

The Future of Catechesis: for Living Faith in a Synodal Church

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► ABSTRACT

The Article, inspired by the experience of the Synod on Synodality, seeks to trace the future of the praxis of Catechesis, keeping pace with the dynamics of living faith, lived faith and life-giving faith. It elaborates on the catechetical commitment to educate for living faith and on the pedagogical movements related to a *life to faith to life* approach, in a Synodal Church.

► KEYWORDS

Faith Alive; Lived Faith; Life-giving Faith; Participative Community; Shared Christian Praxis; Synodality.

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1. Becoming a Synodal Community

The practice of synodality was favored by the first Christian community (see *Acts* 15: 4-29) and has been engaged intermittently since then – more so within the Eastern than Western communions of Catholic faith. Now it seems that the Holy Spirit is insisting that synodality be the Church's defining *modus operandi* from here forward. It calls us to bond and function as a participatory Christian community that moves along together (*syn – hodos*). Such synodality requires that all the baptized be active participants in the life of the Church and agents of its mission to the world.

Often Pope Francis has likened this renewed synodal path to turning the Church as a pyramid upside down; he means to realize it first and foremost as the whole Christian people of God with its leadership as serving rather than ruling over this Body of Christ. Here Francis is echoing Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* and the sequence of its chapters, focusing first on "the Mystery of the Church" (Ch 1) and then on "The people of God" (Ch 2), before outlining the function of "The Hierarchical Structure of the Church" (Ch 3) – at service to the community. Of course, the Church will always need a leadership structure that serves its "holy order" (*hier-arche*, the opposite to *an-arche*), yet the leaders no longer define the Church. It is first and foremost the whole Christian people of God, with all, according to their gifts and opportunities, to be active partners in the ministry of the Church and its mission to the world.

Though this might sound tame enough at first blush, in fact synodality calls for a whole new (or renewed) way of being Church. To begin with, its defining characteristic is that all the baptized are called to actively participate in its life and mission. Over and over, the documents that have emerged since Pope Francis first called the Church to radically deepen its practice of synodality (beginning with the Synod on Synodality, Oct 2021), the word *participation* and the people as active *participants* have been the dominant theme (for example, used over 50 times in the *Document for the Continental Stage*, Oct 2022). We can note varied characteristics of the participation intended.

Participation demands that all members be welcomed to invest their gifts in service to the Church's mission – the realization of God's Reign that centered the ministry of Jesus, ever working together and being co-responsible to effect God's saving will for the world. Add, too, that such participation calls every baptized person to share their spiritual wisdom within their Christian community and to be open to receive the wisdom of others. In sum, participation requires that all Christians be active agents of their faith rather than passive recipients.

This synodal way of moving along together requires that all members contribute according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. It requires mutual exchange in which all members are invited to share their own deep truth, with their word being heard and welcomed in the community discourse. A syn-

odal church moves along together with collaboration, conversation, and collective discernment – all of which requires deep sharing and listening, with all the baptized to be fully heard and heeded. As the *Instrumentum Laboris* notes, synodality requires «readiness to enter into a dynamic of constructive, respectful, and prayerful speaking, listening, and dialogue».¹

2. Need to Catechize for Living Faith Toward Synodality

Our catechetical praxis greatly depends, as it should, on our understanding of Christian faith – that for which we are to educate. To illustrate this point, let me draw on a little of catechetical history. The *Catechism of Trent*, also known as the Roman Catechism, was published in 1566. Embracing the understanding of faith reflected in the decrees of that great Council, Trent's Catechism defined faith as «that by which we yield our unhesitating assent to whatever the authority of our Holy Mother the Church teaches us to have been revealed by God».² Its emphasis on faith as belief and solely by Church authority was understandable in the historical context; the Reformation had questioned many of the Church's traditional teachings. However, understanding faith solely as *belief* encouraged a catechesis that soon became a simple question and answer summary of the Church's faith that was to be memorized by rote. Memorizing the core *beliefs* of Catholic faith in a question/answer pedagogy became the dominant mode of catechesis from Trent down to Vatican II; indeed, a catechism approach of memorized formulas of belief is still much in vogue in many parts of the Church today.

