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OUR JOURNEY ON THE WAY OF CATECHESIS

Make known to me your ways, LORD;
teach me your paths.
Guide me by your fidelity and teach me,
for you are God my savior,
for you I wait all the day long.

—Psalm 25:4–5

What demanded your attention the last time you traveled a familiar pathway? Perhaps you were on a road, field, alley, or avenue. Was it then that something moved you to emulate or learn more about another, perhaps an ancestor whose life continues to challenge you to unravel the meaning of your own?

What are the ways of the Lord that direct your seeking to live the Way, a journey marked by the faithful witness of generations gone by and those still to come (cf. Acts 9:2)? What guideposts seize your attention as you pursue “the way of wisdom” (Prv 4:11)? What is it that you are truly seeking?

Imagine yourself in familiar surroundings, searching for an old family artifact, perhaps a family record book. You long to make it available to

others, for it contains entries handwritten by your ancestors. Surely, you think, others will share in your joy at locating this distant family account of past generations. Love demands no less, you surmise.

A tightly covered basket whose odor hints at its age catches your eye. You remove the lid, and a loosely bound book seems to stare up at you. Its worn cover, yellowed pages, and sewn binding show their years. Your search is over, you think. But as you lift the book out of the basket, paper flakes scatter about you. Some pages of the old volume, dried, tattered, and worn, scatter beyond your immediate reach. You hold the book close now, your grasp more firm, as memories flood your senses and people and events seem to come to life.

Rich and joyful echoes of past lives and events suddenly emanate from this old family book that demands more of you than mere recollection. Your heart is on call now, on fire now, as an assortment of memories, perspectives, and traditions overtakes you, inviting you to discern anew your participation in what is, of course, your own living heritage, your “way.” Love demands no less. *Belonging* and *believing* take on newly discovered meaning as momentary reflection carries you.

Somehow you have arrived, secure in the history that holds you and makes you who you are. It becomes difficult to wrap words around this aging yet still present love. Images may surface of family members and others who helped to form you, persons who have accompanied you through the “living, dying, and rising” moments of your life. A community of others surrounds you, albeit from a distance, as you preserve the past in a present moment now destined to waft through a future horizon. For what you have found is not just an old artifact ripe with temporary or fading sentiment. It is that which, over time, you will hand on to another . . . and another . . . and another—all along the way.

Catechesis: “Stepping Lively”

What does this scene have to do with catechesis? Pope Francis tells us, “The believer is essentially ‘one who remembers’” (EG, 13). Remembering (both in the standard sense of recalling and in the sense of bringing in new members or recharging existing members) is a significant activity within

the Church's ministry of catechesis. Catechesis, over time, helps to shape and identify us as Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, as we progress and remember along the way.

Catechesis engages and combines many elements that nurture formation in faith: listening and finding; discovering and uncovering; celebrating and remembering; believing and professing; teaching and learning; and adhering, replenishing, and enacting. The *General Directory for Catechesis* asserts that “catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways” (GDC, 105).

Essential, of course, to the activity and ministry of catechesis is Jesus Christ, given and offered for all. “The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity” (CT, 5; cf. GDC, 80, and NDC, 19B). Such communion and intimacy are foundational to our developing spirituality, which is enriched by a holistic sense of why and how we live by faith.

Catechesis is a term of Greek origin. Simply put, to *catechize* is to “resound” or to “echo.”¹ Catechesis offers us both an invitation to and a participation in echoing the depth, core, and fullness of what the Church proclaims and teaches. We do so “in the Spirit” eagerly and energetically, for the Word of God frees us and enlivens us. This is no ordinary or static resounding, different only in degree from a search through (or for) a highly valued old family artifact, as important as that may be. Rather, it is a deliberate and sustained echo that enters our hearing (and, I would argue, all our senses) and lasts for a lifetime.

