



# FAN INTO A FLAME

The Ministry of Catechist in the  
Catholic Church in Ireland



Council for  
Catechetics



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Amoris Laetitia (Francis)
AM	Antiquum Ministerium (Francis)
CIC	Codex Iuris Canonici
CT	Catechesi Tradendae (John Paul II)
EG	Evangelii Gaudium (Francis)
DC	Directory for Catechesis (2020)
LG	Lumen Gentium
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
SGN	Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis (2010)



# INTRODUCTION

1. In his second letter to Timothy, St Paul urges him to ‘fan into a flame the gracious gift of God which is in you’ (2 Tm 1:6). Paul borrowed the symbol of fire from the account of Pentecost where the first disciples were filled with the Spirit of the risen Christ which empowered them to preach the Gospel with courage and conviction (cf. Acts 2:1 ff.).

In the Irish faith tradition, Muirchú narrates how, on the Hill of Slane, St Patrick lit the Easter fire – a symbol of the Christian faith. A prophecy was made at that time that this fire, once lit, would never be extinguished (Muirchú, *Life of Patrick* I, 15). In his hymn in praise of St Brigid, Ultán described her as a woman ‘ever excellent, golden, a radiant flame’ because of her example of charity.<sup>1</sup> She is remembered in our faith tradition as a woman of burning compassion and hospitality who chose to live by ‘the beatitude of mercy’.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades, the fire of faith has certainly dimmed in the Irish Church. Though it may seem at times to be reduced to embers, it still burns. Today we pray as a Church that these flames of faith may burn strongly once more, ignited by a New Pentecost that will lead to a renewed Church of conviction and not just convention.

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1 *Celtic Spirituality*, from *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. O. Davies (New York, 1999), p. 121.

2 ‘Life of Brigit’ in *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, trans. Whitley Stokes (Oxford, 1909), 187-8.



## Decision to Establish the Ministry of Catechist

2. The Irish Episcopal Conference welcomes Pope Francis' *motu proprio Antiquum ministerium* (hereafter *AM*), in which he establishes this ancient and important ministry in the Church as a stable lay ministry. We gladly respond to the invitation of Pope Francis 'to render effective the Ministry of Catechist, determining the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission to this ministry and devising the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise'.<sup>3</sup>
  
3. We see the formal recognition of the ministry as a further step towards the Catholic Church in Ireland embracing the challenge of the new evangelisation where all the baptised are imbued by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and participate fully in the life and mission of the Church. *AM* outlines the rationale and scope of the ministry and seeks to define its role. In this present National Directory on the Formation and Ministry of Catechists, we outline our vision for the development of this ministry in the Irish context and explore how catechists can serve the Church in Ireland with the gifts and skills required. As an essential prerequisite, it outlines the criteria for the selection of candidates, their formation, and institution. In simple terms the catechist can be defined as a witness to the living Tradition and a mediator of the Catholic faith who accompanies and facilitates the incorporation of new disciples of Christ into his ecclesial Body (cf. *DC* 112).

## A Changing Landscape

4. The formal establishment of the ministry of catechist in Ireland comes at a time of great change and transition. Traditionally, a

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3 *Antiquum ministerium*, 9.

parish was considered to be a separate entity defined by spatial boundaries and so was deemed to be self-sufficient for its own survival and equipped with its own resources for missionary activities such as sacramental preparation and evangelisation. This limited spatial model was challenged by Pope St John XXIII, who described a parish community in organic terms, not primarily as a structure but as ‘the village fountain to which all can come and slake their thirst’. Later, Pope St John Paul II insisted that ‘the parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful’ (*Christifideles Laici*, 26). Therefore, existing structures and new ministries are meant to serve this vision of what the local Church is meant to be as a living, vibrant community of faith.

5. With the changing ecclesial landscape in modern Ireland, as Church communities have become smaller, many parishes have felt the need to come closer together in partnership and collaboration to share resources and to create a greater sense of belonging. This development was encouraged by Pope St John Paul II and, in more recent times, by Pope Francis, who speaks of the ‘pastoral conversion’ necessary on the part of the whole Church ‘so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation’.<sup>4</sup>

It is within this renewed understanding of a living Church that the ministry of catechist can find its true expression. The *Directory for Catechesis* describes the catechist variously as ‘witness to the faith and keeper of the memory of God’; as ‘teacher of the

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4 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 26; *Code of Canon Law*, 555, 1,1. Cf. also Congregation for the Clergy, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church*, London: CTS, 2020.

faith and mystagogue'; as 'accompanier and educator', as someone who 'accompanies' others in faith; and an 'educator' (*DC* 113). These elements of the ministry will be explored in greater detail in what follows.

We do not, however, envisage a one-size-fits-all ministry, partly because of the diverse needs of diocesan and parish communities, and also because catechists themselves will vary in the gifts that they bring to their mission. Within a coherent framework, some scope must be left for the creativity of the Holy Spirit and the gifts he bestows on those who are called as catechists to serve the life and mission of the Irish Church, in the concrete reality of today and of the years ahead.

### **Coordination of the Ministry by the Episcopal Conference**

6. The Episcopal Conference intends to establish a coordinating body that will have the responsibility, on behalf of the Conference, to oversee the development and approval of formation programmes for the ministry of catechist and to provide a broad framework within which the ministry can be established in a coherent way, taking into account the particular needs and circumstances of the various dioceses of Ireland.

### **Christ The Teacher: The Model Catechist**

7. Jesus Christ is the model catechist. In his earthly ministry, Jesus left us a rich pedagogical example to model and emulate. In the Gospel accounts, Jesus presented himself to his disciples as their true teacher and at the same time as a patient and faithful friend (cf. Jn 15:15; Mk 9:33; Mk 1:41-45). Jesus is shown in various forms of teaching more than one hundred times. Jesus taught his disciples the truth through his whole life. He provoked them with questions (cf. Mk 8:1; 4:21, 27). He explained to them in greater depth what he proclaimed to the crowd (cf. Mk 4:34;

Lk 12:41). He introduced them to prayer (cf. Lk 11:1-2). He sent them on mission, not alone but as a small community (Lk 10:1-20). He promised them the Holy Spirit who would lead them into all truth (cf. Jn 15:26; Acts 4:31) and sustain them in moments of difficulty (cf. Mt 10:20; Jn 15:26; Acts 4:31).

8. Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the Risen Christ, addressed him with the affectionate term of 'Rabboni' as one might a favourite teacher (Jn 20:16). Teaching was at the heart of Jesus' public ministry, and his pedagogical style was animated by a deep concern for people's everyday existence. He engaged his audience within the specific circumstances of their lives and was a master storyteller who spoke to the heart of his listeners in novel and innovative ways. He used images and symbols from the natural world to teach spiritual truths.<sup>5</sup> He manifested God's merciful love by forgiving sins and healing those afflicted by illness. His saving actions had the effect of reintegrating into community those who were marginalised socially and religiously. He demonstrated God's providential care and concern for all his creatures by feeding the hungry and grieving with the bereaved. He travelled extensively throughout his region of Palestine meeting with local Jewish and gentile communities, driven by his mission to inaugurate the reign of God. Jesus is the Good News because he is 'the fullness of Revelation: he is the complete manifestation of God's mercy and, at the same time, of the call to love that is in the heart of humanity' (*DC* 15).
9. In the ministry of Jesus, works of compassion and mercy always accompanied the proclamation of the kingdom (cf. Mt 4:23). Jesus invites disciples to share in his work of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He summons every disciple to share in his mission, to join him in the work of educating people to embrace faith as a

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5 Cf. Pope Francis, *Desiderio desideravi*, 19.

way of life at the service of the reign of God, which includes the service of one another. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus chose twelve apostles and commissioned them to a leadership role of teaching and healing with his emerging community of disciples. These and their successors were to be ‘teachers of the apostolic faith endowed with the authority of Christ’ (cf. Acts 2:42; *Lumen gentium*, 25). Yet the teaching function was never limited to ‘the twelve’. Soon thereafter, Jesus chose ‘seventy others’ and sent them out ‘in pairs’ to proclaim the Good News and to heal in his name — the two ever going hand in hand. In sum, they were both to ‘cure the sick’ and teach that ‘the kingdom of God has come near to you’ (Lk 10:1-12). Therefore, from the mandate given by Christ to these early Catechists, we can see them as disciples who transmit the faith by word and deed. Catechists are people who keep the memory of God alive in our time by the witness of their faith (DC 113a).

