

Christian Formation News

The background for CHANGE – “Whole Community Catechesis”

The staff and volunteers of Christian Formation have been researching, praying, surveying, discerning, evaluating, praying some more and finally making a move to change how we help to form all of those in our midst in the Catholic faith. As Mahatma Gandhi once stated, “*we must become the change we want to see*” – we want to help our community embark on a journey of faith that is welcoming, inclusive and supportive of our lives as Catholic Christians. This new journey has long been described as “***Whole Community Catechesis***” or ***WCC***. Although there are many models of WCC in practice around the United States, one can generally say that this term refers to a movement toward catechesis that involves the entire parish community in lifelong faith formation and that necessitates the coordination and collaboration of catechetical and liturgical ministries.

Because any type of change may be frightening, we hope to provide everyone in our parish with some information and tools to help ease us all into a new journey of Whole Community Catechesis. As King Whitney, Jr. once stated in the business world, “*Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better.*” Our parish staff, as well as key Christian Formation ministry volunteers, hope to enable everyone to ultimately become confident as we share further news with you in this website, through the bulletin and flyers, and through the upcoming sessions we have scheduled for November 2006 and January 2007. Along those same lines, we wish to share with you the background information from the Catholic Church in regard to WCC:

The Origins of Whole Community Catechesis

The following factors have led to the development of whole community catechesis:

- Influence of several important documents that have been issued during the past three decades. These include:
 - ***Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975)***, an encyclical by Pope Paul VI that outlines the principles and model of evangelization. Catechesis is described as a “moment in the process of evangelization.”
 - ***Catechesi Tradendae (1979)***, an encyclical by Pope John Paul II that looks specifically at the nature and methods of catechesis. In this document, Pope John Paul II acknowledges that many baptized children and adults lack the requisite “pre-catechesis” necessary for catechesis to be effective.
 - ***Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (1988)***. Several generations of parish leaders have been formed by their experience with the Rite of Christian Initiation.

- ***Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCB 1997)***, in which the bishops, for the first time, specifically refer to comprehensive youth ministry as being “intergenerational” and involving “community-wide collaboration.”
 - ***General Directory for Catechesis (1997)***, out of which two key principles are drawn: First, that **adult catechesis is the “axis” around which catechesis for all others revolve. Second, that “catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community.”** This document is so foundational to the concept of whole community catechesis that it is singled out as a separate influence.
 - ***Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States (NCCB/USCC 1999)***, in which the bishops admit that “...despite the consistency and clarity of this message [the priority given to adult catechesis by the GDC], the Catholic community has not yet fully heard and embraced it. While most Catholic parishes place a high priority on the faith formation of children and youth, far fewer treat adult faith formation as a priority. This choice is made in parish staffing decisions, job descriptions, budgets, and parishioner expectations.” The document goes on to say that parishes must take a new, multifaceted approach to adult formation that integrates catechesis in all areas of parish life such as liturgy, family and home-centered activity, small and large groups and individual activities.
- Direction provided by the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), in particular, “The Christian community is the origin, locus, and goal of catechesis. Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community and invites [people] to conversion and the following of Christ.” (GDC, 254)

”Catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community...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...The Christian community follows the development of catechetical processes, for children, young people and adults, as a duty that involves and binds it directly.” (GDC, 220)

- An experience of the Rite of Christian Initiation as an inspiration for all catechesis. Many people in parishes have experienced the powerful and positive effects of the Rite of Christian Initiation on the entire community. Those aspects of the RCIA process that particularly resonate include the emphasis on evangelization, the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist, the importance of small group faith sharing and the necessary support of the entire parish.
- A sense that parish communities need to look at ways to coordinate their diverse catechetical programs and to provide a common focus. “These different programs of catechesis, each with its own socio-cultural variations, should not be organized separately as though they were ‘separate compartments without any communication between them.’ It is necessary that the catechesis offered by a particular Church be well coordinated. Among the diverse forms of catechesis ‘their perfect complementarity must be fostered.’ ” (GDC, 275)

The General Characteristics of Whole Community Catechesis

While there currently are several different versions of whole community catechesis, they share common characteristics:

- **Catechesis is a lifelong process that is situated within the process of evangelization.** There is a sense that the current catechetical model focuses primarily on children and sacramental preparation; that parents and most other adult members of the parish tend to be absent from this process; and that Confirmation marks a type of "graduation" from any kind of catechesis. Whole community catechesis stresses the need to evangelize all members of the faith community, young and old, and to promote **lifelong catechesis** through a variety of means. The emphasis on evangelization is rooted in reflection on the milestone encyclicals, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Catechesi Tradendae*.
- **The Sunday Eucharist is the font from which the catechesis of the entire community flows.** Taking their cue from the RCIA practice of "breaking open the Word", proponents of whole community catechesis propose that catechesis for all parishioners start with (but not be limited to) the weekly proclamation of the Word of God. Groups of various ages, intergenerational assemblies, and individual households, all would discuss the meaning of the scriptures read the previous Sunday. The homily would set the tone for these discussions to take place during the week. Proponents believe that the quality of homilies will improve and that attendance at the Eucharist will increase as people begin to make the connections between what they hear at Mass, their individual lives, and the shared life of the faith community.
- **Participation in lifelong formation in faith is viewed as central to Christian identity and to the identity of the parish.** Participation in the lifelong learning process with the faith community is not optional; it is one of those fundamental elements of the Christian life. Thus, catechesis is seen not so much as an array of optional parish programs, but rather is viewed as integral to all areas of parish life. This means that parish liturgy, events, meetings, classes (in fact the entire life cycle of the parish) are all evangelizing and catechizing moments. There may be special times set aside for classes or formal catechesis; however, these are not the sole or even primary vehicles for catechesis. A conscious and coordinated effort is made to promote learning and faith sharing wherever the faith community gathers.
- Whole community catechesis can only occur when collaboration and coordination of ministries is fostered. Whole community catechesis depends on the collaboration of leaders in key areas of parish life such as liturgy, Christian Initiation, adult faith formation, youth ministry, parish council and religious education for children. Not only do these leaders need to coordinate their respective ministries to reflect a common vision, they also need to work together to develop joint catechetical opportunities.

