar, comprehensive understanding of faith formation that is rooted in the life of the Church. She writes,

Throughout history, reaching back to Acts 2:42–47, the Church’s educational ministry has been embodied and lived in five classical forms: *didache*, *koinonia*, *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *leiturgia*. If we would educate *to* all of these forms, as well as *through* all of them, then attending only to any one of them, simply would not do. The fullness of the pastoral vocation demands that any ecclesial education must be one that educates:

- to *koinonia* (community and communion) by engaging in the forms of community and communion;
- To *leiturgia* (worship and prayer) by engaging in the forms of prayer and worship and spirituality;
- to *kerygma* (proclaiming the Word of God) by attention to and practicing and incarnating the kerygma, “Jesus is Risen,” in the speech of our own lives, especially the speech of advocacy;
- to *diakonia* (service and outreach) by attending to our own service and reaching out to others, personally and communally, locally and globally;
- to *didache* (teaching and learning) by attention to the most appropriate forms of teaching and learning in our own communities.

Should any of these be left out as full partners in the educational work of ministry; should any of these be downplayed; should any of these be exalted to the denigration of others, we will not be able to educate fully. All are needed. (Harris 43–44)

The Generations of Faith approach utilizes all six interrelated tasks of catechesis by centering faith formation in the events of Church life.

## Foundation 4: A Model of Catechizing Activity

The *General Directory for Catechesis* presents the baptismal catechumenate as the model for all the Church’s catechizing activity.

Given that the *missio ad gentes* is the paradigm of all the Church’s missionary activity, the baptismal catechumenate, which is joined to it, is the model of its catechizing activity (cf. MPD 8; EN 44; *Chrisifideles Laici* 61). It is therefore helpful to underline those elements of the catechumenate which must inspire contemporary catechesis and its significance. (GDC #90)

The *Directory* highlights elements of the ancient catechumenate that “...must inspire contemporary catechesis ....” In view of the “fundamental difference” between catechizing individuals not yet baptized (catechumens) and catechizing individuals already baptized, the *Directory* outlines elements as they apply to post-baptismal catechesis (#91).

- The baptismal catechumenate constantly reminds the whole Church of the fundamental importance of the function of initiation and the basic factors which constitute it: catechesis and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.
- The baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community....
- The baptismal catechumenate is also completely permeated by the *mystery of Christ's Passover*. For this reason, "all initiation must reveal clearly its paschal nature" (RCIA 8). The Easter Vigil, focal point of the Christian liturgy, and its spirituality of Baptism inspire all catechesis.
- The baptismal catechumenate is also an initial locus of inculturation....the Church receives catechumens integrally, together with their cultural ties. All catechetical activity participates in this function of incorporating into the catholicity of the Church, authentic "seeds of the word," scattered through nations and individuals (cf. CT 53).
- Finally, the concept of the baptismal catechumenate *as a process of formation and as a true school of the faith* offers post-baptismal catechesis dynamic and particular characteristics: comprehensiveness and integrity of formation; its gradual character expressed in definite stages; its connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs; its constant references to the Christian community.

Viewing the baptismal catechumenate as the model for all the Church's catechizing activity has two important implications for faith formation.

1. This view reinforces an events-centered approach to faith formation that immerses people into the life of the faith community, providing the opportunities to learn by participating and experiencing. Craig Dykstra observes, "The process of coming to faith and growing in the life of faith is fundamentally a process of participation. We come to recognize and live in the Spirit as we participate more and more broadly and deeply in communities that know God's love, acknowledge it, express it, and live their lives in the light of it." (*Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 40)
2. This view places an emphasis on engaging people in the practices of the faith community: learning by studying, practicing, performing, and reflecting, and most importantly learning by doing the activity. People come to faith and grow in faith, and in the life of faith, by participating in the practices of the Christian community, and the practices of the whole Church. It is not enough simply to know about these practices or think about them or observe other people engaging in them. Each of us must actually pray, read, interpret the Scriptures, and provide hospitality to strangers.

Why is faith formation centered on the practices of the faith community so important? Craig Dykstra writes,

These are the kinds of practices that the Church's people engage in over and over again, because they are practices that constitute being the Church, practices to which God call us as Christians. They are, likewise, practices that place people in touch with God's redemptive activity, that put us where life in Christ may be made known, recognized, experienced, and participated in. They are means of grace, the human places in which and through which God's people come to faith and grow in maturity in the life of faith. From its own history and experience, the Church knows that such practices enable the community and its people as individuals to continue their experience with God made present in Word, in sacrament, in prayer, and in the community's life in obedience to its vocation in the world. (*Growing in the Life of Faith*, 43)

The Generations of Faith approach is designed to immerse people more deeply in the life of the Church so that they may learn by participating and experiencing. By so doing, people of all ages are engaged in the practices of the Catholic faith, practices that can become integral to each person's life.

## ► Practices of Generations of Faith

The *General Directory for Catechesis* calls for a lifelong approach to faith formation with the Church as the center of catechesis—as the curriculum for lifelong catechesis, as the content for learning, and as the catechist or teacher of the faith. The Generations of Faith approach has seven defining features, or key practices, that guide the development of faith formation in a parish community.

