Toward an Adult Church

A Vision of Faith Formation

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✣ Part Three ✣

Adult Formation in the Faith Community

There once was an old monk, wise and holy, who lived in a monastery set far back in the woods. In addition to being wise and holy, the monk was also considered to be somewhat scattered as he would often go wandering off into the woods and not return when he was expected. His neglect of meals troubled the prior, his neglect of community prayer scandalized some of the brothers, and his neglect of visitors who had come to see him irritated the guest master.

And so it was that one day, after being reminded that he had visitors coming mid-afternoon, the old monk headed off into the woods and did not return in time for his guests' arrival. After waiting for several hours, the visitors decided to walk into the woods themselves in search of the wise and holy monk. They wandered deeper and deeper into the woods. As the light began to fade, they realized that they were lost. In a panic they began to search in earnest, calling the monk's name. Finally, as darkness descended, one of the group stumbled over something and

looked down to find the monk curled up under a tree asleep. "We found you!" they exclaimed. "Wonderful! Now you can show us the way out." Getting to his feet the monk replied, "Ah . . . that is a problem. You see, I know many ways into the woods but I am never sure how to get out. If we work together, perhaps together we can find a way out!"

In many ways, Parts One and Two of this book have brought us "deeper into the woods" of what it means to be and to form an adult church. It is with Part Three that I propose a sense of direction for how "perhaps, together we can find our way out."

Gathering the insights from the first parts of this book, Chapter 5 sets out some of the core principles for bringing adult faith formation to life in the parish context. It begins by recognizing the necessity of stepping back from the desire to move too quickly in designing a program or approach. The tendency of many religious education practitioners to look immediately for the program (and often for the textbook or publisher's package) that will address their concerns is problematic, particularly when we are speaking of the paradigmatic shift that is at the heart of the discussion here. Instead it is essential that a parish team or pastoral staff articulate the core vision that guides the faith formation activity of the parish and then name how it will be shaped. From the vision come *presumptions* (principles or guidelines that guide the decision making in planning, implementing, and evaluating the faith formation efforts) and the proposal for *structures* (elements of parish life that contribute

to the work of creating a learning community and an evangelizing community). These serve as a firm foundation for creating a program that can respond effectively and integrally to the demands and needs of the adult faith community.

As we think about making the fundamental shift from a children- and youth-based to an adult-based focus, the task can appear, and then become, overwhelming. Where do we begin? How do we get started? These are regular and important questions that arise when parish religious educators gather to speak about giving life to an integrated parish-wide vision of adult faith formation. While the best place to begin flows from the life and issues of the parish, my proposal is that addressing the approach to ministry formation is one fortuitous starting point.

In Chapter 6 I propose a model for catechist formation that is reflective of adult faith theory and is designed to help catechists at all levels—adults, youth and children—to situate their work in the sustaining and life-giving context of the Church's mission. To effectively facilitate a significant shift as is proposed in this book, parish leadership needs to engage in the process with an awareness of the dynamics of institutional change. Resources from business, filtered through the lens of a Christian theological perspective, provide some helpful insights. This is the focus for Chapter 7.

Just as the old monk had discovered that there were many paths that led deeper into the woods, it is clear that there are many paths leading out. These chapters serve to provide some signposts for the hike.

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Adult Formation: From Vision to Presumptions to Structures

In an interesting and helpful little book on leadership, Bernie Swain introduces the distinction between "reform" and "renewal."[1] Reform has to do with the structures and external expressions; renewal has to do with conversion. Swain proposes that the work of leadership is to bring reform and renewal together by entering into a three-step process: (1) name the new vision; (2) allow a lengthy period in order to give people the opportunity to explore the rationale for the change, provide opportunity for people to gain the skills and perspective necessary to implement the change, and establish the structures that make the change viable; (3) introduce the reform that gives expression to the renewal. Swain argues convincingly that in the immediate aftermath of Vatican Council II, reform took place without the support of renewal.

Here is an example of reform without renewal. When I was living in Minnesota, the town's commitment to recycling went

beyond vague encouragement to the very pragmatic reality that the city required that I buy specially marked bags for my nonrecycled trash. Since recycling entailed no additional cost, I quickly mastered the process because it was financially expedient. Reform had taken place. But, a move to Boston brought a nearby "dumpster," which meant that there was no immediate advantage to recycling. In fact, recycling required that I haul the cans and bottles and papers to a neighborhood center about two blocks away. I returned to a single pail and abandoned the reform.[2] The disadvantage of reform without renewal is clear: The most minor of challenges can derail the best of reforms. Without the conviction and structures that are brought about by renewal, reform has hardly a chance.

I generally concur with the adage that doing something—no matter how small—is better than doing nothing at all. However, when a parish is attempting to give expression to a vision of adult faith formation that genuinely challenges the dominant child-centered view, it is important that a solid foundation be established before programs are initiated. That is, it is essential that reform and renewal go together. Three scenarios highlight some of the issues that arise when we move too quickly to programs.

> *St. Agnes' Parish:* A couple of years ago the director of religious education (DRE) attended a workshop on adult catechesis. Excited and energized by it, she took the opportunity at the next parish staff meeting to speak enthusiastically about the call to adult faith formation. She was ready to put something into place; the rest of the pastoral team, though somewhat less eager, agreed that something should be done. With this encouragement, she set about planning an extensive program including speakers, retreats, and opportunities for Bible study. While advertising was fairly good, few people

attended the first two sessions; no one else from the staff participated. Without realizing it, the youth minister planned a meeting of parents and mentors at the same time as the third session. The retreat was canceled for lack of participants; the Bible study never got started. The DRE was really disappointed with the lack of response and put all her energy back into the program for children and youth.

These days, when anyone speaks of adult faith formation or invites her into conversation about *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*,[3] the DRE is a reluctant participant. "We tried that," she says. "People here at St. Agnes really don't care about adult programs."

St. Bartholomew's Parish: The DRE and three members of the faith formation committee from St. Bartholomew set about putting into place an opportunity for adult formation. They used as their model a process that had been going well for several years in a neighboring parish, St. Dennis. After attending a couple sessions at St. Dennis, they initiated the program at St. Bartholomew, following the schedule and format just as the other parish had designed it. After the first session, a couple of people voiced dissatisfaction with the schedule, which allowed about twenty minutes for the presentation and an equal amount for small group discussion: they didn't like small group discussion. The folks at St. Bartholomew began to change the schedule without reflecting on the rationale for the original format. By the end of the first year the program consisted of an hour lecture and a brief question-and-answer time where almost no one raised a question. The DRE and committee at St. Bartholomew's were not sure why, but the program didn't seem to have the same energy that it had at St. Dennis.

St. Columba's Parish: The parish staff had been discussing the vision and core presumptions of adult faith formation for a year. Many of the members had gone to a workshop together and came back energized. As they sat down to plan the adult component for the following year, they had before them the structure that had been in place for years—weekly sessions of about an hour with children in groups of about fifteen with one or two adults. They took that structure as given and then began adding elements that they hoped would give life to the vision of adult catechesis. Unfortunately, once the children and youth were assigned space, there really wasn't any good place for adults to meet. And many of the people who would be interested in opportunities for adult faith conversations were already involved in the catechesis of children and youth, and so would not be available for a program built around the present structure. In the end, some new initiatives were put in place, but the sense of an integrated lifelong process that the staff had envisioned didn't come about.

Each of these scenarios points to the difficulties of giving expression to a new vision of faith formation. In each case, some element of the relationship between reform and renewal was in need of further attention. Reform and renewal come together in the movement from articulating vision to naming presumptions to establishing structures and only then initiating programs.

ESTABLISHING A FIRM FOUNDATION

As we move into the discussion of the process for giving expression to a renewed vision of catechesis, two observations serve as helpful prelude. First, catechetical leaders at both the parish and diocesan levels have become accustomed to thinking of changes in catechesis in terms of textbooks and publishers' resources. A group of catechetical leaders exploring together a framework for an alternative way of imagining the catechetical endeavor, almost inevitably have as their first question: "What series do you use?" While the contribution of publishers to the life of the Church and to the work of catechesis is significant, there is a growing recognition that what happens in parishes needs to flow from and respond to the needs of the particular faith community. The role of the publishers is not so much to provide the complete program as it is to set out the best resources and multiple models for adapting the materials to the needs and direction of a specific parish.

The second comment is a corollary of the first: The effective implementation of any catechetical process requires a clear articulation of the strengths and challenges of the parish. An approach that is effective in one setting may not be in another. At the same time, the more that catechetical leaders from various settings gather to discuss models or concepts that have worked for them, the more enriched become everyone's images of what can be done.

With this in mind, we can begin to examine more closely the movement from vision to presumption to structures to program. Like the tip of an iceberg, the program is the element that is visible, that can be appreciated and evaluated by the parish membership; it is within the program that the hard work and careful thought of the parish staff is made evident. However, the viability and effectiveness of planning and implementing a program is dependent upon the often more time-consuming work of articulating a vision, naming the presumptions, and examining the existing structures. Each of the experiences in the parishes described above fell short of the potential because some dimension of establishing the foundation was neglected.

