

# A New Moment For Catechesis In The Diocese Of Green Bay

*A Pastoral Letter on the United States Catholic  
Catechism for Adults and its use in this Diocese.*



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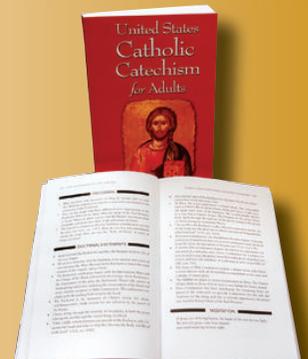
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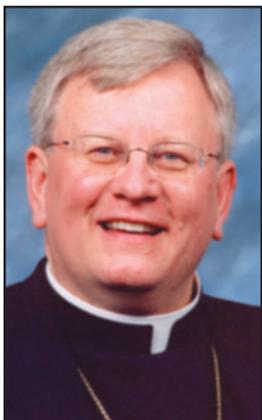
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# A MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP



My dear priests, deacons, parish directors, religious, Catholic school administrators and teachers, directors of religious education, youth ministry and adult faith formation, campus ministers, catechumenate catechists, parents and all the lay faithful ...

As I write this pastoral letter regarding the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Church to all of you, I am profoundly struck by the words of another pastoral letter written by the great apostle Paul, almost two thousand years ago.

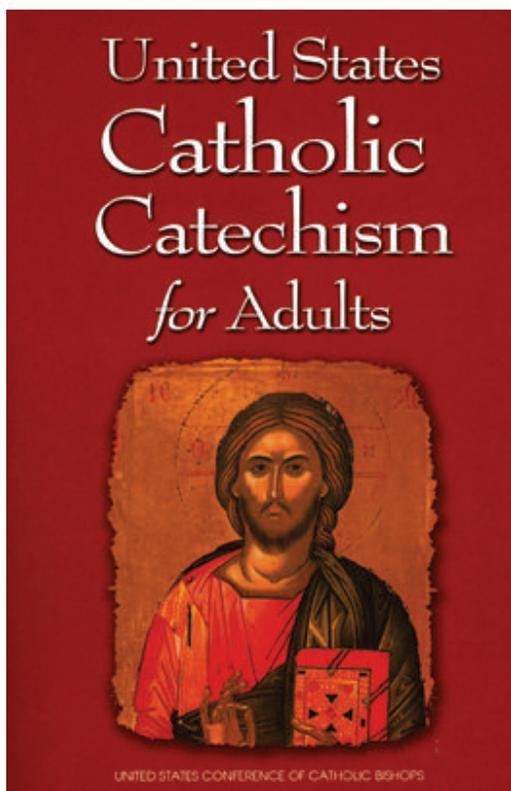
"Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy ones and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the holy ones because of the hope reserved for you in heaven.

Of this you have already heard through the word of truth, the Gospel, that has come to you.

Just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, so also among you, from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth.

From the day we heard about you, we do not cease praying for you and all spiritual wisdom and understanding to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God".<sup>1</sup>



**"I am announcing that the new adult catechism, The United States Catechism for Adults is to be the foundational text for all adult faith formation and catechesis in the Diocese of Green Bay."**

I am writing to you because I sense a new moment in the opportunity to "grow in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" here in the Diocese of Green Bay. There are many new resources, outstanding documents of the universal Church and of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in this country which afford us this new catechetical opportunity.

In the last twenty years the Catholic Church has made incredible progress in the realm of religious education, which now at the behest of Second Vatican Council, we call "catechesis."<sup>2</sup> The publication of the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>3</sup> has solidified and clarified the Church's position on our treasured tradition since the days of the early Church and the flowering of the catechetical mission of the Church over the centuries. The Catechism has been a unique gift to the Church and will continue to bear much fruit for the future. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a complete and accurate exposition of Catholic doctrine. It contains the essential and fundamental context of the Catholic faith in a full and summary way. It presents what Catholics throughout the world believe, celebrate in the sacraments and live in morality always centered in prayer.

