ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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Dear Pastors and Catechetical Leaders,

As catechetical programs begin again in parishes across the Archdiocese, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the work that you do in collaboration with parents to hand on the rich treasure of our faith. What we are called to hand on is not a series of ideas or principles but an encounter with a person: Jesus Christ. At the heart of the work of catechesis is fostering that encounter with Jesus Christ and helping young people to know him and to love him.

The difficulties posed by the pandemic were particularly challenging for our Catechetical Leaders as you had to adapt to an ever-changing set of needs in the face of constantly fluctuating realities posed by the pandemic. With every challenge there is also an opportunity, an occasion to look at how we have been doing things and how we might do them better in the future.

With this in mind, and in light of the recent release of a new *Directory for Catechesis*, I have published the enclosed pastoral note. In it I hope to share some highlights from the new *Directory*, position catechesis within the larger context of our ongoing efforts of evangelization and parish renewal, and address some particular challenges and opportunities that have arisen in parishes across the Archdiocese.

Please know that our Institute for Evangelization is ready and willing to assist you as you reflect upon the enclosed guidance and consider how to put it into action in your parish. As always, know of my prayers and gratitude for you in your ministry.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Faithfully in Christ,

+William E. Lori

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore

A Pastoral Note on Faith Formation

Archbishop William E. Lori, S.T.D.

A *Directory for Catechesis*

In the Summer of 2020, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization published a new *Directory for Catechesis (DC).* As I noted in *A Light Brightly Visible 2.0 (LBV 2.0)*,

> It seeks to close the gap between evangelization and catechesis and helps parish leaders to grasp more profoundly the vision of evangelization in Pope Francis' seminal encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*, upon which LBV was based. Indeed, this new Directory takes up many of the themes found in LBV, including evangelization as the basis for all ministry, the need to move beyond 'business as usual,' the art of accompaniment, missionary conversion, and the crucial role of the RCIA process.

While I did not fully explore these themes in *LBV 2.0*, they are integral to our path forward in evangelization and discipleship. I would urge you to read the new Directory prayerfully and allow this to guide your discernment as parish leaders as you continue to revisit your approach to faith formation.

As a part of the implementation of the new *Directory for Catechesis*, I have reviewed the text and solicited guidance on it. In light of these conversations, I have decided to update our archdiocesan sacramental guidelines. These guidelines are distinct from the recently promulgated sacramental policies, which are a local application of the universal law of the Church. The sacramental guidelines are an invitation for pastors and parish catechetical leaders to think creatively about sacramental formation, so that *each individual believer* is accompanied *in a particular way* to the reception of God's sacramental grace. However, as we all know, the task of catechesis is far more comprehensive than the limited time associated with "immediate" sacramental preparation. As the Directory explains, "Catechesis is placed at the service of the believer's response of faith, enabling him [or her] to live the Christian life in a state of conversion." (*DC* §73). Catechesis should be a lifelong process where – in response to encountering the Lord – the individual believer grows in knowledge and love for Jesus Christ and His Church.

Parish Faith Formation Today

The new *Directory* speaks clearly as to how catechesis and faith formation should be carried out at our parishes for young children and adolescents. Specifically, it has become clear that, despite our best efforts, a "classroom model" of faith formation has not borne the fruit that we sought. One does not need to review the sociological data to know that knowledge of Christ and the teachings of his Church is very low in the United States. More importantly, many of these programs do not help children and families to encounter Christ and to be converted by this encounter to a life of discipleship. Like some you of I am of an age that remembers pre-conciliar models of faith formation such as "CCD" and the Baltimore Catechism. Faced with the decline in religious literacy among the faithful and aware of the many challenges before us, it is tempting to think that returning to such models of catechesis lock, stock, and barrel would be the answer to our problems. Appealing as that may be at times, it does not take into account the broader wave of cultural change to which this model is not adequately equipped to respond. As Pope Francis often reminds us we are not in "an époque of change but a change of époque". We can no longer assume the cultural foundations of faith that we once could. In effect, we are living more and more the experience of the first Christians, preaching the Gospel in a world that does not know Christ, but a world that God loves and desires to save.