Anyone who has hollered “Hello!” in an underground cavern has surely heard in reply “Hello! Hello! . . . Hello!” as the word found its way back to the speaker. In the case of catechesis, the word reaches beyond familiar limits, finding welcome in its movement to another (or others), returning to be uttered again, now with even greater resonance, power, and confidence—for the source of our echo is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. It is he whom we echo, he whom we follow, he for whom we live as disciples and stewards of the Word. The living and life-giving Word of

God pierces time and history, resounding from generation to generation, community to community, person to person.

Catechesis offers us the opportunity to participate (as we ourselves are renewed) in a historic ministry of offering to others the Church's living faith through gifts ever ancient and ever new, alive through the "five inner senses: will, reason, memory, imagination, [and] thought."² We echo that which rings true, that which we have been given and are compelled to share. And—surprise!—so often the echo is reheard deep within ourselves, within that inner sanctum of soul and identity, as our words of living faith and belief fall gently and confidently from our lips to touch the heart of another.

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). The Church carries out the mission given by Christ through evangelization efforts that move us beyond perceived limitations and worrisome liabilities. "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (EN, 14). Today we serve through a New Evangelization, rich in ways of encouraging and inviting already baptized people who may have moved away from the community of the Church to explore returning to the faith of their baptismal heritage. The New Evangelization reaches people of many types and situations, including those who sense the movement of the Spirit in their lives for the first time. It also impacts the faithful, for the need for a renewal of faith recurs during a lifetime.

In the ever-lively opportunity presented by the New Evangelization, we experience anew the confluence of evangelization and catechesis. The Gospel cannot be contained, neatly sealed and stored away in an enclosure that is more coffin than memory keeper. It is destined to resound, to burst into and through minds and hearts orally, joyfully, communally. This Gospel movement is particularly encouraging at a time when inculturation is so visibly appreciated and apparent in the life of the Church. "Inculturation involves listening to the culture of the people for an echo of the word of God. It involves the discernment of the presence of authentic Gospel values or openness to authentic Gospel values in the culture" (NDC, 21C).³ The shared beauty of faith and culture is demonstrably identifiable in these new-millennium days.

Catechesis is a type of “handing on” that is not easily constrained to a measurable moment in time, one among many—which implies that perhaps it is devoid of serious purpose or intent. Nor is it a rapidly constructed and momentary “handing off,” as in a sporting event or business transaction. Rather, gifted emissaries of faith “step lively” and over time share a timeless treasure made more vibrant through living relationships of mercy, justice, compassion, and understanding.

We offer, through the grace of God, a catechesis of love. The Holy Spirit abides within the community of faith from age to age, from the apostles who walked with Jesus to disciples who find their way in him today. Generation after generation—stripped of all but Christ himself and living in and through the community of the Church—become one in a symphonic melody that resounds from the Church’s ongoing expression and experience of the One who is way, truth, and life.

Entering Catechetical History

What are some starting points for exploring the historical and contemporary world of catechesis?

How might we characterize our catechetical passage through life, marked by joyful hope for an eternity of life in God’s own presence? Happily seized by Christ and confidently motivated by mission, the catechist offers herself or himself within the community of faith not as mouth-piece but as “life-piece,” expressing discipleship beyond words and telling beyond familiar stories. This lifelong journey, vibrant through the remembered witness of faithful generations, is marked by anticipation and expectation.

Living and journeying the Way calls us to probe, explore, and understand our heritage as proclaimed and professed over the ages as we seek to embrace it today in the light of faith. We do this as part of a community of sisters and brothers in the Lord. Indeed, our support of and for one another is essential and must be presumed along the Way.

