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Spiritual

Led by the Spirit

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

Catechists have a vocation. At first glance, that may seem to be an unremarkable statement. It is, however, full of meaning and implications, especially for the spiritual life of those who are catechists.

To have a vocation means "to have been called." It is the Lord who calls us to various forms of service, including catechetical ministry. The Church is the instrument that the Lord uses to communicate the call. The Church accompanies those who are called with encouragement and support and offers a clear communication of the demands and challenges of the call.

Consider for a moment the different calls, or vocations, that are evident in the Sacred Scriptures. They begin in the Book of Genesis when God calls man and woman to increase and multiply and to be stewards of creation. God summons men and women from Abraham and Sarah to Moses and the prophets to play a special part in the unfolding of Salvation History. The Annunciation contains Mary's call to represent all humanity in receiving the Savior into the world.

Vocations, or special callings, continue in the Church into our own day and into each of our lives. It is a splendid panorama of God's providential care summoning people to collaborate with his great work of bringing all things into one in Christ who will present all creation to the Father so that God may be all in all. We are a part of this great movement of Salvation History.

When God calls us to serve as catechists, as faithful communicators and teachers of faith, he does not simply leave us on our own. God pours his Holy Spirit upon us, the Spirit of wisdom and courage. Prompted by the Spirit we are able to move wisely, that is, aware of the "big picture," the larger design of God's plan for us in Christ. In that way, we are never lost in the details of the tasks—and they are many—that face us. The Spirit encourages us as well, especially in the face of difficult circumstances. When we confront human limitations and sin—our own as well as those of others—we are tempted to pull back. The Spirit gently nudges us forward.

In our own small way we are involved in the unfolding of God's plan for humanity.

Reflection

What should we do with these realities of vocation, of collaborating in the work of God, and of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit?

First and foremost, it is a matter of noticing and paying attention. It is very easy to be caught up in the tasks that are ahead of us. If we are, in any way, not entirely secure or sure about what we are doing, we tend to fret and become anxious—a state of mind and soul that consumes considerable attention and energy. For us, the first thing we must attend to is an internal gathering of ourselves. When we stop and reflect on our ministry, we recognize that it is truly a calling from God given to us through the Church. We acknowledge that in our own small way we are involved in the unfolding of God's plan for humanity. We rely on the gift and help of the Holy Spirit.

This is not something just done once. We must regularly return to this deliberate act of attention to who we are, what we are about to do, and the resources of the Spirit that will accompany us. This is how we stay faithful to our calling as catechists.



For Reflection

- To what extent do I consider my work as a catechist a vocation?
- When has it been difficult to be as attentive as I would like to be to my work as a catechist? When have I felt most certain of my role?

Louis J. Cameli is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Norridge, Illinois. He completed his theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome and obtained a doctorate in theology with a specialization in spirituality. He is the former director of ongoing formation of priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago and director of the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House, Mundelein, Illinois. In February, 2002, he received the Pope John XXIII Award from the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) for his contributions to the continuing education and ongoing formation of priests. He has authored numerous books on spirituality and also served as a writer and theological consultant for RCL's *Faith First* and *Faith First Legacy Edition* K-8 curriculum.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Gracious Spirit, I am confident
of your ever-loving presence.

Bestow on me the **wisdom**
to see things as they really are
and to be open-minded to all I meet.

Grant me the **understanding** that comes from a heart
willing to hear and embrace, listen and forgive.

Deepen in me the **knowledge** to discern
appropriate ways to communicate your word.

Inspire me with your **courage** to do what his right
in meeting the challenges of the day.

Quiet me with your **reverence**
as I attempt to respect you in all creation.

Allow me to stand in **wonder and awe**
at your presence.

Help me be a catechist
who is **enthusiastic** for your ministry,
contagious in your love,
and **eager** to serve your people.

I ask this through Jesus Christ,
who came as brother, teacher, servant,
and friend to all.

Amen.

Overview: Person of the Catechist Module

As a catechist you are engaged in a rich and vital ministry of the Church. The *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)* reminds you that “Christ invites all catechists to follow him as a teacher of the faith and a witness to the truth of the faith” (NDC 54B, 8). This module will guide you in reflecting on the catechetical vocation and understanding your unique role within it.

In this module you will engage in a process of faith reflection using three components: A DVD, this companion booklet, and a CD-ROM. See page 5 for an explanation of how these components complement one another. You began on pages 6 and 7 with a reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in your catechetical ministry. On the next page an exercise will allow you to reflect on your vocation as a catechist.

