

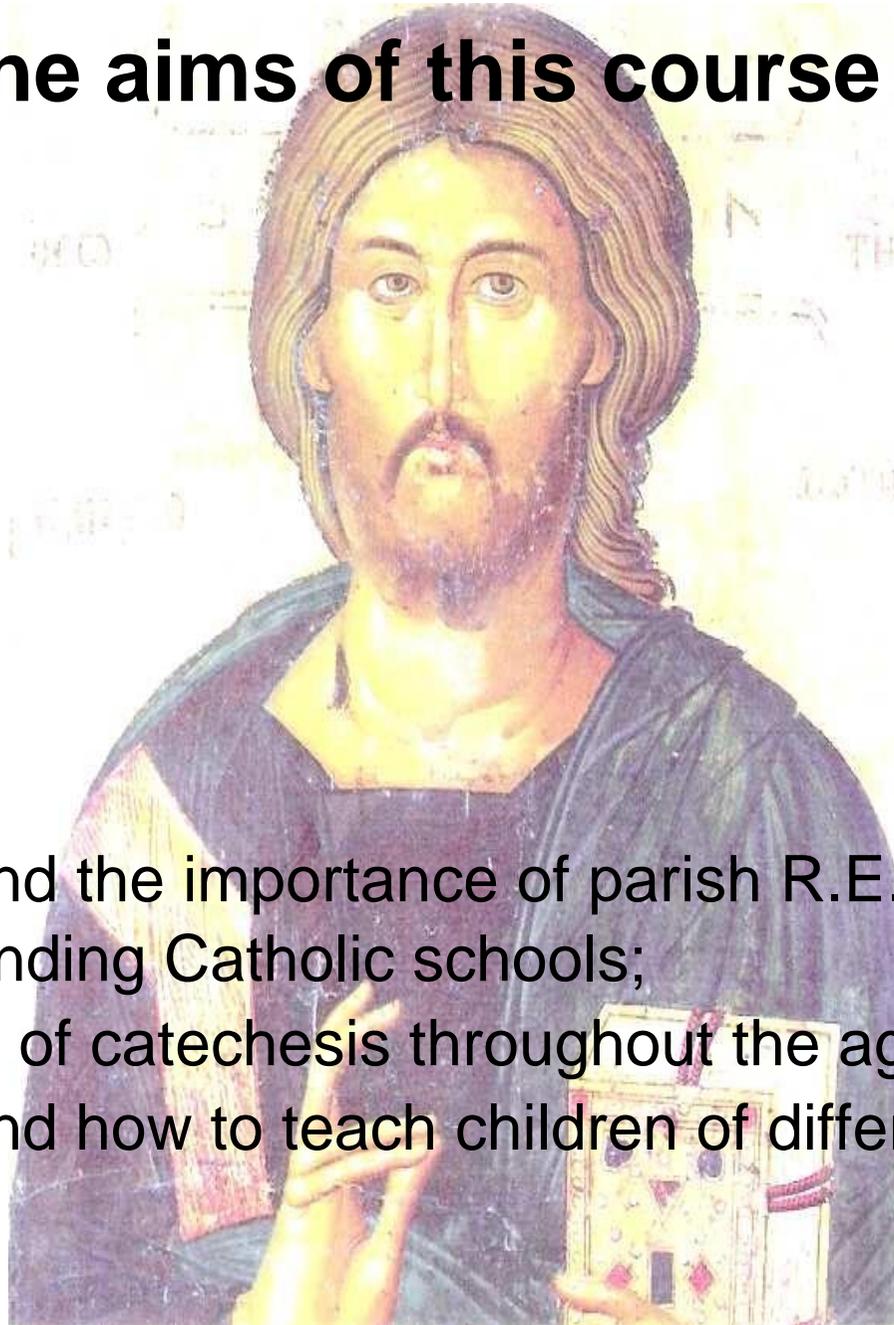
Parish Religious Education

for children who are not attending Catholic Schools



The aims of this course are

- to understand the importance of parish R.E. for children who are not attending Catholic schools;
- to be aware of catechesis throughout the ages;
- to understand how to teach children of different ages.



Our diocesan policy states



that all children who are not attending Catholic schools should be offered Religious Education.

This is primarily the responsibility of the parents; but parishes have a duty to assist them with the responsibility.



At their child's baptism, parents promise to educate their children in the faith.

How can the parish help them?

A timeline of catechesis

Our first example of catechesis after the death and resurrection of Jesus comes in the Acts of the Apostles when we read of Peter speaking on Pentecost Day. He spoke for a long time using many arguments and the result of this catechesis was that about 3,000 were baptised.





The Gospel continued to be proclaimed to them and the community began to live what we know as the Christian life, receiving the teaching of the Apostles. This teaching of the Apostles would have been instruction for the newly converted in which the Scriptures were explained, a fairly simple catechesis based on the scriptures. (*Acts 16:11-15*)

Luke describes Apollos as someone “who had been given instruction (*katechumenos*) in the way of the Lord.” (Acts 18:25).

Paul speaks of those who are “taught the word”, the one instructed called *katechoumenos* and the teacher *katechounti*.

For both Paul and Luke, *katechetes* meant being taught about Christ. The Greek word used by Luke and Paul comes from two other Greek words: *kata* meaning “down” and *echein* meaning “to sound”



1st Century: The Didache



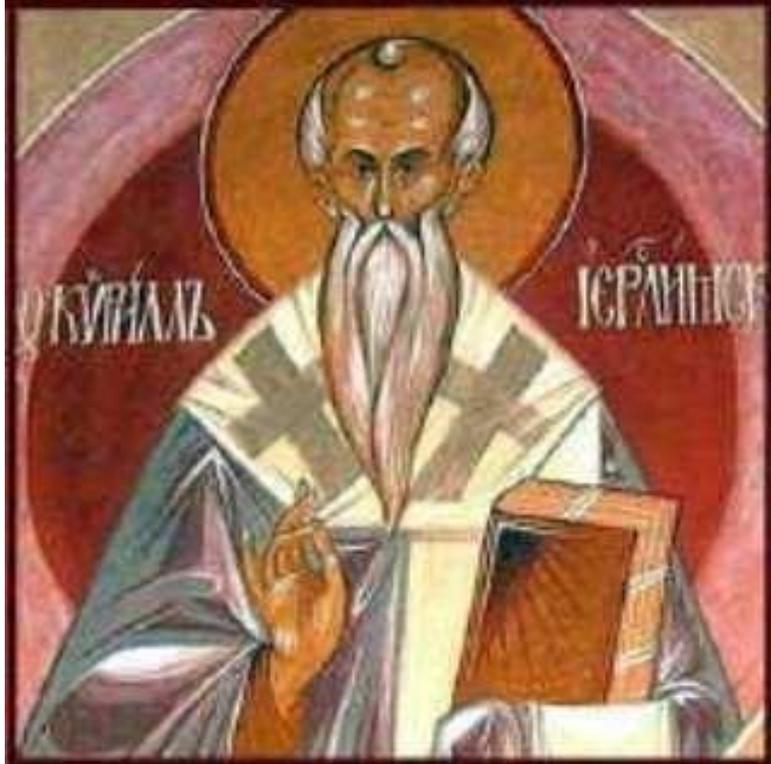
One of the oldest catechetical sources is a short manual known as the *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. It contains teaching on Christian morality, the Sermon on the Mount, liturgy the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.