The image of the Way is fitting for anticipating and describing our movement through the Church’s catechetical journey, here applied to Catholic life and teaching (cf. Acts 9:2). It is scripturally rich, with layers of

meaning. We may first see it as a pointer, suggesting a particular direction. As time passes and as we come to grips with the meaning and expression of our Catholic identity, it may even become an emblem for us, a summary descriptor of all we are and do as Christians in giving our lives over to the One who is “the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Just as Jesus began his public ministry within the geographic and cultural setting of Galilee, so do we serve in this ministry of the Church from within our own local, regional, cultural, and geographic environs. We do so remembering that Jesus

made himself a *catechist* of the Kingdom of God for all categories of persons, great and small, rich and poor, healthy and sick, near and far, Jews and pagans, men and women, righteous and sinners, rulers and subjects, individuals and groups. He is available to all. He is interested in the needs of every person, body and soul. He heals and forgives, corrects and encourages, with words and deeds. (GDC, 163)

Notice the use of the present tense. Ponder the emphasis of Jesus on others, regardless of their elevated or downtrodden state in life. This statement of Jesus’ presence and availability is as true today as it was two millennia ago. What he offers is so essential that nothing can prevent its fulfillment. Indeed, he offers himself to the Father for all generations, redeeming us, healing us, encouraging us, giving his life for us, and rising for us. Jesus loves people. The truth of his promise to be with us in the Spirit carries forward through our daily witness and determined discipleship.

Our entry into the still-developing and complex history of catechesis emerges from expectations born of the blended and culturally rich experience of our current milieu. Just as others have done before us, each of us joins the journey of faith along the way of living faith. The difference is our time of entry. It seems natural to suggest that we join this bright pathway through the present moment of our lives. But what is this moment? How might it be assessed through the lens of catechesis?

One commonly understood meaning of *moment* invokes a brief duration of time. Another, more expansive meaning is a period of time. Many moments of life may attract us to the Gospel and to all who accompany us on the walk of faith. We may even be tempted to idealize a single moment of life that teases our imagination as natural memory gradually recedes, increasingly moving beyond timely awareness as days turn to weeks, weeks to months, and months to years. We age.

Some of us may hear “Live in the moment!” proclaimed as an indictment—as if we have failed ourselves or others if every passing second of our lives does not yield inspiring and measurable success. Think of a less-than-stellar workday, a conflict-laden meeting of parish organizations, or a catechetical workshop that does not go as intended.

Frustration can set in for those of us who seem to live, either professionally or personally, from moment to moment. Fed by promises of immediate life fulfillment that may surface from deep within ourselves, from well-meaning colleagues and friends, or from across the Internet and other media,⁴ we may find ourselves laying claim only to anxiety, discomfort, and even greater challenges for achieving tomorrow’s success.

Perhaps these are all reasons why the New Evangelization must begin within and with ourselves. In reality, limited momentary experiences, as well intended as they may be, are insufficient for the remembering believer. Such moments fade and slip away before our eyes. They limit our way.

Through unmuted voices joined to the still resounding witness of those who have preceded us in faith, catechesis boldly seeks to confirm a new and ceaseless moment of no short duration, for “now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). This is a lasting moment of anticipation, expectation, and participation through which our ongoing conversion, initiated by the Holy Spirit along the baptismal way, takes root. It is time that offers us welcome, challenge, and change, for it is the time of Christ among us.⁵ It is a time of the experience of Christ all day long, all life long, even when we may be unaware of or even doubt his presence. It is the Christ moment.

In entering this eminently lasting, overarching, and life-changing moment, we find new meaning for the present as we secure roots linked to past lives and renew hope for generations to come. As with generations

before us, regular participation in the celebration of the Eucharist confirms that we are called to the day of salvation and to something beyond the successive brief or passing moments of our lives.

Through the abiding grace of God, we can choose to live in harmony within the all-encompassing milieu of the “Christ moment”—a new stage for all God’s children. This Christ moment perdures through the witness of faith professed by our ancestors and is entrusted with confidence to us and to our descendants who, with fresh understanding, will bear the message of Christ in millennia to come.

The handing on of faith in past eras—for example, orally from person to person, by preaching, by moral decision-making formed in light of the Gospel, or through Christian witness in socially threatening or nonthreatening times—may at first call to mind similarities to conditions today. However, there are differences, based in part on how we perceive the social order.