## Evangelisation Past and Present

10. Since the initial evangelisation of Ireland over 1,500 years ago, the seeds of faith have germinated and borne fruit, generation after generation. Under the direction of St Patrick, and later saints such as Brigid and Colmcille, monastic communities rooted in personal encounter with Christ, in His Word and in the Eucharist, became the foundation stones of the local Church. Beginning as centres of hospitality and learning, they also became the launching pad for the first wave of Irish missionaries to Europe, led by Saints Columbanus, Fursa, Killian, and many others.
11. Through extended periods of persecution and discrimination, when faith was nourished primarily in the family circle and the community of the baptised, courageous priests and bishops risked their lives to proclaim the Gospel and to celebrate the Eucharist



and the sacraments whenever it was possible to gather people. Finally, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Catholic Emancipation saw the beginning of a new phase of growth, with the building of churches and schools, the establishment of native religious congregations and the sending out of missionaries from the Catholic Church in Ireland to ‘the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). Over the past fifty years, the Church has lived in a changing and more diverse Ireland, where Christian faith is no longer the dominant culture, and where it has become increasingly clear that the effectiveness of catechesis depends on evangelisation. The National Synodal Synthesis remarks: ‘Ireland offers a particular moment in this encounter with a modern society whose culture is still capable of a Christian sensibility and of affording space for the transcendent, but which has roundly rejected the model of Church which shaped its past.’<sup>6</sup>

12. Today, the Church in Ireland, established on her Apostolic foundation, calls men and women to be co-workers in the

6 Synthesis of the Consultation in Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod (2021–23), Conclusion.

vineyard of salvation, not only building up the Church herself, but contributing to the establishment of civilisation and the transformation of culture. As the *Directory for Catechesis* states: ‘In the multiplicity of ministries and services with which the Church realises her mission of evangelisation, the “ministry of catechesis” occupies a significant place, indispensable for the growth of the faith. This ministry provides an introduction to the faith and, together with the liturgical ministry, begets children of God in the womb of the Church. The specific vocation of the catechist therefore has its root in the common vocation of the people of God, called to serve God’s plan of salvation on behalf of humanity’ (*DC* 110).

### Revival of an Ancient Ministry: Documents of Pope Francis

13. The documents *Spiritus domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, promulgated by Pope Francis in 2021, formally established the new lay ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist open to baptised men and women. In *AM* Pope Francis firmly situates the ministry of catechist within the faith community that is endowed with the gifts of the Spirit to fulfil her mission. Drawing on the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthian community, he sees the ministry of catechist among the many ‘spiritual gifts’ that the Spirit has bestowed upon the Church for the mission of evangelisation (cf. 1 Cor 12:28-31; *DC* 39). For Pope Francis, retrieving this ancient ministry of catechist ‘encourages the Church in our day to appreciate possible new ways for her to remain faithful to the word of the Lord so that his Gospel can be preached to every creature’ (*AM* 2).
14. Pope Francis invites us to recognise that what is under discussion are lay ministries ‘essentially distinct from the ordained ministry that is received through the Sacrament of Holy Orders’ (*Spiritus domini*). The Pope writes, ‘In the horizon of renewal outlined by

the Second Vatican Council, one feels ever greater today the need to rediscover the co-responsibility of all of the baptised in the Church, and particularly the mission of the laity.<sup>7</sup> Citing the Final Document of the Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region, the Pope also observes that ‘regarding the entire Church, in the variety of situations, it is urgent that ministries for men and women be promoted and conferred ... It is the Church made up of baptised men and women that we must consolidate, promoting forms of ministry and, above all, an awareness of baptismal dignity.’<sup>8</sup>

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7 Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte, 10 January 2021: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210110\\_lettera-donne-lettorato-accolitato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210110_lettera-donne-lettorato-accolitato.html)

8 Ibid.



# THE MINISTRY OF CATECHIST

## A Vocational and Ecclesial Ministry

15. All the baptised are called to be what Pope Francis now calls ‘missionary disciples’ (active followers of Jesus). Another way of putting this is to say that through Baptism we share in the threefold mission of Christ, as priest, prophet, and king. The ministry of catechist is a vocational ministry for the lay baptised who discern and respond in love to the call of the Holy Spirit to serve the Church (cf. *DC* 122). They answer the call to serve the needs of their local faith community at a diocesan level, first and foremost, as dynamic disciples and witnesses to the Gospel. Candidates to this ministry are called to embody a living faith so that through the witness of their lives the faith can be transmitted to others. When we look at the vibrant faith of the first Christian communities, we see that the Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est* 25). This dynamic understanding of faith must influence the way in which we prepare for and exercise the ministry of catechist (cf. *SGN* 35; *DC* 79; also Acts 2:42-45).
16. The bishop is the first catechist in the diocese. It is the responsibility of the bishop to ensure that ‘catechists are properly

trained for their function so that they are thoroughly acquainted with the doctrine of the Church and have both a theoretical and a practical knowledge of the laws of psychology and of pedagogical methods' (*DC* 114). Diocesan vocations directors and the National Vocations Office will have a role in promoting the ministry and in accompanying prospective candidates (cf. *DC* 115-120). A certain flexibility in terms of the individual circumstances and prior experience of each candidate needs to be considered on an individual case by case basis. Formation should take account of prior learning and experience so that formation enables each candidate to grow into their own sense of identity. Men who present themselves as candidates for stable ministry generally consider priesthood or diaconate. It is important, however, to recognise the unique nature of the ministry of catechist as a lay ministry, which is open to both women and men, whose complementary gifts and partnership in mission can bear fruit for the Church. A minimum age of 21 on entry into formation is recommended.

## Kerygmatic Proclamation

17. The proclamation of Jesus Christ and his saving work has long been proposed as the centre of catechesis. 'The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ' (*CT* 5; cf. *DC* 75). Any formal or informal catechetical work must have Christ at its centre. To say that catechesis must be kerygmatic is to say that the saving mystery of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection must permeate every catechetical moment. This proclamation is not only first in the temporal order, but is rather 'the essential dimension of every moment of catechesis' (*DC* 57).

## The Catechist as Witness of Faith and Keeper of the Mystery of God

18. The Church is entrusted with the mission of ‘making disciples’ (Mt 28). It is a well-established fact that people listen to witnesses, and only to teachers if they are first witnesses (cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 14). The testimony of the catechist’s own life, as one who has encountered Christ and become a disciple, ‘is necessary for the credibility of the mission’ (*DC* 113a). While catechesis clearly involves teaching the faith (‘whole and entire, in all its rigour and vigour’ [*CT* 30]), it cannot be reduced to an academic exercise, or even the communication of an abstract truth. It is first of all a sharing in the life that comes from God and an expression of ‘the joy of having met the Lord’ (*DC* 68). This poses a challenge in Ireland where school-based religious education may not always be, or even be designed to be, catechesis. The catechist ‘keeps, nourishes, and bears witness’ to the joy and new life that continually flow from his or her experience of the goodness of God in a personal encounter with Jesus. Recognising their own frailty before the mercy of God, catechists do not cease to be signs of hope for others (cf. *DC* 113a). Pope Francis recently pointed to the need to ‘listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer’ and remarked that ‘many people have lost not only the habit but also the very notion of what it means to worship God.’<sup>9</sup> Thus the catechist, as witness is also one who, in the heart of the community, becomes a keeper of the mystery of God.