People initially received catechesis individually but gradually they prepared in groups. Catechesis referred to people who were preparing for baptism and those preparing were known as *catechumens*. They became a distinct group in the Church.

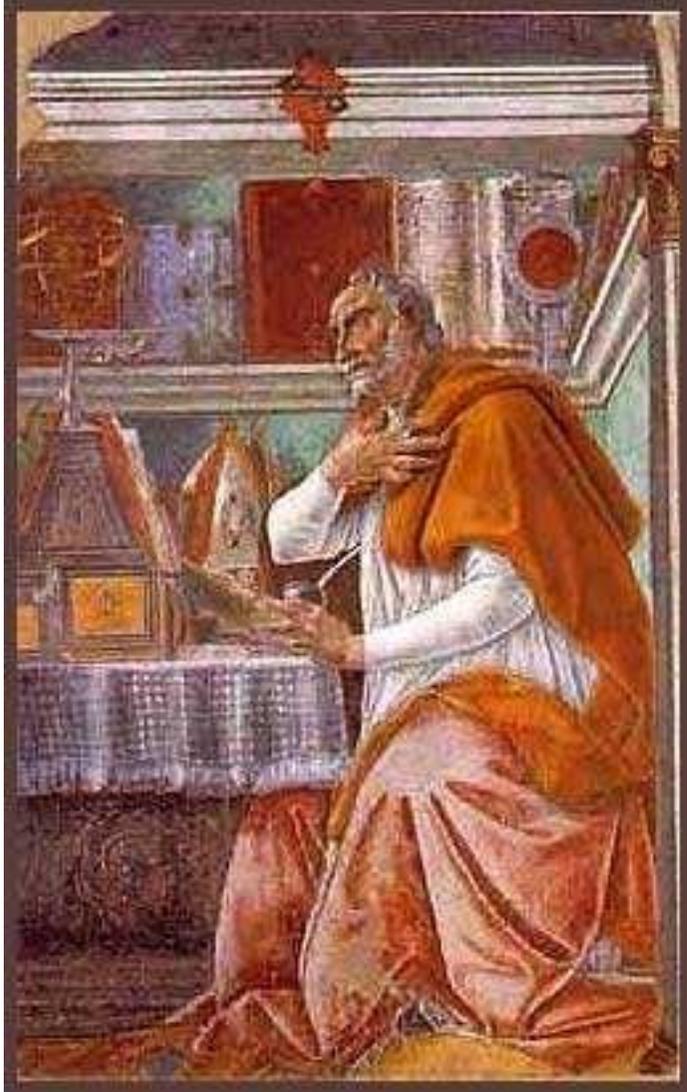


Their catechesis took place during the Mass. The catechumens were dismissed after the homily because they could not share in the Eucharist later on in the Mass.

Their catechists were the bishops and the priests, the teaching method was preaching and the content was a mixture of the doctrinal (based on the Creed) and of the moral (based on the Ten Commandments).

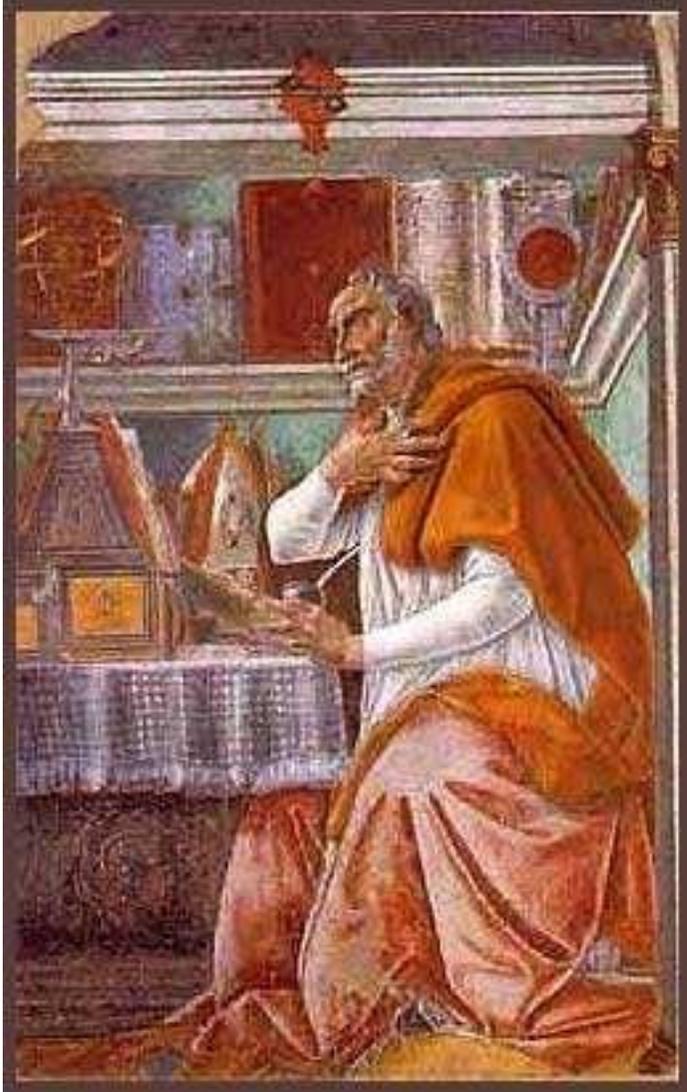


By the 4th century, catechesis was a term specific to the catechumenate and it included pre-baptismal and post-baptismal instruction. From the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem in the 4th century, we see the Creed as central to catechesis.

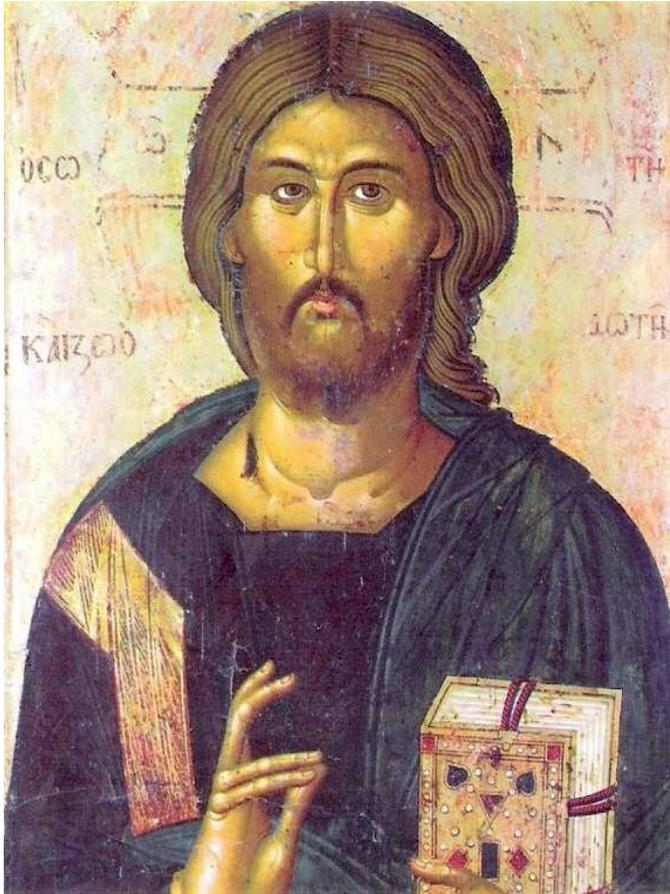


Early Catechisms: 5th Century:

Two works of St. Augustine shaped the catechetical tradition of the Middle Ages. One was a practical manual for the catechist; the other was in response to a request to sum up the essentials of Christian doctrine in the briefest possible form



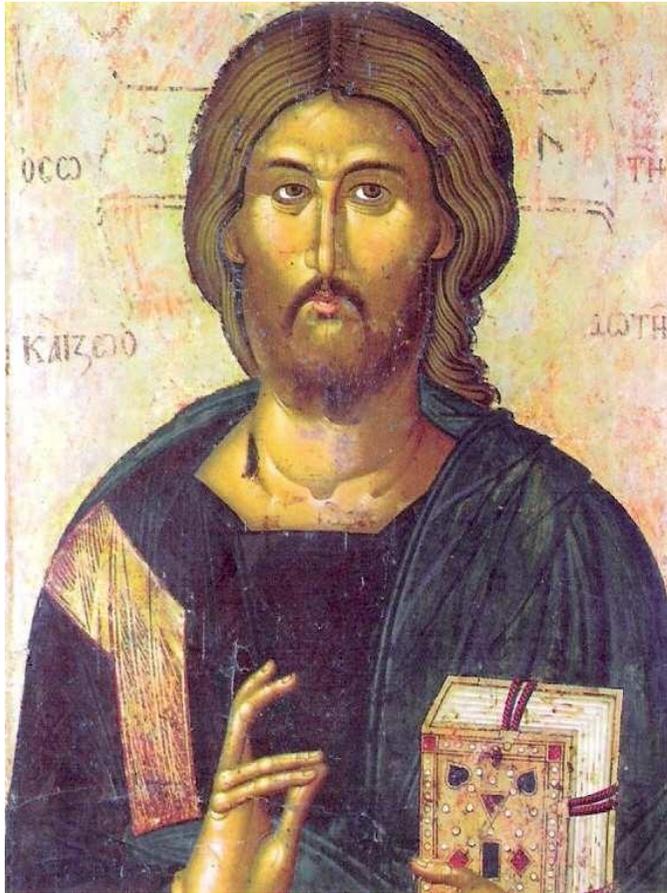
From about the 5th century, there was a gradual decline in the catechumenate. Infant baptism was becoming widespread. Sponsors or godparents spoke now on behalf of the child rather than being a witness to the candidate's faith and they became the guardians of the infant's faith after baptism



By the 9th century,

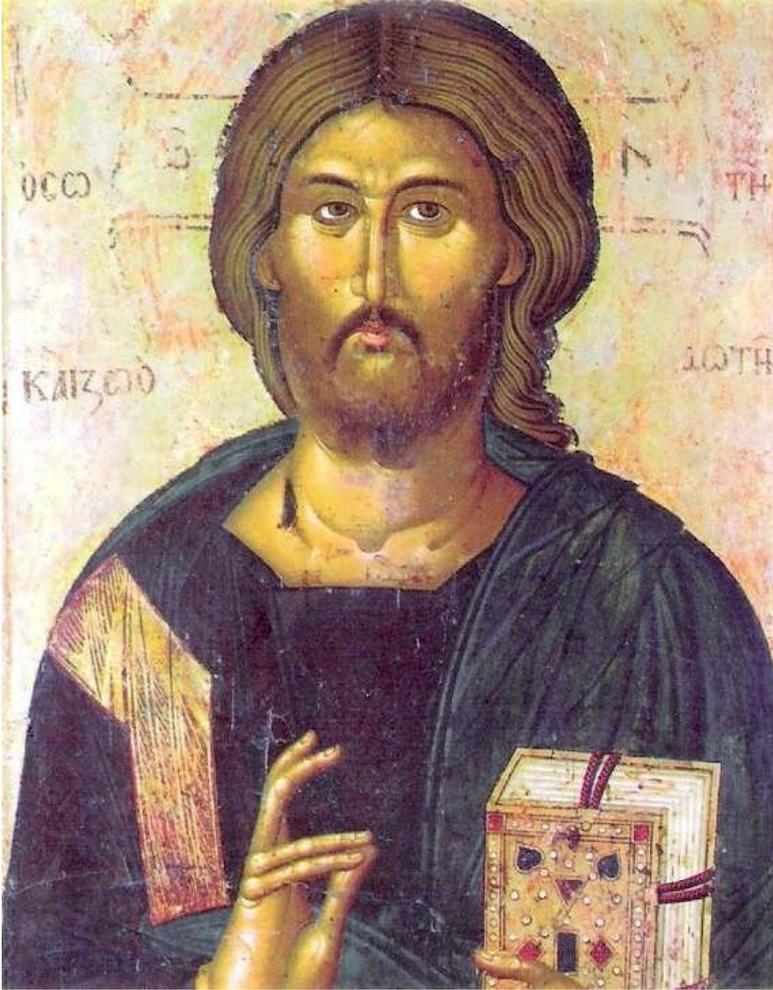
the Creed and the Our Father were seen as central catechetical texts. Those preparing for baptism needed to memorise them. The homily was still the basic form of instruction and priests were told to preach regularly on the Creed and the Our Father.

Manuals on the faith, aimed at helping the clergy to teach became more common – using questions and answers – the suggestion of a perceived need to absorb vast amounts of information, teaching religion from a book. Generally, there was no attempt to reflect on or understand scripture.



As time went on, preaching remained an important vehicle for teaching but this was complemented by religious art: pictures, statues, stained glass windows, wall paintings.

There was a flourishing of religious drama (the Miracle and Mystery plays) initially enacting the events of Holy Week and Easter then other biblical stories. This created a catechesis which touched people's imaginations and emotions.



With the onset of printing, things changed. Growing ignorance amongst the clergy and the recognition of a lack of uniformity led to the publication by a number of theologians in Europe of manuals for teaching addressed to specific groups – particularly children.



One of the leading figures in this was Martin Luther, who is perhaps better known for his views which began the Protestant reformation. Eight years after his excommunication, he produced catechisms.

In his preface to the children's catechism, he says that the children must learn by heart the formulas in the catechism without changing a single syllable – telling those who refuse to do this that they were denying Christ and they are not Christians.



They were not to be accepted at the Lord's Supper. When the children know the texts well, they must also be taught their meaning so that they will understand what the words mean. They were to take all the time they need.

One of Luther's priorities was to make the family the centre of learning. It was the parents' responsibility to hand on the faith, not only by good example, but by systematic teaching.



His method, of repetition and memorisation was to become the definitive model for learning the faith for years to come.