Our Church has found it challenging to integrate what are sometimes considered competing goals for faith formation: 1) to deepen an individual believer's relationship with the Lord, and 2) to increase knowledge of Christ and the Catholic faith. Put another way, there should be and *is* a interconnected relationship between *knowing* Christ and *loving* Christ. While these two objectives cannot and should not be thought of as competing, often in practice, they remain in tension. It is important to remember that this is the life-giving tension inherent in learning the infinitely-knowable mystery that is God. Let me be clear: the more one loves the Lord, the more they will desire to learn about Him; *and* the more one learns about the Lord, the more deeply they can fall in love with Him. I realize that many of the faithful seem to lack a burning desire for the Lord, but this only demands all the more that we make space for this encounter. The human heart is made for relationship with the Triune God.

In *LBV 2.0,* I spent much space writing on the importance of prayer in the lives of priests and lay leaders because *without spending daily time with our Lord in prayer, it is impossible to share the faith with others.* Specifically:

> Through daily and sustained prayer and the sacraments, the light of the Gospel shines in and through you, my co-workers in the vineyard, as you bear united witness to the truth and love of Jesus in our midst. I earnestly urge you, as I must daily urge myself, to set aside critical time for prayer, Scripture reading, Eucharistic adoration, and Marian devotions. Your prayerfulness has a tremendous impact on how you fulfill your ministry and influences the many people you so generously serve.

The more we encounter the Lord, the more our understanding of the Church and Her teachings are conformed to the one who gives them. We are not speaking about slavishly submitting our will to an external authority. Rather, growing in the relationship with the Lord purifies our minds and opens our hearts more fully to the Spirit of Truth.

As parish leaders – lay and ordained – it is essential that our work and mission comes from the one who sent us. To form parishioners well, we be formed from the heart of the Church and the divine pedagogy. As the Directory explains:

> Being an object of faith, the content of catechesis cannot be subjected indifferently to any method whatsoever, but requires that this reflect the nature of the evangelical message with its sources and also consider the concrete circumstances of the ecclesial community and of the individual baptized persons. (*DC* §194)

Our whole formational enterprise must be done in a manner that honors the rich content that we share and the unique persons with whom we share it.

It has become increasingly common to use the language of "family faith formation" for a pedagogical method that invites parents to take up their role as their child's primary catechist and educator. While this language represents a range of approaches, it has deep roots in Scripture and the Early Church, where families were brought into the faith, precisely, *as families*. (Cf. *Acts* 16:15; 16:34; 18:8). While "Catechesis does not have a single method," (*DC* §195) this approach certainly has great advantages and demands careful attention. As the Directory explains:

> The greatest challenge in this situation is for couples, mothers and fathers, active participants in catechesis, to overcome the mentality of delegation that is so common, according to which the faith is set aside for specialists in religious education. This mentality is, at times, fostered by communities that struggle to organize family centered catechesis which starts from the families themselves. (*DC* §124).

On the other hand we must not fool ourselves into thinking that such a form of catechesis will be easier because it allows us to delegate the work back to the parents. *Parents can't simply be given materials to review and teach their children the faith.* Some parents may be equipped to share the faith with their children, but many have neither the knowledge nor practical skills to carry out this task. *Here, I should note that pondering this situation in moral categories is unproductive for the mission and unity of the Church.* Put simply, assigning blame does no good. For our part, as an institutional Church, I will say that we have tacitly encouraged an abdication of this parental responsibility, and as catechists, we have an opportunity to take up the task of engaging and educating parents in the wholistic formation of their children. Indeed, many parents, feeling unequipped, will welcome an opportunity and the tools to share their faith life and experience with their children. We must realize that this offers an opportunity for the parents to grow in their own knowledge and love of Christ, whatever their past experiences of catechesis may have been.

