

ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Today, perhaps more than ever before, it is important to recognize that learning is a lifelong experience. Rapid, radical changes in contemporary society demand well planned, continuing efforts to assimilate new data, new insights, new modes of thinking and acting. This is necessary for adults to function efficiently, but, more important, to achieve full realization of their potential as persons whose destiny includes but also transcends this life. Thus they will also enjoy ever deepening fellowship with the many communities to which each of them belongs. **Consequently the continuing education of adults is situated not at the periphery of the Church's educational mission but at its center.** Like other church-sponsored educational efforts, adult programs should reflect in their own unique way the three interrelated purposes of Christian education: the teaching of doctrine, the building and experiencing of community, and service to others.

To Teach As Jesus Did (TTAJD), #43

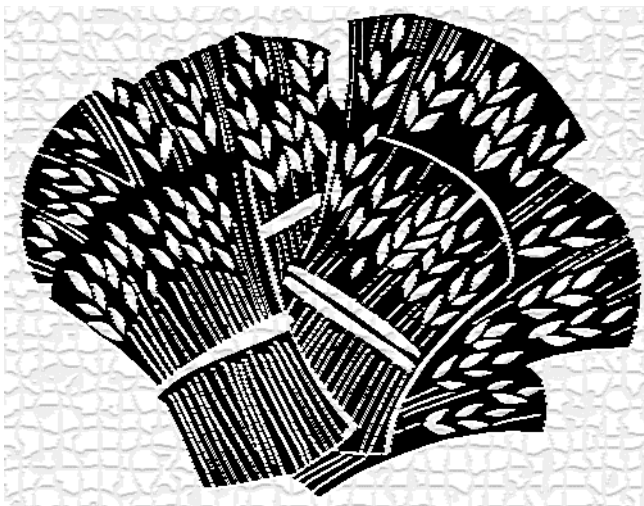


The life of Jesus reveals the unconditional love of God for all creation. We are challenged through the person of Jesus to holiness and wholeness, to ministry and service. He invites us to become fully human and to lead others to full humanness. We are called to live a life that reflects fully the love of God revealed through Jesus. We are called to immerse ourselves into the ministry of Jesus.

We, then, as Church, share in Jesus' mission of proclaiming and witnessing to the Reign of God. The Church is a principle sign, through word, deed and image, of the communion that exists between God and creation. The Church, the People of God, mirrors the image and many gifts of God in a way that calls others to participate more fully in God's life.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION, CONT'



We come to recognize God's presence and our share in the mission of Jesus more fully as we grow in faith, hope and love. We are invited to be co-creators of life and love. Our lifelong journey of faith leads us to respond to the movement of the Spirit and to a greater understanding of the Christian message of conversion. As Church, then, we recognize the need to nurture one another in our individual faith journeys by worshipping together, learning together, and sharing our faith experiences with each other within a community of faith that then goes forth to

serve in the name of Christ.

Since adult Christians are capable of a free, mature faith response to the Gospel, it is imperative that these opportunities of coming together extend into adulthood. It is crucial for the future of the Church and the continuation of Jesus' mission of healing, loving and proclaiming mercy and justice that adult Christians are informed and motivated to live a life that reflects gospel values.

Because Christian faith is a dynamic response to the Gospel by the human person at every stage of life, it is vital that learning in faith continues throughout adulthood. This is a clearly stated responsibility of the pastor in Canon Law.

As the parish begins a consideration of adult religious education, begin with a clear look at all that is already going on in the parish. Look to the training programs for parish ministers such as school teachers and catechists. Look to the formation of liturgical ministers including music ministers. Consider parent meetings for sacramental preparation or Parent Teacher Organizations. A firm sense of all that is being done is necessary for identifying those areas that need more attention. See [Adult Education Plan/Checklist](#) which can assist with this review. (Adapted from *Lifelong Learning the Adult Chapter*, Archdiocese of Cincinnati)

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CONSIDERING TERMS

The terms “Adult Religious Education” and “Adult Catechesis” are often used interchangeably to describe the adult learning experience. There has been, and continues to be, spirited discussion among scholars over which term best captures the whole spectrum of experiences that motivate people to live out their Catholic faith. Yet, as with most religious language, each of these terms has some strengths and limitations in the attempt to speak about the adult learning experience.