Including but reaching beyond belief, Vatican II proposed a holistic understanding of faith that is to engage the whole person, head, heart and hands, shaping our beliefs indeed and then our spirituality and daily praxis of faith as well, now to be lived out in synodality with all Christians. This holistic understanding is epitomized in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*,³ where, citing St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the Council summarized that the purpose of all Christian catechesis is “to bring about the obedience of faith” (16:26). In other words, Christian faith is to be lived and realized in the daily of life, engaging, like its greatest commandment, all of our mind, heart, and strength (*Mk 12:30*).

Let me outline briefly how such holistic faith is to be realized – and thus catechized – in the daily of life and then to imagine how the call to synodality lends a fresh perspective and impetus to catechizing for such faith. I propose that Christians are called to a *living* faith that is *alive*, *lived*, and *lifegiving* – for the per-

¹ XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session (October 2023), (20.6.2023), n. 18, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf> (last consulted 31 December, 2024). (Henceforth referred to as *Instrumentum Laboris*).

² PIUS V, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, James Donovan (Ed.), Lucas Brother, Baltimore 1913, n. 14.

³ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei Verbum*. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, (18.11.1965), n. 5, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 58 (1966) 817-835: 819.

son and for the life of the world. Then, when situated within the horizon of synodality, catechesis for *living* faith, calls for pedagogies that are *communal* in their context, *conversational* in their dynamic, and encourage faith by personal *conviction*.

Alive faith

A Faith that is fresh and vibrant, constantly renewing and deepening, ever reaching into new horizons of faithfulness and holiness of life. *Alive* faith continues to grow and develop across the life-cycle until we finally rest in God. In his conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, Jesus portrayed his Gospel as “living water,” “gushing up to eternal life” (*Jn* 4:10 and 14). Christians must return often to the fresh waters of Jesus’ Gospel and do so in synodality with other Christians in order to journey onward together in a vibrant faith.

Lived faith

From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus repeatedly prioritized *lived* faith as the measure of discipleship. For example, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (*Mt* 7:21). So, not the *confessing* but the *doing* is what realizes Christian faith. Jesus repeated often, in one way or another, “blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (*Lk* 11:28). In an amazing moment when his mother and family came looking for him, fearing for his well-being, Jesus declared that his family now are “those who hear the word of God and live it” (*Lk* 8:21). For Jesus, faith must get done. And surely the most likely way to get it “done” is by walking with others of like faith and commitment – in synodality.

Life-giving faith

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus lived and taught a life-giving faith, a faith that would be salvific and liberating for oneself, for others, and especially for those most in need. Such life-giving faith was best symbolized in his teaching and praxis for the reign of God – the most utopian symbol imaginable. Life giving faith after the way of Jesus must contribute “for the life of the world” (*Jn* 6:51) and promote “life in abundance” for all (*Jn* 10:10). On the ground, this translates into concrete commitments to compassion and social justice, opposing every form of prejudice and discrimination, and caring for our “common home” (Pope Francis). Likewise, such life-giving faith demands deep compassion for the poor, the marginalized, the excluded, the victimized, the hungry, and toward all instances of human suffering. Again, such life-giving faith can only be sustained by walking with others of like commitment.

Community

It is clear from the documents that have emerged since the start of the Church’s four-year program that synodality calls to a deeply communal and bonded faith. In sum, all the baptized are to form Christian communities «who live the closeness of the day-to-day around the Word of God and the Eucharist».⁴

⁴ XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *A Synodal Church in Mission*. Synthesis Report of the First Session (4-29 October 2023), (28.10.2023), n. 8e,

One of the rich fruits – already – from the retrieved emphasis on synodality is «our awareness of our identity as the faithful People of God, within which each is the bearer of a dignity derived from Baptism and each is called to differentiated co-responsibility for the common mission».⁵ Clearly this deepened emphasis on the communal nature of our faith calls for a catechesis that reflects a participatory pedagogy, that actively engages all in the teaching/learning dynamic, nurturing community, and encouraging all to be agents in their life of faith.

Conversation

To pose an approach to catechesis within a paradigm of conversation is to swim against the still high-tide of “teaching as telling.” In many ways, traditional catechesis – at least from Trent to Vatican II – was the epitome of what Paulo Freire would call “banking education,” depositing information in passive receptacles and evaluating on how accurately students can repeat what was taught. A synodal church calls for a pedagogy whose defining paradigm is conversation, in which people are invited to speak their own word and to hear with open hearts the word of others – even if at times with disagreement. A synodal catechesis needs to be a ministry of listening and accompaniment,⁶ – with the listening implying that people be invited to speak and share their own word. We need «authentic listening in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church»,⁷ and to each member personally. Each of us ever has a “word of God” to share; a synodal catechesis must provide a context that prompts and welcomes people to share their faith and opens them to the word of others. This is how we can catechize for a synodal Church.