Articulating a Clear Vision

In an article examining the process of change within women's religious communities, Donna Markham writes that leadership begins by tapping into the most deeply held values of the group. Reminding ourselves of the core values—Gospel values—serves to inspire a reimagining of the future and the development of vision. This is the source from which a bold vision can emerge. Markham writes that the role of leaders is this: "Articulate a bold vision and communicate it repeatedly. Such vision must be magnetic and possible. It must inspire and call forth our [faith community's] 'best self.'"[4]

The DRE at St. Agnes entered into the conversation with the rest of the staff with only a sense of the vision that she was following; it was the vision that had been articulated at the workshop, perhaps, but it was not made concrete by the DRE or by anyone else in the parish. Without allowing time for the staff to enter into extended conversation about the place of adult faith formation in the life of the parish and to articulate and "own" a common vision, the DRE is left to "go it alone." This often means that adult faith formation is at the periphery of parish life. In addition, the lack of clear connection between the vision and the program easily led to discouragement when the program didn't go as well as hoped, and to a certain resignation: we tried it and it didn't work.

Naming the Presumptions

While a vision is an essential starting point, it is designed to set out the big picture and the deepest hopes of the participants. Vision statements, when they are reflective of the members' val-

ues, are hard to disagree with—they sound and "feel" right. But the vision statement is not designed to serve as an immediate guide for program planning; it is the point of reference, a touchstone of authenticity to which the participants rally. While naming the vision is essential, it is also necessary to draw out the implications of the vision—implications that will serve as the guiding presumptions for establishing the structures and planning the program. It is here that the way in which the vision will come to expression in this particular context is made clear.

What are the presumptions that sit behind the vision for how the future of the catechetical endeavor can unfold? They are the answers we give to these questions in light of the vision: Who is involved? What are we trying to accomplish? How could we or ought we do it? Why should it be done this way? They serve to make clear the implications of the vision statement; until care is taken to set out the core presumptions, the vision's full impact is often unclear. The presumptions for a parish process of faith formation make explicit the guiding principles for the place and shape that it is going to take in the life of the parish. They serve as the basic operating guidelines that play a significant role in determining the way in which time and energy and funds are expended.

All programs are built on certain presumptions; many times these are unnamed and tacitly held. An example clarifies the nature of presumptions and their relationship to the program. Here we can work backward from an existing program and talk about the presumptions that are inherent to it.

Imagine the standard religious education program in a fairly large parish. Besides the pastor and an associate who also works in the chancery, there are a full-time DRE, a part-time youth minister, and a part-part-time person who works with the preschool program. The DRE understands her responsibilities as coordinating the religious education of first graders through adults and working closely with the youth minister on catechesis for high school students. However, if you were to analyze an average week, about 80 percent of her time and creative energy is spent in supporting the programs for children and youth.

It's a good program, well organized and coherent. Children meet in peer groups during the break between liturgies on Sunday as well as on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. They meet in groups of seven or eight children that have been carefully arranged by schools/neighborhoods so that the kids know one another. The series they use is good; one of the reasons it was chosen was the "home activity" sheets that go home with the kids at the beginning of each unit. These sheets give the parents a summary of the unit's lessons and some suggestions about how to work with the central themes at home. The question of whether the sheets are used at home can't be answered. While the DRE had hoped to meet with the parents at the beginning of the year, the meeting didn't work out, so the sheets came home without any preparation of the adults.

The sacrament programs—formation for Penance, Confirmation, and Eucharist—have been given a good deal of attention over the years. They are model programs involving lots of people and with high expectations for the parents. Parents meet monthly for talks on the theme that their children will be studying, and are expected to complete a book at home with them, one chapter a month. There is engagement with the rest of the parish as "prayer partners" for those preparing for sacraments. This is really seen as the core of the program.

Most of the programming for the adults is either periodic in nature or addressed to the formation for ministries. A couple of times a year, a speaker is brought in to address a particularly relevant topic; few people generally attend these sessions. The formation process for ministry attends primarily to the practical elements, with some comments on the place of this work in the life of the Church. As far as adults are concerned, by far the most energy and time goes into the work with parents in sacramental formation.

Even if they did not list their presumptions, we can look at the program and name some of the core ones. These would include:

- The primary focus of religious education is the children and youth, with particular attention given to sacramental formation.
- Children and youth learn best about their faith in peer groups with complementary work done at home with families.
- Families/Parents play a significant role in helping to form children preparing for celebration of first sacraments.
- The primary mode of adult formation is related to adults in their role as parents.

In the process of articulating the presumptions that follow from a newly named vision, it is helpful to begin by considering those that are operative in the present program. Bringing those to light provides clarity to the nature and role of presumptions, and gives a starting point for naming the ones that are more reflective of the vision. In looking at the present ones, we can ask: What presumptions that presently shape the way in which faith formation is done are challenged by the newly articulated vision? Which presumptions are not in keeping with the self-named vision and therefore need to be reconsidered or jettisoned? And which ones are consistent with it and therefore need to be attended to and fostered?

The presumptions, when clearly articulated and carefully modified in the interplay of vision and experience, serve as an important resource in the unfolding of the faith formation process. They act as the criteria for planning, evaluating, and adjusting the parish program.

While change and adjustments in programs are inherent to a living, vibrant process, having a clear sense of the presumptions for the core elements of the program allows the leaders to make changes without losing track of the vision. At St. Bartholomew the lack of clarity and conviction about the core presumptions of the process—in that case that adults learn best in sustained conversation with other adults—led to changes that actually worked against the articulated vision.

Examining Structures

Once the presumptions are named and affirmed by those involved, particularly the wider parish leadership, the next move is to look at the structures within the parish that would support giving expression to the vision and presumptions. By structure, I am referring to two different though related dynamics in the life of the parish.

The first set of issues relates to how the life of the parish is structured. Here we ask about the way in which various elements of parish life are or could be in relationship with one another: What is the web of communication and interaction in the parish community? How does the pastoral team or staff support each other in the various parish activities? What is the relationship between those involved in liturgy and those involved in catechesis? How do the social committee and the social justice committee engage in conversation with one another? Where and how do adults already gather for conversation within the dynamics of parish life? In essence, all of these questions are asking about the structure and dynamics of relationships within the parish that contribute to the vision and reflect the presumptions set out.

A second set of issues involves looking more specifically at the parish's catechetical program and asking questions about what structures control the direction in which the parish moves in giving life to the vision. Here I am thinking of structure in terms of time and place. Does the scheduling of meetings and children's classes afford the optimum opportunity for adults to gather? Does it make clear the fundamental connection of faith

formation to the life and vitality of the parish? Does it give enough time for genuine conversation? How do the facilities affect the way in which the presumptions will be given expression?

St. Columba's had started off well by investing time and energy in talking about the vision and naming some of the presumptions that flowed from the vision. But they didn't step back to look at the structures that were already present in the parish and to evaluate them against the vision and presumptions. The structures in place for children simply could not support the work with adults. The result was a solid vision but no structures to support the program.

Before looking briefly at program, it is important to note that when we examine structures and programs we need to do so with an eye toward "holding on and letting go." That is, we must hold on to those elements that are in keeping with the vision statement and support the presumptions that have been articulated while letting go of those that are not.[5] Without "letting go" of elements that are not in support of the vision and presumptions, mind-sets and approaches that are contrary to the hoped for movement of the parish are not challenged. In addition, by not attending to the movement of holding on and letting go, there is a tendency to simply add more things: Bible study and couples' groups and periodic lecture series. Adding these without examining the structure and presumptions behind them leads to an accumulation of disparate activities and the dissipation of the energy of the leadership. And finally, without "holding on" it is possible to miss some of the ways in which the parish is already working toward this vision. Holding on and enhancing the appropriate elements of the catechetical work of the church gives the opportunity to establish additional and potentially more effective structures of relationship within the parish: How does the process of Christian initiation of adults fit in with the ongoing program of adult formation? How can the post-Confirmation youth support the faith growth of the junior high group? How are the sacramental formation programs for parents genuinely experiences of adult faith formation? A careful consideration of these kinds of questions serves as a solid foundation for establishing an integrated, coherent, and unified experience of faith formation for all members of the parish community.

Initiating the Program

As was discussed in Chapter 4, the call for adult faith formation that we find in Church documents is not simply a call for more individual programs for adults, but an affirmation of the creation of learning communities. So even as we speak about initiating programs, it is essential that the wider view of forming an evangelizing community be maintained.

We can think of the planning process as having two core elements: remote and immediate. The remote planning consists of naming or establishing the needed structures, determining the specific format of the sessions, and defining their focus and direction. It is in the process of remote planning that the people who are working with the program—catechists, facilitators, and so on—are gathered and formed into a sense of their identity and place in the life of the community.[6] It is also often in this context that more communication with the wider parish community takes place. While invited into the process at every level, it is as the program takes shape that people are given further information and called to active participation.

Immediate planning centers on attending to the details that are in service to the smooth and hospitable experience of a particular session. We can think of this part of the planning process as similar to the role that a host plays in giving a dinner party.[7] The host plans the menu in light of the needs and preferences of those invited; she prepares the food and the environment in a way that is aesthetically pleasing; and she plans the evening with the understanding that the conversations that

ensue must be allowed to unfold on their own without undue direction from her. In a similar way, the person directing a program plans the evening so that the issues and experiences of the participants are brought into dialog with the sessions topic and direction; she arranges the environment to enhance the dynamics of the evening; and she recognizes that the multilayered conversation that defines the movement of the evening will unfold in ways she can't even imagine.

A PROPOSAL: VISION AND PRESUMPTIONS

In many ways the strengths and resources of the particular parish fundamentally determine the structure and program. The availability of a parish center where people can gather in small groups; a close sense of neighborhood with small communities naturally gathering around shared interests; a nearby Catholic college or university from which to draw speakers and teachers; the financial ability to purchase published resources: the presence (or absence) of these structural realities influence the direction a parish takes as it moves from structures to program.

