



ENCOUNTER

Evangelization and Catechesis of Children, Youth & Families

Office for Evangelization and Catechesis
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

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The Office for Evangelization and Catechesis (OEC) is pleased to present Volume 1, Issue 1, of *Encounter*. This newsletter is intended to support diocesan directors of religious education, parish catechists, and families who provide catechesis within their homes each day.

In the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls all Christians to an encounter with Jesus Christ:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. (No. 3)

Pope Francis also calls us to reflect on our vocation as catechists and reminds us that we are called to be witnesses so that through our ‘being’ others may encounter Christ.

Catechesis is a vocation: “being a catechist”, this is the vocation, not working as a catechist. So keep this in mind: I didn’t say do the “work” of catechists, but to “be” catechists, because this is something that embraces our whole life. It means leading people to encounter Christ by our words and lives, by giving witness. (Address of Pope Francis to participants in the pilgrimage of Catechists, 27 September 2013)

Catechesis can never be reduced to an activity that is completed once a week in a one-hour class. Rather, catechesis is experienced through our openness to being with others on the journey of faith.

When I reflect on my own journey, it really isn’t the specific lessons I was taught that I remember. Rather, it is the experience of faith shared by others along the way that has helped me to come to know and love Jesus. Praying with my mother and father before bedtime, listening to the stories my grandmother told about the saint for whom she had great devotion, participating in liturgical celebrations that invited me to pray and sing and give thanks, prayers of my relatives during times of hardship and crisis, priests and religious sisters who invited me to be their witness to care for the poor and vulnerable in our midst – people being witnesses to Christ – helped me to grow in my faith and to want to know more.

It is our hope that this newsletter will become a forum for sharing research, ideas and strategies from among the vast experience and expertise that exists throughout Canada.

Our inaugural edition of *Encounter* includes perspectives and approaches to catechesis from various dioceses in Canada. May these stories and strategies be a source of inspiration for you in your own work so that by your witness those around you encounter Christ.

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MOVING TOWARD A CATECHESIS OF ENCOUNTER

The following article was published in *The Catechetical Review* (Vol. 1.1) and is reprinted here with permission from the publisher. If you visit Catechetics.com, you may also view and print this article directly from the website for free and share it in catechetical settings.

The New Evangelization is a call to each person to deepen his or her own faith, have confidence in the Gospel, and possess a willingness to share the Gospel. It is a personal encounter with the person of Jesus, which brings peace and joy. (Disciples Called to Witness, 3)

Does the New Evangelization make you a little bit uncomfortable? Does it feel as if you are moving out into unchartered water? Does it feel as if some of the tools you are comfortable using aren't adequate anymore? If so, you may be just where God wants you.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls us to go outside of our classrooms, our parishes, our comfort zones, and even our very selves to share Christ with a world that so desperately needs him. "Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (20). Yet to do so effectively, we cannot rely exclusively on our gifts, talents, knowledge, skills; we must rely primarily on the Lord. Pope Francis' prayer to open *Evangelii Gaudium* places all our trust in Christ. "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord; take me once more into your redeeming embrace" (3). Alone, we fall short; with Christ we can do all things.

This prayer reveals one key quality with which we must approach the task of catechesis: humility. If catechesis is truly introducing others to a person and not just a set of ideals, knowledge, and ethics—if it is truly an encounter with Christ—then as catechists we must ensure that others encounter Christ and then let Christ work. The Lord may choose to use us as his instruments to reveal himself to another. To do this we must be docile enough to let him work through us, and say as Mary did, "I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk. 1:38).

Humility is harder than it seems. All too often we want to rely solely on our own strengths, knowledge of the faith, and gifts to help others meet and come to know Christ. My pride creeps in many subtle ways.

When an uncomfortable question arises (or we enter an unfamiliar environment), we might want to react with what is comfortable, with what we know, with something to minimize the discomfort of the unknown. Yet this is the frontier of the

New Evangelization: learning to be comfortable with others' questions, with others' doubts and fears, pain, and confusion. We know that we go out in Christ's name and with Christ at our side. We may be tempted to offer a quick solution or a pat answer, when what may be needed in the moment is simply being a patient listener (See EG, 24). This pre-evangelization is essential for people to know they are cared for and loved. It provides a loving context to experience, share, and encounter Christ.

Evangelization and catechesis are moments of encounter with the person of Christ. This means we don't share something foreign to us; we include our encounters with Christ and how he has changed our lives. As Catholics we are not always comfortable doing this. We might prefer to teach only about Christ. Yet we are called to also share how we encounter Christ and how he personally affects our lives. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reminds us, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (41).

As catechists we become more effective when we are both witnesses and teachers, but our witness is essential. This takes practice and work; but when we can share how the saving truth and love of our Lord has changed us, it takes on new meaning and significance to the children, youth, and adults we catechize. People want to know we are genuine and truly believe and live what we proclaim. Indeed our witness is a proclamation of the Gospel. It is evangelization! Catechesis and evangelization unite when we can share how Christ and his Gospel have personally touched our lives and how the Truth transforms the lives of those who accept Christ and his teachings.

