

# The Role of the Community

## PRIOR READING

*If you have time before the session take time to read the following extracts from Church documents as an introduction to the session There is space to make you own notes in the right hand column.*

The parish remains the pre-eminent place for catechesis (sharing faith... by example first). It must rediscover its vocation, which is to be a welcoming family home.

John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 67



The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumenate in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.

RCIA 4

The catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity. This is achieved in four ways:

1. a suitable catechesis...
2. As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation. Thus formed, 'the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey. Already sharing through faith in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, they pass from the old to a new nature made perfect in Christ. Since this transition brings with it a progressive change of outlook and conduct, it should become manifest by means of its social consequences and it should develop gradually during the period of the catechumenate. Since the Lord in whom they believe is a sign of contradiction, the newly converted often experience divisions and separations, but they also taste the joy that God gives without measure' (AG 14)
3. The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites...
4. Since the Church's life is apostolic...

RCIA 75



'Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making of oneself a disciple of him. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him, and to live as he lived. In this way the believer unites himself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church.

GDC 53

'this comprehensive formation includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life'... 'this (formation) lays the foundation of the spiritual edifice of the Christian, nurtures the roots of his faith life and enables him to receive more solid nourishment in the ordinary life of the Christian community.

GDC 67

As it is formation for the Christian life it comprises but surpasses mere instruction. Being essential, it looks to what is 'common' for the Christian... and finally, being initiatory, it incorporates into the community which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith'

GDC 68

Initiatory catechesis lays the basis for the Christian life of the followers of Jesus.

The process of continuing conversion goes beyond what is provided by basic catechesis. In order to encourage this process, it is necessary to have a Christian community which welcomes the initiated, sustains them and forms them in faith. 'Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes the catechumen at a certain stage of his catechesis. The accompaniment which a community gives to the initiated is eventually transformed into their being totally integrated by the same community.' GDC 69

'Continuing formation in the faith is directed not only to the individual Christian, to accompany them in their journey towards holiness, but also to the Christian community as such so that it may mature also in its interior life of love of God and of one another as well as in its openness to the world as a missionary community... Approaching this ideal little by little demands of the community a great fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, the constant nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing education in the faith, listening all the time to the Word.' GDC 86

'These are the profound reasons for which the Christian community is in herself living catechesis. Thus she proclaims, celebrates, works and remains always a vital, indispensable and primary locus of catechesis.' GDC 141

Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian Community'. ...the community accompanies catechumens, and with maternal solicitude makes them participate in her own experience of the faith and incorporates them into herself' GDC 254

Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian Community... It is the community that welcomes the catechized in an environment 'in which they will be able to live in the fullest way what they have learned.' GDC 220

The Christian community not only gives much to those who are being catechized but also receives much from them... They bring to the community new religious and human wealth... Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized, but also brings the community itself to maturity. GDC 221

The parish community is called to be a fraternal and welcoming family where Christians become aware of being the people of God... the parish is the usual place where faith is born and where it grows. GDC 257



'The quality of the community's life will greatly affect the formation of catechumens. The presence of catechumens challenges the community to be credible, to be the body of Christ they claim to be.' Nicky Stevens.,



When time is not invested in formation of the adult faith community, Dunning describes the ensuing disaster as 'pouring the new wine of adult initiation not into the new wineskins of a spirit-filled community, but into the old churchskins of tired structures and institutions epitomized by enquiry classes and lectures. They will initiate new members not into a community but into a book and a priest. They will invite catechumens not into a lifelong journey that varies for each person but into a terminal programme of classes with a few perfunctory mechanical liturgies thrown in and call it a catechumenate. They will lose the new wine by pouring it into old churchskins' James Dunning, Echoing God's Word