When we look at the process for determining vision and presumptions, however, it becomes clear that these are not simply determined by a parish in relative isolation. They emerge from the dynamic interaction of many perspectives including the overall vision of the parish, the goal of catechesis as understood both locally and in the wider context of ecclesial documents, the understanding of faith development, adult education theory, and, most centrally, the mission of the Church. So while program and structure are appropriately determined at a parish level, the defining of presumptions and vision, while taking place within the parish, must reflect an awareness of the broader context.

In many ways the first four chapters of this book are about defining the broader context within which a parish's catechetical

vision and presumptions are defined. With those as the backdrop, let me here propose elements of a vision as well as a series of presumptions that can serve as a starting point for the further conversation and refinement that need to take place at the parish level.

Elements of a Vision

At its most integral, adult catechesis provides participants with the means and perspectives that allow them to give expression to their baptism through engagement with the mission of evangelization. While we want and encourage an active sense of membership expressed in service to the community of faith, ultimately, the Church is gathered to be sent, and the most important expression of the reality of the Church is its commitment to transform the world in light of the reign of God. So, a vision statement for catechesis has as its central point of departure the mission of the Church that is to proclaim the reign of God: the reality of God's action in human history. This is at the heart of the common call to be an evangelizing community.[8]

Rooted in baptism, the work of evangelization is grounded in the person's relationship to Jesus Christ. "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ" (*GDC* 80).[9] While personal in nature, the relationship with Jesus is not individual: We are called into communion with Jesus Christ in the context of the community of faith. It is within the faith community that each person's relationship with Jesus is defined and strengthened. So a vision statement also includes this fundamental alliance between personal faith and the faith of the community. It is within the context of the community of faith that each of us receives and gives expression to the call to be evangelizers

In light of this, a proposed vision statement might begin: "Catechesis challenges, prepares, and motivates the full commu-

nity of faith to give expression to the relationship to Jesus Christ in active engagement with the Church's mission of evangelization." This is a formidable vision, no doubt, but one worthy of our best efforts and our best resources, for nothing less than the fulfillment of the Church's identity and the effective proclamation of the liberating work of God in Jesus Christ is in play.

Proposed Presumptions

The fundamental elements of the vision provide a starting point. A series of five presumptions serves to draw out its pastoral implications.[10] While we can point to each of these as separate statements, they are in fact essentially connected, sharing as they do the common root of the articulated vision.

1. *The call for renewed attention to adult faith formation is not primarily about establishing new programs but about gaining a new perspective on the life of the parish.*

While freeing the leadership from the immediate task of defining and implementing yet another program, this presumption points to the more challenging task of becoming a learning community.[11] It is in the context of a learning community that people continue to grow in their faith and that the ability to be an evangelizing community is enhanced.

A learning community means that learning is taking place at all levels of the parish—individuals, members of committees or groups of ministers, and the community as a whole. The task of leadership is not to generate more programs but to contribute to an environment that supports the learning of all. Unless each person within a parish is committed to learning, no program of adult formation for parish or committees will really work.

A learning community provides the space and setting in which critical reflection can take place. This involves a level of engagement with our experiences that goes beyond automatic processing to a genuine reflection on what is happening, on why it is happening, and on the implications for the future being created in the present. The process of critical reflection is complex and multilayered.[12] It is not often supported by a fast-paced culture in which everything is presented in sound bites and bulleted lists. Leadership within a learning community invites and indeed challenges all its members to engage in this at times difficult activity by working to establish an environment that allows for quiet reflection and critical conversation.

2. *Learning takes place not simply under the auspices of religious education; learning takes place in the very life and rhythm of the parish.*

All elements of the life of the parish have the potential to invite people into critical reflection. One of the core tenets of a learning community is recognition of the essential interconnection of the various elements of parish life. In discussing the nature of learning, Hawkins writes:

> Learning is comprehensive because everything the church does offers an opportunity for people to name their experiences, to recognize their assumptive frameworks and to make choices about what they know and how they know it. Teaching and learning are not limited to a single church subsystem called religious education.[13]

The more clearly we recognize and embrace the multiple ways in which people and communities grow in faith, the more effective our work will be.

But it is more than simply a pragmatic issue. The separation of catechesis from other elements of parish life—liturgy, social justice, school, and youth ministry—is simply untenable in this context. The *General Directory for Catechesis* makes clear that the cooperation and coordination of ministries of faith formation is not simply for efficiency, but is itself a witness of the call for unity and has an effect on the Church's ability to evangelize.[14]

Recognizing and fostering the fundamental interconnection of all the ways in which adults, youth, and children grow in their faith is an essential presumption for giving life to the vision of catechesis set out here.

3. *Learning as transformation is at the heart of the adult faith formation enterprise.*

At the heart of adult learning is transformative learning. As Mezirow makes clear, transformative learning involves looking closely at what we believe and think and feel in order to critically examine the assumptions that guide us. Transformative learning involves us in critical reflection not only on our experiences but also on the presumptions that shape the way in which we interpret and understand these experiences.[15]

A meeting of catechists may have as its focus the faith development of children and youth. A clear presentation contributes to the participants' knowledge of the tradition (information) and connection with the beliefs of the wider community (formation). There might even be a conversation among the catechists that explores the implications of this for how and what the catechists teach. But unless there is some means by which the adults are invited to examine their own beliefs, to gain insight into why they hold those beliefs, and to recognize the connection between this teaching and their lives as Christians, then this meeting of adults does not reflect this core presumption.

4. *Adults learn best when they are in conversation with other adults about things that matter.*

Sustained, critical conversation is at the heart of adult learning because it is essential for transformative learning.[16] At a fundamental level, I believe that providing adults with the opportunity to be in extended conversation about that which is of real consequence to them is the single most important contributor to effective and transformative learning.

Two key elements are needed for sustained critical conversation: effective questions and sufficient time. One of the most challenging aspects of facilitating good, critical conversation is finding the questions that will invite participants into the multilayer conversation—conversation with their own presumptions, memories, and experiences, conversation with the tradition, conversation with other believers, and conversation with the future. The questions must invite participants into the exploration of the intersection of faith and life: faith and their lives, and the lives of their families and friends. That intersection is the focus of all of those multiple layers of conversation within the context of adult faith formation. While there is a tendency to gravitate to ecclesiocentric questions, the lines of inquiry that open up that intersection and invite people in are those that engage the experience of God's presence in their day-to-day lives. Instead of "What is your clearest memory of the sacrament of Reconciliation?" let me propose, "Reflect on a time of gracious forgiveness: either a time you forgave someone when it was really difficult to forgive or a time you were forgiven when you weren't really sure you were going to be. What feelings or thoughts were (or are) part of that experience for you? After taking time to remember that experience of gracious forgiveness, name one or two insights into the nature of forgiveness that you glean from this memory." Or rather than beginning the lector workshop with, "What characteristics does an effective lector need to possess?" we could begin with, "Who has been the best storyteller in your life? Tell us about that person and what made him or her such a great teller of stories." Clearly these types of questions take longer to compose and longer to answer. But they are designed to open up the conversation that brings life and faith into dialog.

The second essential element for effective sustained, critical conversation is sufficient time. Too often the "discussion time" gets shortened if or when a program starts late or a presenter goes on longer than expected. No strict formula of time distri-

bution is going to guarantee effective adult formation or sustained conversation; however, it seems helpful to propose an overall division of one-third prayer and reflection, one-third presentation, and one-third conversation among participants. While no one session might reflect this time distribution, this can be helpfully applied to the program as a whole (e.g., the multiple meetings one has with parents involved in sacramental formation, the gathering of catechists over the course of a year). In whatever way it is facilitated, making a substantial time commitment to conversation is essential.

5. *Effective faith formation takes place in a just and hospitable space where the wisdom of all the participants is recognized and affirmed.*

Catechetical theorists like Jack Seymour, Parker Palmer, and Mary Elizabeth Moore speak of the need to create hospitable spaces where we are welcomed and heard. The term space is used in both a literal and metaphorical sense.

In speaking about adult faith formation, the hospitality of the literal space is reflected in the comfort of the surroundings, and the care given to the environment. The arrangement of the chairs serves as an important signal to the "feel" of the space and the kind of interactions that it will support. The open area within a circle of chairs speaks to the place where the thoughts and ideas of the participants can meet and mix and be received and challenged. No such open area exists in a room with rows of chairs arranged facing the podium. In addition, the presence of works of art, plants, beautiful fabric and so forth, speaks volumes for the respect that the catechist has for the participants: It is saying that you and our time together are worth the effort. Being invited into a space that has been arranged with care is an invitation into hospitality.

Speaking metaphorically, a hospitable space is marked by a spirit of mutual respect and trust. Palmer writes: "Hospitality

means receiving each other, our struggles, our newborn ideas with openness and care."[17] A hospitable space is a context in which listening and speaking are both seen as active and demanding elements of conversation.[18]

While physically comfortable, aesthetically pleasing, and psychologically safe, a hospitable space doesn't mean that the learning that takes place there is comfortable and pleasing. Just the opposite, in fact. The hospitality of the learning space is essential in order that the difficult and sometimes painful work of learning can take place. Palmer articulates the point in this way:

> Hospitality is not an end in itself. It is offered for the sake of what it can allow, permit, encourage, and yield. A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur—things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. Each of these is essential to obedience to truth. But none of them can happen in an atmosphere where people feel threatened and judged.[19]

Developing this concept of hospitality, Seymour argues that a hospitable space is also a just space, "because it honors the whole presence of each one standing in an intersection."[20] In establishing a hospitable space, the educator makes every effort to acknowledge the influence of power, to attend to the voices of the marginalized, and to recognize and affirm differences of perspective. In doing this, all who are present (and at some level even those who are absent) are recognized and respected—this is at the heart of justice.