### **Practice 1: Events-centered Catechesis**

With Generations of Faith, faith formation is *events-centered*. The lifelong curriculum and individual learning experiences are developed around the *events* of our shared life as a Church: Church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and liturgy, prayer and spirituality, justice and service, and community life. These events hold tremendous educative and transformative power.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us, "...it is from the whole life of the Church that catechesis draws its legitimacy and energy ..." (GDC #168). The beliefs and practices for living the Catholic faith are embedded in the events of Church life. Events-centered catechetical programs prepare people of all ages and generations to understand the meaning of Church events and participate more actively in the life of the Church. If parishioners are not prepared to participate in the events of Church life, they cannot learn through their participation. The key is to unlock the power of these events through catechesis.

If the Church itself is the curriculum, then the events of Church life are learning experiences. To uncover the curriculum already present in the life of the faith community, we need only look to the communal events which shape the life of our parish community and embody the story, the beliefs, and the practices of the Catholic faith. In *Educating Congregations*, Charles Foster describes the significance and power of these communal events for faith formation.

The gospel originated in acts of God experienced as events by communities of people. Robert MacAfee Brown has observed that all discussions of faith have some relationship to certain events in the past....Something happened long ago in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that transformed perspectives, commitments, and ways of living among a small band of people in a small Mediterranean country. The stories of that event have gathered people into its possibilities for centuries, shaping and transforming their lives and culminating in communities of memory and transformation.

Subsequent events...(in the history of the Church)...refine and particularize the meaning of the incarnation in our times and places. Events in our congregations and local communities further refine and refocus our faith experience.

Our relationship to these communal events has an educative character. If they are to become important to us, we must be familiar with them. If we are to participate in them, we must learn how to do so. If we are to be agents of their meanings, we must develop sensibilities for the roles and responsibilities need-

ed to fulfill that task. As we try to understand these events we begin to link ideas and actions, to discover new possibilities for living. As these events become increasingly important to us, we find ourselves developing skills to interpret other experiences through their categories and concepts. As we encounter their limits to be gospel in our ever-changing situation, we find ourselves searching underneath and from the margins of their interpretation for new insights. In these activities certain events begin to inform our consciousness, and we find ourselves living increasingly into their meanings and out of their possibilities.

We begin to identify with them. We take on their character....We discover ourselves in a community of people identified with that event. We begin to see the world through the perspective of the community originating in and shaped by that event....These events not only tell us who we are, but also to whom we belong. They provide us with clues about how we are to relate to others and to participate in the world around us.

We can discern five distinct patterns of events in the life of the parish community, around which we can fashion a curriculum. These patterns are present in every community, and they are remarkably predictable from year to year. (Look back at the parish calendar over the past several years to determine the patterns.) They provide the clearest and most consistent structure for the education of a parish community as well as a regular ordering of Church life.

- *Church year.* The pattern of the parish's celebration of the seasons and feasts of the Church year provides a variety of events around which one may build Church-centered faith formation.
- *Sacraments and life-cycle rituals.* The celebrations of the sacraments throughout the year provide a second source for an events-centered approach. Life-cycle rituals, such as funerals, birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations, also have an educative power.
- *Prayer and spirituality.* The Church's prayer practices (e.g., the rosary, the Stations of the Cross), spiritual traditions (e.g., mysticism, contemplation), and devotions (e.g., Eucharistic adoration) provide a third source for an events-centered approach.
- *Justice and service.* The Church's work of justice and acts of service, locally and globally, provide a fourth set of events around which to build faith formation.
- *Community life.* The Church's community life—seasonal and ethnic festivals, social events, dinners, parish anniversaries, and other settings where the community gathers—provide a fifth set of events.

## **Practice 2: Lifelong and Systematic Catechesis**

Faith formation is *systematic, cyclic, episodic, and continuous*. It is formed around the natural rhythm and pattern of the faith community's life as experienced throughout the year. The events of Church life form a spiral curriculum (think Church year) that immerses people more deeply each year into the faith of the Church. The events of Church life are so theologically rich that it will take years to immerse people in their meaning and practice (think of the theological themes embedded in Lent). Our catechetical task is to continually deepen their understanding and practice.

Fashioned around the life of the Church, the Generations of Faith curriculum provides a multi-year plan of events that continues to spiral more deeply into Church events on a regular basis (every six years). A multi-year curriculum plan outlines the scope (content) and sequence (timing) of your lifelong curriculum.

This lifelong curriculum of Church events systematically and comprehensively presents the Gospel message and Catholic tradition through six major content areas: Church year feasts and seasons, sacraments, justice and service, morality, prayer and spirituality, and the Creed (see GDC #84–87, 97–115.). The *General Directory for Catechesis* (#115) identifies the significance of these major aspects and dimensions of the Christian message for catechesis.

