

[from *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* —
A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation,
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Scripture and tradition form the core content of all adult catechesis, for the Church has always considered them the supreme rule of faith. Through them we receive the very word of God, and in them resounds the voice of the Holy Spirit. Sacred Scripture provides the starting point for reflecting on the faith, while the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* serves as the reference for the authentic presentation of the content of the faith. Use of Scripture and the Catechism—including the sources from which it draws, those to which it refers, and other catechetical resources based on and consonant with it—will help adults grasp the content of the faith and its practical application in Christian living.

The Catholic faith is like a symphony in which the unity of faith finds expression in richly diverse formulations and manifestations. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* states: “The maturation of the Christian life requires that it be cultivated in all its dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development.”

The ongoing development of a living, explicit, and fruitful Christian faith in adulthood requires growth in all six dimensions. Each of them is a fundamental aspect of Christian life and a foundational content area for adult faith formation. The exploration of the six dimensions that follow are presented as content summaries to indicate what adult faith formation programs and opportunities seek to accomplish.

1) Knowledge of the Faith

- Recognize *communion with Jesus Christ* as the definitive aim of all catechesis.
- Explore the *Scriptures* so that adults may be hearers and doers of the word.
- Become familiar with the *great teachings of Christianity* (its creeds and doctrines) and their place in the hierarchy of truths—for example, the mystery of God and the Trinity, Christ, the Church, the sacraments, human life and ethical

principles, eschatological realities, and other contemporary themes in religion and morality.

- Study the Church’s teaching on the *dignity of the human person* in its social doctrine, including its respect-life teaching.
- Learn the richness of the *Church’s tradition*, explore the *theological and cultural heritage* in which faith is expressed, and gain perspective on contemporary events and trends through an understanding of *church history*.
- Develop the *philosophical and theological foundations of the faith* and appreciate expressions of *Christian thought and culture*.
- Learn the meaning and practical relevance of *current church* teachings as presented by the pope, diocesan bishop, Vatican congregations, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

2) Liturgical Life

- Understand, live, and bear witness to the *paschal mystery*, celebrated and communicated through the *sacramental life of the Church*.
- Learn and embrace in one’s life church *doctrine on the Eucharist* and the *other sacraments*.
- Acquire the spirituality, skills, and habits of *full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy*, especially the eucharistic liturgy.
- Value the dignity of the *baptismal priesthood* and of the *ordained priesthood* and their respective roles in liturgical celebration and Christian mission.
- Appreciate and appropriately participate in the Church’s daily prayer, the *Liturgy of the Hours*, and learn to pray the *psalms*, an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church.

3) Moral Formation

- Understand how the entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the *new commandment* of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us, and promote each disciple’s formation in the life of the risen Christ.
- Study the *Ten Commandments*, the *Beatitudes*, and the moral catechesis of the apostolic teachings, and live in accord with them.
- Appreciate the *dignity, destiny, freedom, and responsibility* of the human person, together with the reality of sin and the power of God’s grace to overcome it.
- Learn how to acquire and follow a *well-formed conscience* in personal and social life, clarifying

current *religious and moral questions* in the light of faith, and cultivating a Christian discernment of the *ethical implications* of developments in the socio-cultural order.

- Recognize, defend, and live by the truth of *objective moral norms* as taught by the Church's magisterium in its moral and social teaching.
- Promote a thorough catechesis on the *Gospel of life* so that *respect for life* from conception until natural death is honored in personal behavior, in public policy, and in the expressed values and attitudes of our society.
- Live a *lifestyle reflecting scriptural values* of holiness, simplicity, and compassion.

4) Prayer

- Become familiar with the diverse *forms and expressions of Christian prayer*, with special attention to the *Our Father*, the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples and which is the model of all Christian prayer.
- Experience and appreciate the richness of the Catholic *ascetical-mystical tradition* as it has taken form across the centuries in diverse historical and cultural settings.
- Develop a regular *pattern of personal prayer* and spiritual reflection, recognizing vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer as basic and fruitful practices in the life of a disciple of Jesus.
- Engage in *shared prayer with others*, especially family prayer, as well as at parish meetings and in small communities of faith.
- Recognize and encourage practices of *popular piety and devotion* that help believers express and strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ.

5) Communal Life

- Pursue *personal and spiritual growth* in human and Christian maturity.
- Cultivate the human values and Christian virtues that foster growth in *interpersonal relationships* and in *civic responsibility*.
- Nurture *marriage and family life* to build up the Church of the home.
- Share actively in the life and work of the *parish*, and foster the potential of *small communities* to deepen the faith and relationships of members, to strengthen the bonds of communion with the parish, and to serve the Church's mission in society.

- Learn the Church's teaching on the *nature and mission of the Church*, including an understanding of the Church's *authority and structures* and of the *rights and responsibilities of the Christian faithful*.
- Support the *ecumenical movement* and promote the unity of God's people as a constitutive dimension of fidelity to the Gospel.

6) Missionary Spirit

- Cultivate an *evangelizing spirit* among all the faithful as an integral element of their baptismal calling, of the Church's nature and mission, and of a Catholic way of life.
- Respond to *God's call* whether as lay, ordained, or religious, and develop a *personal apostolate* in family, Church, and society.
- Motivate and equip the faithful *to speak to others* about the Scriptures, the tradition and teachings of the Church, and one's own experience of faith.
- Explore and promote the applications of the Church's *moral and social teaching* in personal, family, professional, cultural, and social life.
- Understand the importance of *servicing those in need*, promoting the *common good*, and working for the *transformation of society* through personal and social action.
- Appreciate the value of *interreligious dialogue* and contacts, and promote the Church's mission *ad gentes* in the local and universal Church.

The scope of catechetical content is cognitive, experiential, and behavioral and it requires development in the threefold dimension of word, memory, and witness (doctrine, celebration, and commitment in life). This balanced method fosters growth in both the faith by which we believe and the faith *in which* we believe. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* says, "this 'Yes' to Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of revelation of the Father, is twofold: a trustful abandonment to God and a loving assent to all that he has revealed to us." It takes place "through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living"—both together foster each disciple's growth into the full faith and life of the Gospel. This approach also promotes a natural linkage between the faith we profess and celebrate and the life we live, thus meeting one of the principal challenges of our day.