For example, we may find that such sociological labels as urban, suburban, and rural that carried us into the twenty-first century are now inadequate.⁶ They may even appear to blend together along electronic pathways whose storefronts display an endless variety of high-tech worldwide communications systems. People in one part of the world welcome the dawn as others enjoy fading hues of daylight, all while communicating with one another at lightning-fast speeds that, with a simple click, merge sunrise and sunset, ranches and cities, farms and residential developments, and apartment buildings and the rich greens of barely populated mountain foothills. Time zones become irrelevant and unnecessary for many. Opportunities for interaction abound!

However, instantaneous communication, offered through devices that rest at a forty-five-degree angle on one’s knees, may make for all too swiftly deleted memories. “In the moment” may be seen as nothing more than a few seconds on their way to the shadows of time, soon to be replaced by other happenings. For some Catholics, *60 Minutes* may be more of a statement about time at church than the name of a popular television show.

Complaints about “not getting anything out of” Mass (“Boring!”) might actually suggest our need to recommit ourselves to being “in the

moment” in all its depth and breadth. Who encourages us to extend our pause from lightning-fast living during the eucharistic celebration? How might mystagogical reflection and engagement invite us to savor this sacred moment, not just for an hour but for a lifetime? How might “at church” become “as Church”?

Jesus surely accompanies us in the daily events of our lives. We are one with him along the way in the great and memorable experiences of faith and of life. Clearly, his everlasting presence and promise of life with God forever is neither passing nor momentary. It is he who surrounds, supports, and elevates us, through the gift of his Spirit, as we encounter demands brought forth by the sweep of a second hand. In entering our own communal catechetical history, the present moment stretches in many directions, always with Christ at the center.

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19–22)

The Plan of the Book

The history of catechesis can be approached in a number of valuable and diverse ways. While there may be differences among authors’ perspectives, there is also likely to be some overlap in identifying important dimensions of the history, the study of which has been richly served by many scholars whose work continues to inform the field.⁷

The remaining chapters of the book present pertinent topics of historical and contemporary interest along the way of catechesis, from millennia gone by to the present. The presentation is intentionally limited. My experience and understanding of catechesis within the Catholic Church and, in particular, the Latin Church, inform the overall perspective and topical selections, with a diversity of references identified in the endnotes.

We move from some Old Testament foundations, an essential beginning for rooting and tracing our history, to the One who is the Way, Jesus Christ. Our journey continues with highlights of the New Testament and the emerging Church, followed by a look at the development of the catechumenate and catechesis. We then span the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, review catechesis in light of the fracture in the Church at the time of the Reformation, and look at succeeding centuries, down to the movement into the new millennium.

The flow of our journey is captured by the chart that follows. Locate the “Start” arrow in the chart to trace some aspects of the historical development presented here.

Catechesis: A Historical Overview

One Approach

START

Chapters 2–5: Foundations and Early Church

Old Testament; Jesus Christ, Teacher and Catechist; New Testament; proclamation and teaching; scripture, tradition; Creed; deepening faith; emerging catechumenal and communal process of initiation

Chapter 6: Spanning the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries

The Middle Ages; catechesis through changing times; diminished catechumenal reality; “lived faith” in home, life, community; reliance on Creed, Lord’s Prayer; examples of the era

Chapter 7: Fracture and Reform

Sustaining catechesis during a time wounded by division; catechisms and shaping a pattern in print; some representative persons and communities; growing awareness of the “person”

Chapter 8: Bridging a Millennium

Nineteenth to twenty-first centuries; content, method, kerygma, experience; Vatican Council II; renewal (many areas); community and ministry, catechumenal lens; New Evangelization; cultural diversity; Catholic social tradition; mercy; Jesus Christ, the Way

Each chapter includes a broad look at the catechetical climate of the era under study. The scope of catechesis underwent adjustment over the course of several centuries, especially after the emergence of the printing press in the West in the mid-fifteenth century. To today's catechists, this may seem to have been a sudden move, but the changes actually happened over a period of time. Subsequently, there was a reawakening of the understanding of foundational linkages among scripture, liturgy, sacrament, and catechesis, along with the integration of important insights from education and related social sciences.⁸ Today we are witness to the Church's expansive catechetical agenda, rich in doctrinal understanding; pastoral integration; increasing awareness of the necessity of catechesis for all; and renewed understanding of Catholic social teaching, especially for peace and justice. We do not seek applause for yesterday's achievements but remember that "the salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy" (EG, 112).