In the years following the publication and dissemination of the universal *Catechism of the*

Catholic Church in the United States, I personally have had the wonderful opportunity to see history in the making somewhat “up close and personal.” In the late 1990s, I had the privilege of working at the Vatican as an official at the Congregation for Clergy, which has the responsibility for catechesis world-wide. I was in the room at the Vatican when His Eminence, Cardinal Dario Castrillon-Hoyos expressed gratitude to the Bishops of the United States, represented by Bishop Donald Wuerl, then Bishop of Pittsburgh, now Archbishop of Washington, D.C., for all of their good work in the area of catechesis. The Cardinal placed before the Episcopal Conference of the United States Bishops the challenge of producing a “National Catechism” that would serve the purpose of explaining and enculturating the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* into the Church in our country. Bishop Wuerl and the other Bishops of the executive committee of the Conference of Bishops, a bit hesitantly but gladly, accepted the opportunity to fulfill the request of the Cardinal and began the mammoth task of preparing such a volume for use in the entire United States. Little did they know that the task would be a three-year project with broad based consultation of experts, members of the Christian faithful, priests and every Bishop in the United States.

After I was ordained a Bishop, I also had the opportunity to serve as a Bishop member of the Committee on Catechesis and was able to participate in the review of the *National Directory for Catechesis*<sup>4</sup> and to review, also as a member of that committee, the new national catechism as it was being written. This volume is and will be a real treasure for our Church in this country and for our Diocese now and in the distant future. The book is entitled *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*<sup>5</sup> and it was approved by the full body of Bishops in November of 2004, subsequently approved by the Holy See and then published by the Bishops’ Conference in July of 2006.

The Bishops of the United States, at the request of the Congregation in Rome, have taken real initiative and leadership in providing a text that will be a close reflection of the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and yet provides a cultural context for our country that helps our people to understand and assimilate the faith. The book

itself is written in a “catechetical modality” which means it includes doctrinal instruction but also stories of saints and Catholics in our tradition who exemplify that section of the teaching. There are continuous references to the Bible and to other elements of the Church’s teaching as well as discussion questions to help readers in groups to understand and process the material in each chapter<sup>6</sup>.

The Bishops see this adult catechism as a tool for adults in the Church who often have not had much background to be given a consistent and faithful presentation of the teaching of the Church so that they can appropriate it into their own lives. They also envision this work being the primary text of formation for catechists in parish catechetical programs and for teachers of religion in Catholic schools, for all adult faith formation programs, campus ministry programs and the basic text or resource for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults during that intense time of conversion and preparation called the “Catechumenate.” It is also strongly recommended for those involved in lay ecclesial ministry in their parishes. According to the Bishops, each household, besides having a copy of the Bible and a manual of Catholic prayers, ought to have a copy of the *U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults* so that parents can have a ready reference for study and prayer in their home.

While the new adult catechism is readily available and easily understandable, whoever uses it may need some preparation and training in order to ensure that the overall purpose and mission is clearly and appropriately understood.

Given this background and with the publication of this pastoral letter, I am announcing that the new adult catechism, *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is to be the *foundational text for all adult faith formation and catechesis in the Diocese of Green Bay*. This catechism will serve as the rudder on the ship of the catechetical mission of this Diocese as we “put out into the deep” of this new century and millennium. We commit ourselves to doing our very best to prepare for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, commonly called the “new evangelization” as foreseen by the Second Vatican Council, by Pope John Paul II and now by Pope Benedict XVI.

## EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS

What I am really calling for here is that all of us see our relationship to Jesus Christ as the most central one of our lives and that we recognize that “conversion of mind and heart” to become more like Him every day is the true meaning and purpose of our lives. This process is often called “on-going conversion.” Actually, this process of knowing and loving God is a dynamic one that begins in evangelization and grows ever deeper in the various ages and stages of our lives.