Learning communities thrive when the insights, perspectives, and experiences of a broad base of the community are accessed and respected. A spirit of mutuality and collaboration serves as the foundation for this. The community gathers, not divided between "those in the know" and "the folks in the pew,"

but as people who are journeying together toward becoming a more effective evangelizing force. The wisdom of all of the members is essential.

Living into the Named Presumptions

While there are certainly other presumptions that would be worth examining as expressions of the vision named above, and there are certainly other ways to articulate the presumptions I have proposed, this discussion serves as an example of the relationship between vision and presumption. But even when they are named, the process of living into them and embracing the ramifications of the presumptions in a particular setting takes time and openness. Once a parish moves from presumptions to structures and then to program, the work continues as the program is tweaked, the structures are enhanced, and the presumptions are mined for the ongoing challenge they give to the life of the faith community.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

1. In reflecting on the themes examined in the first four chapters of the book, list the central elements that you would want to integrate into a statement of vision for the catechetical work of your parish. In what ways does that complement or challenge the vision (either explicit or tacit) that guides the present model?

2. In thinking of the pairing of renewal with reform as the movement from vision to presumptions to structures to programs, what insight do you gain into the process of creating a new faith formation paradigm? In light of your own experience, what strengths do you bring to this process? What strengths are present within the parish community? In what way is this a challenging process for you? for your parish?

3. Name a commitment or conviction that this chapter has called forth from you. What is the next step that you will take in moving toward an adult Church and an evangelizing community?

NOTES

1. Bernard F. Swain, *Liberating Leadership: Practical Styles for Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).
2. Lest the ecologist among us become unduly distracted by this: I have since experienced renewal and reform and now engage in responsible recycling, and teach my daughters to do the same—thank you, Molly.
3. NCCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (OHWB) (Washington, DC: USCC, 1999).
4. Donna Markham, "Making Friends with the Dragon: Women's Leadership in a Time of Transformation," In *Human Development* 12, Summer (1991): 29.
5. This concept is set out by Maria Harris in *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 176–78. And in many ways that dynamic is at the heart of all creative work of faith. See, for example, the way in which this same dynamic is at the heart of the work of Jeremiah as Walter Brueggemann presents him in *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). My point is this: While the way in which vision setting and planning are described here is practically reasonable, it must also be theologically sound. As we engage in the process of planning, it is essential that it be both pragmatic and reflective of who we understand God to be, who we understand people to be, and the relationship between the two.
6. See the following chapter for a discussion of catechist formation. As that chapter makes clear, this work of forming a community of those who serve as catechists for the parish is an essential dimension of effective catechesis at all levels but especially with adults.
7. I am indebted to Mimi Bitzan for this image. Her role in "hosting" the parish faith formation program at St. Paul's Parish in St. Cloud, Minnesota, from 1991 to 2000 contributed in no small measure to its success.
8. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of evangelization and its implications for how we think about the nature and mission of the Church as well as the task of catechesis.

9. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (*GDC*) (Washington DC: USCC, 1997).
10. I have examined some of these ideas elsewhere. See: "When Is Catechesis of Adults Genuinely Adult?" in *The Living Light* 37, no. 1 (2000).
11. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
12. In discussing the centrality of critical reflection to the process of religious education, Thomas Groome articulates well its complexity. He highlights the essential interconnection of critical reasoning, critical remembering, and critical imagining. He makes clear that there is both a personal and social dimension to these. That is, in critical reasoning I not only ask questions concerning why I think or respond or understand something the way I do. I also reflect on the social realities that support this perspective. Groome makes clear that it is important to take into account this complexity and recognize that many people will be unaccustomed to engaging in this type of reflection. It seems to me important to recognize that preparing catechists and parish leadership to foster and encourage this type of reflection is also a daunting task. (See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 198–208.
13. Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 40.
14. "The coordination of catechesis is not merely a strategic factor, aimed at more effective evangelization, but has a profound theological meaning. Evangelizing activity must be well coordinated because it touches on the *unity of faith*, which sustains all the Church's action" (*GDC* 272).
15. This concept of the centrality of transformative learning to adult education in general and adult faith formation in particular is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The clearest overviews to the fundamental elements of Mezirow's theory can be found in "How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning," in *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1990). "Transformation Theory of Adult Learning," in *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*, ed. Michael Welton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
16. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the role of conversation within a learning community and its place in the process of transformative learning.
17. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 74.
18. In an interesting study on introducing inclusive language into the worship experience in a seminary setting evidence was given of the necessity of having one's experience and feelings truly heard in order for change to take place. In comparing the experience of those who initiated or embraced change and those who resisted change, Coffman found that the most significant factor was whether or not they believed that they had been heard. Coffman writes: "One's feelings however strong or mild must be permitted expression and acknowledgment in such a way that the persons know that they have been heard. In addition the hearing must include the possibility of having one's own position be changed, or at least enriched by new awareness; that is, the act of hearing another's feelings is not merely a perfunctory step to be 'gotten through.'" It is only after being heard and acknowledged that the person can hear and acknowledge the feelings and perspectives of others. (See P. M. Coffman, "Inclusive Language and Perspective Transformation" (paper presented at the 32d Annual Adult Education Research Conference, Norman, OK, 1991). As was explored in Chapter 4, this active listening is essential to transformative learning. I pick up that theme again in Chapter 7 in the discussion of leadership for change.
19. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 74.
20. Jack L. Seymour, Margaret Ann Crain, and Joseph Crockett, *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning, Learning, and Vocation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 91.

6

Forming Catechists for an Adult Church

A day-long workshop on the recently published document *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* set the call for adult faith formation within the context of the mission of the Church: Everything we do is in some way oriented to evangelization and furthering the reign of God. As the workshop continued, the participants—mostly parish catechetical leaders—were invited to name what they saw as the most challenging force working against the implementation of the document's vision for adult faith formation. While reluctant pastors, recalcitrant parish councils, and the reality of their own overextended work commitments were on the list, the comments returned again and again to issues related to the catechists. As the conversation continued, the variety of concerns clustered around two themes. The first was expressed by one of the participants in this way: "The catechists who work with the K–6 program are really pretty good. Most of them are conscientious, I think, about going over the catechist guide in advance and coming in prepared to some degree anyway. But their focus is often quite limited just to the immediate content of the session. They seldom see themselves as part of a

larger activity and certainly don't see themselves within the broader context of evangelization. How do we go about broadening that?"

The second theme concerns those who work with adults and can be expressed this way: "While it is all well and good to speak about the importance of adult faith formation and the centrality of that endeavor for the life of the Church, who do we think is going to do this? Most parishes have few people with experience in adult education; many catechists and catechetical leaders simply take the presumptions and approaches that may have been well honed in their work with children or youth and simply apply them to adults. Where are we going to get the leadership who can engage in genuine adult formation?"

Without being overly simplistic, I believe that the primary response to these concerns is rooted in the way in which catechist formation takes place. If the meetings of the K–6 catechists attend primarily to the process and details of keeping the program moving smoothly—discussing the logistics of an upcoming liturgical event, outlining the lessons that need to be covered over the next several weeks, and strategizing on how best to engage the multiple learning styles of the children, the results will be catechists who attend primarily to the process and content of their part of the program with little motivation or encouragement to see the larger picture. And if the process of catechist formation and the formation of other ministers within the parish is lax in incorporating principles of adult education and transformative learning, it should be of little surprise that the catechists of adults follow the lead of "teaching as they were taught" and neglect to attend to the genuinely *adult* nature of adult faith formation. My conviction is that catechists and others engaged in the catechetical enterprise cannot give expression to what they have not experienced.

Before continuing, I invite you to pause for a moment and reflect on your experience of catechist formation either as a catechist

or a catechetical leader who plans and facilitates the process. Here are some questions to guide your reflection and conversation:

1. If someone from the outside were to analyze the various forms of catechist formation that take place in the course of a year, what conclusion might he or she draw about the goal or focus of such formation?

2. If the formation process of a given year were divided into a time pie using these categories—Prayer and Reflection, Presentation, Structured Conversation, and Other—what would it look like?

3. If someone from the outside were to look at the catechist formation process as an example of adult education, what principles, or presumptions about the nature of adult learning, might he or she draw from that experience?

An examination of two themes defines the flow of this chapter. The first is in response to the question What are the elements of formation that are essential to the ministry of catechist formation? And the second answers the question How do we engage in catechist formation in such a way as to engage the imaginative and transformative learning of the participants? In responding to these questions, a proposal for catechist formation emerges that both forms people for the specific ministry of catechist, and invites them to be participants of an adult, evangelizing community.

FORMATION: DEVELOPMENTAL AND ARTISTIC

In beginning this discussion of catechist formation, some attention to the term *formation* is warranted. The word itself suggests both a developmental and an artistic connotation.[1] On the one hand, to speak of formation is to refer to the way in which it develops or grows over time and the process by which that development is supported. The term *formation* also suggests that one's growth occurs across a variety of dimensions: physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual. Each of these can be used to modify the term *development* and are among the aspects that we might include when we consider what it means "to form disciples" or "to be formed by a community's life and values."