This urged the bishops at the Council of Trent in 1546 to consider the publication of a catechism for children and uninstructed adults.

They became conscious of a need for Counter Reformation to correct the errors and evils of the Reformation.

CATECHISM
OF THE
COUNCIL
OF
TRENT

1566: The Roman Catechism

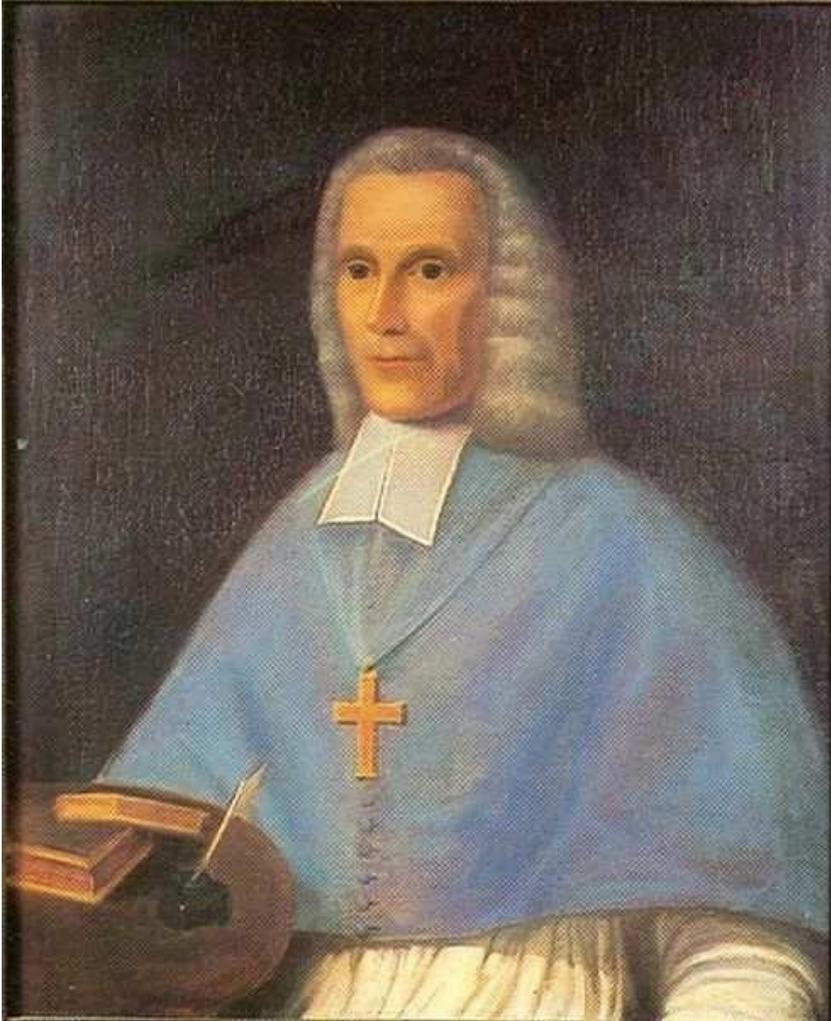
The Council of Trent wanted to help priests in teaching Catholic people after the Protestant Reformation. It was the last major catechism of the Church until the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was promulgated in 1992



In the mid-16th century, Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, organised the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine which set up a number of schools in Milan to provide religious education for children, young people and uneducated adults.

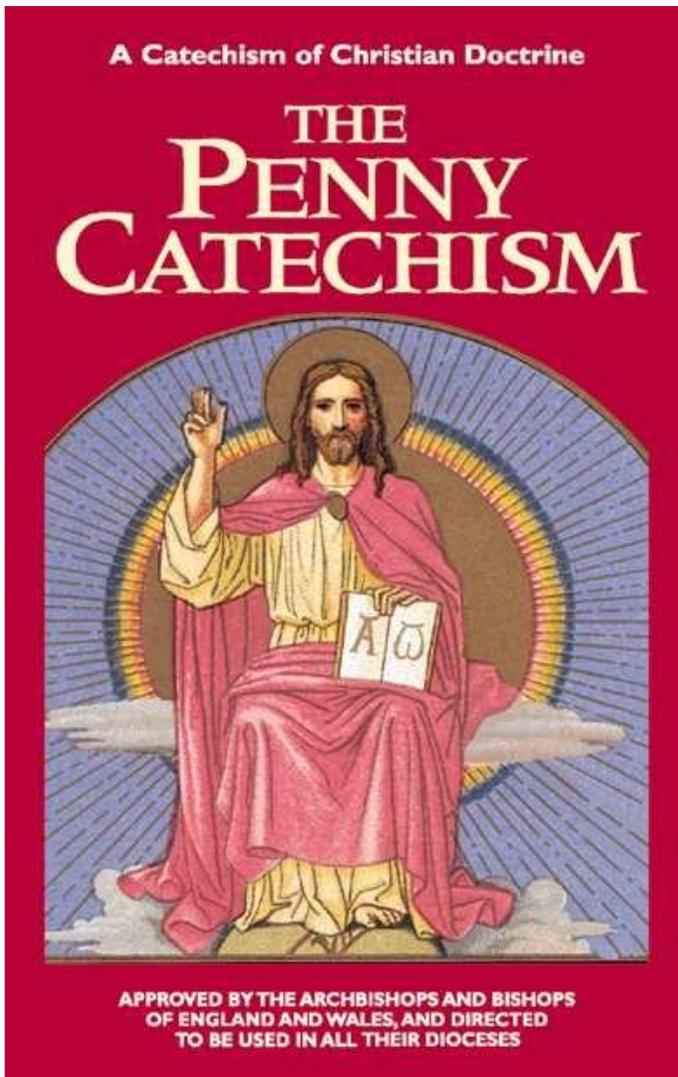
He recognised a need to adapt religious education to the ages and abilities of the pupils. Teachers were to be examined before being allowed to teach.

By the time of his death in 1584, there were 3,000 lay teachers working with more than 40,000 children and adults in the schools.



