

# A Reflection Process on Using Age Specific Catechesis as a Springboard for Lifelong Catechesis Involving the Whole Community

By Leisa Anslinger

## **Gather and Reflect**

First, reflect on the life of your parish—its liturgical seasons, sacrament preparation, outreach ministry, life transitional rituals, and so on. *What are some teachable moments that are utilized to assist adults to reflect on their own faith?*

Gather a group of parents, catechists, and a catechetical leader (you!) who is eager to begin. Get some newsprint, markers, and a blank calendar on the table.

This meeting can be a teachable moment about catechesis involving the whole community. Begin the meeting with prayer and faith sharing upon the Sunday Scriptures, and then moving into some good conversation. As the participants consider their daily lives and the challenges of living the Gospel with passion, they will help the catechetical leader shape catechesis for the parish. They know the importance of providing a variety of opportunities for people to grow in their relationship with God through lifelong faith formation, and they have seen the impact such opportunities have made upon the community in recent years. The best planning is done with the people.

These adults will be eager to talk about future possibilities. Don't expect abstract or idealistic discussion. Instead, you'll find them speaking from their hearts, voicing perceived catechetical needs for themselves and for the community.

Have the group consider this: If the community is a home for catechesis as the *General Directory for Catechesis* indicates (GDC, 253), then *how will the parish family nurture its members through lifelong faith formation?*

You'll find it doesn't take long for the conversation to deepen. Imagine this situation. Within a few moments, a catechist makes an important observation. She notes that participants are speaking about their needs, using experiences with children to illustrate topics the entire community might address. The children's program has become the springboard for lifelong catechesis involving the whole community, from young children through senior citizens.

The participants want to grow in their love of God, in their understanding of our faith, and in their willingness to serve as Christ's body. They realize that one way to develop processes that will be realistic and engaging is to make the connection between real life and catechesis apparent. They know that parents often respond with particular openness when their children are involved, and they recognize that the needs they voice are typical of adults who are not parents, and of those whose children are older.

## **Make the Shift**

You might be wondering how your community can make the move from children-centered religious education to lifelong catechesis involving the whole community. Use the children's program as a springboard. Here are some practical starting points.

1. Consider elements of living faith that can easily be explored by people of all ages: the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year, saints as models of discipleship, the symbols and signs of our sacramental life, developing comfort in reading and reflecting upon Scripture. Review your parish bulletins or religious education calendar for the past month. Look for activities and programs that already involve the parishioners of different ages. Consider what elements of your children's program could be expanded to include the whole community.
2. Get feedback. Listen to parents and grandparents speak about what their children need to better understand. Hear adults comment, "I wish I knew that when I was growing up," or, "my child asked me about this, and I didn't know how to respond." Include youth in focus groups or input sessions. Ask catechists what themes could benefit from reinforcement, and always look to ways that will deepen full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharist, reflection upon the celebration, and the ways in which faith is lived throughout the daily moments of life.
3. Begin realistically. Choose two or three elements for the first year, and select dates with which there will be minimal conflict. Vary the method of presentation or process: an intergenerational gathering with people of all ages together once; an event at which adults and children are separated for another; the third element might be explored through small faith group sharing and printed materials upon which people may reflect at home.
4. Tie catechesis to the celebration of the Eucharist through more than content. Use music and prayer texts from the Sunday celebration to enrich presentations; seasonal colors or ritual patterns enhance processes, providing connections that will renew active participation in the sacraments.
5. Think fun! Who said catechesis has to be stuffy? Why does it often seem that faith formation equals classroom instruction on some abstract concept that appears removed from the daily joys and challenges of faithful living? Consider ways of inviting participants to reflect upon their lives in the context of a presentation on a specific topic, or upon the Sunday Scriptures. Include a little food and an opportunity to share in groups, and the stage is set for a successful process. Include opportunities for people of all ages to mix, or for discussions to take place in age groups, depending upon the depth of discussion desired.

Be renewed through catechesis that actively involves all in the community, and empower the renewed community to shape future processes. Once the parish family has experienced this inclusive approach to catechesis, there is no limit to the possibilities for furthering living discipleship.