

Report of a Meeting of Bishops and National  
Directors of Catechesis in Europe  
8-11 May 2006

Christian Initiation as a  
Process for Becoming Christian

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**Meeting of Bishops and National Directors of Catechesis in Europe, Rome, 8-11 May  
2006**

**Castrillon Hoyos, Prefect for the Organised by the Consiglio Conferenze Episcopali  
Europee (CCEE) with the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (CEI)**

**Conference Theme: Christian Initiation as a Process for Becoming  
Christian.**

**Delegates** from the following: Holy See (Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos, Congregation for the Clergy, and Mons Carru, Undersecretary); CCEE; CEI; Group of Italian 'Experts'. Albania; Austria; Belgium; Bielorrussia; Croatia; France; Germany; England and Wales; Ireland; Italy; Kazakhstan; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Holland; Sweden; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Czech Republic; Romania; Russia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Turkey; Ukraine (Byzantine); Ukraine (Latin); Hungary

Following **welcome from** Peter Fleetwood (CCEE) and Walther Ruspi (CEI and Director of the National Catechetical Office, Italy), Bishop Cesare Nosiglia, Archbishop of Venice and delegate for the CCEE for Catechesis, gave an introduction to the meeting.

**INTRODUCTION: Christian Initiation as a process of becoming Christian  
(Cesare Nosiglia) (no English translation available)**

**Main points summarised here:**

We live in times of both difficulties and opportunities, but also a time of the Holy Spirit, and like the apostles on the road to Emmaus, our hearts burn within us. Our faith is not a 'tradition' but a 'conviction'. The Council of Trent, determined to diffuse the ignorance of the people concerning their faith, produced a Catechism that established a form of permanent catechesis. Catechesis for the young has always had strong commitment. Pius X lowered the age for reception of Holy Communion, favouring a fruitful catechesis of children. Vatican 11 did not give us a document on catechesis, but gave us the principles which have given birth to many strong, fruitful catechetical movements, and extended the vocation of catechesis to all people together. They established principles of renewal and new methods of teaching. However, problems arose: how to involve families; the exit of young people after the sacrament of confirmation; cultural complexities and barriers seemingly impregnable to the Gospel. There is a need for sociological analysis, not only to see the positive and negative aspects of culture, but to give evangelical direction to changes in approach. Cultural formation of priests and catechists is vital, for example, an understanding of youth, their cultural condition and ability to receive the Gospel. God goes beyond every human presumption and is reigning, even when it looks like a desert,! People's aspirations lie deep at the heart of their being. Initiation in faith in Christ must be lived out in the community, through welcome, love and witness. It is a 'school' that needs to be extended to life. This 'school of initiation' is the work of the whole community. The catechumenate is part of, and must feel part of, the people of God. In this school of initiation we meet Christ. The catechumens are receiving doctrinal and moral catechesis, as well as being catechised through ritual. They are being introduced to the norms of our life, and the mysteries of faith. It is school that leads to maturity in Christ. It is very important from a pastoral (and theological) point of view that the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist maintain their unity, even if the timing for these sacraments is different. All this initiation takes place within the life of the community. Together we are building the Body of Christ, the Church, through witness and profession of faith. The fact that Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are intimately linked as the pathway in this process does not mean that we cannot propose such a journey to the already baptised, to enable renewal and the grace of Baptism to become effective in them. Every 'itinerary' of Christian Initiation is a lifelong path, for all believers to live and witness.

## **SESSION TWO: A. Essential Elements in the Process of Becoming Christian (Sr Judith Fogassy, Hungary) Summary.**

Sr Judith used General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) 80 as working definition of catechesis: to bring people into the fullness of relationship with Jesus Christ.. who is the way to the Father. It is for all age groups, and draws its inspiration and dynamism from the model given for the Catechumenate (RCIA) (GDC 90-91)

**Initiation as the goal of catechesis:** catechesis occurs in stages, from initial conversion to Christ, along a continuing pathway of initiation into life with Christ and his community. Becoming Christian involves a search for identity that will effect values, life-style, outlook. It means naming that which is not Christian too, and turning from that. Initiation is process of becoming.

### **Essential elements of Initiation:**

As 'love story' it involves people who witness to that love. Both the catechists and the community bring us into 'dialogue with the Christian love story' – dialogue between the human person and God's living Spirit in the Church.

1. **Mutual enquiry:** We are not 'on the inside waiting for those outside to come with their questions.' It is a two way flow – we listen to the Good Shepherd. We first enquire – to those who come: how are you? What are your wounds? Its not about our goodness but God's initiative, God who has been active and 'sees us first'. We go out to seek for the lost – our missionary mandate from Jesus. (CCC 101,109,2576,30)
2. **The Eucharistic Community**(Diocese and Parish CCC1329): is the context for initiation. Community united: 'one faith, one Lord, one baptism' (Eph 4:5), one body (1Cor 10:17)formed by Christ, who is present; the 'body' is united in and by the Eucharist. (CCC1322-1327). Community is context/witness to the transforming power of God through faith/grace. It is the 'school of faith' where we experience the bond of love. (Jn 17:21-23; *Deus Caritas est*, 17) We not perfect – our 'belonging' comes through grace, through the sacraments.
3. **The transition of faith, the free act of faith and conversion.** Faith is gift of God, but also a human response. Jesus invited people to faith. Choice/opportunity to respond is ours. (CCC 154) Without free choice/response, conversion is not possible, and initiation becomes meaningless rituals – and people will walk away. It is not about pick and choose or compromise, but radical choice/witness. (Sr Judith told story of Ramone, a gang-land youth, choosing to leave the gang in order to be baptised and live as a Christian – he was killed by other gang members. The 200 young people in the catechumenate then saw starkly what the choice for baptism meant!) Fear, or desire to please can be obstacles to true conversion. The enquirer must want the life offered to him or her, and be prepared to change his life according to the demands of the Gospel. (intellect, emotions, political sense, behaviour, relationships, religious identity). 'The unfolding of Divine revelation leads to the unfolding of the content of faith – clear and precise teaching).
4. **The Rites, and 'sacramental initiation'.** Not 'nice ceremonies' but essential landmarks on the journey. Symbolic language unveils mysteries of our faith, strengthening the relationship developing in the life of the candidate. The rites reflect the mystery that the Community of Christians live and celebrate in the Mass, 'source and summit' of our lives. Not private – channel of grace for whole community.
5. **Development of new perspective. Radical conversion.** See God/self/world in new light. Understands and believes Gospel vision is for him/her, and it makes demands. Christ calls 'come out' of whatever keeps you bound in darkness. New understanding of the mystery of the cross, passion and resurrection in life.
6. **Living the Liturgical year.** (SC 102, CCC 1171) Essential that the candidate/catechumen lives the mysteries of Christian faith, through at least one liturgical year, which has the Paschal Mystery at its heart. (SC7) The Word is to be lived and not just 'pondered'. The gospels of the liturgical cycle 'give us the ABC of the mind of God – what it is to be fully human and alive in Christ' i.e. our Christian identity.

7. **The Team:** Sponsors. The 'team' or small group who meet with the catechumens each week represents the Christian community. They witness how this community lives the Gospel. They give personal testimony and engage in mutual enquiry with those they accompany. They come to know what each individual candidate needs, and open to the Spirit to guide them. Their involvement avoids the danger of the enquirers/candidates/catechumens becoming attached to the catechist/priest/'expert', and a one-to-one process alone. True initiation is into the life of the Church, and takes place amongst the people of the community.
8. **Mystagogy.** The neophytes have been sacramentally initiated, but cannot live their faith without the continued support of those who have accompanied them so far, and the life of the community. Sometimes, every effort is concentrated into sacramental preparation and post-baptismal catechesis is neglected. This period allows for continuing/deepening catechesis – continuing to 'hold hands' with the neophytes. There is opportunity for wisdom/counsel as the mysteries of faith continue to unfold.

**Conclusions:** these essential elements, connected with the living faith community, involve the catechumens fully in the experience of what it means to be 'church'. The parish is the locus of initiation not because it is 'perfect' but because it is the means of renewal/new evangelisation for the whole community – it brings new life. The catechumenate initiates people into:

- **Faith of the church** – 'I believe/we believe
- **Life flowing from faith** – gospel in daily life, hope in the loving God at work in their lives.
- **Mission of the church** – witness to love, work for peace/justice.
- **Service of the church** – works of mercy/responsibility to share in service
- **Community of the church** – to draw strength from and be active members of 'Body of Christ'
- **Life of prayer of the church** – as priest/prophet/king – to worship & give thanks, and pattern life on the Eucharist – through praise, thanksgiving, offering, and intercessory prayer.