Conviction

Formation in Christian faith will always require primary socialization into such identity. As the Synthesis summarize, «the first formation takes place in the family»,⁸ and, we can add, followed by enculturation into a Christian community. Yet, ultimately and for maturity of faith, synodality calls for a personally chosen faith. To be convicted in Christian faith is all the more needed in our “secular age.” Nothing less than an owned faith – rather than a simply inherited one – will thrive in our postmodern world and encourage our growth as a synodal community.

For the remainder of this essay, let us imagine the kind of catechesis needed to nurture *living* faith in a *synodal* church. Our growing together in synodality greatly depends on our practice of catechesis, and in particular the pedagogy that we employ in formal instruction. To state the obvious, and ever counting on the grace of God, it is the methodology employed in catechesis that shapes the learning outcome. So how are we to craft our pedagogy toward the learning outcome of *living* faith in a *synodal* Church?

<<https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>> (last consulted 31 December, 2024). (Henceforth referred to as *Synthesis*).

⁵ *Synthesis*, n. 1a.

⁶ Cf. *Synthesis*, n. 16n.

⁷ *Synthesis*, n. 2d.

⁸ *Synthesis*, n. 14c.

I will first outline the catechetical *commitments* needed for such pedagogy and then, final section, the catechetical *practices* to implement it.

3. Catechetical Commitments to Educate for Living Faith in a Synodal Church

What might be the distinguishing commitments of a catechesis that educates people to integrate their lives and their faith into a *living* faith? The more we implement such a pedagogy, the more we will become a synodal church, with all receiving from and contributing to its mission and moving along together.

Let me preface here that I have been working toward such a catechetical approach for more than forty years, and now with renewed impetus from the horizon of the Church as a synodal community. I have written widely about it as a “shared Christian praxis approach” (more friendly as “bringing life to Faith and Faith to life”); it has been implemented in a great variety of cultural contexts, and across the lifespan. I have been informed in its foundations and practices by many scholars of pedagogy, including Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, Angela de Merici and Maria Montessori, and by more contemporary scholars like John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Maxine Greene. I have been further encouraged in this approach by the Church’s renewed consciousness and commitment to synodality; this will require a catechesis that enables people, in communion and conversation, to bring their lives to their Faith and their Faith to their lives.

However, I have also come to recognize that the distinguishing commitments of a *living* faith pedagogy in a *synodal* church are amazingly evident in the teaching praxis of the historical Jesus. Ironically, while the books about *what* Jesus taught could well fill a library, there has been precious little attention to his actual pedagogy – to *how* he taught. Nor did Jesus have a lock-step pedagogy that he used laboriously on every occasion. Yet we can detect a general style of teaching that marked his public ministry. As I outline some eight characteristics of a *living* faith and its *synodal* pedagogy, I will note how its commitments are echoed in the pedagogical praxis of Jesus.

3.1. Create a Welcoming Community

The revived notion of synodality calls for a catechetical community that welcomes and encourages all to be active participants in its pedagogy, teaching and learning together, contributing and receiving according to their personal style of engagement. All must be made to feel included, respected and that their contributions are taken seriously. That we develop the practice of such an inclusive pedagogy, promoting the participation of all, is essential, going forward, for becoming a synodal Church – and this from kindergarten onward!

We surely have a model of such hospitality and inclusion in the pedagogical praxis of Jesus. The most radical symbol of his inclusive community was his table fellowship, with all welcome, even hated tax collectors and public sinners. Then note his outreach to lepers, to the poor, to women, to people considered unclean, even to Roman officials – and the list goes on; all were welcome to hear his Gospel and receive his healing ministry. That such communal catechesis

must begin early, note Jesus' amazing outreach to children, and his frequent cant of "let the children come to me, for the reign of God belongs to such as these" (Mk 10:14). And Jesus fully included children in a culture where they were of the lowest social status, often the victims of harsh physical discipline.

