



STATEMENT ON CATECHETICAL MINISTRY

September 21, 1992

The Feast of St. Matthew the Evangelist
and
The Tenth Anniversary of Their First Statement on this Subject

Before Christ ascended to His Father, He gave a charge to the whole Church to evangelize:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20.

On this feast of St. Matthew the Evangelist and in this year, as we celebrate the Fifth Centenary of Evangelization in our land, we invite all our people to join in reflecting on the catechetical ministry that is so essential to the mission of the Church.

Catechesis -- "A means of evangelization that must not be neglected is that of catechetical instruction. The intelligence, especially that of children and young people, needs to learn through systematic religious instruction the fundamental teachings, the living content of the truth which God has wished to convey to us and which the Church has sought to express in an ever richer fashion during the course of her long history."¹ Catechesis is a life-long continuous process of conversion, formation and spiritual growth which "helps individuals and communities acquire and deepen Christian faith and identity."² It leads them "to a full knowledge of the mystery of salvation"³ and "to a full response to God's gift of faith."⁴ The goal of catechesis is, "to foster living, conscious and active faith."⁵ This means, above all, working toward the formation and personal conversion of Catholic people committed to the transformation of themselves and of the world. "The teaching ministry of the Diocesan Bishop, then, serves the revelation of God, both directly in his own activity and in the encouragement he gives for its accurate presentation by others `so that the whole of Christian Doctrine is imparted to all."⁶ From this comes the authority for all catechetical activity in a diocese.

Mission -- Catechesis, as a life-long process, clarifies the mission of the Christian community to live and witness to the Word of God. It teaches that included in this mission is the building of a society imbued with peace and justice as the proper apostolic work of the Church. What is learned must be expressed in works of love, justice and peace. In all of these aspects, catechesis and mission remain founded and rooted in the Sacred Scriptures, the living Word of God, and in tradition developed and supported by the teaching authority of the Church. In carrying out this mission, catechesis calls us to proclaim the message, to foster community, prepare for prayer and worship and motivate ourselves and others to Christian witness and service. Through catechesis the mystery of salvation, of God's grace within the Church, of the full moral, sacramental, eucharistic life is proclaimed, nourished and enriched. "No one will deny that this instruction must be given to form patterns of Christian living, and not to remain only notional."⁷

Call to Teach -- The risen Christ sent his followers to make "disciples of all nations."⁸ The task of the Church is the making, by God's grace, of loving disciples who will transform themselves and the world. It is the right of all to receive instruction and formation through the ministry of the Church.⁹ This right lies at the heart of the Church's nature, to insure that people of all ages have opportunities to become members of the Church, to grow in their knowledge and love of the Lord and in their living of His Gospel. Therefore, the Church calls upon all Catholics to accept responsibility for the teaching mission of the Church according to their station in life, their training and their experience.

Right to be Taught -- Persons in all stages of their development, from birth through adulthood, have the right to continue to grow in their lives of faith. When those of any age cease to grow in their knowledge and awareness of Christian life and responsibilities, the effectiveness of the Church's witness grows correspondingly weaker. The Church must minister to people of different ages, different cultures, and different life situations. The Church must also respond continually to the challenges of Jesus through an authentic evangelization of our multi-faceted communities: rural, urban, migrant, immigrant, and refugee.

Parish -- Although a major dimension of catechetical formation takes place through parish programs, the total parish catechizes in all that it does. The parish liturgies, as the dynamic focal point of Church life and ministry, must inspire and support Christian growth in faith. Pastors and parish leaders must provide and promote formation programs to catechists and parishioners as well as opportunities for Christian service.

Pastors -- "All believers have a right to catechesis; all pastors have a duty to provide it."¹⁰ The pastor and priest associates, in union with the Bishop, provide full and authentic Catholic teaching, and they should be a source of leadership and support for all those involved in this catechetical ministry of the Word. The pastor is ultimately responsible to insure that parish policies are in accord with diocesan directives pertaining to religious education and reception of the sacraments. Involving others, especially professional religious educators, in carrying out this mission is imperative.

Family -- The role of parents and family in faith formation is of utmost importance. Parents, as the first to communicate the faith to their children, must model continuous life-long learning and living of that faith. By their word and example, they significantly foster the faith development of children and youth. All that is done in catechetical ministry needs to have a "family perspective" in order to maximize the essential role of parents in nurturing faith.

Parish Director of Religious Education -- The parish director of religious education (DRE) should be professionally educated for this position and should be responsible for designing, directing, and implementing the catechetical ministry of the total parish under the direction of the pastor. The DRE should be a resource person for programs for infants and young children, the Catholic school, the programs of youth ministry and adult education. Such a person must not only have a deep commitment to the Gospel's message and mission, but also the professional capabilities to direct and support parish programs and planning. This calls for just compensation. Small or rural parishes may join together to employ a director of religious education.