**None of the above are optional if we are to bring people into union with Christ, the goal of catechesis.**

## SESSION TWO

### **B. Becoming Christians and Becoming Fully Human: Catechesis as an aid to becoming fully human,** Given by Dr Marion Shober, President of the Association of German Catechists, with responsibility for catechesis and religious education formation/training for teachers in Catholic Schools (**Germany**).

*There was a difficulty in the English translation of the German word 'menschen', the latter being so much more than 'man' or even 'humankind'. Some of the theological/mystical nuances were lost in both the paper and simultaneous translations. Difficult to translate 'inclusively'. I shall attempt here to put over Dr Shober's main points. (CD)*

Dr Shober sub-titled her paper with a quote from *Gaudium et Spes*, 41: 'Whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man', and opened it with GS 1 "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts'.

**The close bond of people with their experiences and the reality of their world** (as expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*) guides and animates catechesis. The transmission of our faith challenges us to put across the content of our biblical-Christian tradition to people of our times in such a way that they will feel both challenged and affirmed by the Good News. All catechetical processes must take seriously the dimensions of humanity: experience & language. The fundamental question that permeates all our catechesis: What has Christian faith got to do with my life? (Theology of Karl Rahner – how can we convey central truths of faith, as a vision for life for people today? (*Gottgeheimnis Mensch, Magonza 1995 p26*))

**The search for the meaning of life and personal identity:** in the interaction between pre-ordained and self-determining factors, human beings can become fully human over a life-long process of maturation. The dynamics for this process are the constant questioning of the meaning of life and the desire to be a better human being. What is at the root of the mystery of human existence?

**The fundamental anthropological challenge/task of becoming fully human** provides catechesis with a number of approaches for transmission of our Christian faith, the cornerstone of which is God becoming man in Jesus Christ. If human formation identifies a human being becoming human through the formation of personality, then in catechetical formation, becoming 'human' means becoming 'Christian' because catechesis considers becoming fully human a process based on the way Jesus Christ became man. Therefore, all catechetical formation must explain the importance of Christian faith for self-knowledge and personal development, orientation in the world and fulfilment.

**The aim of catechesis** is to discover God's image in humanity, and enable the conditions for a personal relationship with God. Personal encounter with the mystery of God who became man leads human beings themselves to become fully human, to mature and understand his or her original vocation. For Rahner, discovering and understanding God's 'imprint' in human persons was the most pressing and exciting task of theology. Rahner says it is not through philosophical or rational arguments that we find faith, but through personal relationship with God who became man in Christ. In Christ, divine and human reality meet. In Christ, God reveals God's Self, as One who redeems, loves and 'graces' humanity. In Christ we recognise the invisible God (Col 1:15) and how to become fully human as God intends us to be. (see *Gaudium et Spes* 22 'only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light' and 'whoever follows after Christ, the perfect human being, becomes himself more fully human' GS 41). In saying 'yes' to Christ, we do not lose our identity, but become in our turn fully human. It is a task of catechesis to enable people to find through the mystery of personal relationship with Christ, a 'boost' for their own human and personal maturity. Dr Shober says it is 'only by meeting the incarnate love of God that man finds himself and become entirely human'. Through our encounter with Christ, we are transformed into Christ's likeness. Through the 'gaze of love' we begin to see everything with 'new eyes'. Christ is ever present and close to us – through Christ's presence and redeeming love, we can become more Christ-like in our faith and in our God-given destiny as human beings created in/to/for love. Our

destiny is fully realised through Jesus Christ – through our faith we become more and more part of humanity made in God’s image. Becoming ‘Christian’ is to become ‘Christ-like’. Yes, we are imperfect, but we trust in the fulfilment of our vocation to love, and engage in the life-long journey to maturity in Christ, in faith and humanity. As Rahner wrote: ‘We are Christians only with the aim of becoming Christians’. (*KR: Grundhurs des Blaubens, 1976*)

Dr Shober concluded with two quotes

- (i) Romano Guardini: Each person is a unique word that God pronounces exclusively on them. Our task consists in rendering audible during our life in this world this unique word that God has told us personally.’
- (ii) Angelo Silesius: If Christ had been born in Bethlehem a thousand times but not within you, then you would be lost forever.

## SESSION THREE:

### A. **The Practice of the Catechumenate in a Context of Cultural and Religious Pluralism**

Given by Beatrice Blazy, responsible for the Catechumenate in France.

Beatrice Blazy began her paper with the assertion that you cannot separate 'becoming a Christian' as something separate from or outside being fully human. The catechumenate is defined as space and time in which the Word of God re-echoes, in order to enable people to realise their deepest needs and be fulfilled. The process cannot take place without considering the cultural influences on the catechumens. Sr Blazy then gave a rich variety of examples from within her experience in multi-cultural France.

1. The huge variety of Catechumens: age, social, ethnic, & religious background, some influenced by cults or 'new age'. There are immigrants from the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Japan, China. Those coming are not doing so as part of a 'mass movement' but are on individual, personal journeys. Some are already integrated into French society. Others still deeply influenced by culture of origin. There is also a rising number of enquirers with the problems of divorce and remarriage – it is sometimes through this test of failed relationships that people turn towards God and ask for help to find their way towards the church.
2. The common elements of motivation/expectations of those coming in thinking about their relationship with religion:
  - i. Meaning of life, death, evil...
  - ii. Ethical values in life
  - iii. Sense of belonging/identity
  - iv. Quest for spiritual life, intimacy/relationship with God
3. The Welcoming of Catechumens is founded on 2 basic convictions:
  - i. The Holy Spirit at work in each personal journey – Word of God is open to all who will hear, and decision to be initiated will then be free individual response. Those who accompany are 'labourers' who help others to Jesus, the door, the way, the truth and the life. People are met where they are, with all the mixed motivations they have (curiosity, to 'feel more French', to 'get married in church' etc)
  - ii. Diversity of cultures and backgrounds is not a difficulty but an asset – great opportunity. The 'sharing' in the enquiry/catechumenate enables people to discover the importance of being together, a community of believers established in solidarity in the name of Christ. Their stories affect/nourish one another. (e.g. 2 catechumens: A university professor, and an illiterate woman found themselves in same group – drew great mutual benefit in pondering Gospel – as neophytes, the woman became Godmother to the professor's infant son)
4. The Practice of the Catechumenate: How it is lived out in parishes.

Process based on individual accompaniment in the small catechumenal group, and attendance in the 'catechetical assembly'. Personal accompaniment allows for progress at their own pace, and allows for cultural specificity. Assemblies allow for broader exchange, based on Liturgies of the Word. Everyone has the opportunity to participate/speak freely. The steps are celebrated depending on the needs of the community and cultural factors of the individuals – e.g. Gospel Choir invited to help celebrate Rite of Welcome when a group of African immigrants joined the catechumenate.

Catechumenate is practiced in most French dioceses, and is based on a number of essential ingredients:

- a. getting to know the catechumens(principles, origins, culture – LISTENING). Each catechumen goes through inculturation process from their traditional practice through to the ritual of baptism.
- b. Discerning their expectations from the very start – where they are at with God. Evangelisation.
- c. Diocesan catechumenal services must be related to individual communities, linking people to communities where there are people of the same origin
- d. Communicating in language that is accessible – verify meaning of words – religious jargon can be barrier
- e. Symbolic language – allow symbols to speak and establish common bond between people of different background/expectations. Use times of pilgrimage, silence, retreat, parish liturgies.
- f. The ‘sponsors’ who accompany are not the ‘holders of the truth’: God reveals God’s Self in all cultures even if they are expressed in ways we find strange.

5. Difficulties and Limitations:

- Those with specific religious background have more difficulty entering into complex Judaeo-Christian tradition : e.g. Buddhist or animistic traditions.
- Language barriers – non-French speakers, or religious jargon. Aim to have material/bibles in catechumens language, or translate texts you are using.
- Choosing Christ – can lead to family/relational break-ups, with lonely isolated catechumens (e.g. Muslims who convert are ostracised by their communities). Need to establish groups for sharing prayer/solidarity. Special support for those with marital problems in past/present.
- Choosing Christ can be in conflict with some customs or values in their societies (e.g. polygamy, equality, or fear to commit to ‘one’ religion.

Sr Blazy concluded: RCIA continues today because of its ability to adapt/meet people where they are culturally. Catechumens are very sensitive to the fact that this is a universal Church, and that they become Christians through the same sacraments celebrated in the same way with the same steps and stages since the time of the Apostles – a universal communion between all those who seek God.