In *Catechesi Tradendae*<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II stresses the centrality of Christ and establishes the essential link between evangelization and catechesis. “At the heart of catechesis, we find in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ. The definitive aim of catechesis is to introduce people to an intimate friendship 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 Trinity.”<sup>8</sup> There is no separation or opposition between catechesis and evangelization<sup>9</sup>. They integrate and complement each other. Catechesis must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly, with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

“It is true that being a Christian means saying “yes” to Jesus Christ, but let us remember that this “yes” has two levels: It consists in surrendering to the word of God and relying on it, but it also means, at a later stage, endeavoring to know better - and better the profound meaning of this word.”<sup>11</sup>

# THE HISTORY OF COMMITMENT TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS IN THE DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

The primary indicator of the historical commitment of this Diocese to Catholic education is abundantly apparent in the commitment to Catholic schools and a constant effort to preserve and improve those schools, including joining together in area-wide systems. Such systems encourage our schools in their quest to serve the goals of academic excellence, strong Catholic identity, and missionary and service outreach to the community and to the world. For each and every Catholic school this has been a priority.

Fresh in the Diocesan memory of some is the leadership role of the program called *The Green Bay Plan*<sup>12</sup> of 1971. I understand that in the early '70s Bishop Aloysius Wycislo and the leadership of the catechetical effort in the Diocese were endeavoring to convey through religious education the teaching and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. This program gained a nation-wide reputation. We are again at the cusp of a tremendous opportunity here in the United States and in the Diocese of Green Bay as we now have available all the resources that were not available thirty years ago: *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *General Directory for Catechesis*<sup>13</sup>, the *National Directory for Catechesis* and the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.

With the great advances in technology today, we are in a favorable position to make our programs available to all of our parishioners and to all those needing access to our programs. Technological advances also assist our ability to access other solid programs that may be available online. Surely changes in this area will continue rapidly and increase our capacity to reach out to the faithful in a cost-effective and expeditious manner.

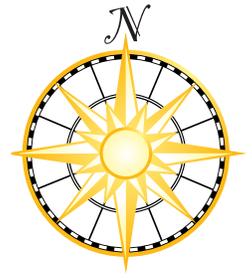


SUBMITTED PHOTO | FOR THE COMPASS

**Fr. James Massart leads a USCCA training session for catechetical leaders at the Diocese of Green Bay.**

With all of the resources available from the Universal Church and from the Bishops of this country and with the incredible advances in technology, we are clearly at a new moment in the catechetical history of the Church in the United States and in the Diocese of Green Bay. It is incumbent upon us not to miss this opportunity but rather to rebuild a foundation that is solidly set upon the mind and heart of Jesus Christ and the Church. We must find new ways, rooted in prayer, to communicate this wonderful treasure of our faith to present and future generations.

# SETTING OUR COMPASS TO TRUE NORTH



In the catechetical area of the Church's life the following questions must be considered: What is true north? How will we know when and if we have arrived? These documents express the destination so beautifully, but, as the pastor of this community of faith, I would like to express it this way. Our goal is to help the whole community of faith to come to at least a basic standard of knowledge of Christ and of the teachings of the Church in such a way that the people of God is guided in living in these perilous and confusing days. The only answer to the confusion of our times is a thorough knowledge of the Truth and cooperation with the grace of God to live that knowledge to the full in preparation for the kingdom of heaven.

Today we live in a culture that is too often distancing itself from God and exalting the self to such a degree that pluralism could dilute the truth so much, thus weakening and destroying the fabric of society. It has happened before even to the greatest of nations and entire civilizations. Gratefully it has been the role of the Church to bring reform and clarity to a wavering world. Through the monastic movement after the fall of the Roman

Empire, through Catholic colleges and universities in later periods of the Church's history, the Church has saved Western civilization from near extinction.