## The Catechist as Teacher and Mystagogue

19. The catechist is a teacher, ‘an icon of Christ the teacher, [therefore] the catechist has the twofold task of transmitting the content of the faith and leading others into the mystery of the faith itself’

9 Pope Francis, Opening Address for the Synod on Synodality, 9 October 2021.

(*DC* 113b). The first task is that of the teacher, the second, that of the mystagogue. In both, Christ is the model. In the first instance, catechesis calls for a deepening knowledge of Jesus (not just knowledge *about* Jesus) and what it means to be a disciple. 'Christocentricity in catechesis also means the intention to transmit not one's own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Truth that He communicates or, to put it more precisely, the Truth that He is' (*CT* 6). Every catechist must be able to say honestly: 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me!' (*CT* 6).

20. There is a tendency to assume that once people have been baptised, the deepening of faith happens more or less automatically, and that once young people have completed second-level education, catechesis has come to an end. The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults includes a period of mystagogy after baptism in which the newly baptised Christian is helped to grow into a deeper experience of the presence and action of Christ in the sacramental mysteries. This is an experience which, by definition, cannot be had before baptism and which, after baptism, may not be readily recognised.

In our Irish ecclesial tradition, since most people are baptised as infants, the mystagogical aspect of catechesis includes the preparation for the other sacraments of Christian initiation, which are generally received during childhood. Mystagogy, however, is wider in scope and continues throughout adult life. It involves helping the baptised to come to a deeper appreciation of the presence and action of Christ as they gather around the twin tables of his Word and of his Body and Blood, thereby becoming 'one body in Christ' (*Rm* 12:5). The Christian's 'faith is a participation in the ecclesial faith that always comes before their own' (*DC* 21). Catechesis that fails to support sacramental life and to build communion falls short of its lofty purpose, for in the Eucharist we find 'the source and summit of the Christian life' (*LG* 11).

Men and women are helped not just to live together with God's blessing but to understand themselves as the visible sign of his love in the Sacrament of Marriage. In a similar way, through the mystagogical aspect of lifelong catechesis, Christians will be helped to develop the habit of seeking Christ and recognising him as he presents himself in every sacramental moment.

The catechist, in this way, supports others in growing into a deeper understanding of 'the truth about human beings and their ultimate vocation, communicating the knowledge of Christ and at the same time introducing them to the various dimensions of the Christian life' (*DC* 113).

## The Catechist as Accompanier and Educator

21. The catechist is someone who accompanies others on the journey of faith. The *Directory for Catechesis* states: "The catechist is an expert in the art of accompaniment, has educational expertise, is able to listen and enter into the dynamics of human growth, becomes a travelling companion with patience and a sense of gradualness, in docility to the action of the Spirit" (*DC* 113c). The reference to the 'travelling companion' brings to mind the image of Jesus who walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and, as they went, 'explained to them the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about himself' (Lk 24:25). In the Irish tradition, we are familiar with the concept of an *anam cara* or 'soul friend' as someone who is close to us on the pathway of life and discipleship. This is who the catechist is called to be — 'an expert in humanity, who knows the joy and hopes of human beings, their sadness and distress and is able to situate them in relation to the Gospel of Jesus' (*DC* 113c).

Perhaps because of our historical experience of education, we tend to speak of teaching and educating as if they were the same reality. The *Directory*, by describing the catechist both as a teacher and an educator, seems to distinguish between the two.

Whereas the teacher presents knowledge that he or she has, the educator draws out the knowledge that someone else has but may not have recognised. This approach is often associated with the character of Socrates, who helped people to arrive at a deeper understanding through dialogue. Jesus was also an educator in this sense, entering into dialogue not only with his closest disciples but also with people such as the woman at the well (Jn 4), the man born blind (Jn 9), and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24), hearing their unspoken questions, noticing their hopes and joys, their sorrows and fears, and helping them to recognise his presence with them. In order to be an educator, the catechist has to know when and how to listen.



Photo: Bishop Kevin Doran

In the Irish tradition, we are familiar with the concept of an *anam cara* or 'soul friend' as someone who is close to us on the pathway of life and discipleship.

# WAYS OF SERVING

## A Diverse and Intergenerational Ministry

22. As in the exercise of any ecclesial ministry, the individual called to the ministry of catechist places his or her gifts at the service of the Church. The Church fosters and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission of catechising (*DC* 122). Under the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the bishop, chief catechist in his diocese, will collaborate with clergy and catechists to organise the ways in which the instituted ministry of catechist can best serve the needs of the diocese and the People of God. In Ireland there are many opportunities and avenues in which catechists will serve.
  
23. The introduction of the ministry of catechist in the Irish Church will strengthen the parish community as the necessary locus for faith formation (*SGN* 130). Recent years have seen an increase in the study of Sacred Scripture and *lectio divina*, faith formation programmes, prayer groups involving faith sharing and some elements of catechesis at the level of parish communities. Opportunities for adult faith formation online have likewise blossomed; retreats, faith courses, talk series, and study groups are all available online. Serving, promoting, and advancing these types of opportunities is another important way in which catechists can serve the Church in Ireland. While not replacing or excluding those already serving in different capacities, those who accept the ministry of catechist in a vocational sense will

add strength and expertise to this good work already underway. The introduction of the instituted ministry of catechist provides an opportunity to develop faith formation in parishes for adults, young people, and children.

## The Catechesis of Adults

24. Informed by the restoration of the catechumenate, ‘the catechesis of adults is the chief form and model for all catechesis and for faith development at every level in the Church’ (*SGN* 69, cf. *CT* 43, *DC* 63). The *Directory for Catechesis* reiterates this strongly, and this presents a significant challenge to current practice in Ireland (*DC* 77). In the prevailing circumstances, the primary focus of the ministry of catechist will be to work with adults, which of course includes working with the parents of school-going children.
25. A priority across the island of Ireland is to develop and increase the capacity of parish communities to contribute to the faith formation and sacramental preparation of individuals and families, including those who have never been evangelised, or those who have drifted away from the practice of faith. While acknowledging the tremendous work done in Catholic schools, the parish needs to be central rather than peripheral to the formation of children in the Catholic faith, supporting the role of parents as the first and best teachers of their children in the ways of faith (Rite of Baptism). The task of engaging parents more fully in their own faith journey is acknowledged to be of vital importance for the faith formation of children and the strengthening of parish life.
26. Finally, some catechists may be able to facilitate or themselves provide religious education and faith formation of children at parish level, especially for children who lack the opportunity for adequate religious education at school. This is not the primary focus of the ministry of catechist, and would require that the



catechist be specifically formed in the pedagogical methods appropriate to the religious education of children. Classes could be offered in the ‘Sunday school’ model, informed by the current religious education curriculum, approved by the Irish bishops. Catechesis could also be incorporated informally into youth group meetings or other events hosted at local level. Montessori-based Catholic religious education is already being made available in many parishes, helping children deepen their prayer, knowledge, and joy in the Lord.<sup>10</sup> This could also be supplemented by such things as Children’s Liturgy of the Word, Family Mass experiences and contemplative prayer.

27. Many of the grassroots faith initiatives currently underway in Ireland span parish, diocesan, and county boundaries. Youth retreats and prayer meetings unite secondary school and university students outside of the academic context. Many have given of their time and resources to implement Pope Francis’ vision of care for our common home as set out in *Laudato Si’*. Catholic university students from across the country are increasingly connected and meeting for faith-centered retreats, pilgrimages, hikes, and social events.

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10 Among those approaches currently offered in various places in Ireland are: ‘Catechesis of the Good Shepherd’, ‘Godly Play’ and ‘Children of the Eucharist’.

# CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

## A Period of Discernment

**28.** Because of the fundamentally ecclesial nature of the ministry, discernment of suitable candidates is crucially important. Discernment is not easily understood or practised in a culture which is more oriented to autonomy than to the prayerful recognition and free acceptance of God's will as something fundamentally good. Discernment takes place on the part of the person who senses a call to become a catechist — 'those lay men and women who feel called by virtue of their baptism to co-operate in the work of catechesis' (cf. *AM* 5; *CIC* 225). The bishop, or those delegated by him, must also make an initial discernment as to the suitability of a prospective candidate. Before a prospective candidate is called to formation he or she will be required to participate in a period of discernment and preliminary formation which includes accompaniment, prayer, dialogue and evaluation along with other prospective candidates. This period should be of at least six months duration.