But we can also note that formation suggests an artistic dimension, for "to form" or "to give form" refers us to the artist. The sculptor, for example, helps to give shape to that which is already there, that which is undefined, raw, and open to the process of being formed. The developmental dimension of formation places an emphasis on accruing more insight and becoming more sophisticated in how one interprets the world; it points to a relatively smooth growth over time. This artistic dimension of formation evokes a more intense and often circuitous route. It speaks not so much of a moving forward but of a breaking out and an uncovering.

A theorist who has drawn on this sense of formation in discussing the process of religious education is Maria Harris. In the opening chapters of *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, Harris works with the assorted derivatives of *form*, much as an artist works with clay, to disclose the ways in which the dynamics of education can be perceived as the "fashioning and refashioning of the forms that human life offers, the forms we shape as artists at the same time we allow those forms to shape us."[2] Harris proposes that religious education involves taking the forms of Church life—teaching, proclamation, service, liturgy, and community—and lifting them up as forms through which we are transformed. Catechesis involves us in educating both to these forms and through these forms; we become more of a people of prayer by engaging in prayer, and we are formed into a people of service by engaging in service and allowing that form to transform us.

To engage in "formation" invites us to bring together these two complementary perspectives: the developmental, with its emphasis on the accruing of more insight, more information, even, and the artistic, with its recognition that formation is about embracing our experiences as people of faith and allowing them to form and transform us. At the point of intersection of these perspectives, we find an understanding of formation that is holistic, interdisciplinary, and multifaceted. We recognize it as a complex enterprise that brings into play the many ways in which the catechist is called to engage in the process of catechesis.

The approach that the *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* uses in speaking about catechist[3] formation provides a helpful resource for bringing the two dimensions of formation together. The chapter "Formation for the Service of Catechists" attends with care and detail to the importance of the basic training and ongoing formation of catechists at every level. The writers of the *GDC* make clear the importance of catechist formation: "The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists. Thus the adequate *formation of catechists* cannot be overlooked by concerns such as the updating of texts or the reorganization of catechesis" (234). They go on to assert that catechist formation must be attentive to the broader task of catechesis, that is the overall vision of the catechetical enterprise.

Five "inspiring" criteria of the formation of catechists are listed: (1) The formation of catechists is rooted in the call to evangelization and supports catechists in their sense of faith, their ecclesial identity, and their social sensitivity. (2) It emphasizes the essential connection between instruction and formation. (3) It assists catechists in their ability to articulate Church teaching in an inclusive and evocative way. (4) It recognizes the distinctive contribution of the laity and sets this out as an essential contribution of lay catechists. (5) It follows a pedagogical style that is in keeping with the appropriate pedagogy of catechesis (*GDC* 237). In enumerating these, the writers of the *GDC* make clear the essential connection between the aims and means of catechesis and the aims and means of catechist formation. There is to be a clear connection between the understanding of catechesis and the way catechist formation is planned, structured, and implemented.

In light of this conversation, the dimensions of formation are set out: "being, knowing, and savoir-faire." Let me propose here that the significance of these three elements is not simply that they are areas that need to be addressed in the formation of catechists. They are significant because they point to the very essence of the work of the catechist: the catechist engages in this ministry as person of faith, theologian, and educator. To be a catechist is to draw on who one is, what one believes, and how one engages with others . . . being, knowing, and savoir-faire.

Catechist as Person of Faith: Being

The writers of the *GDC* make clear, and I concur, that the most significant dimension relates to the catechist as person of faith. They write: "The deepest dimension refers to the very being of the catechist, to his [and her] human and Christian dimension. Formation, above all else, must help him [and her] to mature as a person, a believer and as an apostle" (*GDC* 238). Ultimately, it is as a person of faith that we are most effective in our ministry as catechist.

Undergraduate students in a required introductory theology class provide an interesting lens to the catechetical work of the Church. I have taught introductory theology courses in four different settings since 1983, and each time I have taught it, I have asked the students to write a short essay that highlights the experiences that have had a positive influence on their engagement with God or Church or faith as well as those experiences which have had a negative influence. Although the discussion of

negative influences has varied, the descriptions of positive influences share many similarities: in almost all cases, the students make reference to some person (at this age, usually not their parents) whose lived faith had a significant impact on the student's sense of God or Church or what it means to be a believer. While this might have been a catechist or a youth minister, a coach or a teacher, it was seldom *what* they said that influenced the young person; it was *who* they were as people of faith.

One of the stories points clearly to the centrality of the lived faith of those who enhanced the faith life of the young person. It was recounted by a sophomore who wrote about an experience that had happened a few years earlier. For reasons that were not clear in the essay, the student had plagiarized a major paper at the conclusion of her theology class at the end of her junior year in high school. She "borrowed" a paper from a friend who had written it for another teacher a couple of years earlier. The student got caught and the repercussions were significant. But what she remembered most clearly about the event was the compassion and respect with which the theology teacher treated her. In telling the story, the student makes clear that her theology teacher, rooted in her love for the students and her love of her field, was able to challenge this young woman to rethink her priorities and to look into the gifts and abilities that she has. She certainly learned her lesson, one part of which was not to plagiarize! But she learned another lesson as well: She saw modeled in her theology teacher a person of faith who by her actions reflected God's love and forgiveness. It is of little surprise that the student decided to major in secondary education and theology. In reflecting on this account and similar ones received over the years, a connection can be drawn to the concept of "vocation." James Fowler describes vocation in these terms:

> . . . the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership. The shaping of vocation as total response of the self to the address of God involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work and private life, our public life, and of the resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God's purpose in the services of God and the neighbor.[4]

Fowler makes clear that vocation is not to a job or career but to a way of being in the world that is a response to the address of God, to the invitation of partnership with God. This call to partnership permeates all the actions and decisions that a person makes in a day, in a year, in a lifetime.[5] It is in being grounded in this vocation that the catechist is able to live into a sense of her identity and integrity as a person of faith.

Parker Palmer uses those terms—*identity* and *integrity*—in the opening chapter of *The Courage to Teach.* He writes of the interrelationship of identity and integrity and the importance of these elements to an effective teacher. Identity can be understood as the coming together of all of the elements of our lives, as the wholeness of who we are in the variety of settings. Identity, Palmer writes, "is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human."[6] Recognizing the multiple dimensions of who we are and working to keep those in healthful relationship while negotiating the busy intersections of our lives are at the heart of integrity. "*Identity* lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and *integrity* lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death."[7] In ways that connect with Fowler's notion of vocation as an "orchestration" of all that we have, living in integrity involves acknowledging what is the essence of selfhood, and being aware of harmonizing these dimensions in a life-giving way.[8] Palmer proposes that good teaching is not simply about technique; good teaching takes place when it is rooted in the identity and integrity of the teacher.

What does this mean for the catechist and the way we approach catechist formation? The end of this chapter includes

some proposed guidelines for how one plans and implements an integrated process of catechist formation; a few preliminary points can be made here.

At a fundamental level, effective catechist formation begins with the way in which people are invited into the ministry of catechesis. The regular appearance in the Sunday bulletin of the statement "Fifth and sixth grade catechists needed" belies the reality that there is a charism inherent to the work of catechesis and that the gift is not given to everyone. Just as those who are part of the parish's music ministry—whether cantor or musician or choir member—are expected to give evidence of the appropriate musical gifts and talents; just as members of the parish council are recognized by community members as having gifts of leadership: those who are catechists are called forth and recognized because of their gifts. Whether we are thinking of those working with adults or with youth and children, our fundamental sense is that the catechist is one whose faith is clearly expressed and most powerfully fostered in the act of catechesis. In the best expression of this ministry, catechists engage in their ministry not only as a service to the faith community and to the adults or children with whom they work; they are catechists because it is there that their own faith is fostered.

Donna has served as director and primary catechist of the RCIA process in her parish for the past four years. It is a time-consuming task. In talking about her experience, Donna affirms that her ministry as a catechist has been one of the most important means by which her own faith has been fostered. "I love Lent!" she states. "There is something about the intensity with which we study the readings. And the rhythm of prayer and study and ritual. . . . By the time the Triduum comes I am ready to hear again the defining stories of our faith tradition and reaffirm my place in the Christian community." Donna serves in the ministry of the RCIA not only to be of service to the catechumens, candidates, and their sponsors; she serves because it is there that her own faith is fostered.

How different to replace the bulletin announcement "Sixth grade catechist for Monday afternoon classes still needed. Call for more information." with "Invitation to those whose own faith is fostered by sharing it with children and youth and other adults. Come share your gifts and faith with us!" In the context of Palmer's understanding of teaching, a catechist is one whose identity comes to expression in the role of catechist and whose sense of integrity is enhanced by that ministry. Attending to the "being" dimension of the catechist begins with the way in which we invite people to the work.

Part of the invitation also includes a sincere and honest appraisal of the commitment that is being asked for. The tendency to minimize the time, energy, and spirit that are essential to being an effective catechist leads to disappointing results all around: The director or coordinator of religious education is frustrated at the lack of participation in catechists' meetings; the catechist is overwhelmed by her lack of success in the sessions and her feeling of never being quite ready; and every year a new set of catechists has to be found because the turnover rate is so high. It is more effective and engaging to invite catechists into a community of people who gather from time to time for prayer and community, who share in the common mission of catechesis, and whose faith is enriched by the interaction among the catechists and by the engagement with adults, children, or youth in the catechetical enterprise. The catechist formation process should then embody these opportunities.