- *Church year feasts and seasons.* “The history of salvation, recounting the ‘marvels of God’ (*mirabilia Dei*), what He has done, continues to do and will do in the future for us, is organized in reference to Jesus Christ, the ‘center of salvation history’ (DCG [1971] 43).” (GDC #115) (See also GDC #85, 97–98, 101–102, 105, 108.)
- *Sacraments.* “The sacraments, which, like regenerating forces, spring from the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, are also a whole. They form ‘an organic whole in which each particular sacrament has its own vital place’ (CCC 1211). In this whole, the Holy Eucharist occupies a unique place to which all of the other sacraments are ordained. The Eucharist is to be presented as the ‘sacrament of sacraments’ (*ibidem*).” (GDC #115) (See also GDC #85, 108.)
- *Justice and service.* “Jesus, in announcing the Kingdom, proclaims the justice of God: he proclaims God’s judgment and our responsibility. ...The call to conversion and belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom—a Kingdom of justice, love and peace, and in whose light we shall be judged—is fundamental for catechesis.” (GDC #102) (See also GDC #86, 102–104, 108.)
- *Prayer and spirituality.* “The Our Father gathers up the essence of the Gospel. It synthesizes and hierarchically structures the immense riches of prayer contained in Sacred Scripture and in all of the Church’s life.” (GDC #115) (See also GDC #85, 108.)
- *Creed.* “The Apostles’ Creed demonstrates how the Church has always desired to present the Christian mystery in a vital synthesis. This Creed is a synthesis of and a key to reading all of the Church’s doctrine, which is hierarchically ordered around it.<sup>3</sup>” (GDC #115) (See also GDC #85, 99–100, 108.)

3. St. Cyril of Jerusalem affirms with regard to the Creed: “This synthesis of faith was not made to accord with human opinions but rather what was of the greatest importance was gathered from all the Scriptures, to present the one teaching of the faith in its entirety. And just as a mustard seed contains a great number of branches in a tiny grain, so too the summary of faith encompassed in a few words the whole knowledge of the true religion contained in the Old and New Testaments.”

- *Morality.* “The double commandment of love of God and neighbor is—in the moral message—a hierarchy of values which Jesus himself established. ‘On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets’ (Mt 22:40). The love of God and neighbor, which sum up the Decalogue, are lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes and constitute the *magna carta* of the Christian life proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>4</sup>” (GDC #115) (See also GDC #85, 97, 104, 108.)

4. St. Augustine presents the Sermon on the Mount as “the perfect charter of the Christian life and contains all the appropriate precepts necessary to guide it” (*De Sermone Domini in Monte I*, 1; *Patrologiae Cursus completus, Series Latina* 34, 1229–1231); cf. EN 8.

### Practice 3: Emergent Catechetical Content

Faith formation is *emergent*. The beliefs and practices for living as a Catholic today emerge from the life, events, and practices of the faith community. Our catechetical task is to uncover the theological and doctrinal message within each event and shape the curriculum accordingly.

The content that emerges from a multi-year, events-centered curriculum provides the foundations of the Catholic faith. Consider the themes embedded in Lent: baptism, salvation, sin and repentance, conversion, cross, Jesus Christ (Messiah and suffering servant), justice, moral life, paschal mystery, and the three lenten practices (fasting, praying, and almsgiving). A cyclic curriculum moves through these themes over multiple years, immersing people more deeply into the lenten experience. While every event in the Church year is not as rich in content as Lent, each event brings its own particular aspect of the foundations of the Catholic faith to the process.

The beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith are not abstractions, but integrated into the life and events of our faith communities. These beliefs and practices emerge from the event, rather than being imposed on it. For example:

- To identify the content in a Church year season (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter), we explore the lectionary readings for the season, the liturgies and rituals, the key symbols for the Sundays, and major celebrations within the season.
- To discover the content in a sacramental celebration, we explore the Rite or order of service, the introduction to the Rite (the theological foundation), the lectionary readings, symbols, prayer texts, and ritual actions.
- To discover the content in a justice or service event, we explore the focus and design of the project, the social issues being addressed and their impact on people, the causes of the situation, the reason for addressing the situation, the audience being served, and the specific actions of those who are working for justice or serving those in need.
- To discover the content in prayer and spirituality events, we explore the history of the event or spiritual tradition, the prayer practices in the event, connection to a saint or Church tradition, and order of service.

#### **Practice 4: Connected Catechesis: Prepare, Engage, Reflect/Apply**

Faith formation *prepares* people of all ages and all generations for meaningful participation in Church events through intergenerational learning, *engages* all ages and generations in Church events, and guides them in *reflecting on* and *applying* the significance and meaning of the events to their lives as Catholics. It is *connected catechesis*: the catechetical program leads directly to participation in Church life. Learning programs draw their content from Church events and lead people toward active, conscious, meaningful participation in Church events. The event is the centerpiece of the learning process.



*Preparation* empowers people to participate meaningfully in the Church event, engaging them in its dynamic and providing the activities and resources that help people participate fully in the event. Preparation programs and activities are designed to help people of all ages and generations develop:

- *know-what*, that is, an understanding of the meaning of the event and its scriptural, doctrinal, and theological foundation;
- *know-why*, the ability to appreciate and value the meaning and significance of the event for their lives;
- *know-how*, the ability to participate competently in the event and then live out its meaning and significance.

The second movement in the events-centered methodology involves our *engagement* in the event. Events are at the heart of the learning process. By actively participating in the event, people transform their lives and they learn.

The events-centered methodology comes full circle with *reflection* on the meanings people draw from their engagement with the event, using the structure of the event and the preparation content and activities as guides. It also includes *application* of the learning to one's life as a Catholic today. Reflection and application activities and strategies are often packaged in kits for use by individuals and families at home.

