



Building Faith at Home and in the Parish:

The *Directory for Catechesis* and the Vital Role of Family Faith Formation

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Evangelizing Catechesis

An evangelizing catechesis seeks to deepen a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

It proclaims the core message of the Gospel, the kerygma

It accompanies people to a response of faith and conversion to Christ

It provides a systematic exposition of God's revelation within the communion of the Catholic Church

It sends out missionary disciples as witnesses to the good news of salvation

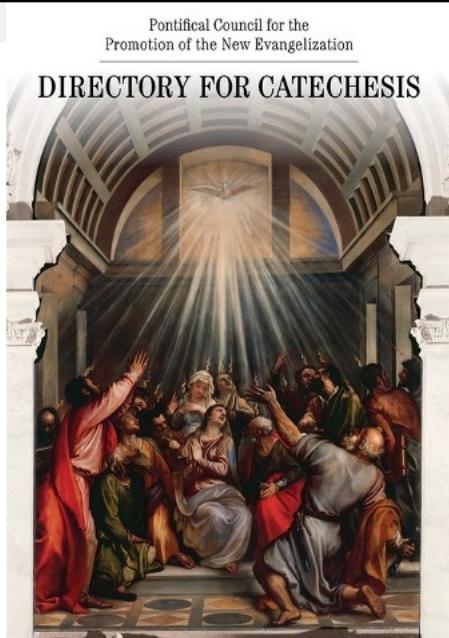
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Part One --

The Directory's Vision of Family Catechesis: Theology, Identity, and Mission



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Why the *Directory for Catechesis* Matters

- Universal Church vision for catechesis today
- Moves from program delivery → accompaniment of persons
- Explicitly situates catechesis in real human lives and families (DC 224-225)

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Faith Develops in Real Lives

- Faith is not linear
- Faith and human development influence one another
- Catechesis must respect psychological, cultural, and family realities



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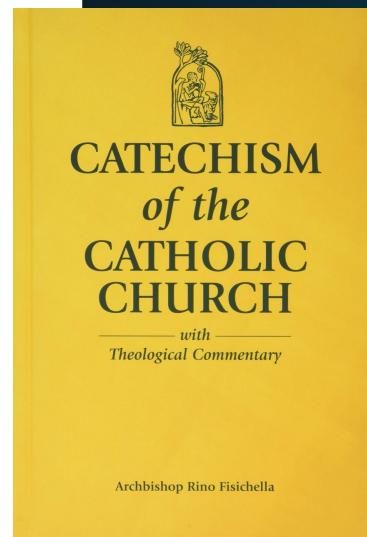
The Parish as a “Family of Families”

- Family as “community of love and life” (*DC*, 226)
- The Church becomes a family of families through domestic churches
- Parish identity flows from this ecclesiology

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Family is Key to Fundamental Mysteries of Faith

- God and Church are revealed as family.
- Family is a sign and image of the Trinity (CCC, 2205; Gen. 1:26-27)
- Christ's relationship with the Church revealed as a marriage (Eph. 5, Rev.)
- God reveals himself as parent; fellow Christians as brothers and sisters
- "...Parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of faith of which they are the first 'heralds' for their children" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2225).



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Family Catechesis in the *Directory for Catechesis*

- **Catechesis in the family**
- **Catechesis with the family**
- **Catechesis of the family**

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Catechesis IN the Family (DC 227)

Simple, spontaneous, daily
Witnessed more than taught
Rooted in routines, affection,
moral formation

- Help young learners articulate their faith (ticket out the door)
- Assist parents in talking with their children about the faith.
- Give families simple ways to “live out”/reinforce faith lessons



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Catechesis WITH the Family (DC, 229-230)

Some common models of family catechesis

- Age-level/grade level integrated family catechesis
- Intergenerational “whole family” catechesis
- Parent-facilitated catechesis
- “front porch” experiences

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Catechesis WITH the Family (DC, 229-230)

- Equipping Parents with Awareness of Development of Faith
- Age-specific goals
- Developmental windows of opportunity
- Practical recommendations for integration into the life of the family



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Catechesis OF the Family (DC, 231)

- Family as agent of evangelization
- Faith spreads naturally outward
- Domestic Church participates in the Church's mission

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Family catechesis is not a strategy or a program; it is the Church living her identity as a family of families.



