

ADULT FAITH FORMATION

PHILOSOPHY

Throughout his public life, Jesus was a teacher. For the most part, he taught adults in synagogues, in the Temple, on festive occasions, and often in his daily gatherings with people. His goal was to convey the genuine message of God; to let it be known and to guide many people to accept it. At the Jewish feast of Booths, *“the feast was half over by the time Jesus went into the temple area and began to teach. The Jews were filled with amazement and said, ‘How did this man get his education when he had no teacher?’ This was Jesus’ answer: ‘My doctrine is not my own; it comes from him who sent me. Any man who chooses to do his will, will know about this doctrine—namely, whether it comes from God or is simply spoken on my own.’”* [John 7:14-17]

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

We are all called to teach as Jesus did—to be sowers of seeds and to address the most important questions raised by women and men. We are all called to *“Let justice roll like a river.”* [Amos 5:24-27]. To understand and exercise justice is really a vocation, it is a biblical call. Adult Catechists are called to bring back whatever people have lost—faith, love, hope, understanding, welfare, forgiveness, peace, strength, etc. *“This means that adult catechesis, in pursuing its goals, must clearly discern the problems and expectations of people today and be alert to the positive elements in their situation which are emerging. With evangelical forthrightness, it must be able to show why the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus offers light and hope.”* [Catechesi Tradendae, #3]. Salvation is individual and corporate, the commitment to restorative/social justice is an integral aspect of the Church’s mission.

INCULTURATION

In the Church today the importance of adult ministry is evident. Pope John Paul II stated that *“one of the constant concerns whose urgency is confirmed by present day experience throughout the world, is the catechesis of adults. This is the principal form of catechesis because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibility and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form”* [Catechesi Tradendae, 43].

It is particularly incumbent upon adult ministers to understand and be committed to the furthering of inculturation always and everywhere. The General Directory for Catechesis, #109 makes a clear statement in this regard: *“‘Inculturation’ of the faith, whereby in a wonderful exchange are comprised, ‘all the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance,’ it is a profound and global process and a slow journey. It is **not** simply an external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive or superficially decorative. On the contrary, it means the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel which touches them deeply, ‘going to the very center and roots’ of their cultures.”*

However, inculturation does not stop with an encounter between the Gospel and a culture, but also includes the multiple interactions between various contemporary cultures. We live not only in a global Church but also in a global world. All people are

called to build inclusive communities in a variety of ways—not only by learning to appreciate another’s customs, language, social mores, etc., but also by responding to a call to leadership whenever and wherever an opportunity arises.

GOALS

1. To include in all Adult Faith Formation gatherings some reflection on Sacred Scripture that is related to the life concerns of the participants. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament continue to challenge, comfort, inspire, surprise, provoke, amuse and sanctify adults. Scripture, doctrine, life experiences, liturgy and acts of charity are all related to growth in faith, mission and ministry.

2. To accept adults where they are, learning to listen as well as to teach. Because all adults are touched by their own experience, including the conditions in which they live, work, and encounter in the public square, catechists need to develop a sensitivity to whatever assists adults in overcoming the distance between Church and society; faith and culture.

3. To be convinced that the adult leader’s main task is to discover what mature adults need and want to learn. As stated in “*Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*,” by the International Council for Catechesis, Vatican City, 1990, #57 “Of fundamental importance is the ***dialogical approach***. . . In this way, they can make known their needs and participate, as they should, as subjects or agents in their own catechesis and in that of others.” Studies show that adults retain far more of what they have learned by dialogue than by lecture. When leaders do focus on issues within the daily lives of adults, motivation is greatly enhanced and the seeds of faith blossom.

4. To augment the power of the Holy Spirit by reaching out to many adults who are not touched by any kind of catechesis, and to increase our efforts to find new ways to reach those adults who have not heard the message of Christ, or who having been evangelized, have left the Church.

“Catechesis is one moment in the total process evangelization.” [*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #17; *Catechesi Tradendae*, #18] “Catechesis *per se* has to be *distinguished* therefore from other activities, even though it cannot be separated from them:

___it is different from *evangelization*, which is the proclamation of the Gospel for the first time to those who have heard it, or the re-evangelization of those who have forgotten it.

___it is different from *formal religious education*, which goes beyond the basic elements of faith in more systematic and specialized courses;

___it is also different from those *informal occasions for faith awareness* in God’s presence, which arise in fragmentary and incidental ways in the daily life of adults.

At the same time, adult catechesis remains *closely related* to all the above aspects of faith development.” [*Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*, p.12]