Reflection helps people to

- *share* their experience of the event (storytelling);
- *assess* the significance or meaning they draw from their engagement in the event and connect it to the Scriptures and Catholic tradition (theological reflection);
- *apply* the meaning (beliefs, practices) to their daily lives (transfer of learning);
- *report* or “publish” their learning for others in the parish community (feedback).

## **Practice 5: Intergenerational Catechesis**

Faith formation is *intergenerational*. It provides events-centered catechetical programs for all ages and generations in the parish community. The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us, “...it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it” (GDC #168). Intergenerational learning provides an opportunity to gather the whole parish to learn, pray, celebrate, and share. It has tremendous benefits for the parish and for individuals. Intergenerational learning

- builds community and meaningful relationships across all the generations in a parish;
- provides a setting for each generation to share and learn from the other generations;
- provides an environment where new ways of living one's faith can be practiced;
- provides adult role models for children and youth;
- promotes understanding of shared values and a common faith, as well as respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life;
- helps to overcome the age-segregated nature of our society and Church programs.

## **Practice 6: Alignment of Catechesis for All Ages**

Faith formation provides *alignment* of learning through common events and themes that are experienced and explored by all ages and all generations in the faith community. The key in events-centered learning is that the whole parish is focused. Everyone prepares for the same event with the same theological focus, creating parish-wide synergy.

All too often, parish faith formation provides little generational convergence. In the schooling and programmatic approaches, different age groups or interest groups study topics appropriate to their age or group. Scope and sequence charts and curriculum guidelines do a fine job of describing the unique content for each age group in childhood and adolescent catechesis, but do little to indicate points of convergence. Most of the time, people are learning in parallel tracks. Family members rarely explore the same theme at the same time, minimizing opportunities for mutual sharing and activities. As a result, little of what is learned gets put into practice.

The Generations of Faith approach provides a support system for learning in the parish and at home by focusing on common events and themes that engage the whole parish community. The fundamental unity of the parish and of faith formation is strengthened by establishing common events and themes that are explored by all members of the community at home and through parish faith formation programs. Establishing a common event or theme, which members of the congregation explore at their appropriate level, makes cross-generational conversations more feasible and potent in the parish and at home.

## **Practice 7: Home Faith Formation**

Faith formation is *empowering*. Empowering and enabling individuals and families to live their faith at home and in the world is constitutive of lifelong faith formation. The lifelong, events-centered approach of common events and themes provides a focus and support structure to build a partnership between the home and parish. It overcomes the isolation many families and individuals feel when asked to engage in home-based activities and faith-sharing. The parish-wide support structure enhances faith sharing at home because everyone is doing it. In time, the household becomes a community of learning and practice.

What the *General Directory for Catechesis* says about families can be applied to all households of faith throughout the life cycle—the new couple, families with children and teens, families with young adults, single adults, families in later life—and to all configurations of family relationships such as two-parent, single-parent, and multi-generational families.

...The family is defined as a “domestic Church” (cf. LG 11; cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 11; *Familiaris Consortio* [FC] 49), 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” (EN 71). The family as a *locus* of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 52, FC 37a)...It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily that structured into periods. (#255)

Lifelong faith formation provides individuals and families with the resources and tools they need to *extend* and *expand* their learning from a parish catechetical program and their experience of a Church event to their daily lives and home life. It provides event-specific home materials to help families and individuals celebrate traditions and rituals, continue their learning, pray together, serve others and work for justice, and enrich their relationships and family life.

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## ► Appendix

### **The Six Interrelated Tasks of Catechesis from the General Directory for Catechesis #85**

#### **Promoting knowledge of the faith**

Who has encountered Christ desires to know him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father which he revealed. Knowledge of the faith (*fides quae*) is required by adherence to the faith (*fides qua*) (cf. DCG [1971] 36a). Even in the human order the love which one person has for another causes that person to wish to know the other all the more. Catechesis, must, therefore, lead to the “gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan,” (cf. DCG [1971] 24) by introducing the disciples of Jesus to a knowledge of Tradition and of Scripture, which is “*the sublime science of Christ*” (DV 25a). By deepening knowledge of the faith, catechesis nourishes not only the life of faith but equips it to explain itself to the world. The meaning of the Creed, which is a compendium of Scripture and of the faith of the Church, is the realization of this task.

#### **Liturgical education**

Christ is always present in his Church, especially in “liturgical celebrations” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC] 7). Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy (cf. SC 14) and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. For this reason, catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ “for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds...” (DCG [1971] 25b), as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life.

#### **Moral formation**

Conversion to Jesus Christ implies walking in his footsteps. Catechesis must, therefore, transmit to the disciples the attitudes of the Master himself. The disciples thus undertake a journey of interior transformation, in which, by participating in the paschal mystery of the Lord, “they pass from the old man to the new man who has been made perfect in Christ” (AG 13). The Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus takes up the Decalogue, and impresses upon it the spirit of the beatitudes,<sup>5</sup> is an indispensable point of reference for the moral formation which is most necessary today. Evangelization which “involves the proclamation and presentation of morality” (*Veritatis Splendor* 107), displays all the force of its appeal where it offers not only the proclaimed word but the lived word too. This moral testimony, which is prepared for by catechesis, must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel (cf. CT 29f).

