

# Making the Vision of Lifelong Catechesis a Reality

By Bill Huebsch

## The General Directory for Catechesis

The General Directory for Catechesis sets the stage for everything we do today in the Catholic Church regarding faith formation. Also known among catechetical leaders simply as “the GDC,” it was called for at Vatican II in the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, in Latin *Christus Dominus*. There, in article #44, the bishops said, “A special directory should... be compiled... for the catechetical instruction of the Christian people in which the fundamental principles of this instruction and its organization will be dealt with and the preparation of books related to it.”

The Directory, finally published in 1997, provides a clear roadmap. It sets out certain principles and guidelines for us to follow. The principles and guidelines paint a picture of catechesis that is the foundation of Our Sunday Visitor’s print materials, from ***Call to Faith*** for children and adolescents to ***Growing Faith*** and ***People of Faith*** for adult and intergenerational use. These principles, include, among others, the following:

- Catechesis is constitutive of the Christian Life. To be a follower of Jesus is to growing in ones faith at every age and stage of life. Indeed, catechesis is for the whole community.
- Catechesis is inextricably linked to the Liturgy of the Church. Indeed, the Liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life and all catechesis flows from it and leads to it.
- The Baptismal catechumenate is the model for all catechesis, which is why we include elements of the catechumenate in every chapter of our materials.
- Conversion to deeper communion with Christ precedes catechesis, and catechesis leads to deeper conversion.
- The home is the first center for catechesis, but there is also an ecclesial role. This means there must exist a partnership between home and parish.
- Nothing replaces the person of the catechesis in the process of handing on the faith. We hand on what we ourselves believe and practice.

The GDC says, in part, “the goal of catechesis is to put people in touch, in communion, indeed, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.” For that reason, Our Sunday Visitor provides you with resources to help your parish and school community do the faith sharing involved with “Breaking Open the Word.” Breaking Open the Word is an ancient practice of the Church and is practiced in the catechumenate itself. Such faith sharing leads to the deep communion and intimacy with Christ for which the GDC calls. Look at the Questions of the Week for adults, children, and youth and the lectionary-connected resources for children, youth, adults, and families on the Call to Faith website.

## Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us

As part of their hope to fully integrate the General Directory into the life of the Church in the United States, the US Bishops, at the dawn of the new millennium, sent an actual pastoral plan to the Church in America. This plan, spelled out in their document, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, clearly and forcefully calls all catechetical leaders in the Church to fully integrate adult faith formation into all we do. This pastoral plan for implementing lifelong faith formation that follows this general outline:

Part 1: Notes on the new focus in the Church on adult formation

Part 2: The qualities found in mature adult faith and discipleship

Part 3: A plan for this ministry: including goals, principles, the content and some general approaches to providing lifelong formation

Part 4: A method for planning in each parish in order to provide lifelong faith formation at every age and stage of life.

Our bishops want us to position adult faith formation, in fact, “at the heart of our catechetical vision and practice”...without weakening our commitment to our other essential educational ministries” (#6) such as schools, children and youth catechesis, and the catechumenate. Our Sunday Visitor has taken this mandate of our bishops very seriously, and the many resources on the Call to Faith website that flow from and connect to our spiral scope and sequence. Gathered and self-directed adult learning and faith formation can take place in conjunction with the core catechetical themes being addressed in the curriculum of children and youth.

Building on the bishops’ wishes, we provide integrated resources for you here, directed to children, adolescents, adults, families, and indeed, the whole parish community! We welcome you! For an interactive presentation of how this lifelong catechesis can take place in your community, check out the lifelong catechesis guide on the home page.