Catechist as Theologian: "Knowing"

The second dimension of catechist formation is that of "knowing." The writers of the *GDC* set this out as a knowing that is connected to the catechist's commitment to the Christian message and to the human beings involved. The catechist is to have "sufficient knowledge of the message," as well as of those with whom she or he shares the message and "the social context in

which they live" (*GDC* 238). So, catechists are called to know the message and know the people.

As we look at how to integrate this dimension of knowing into the process of catechist formation, two elements seem to be important. First is the conviction that all Christian knowing is for Christian living. For the believer, the Christian story is never simply interesting information; the work of the catechist can never end with the effective transmission of the facts of the Christian story. The knowing must be situated in the *context* of the lives of the learners and support an ever deepening commitment to Jesus Christ expressed in lived Christian faith.

One spring, on the Friday before Holy Week, I was picking up my younger daughter from school (she was in kindergarten at the time). As she got into the car she informed me: "I know what this Sunday is." "Really," I responded. "What is it?" "It's Pompom Sunday!" she replied, quite proud of herself. "Do you mean *Palm* Sunday?" I asked. And with the look that a six year old can give her parent when she is amazed at how little the parent knows, Catie replied: "No, it's Pompom Sunday! Everybody is saying 'Hosanna' and cheering for Jesus and waving their pompoms! We need pompoms to cheer for somebody." She had been to enough college football games to know how to cheer. And that does put a new image on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem! I was right, as I *knew* it was Palm Sunday; but she was right because she *knew* what it means to cheer for Jesus.

On the one hand, the "knowing" that is essential to the work of the catechist is a knowing that keeps at the center the link between faith and life. and It is not simply about information but formation and transformation as well.[9] At the same time, the catechist is called to a "knowing" of Church teaching that is coherent, systematic, and balanced. In some ways, Palmer's notion of identity and integrity can be applied in a broad sense to how a catechist is to approach the Christian tradition. For Palmer, identity and integrity are about keeping in positive relationship

the total experience of our lives—our past, present, and future—and seeing the wholeness as a synthesis of who we are and what serves as a genuine expression of selfhood. It is knowing who we are and who we are becoming in light of who we have been, that serves as the sure grounding for the work of teaching. In a similar way, the catechist's knowing of the Christian tradition requires a similar relationship between past and future. It requires a balance of memory and openness.[10]

As a Church we are rooted in a long and solid tradition—we are a Church that recognizes and affirms a wide range of thinkers and scholars, hermits and mystics. They represent a diverse collection of women and men, sinners and saints, academically formed and self-educated. Particularly in the years following Vatican Council II, those whose ideas, insights, and experiences serve as the foundation of the Christian tradition and the Church's teaching represent a growing diversity of ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds. So when catechists today come to any specific teaching—the humanity and divinity of Jesus, the nature of the Church, an understanding of sacraments, ways of reading Scripture, the elements of Catholic social teaching—they join a large and lively conversation that has been taking place within the Christian community for 2000 years, and that is in continuity with a still longer conversation that we trace back to the call of Abraham. As today's catechists attempt to "know" the Christian tradition in a way that is accessible to them and their students, they do this not only with the insights of today's Church but with a sense of respect for the way in which the Church has given expression to it in the past. We are a people who are rooted in the firm foundation of the past, a people who value and depend on *memory*.

On the other hand, the Church exists not as a past, complete, static reality but as a living, breathing entity located in history, expected to speak in a way that addresses present reality. In addition to memory that holds firmly to the past, we need

openness that allows us to move into the future. As we look at the Church in the present and into the future, we recognize that there are new questions, new experiences, new perspectives that the Church has never had to address. While memory provides an essential framework for responding, without openness to the experience and insights of believers today, that memory runs the risk of being static and sterile.

The challenge is to maintain the balance: Openness without memory leads to a kind of faddishness and a relativity that says that all directions into the future are the same. It is interesting to think about the significant times in the history of the Church as those times in which there was a struggle to sustain the balance between memory and openness. Memory without openness becomes dry and static, a calcified remembrance of a once living church. The balance of memory and openness is at the core of the catechist's "knowing" the Christian message in a way that has the power to transform. Only then can the catechist proclaim it as the transforming Good News for others.

The *GDC* makes clear that it is not simply knowledge of the Church's teachings that suffices when speaking about the "knowing" that is necessary for catechists. The second "knowing" that is central to catechist formation is related to how the catechists understand the learners and their social and cultural contexts. There are multiple dimensions to this discussion of knowing the learner: the social-psychological, where the work of Erik Erikson is so crucial;[11] developmental theorists who build on the thoughts of Jean Piaget;[12] and those who specifically look at faith development with James Fowler as a central voice.[13] In addition, issues of learning style and an awareness of "multiple intelligences" are also important in how we know the learner.[14] A secondary dimension is a cultural one[15]—how does the perspective of the Baby Boomers, the Gen-X'ers or the Millennium Generation shape the way in which the Gospel is proclaimed? What are the characteristics of the postmodern culture

within which catechesis takes place, shapes and forms the catechist as a person of faith and as theologian? When we speak about "knowing," it includes knowing the learners as well.

We return to the question of the implications of this discussion for catechist formation. Some guidelines are examined at the end of this chapter, but two themes seem particularly pertinent to this focus on "knowing."

First, in exploring the way in which the catechist is called to *know the learner*, fostering the awareness of the catechist's own social and moral development is important. Recognizing that teachers often teach to their own dominant style of learning, raising the awareness on the part of each catechist of how he or she learns best and the variety of ways in which other people learn is helpful.[16] Most important, providing a context where the catechists can reflect on their own faith and the way in which it was fostered when they were children, youth, and now as adults is essential to effective catechist formation.

Second, in supporting the catechist in responding to the call to *know the Church's teaching*, the Christian message is presented in a style that moves beyond information and invites the catechist into commitment and conversion. Simply taking a theology course at the local Catholic college does not necessarily suffice for the type of theological foundation that the catechist needs.[17] A model of theological reflection provides an effective approach to enhancing the catechist's theological understanding in a way that will enhance his or her ability to express the Christian message in life and in teaching. In theological reflection the experience of the participants serves as an essential element of the manifestation of God's presence among us. The Christian tradition is understood and appreciated in its ability to illumine, clarify, challenge, and make more accessible these experiences as experiences of God.[18]

What becomes clear from this discussion is that the catechist's growing knowledge of the faith is rooted in the dynamic

relationship between content and process. They cannot be separated. It is specious to propose that the Catholic tradition can be conveyed without carefully thinking about the approach used, or to think that a catechist formation process can spend a certain number of sessions on content and then move on to process. The way in which the Christian message is taught has an impact on both how the catechist comes to understand Church teaching *and* how he or she engages others in coming to new insight about the Christian message and the implications for lived Christian faith.[19] Thus, we turn to the third essential element of catechist formation: savoir-faire.

Catechist as Educator: Savoir-faire

Here the writers of the *GDC* point to the importance of cultivating catechists' "know-how," but this is more than simply teaching a series of effective techniques. The point of intersection between knowing the learner and knowing the Christian story is where the catechist brings into play the skills that allow catechesis to form, inform, and transform. The *GDC* includes the statement: "Formation seeks to mature an education capacity in the catechist which implies: an ability to be attentive to people, an ability to interpret or respond to educational tasks or initiatives in organizing learning activities and the ability of leading a human group toward maturity" (*GDC* 244). Savoir-faire is not about technique in a narrow sense but is a way of talking about the perspective or attitude as well as the ability of the catechist to engage others in conversation about issues of faith: a conversation that is essential for the move toward maturity of faith.

To bring this discussion of savoir-faire to conclusion, three observations are helpful. First, our volunteer catechists do need information in both dimensions of "know-how": knowing the tradition and knowing the learners. Essential are conversations around contemporary notions of ecclesiology, Christology, sacramental theology, and moral theology, as well as Christian anthropology, faith development theory, and fundamental education theory. For example, many of the catechists with whom we work have not had the opportunity to step back to reflect on the anthropology and the understanding of revelation inherent to the catechetical process most series use, which begins with the experience of the learners. Too many catechists do not understand that we connect with the experience of the learners not simply to get their attention or to name issues in their lives where the teaching of the session may apply; we connect with the experience of the learners because we believe that in that experience, God is present and revealed. Explicit formation in this area is important.

Second, in addition to sessions that examine this type of content, it is also essential that new catechists be connected with more experienced and reflective catechists who can serve as mentors. Establishing that relationship gives the new catechist a context for exploring her understanding of the catechetical ministry and her place within it. In addition, the mentoring relationship serves to encourage both parties to be more reflective about their teaching; it provides both with a setting for talking about their own spiritual growth.[20] While the information given to catechists in meetings or in the catechist guide can be helpful and necessary, at the heart of forming effective catechists is the process of learning by doing with reflection and self-evaluation.

Finally, reiterating a point that was made earlier: All catechist formation must be reflective of the core principles of adult catechesis. If the invitation to be a catechist is issued in the terms used above—"Invitation to those whose own faith is fostered by sharing it with children and youth and other adults. Come share your gifts and faith with us!"—then it is incumbent upon the leadership to be sure that the catechist formation engages the faith growth of those involved. A brief examination of the presumptions that I set out in Chapter 5 as implications for catechist formation is helpful.