## Criteria for Admission

- 29.** Criteria for admission to both the initial period of discernment and the formation programme itself might include:
- That candidates be already fully initiated into the Church, by Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
  - Having a sense of vocation to be a catechist; or a Spirit-driven desire to deepen one's participation in the life

and mission of the local and diocesan Church; to bring Christ to others.

- Having achieved the educational level necessary to follow the academic programme without undue difficulty (this would normally mean Leaving Certificate or equivalent).
- A commitment to one's own formation in faith.
- A commitment to the journey of discipleship with the community.
- A desire to share the gift of faith in Christ as a 'treasure of life and love' (*EG* 265). To help train others to become missionary disciples.
- The ability to give the time required for study and service without neglecting the needs of family.
- The ability to work effectively in partnership with others: 'It is fitting that those called to the instituted ministry of catechist be men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion' (*AM* 8).
- The ability to form mature adult relationships with others built on trust and mutual respect.
- The ability to lovingly accompany those on the margins of Church and to integrate human weakness (cf. *AL* 8).
- Having the capacity, with the help of training and formation, to communicate in a pastoral gathering.
- The ability to speak out of a personal experience of Jesus and a sense of belonging to the community of the Church.
- Being free from involvement in activities or movements which would be inconsistent with the ministry of catechist.
- Having the written recommendation of their parish priest. This includes a recommendation that the candidate can work effectively with others for the good of the Church and to be co-responsible for the mission

of the Church: 'It is essential that they [catechists] be faithful co-workers with priests and deacons, prepared to exercise their ministry wherever it may prove necessary, and motivated by true apostolic enthusiasm' (*AM 8*).

- Being committed to safeguarding best practice.

This list of criteria is not exhaustive but includes the most important indicators of whether a person is a suitable candidate for the ministry of catechist.

## Skills and Characteristics for Ministry

- 30.** In order for the ministry of the catechist to be effective and fruitful, there are a number of essential skills and characteristics which will need to be developed and fine-tuned over the period of formation and across a life-time of ministry. It will be noted that these skills build on the potential which is already identified in the selection of candidates.

**A gradually deepening relationship with Christ:** 'Communion with Christ is the centre of the Christian life, and as a result the centre of catechetical action' (*DC 75*). The catechist must first be in a living relationship with Christ in the Church, prayerfully living his or her own call to ongoing conversion of mind and heart. This living relationship is absolutely fundamental to any catechetical ministry.

**Communication:** The catechist must be capable, following appropriate formation, of proclaiming and further explaining the teachings of the Catholic faith. This requires public speaking skills and basic pedagogical understanding, which must be inspired by the mystery of the incarnation (*DC 194*). Methodological choices must 'reflect the nature of the evangelical message ... and also consider the concrete circumstances of the community and of the individual baptised persons' (*DC 194*).

**Organisation:** The work of the catechist requires basic organisational skills, both in the context of teaching and sharing the faith, and also in the planning and running of groups, retreats, classes, or other faith-based events.

**Accompaniment:** The catechist must also be able to walk with individuals and groups at the right pace and beginning from where they are. Since this is a relational ministry, flowing from the catechist's own living relationship with Christ, catechists must be able to relate with others from a wide variety of different backgrounds, life-experiences, world-views, and current life situations. This includes the ability to listen and relate without judging. In fact, everything the catechist does must be grounded in this model of accompaniment.

**Collaborative ministry:** In the Church, 'There is diversity of gifts, but the Spirit is the same. There is diversity of ministries, but the Lord is the same' (1 Cor 12:4-5). Catechists need to develop the capacity to work effectively with one another and with others who exercise ministry in the Church, whether lay or ordained, as well as with those whom they serve. A preoccupation with 'my way' of doing things poses the risk of clericalism which would be no less helpful among lay ministers than it would be among those who are ordained.

**Group skills** are essential so that the catechist can enable groups to work well together and foster a sense of community. Indeed, 'the catechist is called to awaken within the group the experience of community as the most coherent expression of the Church's life, which finds its most visible form in the celebration of the Eucharist' (*DC* 219). The catechist must be able to lead prayer and reflection, guiding others in their ability to do the same. Finally, the catechist must have a sense of what makes for good celebration and enable others to participate well in the liturgy.



**Capacity for growth** is an essential characteristic both in the initial formation stage and throughout the years of ministry. The catechist needs to be able to learn from his or her own experience and in the course of his or her engagement with others.

# PROCESS OF FORMATION

## Purpose

31. A key consideration for forming and training catechists is the goal of their mission. What are they being trained for? The essence of a catechist's formation is to be an effective witness to the transformative power of God's love that continues to sustain him or her on the journey of life and as they strive to follow Christ faithfully each day. Therefore, formation and training to be a catechist will involve an openness on the part of the candidate to reflection and the deepening of one's own Christian commitment as a disciple of Christ. In the words of the *Directory for Catechesis*:

Formation is an ongoing process that, under the guidance of the Spirit and in the living womb of the Christian community, helps the baptised person to take shape which means unveiling his or her deepest identity which is that of being a child of God in profound communion with his brothers and sisters. The work of formation acts as a transformation of the person who internalises the evangelical message existentially and in such a way that it may be light and guidance for his/her ecclesial life and mission. (DC 131)

This vision clarifies the two-fold dimension of being a catechist — namely to be a witness to Christ within the Church and

to help foster that living relationship with God in the lives of others: ‘The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people, not only in touch, but in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ’ (CT 5).

## Integral Formation

**32.** Because of these personal and missionary dimensions of the vocation of the catechist, formation to become a catechist touches the whole of the person and prepares him or her for mission and for service. The *Directory for Catechesis* calls for an ‘integral formation’ programme which incorporates all the dimensions of formation (academic, practical, pastoral, personal and spiritual) in a balanced way, without any one dominating. The end result should be that the activity of the catechists ‘springs in truth from their own witness of life’ (DC 139). The formation programme must be designed to serve the ministry, and a re-incarnation of existing academic courses with the other (pastoral and spiritual) elements added on will not really be adequate for this purpose. Particular attention should be paid to the following areas:

**33.** *Knowing-how-to-Be-With*

Through their participation in the formation programme, candidates will develop a greater appreciation of the human condition in general and a greater awareness of themselves in particular. Through prayer, study, discussion, interactive group work and quality time spent together, they will assimilate the content of their studies, growing in their identity as children of God and their call to be joyful witnesses to the Gospel as catechists. The process of human formation will help the candidate to identify their own gifts, growing in maturity and coming to see that the gift of faith is the friend and not the foe of authentic human development. It will also help them become aware of their limitations which ‘cannot discourage the catechist



from welcoming the call to service' (DC 138). In fact, awareness of one's incompleteness can serve as a bridge to everyone's call to growth and maturity. In the words of Pope Francis: 'Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing' (EG 21).

The *Directory for Catechesis* highlights the ministry of the catechist as relational and in communion with other ministries in the Church. This relational capacity is central to the suitability and training of the catechist 'which is made concrete in a willingness to live human and ecclesial relationships in a way that is fraternal and serene' (DC 140). The catechist ministers 'not as an individual but together with the community' and in its name. For this reason, he/she 'knows how to work in communion, seeking engagement with the group of catechists and the other pastoral workers' (DC 150). It requires of the catechist that he/she has a love for people, is interested in their lives and has a willingness to listen, a capacity for friendship, a desire to patiently accompany others on their journey of faith, and to always keep the needs of the other in view. Most importantly, the *Directory* highlights the importance of boundaries between the catechist and those he/she serves to 'guarantee absolute protection from any form of abuse' (DC 114). In the words of the *Directory*: 'They should be able to distinguish between the external forum and the internal forum and should learn to have great respect for the sacred freedom of the other, without violating or manipulating this in any way' (DC 142).