The body of this booklet is divided into four segments that parallel the divisions of the DVD and provide you with the opportunity to consider your own commitment to this ministry.

- **The Vocation of the Catechist:** A reflection on your call to be a catechist and your unique place in the Church’s mission
- **Qualities of Catechists:** A survey of the qualities of the catechist as expressed in the Church’s documents
- **Growing as a Catechist:** An exploration of the importance of continued growth in faith and understanding

- **Trusting the Spirit:** A reminder of the need to appreciate the active role of the Holy Spirit in your ministry

Each segment in the booklet leads you through a four-page process to reflect on the DVD content and choose ways to apply the content to your catechetical setting.

1. **Introduction:** States the goal and objectives for the session and provides a question for personal reflection
2. **Looking Ahead—Presentation:** Includes a video overview and space to write questions and comments during and after viewing
3. **Looking Back—Reflection:** Includes three questions to check comprehension and offers a chance for group reflection
4. **Looking Beyond—Application:** Includes an opportunity to summarize new insights and apply them to a practical setting

There is an enrichment article at the end of each segment process that extends learning by exploring a topic related to the segment theme.

Catechists need the support and encouragement of other catechists, so try to participate in the learning process of this module in a group setting. If circumstances require that you work independently, find at least one other catechist with whom you can work and share your reflections.

Carol Augustine is Director of the Division of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She formerly served the archdiocese as the Coordinator of Catechist Formation and the Coordinator of Religion for Catholic Schools. Prior to her diocesan work she served as a Catholic schoolteacher and parish director of religious education. She was elected president of NCCL in 2002. Carol holds a Master of Education degree from Johns Hopkins University.

Qualities of Catechists

The tasks of catechesis described by the *National Directory for Catechesis* suggest some qualities that every catechist needs to have or cultivate. (See NDC 20.) By reflecting on these qualities, all catechists can gain a deeper appreciation of the many dimensions of their ministry. In this segment you will have the opportunity to explore some of these qualities.

Goal

To examine some of the ideal qualities of catechists

Learning Objectives

- To identify important qualities of catechists by looking at strong role models
- To explore the importance of the connection to a faith community in your formation as a catechist
- To refine your personal understanding of the qualities of a catechist

Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect on the following question. Then discuss it with another person or with your group.

What are the unique qualities you bring to this ministry that will help you as a catechetical minister?

Prayer

Creator God, by your constant faithfulness, you have shown us how to assist others on their journey into your love. You guide us with patient, loving care and the example of your Son who reveals to us everything that a good teacher should be. Be with us as we continue our formation as catechists for your Church. Amen.

Looking Ahead

This segment explores some of the qualities that will be most helpful to you in a catechetical setting. Below you will find an outline of the principal content of the DVD that accompanies this segment. You may wish to refer to this outline as you watch the DVD. Below the outline, there is space for you to jot down questions that occur to you during and after the viewing.

Video Outline

- A discussion of role models whose qualities have influenced the catechetical ministry of the participants
- An explanation and summary of key qualities of catechists
- A reflection on these qualities by members of the video group

Comments and Questions

Use the space below to list questions, feelings, or ideas that occur to you as you view the video.

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines and a vertical blue line on the left side, designed for handwritten notes.

Like all
the faithful,
catechists
are called
to holiness.

NDC 54B, 8

Watch Segment 2
of the DVD
or CD-ROM now.

Looking Back

Reflect silently on one or more of the questions below and then jot down your response(s). Then share your thoughts with another person or with your group.

1. Who has been your best role model as a catechist? Describe that person's qualities.
2. Explain ways your faith community has enabled you to live as a stronger witness to the Gospel.
3. As you recall the content of the video segment, what words or images will you try to carry with you into your ministry?

Remember . . .

QUALITIES OF CATECHISTS

Response
to the Call of
the Holy Spirit

Witness to
the Gospel
and its Way

Commitment
to the Church
and its Teaching

Sharer in
the Community

Servant of
the Community

Knowledge,
Skills, and
Savoir-faire

Looking Beyond

God's activity in each age calls for its own response, which will always be somewhat the same as, but also unique from, the response possible or expected in previous eras.

Thomas H. Groome,
Christian Religious Education, 194

Over the years you will continue to grow in your appreciation of the uniqueness you bring to the catechetical ministry. The exercise below will help you refine your present understanding of yourself as a catechist.