## SESSION THREE

- B. **The Pastoral Program: Journeys in Adult Faith (WeG): The spiritual initiation of baptised adults into the community**, Clemens Armbruster, Priest of Archdiocese of Fribourg, & colleagues, Germany.

**A project that seeks to support baptised adults in their faith.** Fr Ambruster began with a question: Infants are baptised, celebrate and receive gifts, children receive first Communion, celebrate and receive gifts, teenager are confirmed, celebrate, and receive gifts. What about adults? At each stage (infant, child, teenager) the church catechises with appropriate language. What are we offering adults – what celebrations of faith do we have for adults? How do we include adults in faith development? Many are leaving, feeling little sense of belonging, having left their faith at a childhood stage of development, when they were confirmed many years before. They have lost the experience and meaning of these sacraments of initiation. ‘A child who does not grow does not remain a child but becomes a dwarf’ (Heinz Shurmann, Oratory Priest and NT Scholar). The same holds true for faith: a faith that does not grow does not remain ‘childlike’ but becomes dry and atrophied. The question of what we do for adults resulted in Armbruster’s **‘Journeys in Adult Faith’**. He makes the following observations:

**Journeys in adult faith need to become the norm in pastoral ministry.** There is no ‘standard’ programme for adults. In Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Croatia, priests and pastoral ministers are not formed to offer catechesis for adults. GDC gives guidance. There are however some parallel programmes for parents of children preparing for first sacraments, where parents involved in the catechesis of their children. But what about those who work full-time, those who do not have children, or those who do not bring their children for first sacraments, or where there is no parallel process offered to parents of children preparing? The majority of adults no longer participate in the life of the church, and are often indifferent.

**How does the journey of maturation begin?** How is it nurtured? What sparks it off? The GDC says faith is conversion to Christ, and a decision to walk in Christ’s footsteps – it is a personal encounter with Christ and becoming a disciple. (GDC 130 German edition, Bonn 1997). How can we facilitate this encounter? The Holy Spirit reveals Christ. When Jesus is proclaimed, the Spirit enters the heart that is open.

**Journey in Adult Faith** (or **‘WeG’**: Wege erwachsenen Glaubens. The word ‘Weg’ in German means ‘way’ or journey’ too).

The parish forms in-house teams to work with adults and allow them to have a new experience of God. The pastoral programme has several features:

- (i) specifically directed at adults – introduction to the Christian faith
- (ii) mix age group teams to respond to different life stages
- (iii) courses and seminars offered at regular intervals
- (iv) parish team invite people to come along
- (v) begins with process of evangelisation to the whole parish – in which all the different ministry groups can participate/attract new members

### **WeG: 2 stages and 5 steps.**

Preparation stage:

- (i) inform parish community: events to explain vision and need/homilies/ministry groups/articles in parish bulletin. Directed at those who come to Mass, and also looking for people who could be team leaders
- (ii) build team of leaders: key role in implementing stage (the Weg Team)

Implementation stage:

- (iii) faith formation course ‘the WeG Seminar’ (see [www.ddmedien.com](http://www.ddmedien.com) or email [welcome@ddmedien.com](mailto:welcome@ddmedien.com)). Goal of seminar to enable personal experience of faith. (Phil

3:12) 6-8 weeks in length – meeting, talks, discussions, prayer. Included in the course is a celebration of Mass for reconciliation and one to renew baptismal promises. Participants also receive a ‘spiritual diary’ for recording their reflections. The experience moves participants to a sense of the life-long nature of growth in faith, a sense of belonging to the community of faith, and the desire to make room in life for God.

- (iv) promote the formation of small faith sharing parish groups – reflecting on the Word, relationship to Christ, lifestyle. About 50% of those attending the WeG seminars commit to these follow-up small groups. Their initial experience is consolidated and deepened. They begin to feel ‘at home’.
- (v) allow each person to find their own place in the parish according to their gifts. During the year-long small group process, people discover their own personal talents, and the call to serve in the parish/from the parish. People were also encourage to start their own initiatives, and thereby help develop the community. A few continue to work with the WeG seminars, helping new adults in their faith journey.

**Summary:** this is now a tried and tested method of adult faith development, allowing adults to have a lived experience of adult faith, and recognising that this is a life-long journey rooted in the community. It encourages adults to fulfil their own baptismal calling and use their gifts to serve. It is a process that is open to new people seeking God – a program in the parish is ready and waiting to respond to the needs of new adults, providing a living community of faith.

## SESSION 3

- C. **Practicing the Catechumenal Process for Adults (RCIA) in a social context where Catholics are a minority.** Paper prepared and presented by Deacon Stefan Nordstrom, Sweden, responsible for the Catechetical Commission)

In Sweden, Stefan explained, there are 9 million inhabitants, 7 million of whom are Evangelical Lutherans, but less than 10% are active church members. The Roman Catholic Church in Sweden has 150k members, in 1 Diocese, with one bishop, one auxiliary bishop, and 42 parishes. (The largest parish is St Joseph the Worker, a mining area, and it is the size of Portugal!) 90% of the Catholics are immigrants or of immigrant origin. There are 150 priests, 250 nuns, and 22 permanent deacons. Sweden is a secular country, unsupportive of religious practice, and the church has very little influence. Religion is 'private' – and it is difficult to emphasise the aspect of community and mission inherent in the Christian faith.

RCIA was translated into Swedish 10 years ago. The Rite was first used in 2000. It is used in different ways in different parts of the country – e.g. in Gothenburg, they only use the process from Rite of Election to the Easter Vigil! It is not clear what the role of the Bishop is in the process. Because of the great distances between parishes, the rite has been adapted. The Bishop celebrates the Rite of Election in the Cathedral, and all catechumens are required to attend. The rest of the process is carried out in the parishes. The Scandinavian Bishops' Conference have 'RCIA' and how to adapt the process for use in their countries on the agenda for their discussions this year (2006). Every year we have about 35-40 Adult Baptisms in Sweden. The majority of adults are prepared without the RCIA process, over a very short period of 2 – 3 months. Only about 5% use RCIA. The result of this 1:1 model is that most new Catholics have had no contact with the community. We are missing a real pastoral opportunity here – it is like 'childbirth without pregnancy'. They never really discover and deepen their faith. By comparison, adults who are already baptised in another tradition (about 100 per year) have a preparation period of at least a year. Again, this is on a 1:1 basis, with no support from the community – at a time when such support would be crucial. Many have no contact even after being received, and some stop attending altogether.

**On a parish level: St Eugenia, Stockholm,** a Jesuit parish – 9000 parishioners, parish priest, 2 curates, 2 deacons, one sister. Have followed RCIA process for 6 years – reserved for the unbaptised, of which there have been between 3 and 6 people in each of these years.

### **Process in St Eugenia:**

*Publicity of Catechumenate* – for the unbaptised – notice board, bulletin and internet. No pre-catechumenate phase mentioned – but in practice, we have an 'introduction to the Catholic faith' course the year prior to entry to the catechumenate. This is 14 evenings Autumn to Spring, talk, coffee, discussion, and time of prayer – different models of prayer. Some join the catechumenate direct, but this has not proved helpful. The Introductory course is attended by baptised people from other traditions, lapsed Catholics wanting to return, baptised but uncatechised Catholics and the unbaptised. A private personal meeting with the priest is offered to all. Some opt for a 1:1 private process following this initial introductory phase, because as yet we have no process for the already baptised.

*Catechumenate:* reserved for the non-baptised following their enquiry phase of one year. Catechumenate runs from September, with Rite of Acceptance in November, and Rite of Election 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday Lent, and Baptism at the Easter Vigil. The group has been led by the priest or a deacon, involving sponsors at an early stage, giving the catechumens contact with the parish. There are also good discussions led by lay Catholics. So far, every year has been different, adapting the Rite as we learn by experience. The Rite of Welcome was celebrated on a weekday, but the scrutinies were celebrated at the parish Sunday Mass, and baptisms are always at the Easter Vigil.

*Mystagogy* – to emphasise the role of the Bishop in the process, we wait for the celebration of Confirmation until the Easter Season, and sometimes Pentecost, when the Bishop comes. The preparation for this is over 5 evenings. We feel we need to extend the mystagogical period, to

enable the newly baptised to integrate with the community and the Christian life. We call this 'Further on the Road'. They value this support.