Forging Connections: Catechetical History and Contemporary Catechesis

The image of a weaver helps us to review and expand our understanding of the Church's catechetical journey. A weaver combines strands of material (e.g., yarn) to create a whole cloth. Similarly, catechesis is in part born of the merger of various strands into a single whole, one that is representative of a still-developing history.

Regardless of era or event, Christ remains the center of faith and life and the focus of our way in living the faith we profess as the Church. Christ establishes the context for who we are and for what we proclaim on the way of faith. He is our spiritual core and the *living* content of our experience of faith. Catechetically, we see this content proclaimed and embraced through scripture and tradition and as interpreted by the Magisterium, "the servant of the word of God" (NDC, 18).

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the guiding role of bishops, our chief catechists (see NDC, 54A), in caring for the baptized and in calling all people to Christ (see CD, 11ff.). As a result of the Second Vatican Council,⁹ new opportunities arose for the laity to join with the ordained

in serving the people of God. Persons serving in consecrated life secured many positions as part of a catechetical schematic that also attracted married and single laypeople.

Jesus offers us the way of life and the way to live in the Spirit as the Church, through which we come to participate in the life of the Risen One. For example, *Lumen Gentium* declares that the laity “in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ” (LG, 31).¹⁰ This is enlivening and stimulating. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ [‘priest, prophet, and king’] and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them” (CCC, 783).

The movement of the Spirit guides and inspires us as we welcome the integration of many aspects of Catholic life and practice within the fertile soil in which the Gospel continues to take root. Gifts of collaborative trust, including leadership formation and the witness of catechetical leaders, continue to reinforce such a perspective, especially—though not exclusively—in diocesan and parish life. All participate in the essential ministry of catechesis during an era of New Evangelization.

The New Evangelization, bolstered by effective and ongoing catechesis, offers a gateway for exploring and enacting a diversity of approaches for proclaiming and teaching the faith. One helpful aspect is the review of the state of catechesis in the life of the Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council. This is more than a summary of practices and perspectives; rather, we engage the past in helping to inform and shape catechesis for now and for the future. A wealth of ecclesial documents since the council continues to influence this necessarily vigorous effort, one framed in part by the six tasks of catechesis and for which clarity of teaching remains a priority. The broad sweep of pastoral needs demands heightened attention to the implementation of the Church’s evangelizing mandate; well-formed and well-informed catechists are essential, especially as people respond to the Spirit’s call to consider anew their relationship with Christ and, for some, explore a return to the Church.

Our main topic here is the evolution of the way of catechesis over the ages. Countless persons strove to hand down the gift of faith from

within the heart of the Church. They belonged, as do we. They believed, as do we. They discerned matters of faith and of life, as do we. They experienced firsthand what it is to live, die, and rise during life's joys and challenges, keeping faith alive! As do we. I propose that this witness in faith through the years forms an important strand of the historically woven tapestry of what are known today as evangelization, catechesis, and New Evangelization.

This long and evolving history includes highs and lows of the catechumenate; “the domestic Church” (LG, 11; cf. CCC, 1655ff.) stoking the fire of faith alive; extensive reliance on printed resources for catechesis; renewed awareness of the importance of catechesis for all in the midst of a rebirth of emphasis on the role of initiation in coming to faith; and shifts in catechetical practice and service, including service in catechetical leadership through lay ecclesial ministry.¹¹

As we read “through” history and not merely about history, and as we derive meanings and possibilities for catechesis today, our history can serve as a type of catechetical mirror for the contemporary community of faith, the Church. Catechetical history—*our* history by faith and inheritance—is welcomed within these pages as a dear friend to be received and interpreted as we serve within our own cultural and catechetical milieu along the way of faith.