5. Cf. LG 62; CCC 1965-1986. The CCC 1697 specifies in particular the characteristics which catechesis must assume in moral formation.

## Teaching to pray

Communion with Jesus Christ leads the disciples to assume the attitude of prayer and contemplation which the Master himself had. To learn to pray with Jesus is to pray with the same sentiments with which he turned to the Father: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication and awe for his glory. All of these sentiments are reflected in the *Our Father*, the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples and which is the model of all Christian prayer. The “*handing on of the Our Father*” (RCIA 25 and 188-191) is a summary of the entire Gospel (cf. CCC 2761) and is therefore a true act of catechesis. When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit....

## Other fundamental tasks of catechesis: initiation and education in community life and to mission (GDC #86)

Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church....

### Education for community life

a) Christian community life is not realized spontaneously. It is necessary to educate it carefully. In this apprenticeship, the teaching of Christ on community life, recounted in the Gospel of St. Matthew, calls for attitudes which it is for catechesis to inculcate: the spirit of simplicity and humility...; solicitude for the least among the brethren...; particular care for those who are alienated...; fraternal correction...; common prayer...; mutual forgiveness....Fraternal love embraces all these attitudes....

### Missionary initiation

a) Catechesis is also open to the missionary dimension (cf. CT 24b and DCG [1971] 28). This seeks to equip the disciples of Jesus to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives....The evangelical attitudes which Jesus taught his disciples when he sent them on mission are precisely those which catechesis must nourish: to seek out the lost sheep, proclaim and heal at the same time, to be poor, without money or knapsack; to know how to accept rejection and persecution; to place one's trust in the Father and in the support of the Holy Spirit; to expect no other reward than the joy of working for the Kingdom (cf. Mt 10:5-42 and Lk 10:1-20).

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# Generations of Faith Orientation Workshop

**Preparation** This orientation workshop is designed to be used in conjunction with the Generations of Faith video, “Introducing Generations of Faith” (available by calling the Center for Ministry Development at 203-723-1622). The video is organized into three parts:

- Part 1. Introducing Generations of Faith: Six Principles and Practices
- Part 2. A Story of Holy Week: A Walk through a Preparation Program
- Part 3. Parish Interviews with Parents, Pastors, Parish Staff, and Diocesan Staff

There are a variety of ways to use the video. Here are three examples.

- Use the video with parish leadership committees and parents to introduce the key principles of Generations of Faith and to show how other parishes are implementing the program.
- Use the video as part of an orientation program for your catechists and leaders who are working in preparation programs.
- Use the video as part of a workshop or training program for new members of your Generations of Faith core team.

**Purpose** To introduce parish leaders and leadership groups to the essential vision and features of the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation

## Supplies and Equipment

- “Generations of Faith Vision and Practices” essay
- copies of the worksheet with reflection questions
- “Introducing Generations of Faith” video
- VCR and projector or TV
- newsprint, markers, and masking tape
- pens
- CD player and reflective music

**Session Length:** 45–60 minutes

## Conducting the Session

1. Welcome the participants. If introductions are needed, take a few minutes to introduce yourself and participants introduce themselves to the group.
2. Read the opening prayer:  
*Loving God, bless us with your Spirit, that we might clearly see the path and means for faith formation in our community. Help us to help our community to celebrate the gift of your son Jesus, and to lead one another into intimate communion with him. Amen.*
3. Describe the shifts toward a new approach to faith formation using the essay “Generations of Faith: Vision and Practices.”
4. Introduce the vision of Generations of Faith by reading aloud the following quote:

Generations of Faith provides an integrated and comprehensive approach to faith formation that equips the parish community to become a community of learning by creating lifelong faith formation that is centered in the events of Church life, that embraces all ages and generations, and that promotes faith growth at home, through parish preparation programs, and, most importantly, through participation in Church life.

5. Show Parts 1 and 2 of the video, which presents six of the seven practices that guide the development of a Generations of Faith parish community. (Intergenerational catechesis has now been singled out as a practice, but it is not included in the video program.)
  - events-centered
  - lifelong and cyclic
  - emergent content
  - prepare-engage-reflect/apply process of learning
  - alignment of learning
  - home faith formation
6. Introduce the seventh practice and review the practices, using the essay. Invite questions and observations from the group.
7. Distribute the worksheet and ask the participants to respond in writing to the questions.
8. Invite the participants to share their reflections. Record and discuss their responses. *Option:* Show Part 3 of the video, which includes interviews from Generations of Faith parishes. Conclude with reflections and insights from the participants.
9. Conclude in prayer, using the following quote from the *General Directory for Catechesis* and/or the Gospel reading:

...Hence, when catechesis transmits the mystery of Christ, the faith of the whole people of God echoes in its message through the course of history: the faith received by the Apostles from Christ himself and under the action of the Holy Spirit; that of the martyrs who have borne witness to it and still bear witness to it by their blood; that of the saints who have lived it and live it profoundly; that of the Fathers and doctors of the Church who have taught it brilliantly; that of the missionaries who proclaim it incessantly; that of theologians who help to understand it better; that of pastors who conserve it with zeal and love and who interpret it authentically. In truth, there is present in catechesis the faith of all those who believe and allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. (GDC #105)

### **A reading from the Gospel of Matthew 13:31–32:**

Jesus put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

### **Let us pray . . .**

*God of knowledge, wisdom, and learning, increase our determination to enrich the world with the gift of your Good News. May we celebrate your presence in our midst and be empowered to continue to plant and nurture the seeds of faith in one another and all those whom we are called to catechize. Amen.*

## Our Hopes and Dreams for Faith Formation

What are the benefits of the Generations of Faith approach? What do you hope the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation will do for the parish: for all its members, the families, the young, the old, etc.? What fruits do you hope it will bear?