**Concluding Reflection:** We have moved from the 9-month initiation with some sort of pre-catechumenate towards a more year-round initiation process. We experience a tension between what we want – a process of genuine conversion and lifelong commitment, and a simple response to 'I want baptism'. We would like to have 2 years preparation for Baptism, one year pre-catechumenate and one year catechumenate. Society and 'life in the fast lane' mentality goes against this – people feel it is too long. However, we feel we have good reason to stick to our longer preparation – the need to move from privatisation of religion being one. Are we placing the threshold for becoming Christian too high? Or are we being responsible, giving a better preparation for a life-long commitment to Christ? The question of discernment arises too – how can we discover that the catechumens growing in faith? How can we nourish conversion? We are also aware of the danger of remaining anonymous. Should we have small groups for the pre-catechumenate phase, open to parishioners taking part. In the Catechumenate phase, we have questions about content, what stories to share, how deep, how intellectual, what areas of Catholic praxis should we share, should we use a lectionary based method, and so on. We need to make sure we have a process that enables enquirers to be ready for the catechumenal phase. This is all part of our discernment process for each individual person, and needs further consideration. We are thinking about 'spiritual direction' in the Jesuit tradition. In the mystagogical phase, we are going to offer the Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life, in parish groups, to integrate them into the community, and deepen their Christian faith-life experience.

**Future process could look like this:**

- First year pre catechumenate
- Second year – catechumenate leading to initiation
- Third year – mystagogy – 'Further on the road'
- Fourth year – spiritual exercises in daily life.

**Aim to involve the parish community more,** training some to be 'leaders' or 'guides' in the process. We have continuing concerns about ministry to lapsed Catholics; parents of children bringing their children for first sacraments; using RCIA as our model for these areas too. RCIA is certainly challenging us in the parish – our whole way of being community, our welcome, the privatisation of faith. We recognise it has a huge amount to offer us as a community, as a tool for pastoral care and meeting people where they are, and also to enable every parishioner to witness from their own baptism – to be Christ's body in the world.

## **DIALOGUE SESSION in Language Groups (1):**

### **English Language Group:**

England and Wales, Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Switzerland, Hungary.

#### **Main points of discussion:**

- Role of Bishop is key to the RCIA process, and all catechesis
- Diversity of situations – needs support at diocesan and parish level
- Divisive nature of some ‘new movements’ – against unity of mainstream Catholic
- Catholics behaving as ‘Reformed’
- Free-standing evangelisation weekends offered in UK by CASE
- On the Way to life: UK cultural survey – crisis of transmission/renew sacramental imagination
- Annual catechetical conferences: theological, pastoral, catechetical and liturgical aspects
- Pastoral concerns – bringing parishes together
- Discernment in the process – how do we listen? (UK RCIA Conference on ‘Discernment in the RCIA, Sept 6-8, London. See [www.rcia.org.uk](http://www.rcia.org.uk))
- What is catechumenal catechesis? Witness? ‘You were seen on the way to Mass today’ is witness.
- Question of Identity – Who am I as a Catholic? Without causing division. If we don’t know our identity, how can we be open?
- Opportunity of Homily – huge potential

## SESSION 4

### A. **The Experimentation of a Catechumenal Itinerary for Children-Youth in the Parish of Mattarello (Trent)** presented by Fr Antonio Brugnara.

Reasons for this experiment: implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children (RCIC) (which is in Part 11 of RCIA,) based on the *Guidelines for Initiation of Children and Youth from 7-14yrs*, promoted by the Permanent Council of the Italian Bishops' Conference, in 1999. Mattarello parish, suburb of Trent, began this experiment in 2000. Currently involves 70 youth. Involves many uncatechised youth – no evangelisation in family. Many coming late to baptism. Question was asked: how can we help families to come to know the Lord? Gradual and progressive process, giving priority to evangelisation, involving the parents and others in accompanying the young people. It develops the relationship between initiation and the Christian community, especially through the steps that are celebrated on the journey. It also re-establishes the connection between the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and eucharist, and celebrates these at the Easter Vigil. It also encourages the relationships of evangelisation, catechesis, liturgy and charity.

#### **Process:**

- Launched by bishop
- Community 'sensitised' to the process
- Task – to establish guidelines for such a process
- Two programmes offered: (1) tradition catechesis for the baptised who had received some family catechesis and (2) a programme for the unbaptised and the baptised who had NOT had any catechesis in their families.(RCIA 295) This second programme was also open to those who wanted to be part of a group with their friends – so starting from scratch with evangelisation.

Parents signing up for their children had to CHOOSE the itinerary that best corresponded to their situation. This caused a lot of debate in the village! It meant a real reflection on the family situation with respect to the Christian faith. It clarified the need to revise the pastoral program for baptism in the parish. Some families with children aged 2 and 3 were coming for baptism, and were directed to this catechumenal programme, so very young children were involved from the start.

The programme operates every two years – bringing together mixed age groups. The programmes run concurrently: one for those who are nearing the end of the journey towards the sacred mysteries; another for those who will be initiated next Easter Vigil, and a third for those who have completed the first phase of their journey as catechumens. The youth are divided into small groups of 8-10, led by one or two catechists, meeting one hour per week October to May.

In addition to the weekly meetings, there are 4 or 5 meetings with their parents, held every 6 weeks on a Saturday – concluding with Mass and Supper together, which the parents cook. This has created a people who are open, priest with parents, catechists and children, with the Word of God, and use of drama to present. 80-90 people attend. Tremendous sense of community. During the last years of the journey there are weekend trips to places of pilgrimage – e.g. Rome, Assisi, Aquilea, Ravenna – all to help them name the apostles as real people and Christianity as relevant to real life.

#### **The experience is characterised by:**

- Evangelising power of the first 3 years
- The art of story telling
- Progressive formation in prayer – group and family
- Involvement of parents/ and adult sponsors – progressively involved. V significant – parents seeing their role of faith sharing in the family and offering them activities within their reach.
- Parents offered parallel journey without asking too much – responding to their questions – v gradual
- Catechesis that culminates in moments of community celebration
- Encounter with people and the lived realities of the community
- Introduction to charitable/missionary experiences
- Central focus of the whole pathway – LITURGY

## Programme of Catechumenal journey (RCIA 4-8) divided into 4 phases

1. **Evangelisation – not less than one year** – to meet Christ (Gospel of Mark, and symbol of stick and backpack – your choice to pick up your backpack and follow Christ)
2. **Catechumenate – 2 ½ years** , culminating in sacraments of initiation at Easter Vigil. This phase divided into 3 with 3 tasks: salvation journey ending in recitation of Creed ‘in communion with the Father, Son and Spirit, culminating in praying the ‘Our Father’ and thirdly, commandment to Love, ending in Rite of Election (symbols: Chest with hidden treasure: bible, veil, white vestments)
3. **Lenten season:** intense preparation. Reconciliation for those already baptised. Scrutinies.
4. **Easter Vigil:** the time of the sacred mysteries – **lasts all Easter season, and continues for two more years of mystagogy.** Year One: deepening of Baptism and Confirmation. Year Two: Eucharist lived more fully. Youth more involved in social outreach project during these two years.

The young people pass from one phase to the next not on basis of age but readiness for that particular Rite. **There are 3 moments or ‘doorways’:**

- a. from evangelisation period to catechumenate: Rite of Admission – welcomed as catechumens.
- b. From catechumenate to period of purification and enlightenment: Rite of Election
- c. Easter Vigil: Sacraments of Initiation

### Closing remarks:

- All the celebrations on the journey happen at the Sunday Mass with the community
- Community aware of this growing reality of young people in the parish – very positive
- Enormous strength for all from these liturgies – initiation gives life to all!
- All other parish programmes are influenced by this
- Parents involved – strengthens all relationships (family, parish community)
- The community get to know each other
- The value of eating meals together, and travelling together
- The responsibility of all the community for the formation of the children/youth
- New opportunities for parish to engage with young families
- Each one called to contribute
- Some difficulties: where parents do not wish to be involved – how to discern, and then support the young people in these families in other ways
- These choices took a lot of energy – but they are very fruitful.
- It is a serious journey – no ‘quick-fix’ – but real growth possible.
- Has awakened desire in many to become Christian – young and old alike
- A wonderfully open and positive experience – fired by the desire, with the grace of God, to lead the lost sheep back home.

## SESSION 4

**B: Catechesis for Children and Young People in Portugal:** presented by Fr Jose Cardoso de Almeida (No English translation available)

### Main points:

Renewal of the Church in Portugal – the priority is evangelisation and mission, with catechesis deepening faith to maturity is nationwide. For young people from 6–16 yrs there is a comprehensive catechetical programme covering the 10 year span. Ten catechisms and ten guides for catechists were produced by the Bishops' Commission for Christian Education. To date, 600k young people have been through these programmes – 10% of the Portuguese population have been involved.

The Bishops produced a document: *So that they may believe and have life* –this has been studied at parish level all over the country, as a bridge between catechesis and the lived reality of Portuguese people. It is real vision of hope for Christian Initiation, and an expression of Church communion. The catechists in parish communities are finding ways to take this vision forward.