3.2. *Conversation as Primary Mode of Discourse*

Though there is surely place for *presentation* within a synodal pedagogy, the primary paradigm needs to be one of *conversation*, with all the give and take that a good conversation entails. All must feel welcome to join the conversation and to actively participate according to their learning style. Note that the original document that launched the renewed move toward synodality stated that the core intent is «to give voice to the whole people of God».⁹ But it will help people to engage in such conversation if they have been so catechized. Suggesting as much, the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session of General Assembly Synod of October 2023 states the intent of synodality as «to enter into a dynamic of constructive, respectful, and prayerful speaking, listening, and dialogue»¹⁰ – a paradigm of conversation. Pedagogically, a synodal catechesis must encourage conversation within and between participants, with the texts and symbols of Christian faith, and with the cultural world in which they live. A catechetical key to prompting participants to share their insights and wisdom will be to pose questions that elicit as much, and then to ensure that all are heard and taken seriously.

Though we typically image Jesus the Teacher as didactic – simply holding forth – his dominant style was one of conversation, often beginning with a parable from people's everyday lives (in the Synoptics) or an engaging metaphor (in John). Both are ways to engage people to think for themselves, prompting first a kind of inner conversation that would then flow out into the community. Note, too, that he posed direct or indirect questions over 300 times throughout the Gospels. Among the most significant, surely, was his "who do *you* say that I am?" (Mt 16:15), put to disciples on the road to Caesarea Philippi, deeply engaging their emerging faith. Note again, a favored location of Jesus' conversations-in-faith was at the table.

3.3. *Engage Participants' Lives and Interests*

Following on from hospitality and conversation, a pedagogy for *living* faith toward a *synodal* church needs a curriculum that engages people's everyday lives, their interests and concerns, their hopes and dreams, raising up life-centered themes that dispose them to become active participants by engaging their interests. Paulo Freire encouraged such pedagogy as turning people toward their own *realidad* – their situated reality in the world – in order to engage them with a "generative theme," something relevant to their lives. For effective catechesis, it is imperative to stimulate and then engage the felt interests of participants; as

⁹ FRANCIS, *Episcopalis Communio*. Apostolic Constitution on the Synod of Bishops, (15.9.2018), n. 6, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.pdf (last consulted 31 December, 2024).

¹⁰ *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 18.

John Dewey was fond of saying, people learn little for their lives unless they are interested. A synodal pedagogy needs to craft the curriculum to be interesting to people's own lives and for their *living* faith in the world.

Jesus was an amazing example of a pedagogue who engaged people's personal interests. His central theme of the Reign of God was of urgent concern to the people of his time; he regularly aroused such interest by turning them to their daily life in the world. Again, the parables and metaphors are a prime example. Can't you imagine him, some early morning, down by the lakeshore with the people who were sorting fish – the little ones to go back in, the dead ones to the birds, and the good ones to market. Jesus, having observed a while, says, "You know, the reign of God is like people sorting fish" and then, with their interest aroused, he went on to teach them about who will belong – that it is not inevitable, there will be a sorting, etc. And he did likewise by comparing God's reign to women baking bread, a vineyard keeper hiring workers, a farmer sowing seeds, etc., ever encouraging people to live out God's reign in their daily lives.

3.4. *Participants to Share their own Word, To Name their Own Life*

From the beginning and throughout, the pedagogy must invite and welcome people to share their own truth from their daily lives and social situations; here good reflective questions are key. Prompting people to speak their own word, to name their own reality as persons, is the first step, claimed Freire, toward an emancipatory way of knowing. Such inviting to expression is the antithesis of "banking" education – depositing information in passive receptacles. And though a verbal way of sharing may be most typical, participants can do so through any mode of self-expression – art, symbols, writing, etc.

Again, Jesus constantly invited people to recognize their own reality and especially, as noted already, by the parables and metaphors he employed – things they could look through to see and recognize themselves and their lives. He wanted people to recognize what they were doing and what was being done around them – the present praxis of their historical situation. Note, too, how often Jesus posed a question to people who approached him, inviting them to first name their own reality and desire. For example, he asked the blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" – though Jesus surely knew well what he would request. And Bartimaeus expressed his own desire: "Master, I want to see" (Mk 10:51).