What image, if any, comes to mind for you when you think of this approach? What Scripture passages, if any, surface for you?

What would it be like (or look like) if our parish implemented the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation? Concretely, what ideas do you have about what it will look like? What are the different ways that the Generations of Faith approach could be implemented in your community?

# Generations of Faith Vision and Practice

## Lifelong, Intergenerational, Events-centered Faith Formation

For over thirty years the Catholic Church has offered a comprehensive and compelling vision of faith formation and learning—lifelong, for all ages and generations, rooted in the life of the Church. Yet catechesis across the United States and Canada is still struggling under the burden of an outdated model of faith formation that is actually creating more problems than it is solving. Embracing the vision of faith formation in the *General Directory for Catechesis* requires moving away from the schooling paradigm to a community or “whole church” paradigm of faith formation.

- We will transform the focus on children-only (think of all the time, energy, resources we still commit to children only) by implementing lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, including and especially adults.
- We will transform “start and stop” catechesis (think graduation at confirmation; think preparation for sacraments) by implementing lifelong and continuous faith formation—learning for a lifetime through involvement in the events of church life.
- We will transform age segregation (think grade levels or groups—youth group, older adults group) by implementing intergenerational faith formation—making connections among the generations in learning programs and parish involvement.
- We will transform the focus on the “textbook as the curriculum” by utilizing the events of Church life as the curriculum for all ages and generation—tapping into the educative and transformative power of the Church year, sacramental celebrations, community prayer, and works of justice and service, and providing catechesis that prepares everyone to learning by participating in the events of Church life.
- We will transform the attitude of blaming families for our current situation—the “family’s faith is the problem”—by nurturing family faith at home as integral to faith formation.
- We will transform catechesis as a separate “program” by implementing a more collaborative and integrated approach that involves all of the parish’s ministries in faith formation. Catechesis is interconnected with liturgy, sacraments, the Church year, justice and service, prayer.

### The Church as Learning Community

This is a vision of the entire faith community as a learning community—a congregation of learners. This vision is echoed in the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act. The true subject of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and, therefore animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith... (#78)

Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it, and communicates it in many ways. (#105)

In giving attention to the individual, it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it. (#168)

Catechetical pedagogy will be effective to the extent that the Christian community becomes a point of concrete reference for the faith journey of individuals. This happens when the community is proposed as a source, locus, and means of catechesis. Concretely, the community becomes a visible place of faith-witness. It provides for the formation of its members. ...It constitutes itself as the living and permanent environment for growth in faith. (#158)

To become more fully a learning community, parishes are implementing a new approach to faith formation. Generations of Faith provides

an integrated and comprehensive approach to faith formation that equips the parish community to become a community of learning by creating lifelong faith formation that is centered in the events of church life, embraces all ages and generations, and promotes faith growth at home, through parish preparation programs, and, most importantly, through participation in Church life. This approach has seven defining features—key principles and practices—that guide the development of faith formation in a parish community.

### Seven Key Practices

1. **Events-Centered Catechesis.** The lifelong curriculum and learning experiences are developed around the events of our shared life as Church: the Church year, sacraments and liturgy, prayer and spirituality, justice and service, community life, and proclamation of the Word. These events hold tremendous educative and transformative power. The key is to unlock their power through catechesis. Far too many of our parishioners are not prepared to participate in the events of church life and, therefore, do not learn through their participation.
2. **Lifelong and Systematic Catechesis.** Faith formation is cyclic, episodic, continuous and lifelong. It is formed around the natural rhythm and pattern of the faith community's life as experienced throughout the year. The events of church life form a spiral curriculum (think church year) that immerses people more deeply each year into the faith of the Church. The events of Church life are so theologically rich that it will take years to immerse people in their meaning and practice (think of the theological themes embedded in Lent). Our catechetical task is to continually deepen their understanding and practice.
3. **Emergent Catechetical Content.** The beliefs and practices for living as a Catholic today emerge from the life, events, and practices of the faith community. The beliefs and practices for living the Catholic faith are embedded in the events of church life. Our catechetical task is to uncover the theological
- and doctrinal message within the event. Consider the themes in Lent: baptism, salvation, sin and repentance, conversion, cross, Jesus Christ (messiah and suffering servant), justice, moral life, paschal mystery, and the three lenten practices (fasting, praying, almsgiving). A cyclic curriculum moves through these themes over multiple years—immersing people more deeply into the lenten experience. While every event is not as rich as Lent, the content that emerges from a multi-year, events-centered curriculum provides the foundations or essentials of the Catholic faith.
4. **Connected Catechesis.** Faith formation is a cyclic process of learning: preparing all ages and all generations for meaningful participation in church events, engaging all ages and generations in the events, and assisting people in reflecting on the significance and meaning of the event and applying the learning to their lives as Catholics. Events-centered catechesis seeks to help the learner develop:
  - know-what*: understanding the meaning of the event and its Scriptural, doctrinal, and theological foundation
  - know-why*: appreciating and valuing the meaning and significance of the event for their lives as Catholics
  - know-how*: acquiring the ability to participate competently in the event and to live its meaning in their lives as Catholics.