The question 'What do we mean by catechesis?' People have different ideas. Our problems are:

- Lack of well-trained catechists – only 40% have good basic background
- Many of the catechists are 'beginners'
- Mobility of catechists can be a problem
- Lack of catechetical formation for priests – there are some exceptions, e.g. in Oporto, where they do catechetical training.
- In general, excessively 'scholastic' approach, governed by the school year. Liturgy could be better used in the process.
- 'Lessons' lack motivation for young – competition from media/internet.
- The numbers of young people involved are going down.
- Some parents accompany – others do not.
- Lack of awareness of the needs – some parishes not offering catechesis
- Some catechists are saying that priests do not give catechesis much attention.

### **FUTURE Proposed programme: Bishops at the helm – giving orientation for the catechesis**

A 4-stage programme is proposed

1. 1–3 years: religious awakening/search for community/concludes with 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion
2. Synthesis of faith: Pathway marked by catechumenal catechesis
3. Conversion – constant call in a challenging world
4. Missionary catechesis – the problem of the unbaptised, uncatechised children – aim to 'search for the lost', not wait for them to turn up.

Catechesis as an expression of communion: See the whole reality of the family as an expression of the community. The renewal of the community means a community that is renewed by the Word.

Jose concluded by saying that in Portugal they continue to search for the best pathways in initiation.

The Bishops have provided a clear teaching document which is invaluable in this process.

## SESSION 4

**B. A reflection on the Catechumenate as a source of inspiration for catechetical activity – from the German Bishops’ Document ‘Catechesis in these Changed Times’** presented by Paul Wehlre, Auxiliary Bishop, Friburg, Germany. *(No English paper available)*

The German Bishops’ document says: the grace of God is at work, and God is calling people to faith. Those who believe can help others come to faith. The Bishops feel that ‘catechesis’ is not well defined, compared to other church activities. The paradigm for action is not fixed. Inspiration is needed. The catechumenate is vital – and we can learn from people who come asking for faith. These people discover Jesus personally, and make a choice to follow Jesus. They have found ‘the footprints of God’ in their lives. The Liturgical Year is the key to open up faith. The approach to catechesis must be integrated – personal, community, and liturgical aspects all linked with the catechumenate. For example, in the Presentation of the Creed, this ritual is related to Christian belief lived out in real lives. In Eastern Germany, where only 3-4% are Christian, the catechumenate is very real. Catechetical action is targeted towards adults. The question asked is: Can you say why it is good to be a Christian? People need to be touched personally, and this is the core responsibility of all the baptised. Most catechists are ‘professional’, and so parents ‘hand over’ responsibility for catechesis to these ‘professionals’. We should be open to ‘voluntary’ catechists. The GDC says the Bishop is the Chief Catechist, and all have co-responsibility with the Bishop for this task. For example, the parish choir sings well – but they should be able to build a climate of faith, asking themselves ‘What are we singing about?’ and putting this across, opening people’s hearts to the message. Another example – people who are good at sports, full of life and enthusiasm, should be able to have parish sports group as witness to faith lived out. Young people engaged in charitable work should be able to respond to the question ‘Why are you doing this?’ Young people need particular support to be able to withstand peer pressure. Everything in a parish has a catechetical thrust.

In the Bishops’ text, the area of training and formation is highlighted. Catechesis is to enable fullness of life. We are trying to recover catechesis for the life of the Church.

Bishop Wehlre concluded with his experience of World Youth Day in Cologne, when Bishops were asked to hold ‘catechetical’ sessions with the young people, and respond to them. Before this experience, Bishop Wehlre had rejected catechesis as rather ‘dry’, associating it with ‘the catechism’, but the experience of catechesis with the young transformed his view. This was not an isolated incident – many bishops from around Europe had felt the same.

The German Bishops have a working group on Rite of Christian Initiation of Children, and encourage ‘family mass’ rather than ‘children’s mass’, with parents and children singing in the choir, and participating fully in the liturgy in many ways. The task of the catechumenate is to give the prodigal son a memory of the Father’s house.

## **DIALOGUE SESSION in LANGUAGE GROUPS (2)**

Points discussed:

- Dublin new practice: Although catechesis still carried out in the schools, trying 9 sessions a year, special Sunday Mass in the parish 'Do this in memory of me' catechetical experience for the families of children being prepared for first sacraments.
- Inter-generational catechesis – using the grandparents.
- God will not confirm 'nostalgia' but God makes things new and fresh. Confirm 'memory' yes, but only in so far as it is useful for the journey. 'Dangerous' or challenging memories may need to be recovered in order to be healed?
- Hungarian experience of being 'bruised' as the norm – this is what it is to be human – this needs to be healed. No, bruising is not the norm.
- 'I have come to cast out fear' - catechumenal message is one of truth, casting out fear, and bringing perfect love.
- On the Jewish Sabbath, stories are told – the whole family grows, each generation. The children are given the questions. One story was told of a Mass being celebrated in Hebrew in Jerusalem – and it began with the Grandmother coming to light the candles on the altar – powerful symbols for the families and the telling of their story.
- We need to stand up and tell the story.
- Resources to support community catechesis – liturgical and spiritual
- NMI 39: John Paul II – catechesis is drawing new life from attentiveness to the Word
- We need to promote full valuing of Scripture and greater use of Scripture in building the Christian community. (Spoke of Bishops of England, Wales and Scotland new teaching document: 'Gift of Scripture' (short, easy to read, informing work of catechists, and also good for catechumens and candidates themselves. A range of complementary resources for studying/praying with scripture available from the Liturgy Office [www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturgy/resources](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturgy/resources)).
- Reference made to GDC/RCIA full use of liturgical year in a gradual planned complete catechesis, solidly supported by celebrations of the Word.

## SESSION 5

### A The Need for the Christian Community in the Initiation Process

produced by Msgr Xavier Salinas, Bishop of Tortosa (Spain) and presented by Fr Lluc Rieno.  
(No English paper available)

#### Main points:

- The Christian community is the source, locus and aim of catechesis (GDC)
- The Community welcomes those who want to know the Lord.
- Church develops her maternal nature through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We must root our discourse in reality, and not idealise it. How can the community be part of the integral process of initiation?

Initiation is never 'private' but always has the community at its heart, a living, real, welcoming community where the sacraments are celebrated. No Rite can be implemented without the impact and life of the community. It is the experience of everyone, not 'experts'. Initiation effects the whole community. It is never just a personal encounter.

In the pre-catechumenate, the community welcome. In the Catechumenate, the community accompanies the catechumen through the steps in the process. The Sponsor is the delegate of the community, to help the catechumen to become part of that community. How can we preach a church communion if we are not living it? And what does it mean to live it? The community must offer a lived experience of faith to the catechumen – not limited to feelings. Faith generates the life of grace and leads the catechumen to discover the deep meanings of belonging to Christ and his Church. The quality of the Community is the KEY sign that attracts people. We don't look for 'specialists' to accompany – the dynamic people in the pew will sponsor those who come.

The two great institutions of **liturgy and catechesis** work together, moulded round the process of initiation, proclaiming and celebrating faith – the gift of God is mediated through Mother Church. When people love, pray, celebrate, believe – scripture and liturgy help us discover the dynamics of the gift of God at work. It is not 'know the Lord and be baptised' but the God-given gift of the catechumenate to renew and enrich the church. The church that does not engage with the catechumenate will close in on itself and die. The catechumenate brings the Gospel to our lives.

Key questions to ask:

- What can we do as communities to fulfil our catechumenal mission?
- Do our communities have an awareness of mission?
- Or do we have scholastic paradigm of wisdom and knowledge alone?

If we can find these new paths, the Gospel will then be even more present in our society today. New paths, many ways, based on historical practices, developed in Christian communities.

## Session 5

B. **Paper on the Evolution of Eurocat:** given by Jean-Pierre De Meulder, responsible for the Catechumenate in Belgium, and a member of Eurocat since the 1960's.