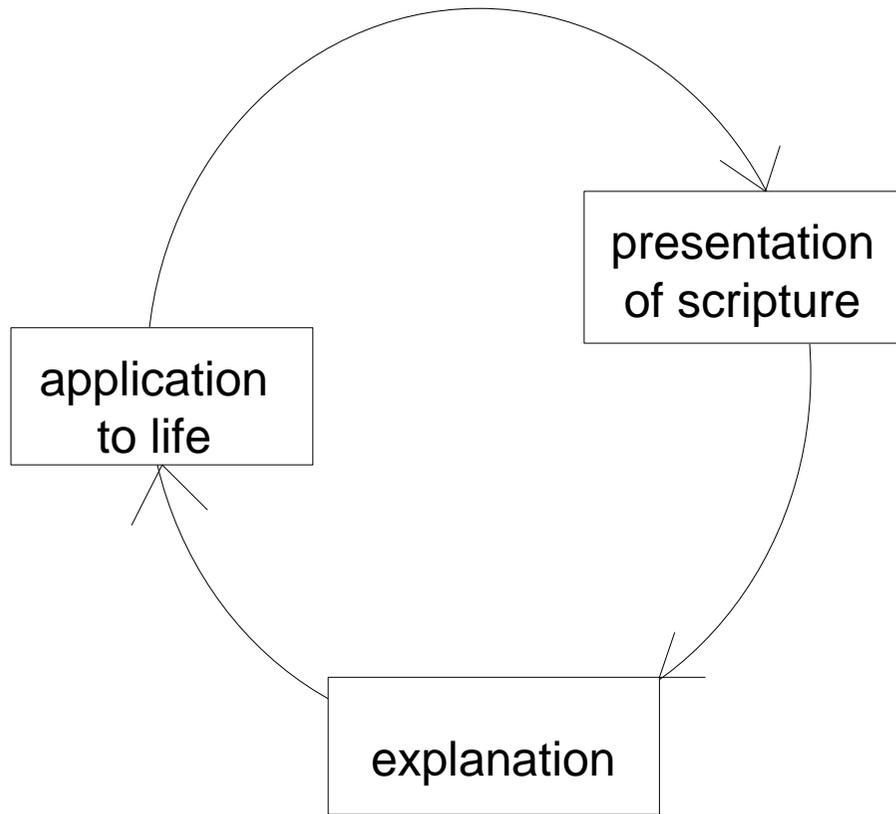
Catechisms were widely used in Europe and were becoming more popular. In England and Ireland particularly, where Catholic schools were forbidden, the Catechism was an ideal text, easily hidden and easily memorised.

A text of the 17th century by Richard Challoner was used for more than 100 years and formed the basis in 1898 for the Catechism of Christian doctrine – generally known as the Penny Catechism.



Printed texts had become the heart of catechesis. Compulsory schooling mean that RE could be taught in schools and had become somewhat of an academic and intellectual process, removed from home and from life.

In the first half of the 20th century, catechisms were *the* means of religious instruction used in schools. Family catechesis had virtually disappeared.



Munich Method

There was a movement in Germany called the Munich Method for a more effective method of learning with the suggestion of 3 steps: presentation (of scripture), explanation and application to life. This initiated some changes in catechetics – particularly a shift from memorisation to understanding.

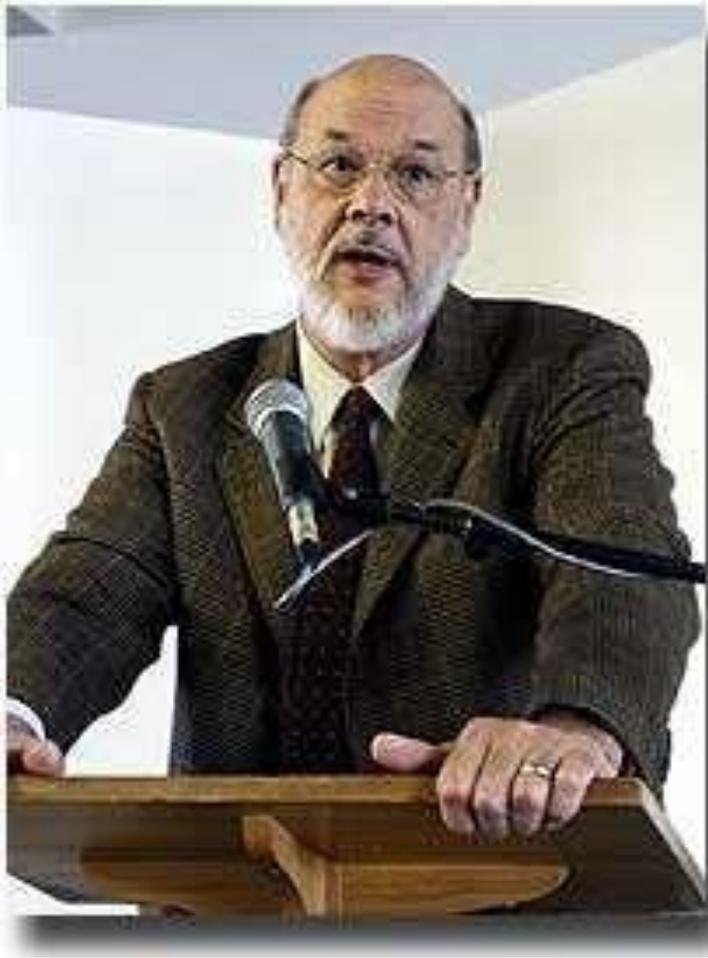


Jungmann, an Austrian Jesuit, published in 1936 “The Good News and our Presentation of the Faith” arguing that Christianity was not merely a set of rules but a living message of the Good News, at the centre of which is the person of Christ.

He rooted catechetics in the Church’s pastoral mission to bring Christ to the world. His vision was of catechetics as education **IN** the faith, not just instruction **ABOUT** the faith.



He said that at the centre of the message of catechetics is a *person* – Jesus Christ, the salvation of mankind. Catechetics, he said, must be *personalised*, following the behaviour of human intercourse, and *Christocentric*, that is, moulding all its elements around Christ



Attention began to be focused on the recipients of catechesis. The starting point became the person's own situation. The aim was to enlighten experience through faith and drew on the work of psychologists such as Piaget, Fowler and Kohlberg.



1962-1965: Vatican II

The 1960's was a period of catechetical conferences – as well as the time of the Second Vatican Council. There was a recognition of the need to adapt the Gospel message to the environment in which it was proclaimed.

Vatican II did not issue a specific document on catechesis but much is reflected in statements about the role of the bishop – and the *Decree on the Role of Bishops* said that the principal role of the bishop was to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

It said that bishops should present Christ's teaching in a manner relevant to the needs of the times; they should be especially concerned about catechetical instruction. The bishop should be, above all, a preacher of the faith, who brings new disciples to Christ.

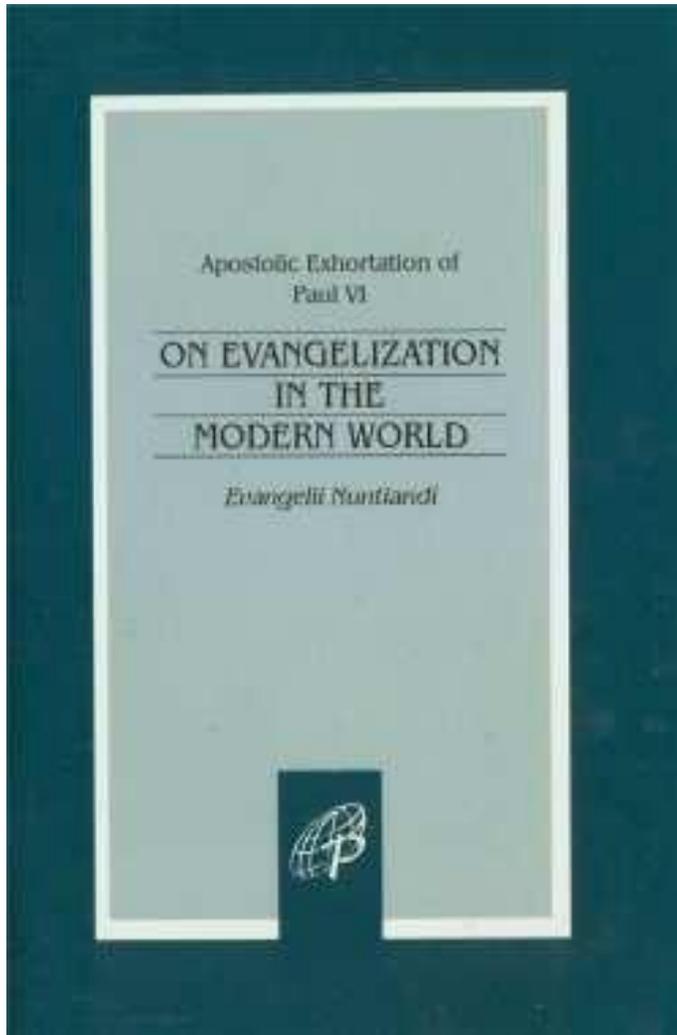
Bishops should, furthermore, ensure that catechists are adequately prepared for their task, being well instructed in the doctrine of the Church and possessing both a practical and theoretical knowledge of the laws of psychology and of educational method.