CATECHIST FORMATION AS ADULT CATECHESIS

1. *The call for renewed attention to adult faith formation is not primarily about establishing new programs but about gaining a new perspective on the life of the parish.*

The invitation in this chapter is not necessarily to do more in the way of catechist formation but to take a perspective on the process that fosters the real growth in faith of the catechists within the parish community. It might be helpful to begin by giving some expression to what you understand the vision and presumptions of the parish process of catechist formation are and what they could be.

Catechist formation shares in the overall movement of catechesis, which has as its focus and charge the formation of an evangelizing community. In many ways the catechists are invited to serve as a central core around which other parts of the parish community connect with the evangelizing work. So the process of forming catechists is first and foremost to form them into an evangelizing community.

The concern raised by the DREs at the opening of this chapter is an important one: how do catechetical leaders energize catechists to see their role and their ministry as part of the larger reality of the Church's mission? To a large degree, the focus and approach to catechist formation serve to define the range of interest of those involved in catechesis. Being intentional about setting the role of the catechist in the wider work of evangelization and seeing catechist formation as formation in service to the mission of the Church and not merely to Church membership are essential to engaging catechists in the wider endeavor.

What impact does it have on the way in which you think of catechist formation if you look at it through the lens of the call to evangelization?

2. *Learning takes place not simply under the auspices of religious education; learning takes place in the very life and rhythm of the parish.*

This presumption, when applied to the work of catechist formation, urges the catechetical leader to look beyond the specifics of a program that he or she may have planned to all of the ways in which the catechists grow in their understanding of the Christian tradition and their commitment of faith. Recognizing and fostering the fundamental interconnection of all the ways in which catechists grow in their faith is an essential presumption for giving life to the vision of catechesis set out here.

In what ways is catechist formation set within the context of the wider parish and all the ways in which parish ministers and all adults are invited to grow in their faith and their understanding of ministry?

3. *Learning as transformation is at the heart of the adult faith formation enterprise.*

With this presumption applied to the work of catechist formation, we move off of a strictly instrumental learning—learning what I need to know to fulfill the job of the catechist—to transformative learning, which involves us in critical reflection not only on our experiences but on the presumptions that shape the way in which we interpret and understand these experiences. While the focus and goal of a particular gathering of catechists may be quite specifically addressed to the smooth operation of the program, how do we do this in such a way as to invite the ongoing transformation of the catechist as a person of faith?

4. *Adults learn best when they are in conversation with other adults about things that matter.*

The two elements that are essential to fulfilling this presumption are the formation of effective, evocative questions and

the structuring of sufficient time for extended conversation. It is essential to remind ourselves repeatedly that the concerns of catechist formation serve as the topic around which we are inviting this group of adults into conversation about things that matter in their lives. At times this is easier to see when we look at formation programs for sacraments. We know that the gathering of parents around themes for first Eucharist has the double focus of acquainting them with the program and inviting them into conversation with other adults. The same dynamics are at play here. While the theme of the catechist meeting may be related to a unit on the Beatitudes or to preparation for Lent, the opening questions are designed to invite the catechists into conversation with the meaning of that theme for their lives as people of faith. Unless the catechists are invited, encouraged, and challenged to reflect critically on their own presumptions and understandings of the significance of an aspect of the Christian tradition for their lives, they cannot facilitate that critical reflection in others. In fact, if they have not done their own critical reflection, they may well discourage it in others as being too challenging and intimidating a task.

In addition to asking effective questions, sustained critical conversation also requires sufficient time. The rhythm that I suggested in the previous chapter—one-third of the time for prayer and reflection, one-third for presentation, and one-third for conversation among participants seems helpful here. The tendency to be highly task oriented tends to lead to a shortening of the first and third elements and an emphasis on the presentation. And with catechist formation that often translates into a series of extended announcements.

In what ways would your model of catechist formation change if you followed the scheduling guideline of one third of the time for each activity—prayer and reflection, presentation, and conversation?

5. *Effective faith formation takes place in a just and hospitable space where the wisdom of all the participants is recognized and affirmed.*

Effective engagement in the central themes of catechist formation—being, knowing, and savoir-faire—requires a space of hospitality. The care that is given to the physical space in preparation for the gathering and to the metaphorical space as the session unfolds speaks loudly of the importance of the faith life of the catechist. And in this hospitable space, catechists are able to give expression to their faith and try out new ways of speaking about God and speaking to God.

One of my contentions concerning the reluctance of some adults to speak about their faith—either to their children or to other adults—is a lack of practice. The process of talking with others about important matters helps us to gain clarity in our own thinking and broadens the perspective that we bring to it. And so, as I stated above, conversation among catechists is essential. The point here is that conversation needs to take place in a hospitable space where the experience and insights of all are respected.

There is another important reason for attending to the space within which catechist formation takes place: it models for the catechists the care they are called to show to the adults, youth, or children with whom they minister. The sense of hospitality, welcome, safety, and justice that we want to have at the heart of the catechetical environment will only be there if our catechists experience it themselves.

In what ways might you improve the hospitality of the space within which catechist formation takes place? What would be some ways of making it more hospitable and just?

FOR YOUR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

1. Review the questions raised at the beginning of the chapter. What new insights do you bring to your reflection on your present model of catechist formation?
2. Reflect on the three roles that the catechist has—as person of faith, as theologian, and as teacher. Which is most important in your experience? Which is most in need of support?
3. Name two or three ways in which you can address some of the key challenges in catechist formation in your pastoral setting.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Michael Horan for pointing out these two ways of thinking about the term *formation*. We examined this in a nascent way in the address entitled "The Direction of Catechetical Leadership in the New Millennium" that we gave to the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership, April 19, 1999, in Indianapolis.
2. Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 41.
3. When international ecclesial documents, such as the *GDC* or "Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community," use the term catechists, they are usually referring to people responsible for a core element of the larger catechetical work. In many places in the United States, this may correspond more closely to catechetical leaders: those who work full time as DREs or parish coordinators or those who work part-time as directors of the RCIA or catechetical leaders for sacramental formation. However, while some of the issues discussed in the *GDC* may have application primarily to the full-time DRE and to others in leadership, many of the themes and points of formation apply to the facilitator of an adult faith-sharing group or the catechist of the third-grade peer group.
4. James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 95.
5. It seems to me that this sense of vocation also points us back to the discussion on apprenticeship as a way to speak about the Christian journey and the work of catechesis. See the discussion of apprenticeship in Chapter 1.
6. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 13.
7. Ibid.

8. This also connects with Erikson's understanding of identity and particularly the adolescent's engagement with the tension between identity and identity confusion. For Erikson, the central task for the adolescent and for the ongoing work of forming one's identity is to look back on one's past and ask "What do I have?" and look to the future to ask "What am I going to do with what I have?"
9. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of the dynamics of catechesis and the essential connection among the elements of formation, information, and transformation.
10. This idea of the fundamental relationship between memory and openness is articulated well by Lawrence Cunningham in *The Catholic Experience* (New York: Crossroads, 1985). See particularly the chapter "Catholicity."
11. The contribution of Erikson is discussed in some detail in Chapter 2. For an overview of Erikson's theory, the best resource is Erik Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed, Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development by Joan M. Erikson* (New York: Norton, 1997). A helpful commentary that provides a solid and engaging introduction to Erikson's theory is Francis L. Gross, *Introducing Erik Erikson: An Invitation to His Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987).
12. Particularly helpful in understanding the basic concepts of Piaget's schema are two books: Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies* (New York: Random House, 1967), and Jean Claude Bringuier and Jean Piaget, *Conversations with Jean Piaget* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). James Fowler includes a helpful section in his book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 37–89, "Part II: Windows on Human Development: A Fictional Conversation" in which he brings into dialog the perspectives of Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg.
13. The key works by Fowler that examine his stages of development are James W. Fowler, Sam Keen, and Jerome Berryman, *Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1978), and Fowler, *Stages of Faith*. An important resource for a critical read on Fowler's faith development theory is Craig R. Dykstra and Sharon Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1986).
14. The primary name connected with the foundational idea of multiple intelligences is Howard Gardner. His original explanation of multiple intelligences and the seven specific intelligences that he identified in his research can be found in his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). His most recent book develops his core ideas and adds the eighth one, the naturalist intelligence, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
15. It would be within the scope of what we are discussing here to set out the dynamics of contemporary culture and its implications for catechesis and for the Christian vision. A number of books examine elements of this question. Accessible, though perhaps not as clearly nuanced as some other books is

Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998). Gallagher does a good job of setting out the central themes of a postmodern context. Looking at the significance of postmodernity for Christian theology is Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997). Finally, Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), provides an analysis of the postmodern construction through the lens of sacramental theology.

16. In David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), Kolb examines learning cycle in terms of dominant learning styles. Subsequent to his research he developed the "Learning Style Inventory," which was revised in 1985 and published by McBer and Company (http://trgmcber.haygroup.com). The inventory is designed to give people a way of recognizing their own learning type and the strengths and challenges that accompany it. It is helpful to have the catechists complete this tool in a group and then chart the diversity within the group of catechists. Discussing the types of activities that are effective for the various learning styles is important; this works to enhance the catechists' savoir-faire.

17. In several places the *GDC* makes clear that catechesis requires an understanding of Church teaching that has as its foundation the call to conversion and the intimate connection between life and faith. This is particularly clear in #241 in which the theological foundations for the catechist are examined.

18. Particularly helpful are the models set out in James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), as well as shared Christian praxis in Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

19. This is particularly the case when the catechists are being prepared to work with adults. Most materials for children include a good deal of discussion of the process that the catechist is to use. Often, however, the process that is set out in resources for adults does not engage the participants at the point of intersection between their present praxis and the Christian tradition.