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Small Group Discussion

Using the Directory's three areas of family catechesis, reflect together on what your parish is already doing well and where families may not yet be adequately accompanied.

1. Catechesis IN the family

- How does our parish currently help parents live the faith at home?
- Where do we assume families 'already know how'?

2. Catechesis WITH the family

- In what ways do we actively walk with parents rather than simply inform them?
- Where do parents experience us as supportive—or as demanding?

3. Catechesis OF the family

- How are families invited to see themselves as missionary disciples?
- Where is this dimension largely absent?

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Part Two -- How Faith Is Transmitted: Developmental Insight and Contemporary Research



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The Directory Explicitly Invites the Human Sciences

- Sociology, psychology, pedagogy are essential to effective catechesis
- Developmental appropriateness is not optional

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Some Key Windows of Opportunity in Childhood/Adolescence



Early childhood – attachment and relationship

1st - 2nd Grade – concrete, rule-based thinking

3rd Grade – “Chumship stage”

4th grade – beginning of internalization of moral decision-making

5th - 6th Grade – sign and symbol, future selves, Scripture

Middle School – Identity development, belonging

High School – differentiation, autonomy, future selves

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What the Research Confirms about Faith Transmission

- Parents are the single most influential factor
- Faith is “caught” more than taught
- Community and extended relationships matter
- Listening, understanding, and accompanying are key



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Summary of Research on Transmission of Faith in the Family and Community

- Fuller Research Institute points to role of extended family and community
 - Participation in whole parish worship is the variable most linked to development of a mature faith
 - 5 to 1 ratio
- Dr. Christian Smith: “Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.”
- Dr. Greg and Lisa Popcak/CARA/HCFM Research: Continued practice of the faith largely dependent on the extent to which the young person identifies faith as central to positive, joyful experiences in the home/family



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Dialogue and Faith

Study released in late 2025 by Communio and Harvard

- Regular, open conversations about faith at home are a massive predictor of adult practice.
- Those with daily childhood faith talks have **7.5 times higher odds** of practicing as adults.



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Faith and Family Life: Helping Families Make Connections



- God reveals himself to us as a parent, and we are his children (Galatians 3:26).
- Parent-child relationships are an image of God's relationship with us -- key to discovering the spirituality of parenthood.
- Help parents discover the connections already present between their faith and their family life.

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The Family Meal

- A meal as the context for Jesus' gift of self
- The apex of worship and communion
- The meals we share with our families serve to draw us closer to one another.



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The Family Meal

Studies by Center on Addiction at Columbia University study: Children and teens who regularly eat with their families (5-7x per week vs. 2 or fewer)

- lower levels of tension and stress at home
- happier and have better peer relationships
- better grades in school
- more likely to confide in their parents
- healthier eating habits
- lower risk of suicide
- much lower risk of substance abuse.

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Works of Mercy: Encounters with Christ in Family Life



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Other Family Moments

We can help families connect faith with other daily moments in the lives of their families by giving them tools for everyday interactions, such as:

- car time
- bedtime
- seasonal celebrations

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Faith grows where relationships are strong, faith is practiced, and life is interpreted through the Gospel.

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Listening to Families with New Ears

The *Directory for Catechesis* asks us to accompany families as they are, not as we wish they were. In your small group, imagine you are listening carefully to real families in your parish.



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Small Group Discussion

Scenario A: A parent who cares deeply but feels overwhelmed and inadequate when it comes to handing on the faith.