Jean-Pierre spoke with passion about Eurocat, and its vision from the earliest days for the catechumenal way, gathering together the diversity of local experience, enriching one another through sharing, friendship developing and growing. Their exchanges over the years have included dialogue with the States and Canada, Africa and Asia. Michel Dujarier (Africa) and Jim Dunning (USA) were key figures for many years (and still continue to influence today.) The last Eurocat meeting took place in Sweden, with representatives from 25 European Conferences. The most recent Bureau planning meeting took place in Krakov (May 2006). This Bureau or 'executive' group is small (at the Core, 3 persons, one from the host nation of the last eurocat gathering, one from the present, and one from the next planned) with the task of ensuring continuity between the bi-annual Eurocat gatherings. The bureau review and evaluate the last gathering, and unearthing the common issues that will form the priorities for the next gathering. The questions of what is provisional, what brings mutual enlightenment, and how to engage with the Gospel at local level. In Krakov the bureau discussed the observations made by many countries of the fact that people leave the church after initiation – and what is the quality of our mystagogical period? How are we engaging people in mission? How are we getting out of our sacristies and searching? 'There is a building site waiting for us... we have fundamental insights for the foundations of the Church'. Sr Judith was the contact person for Eurocat. The bureau, through Jean Pierre, said they feel that they have 'lost contact with England and Wales' (both with the RC and the original Anglican participation) and this needs to be remedied with representation from the National RCIA Executive

## SESSION 5

### **C The Need for Christian Communities in the Process of Christian Initiation**

Bishop Christophe Dufour, Bishop of Limoges, & President of the Bishops' Committee on Catechesis and Catechumenate, France

In 1996 & 2002 the French Bishops wrote to all the Catholics of France naming two priorities: **Continuing Initiation**, and a **Church environment that nourishes and enables faith to take root**. They invited all to 'plunge' into the heart of our faith as experienced in the Easter Vigil. They underlined the life-giving links that must exist between catechesis and liturgy, and catechesis and the community of believers. The Bishops received many letters that wondered about the mandatory reference to Christian communities in the process of Christian Initiation. This paper explores this challenge, making the following points:

**Communities are necessary in order to pass on and nourish the Christian life** (using the ecosystem as an analogy) – catechesis allows faith to grow, and cannot 'isolate' human beings. Catechesis creates community. It is not private. Renewal of catechesis means renewal of the entire church, and this renewal will spring from living missionary communities. This is a matter of pastoral urgency. Bishop Dufour quoted:

- GDC 158: catechetical pedagogy will be effective only to the extent that the Christian community becomes a point of concrete reference for the faith journey of individuals. This happens if the community is proposed as the source, locus and means of catechesis.
- GDC 91: Catechesis is an ecclesial act – and the responsibility of the entire Christian community
- GDC 141: the Christian community is in herself living catechesis. She proclaims, celebrates, works and remains always a vital indispensable and primary locus of catechesis.

Society used to be pervaded by Christianity – all life related to religious rituals, prayer, practices. In a secularised society today, Christian communities of faith need to provide a nourishing environment, through Word, Liturgy, Sacramental life, faith sharing opportunities, pastoral care and outreach/witness to God's love, in the locality – living as people who forgive and reconcile and love.

Catechesis leads to community. Key task of catechesis is education in community life (GDC 86) – people find a 'family' and a sense of belonging and commitment and responsibility.

**Practical & Pastoral challenge:** we are more fragile in our parishes today – busy lives/individual allegiances have changed. How can we establish catechised/catechising communities?

*What is missing?* We had been focussing on children for years, but this had had shortcomings: no link with the liturgy of the Church, especially during the Sunday Assembly, and no link with parish life, particularly intergenerational. Meanwhile, more and more adults, baptised and unbaptised, were asking about Christian faith. This highlighted the shortcomings.

*What communities do we need today?* What features should they have? Can we see what shape they are taking? What about the 'new communities' – they may fulfil their initiation role, but often they lie at the margins of the parishes, rather self-sufficient. What about 'small cell' models – that have a true initiation process? How can parishes support/engage in communities which make initiation possible? Could we define the baptismal vocation as the genesis of growth? In Paris, there are pioneering parishes of 'local communities', based on the baptismal vocation. Can we use the priestly, prophetic and 'regal' baptismal vocation as the 3 pillars on which to build our basic Christian communities within parishes? Can we be inspired by such communities as are found in the South American and African churches?

#### **Suggestions for Action.**

- **Families as the domestic church** – the first base community. How can we support families to become these base communities. This must be a parish priority. Young parents can be encouraged to work in groups for catechesis themselves, and support in the catechesis of their children. (France are producing a resource for Family Catechesis)
- **Sunday Assemblies** : gathering for the Eucharist. Crisis of attendance, based on obligation of workers in a bygone era having to attend Mass in order to find jobs or 'be seen' by the

'Master'. We seek to establish the Sunday Assembly on new grounds, and revive the links between liturgy, catechesis and community. Intergenerational catechesis is proving successful when founded on prayer, teaching, breaking of the Word, and the building of relationships with one another, and welcome of 'the poor'.

- **Popular catechesis**, related to specific liturgical seasons and celebrations, saints days and places of pilgrimage connects with peoples traditions/memories. These are great occasions for catechesis because the whole local population is involved and becomes a 'community' in the intensity of the experience, faith and prayer. First proclamation/evangelisation: communities have a missionary role to bear witness to their faith and provide new evangelisation. We must be sowing seeds.

### **Conclusions:**

Bishop Dufour quoted the French philosopher Regis Debray who when invited to the Community of St Egidio in 2003 said: '**What do we expect from you, the great Western spiritual currents? That you wake up! We smoke the people's opium in a communication system which gives way to the 'however's' of money and an easy life. You, you are free!**'

The Bishop concluded, that yes, we are free, because of the cross of Christ. We are saved by the cross, raised to life with Christ, and called upon to make this mystery at the heart of faith live in the heart of the world, and give rise to communities that initiate people into the life of Christ. **Many non-believers will testify that the world is waiting for us.**



**MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS:**

**from Cardinal Hoyos, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy:**

- Be linked to RCIA
- Find a language to communicate to the already baptised
- Look at our practice as linked to sacramentalisation
- Consider how to stem the drain of youth after initiation
- Rethink what the process of initiation of adults really is
- What are the features of catechesis?

**Mons Carru (Undersecretary of the above) added:**

- Take the challenge of Initiation with faith
- Recognise the Grace of God at work and we are co-operating with this
- Jesus Christ is the precious pearl of the Gospel
- We seek friendship with Christ
- Challenge of initiation needs to be lived with patience
- Tell people of God's immense love for them
- Find new paths
- We can no longer delay reflection on Christian Initiation –a matter of urgency –we need to develop together a serene determination.

## OPEN FORUM

### For comments and questions from the floor

1. How do we accept the 'real' communities that we have, rather than an illusory model? Do we have to re-create communities, or 'interfere' with them, to make them suit the RCIA vision?
2. The catechumenate holds within it the 'secret' for connecting faith and life. This relationship mutually renews personal conversion – commitment to what it means to be converted .
3. Parishioners with many catechumens who need accompanying often feel 'powerless'.
4. The Rites celebrated in the visible parish have huge impact – they connect with the 'real' community.
5. It is the Holy Spirit that creates community through the process, through the Rites. Together we build Christ's church – Spirit and People.
6. We can become aware of the need for community, to affect society, to initiate.
7. Sociologically, this is not 'sublimation' of community. Our community responds to Christ if WE are prepared to be open and convert and be catechised ourselves.. The Faithful need to be faithful, and become aware who they are, and of their mission.
8. 'The Community as locus, subject, fruit...' we hear in the teaching. In Italy, we can hear young people saying 'I believe in Christ, but not the Church'. Is this possible? To say I believe in Christ, but not in his Body the Church? We transmit Christ. Should we be building a 'need' for Church? Do the 'new movements' help in the revitalisation of the Church?
9. RCIA revitalises the community – welcoming people brings life to ourselves. Renewal of the Church comes through Christian Initiation.
10. Barcelona model: 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion preparation – follows the catechumenal way with children and their parents, with themes, sharing, Sunday Mass and 'community time' = sessions of 3 ½ hrs on a Sunday morning.
11. Those who accompany the catechumens, both children and adults, help apply the Rites with simplicity and faithfulness, so that the community can really live them out. The Rites sensitise and challenge the people. The Community has to be the 'fruitful mother' of the small 'real' communities.
12. What is the relationship between 'community' and 'parish'? Do these coincide? Do we need to revive the parish assemblies? Can we take the TIME on a Sunday morning for the community? What about small cells that grow? Communities need opportunities to meet and become alive!
13. In Spain, the parish is the 'place' in the realm of the 'Church'.
14. Bishop = Chief Catechist: has a personal relationship with catechumens (e.g. in Rite of Election) particularly during Lent – the Bishop should go out and FIND those catechumens, and be a catechist and preach the Word, break the Word with them.
15. Holland: we see the problem of 'starting' a community. Is it a 'chicken and egg' problem? How can we stress the value of small Christian communities: a community of communities?
16. France: We ask ourselves: why are neophytes leaving after initiation? We observe – it is not about being 'integrated into the community'. It is Christ who incorporates. But more the need to develop mystagogy, so they feel themselves gifted and responsible – they *know* they belong and want to share in the Word. We need to recognise/discern the gift of God, and then we will know what to do.
17. An example from Brussels: a parish with 100 nationalities represented. Every Sunday, dismissal takes place for 7-12 yr olds in one group, and 13-25 in another group. The Gospel is broken open with them. At the Presentation of the Gifts, they return – and there is an 'exchange' of what they have received – it is a spontaneous moment for the community, powerful, young and adult alike. The Gospel shows us that the catechumenate is a pastoral community activity.. Once a month we meet and split into small groups with the catechumens, in order to personalise the conversion. These things are at the backbone of our community. These elements, if lived, unite us.