Congregation for the Clergy

General Catechetical Directory

1971 *The General Catechetical Directory*

Vatican II called for a renewal of catechesis. In response, the GCD presented new guidelines which reflected on the developments that had taken place at international catechetical conferences following Vatican II.



1975: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

was a turning point in the Church's understanding of the relationship between culture and the faith message



1979 *Catechesi Tradendae*

was an important apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II on catechesis for today.

It was especially significant for identifying the aim and purpose of catechesis.

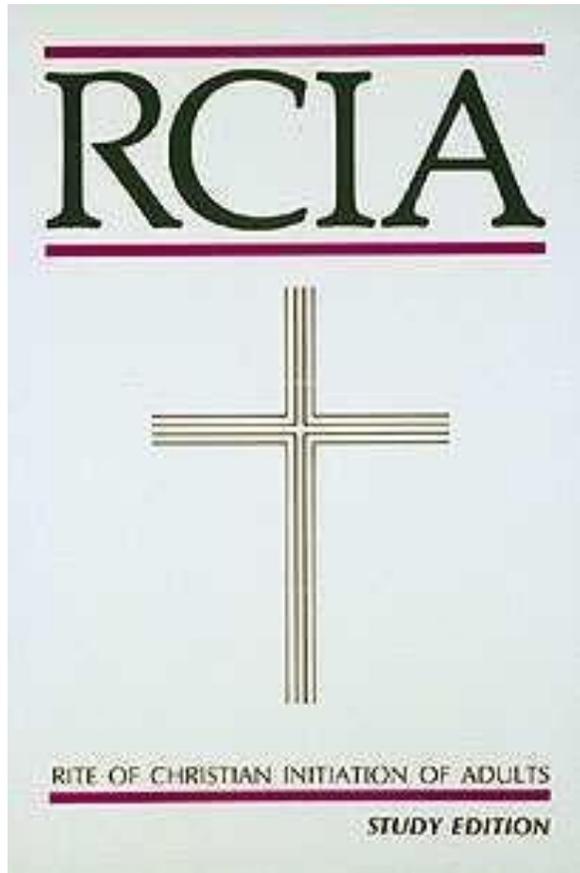
He set down what could be called the *touchstone of catechesis*, the Christocentricity of all authentic catechesis.

He said that, at the heart of catechesis is a person, Jesus of Nazareth, the essential object of catechesis.



Christocentricity in catechesis also means the intention to transmit not one's own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ, the trust that he communicates – to put it more precisely, *the Truth* that he is. (CT6)

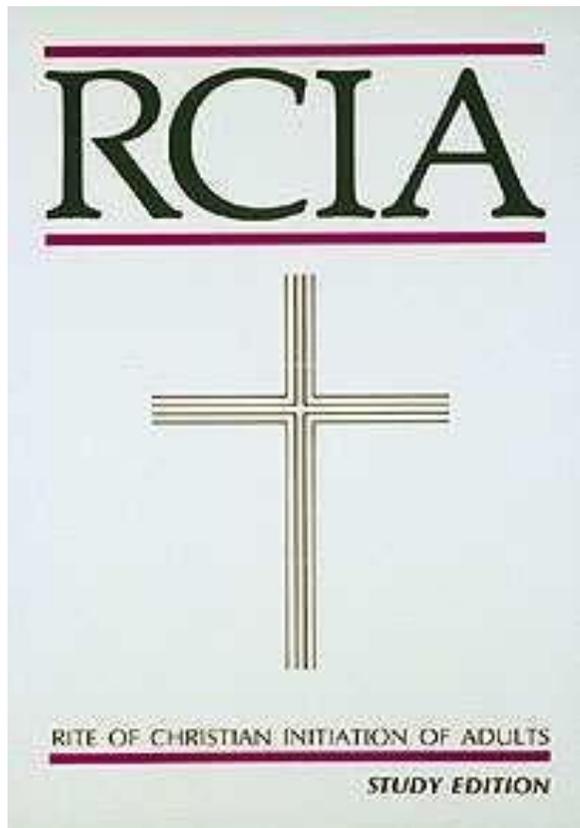
In *CT*, the Pope said that catechesis must be *systematic* and it must be *authentic*. It must be true to Tradition. He said that “blossoms (of faith and piety) do not grow in the desert places of memoryless catechesis.



1985 *RCIA: Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

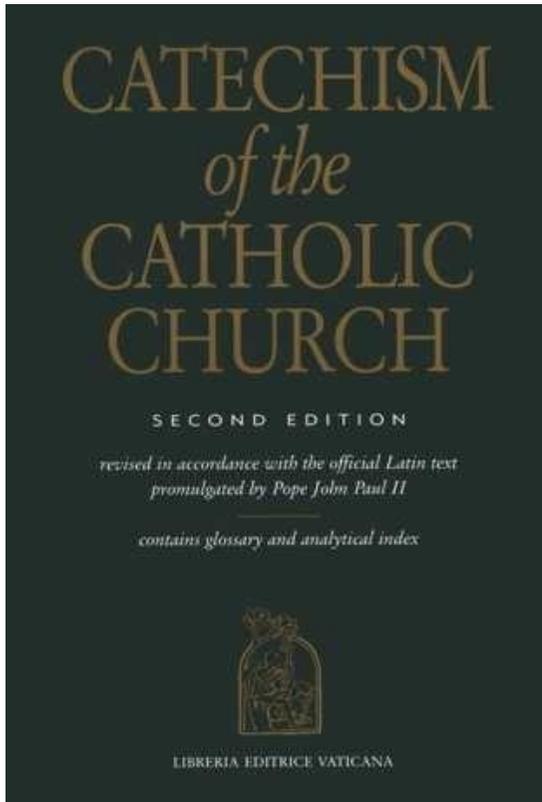
The RCIA was promulgated in 1972; our bishops told us we should begin using it in 1985. It restored the catechumenate for initiation into the Church. The catechetical principles behind the RCIA gave a fresh impetus to the whole understanding of handing on the faith. The faith handed on is celebrated in the Church's liturgy and

the Church's liturgy feeds back into the catechesis which can help explain the nature of celebration and worship.