Serving Life and Faith (SLF), #16-22



The term “catechesis,” in keeping with its historical meaning of oral “echoing” or “handing down” the Good News, has a specific function within the Catholic Christian community. Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, points out that all are called to be catechists in the spirit of the early believers who “proclaim(ed) to humanity what they had heard, what they had seen with their eyes, what they had looked upon and touched with their hands, concerning the Word of Life.” Catechesis presupposes conversion and, therefore, describes an event that is explicitly Christian in its content.

CT, #1

Echoing other church statements on catechesis, the 1990 document, *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*, describes catechesis as “one moment in the total process of evangelization.” Catechesis consists of “an initial deepening of the faith received at baptism, in an elementary, complete and systematic way, with a view to helping individuals all life long grow to the full maturity of Christ.”

ACCC, #32

Adult Religious Education, on the other hand, is a broader term that is used to include all of the same ideas as catechesis but also includes activities that are not explicitly Christian in content, e.g., programs in literacy, nutrition, and job training. *Serving Life and Faith*, a document from the USCC Department of Education, uses “Adult Religious Education” to include both the formal and informal activities “sponsored by the Christian community that [are] aimed at attaining human wholeness.”

SLF, #21

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GOALS FROM CHURCH DOCUMENTS

PRIMARY GOAL

...to enable adults to grow in wholeness as human persons guided by faith in Christ.

SERVING LIFE AND FAITH (1986)

articulates goals in this three-fold manner:

1. To lead people to a deeper understanding of their relationship with God and to live the gospel message to its fullest.
2. To prepare them to meet the challenge of echoing prophetic voices in a world that makes that role undesirable.
3. To enable them to share their faith tradition and faith experiences with the generations to come. #21

ADULT CATECHESIS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (1990)

articulates goals in this four-fold manner:

1. To build Christian communities.
2. To promote an attitude of conversion to the Lord.
3. To help adults to make a conscious and firm decision for membership in the Christian community.
4. To enable adults to exercise their Christian discipleship in the world. #35-38

OUR HEARTS WERE BURNING WITHIN US (1999)

A PASTORAL PLAN FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES
articulates goals in this three-fold manner

1. To invite and enable ongoing conversion to Jesus in holiness of life.
2. To promote and support active membership in the Christian community
3. To call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world

pg.22-24

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PRINCIPLES FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION

The Bishops of the United States offer the following principles of adult faith formation to assist in the achieving the three goals noted on the previous page.

1) GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION

- a) Plan adult faith formation to serve the glory of God, the building of the Kingdom, and the good of the Church.
- b) Orient adult Christian learning toward adult Christian living.
- c) Strengthen the role and mission of the family in Church and society.

2) PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING ADULT FAITH FORMATION

- a) Give adult faith formation the best of pastoral resources and energies.
- b) Make adult faith formation essential and integral to the pastoral plan of the parish.
- c) Design adult faith formation opportunities to serve the needs and interests of the entire faith community.

3) PRINCIPLES FOR CONDUCTING ADULT FAITH FORMATION

- a) Use the catechumenate as an inspiring model for all catechesis.
- b) Respect the different learning styles and needs of participants, treating adults like adults, respecting their experience, and actively involving them in the learning process.
- c) Engage adults actively in the actual life and ministry of the Christian community.

4) PRINCIPLES FOR INCULTURATING ADULT FAITH FORMATION

- a) Bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures.
- b) Let the gifts of culture enrich the life of the Church.
- c) Involve the whole people of God in inculturating the faith.
- d) Let adult faith formation programs be centers of service and inculturation.

OHWB, pg.24-26



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DIMENSIONS OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION - A CURRICULUM

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us tells us: “The Catholic Faith is like a symphony in which the unity of faith finds expression in richly diverse formulations and manifestations. As the General Directory for Catechesis states: ‘The maturation of the Christian life requires that it be cultivated in all its dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development.’” Page 29

The document goes on to tell us that the ongoing development of a living, explicit, and fruitful Christian faith in adulthood requires growth in all six dimensions. Each of them is a fundamental aspect of Christian life and a foundational content area for adult faith formation. Parish adult education program planners can use these six content areas as a guideline for planning. It would seem appropriate that something from each of the six areas would be available each year.