The Possible Implications of Whole Community Catechesis

There are several key implications for parish life and organization when whole community catechesis is implemented in an intentional manner. A few of these are:

- Parishes will begin to develop a new ecclesial vision. Under the guidance of the pastor, parish councils and staffs, a new manner of collaborative visioning and ministry will evolve. Individuals who have previously worked in compartmentalized and frequently isolated ministries will now develop a common catechetical plan and cooperate on its implementation. Depending on the individual parish, key people might include: the pastor, the parish council, catechetical leader, youth minister, liturgy director, RCIA coordinator, human concerns coordinator, adult faith formation coordinator and pastoral associates.
- All of the events and activities that make up the common life of the parish will be seen as catechizing moments. **Parishes will move away from an exclusively classroom based “schoolhouse” model of catechesis to a paradigm that uses the cyclical liturgical-sacramental, social and family life of the parish as the starting points for faith formation.** Parishes will have to provide resources for individuals and families to apply what they have learned from programs and experienced from events, to their lives at home, at school, at work and in the community.
- Currently used resources may not be sufficient to achieve the goals of whole community catechesis. Resources that can be used in an intergenerational context and that incorporate reflections on the weekly readings are the standard.
- The existing curriculum may have to be revised to reflect alignment of learning. One of the key principles of whole community catechesis is that everyone, regardless of age, will be learning about, reflecting on, and discussing the same theme at the same time. All of the essential theological themes will be addressed in a cycle that draws upon the life of the Church.
- The whole community catechesis paradigm will depend on well-formed and trained lay leadership. This new paradigm will rely on at least several trained leaders who meet basic theological and ministerial competencies. These individuals will need skills in coordinating all of the levels of learning that are involved. A subset of volunteers will need to be trained to lead various aspects of the model.

Finally, we want to thank you for your support of our community. Our new Whole Community Catechesis faith formation journey – Living In Faith Everyday (L.I.F.E.), will begin in May 2007. Once this journey begins, it will never end. L.I.F.E. sessions will be held all year long – once a month – in both English and Spanish for adults and in English for all children and youth. Included with this information are links to some additional important information:

- a list of items to review and participate in while L.I.F.E. continues to be planned and implemented and to continue after L.I.F.E. begins!
- a calendar of dates for REGISTRATION for L.I.F.E. as well as all L.I.F.E. sessions for the remainder of this year (2006-2007).

Our goals for the journey are simple... we want to accomplish what we mentioned above - we want to strengthen and support our households of faith and we want to continue to support the central identity of our Catholic faith – the mass. It is at mass that we are

nourished by both Word and Eucharist to be sent out into the world to live our lives as practicing Catholics. We want to foster the environment of lifelong learning for everyone in our parish. We want to live out the Gospel message in all that we do. As stated in Matthew 25, Jesus clearly gives us the blueprint for us to live such lives. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, house the homeless and free those imprisoned in darkness, in other words - be Jesus to others. Jesus also tells us that we are to forgive others as God forgives us. As community, we gather each Sunday for mass. It is here that we hear these words of God proclaimed, ask for forgiveness and together, come to the communion table to be fed. We then go out into the world of home, work, school, and community to love and serve God. These are the actions which make us faithful, practicing Catholics. L.I.F.E. will include all of this – mass, community prayer, Scripture, outreach and much more!

As American writer and lecturer, Gail Sheehy once wrote, *“If we don’t change, we don’t grow. If we don’t grow, we aren’t really living.”* We hope that you find this information regarding the history of Whole Community Catechesis, change, and the accompanying enclosures a source of light for our continued journey. Please know that it is with great courage and optimism that we are moving forward in this new direction. It has not happened overnight, nor has it evolved on a whim. We have been gathering information, attending workshops, asking many questions, and praying with our colleagues across the United States, and reviewing the documents of our Church for the past five years. We are now ready to begin this change in our community and we hope that you will begin to embrace it with us!

With the love and peace of Christ,

Eileen Brown

Eileen Brown,
eileenebrown@hotmail.com
275-7962 ext. 13

Angy Acosta

Angy Acosta, and
msangy76@hotmail.com
275-7962 ext. 17

Monica Cole

Monica Cole
mcole@comcast.net
275-7962 ext. 20