When people are prepared for an event they feel confident, comfortable, and competent to participate. This approach draws people into participating in the events of church life.

Parishes are using a variety of learning models in their preparation programs. Some use age-group learning models, such as classes, workshops, retreats, faith sharing groups; while others use multi-age learning models such as family learning where the whole family comes together for learning and intergenerational learning where people of all ages from children through older adults learn together.
5. **Intergenerational Catechesis.** Faith forma-

tion provides events-centered, intergenerational catechetical programs for all ages and generations in the parish community. The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us, "...it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it" (GDC #168) Intergenerational learning provides an opportunity to gather the whole parish to learn, pray, celebrate, and share. It has tremendous benefits for the parish and for individuals.

6. **Alignment of Catechesis for All Ages.** Faith formation provides alignment of learning through common events and themes that are experienced and explored by all ages and all generations in the faith community. The key in events-centered learning is that the whole parish is focused—everyone is preparing for the same event with the same theological focus. This attention to alignment and focus creates parish-wide synergy.
7. **Home Faith Formation.** Faith Formation integrates home and parish into a comprehensive model of faith formation. Empowering and equipping individuals and families to live their faith at home and in the world is constitutive of this approach to faith formation. Our catechetical task is to provide individuals and families with the resources and tools they need to extend and expand their learning from a preparation program and their experience of the event to their lives and home. We create event-specific home materials that help families and individuals celebrate traditions and rituals, continue their learning, pray together, serve others and work for justice, and enrich their relationships and family life. Attention to home resources and tools is as important as the parish preparation program.

### A Parish Story

***Imagine a parish that is embracing this vision of faith formation and preparing the entire faith community for Lent:***

Lent is coming and the entire community of Holy Family Parish is preparing to immerse themselves in the lenten season through

liturgy and prayer (Ash Wednesday, the Sunday liturgies, Holy Week, Stations of the Cross), justice and service (food and clothing collection, Operation Rice Bowl), and community life activities (Lenten meals)—in the parish and at home.

The Holy Family catechetical ministry has designed a variety of ways to prepare all of the generations for their participation in the lenten season. Their goal is to prepare everyone in the parish community for Lent focusing on the theme for the year: "The Three Practices of Lent: Fasting, Praying, and Almsgiving." Preparation programs guide people of all ages to understand the meaning of Lent and the three practices, to appreciate the significance of Lent and the three practices in our Catholic tradition, to participate actively in the lenten season, and to live the three practices at home and in the world. When people are prepared for an event they feel confident, comfortable, and competent to participate in the events of church life.

The lenten lectionary readings will be a primary resource for preparation. The music director has selected special lenten songs, one for each week of Lent, that express musically the lenten theme. These songs will be used in parish programs and at Sunday worship.

The week before Ash Wednesday, on a Wednesday night, Friday night, or Saturday morning, all ages—from families with children through older adults—arrive at the parish center for a light dinner or continental breakfast, followed by the feature activity—learning how to live the three practices of fasting, praying, and almsgiving. The program moves through several stages of activities:

- Everyone gathers together for a meal—a great time to build community.
- The program begins with prayer and song inspired by the lenten season and the three practices.
- An all-ages opening experience introduces everyone to the focus of preparation—the three practices of Lent.
- The in-depth learning component of the program helps everyone to explore the meaning of the event through age-appropriate learning groups. Families with chil-

dren explore the lenten practices through three activity centers—praying, fasting, and almsgiving/service. The adolescents explore the lenten practices and create contemporary ways to live the three practices today. A guest speaker presents an overview of the lenten lectionary and a contemporary interpretation of the lenten practices for adults.

- The entire group gathers again to share their learning from the in-depth sessions.
- One of the leaders reviews how to use the Lenten Home Kit which provides resources for families and individuals to experience Lent at home: a lenten calendar with daily activities and Scripture passages; a lenten journal for teens with daily readings, prayers, and activities; a daily lenten prayer guide for adults; placemats with weekly table prayers; suggested local service projects and Operation Rice Bowl; several learning activities on lenten themes; and a copy of the parish's lenten calendar.
- In family groupings and adult groupings, everyone develops a Lenten Pledge to live the three practices at home and in the world.
- The program closes in prayer and song.

Young adults—those at home, in college or in the military—receive, via e-mail, a special Lenten Journal with a daily lectionary reading, a reflection written by young adults, and a prayer. All of the adult faith sharing groups in the parish dedicate a session to the “Three Practices of Lent” by exploring the meaning of Lent and reflecting on the lenten lectionary readings. Each participant receives a booklet of daily lenten reflections to guide their journey through the season. All of the parish committees and councils that meet prior to or at the beginning of Lent open their meetings with a special prayer service on the Lenten theme. All of the adult participants receive a Lenten Home Kit and a copy of the parish's lenten calendar.