The following statements are citations from *Our Hearts Were Burning*

1) KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH (SEE CCC #26-1065; GDC # 84-85, 87)

“Recognize *communion with Jesus Christ* as the definitive aim of all catechesis.
Explore the *Scriptures* so that adults may be hearers and doers of the Word.
Become familiar with the *great teachings of Christianity* (its creeds and doctrines) and their place in the hierarchy of truths - for example, the mystery of God and the Trinity, Christ, the Church, the sacraments, human life and ethical principles, eschatological realities, and other contemporary themes in religion and morality.
Study the Church’s teaching on the *dignity of the human person* in its social doctrine, including its respect-life teaching.
Learn the richness of the *Church’s tradition*, explore the theological and cultural heritage in which faith is expressed, and gain perspective on contemporary events and trends through an understanding of church history.
Develop the *philosophical and theological foundations of the faith* and appreciate expressions of Christian thought and culture.
Learn the meaning and practical relevance of *current church teachings* as presented by the pope, diocesan bishop, Vatican congregations, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.”

Pages 29-30

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DIMENSIONS OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION - A CURRICULUM

2) LITURGICAL LIFE (SEE CCC #1066-1690; GDC #84-85, 87)

“Understand, live, and bear witness to the *paschal mystery*, celebrated and communicated through the *sacramental life of the Church*.

Learn and embrace in one’s life church *doctrine on the eucharist* and the *other sacraments*.

Acquire the spirituality, skills, and habits of *full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy*, especially the eucharistic liturgy.

Value the dignity of the *baptismal priesthood* and of the *ordained priesthood* and their respective roles in liturgical celebration and Christian mission.

Appreciate and appropriately participate in the Church’s daily prayer, the *Liturgy of the Hours*, and learn to pray the *psalms*, an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church.”

3) MORAL FORMATION (SEE CCC #1691-2557; GDC #84-85, 87)

“Understand how the entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the *new commandment* of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us, and promote each disciple’s formation in the life of the risen Christ.

Study the *Ten Commandments*, the *Beatitudes*, and the moral catechesis of the apostolic teachings, and live in accord with them.

Appreciate the *dignity, destiny, freedom, and responsibility* of the human person, together with the reality of *sin* and the power of God’s *grace* to overcome it.

Learn how to acquire and follow a *well-formed conscience* in personal and social life, clarifying current *religious and moral questions* in the light of faith, and cultivating a Christian discernment of the *ethical implications* of developments in the socio-cultural order.

Recognize, defend, and live by the truth of *objective moral norms* as taught by the Church’s magisterium in its moral and social teaching.

Promote a thorough catechesis on the *Gospel of Life* so that *respect for life* from conception until natural death is honored in personal behavior, in public policy, and in the expressed values and attitudes of our society.

Live a *lifestyle reflecting scriptural values* of holiness, simplicity, and compassion.

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DIMENSIONS OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION - A CURRICULUM

4) PRAYER (SEE THE CCC, #2258-2865; GDC # 84-85, 87)

“Become familiar with the diverse *forms and expressions of Christian prayer*, with special attention to the *Our Father*, the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples and which is the model of all Christian prayer.

Experience and appreciate the richness of the Catholic *ascetical-mystical tradition* as it has taken form across the centuries in diverse historical and cultural settings.

Develop a regular *pattern of personal prayer* and spiritual reflection, recognizing vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer as basic and fruitful practices in the life of a disciple of Jesus.”

Engage in *shared prayer with others*, especially family prayer, as well as at parish meetings and in small communities of faith.

Recognize and encourage practices of *popular piety and devotion* that help believers express and strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ.”

5) COMMUNAL LIFE (SEE THE GDC # 84, 86-87)

“Pursue *personal and spiritual growth* in human and Christian maturity.

Cultivate the human values and Christian virtues that foster growth in *interpersonal relationships and in civic responsibility*.

Nurture *marriage and family life* to build up the Church of the home.



Share actively in the life and work of the *parish*, and foster the potential of *small communities* to deepen the faith and relationships of members, to strengthen the bonds of communion with the parish, and to serve the Church’s mission in society.

Learn the Church’s teaching on the *nature and mission of the Church*, including an understanding of the Church’s *authority and structures and of the rights and responsibilities of the Christian faithful*.

Support the *ecumenical movement* and promote the unity of God’s people as a constitutive dimension of fidelity to the Gospel.

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DIMENSIONS OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION - A CURRICULUM

6) MISSIONARY SPIRIT (SEE THE GDC # 84, 86-87)

“Cultivate an *evangelizing spirit* among all the faithful as an integral element of their baptismal calling, of the Church’s nature and mission, and of a Catholic way of life. Respond to *God’s call* whether as lay, ordained, or religious, and develop a *personal apostolate* in family, Church and society. * Motivate and equip the faithful *to speak to others* about the Scriptures, the tradition and teachings of the Church, and one’s own experience of faith.

