

Intergenerational Catechesis: Considerations and Resources

In recent years, intergenerational or “whole community” catechesis has gained popularity with a growing number of parishes and some dioceses in the United States. Advocates and practitioners of this approach to catechesis see it as an improvement over traditional forms of catechesis for children and a boost to adult faith formation.

In 2006–2007, the Bishops’ Committee on Catechesis, to which I was a consultant, explored the nature and implications of intergenerational catechesis. While the committee recognized the renewed fervor in catechesis often displayed by parishes using an intergenerational approach, they also voiced some cautions about it. First, they wanted to ensure that recent gains in catechesis resulting from the publication of major catechetical documents, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the general and national catechetical directories, not be compromised. For example, they felt that through the use of the “protocol” based upon the CCC, significant improvements had been made in the catechetical texts that serve as a bedrock of traditional catechetical programs. They did not want to see intergenerational catechesis abandon these important catechetical resources in favor of yet unproven approaches.

Second, they also wanted to ensure that all forms of catechesis, including intergenerational catechesis, are systematic and comprehensive. They wanted curricula in place that developed along with children as they grew in age and maturity. For these and other reasons, they thought it best that intergenerational catechesis be more of an adjunct to traditional catechesis than a replacement for it.

To date, no national study on intergenerational catechesis has been done to provide data on its overall effectiveness, especially as contrasted with traditional catechesis. Still, practitioners have voiced some common observations from their experience. What follows is a very limited list of “hints from the field” for those considering or having embarked on intergenerational catechesis. The above concerns of the Committee on Catechesis should also be kept in mind.

Adult Faith Formation

- Most adult participants find intergenerational learning a non-threatening way to explore their faith with others.
- Some adults are stimulated by the intergenerational experience to want to learn more about their faith. Parishes can and should offer additional learning opportunities to meet this need.
- Intergenerational learning, by definition, is not a comprehensive adult faith formation program. Adults need separate learning opportunities that are geared to their level of experience and state in life.
- Parents need to be trained and given adequate tools to be the primary educators of their children. This is even more crucial than in traditional catechesis.

Program Development

- Pastors, parish administrators, and other parish leaders should be encouraged to speak confidently and enthusiastically about the new catechetical paradigm if it is to succeed.

- Pastoral leaders and staff need to be sensitive to and supportive of the collaboration that must take place across ministry boundaries.
- Demands on staff may increase given the challenges of coordination and other logistical issues and must be planned for accordingly.
- Given the significant liturgical underpinning of whole community catechesis, there needs to be a strong emphasis on liturgical catechesis and the utmost care given to the celebration of the liturgy.
- There should be opportunities for parish leaders involved in the program to share ideas for continued improvement.
- There should be opportunities for families that have enjoyed the program to give testimony about its benefits to fellow parishioners.
- Good resources should be made available for at-home learning activities.
- As with all catechetical formats, intergenerational catechesis needs to be firmly grounded in the principles of the *GDC* and *NDC*.
- Intergenerational learning often works best when blended with a traditional catechetical format.

Resources to help:

- www.lifelongfaith.com. This is the website for **LifelongFaith Associates**. Its major projects and programs include publishing a quarterly journal, *Lifelong Faith*, and sponsoring the “Faith Formation in Christian Practices Project” with resources for households and churches.
- www.pastoralplanning.com. This website was founded by Bill Huebsch, author of *Whole Community Catechesis*. It offers multiple resources to support lifelong faith formation in parishes. It also offers services in leadership development, parish staff development and sacramental formation.
- Bill Huebsch, *Whole Community Catechesis* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2005).
- Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Visions: Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007).
- Bill Huebsch, *A Pastor’s Guide to Whole Community Catechesis* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004).
- Kathy Hendricks, *The How-To’s of Intergenerational Catechesis* (National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, 2005).
- Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kerwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation: All Ages Learning Together* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third/Bayard Publications, 2007).