

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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Re-Imagining the Tasks for Catechesis: A Road Map for Missionary Discipleship

The Importance of Catechetical Directories to Catholic Education

In Catholic Schools across Ontario, our curriculum design in Religious Education and Adult Faith Formation at every level is heavily influenced by three central documents of the Catholic Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides the steady framework and systematic content to be presented, the *Holy Bible* provides the key stories in Salvation History to be lifted up as signposts for students and adults alike, and the *Directory for Catechesis* that speaks to the methodology in teaching.

The first directory of catechesis was published in 1971 as the *General Catechetical Directory*. Following the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1997 by Saint Pope John Paul II, the directory was revised and republished under the title of the *General Directory for Catechesis* – known as the *GDC*. This has been the foundational document regarding methodology in catechesis ever since.

A New Directory for Catechesis

In July 2020, the Vatican published the new *Directory for Catechesis* - the third edition. Like its predecessors, this new directory is an important document of the Church. Of interest to Catholic schools in Ontario, the new directory makes explicit reference to the role of Catholic schools in the mission of the Church and the teaching of religious education but also has important insights regarding the spiritual needs of persons across the lifespan, the key elements of adult faith development as well as current cultural realities – including digital culture – that impacts learning and teaching strategies. This document discusses evangelization, catechesis and religious education in a variety of settings and provides important insights for those who teach in formal and informal settings in the home, school and parish.

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The Six Tasks of Catechesis

The *GDC* lists six tasks of catechesis that answer the question: When we teach the faith, what are we specifically doing? The six tasks are:

1. Promoting Knowledge of the Faith
2. Liturgical Education
3. Moral Formation
4. Teaching to Pray
5. Education for Community Life
6. Missionary Initiation



The Six Tasks of Catechesis

You might notice that the first four: knowledge of the faith, liturgy, moral living, and prayer, follow the structure of the Catechism itself. The final two - living as part of the community and preparing for mission – teach us about our participation in the Church and the world as members of the Body of Christ.

These six tasks relate directly to the six strands of RE in the elementary curriculum: Believing, Celebrating, Living a Moral Life, Praying, Living in Communion and Living in Solidarity. You can see the one-to-one relationship between the tasks and strands here:



The Six Strands of Religious Education

Living in Solidarity - the strand that relates to the task of initiation to mission - was described like this:

This strand focuses on the responsibilities of all baptized to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to make Christ's message alive in the lives of all people. This is the mission of those who form the living Body of Christ.ⁱ

The tasks and strands are always shown around the relationship with Jesus which is described by Saint Pope John Paul II like this:

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱ

In the secondary RE curriculum, these six tasks are captured within the Five Big Ideas of Religious Education.ⁱⁱⁱ We see the tasks grouped and represented under the headings of Religious Knowledge, Living Moral Lives and Celebrating the Faith in Community. These are complemented by the final two strands of Catholic Christian Anthropology and Theological Reflection.

Now Five Tasks of Catechesis

The new Directory has re-imagined these tasks in new language and in a new organization. This directory is heavily influenced by Pope Francis' encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel* as well as his exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate - Rejoice and Be Glad - On Holiness in Everyday Life* - and you will hear echoes of the familiar themes of encounter, accompaniment, mercy and striving for holiness throughout. The new directory lists only five tasks as described below:

1. Knowledge of the faith - Here we see language that points to patience and growth. This is an introduction “to the knowledge of Sacred Scripture and of the Church’s living Tradition”^{iv} and its purpose is the fostering of faith. “It is important not to underestimate this cognitive dimension of the faith and to be attentive to integrating it into the educational process of integral Christian maturation.”^v The Directory affirms that knowing the content of the faith allows us to find meaning in living the encounter.