Explore and promote the applications of the Church’s *moral and social teaching* in personal, family, professional, cultural, and social life.

Understand the importance of *serving those in need*, promoting the *common good*, and working for the *transformation of society* through personal and social action.

Appreciate the value of *interreligious dialogue* and contacts, and promote the Church’s mission *ad gentes* in the local and universal Church.”

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ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

CONCRETE APPROACHES FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us provides concrete methods for adult faith formation on pages 34-38. Given the broad scope of content, the diverse range of adult interests and responsibilities, and the availability of learning resources, no single approach can meet all needs. Consequently, *a comprehensive, multi-faceted, and coordinated approach* to adult faith formation is necessary. *A variety* of learning activities and resources to meet the diverse needs of parishioners is recommended.

“Ongoing faith formation for adults can be ‘accomplished through a great variety of forms: systematic and occasional, individual and communal, organized and spontaneous.’” The following five approaches can be used in any Catholic community, adapted as appropriate to parish size and need.

1) LITURGY

“Each Sunday, the majority of Catholic adults gather as a community of faith to celebrate the eucharist in praise of God... Sunday eucharist remains the center of the Church’s life... Liturgy fosters ongoing conversion, uniting us with Christ and with one another, uplifting our spirits in thankful, joyful praise, and renewing our hearts in love for God, turning us to love of neighbor. Each aspect of worship - the homily, the physical environment, hospitality, liturgical ministries, congregational participation, appropriate music, the Sunday bulletin with inclusions - has the potential to foster adult faith, bringing people into a more intimate relationship with Jesus and with one another.”

2) FAMILY - OR HOME CENTERED ACTIVITIES

“There may be no place more significant for catechesis than the family... Catechetical opportunities situated in family settings foster both adult and family faith growth, while also addressing one of the major reasons adults give for not participating in adult education; time away from their families. Maximize opportunities for adult faith formation to fit into the rhythms of family life and not to pull families apart. Diocesan newspapers,... Catholic magazines, seasonal booklets, monthly calendars, newsletters, periodic mailings, pastoral visits, family prayer and scripture sharing, home blessings, family-to-family ministry, videos that promote family faith sharing, Catholic websites, and a home-based component in programs of catechesis for children and youth can all provide adults and their families with meaningful faith formation experiences.”

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CONCRETE APPROACHES FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION, CONT'D

3) SMALL GROUPS

“Many Catholic adults already meet regularly in a variety of small groups for encouragement to better live their faith in the world and to build community. In their various forms these groups provide genuine support to people in living their faith in daily life... Small communities are powerful vehicles for adult faith formation, providing opportunities for learning, prayer, mutual support, and the shared experience of Christian living and service to Church and society...”

4) LARGE GROUPS

“Some adults prefer to learn in large group settings. It can be effective and efficient to take advantage of times when adults are already present, as when their children’s catechetical sessions are scheduled. Other settings may include lectures, panel presentations and discussions, group service projects, social events ... with a prayer or learning component, ecumenical activities during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and participation in the March for Life on January 22 and working together to provide housing for low-income families or to build or repair parish facilities. We encourage parishes to provide a variety of regular large group opportunities for adult faith formation.”

5) INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

“Adults also spend time alone - commuting or traveling, doing yardwork or household chores, keeping a “holy hour,” or finding a few minutes in the morning or at night for reflection and prayer. Some adults, especially the sick or homebound, spend much time alone. With the right resources and assistance, this time alone can lead to a growing relationship with Jesus... Materials for personal prayer, study and reflection are available in print, on audio or videotape, and on the internet. We need creative ways to make these items more widely know and easily accessible through the use of media...”