PRACTICE FOR CATECHISTS

Witnessing Your Catholic Faith

Imagine that a learner in your catechetical setting asks you why you are a Christian. How would you respond in a way that is both age-appropriate and might draw them into a deeper relationship with Jesus?

A reflection on these questions by members of the study group

Comments and Questions

Use the space below to write your response to the question. Explain why your faith community has inspired you to live this way. How might you witness to the Gospel?

What Did I Learn?

In this space, summarize the most important insights you gained in this segment.

What Will I Change?

In this space, write one thing you will do differently as a catechist because of what you learned in this segment.



Use the reflection on page 39 as part of your personal prayer this week.

Finding Jesus

by Alice Noe

"When did the Catholic Church find Jesus?" the catechist asked. She had been away from the Church in her early twenties and "found Jesus" in another denomination. Having returned to the Church, she was volunteering as a catechist. Her question points out the need for the *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)*.

The *NDC* was written specifically for Catholics in the United States who are responsible for catechizing others, whether adults, teens, or children. Most importantly for catechists, it sets catechesis within the context of evangelization. Evangelization is the context for catechesis because everyone needs to be evangelized, to be brought into communion with Jesus Christ and to know the power of his presence in their life.

As the example in the opening paragraph illustrates, it is possible to catechize people without evangelizing them. It is possible to teach people about Jesus and the truths of the faith of the Church without ever bringing them to know Jesus in a personal way. Consequently, evangelization needs to precede and accompany

catechesis. Evangelization, therefore, is the overarching theme of catechesis and should permeate our teaching. Catechists must be able to lead people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and teach them the truths of the faith of the Church as those truths relate to being children of God and brothers or sisters to Jesus.

Since the *NDC* emphasizes evangelization so strongly, we Catholics must become comfortable with the word and the work of evangelization. What is evangelization? It is the "clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery" (*The Church in America [Ecclesia in America]* 66). (See *NDC* 17.) This definition of evangelization is not so scary. It does not call for knocking on doors as so many people think when they hear the word. But it does presume a personal knowledge of Christ and of the

Evangelization is the overarching theme of catechesis and should permeate our teaching.

Alice Noe grew up Catholic in the Bible Belt and the Midwest. She was a volunteer catechist of adults for many years and has also taught junior and senior high school religion classes. Following ten years as a parish director of religious education in Washington, DC, she is now the Coordinator of Catechetical Program Development and Adult Faith Formation for the Archdiocese of Washington, DC. Alice holds a master's degree in theology from the Catholic University of America.

Scriptures. One cannot be a catechist without being converted oneself, without having a personal relationship with God and a basic knowledge of Jesus in the Scriptures. "This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! We must respond to Jesus Christ" (*Go and Make Disciples* 14). (See *NDC* 17B.) Jesus must make a difference in the life of the catechist and in the lives of the catechized.

A strong emphasis is placed upon the forming of disciples and Christian community, on teaching others to be able to hand on the faith in an ever-widening circle of believers until we reach the four corners of the earth as the Gospel mandates. Ours is a missionary Church. Again, *discipleship* and *mission*, or *apostolate*, may be words with which we are uncomfortable, but they belong in the Catholic vocabulary.

Echoing previous Church documents, another emphasis of the *NDC* is the centrality of adult catechesis, which quotes *Catechesi Tradendae* in affirming that "the catechesis of adults . . . is the principal form of catechesis . . ." (*CT* 43 in *NDC* 48A). Indeed the

catechesis of adults is the axis around which all other catechesis in a parish is to revolve. (See *GDC* 275, *NDC* 48A.) Only adults are capable of mature faith which produces the fruits of evangelization and witness to Christ, seeking justice for all, and the promotion of Christian unity. (See *NDC* 48A, 1.) Since most of our parishes have been focused on the catechesis of children rather than adults, this calls for a reorientation of our thinking, our resources, and our time.

The *NDC* also outlines particular challenges and opportunities within the culture of the United States that we need to be aware of and address in our catechetical ministry. We experience great cultural and regional diversity in our population, which can provide wonderful opportunities for learning even while we confront the effects of divorce, increased mobility, and globalization, to name only a few concerns. The *NDC* challenges the Catholic Church in the United States to bring all people into a personal relationship with Christ and to fulfill Jesus' instructions to "Go . . . and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). It is a tall order. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we go.

For Reflection

- Give an example of a time when you have felt you were effective in sharing the message of Jesus with others.
- What stories from your life might you be able to share with others to illustrate how God has been faithful to you?