



SAINT ROSE OF LIMA

Whole Parish Catechesis

What exactly is Whole Parish Catechesis?

Whole Parish Catechesis is another name for whole community catechesis. It is an approach to parish religious education through which youth and adults as well as children are invited to participate in faith formation programs. The entire parish thus becomes the focus of all we do in catechesis. In whole community catechesis, what happens in the Sunday Mass is closely connected to what happens in the religious education classroom or assembly. The liturgy of the Word from Sunday is

the starting point. Catechesis must flow from that Word and each learner is invited to “break open the Word,” to share their faith about what they believe. Also in whole parish catechesis, parents play a vital role alongside all the other members of the community. Catechesis is not just for children! It’s for **everyone**. Every Catholic is invited to know and love the Church, to walk with Christ in his or her daily life, and to gather faithfully together on Sunday

for Mass. Added to that, whole community catechesis places great emphasis on developing households of faith. It’s certainly true for a child, but also true for everyone, that no matter how effective our experience of faith might be at the parish level, what really counts is how we live that faith in our everyday lives at home! If our homes are not places where the faith is shared and lived, then the work of catechesis is like sowing seed on rocky ground.

Why are we changing the language?

Why can’t we continue calling it CCD or religious ed or religion class?

At Vatican II it was important to refer to the Church using new language. In order for the reform envisioned by the pope to become reality, we needed a new way of speaking about the Church. So, the bishops began to refer to the Church under a new name: *the People of God*. They knew that if the Church was called that, soon it would *become* that, and they were right!

Likewise, the pope renewed our understanding of ourselves as

part of the *Body of Christ*. Refer to people as members of Christ’s Body, they reasoned, and they will *become* Christ’s Body for the world.

The same is true for whole community catechesis. How we name what we do is very important. *We will become what we call ourselves*. If we continue calling our programs schools of religion or religious education programs, or religion class, most people will see them as mainly for children.

However, if we call what we do by a new name, *whole parish cate-*

chesis, people will soon see it as part and parcel of being Catholic. We don’t want to put new wine into old wine skins, after all.

The real challenge contained in the pursuit of alternative models is to create a radical new paradigm of catechesis.

Catechesis cannot simply be a process of going back to the past or making surface modifications of the present models. In other words, it isn’t sufficient to merely tinker with our present method so the classrooms look different. We can’t merely invite the parents to participate. We need a radical new paradigm in order to achieve the goals of the *General Directory for Catechesis*.

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What new approach to religious education does whole parish catechesis offer?

- Conversion, the turning of our hearts to Christ, must become an essential part of every catechesis process.
- The households must play an integral role in all that we do, and families must become more involved at the everyday level, not as occasional guests of the process.
- The RCIA is the model; breaking open the Word is the approach that leads folds to ongoing conversion, love of Scripture, a heart for the material poor, and deeper commitment to community life.
- Adult education must become the norm, not the sideline. Catechesis is for adults as much as for children; in short, catechesis is the work of the whole community.
- Catechists are called to a genuine vocation, not merely to fill the need for personnel in our present programs.
- We must take care to teach precisely what the Church teaches, as outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Finally, those who are in catechesis should see themselves as disciples of Christ on a lifelong journey of faith, not merely as temporary students completing a program that ends with graduation.

Whole community catechesis brings all these features into a single way of thinking, a single philosophy, a single focus for the parish.

It has the power to renew the whole community and to generate great enthusiasm for the gospel.

In Whole Parish Catechesis, do we still refer to the persons involved as “students”?

It would help tremendously to stop referring to people in our catechetical process as students. The word “student” suggests academic learning, even if the meaning of the word could be broader, it suggests a school year period of study, ending in graduation.

That ending is the key problem. Nearly every adult in the Church today believes that he or she has completed their religious education. They’re no longer students. They’re adults now. However, learning to follow the way of Christ never

ends, as the bishops tell us in the GDC. There is no graduation from catechesis; it’s a lifelong journey of faith, a lifelong process.

So instead, we call them simply “learners”. A learner is one who is learning how to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, one who is learning a way of life. This name suggests a never-ending, non-academic process of growing to live as Jesus taught us to. Learner is a biblical word; anyone who refers to himself or herself as a learner is making a serious

commitment to growth. A learner is one who comes to encounter Christ not merely to know about him.

All efforts to change from student to learner are worth it because the entire parish is thus re-educated about whole parish catechesis.

Anyone who wishes to follow Christ more closely in his or her life may be part of the catechesis assemblies as a learning disciple.