In addition to the Lenten Home Kit, the parish's web site, Holy Family On-Line, features the parish lenten calendar, prayers and reflections for all ages on the Lenten Scripture readings, and the entire Lenten Home Kit. A special

bulletin insert for each week of Lent is distributed at all of the Masses.

Wherever you go in the Holy Family community people of all ages and generations are united in a common endeavor: to prepare for Lent, to experience Lent fully at home and in the parish, and to integrate their learning into their daily lives as Catholics.

Faith formation at Holy Family Parish is in the midst of a transformation. They are moving toward a curriculum that is centered on the formative events of the Church community and the participation of all ages and generations in the shared experiences of Church life. Holy Family Parish has embraced the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation.

### Parish Examples

Parishes are utilizing a variety of ways to implement the vision of events-centered, lifelong, intergenerational faith formation. The key is creating a curriculum plan that reflects the character and culture of the parish—its size, cultures, languages, geography. Here are several examples of how parishes have taken this vision and implemented it around the particular character and culture of their parish.

Many parishes utilize the events-centered curriculum as the primary curriculum for all ages and generations. They have dramatically reduced their reliance on age-group catechesis and moved to intergenerational catechesis with preparation programs (usually monthly) that address the learning needs of children, adolescents, young adults, adults, and families in one learning model. Learning is both intergenerational and age-appropriate. Intergenerational learning models are usually held monthly or within close proximity to the event, require an extended timeframe, usually 2 1/2–3 hours, and are offered multiple times to attract a wide audience and make it easy to participate. For example parishes may offer programs on Wednesday from 6:00–9:00 PM, Friday from 6:00–9:00 PM and Saturday from 9:00–12:00 noon. Some even connect the preparation program to the Sunday liturgies, for example from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM following the 9:00 AM Mass. Essential to events-centered preparation is the home kit of resources and tools for learning and living at home.

These “primary” parishes incorporate eight to eleven events per year in their curriculum. For example. Here is a one-year plan for sacraments:

1. Feast of All Souls: Rite of Funerals (October Preparation)
2. Parish Celebration: Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (November Preparation)
3. Advent Season: Sacrament of Reconciliation (December Preparation)
4. Vocations Week/Call of the Disciples: Sacrament of Orders (January Preparation)
5. World Marriage Day: Sacrament of Marriage (February Preparation)
6. Lent: Sacrament of Baptism (March Preparation)
7. Holy Thursday: Sacrament of Eucharist (April Preparation)
8. Pentecost: Sacrament of Confirmation (May Preparation)

Many parishes utilize the events-centered curriculum as their lifelong curriculum for all ages and generations while maintaining their age-group catechesis, which might be lectionary based, textbook based, or program based. They blend age-group catechesis (often weekly) with events-centered catechesis on a monthly or seasonal basis, adjusting the number of sessions of age-group catechesis to incorporate events-centered preparation programs. Many parishes utilize intergenerational learning models in their events-centered preparation. Once again, essential to events-centered preparation is the home kit of resources and tools for learning and living at home.

There are wide variety of ways that parishes blend the two approaches (age-group catechesis and lifelong, events-centered catechesis). For example, one parish that has created a lifelong curriculum with eight events each year, integrates one or two preparation sessions for these events into their existing educational programs: weekly children’s program, bi-weekly middle school program, bi-weekly high school program, weekly RCIA program, monthly adult education program, etc. Even meetings of parish organizations, committees, and councils all begin with a prayer service and Scripture reading on the

theme of the event of the month.

A second parish that has created a lifelong curriculum with ten events each year, conducts a monthly, intergenerational, events-centered preparation program that they offer several times on the first week of the month. During the remaining weeks of the month they offer their age-specific catechetical program. Usually they “cancel” age group classes during the week of the actual event to highlight the importance of participating in the event.

A third parish that has blended age-group catechesis or events-centered catechesis uses a modular approach throughout the year. They utilize intergenerational learning during preparation weeks for the event. These preparation weeks take place one week before the event or the start of the season.

Here is an example of an annual plan of Church year feasts and seasons:

- September–October: 4–6 week unit of age-specific programming
- October–November: All Saints unit: preparation week, All Saints liturgy
- November: Thanksgiving unit: preparation week, service projects, Thanksgiving liturgy
- December: Advent-Christmas unit: preparation week, Advent-Christmas season (liturgies, prayer services, service projects, sacrament of Reconciliation, etc.)
- January–February: 4–6 week unit of age-specific programming
- February: Lent unit: preparation week, lenten season (liturgies, Stations of the Cross, service projects, simple meals, sacrament of Reconciliation, etc.)
- March: Holy Thursday unit: preparation week, Holy Thursday liturgy
- April–May: 4–6 week unit of age-specific programming
- May: Pentecost unit: preparation week, Pentecost liturgy

These are just several examples of the innovation which is taking place in catechesis today. We are at the beginning of an exciting new phase in the development of catechetical ministry—lifelong, events-centered, intergenerational. We are finally making the Church’s vision of catechesis a reality.