Scenario B: A parent who attends sacramental prep but disengages afterward.

Scenario C: A family who values faith but struggles with consistency due to schedules, work, or blended-family dynamics.

- What might this family be experiencing emotionally or spiritually?
- What assumptions do parishes often make about families like this?
- According to the *Directory for Catechesis*, what posture should catechetical leaders adopt toward them?
- What would accompaniment (not pressure) look like here?

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Part Three -- From Vision to Practice: Parish Pathways for Family Catechesis

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Specific Pastoral Moments (DC, 232)

- Marriage preparation
- Mystagogia for young couples
- Baptismal catechesis
- Initiation of children
- Intergenerational catechesis
- Groups of families



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Baptismal Catechesis Reimagined

- Welcome, listening, reawakening faith
- Godparents included
- Time and relationship matter

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Parents in the Journey of Initiation

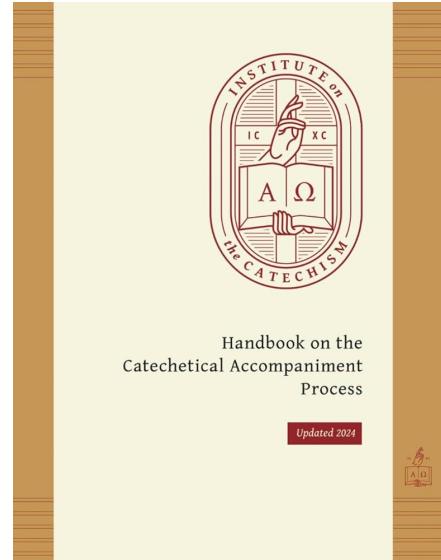
- Some parents return to or deepen faith
- Others receive first proclamation
- Parish must be ready for both
- Happens through encountering or re-encountering the *kerygma*
- Next is deepening faith through formation in fundamentals on an adult level (not only cognitive, but affective and behavioral)



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A Family Approach to Sacrament Preparation

- Should be done in the context of a broader, systematic program of integrated family catechesis
- Incorporating parent and family goals for the sacrament (see the Handbook on the Catechetical Accompaniment Process)



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Intergenerational Catechesis

- Not just “all ages in one room”
- Shared prayer, story, witness with a developmentally-appropriate structure
- Evidence-based methods (coached practice)

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Integrated Family Catechesis – Two Approaches

Grade Level + Family Gathered

- Weekly grade level sessions in the parish for 3 weeks out of the month
- Monthly family gathered sessions on unit themes from a curriculum with a Spiral Scope and Sequence (intergenerational gatherings at the parish)

Home Sessions + Family Gathered

- Parent-led weekly sessions using home session plans
- Multi-age family session plans recommended
- Monthly family gathered sessions on unit themes (intergenerational gatherings at the parish)

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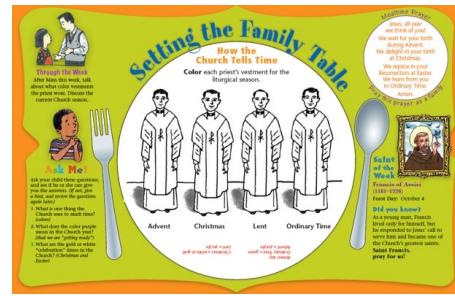
Groups of Families

- Peer accompaniment
- Marital and family spirituality
- Mission-oriented formation

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The Family as Missionaries (DC, 231)

- Give parents “ask me” questions.
- Provide simple, practical guides for families on practices that reflect Catholic Social Teaching.
- Offer families opportunities to participate in service projects.



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Designing One Faithful Next Step

The Directory does not ask parishes to do everything at once. It asks for faithful, realistic accompaniment.



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Small Group Discussion

- How is our parish already engaged in family catechesis, even imperfectly?
- What is one small change that would better reflect the *Directory*'s vision?
- Who would need to be involved?
- What would success look like after one year?