Four Characteristics along the Way

In view of the appeal to the witness of the faithful, four characteristics are proposed here for aiding our reflection along the way of faith: (1) belonging; (2) believing; (3) discerning and reflecting; and (4) living, dying, and rising.

These characteristics, briefly described below, appear intermittently in the chapters in a variety of ways, as befits the topic under review. They often form an implicit perspective for a chapter and may be identified by name only infrequently. And they need not be sequentially applied. No attempt is made here to make all eras of catechetical history look alike; each era has its own distinguishing features. But the characteristics are

there, especially when you see them—even in the background—through *your* experience and reflection.

The four characteristics are derived in part from my experience, study, and implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*¹² and are intended to serve as a tool for reflecting on highlights of the catechetical enterprise in the history, life, and practice of the Church.

Though intentions may vary, all who are baptized represent *belonging* to and within the Church every day. Belonging implies the obvious: being who we are and what we do in relation to Christ, the Church, and others. “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” Jesus says to Pilate (Jn 18:37).

Why do we belong? We long to belong: a neat phrase, but there is more to it than meets the eye. What is it for which we long? For whom do we long? Longing to belong is not simply a state of mind but a state of relationship. Such longing is not an appeal for living within safe havens to which access is granted only by ourselves to ourselves when necessary. Rather, this healthy sense of belonging finds its breath and resonates within supportive relationships of trust through which risks, joys, and challenges populate daily life and where, to apply an overused phrase, “real life” happens beyond familiar comfort zones that are more shield than doorway to God’s children. We hear Jesus’ voice and yearn for his presence. We belong to him.

Pope Francis tells us of Jesus’ enduring love: “Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. . . . He takes us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity” (EG, 268). For the Church, evangelizing necessity and catechetical reality draw from shared wisdom and ongoing experience in fostering living faith.

Believing is linked dynamically to belonging. Believing offers us the graced opportunity to cherish the treasure of what we are charged to hand on with vigor, clarity, and passion—though not alone (“just me and my God”) but through witness in faith commonly professed; not in drudgery but in the strength of loving resolve. Scripture and tradition ground us within contexts born of faith and of life. As we “encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith” (GDC, 66), we seize fresh opportunities

for living our baptismal call and the call to evangelize and catechize. The life-giving Word of God sustains us as we risk seeking new horizons. We are neither a creedless nor a lifeless community. Strengthened by faith within the sacramental life of the Church, we belong as we believe and believe as we belong. We model a collaborative spirit through care for one another, especially those new to Catholic faith and life.

Teachings and doctrinal understanding are welcomed affirmations of faith, essential to heritage and identity, faith and life. They frame and give shape to our understanding of who we are and invite active engagement in the ways, words, and witness that help to form us in faith all our lives long. Believing does not occur in a catechetical closet; rather, believing serves the catechetical mission with linkages to belonging and opportunities for discernment that, among other benefits, heighten understanding. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).

In Genesis, we see images of Joseph as both “discerning and wise” (Gn 41:39) and also, upon seeing his brother Benjamin, “on the verge of tears” (Gn 43:30). The call to belong and to believe summons us to *discernment* and its partner, *reflection*. Through prayerful discernment, our vulnerabilities (historical and otherwise) are exposed within and before the community of faith. We live within and through this humbling need. We ponder and reflect on who we are becoming, what we believe, and whom we believe in as we enter into mysteries rich in truth and promise. This may happen for us in the midst of the daily “living, dying, and rising” (to self and others) experiences that we offer and share through the witness of the heart.