### 34. *Knowledge*

Because catechists are also teachers who instruct in the faith, careful study of the content of faith is an essential part of their formation. Those who proceed beyond the discernment period will commit themselves to at least two years of part-time study, leading to the award of a higher certificate or diploma (level 6–8). This will need to be designed in such a way that lay people with family and

professional time constraints can reasonably be expected to fulfil the requirements. This will include modules that introduce candidates to Sacred Scripture, fundamental and moral theology, ecclesiology, liturgy, the sacraments and pastoral theology. Academic formation strives to help students explore the rich intellectual tradition of the Church and how faith is



Photo: Bishop Kevin Doran

consistent with reason. It will also include study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and certain magisterial documents.

This knowledge is about assimilation of the wisdom of faith and coming to recognise how the light of faith illuminates reason, conscience, and the human imagination. It is not simply about having ready-made answers. Knowing the faith also takes into account the ‘cultural, ecclesial and existential context of the hearer’ (*DC* 143). This will mean an awareness of the cultural differences between the faithful and a sensitivity to the factors that have shaped their lives.

One of these cultural and ecclesial issues is ecumenism. The *Directory* states that ‘care should be taken to familiarise catechists with the essential elements of the life and theology of the other Churches and Christian communities and of the other religions, so that, with respect for everyone’s identity, dialogue may be authentic and fruitful’ (*DC* 144).

At the end of the programme, candidates will be required to complete a comprehensive assessment of their learning in that time. Candidates who have already completed sufficient academic study in certain areas may, with the approval of the bishop, be exempted from elements of the course of study. The amount of

study previously done is not the only consideration. The study must also be consistent with the Catholic faith. Likewise, even if a case is made for reducing the time required for academic formation, there remains a need to ensure that the candidate is adequately formed for ecclesial ministry and for the commitment he or she is called to make. This cannot be rushed and requires an extended time for growth.

In due course, depending on demand, consideration might be given to the development of a one-year post-diploma course for candidates who already have diploma or degree-level qualifications in theology.

### 35. *Pedagogical and Methodological Formation*

As part of their training, catechists are helped to express their faith and to be competent communicators of the Good News (*AM* 8). The goal of formation is to help each person 'to give an account of the hope within them' (1 Pt 3:15). This will require 'knowledge of the discipline of apologetics which shows that faith is not opposed to reason' (*DC* 145). The nature of this apologetic approach is not defensive but rather creative 'which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all' (*DC* 145). There will need to be a module that includes introduction to tried and tested methods of new-evangelisation, such as the RCIA programme and the Alpha and Sycamore programmes.

At the heart of the formation process is one's living relationship with God. This is the gift that is given to be shared with all. As part of their training, candidates will be helped to nourish their own faith through private and liturgical prayer, spiritual direction, and being introduced to the rich spiritual heritage of the Church's tradition. It requires that catechists engage in their own maturation in faith so that they can assist others in theirs. This means engaging candidates in the art of prayer so that our parishes and communities might be marked by an all-pervading climate of prayer (St John Paul II, *Novo millennio inuente*, 32, 34).

To support their maturation in faith, candidates are recommended to have a spiritual director with whom they can meet regularly and who will support them on their journey of faith. To help the catechist grow in his or her spiritual formation, retreats and days of recollection should be provided with the goal of forming candidates who take responsibility for their own faith formation.

### 36. *Communications Skills*

There is a range of communications skills which the catechist will need to develop if he or she is to be effective. One or more modules of the formation programme will need to be devoted areas such as public speaking, group facilitation, leadership of communal and liturgical prayer, spiritual conversation and, of course, the effective use of new digital media to communicate and evangelise. Candidates who have already sufficient prior experience in these areas may, with the approval of the bishop, be exempted from some elements of pastoral formation.

### 37. *Spirit-filled Evangelisers*

The goal of formation programmes for catechists is to produce 'spirit-filled evangelisers' (*EG* 5). This will include the evangelisation of culture and the transformation of society through the penetration of Christian values into the social, political, and economic sectors (cf. *AM* 15; *EG* 102). Formation will enable the candidate to become familiar with the story of Christianity in Ireland that includes both light and shadow. Each year the candidate will be given a variety of pastoral and educational settings in which she/he can be helped to apply their academic learning to the various pastoral contexts they encounter and to learn how they can be someone who 'teaches for the Church' (*AM* 15). Again, support of and supervision of the candidate in these settings will be vital.

38. *Catechetical Ministry and the Ministry of Catechist*

In any diocesan community, there may be many people who exercise a ministry that could properly be called catechetical. They will have different levels of academic formation, skills and experience. Some of them will be able to devote more time to their ministry than others. Some of them will exercise a particular mission or ministry at the request of their parish priest and others through their involvement in some form of lay apostolate. The Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments distinguishes between those who are instituted in the stable lay ministry of catechist and those who, though not instituted, do, in response to God's call, exercise a catechetical ministry. In a letter from the Dicastery to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, we read:

It is important to note that, since this ministry has 'a definite vocational aspect ... and consequently calls for due discernment on the part of the bishop, and since its content is defined by the individual bishops' conferences (obviously in conformity with what is stated in *Antiquum ministerium*), not everyone who carries out a service of catechesis or pastoral assistance and who are called 'catechists' have to be instituted ... Instead, it is absolutely appropriate that at the beginning of each catechetical year they all should receive a public ecclesial mandate entrusting them with this important function.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences*, 3 December 2021: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/12/13/211213f.html>



In other words, it is appropriate that in every faith community there should be an annual celebration, preferably at the Sunday Eucharist, in which all those who exercise a catechetical role in the community are prayed for and during which they have the opportunity to renew their commitment. This is not, however, the same as being instituted in the lay ministry of catechist. The lay ministry of catechist is one to which a person is called by the bishop, for which he or she is specifically formed and in which he or she is instituted for life.

# INSTITUTION OF THE CATECHIST

## Rite of Institution

39. After the period of formation has been completed, those who are called to the ministry of catechist are now ready to be instituted by the bishop for service within the diocese. The proper setting for this institution is a diocesan liturgical assembly in the Cathedral. It is for the local ordinary to decide, taking into account the relevant pastoral and liturgical considerations, when the Rite of Institution should be celebrated. This celebration provides an opportunity for the bishop to encourage all of the faithful to live richly their baptismal call to discipleship and to use the diverse gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. The celebration would be a timely reminder to all the baptised that every Christian vocation, including that of catechist, is directed towards ‘those who are waiting to discover the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Christian faith’ (*AM* 5).

## Instituted for Life

40. Those who are called to the lay ministry of catechist are instituted in their ministry for life. Permanence is not a feature of contemporary living to the degree that it was in the past. We have become more accustomed to a world in which many things are temporary, but the provisional nature of things can, nonetheless, be quite unsettling and can give rise to a real sense of insecurity. It can undermine our sense of belonging. By entering into a ministry for life, a catechist becomes a witness to hope in a God

whose promise is never broken and whose love is never taken back.

## Ecclesially Instituted

41. Catechists are called to work in communion with their local bishop, who will determine on a regular basis where the catechist can best serve, in fruitful partnership with other ordained and lay ministers or members of institutes of religious or consecrated life. This communion in mission will require that those who are formally instituted are also given a canonical mission by the bishop rather than simply being sent out to do whatever seems to them to be useful. An essential aspect of the effectiveness of the lay ministry of catechist will also be the willingness of the parish clergy not just to allow it but to actively facilitate it and to see the catechist as a valued partner in mission. Clergy will need to be formed to understand how they can facilitate the effective and fruitful integration of the ministry of catechist into the mission of the local Church.
42. The circumstances of each diocese will be different. It is a matter for the bishop (or local ordinary), presumably in consultation with others who have relevant experience and expertise, to discern how many people should be called to the ministry of catechist and how they should be assigned or deployed.

Every man or woman who is instituted in the ministry of catechist exercises the same ecclesial ministry. There are not different degrees of institution. Catechists will not, however, all have the same mission. Nor will all of them necessarily exercise their ministry under the same conditions. Some will exercise their ministry in a voluntary capacity, while for others it may be a profession, involving full-time employment with all that this entails. Some dioceses will wish to have a small number of employed catechists. Some may find it more helpful to have a larger number of volunteer catechists.



Yet others may have some volunteers and some who are employed. This will be determined in part by the circumstances of the diocese. It is essential, however, that the terms and conditions under which men and women are called and instituted should be clearly agreed and documented, whether that be in a volunteer agreement or in a contract of employment.