A New Paradigm in Faith Formation

As the Directory explains: "It is important that every Christian community take a realistic view of the heterogeneous family realities, with their ups and downs, for the sake for *accompanying them* in an adequate way and *discerning* the complexity of situations, without giving in to forms of idealism and pessimism." (*DC* §234). We have a responsibility to identify methods of formation that can welcome and accompany each person and family. *It should come as no surprise that some success has been achieved with programs that incorporate elements of mentoring and small groups, which allow for deeper conversations and more sustained relationships.* Family faith formation works particularly well with these models because they situate catechesis relationally. Indeed, "The Christian community is the primary agent of catechesis," and, what is more, "Paying attention to group relationships has a pedagogical significance: it develops the sense of belonging to the Church and assists growth in faith." (*DC* §218). We should not address households and families as a mere collection of individuals and, similarly, we should view our parish communities as truly a community (*communio*) or a family of families.

Sometimes such non-programmatic language can be overwhelming or even paralyzing. Instead, it is my sincere hope that it will be *freeing* for ministry with families. There is no shortage of good materials, that present the faith clearly and faithfully. Today, our task is to create a pedagogical space that opens individuals and families to the Lord. Now it is often said, "You have to belong before you believe." Helpful questions for parish catechetical leaders to ask include: How are our formational gatherings comfortable and conducive to building simple human relationships? Do we give space for families to share their faith with each other and with other families? Do we give individuals different modes and opportunities to grasp concepts? Do we offer compelling witnesses of the faith lived? Do we help families to pray? Does this formation lead to an increase in works of justice and mercy?

Make no mistake this is not going to be easier. This approach often requires more diligent planning and sustained relationships with families. However, it is an opportunity to form parishioners to serve in a different form of catechetical ministry. The task of parish catechesis demands that parish catechetical leaders employ the method of spiritual multiplication. While a parish catechetical leader might be an extraordinary catechist, without additional catechists and mentors, good parish faith formation remains unattainable. Parish catechetical leaders should be a catechist to catechists and a mentor to mentors. In so doing, the principal of spiritual multiplication takes hold and transforms a parish community.

Guidance for Parish Faith Formation

I want to also take this occasion to mention our Emmaus Teams and the Office of Family, Youth and Young Adult Ministry who are *prepared* and *excited* to assist parishes in discerning the best manner to approach parish faith formation. The Institute for Evangelization has been established to serve as a resource for parishes precisely in this way. While Institute personnel possesses a wealth of experience from numerous parishes and pastorates, their desire is to serve each individual parish in realizing their unique mission, given by Jesus Christ, for *this time* and *this place.*

In sum, I offer the follow guidance for faith formation:

- The new *Directory for Catechesis* should be the cornerstone of your faith formation program
- Faith formation should provide families and children an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ and a good experience of Church
- Good content, faithful to the magisterium, is essential
- Successful parish ministry demands prayer in the life of every parish team member collectively and individually
- Well-executed family faith formation is more desirable than traditional classroom models
- Small groups and mentoring can significantly enhance formation
- Parents should not simply be given materials without further instruction
- Children and adolescent faith formation should include robust formation for parents
- The Office of Family, Youth and Young Adult Ministry and the Office of Parish Renewal are vital resources in refining your faith formation program
- As always, polices to ensure the safety of our young people must be followed faithfully and conversation between the Office of Child and Youth Protection and Risk Management and parish leadership are essential as new models for delivering faith formation are developed.

Indeed, the vision articulated in the new *Directory for Catechesis* is marked by a bold simplicity – a boldness that should inspire great hope. There is much work to be done for this new vision for catechesis and formation to take root in our parish communities. We stand ready to work together to respond to these challenges May the Lord bless you and sustain you in this most important work.