Living, dying, and rising converge where “way” becomes actualized in the people and events that cleanse and paint afresh the portrait of our lives. This is no painting to be viewed from a distance but rather one best viewed from within the fibers of the brush itself. For the “distance” of the centuries is now absorbed in one grand display of the community of faith from which we inherit our past and through which the future unfolds. Indeed, Christ the Artist and our Redeemer continues to teach us about living, dying, and rising as he invites us into his own. “For to me life is Christ, and death is gain” (Phil 1:21).

I invite you to explore these characteristics briefly in your own life and hope that this engagement will enhance your consideration of the chapters that follow.

For example, how does belonging affect the way you interact with others? What does it mean for maintaining regular communication with parents, family, friends, or caregivers? Does belonging necessarily mean having others nearby? Or might you be one of the multitude of people whose family is scattered across the nation or around the world? What sustains “belonging” for you if that is your reality? How does your parish, as a locus of belonging, occupy a place of fellowship and discipleship for you? Are you welcome? Do you welcome others, even if you are shy about such things?

As you ponder the movement of faith in your life, consider what it is that you believe and whom it is you believe in. Who is Jesus for you right now? What does he call you to do and to become? What confession of faith keeps you going day after day? What power resonates from within as you profess faith during Mass with the community to which you belong (not just the local parish but the diocese and universal Church)? What power resonates from within as you make belief come alive in faith and action?

Life can be a whirlwind. Is it a challenge for you to stop periodically and take time to reflect on your life? On where you are headed and why you are moving in a particular direction? On why you believe and belong as you do? Consider choices you may be facing or decisions that you have been asked to assist in making on behalf of others. What factors come to mind? How does prayer help to set the context for what you are discerning?

Our discernment can calm us as we deal with life’s challenges and unpredictable outcomes. What joys, what hopes, what griefs, and what anxieties (see GS, 1) welcome or confront you, perhaps almost ceaselessly? How do “dying and rising” occasions of life describe your way as you live by faith each day?

For the baptized, born of water and Spirit, a cradle of hope offers perspective and promise, often through the common witness in faith of the Christian community, especially through the celebration of the sacraments. But this is not hope understood as a golden wish. Rather, catechists

“hold fast to the hope that lies before us” (Heb 6:18) in times that simultaneously suggest both uncertainty and simplistic self-assurance. Indeed, faith sustains us as we strive to be “bearers of paschal joy and hope, in the name of the Church.”¹³

Getting Started

To assist in our reception of historical perspectives that go well beyond the boundaries of this book, we need the support of other voices. Discussion with others about historical trends and practices can enhance our own understanding and influence our own practices.

Each chapter begins with a scriptural selection for your reflection. Reflection questions appear at the end of each of the remaining chapters and sometimes elsewhere in a chapter. They are intended to assist in facilitating these conversations, often with regard to the four characteristics of belonging; believing; discerning and reflecting; and living, dying and rising that were identified earlier.

Catechetical and related documentation lend other support. We are blessed with many sources that support our efforts to look forward as we remain mindful of our past. Examples of such sources are the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *National Directory for Catechesis*. They offer us opportunities for reflection as we run, walk, and stumble along, and sometimes even drift away from, the Way who is Christ and the way we seek to travel together. They extend ready and contemporary assistance for understanding and reflecting on the catechetical journey.

Enjoy this look at our past. Going forward, embrace it as your own the way you would someone you love. Raise new questions as you answer old ones. Raise critical issues. Be merciful toward someone whom you may seek to avoid. Seek more information. Keep alert: the echo is near, even in whispers. Listen to other voices as you hear again the One who is “the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Approach others in a spirit of love and charity as you probe the joys and the challenges of catechesis over the ages. Do not read only for yourself, but think of at least one other person as you rediscover the way of faith that is yours but not yours alone—and surely not yours to lay to

rest in a tightly covered basket. Consider that person's gifts. See in that person a living reminder of a history that is still evolving. And pause to look in the mirror—you might be surprised by what you see beyond and beneath the image of yourself. Listen for the echo.

“At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:12–13).