**“Our goal is to help the whole community of faith to come to at least a basic standard of knowledge of Christ and of the teachings of the Church in such a way that the people of God is guided in living in these perilous confusing days.”**

This is precisely why we need to make our Catholic grade schools, high schools and colleges to be true instruments of cultivating the development of the whole person and the promotion of the common good. This is the reason why our parish and school catechetical programs need to be strengthened — not watered down — in order to assist the next generation to take stronger ownership of their faith and their place in the world. We need to prepare the next generations to answer generously the call to holiness and to equip them for competent, courageous and even saintly and heroic witness. This is not a time to compromise with the negative trends in our culture, but it is time to counteract these trends with competence, right reason and unshakeable faith.

# THE CENTRALITY OF PRAYER IN CATECHESIS

Every catechist should give students a taste of deep prayer, for this is a direct way of relating to Christ. The first “catechists” of the Church, the Apostles, implored Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And Jesus did teach them the greatest of all prayers, the *Our Father*. He also brought them to the silence of the mountain where he witnessed his own prayer to them. Catechesis is learning the truths of divine revelation, understanding them and living them out in a

continuous conversion to Christ through a life of prayer.

St. Anselm famously said many times, “Believe that you may understand.”<sup>14</sup> He was referring to the truths of Christ and His Church, which is His body. The food for this faith is prayer. No catechist should avoid teaching and witnessing prayer to their students. Every catechist should teach and witness prayer to students.

# COORDINATES AS WE SET SAIL

To the Diocesan Curia:

Overall we need to immerse ourselves in the documents that I have mentioned with a study plan for ourselves that will ensure that we have a great familiarity—not just a passing awareness—with the guiding documents of our faith, especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults*.

This period of study and reflection will naturally lead us to the evaluation of all of our formation programs: commissioned ministry, diaconate and seminary candidates

so that these programs are teaching comprehensively the teachings of the Church. Theological opinions that are not in harmony with the teaching authority of the Church are not helpful and could even be detrimental to the faith life of the participants.

I have asked the Department of Education, which has responsibility for catechist formation and adult faith formation, to develop a program and curriculum in three parts that is primarily based on the USCCA. Continuing conversion and prayer are powerful tools for catechesis and will be treated across the entire curriculum. Over time this

will be unfolded and then required as preparation for catechists in our parishes and teachers in our schools. Although this will take some considerable time to be fully planned and implemented, we hope to make it available on a broad basis throughout the Diocese through on-site training sessions as well as instruction through distance learning and interactivity through the Internet.

I have also asked our Diocesan Adult Faith Formation Director to provide service to parishes in the area of the adult catechism as they will need assistance in communicating the central importance of the USCCA for Adult Faith Formation. Resources will also be made available to the parishes regarding the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults and its use in the home. Preparation for the sacraments and all efforts in ministering to parents need to be reviewed and prepared in light of the USCCA.

The Bishops of the United States also provide a review process for all textbooks of religion and catechesis called the *conformity review*.<sup>15</sup> This should help us in the future in choosing appropriate texts for use in our schools and parish catechetical programs.

To Pastors, parochial vicars, deacons, parish directors and other parish leadership personnel:

The *Code of Canon Law* requires the Bishop and the pastors to take special care for the catechetical formation of their parishioners of all ages,<sup>16</sup> with some focused attention on adult faith formation.<sup>17</sup> I ask all pastors and parish leadership personnel to familiarize yourselves deeply with the USCCA and to find the time to teach a class on this in your parish or to make provisions that this is well promoted if taught by someone else.

I also ask you to safeguard the teaching patrimony of the Church, for it is your responsibility as pastor and those in pastoral leadership, to make sure that the teaching in the parish is truly the teaching of the Church<sup>18</sup>. I know also that it is difficult in these busy times for parents to make religious education a priority. I realize that you may find resistance to your efforts because of the many challenges parishioners and families face due to their busy lives, but communicating the importance of authentic teaching and full participation is very important<sup>19</sup>.