Adult Catechesis -- The National Catechetical Directory, issued by the Bishops of the United States in 1977, states that adult religious education is the primary focus of the Church's catechetical programs. The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, issued by the Holy See in 1972, indicates that total Christian formation engages the mind and also touches the heart. Adult Catholics have the right to a clear presentation of the teachings of Christian faith and morals. This experience must address the varying needs of Catholics of every age as well as those with different languages and cultures. All should be helped to believe the mysteries by the very form in which they are presented. Such education must also assist them to witness their Christian faith in their moral lives and must guide them in developing their lives of prayer. Catechesis appropriately takes place in the context of community, where people come to know and serve each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Catechesis for Young People -- Catechesis for our youth must present the Gospel in ways that allow them to accept it as capable of giving meaning to life through understanding the mysteries of Christ. The partnership of family, parish community, catechists, youth ministers, parish DREs and Catholic school staffs are all necessary for effective catechesis of our young people. As infants, children are integrated into the family of God by parents and family surroundings. For the young child, this environment may be the Church, parish programs or school. Parish and youth ministry programs continue for the fragile period of adolescence. Especially for young children and adolescents, a systematic catechesis is needed. This should not be improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal of forming disciples of Jesus Christ.¹¹

Parish Catechetical Programs -- Parish Catechetical Programs aim to help children journey toward a more mature faith. Three traditional components of a parish program are: faith as knowledge, faith as commitment and faith as lifestyle. Catechesis in parish programs involves sharing of traditional Catholic beliefs, nurturing in love of God and the giving of service. All of this takes place within the parish as a

community and is uniquely shaped and formed by the leadership of the pastor, the lifestyle of the parish and the dedication of parish catechists.

Youth Ministry -- In Youth Ministry Programs, catechesis and religious formation are vital elements. A comprehensive Youth Ministry Program consists of the word (catechesis and evangelization), worship, creating community, justice and service, enablement, guidance and healing, and advocacy.

Catholic Schools -- Catholic schools and the dedicated teachers and religious working in them have a long history of effective religious education and have been a wonderful gift to the Church. "Our concern for the importance of Catholic schools is set in the context of the responsibility we have by our episcopal office to ensure total Catholic education in all its phases for all ages."¹² The Catholic elementary school is an integral part of the parish or parishes upon which it depends, and its systematic catechetical program complements the efforts of the family and the parish. Catholic secondary and interparochial schools collaborate with parishes and diocesan personnel in planning and implementing programs for a total, integrated approach to catechesis. Since growth in faith is central to their purpose, Catholic elementary and secondary schools must provide an environment where all learning is permeated with the light of faith. In collaboration with the faculty, the principal ensures that the curriculum reflects the four-fold dimension of Catholic education: message, community, worship and service.¹³

Commitment -- Catechists who communicate the Word of God in the RCIA process, adult education programs, Catholic schools, parish religious education, or in youth ministry must be qualified and eager to fulfill their ministries out of love for the Lord and in response to their baptism. This commitment encourages and supports certification as well as ongoing preparation through an organized diocesan program. To secure quality in all these areas, the parish must make a personal and financial pledge to catechetical ministry.¹⁴

Task Before Us -- The challenges of developing effective catechetical ministries are numerous and complex. Catechesis must not be treated solely as an academic exercise, but as the transmission of a way of life. It includes ongoing formation and conversion presenting the essential realities of Christian faith in ways that are always open to the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring the attitudes and commitment necessary to live an active Christian life. And so, the task remains for the Church to be ready to do everything possible as suggested by St. Paul: "to preach the word, to stay with this task whether convenient or inconvenient -- correcting, reproving, appealing -- constantly teaching and never losing patience."¹⁵ We rely on the strength of the risen Jesus and the power of the Spirit to support and guide this sacred work of bringing the Good News to all people.

We Bishops of Florida express our deep gratitude to all those who share faith with such dedication, talent, and generosity in our catechetical ministries. We praise their efforts and pledge to support them in the fulfillment of this important and sacred apostolate.

Edward A. McCarthy

Archbishop of Miami

John J. Snyder

Bishop of St. Augustine

John C. Favalora

Bishop of St. Petersburg

Norbert M. Dorsey

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Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee

J. Keith Symons
Bishop of Palm Beach

John J. Nevins
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Agustin A. Roman
Auxiliary Bishop of Miami

ENDNOTES

1. Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #44.
2. *Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics in the United States*, #5.
 3. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Bishops, #30.
 4. *Sharing the Light of Faith*, #32.
 5. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Bishops, #14.
6. Cf. "The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop: A Partial Reflection," NCCB 1991, and Canon #386.
 7. Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #44.
 8. Matthew 28:18
9. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, #14.
 10. *Ibid*, #64.
 11. Cf. *Catechesi Tradendae*, #36-#38.
12. "In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," USCC, 1990.
 13. Cf. National Catechetical Directory, #215.
 14. Cf. *Catechesi Tradendae*, #15.
 15. 2 Timothy 4:2

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2. *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith*, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, 1986.

3. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Catholic Education, 1965.
4. To Teach as Jesus Did, USCC, 1972.
5. The Catholic School, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.
6. Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics in the United States, USCC, 1979.
7. The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, USCC, 1988 (Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome, 1988)
8. Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness John Paul II, Catechesi Tradendae, 1979.
9. "The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop: A Pastoral Reflection," NCCB, November 14, 1991.
10. Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1976.
11. "In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," USCC, 1990.