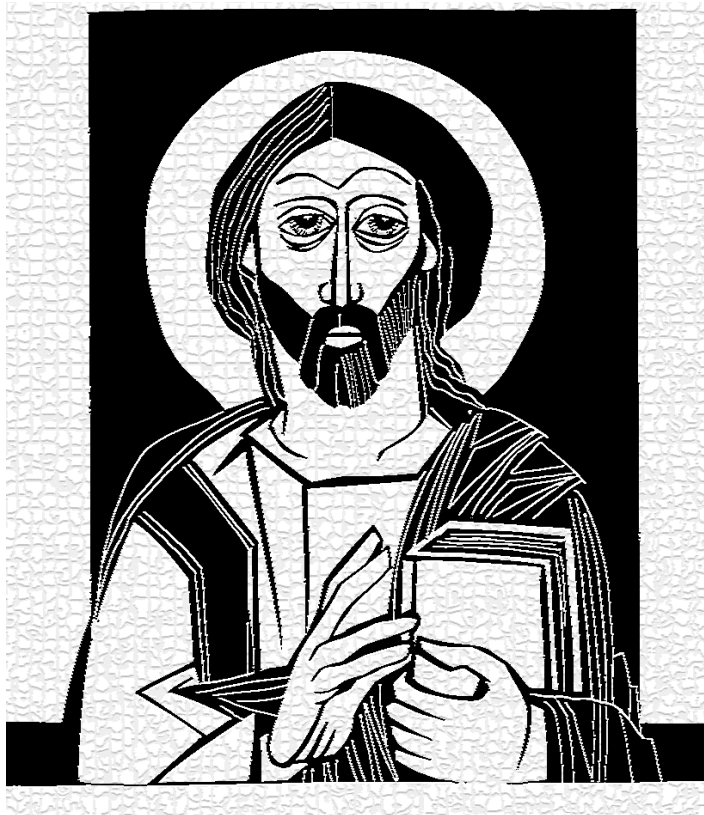
“Because of the differences in size and resources, each parish will have to determine its own array of faith formation opportunities from each of the five preceeding areas. But the basic principle remains valid in all cases: ‘the local Church must... provide diversified programs of permanent catechesis for Christian adults.’”

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CONCRETE APPROACHES FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION, CONT'D

“We encourage new and creative initiatives in every Catholic community. But we also encourage making the most of existing parish activities and services. In fact, every aspect and event in parish life can be intentionally fashioned as an occasion for adult faith formation. For example, every parish meeting can begin with a reading of the upcoming Sunday’s Gospel, followed by a time of reflection and faith sharing. Being intentional about catechetical opportunities can significantly enhance adult faith formation in every community. Whatever approach is used, each parish needs to consider seriously how it will make the lifelong faith formation of its adult members its chief catechetical concern.”

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WHY DO ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?

In document after document, the Church is pointing toward the critical need for adults to be able to understand the Christian story in terms of their personal experience (**theological reflection**), as well as to transform culture through the application of Gospel values and lifestyles (**evangelization**).

These two important features of Catholic life are the primary responsibilities of every Catholic adult.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The capacity to engage in ongoing theological reflection, that is, the dialogue between one's experience and the Scripture and Tradition of the Church, is the single most important objective for adult religious education. The single largest difference in the education of adults and children is that adults bring life's experience to the educational environment. The goal of adult religious education is to help adults recognize those dimensions of both Scripture and Tradition that can help them make meaning out of the experiences of their lives. The great story of the paschal mystery is the central organizing principle of who we are as a Catholic Christian people. It is this mystery which can shape raw human experience into meaning. This point cannot be over stated - the goal of adult religious education is not to produce theologians, church historians or Scripture scholars. The point is to give adults intelligent access to all the Church has learned so that the adult learner can find in the Scripture/Tradition that which is relevant to create meaning in life. As the Scripture tells us, "I have come that you may have life, and have it in abundance."

In the end it is Saint Augustine who sums up best the reason for this perspective when he tells us that "an unexamined life is not worth living."

Review some descriptions of Theological Reflection: > [Vanderbilt University](#)

Review a brief article: > [What is Theological Reflection?](#)

ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

WHY DO ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?, CONT'D

EVANGELIZATION

The second reason for adult education is that the true ministry of the adult lay Catholic is a ministry to the world.

But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven...It is therefore his (sic) special task to illumine and organize these affairs in such a way that they may always start out, develop, and persist according to Christ's mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

Lumen Gentium (LG), #31

The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself.

LG, #33

Moreover, let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy any institutions and conditions of the world which are costomarily an inducement to sin, so that all such things may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. by so doing, **laymen (and laywomen) will imbue culture and human activity with moral values.**

LG, #36

These texts, in some sense, form the second major goal of adult religious education. Catholic adults need to be prepared to be a leaven in society. They need to be able to bring the "Good News" of the Gospel to anyone who is searching for meaning and hope. Catholics need to be trained to bring into the marketplace of our society and culture the value of justice and a commitment to the "preferential option for the poor." Catholic people have a vast heritage known as "Catholic Social Teaching;" sadly this literature is still referred to as the Church's "best kept secret." While forming eucharistic ministers and lectors is important, it pales in importance to forming members of corporations who will bring the gospel message of justice into the real world of mergers, downsizing and environmental security.