In the introduction, the role of the catechist is summed up:

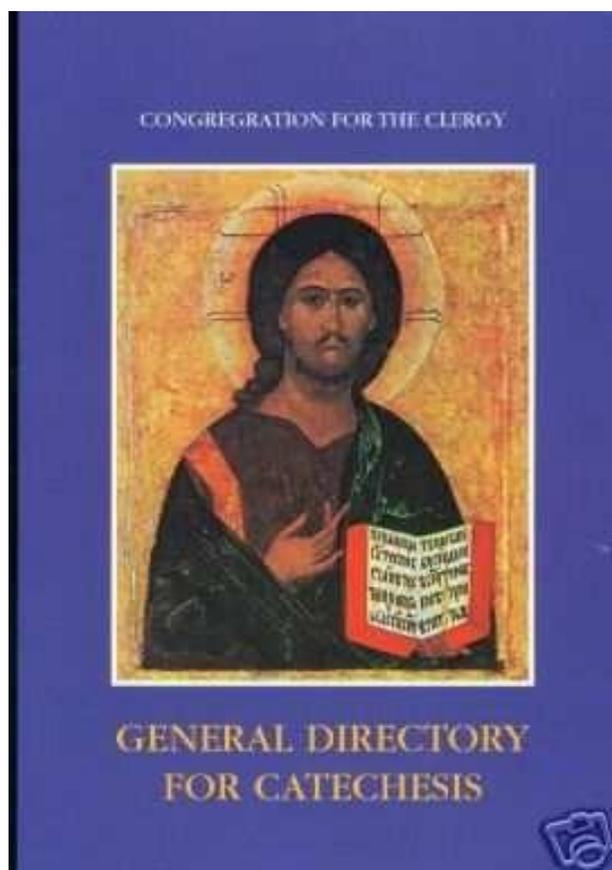
- instruction is filled with the spirit of the Gospel;
- adapted to the liturgical signs and the cycle of the Church's year;
- suited to the needs of the catechumens and
- is enriched by local traditions.



1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

A major catechism and reference resource for bishops, priests, catechists, publishers of catechesis materials and Catholic people. It was the first Catechism for more than 400 years. Its structure says something about catechesis in the way that it is divided into four parts:

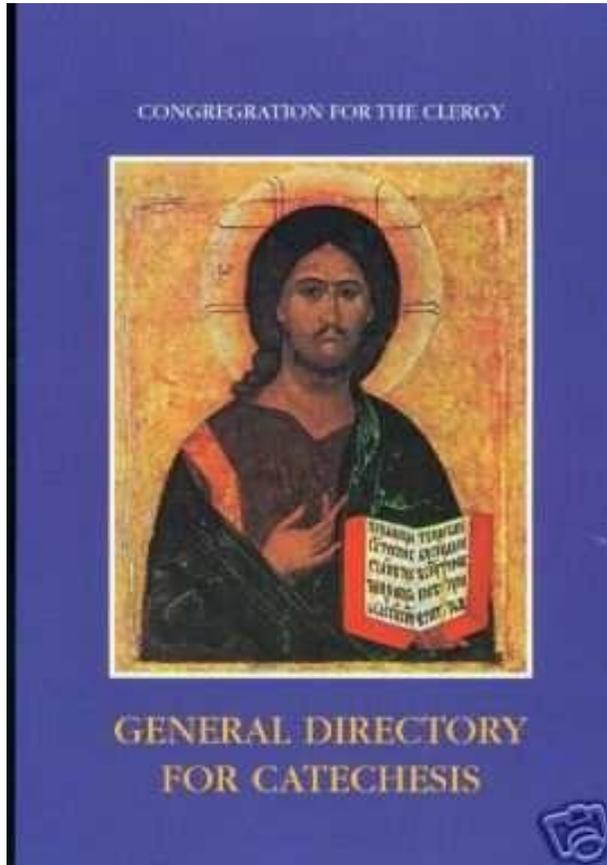
- The profession of faith (the Creed);
- The celebration of faith (liturgy)
- Life in Christ (morality)
- Christian prayer.



1997: *GDC: General Directory for Catechesis*

The revision of the 1971 document – a directory with two aims: firstly, to place catechetical work in the context of evangelisation and secondly, to be sure that the content of faith is fully treated in catechetical work, as presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

If the Catechism is the *what* of handing on faith, then the GDC is the *how* – offering guidance and encouragement for the indispensable adaptation the Catechism requires.



We continue to hear that catechesis is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ; we continue to hear that the tasks of catechesis are:

- promoting knowledge of the faith
- liturgical education
- moral formation
- and teaching to pray

For discussion:

- *What strikes you about this history?*
- *What hopes and fears does what you have heard raise?*
- *What do you think makes a person the best teacher of the faith?*
- *What do we need to know about the children we are teaching?*

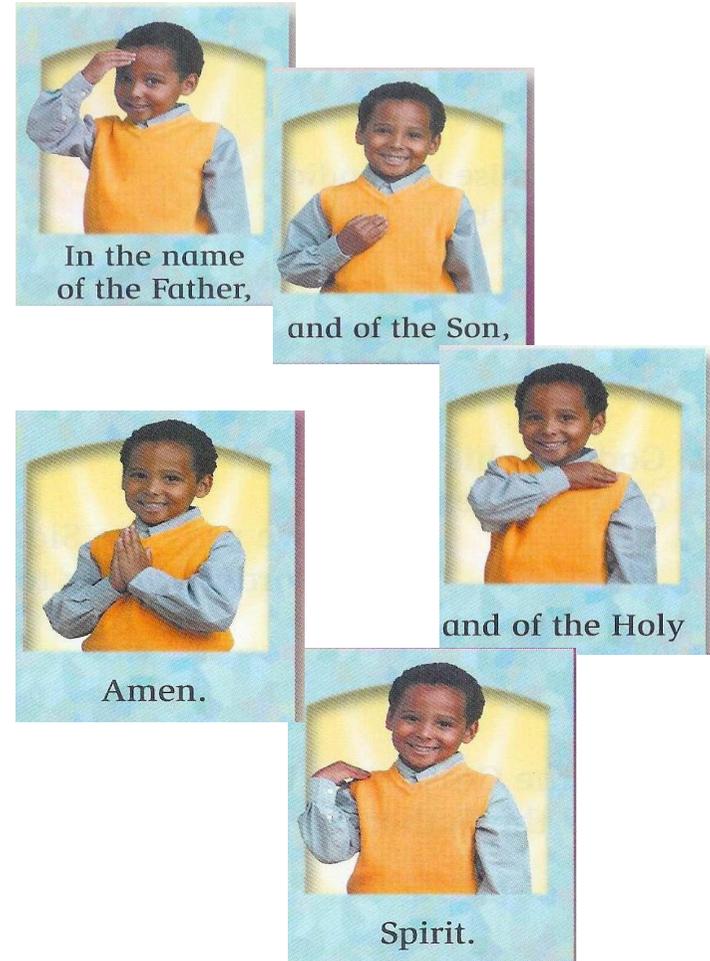


Pre-school children

- are trusting
- they live in a world of curiosity and fantasy
- they have a short attention span
- brief periods of silence & prayer are good ways to draw them closer to God.