Ideally the financial burden associated with the cost of formation should not be an excluding factor for a candidate. The bishop, in calling men and women into formation, needs to consider carefully how those costs are to be managed. It seems reasonable that a distinction would be made between those who will offer their services on a voluntary basis and those who will be seeking remunerated employment as catechists. In much the same way, there needs to be clarity as to how operational costs incurred by catechists in the performance of their duties will be managed.

- 43.** Keeping in mind that catechesis takes place in the lives of people, catechists can minister in a variety of settings and contexts according to the pastoral needs of a diocese, these include:
- a.** Animating family catechesis, particularly in sacramental accompaniment (*DC 226–35*);
  - b.** Accompanying young people (*DC 250–5*);
  - c.** Journeying with adults (*DC 257–64*);
  - d.** Pastoral reaching out to specific groups such as the elderly, disabled, migrants and marginal persons (*DC 266–82*);
  - e.** Leading services of the word and prayer experiences, as well as teaching prayer (*DC 86–7*);
  - f.** Developing the community (*DC 88–9*);
  - g.** Training for liturgical ministries (*DC 81–5*);
  - h.** Offering opportunities to grow in deeper knowledge of faith (*DC 80*);
  - i.** Facilitating gatherings and reflection, enabling others to confidently share their faith (*DC 124–5*).

## Ongoing Formation and Further Education

44. Formation is a lifelong process and catechists should be provided with regular structured opportunities to deepen and renew their academic knowledge and their skills, as well as their faith. Participation in these ongoing formation programmes is not an optional extra but an essential part of maintaining fitness for ministry.
45. Catechists who have the requisite ability, energy and desire for further study should be encouraged and supported in the pursuit of higher qualifications and specialisations.



Photo: Bishop Kevin Doran

## CONCLUSION

46. The ministry of Jesus was not about establishing structures. During the three or four years of his earthly ministry, much of his time was spent inviting people into relationship with God and forming disciples. At the end of St Matthew's Gospel, we read that he told those who were gathered with him to 'go make disciples' (Mt 28:19). That is the essential mission of the Church. It is the mission in which catechists are called to participate, as they help their diocese and their parishes to be communities in which disciples are formed. In the words of Pope Francis, the Church is called to be a community of 'Spirit-filled evangelisers fearlessly open to the work of the Holy Spirit' and 'who proclaim the Good News not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured in God's presence' (*EG* 259).
47. In conclusion, we encourage women and men of faith in all our parish communities, to 'fan into a flame the gift of the spirit within you' (2 Tm 1:6). Consider whether you might be called to participate in this way in the mission that Jesus has entrusted to the Church. Reflect on your own faith; how and by whom it was nourished and ask yourself whether you may be able, with the appropriate formation, to accompany others on the path of discipleship. Explore the possibility with others who know you well and whose judgement you trust and, if you find in your heart a desire to give yourself in this way, make contact with your diocese for advice on how you should proceed. May the Spirit of Jesus, who continues to accompany the Church in every generation,



guide each and every one of us, whatever our mission or ministry, in living generously our baptismal calling in the community of the Church.

48. May Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland, who consoled us in a time of despair, intercede for us now and protect all in her maternal embrace who commit themselves to the future of evangelisation in Ireland through this ministry.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix I: Discernment Process for the Ministry of Catechist

The discernment phase for the ministry of catechist is an opportunity for prayerful communal and personal reflection and exploration of a person's call to an instituted ministry within the community of faith.

It should follow an application and selection process that allows for an initial expression of interest and an initial recognition by representatives of the community that there may be a call to be discerned.

We recommend a six-month process offered at diocesan or provincial level and which is independent of the certified programme of study.

There are two aspects to the discernment: pastoral and personal. The former refers to the judgement of the team responsible for the discernment phase regarding a person's suitability and the latter to the individual's own sense of vocation.

At least part of the process should be residential. This allows for the observation of group dynamics and pastoral discernment of the candidate's ability to engage with others and their relational style.

Elements should include:

- Induction into the discernment process
  - » Understanding discernment
  - » Scriptural perspectives on call and response
  - » Spirituality and prayer
- Introduction to reflective practice
- Discerning the specific vocation of the catechist
- Engaging closely with *Fan into a Flame*
- Personal awareness and development

Each candidate should be accompanied by a mentor who will guide them on an individual basis.

It would be good if the time of discernment concludes with an opportunity for a time of prayerful retreat together.

## **Appendix II: Formation Programme for the Instituted Ministry of Catechist**

### **General Principles**

- a.** Catechesis takes place at many levels. Those who are instituted as catechists take on a co-responsible leadership role at a diocesan level under the direct mandate of the bishop and are to be formed accordingly.
- b.** The programme needs to have a strong emphasis on skills for ministry, such as communication skills, facilitation, group skills, leading public prayer, public speaking, use of digital media and pastoral care skills.
- c.** Integrated pastoral placement needs to be an essential element of the course.
- d.** Assessment needs to be appropriate to adult learners and also praxis-oriented.

### **The Award**

Higher Diploma in Catechetics

Level 8 (60 ECTS Credits)

### **Articulation and Progression**

Students who do not successfully complete the pastoral placement modules may exit with a Higher Certificate in Catechetical Studies provided they have gained 40 credits across the remaining modules.

There will be a pathway from the Higher Diploma to a Masters in Catechetics.

## Delivery

To make the programme accessible while allowing for skills acquisition and the creation of a community of learning, we recommend a blended learning mode (i.e., a mix of face-to-face, online and asynchronous modes). This can take various forms, for example one weekend per month face-to-face, eight times per year, and a weekly online session across four semesters (two years), with some material for students to engage with at a time convenient to them (asynchronous). A fully online programme will not meet the formation needs of the participants.

## Entrance Requirements

Candidates will normally be expected to hold a degree in any field. RPL/RPEL (Recognition of Prior Learning/Experiential Learning) routes will also be available.

Candidates should already have some foundation in theology. We recommend that this be set at a minimum of 30 credits at level 6. Knowledge gained through non-traditional academic routes can also be taken into account through formal RPL/RPEL mechanisms.

Given the ministry context, applicants must have a satisfactory level of English.

Only those who have completed the discernment phase and are put forward by their dioceses are eligible to be enrolled in the programme.

## Programme Aims and Objectives

The Higher Diploma in Catechetics aims to provide advanced training for candidates aspiring to serve as effective catechists at diocesan level. It is designed to deepen participants' understanding of theology, spirituality and pedagogy within the Irish cultural context, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for catechetical ministry. It aims to nurture the spiritual formation of participants through an authentic encounter with the Gospel message, centred on the person of Jesus Christ, as the foundation of their catechetical ministry (*Evangelium Gaudium*).

### *Objectives:*

- a. Foster an integrated understanding of Catholic theology and doctrine to enable participants to articulate the Catholic faith with clarity and conviction (*DC 135b*).
- b. Provide a robust pedagogical framework incorporating effective methodologies and the use of diverse resources to engage people of different age groups and backgrounds (*DC 135d*).
- c. Provide spiritual formation that nurtures the personal and communal prayer life of participants and enhances their ability to accompany others on the faith journey (*DC 135c*).
- d. Cultivate a reflective approach to catechetical ministry, rooted in prayer, discernment and reliance on the Holy Spirit (*DC 135a*).
- e. Cultivate leadership and pastoral skills for supporting welcoming and inclusive faith communities and responding to pastoral challenges effectively (*DC 142*).
- f. Deepen participants' understanding of the catechist's role within the broader context of the Church's mission, promoting collaboration with other ministries (*DC 145c*).