Where did the idea for “whole community catechesis” come from?

The whole movement toward an approach to catechesis which involves the entire parish community comes from four main sources.

First, catechetical leaders have given careful consideration to the way Jesus taught, as the *General Directory for Catechesis* suggests we should.

Second, we have all reflected seriously on the teachings of Vatican II for more than forty years.

Third, the direction provided by the GDC

itself has been nothing other than revolutionary.

And fourth, there is an emerging consensus in the catechetical community that the present way we do our ministry, in what’s known as the “schoolhouse” framework, just isn’t working as well as we’d like it to.

The name, whole community catechesis, comes from the GDC, which says; “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.

It is the same whole community that welcomes those who wish to know the Lord better and permeate themselves with a new life.

Do we still have religious instruction?

Yes, indeed, there is a need for outright religious instruction in order for Christian children to grow up and mature in their faith.

Understanding the sacred Scriptures, the Church's liturgy, its history, devotions, and doctrines is essential.

This is true for Christians of all age groups. Our present schoolhouse framework does provide a structure within which this outright religious education happens very well. The textbooks are complete and beautiful.

The students do seem to come away with a pretty good working knowledge of the church. The religious education of our children will be embedded within the framework of catechetical assemblies where they can be a part of the whole community and supported by the adult learners in the group. Parents make up a good portion of the adult members of the assembly, thus being more involved in Saint Rose of Lima's Whole Parish Catechesis.

Parents are an integral part of the program as both a learner and sponsor for their child.

But... What's Missing?

Well, first of all, for us Catholics, nothing can happen in the Church that does not have its origin in the Sunday Mass.

For us, the liturgy is the "source and summit" of our faith. It's what makes us truly Catholic.

So we must say that a real connection to the Sunday liturgy is missing in most parishes.

How do we add that?

Whole community catechesis makes several suggestions:

- Faith sharing based on the Sunday readings;
- Some form of liturgical catechesis to help us understand the rites;
- Use of a spiral scope and sequence in our textbook series.

What is a "spiral scope and sequence"?

First of all, a scope and sequence is the organized framework, the system of lessons and themes we follow to present the teachings of the faith to a learner.

This framework follows a certain sequence of ideas, one after the other.

It stays within a certain scope of topics and themes. By providing this order for the presentation of the faith, a learner has a better chance of getting it all right!

A spiral scope and sequence is one in which the learner returns to each topic every year, in spiral fashion. Each time the topics are presented

in age-appropriate language and teaching methods.

By using a spiral, all the learners in a single parish can be studying the same theme at the same time, making catechist preparation, parent involvement, intergenerational groupings, and cross-cultural teaching much more possible!

WHOLE PARISH CATECHESIS

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For Questions call :
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What else does Whole Parish Catechesis recommend?

In the past 45 years every single Church document that deals with Christian education and catechesis has insisted that parents and entire households be involved in catechesis, not just the children. Without the rest of the household, no matter how effective the religious education might be, the child has little chance of developing deep faith roots and living by Catholic customs and morality.

In whole parish catechesis, parishes plan for the involvement of the entire community, based on the spiral scope and sequence mentioned earlier.

Not only are the parents present when their children are formed in the faith. Much more radically, households are being formed as Christian homes.

How do the households of our parish get involved in Saint Rose of Lima's Whole Parish Catechesis?

First, Saint Rose's invites every single household in the parish to take part in the faith sharing mentioned above, based on the readings from the Sunday Mass. This Faith Sharing gives rise to the possibility of deeper and ongoing conversion to Christ.

The presence of Christ in the homes is the first step that will lead naturally to more prayer, to interpreting the events of the culture or world through Christian eyes, and to a desire for more catechesis.

Households will receive suggestions about activities, meal sharing, and supporting one another as a family.

You might ask, why is there so much emphasis on conversion?

For many Catholics growing up in the 1950's, we thought conversion was for other Christians. We even called them "converts" when they joined the Catholic Church.

"Each Catholic also needs to turn his or her heart to Christ over and over again."

Today we take a wider view, and we see that each Catholic also needs to turn his or her heart to Christ over and over again throughout their lives.

This turning is what we call conversion. The word comes from Latin, meaning literally, to turn. The reason we emphasize it so much is that, as the GDC teaches, conversion, the turning of one's heart to Christ, *precedes* catechesis.

Adults, like their kids, might sit through instructional classes, but until they turn their hearts to Christ and share that with others, we haven't really done our job of announcing the Good News of Christ.