2. Celebration of the mystery - This section refers to the liturgy of the Church, the celebration of the Sacraments and our celebration of the Eucharist in particular. It aims at an understanding borne of experience. This task calls for education “in the attitudes that the Church’s celebrations require: joy for the festive quality of celebrations, a sense of community, attentive listening to the word of God, confident prayer, praise and thanksgiving, and an awareness of symbols and signs.”^{vi}

3. Forming for life in Christ - This task is described as: “The task of making the heart of every Christian resound with the call to new life in keeping with the dignity of children of God received in Baptism and with the life of the risen one.” Every Christian, it continues, has the responsibility of discovering their own role in the plan of salvation. It suggests that our education here should “point out the attractiveness and the idea of a life of wisdom, self-fulfillment and enrichment so

as to make believers joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel.”^{vii} It lifts up the importance of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. Formation is configuration to Christ, making disciples more Christ-like.

4. Teaching prayer - There is the mention of personal and liturgical prayer here as well as the notion of teaching “to pray with Jesus Christ and *like* him”.^{viii} The opening line of this section is a wonderful reminder that: “Prayer is first of all a gift from God.”

5. Introduction to community life - In this task, we are reminded that the faith is professed, celebrated and lived above all in community. This is not merely a construct or a framework but an integral part of Christian life. This is the truth of each of us as forming part of the Body of Christ. This task is meant to foster a deep sense of belonging and therefore co-responsibility of all in and for the Church.^{ix}

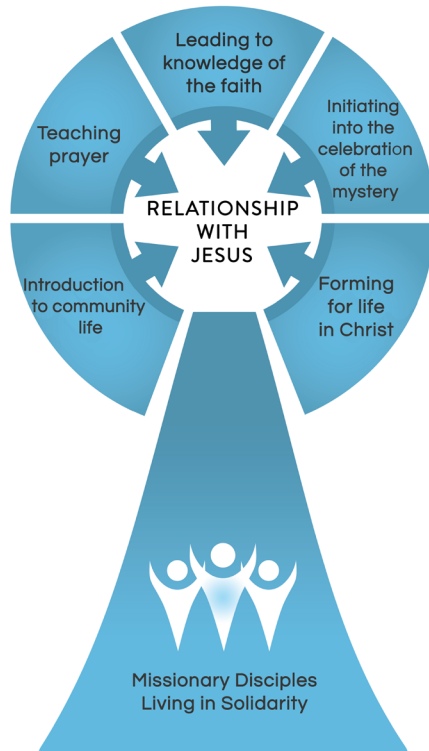
We can summarize the goals of catechesis and the journey of faith as described in the new Directory this way:

Once I know Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation that frees me, I choose to live his way of life, I choose his mission, which is the proclamation of the Gospel. The encounter is with the whole person, not just the mind but the body and heart. There is a ripening of the initial conversion that gives complete meaning to a person’s very existence.^x

We see that the sixth task of catechesis that was listed in the *GDC – Initiation for Ministry* – becomes the goal of catechesis in the new Directory. I learn and experience all of this in order that I may go forth and share the good news. The five tasks give us a roadmap, centered on our relationship with Jesus, that leads us to life as missionary disciples.

Why we teach what we teach - Pause for a moment to review the previous section. What touches you in your role as teacher and catechist in a Catholic school?

What does this mean for the strands of Catholic education? - The six strands of Religious Education remain entirely valid and are in line with the new Directory's vision of catechesis. Moving the concept of initiation into the mission of the Church to the goal of the tasks is a good reminder to Catholic educators that what we teach must always be informed and shaped by why we teach it. You may think about the relationship between the new Directory and the strands of Religious Education in this way now:



THE TASKS OF
CATECHESIS



THE STRANDS OF
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Our faith has a rich content and our recent curriculum documents along with supporting programming supports this presentation of the faith well in keeping with the pedagogical insights of the new Directory.

This new *Directory for Catechesis* provides us with a road map for our teaching. We teach as, for and with missionary disciples who seek to bring the joy of the Gospel to life in our schools and beyond.

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