What do we need to know about children in year 1?

- They are open, curious, spontaneous and full of energy
- They move easily between the worlds of reality & imagination
- They are developing concrete thinking skills – so teach them by using experience by *seeing* an altar, by *blessing* themselves with holy water, by *smelling* incense and candles
- They need their imagination to be engaged



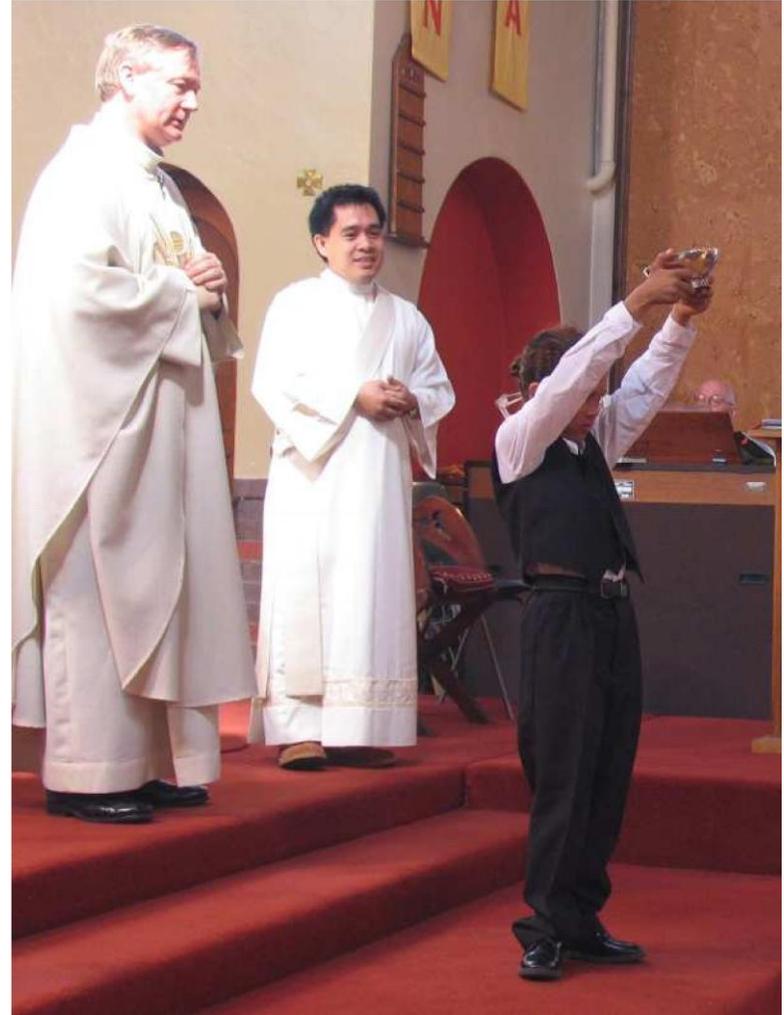
Children in year 2



- are delightfully unpredictable
- need personal interaction
- sometimes show a lack of reversibility.
- They supply a conclusion but cannot retrace the steps that got them there.
- You need to keep catechist-talk to a minimum;
- do not prolong activities.
- Their attention span is about 7 minutes.

Children in Year 3

- are curious, self-aware, outgoing and receptive;
- are ready to become active in the Church;
- are able to centre more efficiently on meanings beneath the surface;
- This is why first communion programmes put them in touch with the Bible and liturgy.



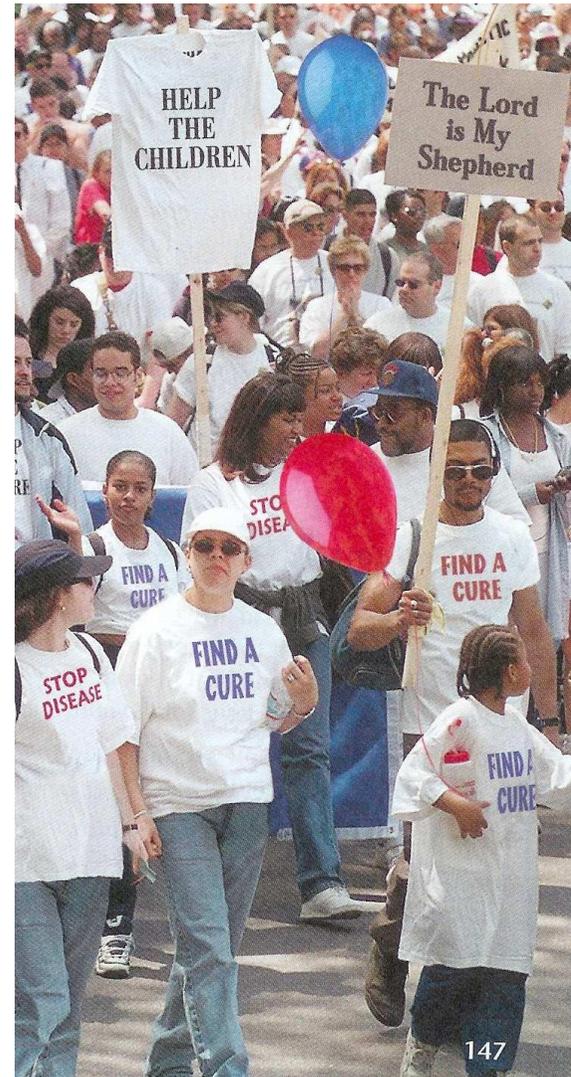


Children in Year 4

- often exhibit an awareness of themselves as both individuals and as part of a group;
- often demonstrate an interest in the world;
- are ready to develop the concept of service and responsibility;
- are *joiners*. The egocentric world has given way to the desire to form relationships.

Children in Year 5

- are developing the ability to think abstractly; getting a sense of love, justice and peace;
- have a keen sense of what is and is not fair;
- are very influenced by their peer group;
- are ready to assume certain responsibilities for their lives and for their faith.





Children in Year 6

- are pre-adolescent – no longer children but not yet adults;
- need acceptance of their peer group but also need adult approval and direction;
- can have a deeply felt experience of God;
- are ready to choose doing what is right and just.

For discussion:



- Picture the group you catechise and name specific actions you have noticed which fit what you have heard.
- Name key catechetical experiences you think would be appropriate for them.

A few practical suggestions



Make sure the children are in a lively and comfortable setting with things of beauty and interest around them – for example, flowers, candles, carpet-mats, etc.

Have helpers of all ages.

Confirmation candidates, students and older parishioners are invaluable.

Approaching people individually often brings a ready response.



Invite the families and the parish to collect scissors, crayons, magazines, felt-tips, cards, coloured paper, pencil sharpeners, etc.



Start a library of books, tapes and posters and consider lending them to the parents for use at home.



Safeguarding

Be aware of the Diocesan safeguarding Service and make sure all the catechists are DBS- checked before they begin serving in the parish.



Health & Safety

Know about

- First aid
- Emergency evacuation
- Machinery
- Accident investigation procedures
- Use your common sense!