### **Programme Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of the programme, graduates will be able to:

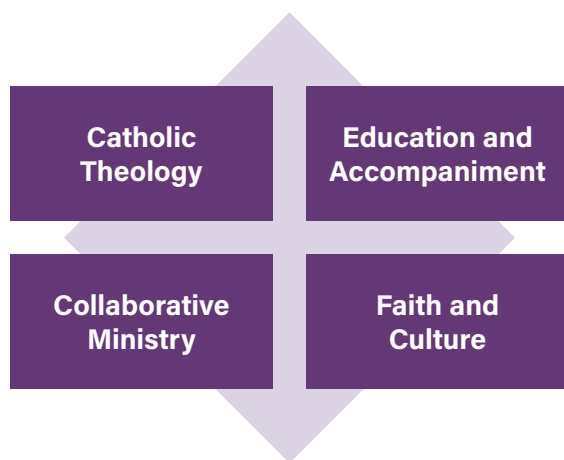
- a. Effectively communicate key aspects of the Catholic faith, including key doctrines, the sacraments and moral teachings (*DC 148*).
- b. Foster a commitment to ongoing spiritual growth in their own lives and in those they accompany (*DC 135c*).
- c. Apply pedagogical principles to design engaging and effective catechetical sessions for a diverse range of learners (*DC 194–223*).
- d. Exhibit pastoral and leadership skills to build community and respond empathetically to pastoral challenges faced by individuals, families and communities (*DC 148d, 150*).



- e. Engage in collaborative ministry at diocesan and parish level (*DC 150*).
- f. Reflect on their role as catechists, integrating theological reflection practice and a commitment to lifelong learning (*DC 146*).
- g. Uphold the ethical and professional standards expected of catechists through commitment to the highest levels of integrity and accountability (*DC 142*).

## Content

### *Core Areas*



There would be scope given for different education providers to design a programme that met the programme outcomes and that covered the four core areas.

Within the modules that make up the programme there should be an emphasis on:

- Co-responsibility
- Personal development
- Reflective practice/theological reflection
- Skills for ministry

Both the module content and the assessment strategy should incorporate communication skills, facilitation, group skills, leading public prayer, public speaking, use of digital media and pastoral care skills as appropriate.

The following content would need to be included:

- a. Pedagogy/androgogy for catechesis and mystagogy (*DC* 98, 157–181)
- b. Sacred Scripture as word of God (*DC* 91–92, 144)
- c. Fundamental, systematic and moral theology (*DC* 83–85, 144)
- d. Ecclesiology (history and theology of the Church) (*DC* 144)
- e. Liturgy and prayer (*DC* 86–89, 95–98, 144)
- f. Sacraments (*DC* 144)
- g. Pastoral theology (*DC* 101, 224–235, 298–303)
- h. Ecumenism (*DC* 144, 343–346)
- i. The New Evangelisation (*DC* 48–50)
- j. Psychology and sociology of faith development (*DC* 146)
- k. Collaborative leadership and synodality (*DC* 53–54, 88–89)
- l. Ethical practice (*DC* 136)

### *Placement*

A supervised pastoral placement is an essential element of this programme. Theological reflection and reflective practice would be integrated in to this aspect of the programme.

### *Assessment*

The assessment needs to be appropriate to adult learners and also praxis-oriented. It is to be conducted in such a way that students are required to display skill and ability to practically apply the learnings in the relevant module. In other words, it must clearly contribute to the skills and competencies set out in the programme learning outcomes.

Programme submissions must include a clear statement of assessment strategy with module-level examples provided.

## Appendix III: Extract from Letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists (Cardinal Arthur Roche, 3 December 2021)

This letter, which accompanies the publication of the *Editio typica* of the Rite of Institution of Catechists, aims to offer a contribution to the reflection of the Bishops' Conferences, proposing some notes on the ministry of Catechist, on the necessary requirements, and on the celebration of the rite of institution.

### I. *The ministry of Catechist*

1. The ministry of Catechist is a 'stable form of service rendered to the local Church in accordance with pastoral needs identified by the local Ordinary, yet one carried out as a work of the laity, as demanded by the very nature of the ministry'.<sup>1</sup> It is a broad and varied ministry.
2. First of all, it should be emphasised that this is a **lay ministry** based on the common baptismal state and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism and is essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders.<sup>2</sup>
3. The '**stability**' of the ministry of Catechist is analogous to that of the other instituted ministries. This definition of stability, as well as expressing the fact that it is a 'stable' ministry in the Church, also affirms that lay people who have the age and qualifications determined by decree of the Episcopal Conference, can be admitted in a stable manner (like Lectors and Acolytes)<sup>3</sup> into

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1 Francis, *Antiquum ministerium*, n. 8.

2 Cf. Francis, *Spiritus Domini*, s.n.

3 Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 230 §1: 'Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the Conference of Bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church'.

the ministry of Catechist. This takes place through the rite of institution which is therefore not to be repeated. The exercise of the ministry, however, can and must be regulated by the individual Episcopal Conferences in terms of duration, content and modalities, in accordance with pastoral needs.<sup>4</sup>

4. Catechists, by virtue of their Baptism, are called to be **co-responsible** in the local Church for the **proclamation and transmission of the faith**, carrying out this role **in collaboration with the ordained ministers and under their guidance**. ‘Catechising is, in a way, to lead a person to study this mystery [of Christ] in all its dimensions. [...] It is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God’s eternal design reaching fulfilment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ’s actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity’.<sup>5</sup>
5. Such a goal includes **various aspects** and its attainment is expressed in **multiple forms**, depending on the needs of the communities and the discernment of the Bishops. For this reason, and in order to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to bear in mind that the term ‘catechist’ indicates different realities in relation to the ecclesial context in which it is used. Catechists in mission territories differ from those working in churches of long-standing tradition. Moreover, individual ecclesial experiences also produce very different characteristics and patterns of action, so much so that it is difficult to give it a unitary and synthetic description.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Francis, *Antiquum ministerium*, n. 9.

5 Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi tradendae* (16 October 1979), n. 5, in: AAS 71 (1979) 1281.

6 Cf. Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, *Guide for Catechists* (3 December 1993), n. 4.

6. Among the great variety of forms, one can distinguish – though not rigidly – **two main types** of Catechists. Some have the **specific task of catechesis**, others the broader task of **participating in different forms of apostolate**, in collaboration with the ordained ministers and obedient to their guidance. The context of the ecclesial reality (Churches of long-standing tradition; young Churches; the size of the territory; the number of ordained ministers; pastoral organisation, etc) determines one or the other type.<sup>7</sup>
7. It is important to note that, since this ministry has ‘a definite vocational aspect [...] and consequently calls for due discernment on the part of the bishop,’<sup>8</sup> and since its content is defined by the individual Bishops’ Conferences (obviously in conformity with what is stated in *Antiquum ministerium*), not everyone who carries out a service of catechesis or pastoral assistance and who are called ‘catechists’ have to be instituted.
8. It is preferable that the following **should not be instituted as Catechists**:  
 those who have already begun their journey towards Holy Orders and in particular have been admitted among the candidates for the Diaconate and the Priesthood. As already mentioned, the ministry of Catechist is a lay ministry and is essentially distinct from the ordained ministry which is received with the Sacrament of Orders;<sup>9</sup>  
 men and women religious (irrespective of whether they belong to Institutes whose charism is catechesis), unless they act as leaders of a parish community or coordinators of catechetical activity. It should be remembered that, in the absence of instituted ministers, they can – like all the baptised – exercise ministries ‘de facto,’ precisely because of their Baptism, which is also the basis of their religious profession;

7 Cf. *ibid.*

8 Francis, *Antiquum ministerium*, n. 8.

9 Cf. Francis, *Spiritus Domini*, s.n.

those who carry out a role exclusively for the members of an ecclesial movement: this function, which is equally valuable, is in fact assigned by the leaders of the individual ecclesial movements and not, as in the case of the ministry of catechist, by the diocesan bishop following his discernment in relation to pastoral needs; those who teach Catholic religion in schools, unless they also carry out other ecclesiastical tasks in the service of the parish or diocese.