3.5. *Critical Reflection on their Life in the World*

If a synodal catechesis is to encourage people to be agents of their faith, they must be encouraged to think for themselves – albeit not by themselves but in community with other Christians and with their shared faith. *Critical* here does not mean negative; from the Greek *krinein* the latter means more to discern than criticize. So being *critical* means to name the issues, to weigh evidence, to consider context, etc. Critical reflection not only asks people what they think but why they think they think that – becoming aware of how their life praxis is greatly shaped by their socio-cultural context. Note, too, that such critical reflection calls for engagement of the whole mind – reason, memory and imagination.

In our postmodern world, with its triumph of reason alone, we typically give it priority, often forgetting what we already know from *memory* or failing to *imagine* new possibilities.

Jesus was a critical (discerning) thinker writ large. He constantly invited people to question their taken-for-granted world and to imagine new possibilities for their life in faith. So much of his pedagogy is epitomized in his repeated “You have heard it said but I say” (Mt 5: 17-48). Indeed, his whole teaching of the Reign of God – and its vision of fullness of life for all – invited participants to deepen their critical reflection on their present reality, and to imagine alternatives. Likewise, his parables often invited people to a reversal in consciousness; so, the Samaritan is the neighbor, the prodigal is welcomed home, Lazarus goes home to God and the rich man to hell, and the list goes on. To say that Jesus encouraged “critical thinking” is an understatement; he demanded it of himself and of his disciples.

3.6. *Persuasive Access to Christian Story and Vision*

The content responsibility of all catechesis is that they render persuasive and ready access to the Christian faith we are to incarnate in daily life. To encourage people’s personal engagement with the tradition it can help to cast it as a grand overarching *narrative* – albeit with lots of dogmas and doctrines, symbols and sacraments etc. within it – that continues to unfold as we live into its vision for our lives. The *Directory for Catechesis* (DC, 2020) overall favors such “narrative language for catechizing,” precisely because it engages the “affective, cognitive, and volitional” of people’s lives.¹¹ So, I propose Story here as a metaphor of the whole corpus of Christian faith as represented by Scripture and Tradition. The Vision, then, entails all that the Story means for and asks of people’s lives toward *living* faith in a *synodal* church. Our catechetical accessing of the Christian Story/Vision should be persuasive, proposing to participants how it has been life-giving across the ages and can still be so for our time.

The heart of Jesus’ public ministry and from the beginning (Mk 1:15) was his proclamation of the Reign of God in the Synoptics and the analogous “light of life” in John; such was the summation of his whole Story/Vision. It was persuasive for people because God’s reign represented hope for the best of everything for everyone, or for life in abundance for all (Jn 10:10), and this as what God desires for humankind. And every aspect or symbol of Jesus’ great Story carried a Vision that invited people to embrace and do God’s will of fullness of life for all now – “on earth as it is in heaven.”

3.7. *Invite participants to personally appropriate Christian Story/Vision*

While personal appropriation should be encouraged throughout such catechesis, it is well to have an intentional moment when participants are explicitly invited to discern and make their own what is being taught. This movement echoes Lonergan’s emphasis on *judgment* as essential for authentic cognition. In brief and drawing upon the long history of Catholic epistemology (especially

¹¹ Cf. DC, nn. 207-208.

from Aquinas) Lonergan outlined authentic cognition as a fourfold dynamic, beginning with *attention* to data, moving then to *understanding*, which should then reach on to *judgment* and *decision* (note: so much teaching settles for *understanding*). While this *appropriation* moment echoes Lonergan's third dynamic of judgment, it amounts to participants discerning and appropriating what is being taught - "coming to see for themselves" and "making their own" the gift that Christian faith can be to their lives.

This *appropriating* movement can be as simple as asking participants, according to the Story/Vision presented, "so what is emerging for you now?" or "what are you coming to see for yourself," or "what make sense to you," or "what do you agree with, disagree with, or add to what is emerging." For younger children, questions can be as simple as, "so what did you hear" and "what stood out for you" or "what did you like best from this story and why," or "how might you take it heart, put it to work," etc. The undergirding pedagogy is to invite participants to integrate what they know from reflecting on their own lives-in-the-world with what is presented as Christian Story/Vision, encouraging them to integrate the two sources into their own personally embraced faith.