18. The catechumenate brings us all to community. The Church is always bigger than that which we live. Everyone must be allowed to engage in the work of catechesis, bringing others to community. All the baptised at every level generate new life, discover the Church.
19. Sponsor: has to know the person as a human being first. To be a loving observer empathetic, friendly, revealing themselves – and this is always risky. We can't achieve without risks!
20. Spirituality and prayer for the pre-catechumenate – simply say: practice being in silence for 5 minutes a day. (Not 'praying' but simply, 'silence'). This then develops into an exploration of prayer, and experience of different forms of prayer during the catechumenate.
21. The task of the 'team' is to help the enquirers and catechumens to integrate into the life of the community from the outset.

## **SESSION 6:**

### **A. VIDEO: The Figure of the Sponsor in the context of the Christian Community.**

This was a short video of a group of Sponsors drawn from a parish community in Hungary. Sr Judith Fogassy facilitated their discussion on the Video and was available for questions from the Congress delegates. The Sponsors came from a huge variety of backgrounds, from university professor to 'new Catholic', single, married, young, old.

**Key observations:** The Sponsors themselves spoke of their experience, and the skills they felt were important in this role.

- A witness to their own personal faith and the faith of the community
- Communication skills
- Active listening
- To observe/understand the human person (temperament, preferences, attitudes...) takes time
- Not to feel you have to be 'best friend' but to accompany with love – this person is a brother, or a sister! Friendship is really inevitable – you become close/genuine/mutual through formal and informal meetings.
- Discernment – what is important to respond to/or let go – you share the joys/sorrow
- You share yourself too – to enable them to share themselves – and yes, this is risky!
- On matters of faith and morals, put the Christian perspective
- Accompanying skills – honest, sensitive reactions.
- Don't 'take over' – don't be 'over active' – be patient! Allow the catechumen to develop
- Frequent topics that arise: life, faith, family issues.

### **How does the 'team' operate?**

There is a broad 'catechumenal plan', organised by the Catechist, implemented by the catechist/& sponsors. After each session, whole team remains to evaluate, and then modify and adapt the plan as and when necessary, in order to respond to the needs of those coming. Each evening, one person takes responsibility for guiding – giving an introduction to the topic. There is time to share experiences in small groups, and time for prayer together, and a practical task for the week to do, to think about, to pray. (e.g. suggest 5 minutes SILENCE every day to start the idea of a prayer life)

The sponsors are present – at the team meetings, at Sunday Mass, at the Rites, in the sessions, and available to the catechumen at any time – the sponsor is the link for the catechumen with the parish community. The task is to integrate the catechumen into the life of the parish community. The sponsors are a 'welcoming team' representing the parish to the catechumenate, but also enabling them to get to know the parish too.

## Session 6

**B: Experiences of the Diocese of ROME:** (Practice for 330 parishes. 90-95 baptised this Easter. People in the Catechumenate at present, about 300. 1:3 parishes has a catechumenate).

(not available in English)

- Catechumenate is seen as 'follow up', very respectful of the journey that has brought the person to this point – grace has been at work.
- We begin with publicity – leaflets for enquirers, informing them that we can 'accompany' them on a journey of faith, their choice. The leaflet is sensitive, inviting choice/response.
- The danger is that parish life is always in a hurry – but if they contact us and choose to respond, we must stop, and listen to the person in front of us. When this first contact becomes more formalised, this is the opportunity to grasp the motivation and energy of the Enquirer! We must give them a good start!

### Team leaders:

- From the whole community, we identify those who could accompany others
- The priest will meet the enquirers at the outset – so they can identify who he is, and know that they will meet him from time to time. The priest is regularly in touch with the catechumenate.
- A team of 2 people guide/accompany each catechumen within the group and outside
  - Transparency is encouraged from the start – family situation etc.
  - There is heart to heart communication
  - In the early meetings, they discuss the meaning of life, images of God. It is not 'direct' or stereotypical. It is very *real*.

### The Qualities of the Team

- Vision of faith
- Transparent witness
- Motivated by daily Christian life –
- non-verbal communication, strong personal spirituality, able to create good open dialogue

We build on these qualities, and require total respect for the Enquirer. We provide

- parish formation
- Diocesan formation (Bishop)
- Diocesan Team – to support parish teams

### Guidelines:

- Liturgical – to enable good celebration of the Rites
- Biblical – in order to be able to break open the Word
- Faith of the Catholic Church – The Catechism
- We recognise the need to understand the culture of relativism, and speaking in a language that they can understand.
- The Parish Community is the place for the catechumenate. Without the community, the discourse is empty! The Community witness is expressed in the figure of the sponsor, in the praying community, in the Liturgy. The catechumens experience the Tradition through the liturgical year. They experience the welcoming attitude of the community. Conversion comes through witness.
- How could we think of Mystagogy without Community! We integrate the neophytes into the community.

One of the strongest moments of the pathway is the first day we meet the enquirer – they come to the parish church and don't know the door to get in...and after a long period of time, on Holy Saturday,... that person will say 'I believe' and that is a very emotional moment for us all.

### **Group Responses to Session 6:**

- What about the people on the road who are divorced and remarried? How do we face this problem?
- Why does Baptism forgive homicide/adultery etc, but not broken marriage? According to our Scriptures, Red should become White. Of course, we must not undermine marriage... but humanity – could this be an opportunity for New Life from this moment on?
- This could be a moment of radical conversion.
- The first interview is essential – it is often complex. Perhaps we have to say ‘You are not able to see this through?’ Do the consequences of bad choices really mean this? Perhaps the Catechumenate is not the answer for all.
- How is discernment practiced on this journey?
- Observation about Confirmation: a story of a man who had left his wife. When he came for Confirmation ‘I welcome you’ was the priest’s response. The path of the Catechumenate does not mean ‘all is well’ – sometimes we need to be very patient, and give time for careful assessment by the person coming for him or herself, and for ourselves.
- There is suffering when dialogue comes to an end. Every situation is different.
- Rome diocesan team is in regular contact with parish RCIA teams, in all these difficult situations. Often there are some cases that are easy to solve, and others that are more complex, that can be taken to the Bishop.

## Session 7

**A: The Parish at the Service of Christian Initiation (painting a picture of an ideal parish)** paper given by Juan Ignacio Rodriguez Trillo, Director of the Catechumenate, Spain.

*(no English available)*

Based on the 1997 Spanish document *Reflections and Guidelines on Christian Initiation*, and the great pastoral challenge to answer the real needs of our communities.

The parish, set amongst people, is the place of privileged contact and therefore is the locus for Christian Initiation. The parish take on the ecclesial task of renewal, and creating spaces of evangelisation and welcome. Parishes can work together, and become points of reference, Christ presence, for people.

### **Keys for a parish:**

- Desire/ambition to become a real initiating community
- To provide evangelising space and revitalise the parish itself
- Working with others
- Pastoral growth
- To be a privileged point of reference for those wishing to come closer to Christ

John Paul II spoke of the parish as ‘the presence of Christ among people’. Christ is the One who acts, the source of our ability to live as Christians and to evangelise as Christ. We look to the Gospel for our approach: Christ and the Samaritan Woman, the Blind Man, the Centurion. The central criterion is Christ’s welcome for ALL, in real situations, not despising or sidelining anyone. People came with all sorts of needs, and were responded to with grace and love. All were transformed. This is the model at the centre of our initiation process. We must beware of ‘bureaucratic’ discernment, failing to see the real anxieties and needs of people. We must beware of ‘putting people into boxes’, and offering certain prescriptions or recipes that make these people ‘disappear’!