9. Careful reflection – which can truly be deepened by a comprehensive and balanced reconsideration of the instituted ministries as a whole – is required in the case of those who accompany **the initiation of children, young people and adults**. It does not seem appropriate for everyone to be instituted as a catechist. As already mentioned, this ministry has ‘a definite vocational aspect [...] and consequently calls for due discernment on the part of the Bishop’. Instead, it is absolutely appropriate that at the beginning of each catechetical year they all should receive a public ecclesial mandate entrusting them with this important function.<sup>10</sup>

It is not ruled out, however, that after suitable discernment, some who are involved in initiation programmes may be instituted as ministers. However, it would be wise to ask the question which ministry is the most suitable, that of Lector or of Catechist, in view of the specific content of each.

In fact, the rite of institution of Lectors states that it is their task to educate children and adults in the faith and to guide them to receive the sacraments in a worthy manner.<sup>11</sup> Considering that

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10 Cf. *Rituale Romanum, De Benedictionibus*, editio typica 1984, nn. 361-377.

11 Cf. *Pontificale Romanum, De institutione Lectorum et Acholytorum*, n. 4: ‘Lectores seu verbi Dei relatores effecti, adiutorium huic muneri praestabitis, et proinde peculiare officium in populo Dei suscipietis, et servitio fidei, quae in verbo Dei radicatur, deputabimini. Verbum enim Dei in coetu liturgico proferetis, pueros et adultos in fide et ad Sacramenta digne recipienda instituetis, nuntiumquesalutis hominibus, qui adhuc illud ignorant, annuntiabitis. Hac via et vestro auxilio, homines ad cognitionem Dei Patris Filiique eius, Iesu Christi, quem ipse misit, pervenire poterunt et vitam assequi aeternam’.

it is an ancient tradition that every ministry is directly linked to a particular office in the liturgical celebration, it is certainly evident that proclaiming the Word in the assembly clearly expresses the service of those who accompany candidates on the path of initiation. Those who receive catechetical instruction should see the liturgical expression of the service being rendered to them in the Lector who becomes the voice of the Word.

If, however, those who are involved in initiation are entrusted – under the moderation of ordained ministers – with a task of formation or the responsibility for coordinating all catechetical activity, then it would seem more appropriate for them to be instituted as Catechists.

In conclusion: not everyone who prepares children, young people and adults for initiation need to be instituted as Catechists. The Bishop's discernment may call some of them to the ministry of either Lector or Catechist, according to their abilities and to pastoral needs.

10. Because of what has now been established, candidates for the instituted ministry of Catechist – having some prior experience of catechesis<sup>12</sup> – can, therefore, be chosen from among those who **carry out the service of proclamation in a more specific manner**: they are called to find effective and coherent means for this first evangelisation, and then to accompany those who have received it into the initiatory stage.

They play an active part in the rites of the Christian initiation of adults which expresses the importance of their ministry.<sup>13</sup> In the period of the pre-catechumenate, Catechists collaborate with Pastors, Sponsors and Deacons to find the most suitable forms for the first proclamation of the Gospel, awakening the candidates to faith and to conversion; they help to discern the external

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12 Cf. Francis, *Antiquum ministerium*, n. 8.

13 Cf. *Rituale Romanum, Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum. Prænotanda*, editio typica 1972, n. 48.

signs of the dispositions of those who intend to be admitted to the catechumenate.<sup>14</sup> During this period they carry out an appropriate catechesis suited to the liturgical year and supported by celebrations of the Word of God, from which they are able to bring the catechumens ‘not only to a suitable knowledge of dogmas and precepts, but also to an intimate knowledge of the mystery of salvation’.<sup>15</sup> The Bishop delegates ‘truly worthy and suitably prepared’ Catechists to celebrate the Minor Exorcisms.<sup>16</sup>

Once the catechumens have been initiated, Catechists remain with the community as witnesses to the faith, teachers and mystagogues, companions and pedagogues who, in every way, are willing to encourage the faithful to conform their lives to the baptism they have received.<sup>17</sup> They are also called upon to find new and bold ways of proclaiming the Gospel that will enable them to stir up and reawaken the faith in the hearts of those who no longer feel the need for it.<sup>18</sup>

11. However, the area of proclamation and teaching describes only a part of the activity of instituted Catechists. In fact, they are called to **collaborate with ordained ministers in the various forms of the apostolate**, carrying out many functions under the guidance of the pastors. In attempting to offer a by no means exhaustive list of these functions, the following can be indicated: guiding community prayer, especially the Sunday liturgy in the absence of a Priest or Deacon; assisting the sick; leading funeral celebrations; training and guiding other Catechists; coordinating pastoral initiatives; human promotion according to the Church’s social doctrine; helping the poor; fostering the relationship between the community and the ordained ministers.

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14 Cf. *ibid*, nn. 11.16.

15 Cf. *ibid*, n.19 §1.

16 Cf. *ibid*, n. 44.

17 Cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation, *Directory for Catechesis*, n. 113.

18 Cf. *ibid*, n. 41.



12. This breadth and variety of functions should not come as a surprise: the exercise of this lay ministry fully expresses the consequences of being baptised and, in the particular situation of the lack of a stable presence of ordained ministers, it is a participation in their pastoral action. This is what the Code of Canon Law<sup>19</sup> affirms when it provides for the possibility of entrusting to a non-ordained person a share in the exercise of pastoral care in a parish, always under the moderation of a priest. It is necessary, therefore, to form the community so that it does not see the Catechist as a substitute for the Priest or Deacon, but as a member of the lay faithful who lives their baptism in fruitful collaboration and shared responsibility with the ordained ministers, so that their pastoral care may reach everyone.<sup>20</sup>
13. It is the task of the **Episcopal Conferences**, therefore, to clarify the **description**, the **role** and the most appropriate **forms** for the exercise of the ministry of Catechists in line with what is indicated in Motu Proprio *Antiquum ministerium*. Adequate **formation programmes** for candidates must also be defined.<sup>21</sup> Finally, care must also be taken to prepare communities so that they may understand the meaning of this ministry.

## II. Requirements

14. It is the task of the diocesan Bishop to discern the call to the ministry of Catechist by assessing the needs of the community

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19 *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 517 §2: 'If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care.'

20 Cf. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christi fideles laici* (30 December 1988), n. 15; Benedict XVI, *Address opening the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the theme: 'Church Membership and Pastoral Co-responsibility'* (26 May 2009); Francis, *Address to Italian Catholic Action* (3 May 2014).

21 Francis, *Antiquum ministerium*, n. 9.

and the abilities of the candidates.<sup>22</sup> Men and women who have received the sacraments of Christian initiation and have presented a freely written and signed petition to the diocesan bishop may be admitted as candidates.

15. The *Motu Proprio* describes the requirements as follows: ‘It is fitting that those called to the instituted ministry of Catechist be men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion. They should also receive suitable biblical, theological, pastoral and pedagogical formation to be competent communicators of the truth of the faith and they should have some prior experience of catechesis. It is essential that they be faithful co-workers with priests and deacons, prepared to exercise their ministry wherever it may prove necessary, and motivated by true apostolic enthusiasm’.<sup>23</sup>

### III. Celebration

16. The ministry of Catechist is conferred by the diocesan Bishop, or by a priest delegated by him, by means of the liturgical rite *De Institutione Catechistarum* promulgated by the Apostolic See.
17. The ministry can be conferred during Mass or during a celebration of the Word of God.
18. After the liturgy of the Word the structure of the rite envisages an exhortation (this given text lends itself well to adaptation by the Bishops’ Conferences in relation to how they wish to specify the role of the Catechists); an invitation to prayer; a blessing; the handing over of a crucifix.

In conclusion I would like us to return to the ever prophetic words of Saint Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

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22 *Ibid.*, n. 8.

23 *Ibid.*

‘We cannot but experience a great inner joy when we see so many pastors, religious and lay people, fired with their mission to evangelise, seeking ever more suitable ways of proclaiming the Gospel effectively. We encourage the openness which the Church is showing today in this direction and with this solicitude. It is an openness to meditation first of all, and then to ecclesial ministries capable of renewing and strengthening the evangelising vigour of the Church. It is certain that, side by side with the ordained ministries, whereby certain people are appointed pastors and consecrate themselves in a special way to the service of the community, the Church recognises the place of non-ordained ministries which are able to offer a particular service to the Church’.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), n. 73, in: AAS 68 (1976) 72-73.