We can readily recognize Jesus encouraging such personal appropriation of what he was teaching. Rather than having people accept his teaching by authority, he ever desired them to come to "see and hear" for themselves - to make their own - the Story/Vision he was teaching. This is why he could bless those who had the ears to hear and the eyes to see (see *Mt 13: 16-17*) the truth he was teaching and to embrace it as their own. And that he left people free to follow their own discernment - even, at times, rejecting his teaching - is amply clear. So when a rich young man declined Jesus' invitation to join his company, because "he had many possessions" Jesus let him "go" (*Mt 19: 16-22*). And when many found his teaching too difficult and left his company, Jesus offered the same option to his inner circle of disciples (see *Jn 6: 66-68*).

3.8. *Invite to personal decision*

Corresponding to Lonergan's fourth and final move in the dynamics of cognition (i.e., *decision*) and in order to be formative toward *living* faith, every catechetical event should invite participants to *decide* how they are to put their faith to work in their daily lives. The decisions can be: *cognitive* - what they embrace with personal conviction; *affective* - how they feel or might pray about it; or *behavioral* - how they might respond by putting to work as *living* faith. And decisions may well be a combination of all three. While we cannot grade people, if grading be needed (e.g. in a school setting), on their personal outcomes and convictions, we can well evaluate their *understanding* of what has been taught, the discernment with which they *appropriate* the content, and the *responsibility* they take for their decisions - whatever they may be.

We already noted above how Jesus encouraged peoples coming to see for themselves and making the faith their own - all to lead on into the discipleship of *living* faith. Note, too, that when he called people to "come follow me" - his central invite to discipleship - the Greek verb there for "come" - *deute* - is more

of an invitation than a command. While Jesus consistently called people to a *living* faith, the call was ever by invitation.

And a final note on Jesus' pedagogy! Rather than making those pedagogical movements sound unduly laborious – as I might have done above – sometimes Jesus enacted the spirit of such a pedagogy within just one Gospel verse. For example, “Look at the birds of the air (engaging people's everyday lives); they do not reap or sow, or gather into barns (critical reflection); yet your heavenly Father feeds them (faith instruction). Are you not more important than many sparrows?” (invite to see for themselves and decide) (Mt 6:26).

4. Pedagogical Movements of a *Life to Faith to Life* Approach.

Now we must ask, how can such catechetical commitments be enacted consistently as an engaging pedagogy? How are we to translate such dynamics into a catechesis and one likely to educate toward a *living* faith while promoting a *synodal* Church. Echoing the commitments outlined above, I briefly offer here the pedagogical movements that can enact them. Note, too, this whole approach to catechesis is deeply grounded in conversation, with all participating according to their learning style; this is precisely what lends it the potential to encourage a *synodal* Church.

In an actual catechesis, the *life to Faith to life* approach (a.k.a Shared Christian praxis) can be implemented around a *focusing activity* and *five pedagogical movements*. Though the movements can occur, reoccur, combine, overlap, and vary in sequence (as with movements in a symphony), for the sake of clarity I lay them out sequentially here. You will readily note how they implement the commitments outlined above. After summarizing each movement, I will offer one brief example - suggested by my praxis in a parish catechetical program with twelve-year-old students and on the generative theme of “Jesus is our Friend”.

Focusing Activity:

Establish the Catechetical Curriculum around a Life/Faith Theme

Here the intent is twofold: a) to engage people as active participants in the teaching/learning dynamic; and b) to focus them on what for them is a generative theme of life or of life-in-faith, something of real interest and likely to engage because it is significant to their lives in the world.

- Limited to a fifty-five-minute class, we focused the theme and engaged our students by displaying a large image of a very friendly-looking Jesus surrounded by children, and simply said, “Today we will learn about the best friend you will ever have; someone who will always be your friend, no matter what. His name is Jesus”. At least we had their attention and personal interest.

Movement One (M1):

Expressing the Generative Theme in Present Praxis

Here the educator encourages participants to express themselves around the generative theme as realized or experienced in their present lives and situations. They can name what they themselves do or see others doing, their own feelings or thoughts or interpretations, their perceptions of what is going on

around them in their socio-cultural context, etc. - apropos the theme of the occasion.

- With the children, after the poster, we asked, “But first, what does it really mean to be a friend?” We invited them to choose someone they consider to be a good friend and then, taking paper and markers, to draw or represent their good friend. We invited them to share their drawings and to tell the story of their good friend if they wished; many did.