No longer, then, is what we share perceived as a sterile set of rules. Our witness, shared in humility, becomes a story of personal transformation that others can see and feel. Through our witness, others see that Christ has changed us for the better and can do the same for them.

Lord, in this time of New Evangelization, give us the grace of humility to confidently go forth in your name, transformed by your love, led and docile to your Spirit, to share your gospel and our testimony to how you have transformed our lives. May we truly live and share the joy of the Gospel with all we catechize and encounter.

Peter J. Murphy, D.Min., is Executive Director for the Secretariat on Evangelization and Catechesis for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

GRANDPARENTS MATTER ...

FOSTERING FAITH IN THE DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

This September, our diocesan pastoral offices of Catechesis, Discipleship and Family Ministry collaborated to bring a half-day workshop for grandparents across the diocese. The idea for such a workshop grew out of our daily experiences with grandparents calling and emailing to express their needs and concerns. They are seeking adult faith formation opportunities in record numbers. They are calling out of concern for their adult children in their marriages and family lives. They are reaching out to take ever greater responsibility for the faith development of their grandchildren. Grandparents consistently demonstrate to us their love of the Lord, their deep faith and their commitment to the Church. Rather than the stereotypical image of an elderly grandparent ready for rest, we see strong, loving, vibrant, faith-filled men and women determined to learn, grow and move to new awareness. We were eager to gather them for mutual support, sharing and learning.

Our workshop day included three presentations looking at various aspects of grandparenting: Grandparents as Memory Keepers and Makers; Grandparents as Spiritual Guides; and Grandparents as Role Models and Nurturers. We decided to offer a variety of print resources to address a wide range of personal interests. Catholic Organization for Life and Family publications such as “Families, Did You Know? Love is Calling Your Children” were available at no charge, while other

resources, including large-print Bibles, selections from Novalis’ “Living With” series, Robert Barron’s *Catholicism* on DVD, along with relationship assistance from such authors as Gary Chapman’s *The 5 Love Languages* were available for sale.

Over 80 grandparents participated in the event. Hosting at a parish with an easy entrance and including breaks between each presentation made it an accessible day for a wide range of grandparents – from the youngest grandparents in their 40s to the many great-grandparents who attended. We are excited to see other parishes already requesting to host this workshop in their area. Participants expressed their gratitude that their pain and concerns about the faith or lack of faith in their children’s lives was acknowledged, that their own contribution to the faith of their family by their witness was affirmed, and that they received concrete suggestions to strengthen bonds with their grandchildren whether far or near. It has certainly encouraged us here, in the Diocese of Hamilton, that grandparents are our great collaborators in fostering faith. God bless the grandparents!

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Anne Jamieson speaks on “Grandparents as Memory Makers: Memory Keepers!”

FAMILY CATECHESIS IN THE DIOCESE OF CORNER BROOK AND LABRADOR

Our diocese promotes the concept of Family Catechesis from age 5 to 11 (K–6). Larger centres follow two patterns: 1) Children and parents remain together for the entire session, receiving the same instruction and participating together or 2) Children and parents come together for prayer, then have separate sessions and come together for closing prayer. The second model is the best, but sometimes having two distinct spaces and/or competent, capable catechists is a problem.

Three parishes follow a home-based model, seeing children once a month and sending home material to be covered and returned at the next session.

For sacramental preparation, we use *We Prepare for Reconciliation* and *We Share in the Eucharist* (Novalis); and approaches vary according to the human resources available. A variety of resources are used for Confirmation, depending on the age of the group.

At present we are using the *Born of the Spirit* series (CCCB) throughout the diocese. In June of 2014, an invitation went to all involved to review four possible resources. About two-thirds of the parishes responded, including four priests. A link to the publishing sites was sent to others. The choice was *Alive in Christ* from Our Sunday Visitor as the one that could be best adapted to our situation.

In such a large, far-flung rural diocese, catechist formation presents a problem. Based on the success of the 2013 Atlantic Catechetical Association conference, which we hosted, the diocese decided that bringing everyone together once a year was well worth the expense and the effort.

We developed a three-year plan in preparation for the launch of our new resource. Since it is impossible to get priests and catechists on the same day, we hold two day workshops.

- In September 2014, we had a workshop called *Passing on the Faith*. Participants were given a review of the history of Catholic education in the province, looked at where we are today in our parishes, and

exchanged ideas about ways of passing on the faith in today's culture in our particular circumstances. It was interesting for both groups – about half of our priests are from the international community, and the catechists learned that in our history we did not always have Catholic schools, and the faith survived.

- In September 2015, we followed the same model. In *Resounding in Hope: the Inspiring Echo of Catechesis* featured sessions on being bearers of hope, the role and spirituality of the catechist, and faith formation in the family. This conference was particularly exciting as for the first time we had members of the Innu communities of Natuashish and Sheshatshiu attend.
- 2016 workshops will be specific to *Alive in Christ* and will be facilitated by Dr. Joanne Paradise, the principal author of the family faith component of the program.