I would ask that you partner with me and with Diocesan personnel to make sure that we seize this incredible moment and opportunity for the future of our Diocese and for the guidance of our Catholic families and youth. Shortcuts or easy choices will not last; we must step up to the challenge and, as the old saying goes *carpe diem*, "seize the day."

I have noticed in my nearly thirty years of pastoral ministry that when I am careful about teaching and preaching faithfully, clearly and with joy—great fruit flows into ministry—a success that does not flow when I may be nebulous or unclear or compromising on the great legacy we have been given to pass on.

**"I ask all pastors and parish leadership personnel to familiarize yourselves deeply with the USCCA and to find the time to teach a class on this in your parish or to make provisions that this is well promoted if taught by someone else."**

I call upon you to remember that it is your responsibility to represent the Church in her integrity and not to fashion the Church after your own or someone else's fancy. For whatever deviation, we will be held accountable by the truth of the final judgment. Our task is to ensure that we and our teachings are in conformity with what Christ and the Church teach and live, and not the other way around. We are not making this thing up;

we are mere instruments of what God wants us to do for His loving people.

We seek to go forward in faith with the Church as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council and continued in the spirit of Pope John Paul II and the present leadership of Pope Benedict XVI. Thus, the Church will be fully alive in Christ Jesus as we prepare for "His Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven." We must prepare for a Church that is alive with the buoyancy of the Holy Spirit. The primary way to this destination is in becoming a community of faith alive in Christ, faithful to the Church and her teachings. We are called to be a people responding generously to the call to holiness within our vocation or walk in life. Help us to embrace with great fervor the Diocesan Mission<sup>20</sup>:

**DIOCESAN MISSION**  
**The Catholic community of the Diocese of Green Bay, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in unity with the universal Church, boldly proclaims the Gospel of Jesus, prayerfully worships in word and sacrament, and compassionately serves those in need, in order to advance God's Kingdom of justice and love.**

+ David L. Ricken

Solemnity of All Saints, November 1, 2009

- 1 Colossians 1:1-6;9-10.
- 2 John Paul II, *On Catechesis In Our Time* (Catechesi Tradendae) (CT) (Washington D.C.: USCCB, 1979), nos. 1, 2.
- 3 The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB)-Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1992) published initially in 1992 was revised with modifications and published in 1997 and also 2000.
- 4 National Directory for Catechesis (NDC (Washington, D.C.:USCCB, 2005).
- 5 United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA) (Washington, D.C.:USCCB, 2006).
- 6 For a thorough understanding of the historical development of the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults and its intended audience see the Introduction to the USCCA.
- 7 CT, nos. 18, 19.
- 8 CT, no. 5.
- 9 Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Evangelii Nuntiandi) (EN) (Washington D.C.: USCCB, 1975), no. 44 for a complete treatment of the relationship between catechesis and evangelization.
- 10 CT, no. 19
- 11 CT, no. 20
- 12 The Green Bay Plan (Green Bay, Wisconsin: St. Norbert Abbey Press, Department of Education, Diocese of Green Bay, 1971).
- 13 Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1998)
- 14 Saint Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium*, in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1962), p.7.
- 15 The Conformity Listing of Catechetical Text and Series can be found on the USCCB website <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/document/Currentlist.pdf>.
- 16 Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition, New English Translation [CIC] (Washington, D.C.: CLSA, 1984), nos, 519, 528.1, 776-777.
- 17 USCCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (OHWB) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1999).
- 18 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (Presbyterorum Ordinis) (PO) (1965), no. 6b.
- 19 Challenges in Catechetical Ministry in the United States are outlined in the Introduction to the NDC pp.12-17.
- 20 Diocese of Green Bay Mission Statement, Approved by Most Reverend David A. Zubik, (Green Bay, Wisconsin, 2005).