**Reflection:** Often we do not offer Jesus Christ, but a form to fill in, without trying to understand the person in front of us. We need to change our mentality – and renew our pastoral care policies based on the Person of Christ. Christian initiation is not only at the start of the Christian life – it is a life-long process of configuring ourselves to Christ. This opens many doors, and the parish needs to be ready and available to respond, during all the seasons of peoples’ lives. **In the Evangelisation of Europe, we need to have parishes with vision:**

- Parishes with a catechumenate as a point of reference – open, ready, developing RCIA and RCIC in all its dimensions, paths that are both personal and communal, inclusive, with sponsors and team to support.
- Urgent need for a new model of catechesis – that enable personal encounter with Christ as KEY – this comes through catechists who know Christ!
- From Day One, include the catechumen in parish life – at all levels (e.g. social outreach, family life etc)
- Parish to have a synthesis of faith – Credo at its centre – this is who we are.
- Groups of families to be involved in the catechetical experience
- Rites that begin liturgical life and encounter with Christ for those who come

In this context, **the Sunday Assembly** and celebration is at the heart of Christian life. The whole community participates in the Day of the Lord. The Parish is renewed where people are welcomed. A Parish serving the needs of Christian initiation *wants* to carry out the mandate of the Lord ‘Go, teach, baptise...’ Missionary initiatives are needed: how can they hear if no-one preaches? Parish Priest – needs to be closely involved/aware/attentive to the community –all ages, young to old. All sorts of parish activities can be channels for initiation. Homilies: Key. Funerals, saints days, church feasts, seasons, family celebrations etc. i.e. when the churches are full! To be a missionary parish is a great challenge, great focus. Must be prepared to WELCOME people.

**The evangelising spaces include:** Families coming for sacraments, marriage preparation, role of grandparents, schools. Many opportunities to announce Jesus Christ, through Witness, and sometimes words! Whole community has to grow in order to bear such witness. They offer

friendship, involvement, dialogue, prayer, and also spaces for 'come and rest' as well as 'go and proclaim'.

Catechists are essential – good formation and support for their work, their own spiritual life.

Through all this, the community's role and responsibility for initiation in faith comes to birth.

**Our issue in Spain:** we must not lose the young!

## Session 7:

### B Report from the Russian Language Group

(Churches of Bieloruse, Byzantine Ukraine, Kazakstan, the Baltic States, Latin Rite Ukraine).

A report of Catechumeanal Experience in these States., by a Benedictine Monk.

Very difficult situations. Two different regions: (1) former Soviet Union (RC majority) and (2) Western Ukraine/Biello-Russe (Christian minority among whom are RC, Orthodox, and these alongside the Muslims). What unites these areas is **freedom of expression** dating back to only 15 years ago. This is a young church. The church existed under communism, but with very few priests, a few religious sisters and lay catechists. What united people was ethnicity – ‘catholic nationality/family’ – many would consider themselves Catholic not because of Baptism but because of where they lived! ‘Catholic ‘communities’ were formed by people who had been deported from west to east, and the tragic/heroic attempts at dialogue were always ‘How do we ‘live’ Church?’ For all Roman Catholics in our situation, the key is ‘making the Church live’. People who have kept faith over the years of communism have had no formation, no catechesis, either as children or adults. They want to come to Church, and they ask for Baptism. Under communism, ‘church’ groups were very small and private. It was dangerous to gather, and new people were regarded with suspicion – they could be spies. Many believers received the sacraments individually. They had never met with others of faith, and had no experience of ‘Church’, and are deeply rooted in their own cultural history. In this new era we must start from their experience, and lead them to a wider experience of Church, not as a national identity, but a world-wide reality. For those asking for Baptism, the pathway is comparable to RCIA. They are being prepared for the sacraments, with two key aspects: knowledge (‘we know nothing’), and Liturgy: its role in the life of the Church. During this period of preparation, there are very different approaches. Generally people take part in the Mass. In Western Ukraine, they have a Children’s Catechism. Families are not able to initiate their children into Christian community life. They come together. The catechumenate is essential for initiation to sacraments. In the Eastern Rite tradition, preparation for Eucharist is carried out in small groups, using the Gospel. In the whole of the former Soviet Union, there is an enormous contrast between areas with no priests, and areas that have daily Mass! The say ‘There are no roads, only directions’ – and the sheer size of the countries and their terrains means the Church must operate in a very decentralised manner. Typically, when groups meet for Eucharist, it is preceded by catechesis for *all* those who come, whether they have received the sacraments or not. These gatherings last for three or four hours, which people find easy. ‘Frantic life’ belongs to the West! This catechetical work is essential. Most of the clergy are ‘foreigners’, and can be regarded with suspicion. The priority is formation of local people as catechists, but again, there is a variety of systems for this training. Retreats and courses are offered, for spiritual development, and knowledge, and broadening of people’s experience of Church and a sense of belonging. These lay people are able to get closer to their people than the (foreign) clergy and religious.

### **Final Summary of the Group Discussions, prepared by an Italian expert.**

Catechesis as the invitation to 'serve' the gift God has given, to enable growth, enable walking on the path of faith. Can we renew our responsibility? We begin by listening to people's questions – and have a new mentality, not only to integrate but to find new solutions. It is a process of Christian 'becoming'. We need to be touched by those who come. We need to be positive towards them. We expect mutual transformation. In our groups, we have faced difficulties of the terminology we use – and we need to define our terms – 'catechumenate' and 'initiation' and refer back to the General Directory for Catechesis for this. We need to recognise, respect and value the distinctions between the pre-baptismal, and post-baptismal catechesis. For those who come already baptised, the spirit of initiation already received is the basis for conversion. That Baptism needs to become effective in them. The Aim of catechesis, according to GDC 66, is the transmission and encouragement of life-long profession of faith. We need to renew our 'co-ordinates', our 'direction' for mission. In particular, priests to welcome the spirit of evangelisation, and to welcome the stories that come. The whole community welcomes. We also allow people to walk away.

There are places where initiation takes place – other spaces, other opportunities – for example, for seafarers, prisoners, military personnel, university students and personnel, immigrants. These bring new questions that need new, fresh answers, within the catechetical process. It is not initiation *to* sacraments but initiation *through* sacraments. 'Service' defines the spirit of evangelisation and catechesis. We are stewards who enable the discovery of Christ who changes lives. Evangelisation is not a matter of 'what to say'; but 'what to listen to'. It is a revolution of the question! To be a receptor of the Gospel is to be in a position of Hope. What is the soul of religion today? It is not obedience, but thirst, quest. It is a departure from the old ways, and the Gospel is a doorway that opens us up to Life!

#### **Strategies:**

In the working groups, the perception has been mature – that the catechumenate and the paths within are a gift of the Spirit for the present time, and benefit pastoral activity. All groups said that Listening is indispensable to establishing the pathway. There are structured pathways that have points of departure and arrival. Paths are developed building on potential strengths. In order not to remain simply 'plans' on paper, new proposals need the support of Bishops and Bishops' Conferences. Team Leaders need help and stimulus to change our ways. The Catechumenal path needs all this support – it needs a living faith-filled spirituality, and renewed communities of believers. Jesus Christ wants us to live together with dignity and respect – this is required of our communities.

Adult faith needs the community, in order to avoid individualism. We journey together, we live together. In the sacramental dimension, adult believers encounter God and God's action. The Paschal Mystery is the source of our life and promise for all of history.

**Future Prospects?** Most evident today is the change in the way of being Christian. We cannot overemphasise the need for inculturation to be received. The central fact is that we need to give people an experience of Church where they meet Christ. The process of change is long, and we don't know where it will lead. There are different time frames in different countries. We need to evaluate the journey so far. We need creativity and dialogue to seek for best practice. We need to give and receive from today's culture, and make the path of faith both reasonable and accountable. Everyone's contribution to this congress has been a great experience of shared reflections and joy.

**Conclusion to the Congress: Archbishop of Venice, Cesare Nosiglia** (no English available)

Main points:

- The different situations of people require different catechetical approaches
- The vital importance of including people with special needs – the Gift of Faith must be at the service of the poorest of the poor, those on the margins.
- Becoming Christian is a life-long process, closely interwoven with becoming fully human
- Families play a critical role in initiation – we must support families in this
- Where there is real unity with the Bishop, new ecclesial movements can play their part.
- What is the role of the priest in the process of initiation? – explore this.
- Communication of faith in fully human way, including humour!
- The Bishop has a key role as Chief Catechist, and his mandate is essential for those who accompany others on the catechumenal path. These people are essentially giving to others what they have received. (1John 1:1-4)

Something which has existed since the beginning,  
which we have heard,  
which we have seen with our own eyes,  
which we have watched  
and touched with our own hands,  
the Word of life  
this is our theme.

That life was made visible;  
we saw it and are giving our testimony,  
declaring to you the eternal life,  
which was present to the Father  
and has been revealed to us.

we are declaring to you  
what we have seen and heard,  
so that you too may share our life.  
Our life is shared with the Father  
and with his Son Jesus Christ.

We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete.

CLDollard  
18 May 2006