We are seeking resources to support the Innu communities.

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H.E.L.P. IN THE DIOCESE OF SAINT BONIFACE



Sometimes we all need a little H.E.L.P. from our friends in faith. In September over ninety Manitoba catechists, and others, gathered for the annual Fall Formation offered by the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface English Catechetics Service. These sessions were based on Joe Paproki's book and leader's guide, *A Well Built Faith: A Catholic's Guide to Knowing and Sharing What We Believe*. The H.E.L.P. acronym situated participants in the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for this workshop. When it comes to talking about our faith, these four pillars provide us with all of the H.E.L.P. that we need: H = We Hold on to our faith, which is revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition and is summarized in the Creed. E = We Express our faith in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church. L = We Live our faith according to Catholic morality. P = We Pray our faith by maintaining a healthy prayer life.

The call to know and share our faith really has no age limits, and this proved to be true, with participants' ages ranging from seventeen to eighty-three! The day integrated prayer and sharing as well as group activities. In order to introduce Chapter Seven: Using a Laser Level for Alignment: Worship and Liturgy the leader's guide suggests a game of pin the tail on the donkey. The focus of the theme is that we align ourselves with God through worship and liturgy.

The learning outcomes through the rest of that section are to have participants able to explain who celebrates the sacraments and how, when and where we celebrate

them. Participants responded with a variety of comments and feedback. Some comments received were as follows: "Activities let participants mingle and interact with each other. The environment is so positive, relaxing and engaging." "I enjoyed the group activities the most. It is such a pleasure working with my brothers and sisters in Christ, and gives me a sense of unity. The pillars and H.E.L.P provided me with a frame of reference for sharing my faith and what I have knowledge about...I am more confident in sharing my faith." "I think the part that is most useful is sharing what we all believe is an act of mercy. It makes us realize that mercy is a part of everyday life – it is something we experience every day. I am motivated to inspire more people to know God and build a relationship with Him."

As the facilitator of these sessions, it was a great joy and delightful testimony for me to see so many people eager to know and share their faith!

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A CONFIRMATION PILGRIMAGE: DIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN

Since 2007, the diocese of Saint John, New Brunswick has facilitated a Confirmation-oriented youth pilgrimage led by Bishop Harris. The objectives for the youth for this event are threefold:

1) to meet Bishop Harris prior to receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation; 2) to undertake a spiritual journey to the diocesan home church, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception; and 3) to experience fellowship with other youth on the same faith journey.

The young women and men and their catechists gather at St. Malachy's Memorial High School in Saint John for a day of talks, which includes background information on the Sacrament of Confirmation, prayer and Mass. For many candidates, this pilgrimage represents the first time they have met as a unit. Their journey is just beginning.

Bishop Harris welcomes the youth as they enter the high school. Youth-oriented music is playing and helps to provide a welcoming setting. The welcome and opening comments, typically provided by a priest or youth ministry lay person, sets the tone for the event. Through sharing advice and experiences concerning their Confirmation and faith journey, they wish to make the experience favourable for youth.

Bishop Harris prays grace before lunch, which is provided year after year by a local parish men's group. Following lunch, Bishop Harris speaks about the process of Confirmation and about his own personal faith journey. Recently confirmed youth provide testimony about their Confirmation experience. Responses to the testimonies have been extremely favourable from both youth and parents.

The Pilgrimage Faith Walk then begins from St. Malachy's Memorial High School, along Waterloo Street to where Mass is concelebrated by Bishop Harris and the Cathedral Pastor. The confirmands provide the ministries for Mass as altar servers, readers, offertory gift bearers and musicians.

Bishop Harris invites a few of the youth representing each of the three regions to provide some of their learning and personal observations from the pilgrimage. The gleanings are always quite memorable.

Numbers of pilgrimage attendees average about 350 each year, which represents approximately 55% of the youth who receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Feedback from catechists, parents and youth indicate that this experience is very worthwhile and provides a wonderful way to launch the young people into their preparations to receive the sacrament.

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HELPFUL LINKS FOR CATECHISTS

CATECHIST FORMATION

- Newman Theological College - Edmonton, AB
Benedict XVI Institute for New Evangelization
- University of St. Paul - Ottawa, ON
- Dayton University - Dayton, ON
Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation
- St. Francis Xavier University - Antigonish, NS

PUBLISHERS

- CCCB
- Novalis
- Our Sunday Visitor
- RCL Benziger
- Pflaum
- Sadlier Religion
- Loyola Press

OTHER HELPFUL LINKS

- Western Conference of Catholic Religious Educators
- Office de catéchèse du Québec



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Western Conference of Catholic Religious Educators - Winnipeg, MB
November 5-7, 2015
- National Conference for Catechetical Leadership - Jacksonville, FL
May 22-26, 2016

SHARE YOUR STORY!

To submit an article for *Encounter*,
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RESOURCES!

Catechetical activities for
Canadian Saints can be found on
our website [here!](#)