Movement Two (M2):

Reflecting Critically on the Theme of Life/Faith

The intent here is to encourage participants to reflect critically - i.e., with discernment - on the praxis they expressed in M1. As noted, critical reflection can engage reason, memory, imagination, or a combination of them, and can be both personal and socio-cultural. The key here is to encourage in-depth reflection that is shared in conversation as a teaching/learning community. The depth of reflection will depend on the developmental readiness of participants. However, I’ve learned not to underrate the potential of younger children for critical reflection provided it is around “concrete” themes of interest to their lives.

- Here we invited the children to more in-depth reflection with such questions as “What does it mean to be a good friend?” “How do we know when someone is a real friend?” “Why do we need friends in life?” “What are the joys of having a good friend? The demands?” “What makes for a best friend?” And so on. As a transition to Movement 3, we asked, “Have you ever thought of Jesus as a friend?” And added, “What kind of friend would you imagine Jesus might be *for you*?” Again, there was lots of sharing in conversation.

Movement Three (M3):

Accessing Christian Story and Vision

Here the pedagogical task is to teach persuasively the Christian Story/Vision around the generative theme of the occasion and this toward encouraging the participants in *living* faith within a *synodal* Church. They should have ready access to the truths, values, and spiritual wisdom of Christian faith around the theme - its Story - and how such faith is relevant to their lives and to be lived now, the Christian Vision.

- We gathered the children in a circle and told the story of Jesus’ special outreach and welcome for children. As found repeatedly in all three Synoptic Gospels, we painted a word picture and invited the children to imagine the scene: of parents trying to push their children through a huge crowd to get a blessing from Jesus, the disciples holding them back, but Jesus objecting with “let the children come to me.” Jesus then explained that theirs is the very reign of God, and encouraged the adults to become more childlike if they are to belong as well. As a sign of his loving care for them, Jesus embraced and blest the children (the Story). We reflected further on the kind of friend Jesus could be for them now, and what it asks of them to be a friend of Jesus (the Vision).

***Movement Four (M4):
Appropriating Christian Faith to Life***

M4 begins the move back to life, focusing precisely now on what students can learn *from* or learn *into* of Christian faith. The reflective pedagogy of M4 is to encourage participants to discern for themselves what this aspect of Christian faith might mean for their everyday lives and according to their own context and perspectives.

- With the children we engaged in conversation around questions that encouraged their own appropriation and “to see” for themselves. We asked, “So what do *you* think? Can Jesus really be your friend? What does that tell you about Jesus? About yourself? What are some of the challenges in being a friend to Jesus? How might you show that you are Jesus’ friend?”

***Movement Five (M5):
Making Decisions for Living Christian Faith***

Here participants are invited to discern and make decisions about the accessed truths, values, and spiritual wisdom of Christian faith, being encouraged to discern its meaning and embrace it as their own. Decisions can be cognitive, affective, or behavioral, shaping what people believe, how they might relate with God or others, or the values they want to embrace and live by. The hoped-for learning outcome will be the participants’ commitment to *living* Christian faith and working toward a *synodal* church.

- With the children we invited them to make a decision and to write it in their notebooks of “One thing I will try to do this week to show that I’m a friend of Jesus.” We welcomed them, as comfortable, to share their decisions. Many did.

In conclusion

I note briefly that this *life to Faith to life* approach has been well endorsed by the *Catechetical Directories* that have been issued by the Church since the Second Vatican Council. Since Vatican II it seems that the Church has been moving toward a participatory catechesis that encourages the integration of life and faith into *living* faith. I believe a *life to Faith to life* approach to catechesis outlined here is now the horizon for the whole Church and that such a participatory and conversational pedagogy is the most likely, by God’s grace, to educate for a *living* faith in a *synodal* Church.

Il futuro della catechesi. Per vivere la fede in una Chiesa Sinodale.

► SOMMARIO

Questo contributo ispirato dall'esperienza del Sinodo sulla sinodalità cerca di tracciare il futuro della prassi della catechesi, tenendo il passo con le dinamiche della fede viva, della fede vissuta e della fede vivificante. Elabora l'impegno catechetico di educare alla fede viva e sui movimenti pedagogici correlati a un approccio Vita alla fede alla vita, in una Chiesa sinodale.

► PAROLE CHIAVE

Comunità partecipativa; Fede vissuta; Fede viva; Fede vivificante;
Prassi cristiana condivisa; Sinodalità.

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