20. A helpful resource for exploring a structured model for establishing and supporting mentors can be found in Leona M. English, *Mentoring in Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1998). Drawing on a range of research from a variety of settings, English sets out the potential, dimensions, and challenges to effective mentoring. While a formal structure as defined as English proposes might not be possible or necessary for volunteer catechists, many of the insights and elements she discusses would be helpful.

7

TOWARD AN ADULT CHURCH: LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE

In his book on congregations as learning communities, Thomas Hawkins tells of a friend's first experience going white-water rafting. There were four rules that she had to learn before she could get into the water.

> First, rest in the calm spots because there are always more rapids ahead. Second, when heading for a rock, lean into the rock rather than away from it. Third, never stop paddling. Fourth, let go of everything but your life jacket if you fall into the water.[1]

Hawkins goes on to say, "These rules also apply to ministry in a permanent white-water society." A core thesis of Hawkins's book is that the rapidity of change in all aspects of our lives—a perma-

nent white-water society—requires a new understanding of leadership and the role of the congregation as a learning community.

Certainly the pages of this book serve as an invitation and a challenge to embrace change and to facilitate a new paradigm for how we think about and engage in the work of catechesis at the parish and diocesan levels. The fundamental change in focus that is at the heart of this book—a shift from an emphasis on children and youth to a stress on the faith development of adults—requires significant openness to change. Even the words of assurance, which have often been given in this book, that this does not mean neglecting the children in favor of the adults, does not help the feeling that many may have that we are in a fairly small raft and heading for the rocks. I believe that these are exciting but potentially scary times in the life of the Church, and the place of effective leadership in navigating the depths and shoals in this white-water ride is essential.

This chapter thus serves as an invitation to reflect on issues of leadership, particularly connected to leadership in time of change. This chapter is somewhat different in approach from the others as it invites you into conversation with your past experience and your future hopes. These pages are best done in extended conversations with others who share your passion for adult faith formation and the future of the Church as an evangelizing agent in the world.

We begin by examining our experiences and reaction to change, and then we consider elements of institutional change and the reactions and resistance that often come with it. In the second section we reflect on the demands on leaders in times of change and the role that they are to play. In speaking about the insights that contributed to his description of servant leadership, Robert Greenleaf reflected on the gifts of American journalist and writer E. B. White. Greenleaf writes: "Mr. White, I soon learned, had two gifts that are seldom possessed by one person: the ability to see things whole, or more whole than most, and the language to tell us ordinary mortals what he saw."[2] It seems that this is an apt description of the gifts that a leader needs in facing and facilitating change. I invite you to reflect on that as we examine the role of leader and the experience of change.

TIMES OF CHANGE

We have all experienced change at various points in our lives—change that we have initiated and some that has been thrust on us by others. Whatever forces contribute the change in our lives and in our ministries, how we think about change needs to be considered. At issue in this conversation is how we perceive change. Do we see it as a threat to who we are as a Church, an institution, a society? Is the necessity for change seen as a negative evaluation of what we have been doing in the past? Or do we see it as an inevitable part of life and as an opportunity to reexamine past values and affirm present visions as they are coming to expression in the future? Reflecting on our own experience of change serves as an important beginning point.

Naming Our Experience of Change

Call to mind two or three key experiences of change: perhaps a change in leadership in your parish or work setting, perhaps a change in your focus of ministry that was introduced by you or by others, perhaps a time of change brought on by a specific crisis or opportunity.

As possible, think of times in which you have been part of the process for introducing change and times in which you have been the "recipient" of the changes others have made. Call to mind those times in which change has been effectively carried out and times in which it seemed to be more difficult than it needed to be.

After calling to mind these various experiences, reflect on these questions and engage in conversation with others.

1. What is your own reaction to change, generally speaking? What difference does your role in the process of change make in your reaction? List the characteristics of situations of change that you think have an impact on your response to change.

2. What is the role of people in leadership in effectively facilitating change? What would characterize those leaders who are good at introducing change? Presuming that all leaders hope to introduce change in ways that are effective, what do you think keeps people from effectively bringing about change?

The Reality of Change

In all aspects of our lives, change is inevitable. A way of parenting that worked last month seems ineffective today. The model of decision making in a company or business becomes a block to timely judgments rather than a help. The assignment that was so effective a couple of semesters ago no longer has the desired impact on the students' learning and understanding. The model for acquiring and training volunteer catechists that seemed to work pretty well for years is having poor results. In small ways and significant ones we are invited, challenged, or dragged into the process of change. Sometimes the change is precipitated primarily by specific outside forces and by decisions made by others. Sometimes we bring the need for change into focus ourselves through shifts in our attitudes or perceptions; new insights into a situation make it clear to us that the present model is not working as well as we had hoped. And always the necessity of change is brought about when a configuration of forces makes a mode of action that has been effective up to now no longer feasible.

One way to understand change is to take the process of change apart a bit and step back to see where we are. A helpful model for thinking about the process of change is to see it as a cyclical process of genesis, growth, stabilization, breakdown, and dis-integration, leading back to genesis.[3]

Exploring this cycle through the lens of an example is helpful. Looking at the dynamics of the way a board or committee changes its sense of role and authority in response to a change in leadership can illumine the discussion. I develop it here in terms of a parish religious education advisory board, but the same dynamics can be applied to diocesan commissions or other types of groups.

Any time we look in on a group, we are coming in somewhere in the middle of the cycle. So we pick up the Religious Education Advisory Board (REAB) for St. Odo the Good Parish at the point of stabilization.

Stabilization

The REAB had been in existence for several years. Started by the former DRE, Martha, the Board of seven to ten members understood itself to be advisory in nature. In the first year or so (during the original period of genesis and growth), there was some tension about decisions that had been made at an REAB meeting being overturned or just forgotten by Martha. But Martha was really clear on her vision for the group and worked to be sure that the vision was understood and embraced by the REAB membership: This group was to be simply an advisory group. Martha set up the agenda and invited comments and suggestions on some of the issues that faced the religious education program. In addition to serving as an advisory group, it was often the members of this group that were asked to do the little extra things that help a program run smoothly. While all of the members were asked to help, most of the tasks were completed by just a couple of people.

In *Spiritlinking Leadership* Donna Markham has an interesting discussion concerning the evolution of working groups. The kind of tension that Martha experienced with the REAB is reflective of the move from the "inclusion" phase, where participants are polite and avoid confrontation, to the "confrontation" phase, where issues of power, authority, and control come to the fore. The final phase is "collaboration," where the insights of the entire group are respected and the members understand themselves to be colleagues.[4] To stay in one of the first few phases can easily lead to stagnation rather than stability as the group is engaged in attending to its inner dynamics rather than addressing the task at hand. Looking back on the REAB in the year or so before Martha left, that certainly seemed to be the case.

Breakdown

There are subtle signs of "breakdown" in any group that is in need of change: attendance is down, energy for new projects or ideas is low, disagreements that had been resolved come up again, new members are hard to find, and those who do come into the group are often isolated or dismissed. That was pretty much the state of things when Martha decided to leave the position at St. Odo's and Mary was hired to take her place.

Dis-integration

For the first several months after Mary arrived, the REAB continued to meet monthly. While in some ways the meetings were similar to the ones that Martha ran, it became increasingly clear that Mary had a different vision for the REAB and for religious education at St. Odo's in general. At times it seemed as though no one was communicating very well at all. Mary asked one of the members to serve as chair of the group, and that wasn't a popular decision. A couple of meetings had to be rescheduled because of conflicts with other parish events. As Mary attempted to set out her vision of the REAB and her hopes for the parish,

she was generally greeted with silence or vague acquiescence. Toward the end of her first year, as Mary began to talk about elements of the religious education that she believed were in need of change, many of the members became defensive; a couple went to the pastor to complain. Ultimately, the REAB in that configuration simply fell apart—it lost its center and its vision; it lost its integrity. It dis-integrated.

Note that what dis-integrated at St. Odo's was more than just the REAB, which disbanded because of the challenge of change in the overall understanding of catechesis that Mary and other members of the parish team were setting before them. Often marked by feelings of impending chaos and fear of the future, this phase of dis-integration may be fiercely resisted even by those who acknowledge that change is necessary. We tend to respond to the challenge of dis-integration in a variety of ways. Here I mention four unhelpful ones that were clearly present at St. Odo's that year.

1. Most obvious is *denial*. We simply deny that any serious change is needed. "Really, it's not as bad as you think it is," we might tell one another. "Things are going well enough," a colleague might tell us. "No matter what you do for some people, they are never satisfied," we might think to ourselves.

   The most obvious effect of denial is to turn a blind eye to the fact that breakdown/dis-integration is taking place and needs to take place. A second effect is to silence the people who are pointing out the necessity of change, who are saying this just is not working. Denial serves as a dismissal of those who argue for change.

2. Related to this first negative response is a second, which also denies the breakdown: we spend time simply patching the present. We could have better cate-

chist formation or more meetings with parents, we could have the students come in less often, or more often, or on a different day, or in a different space. These are all incidental changes that usually have little impact on the overall need for substantive change. This reflects an attempt to keep the attention away from the reality of breakdown and the need for a new creation. A dish or plate that is broken can sometimes be glued back together. And if we leave it alone on a shelf there is no problem; but add a little heat or a little pressure and it breaks again.

3. The third kind of reaction acknowledges the reality that the present is no longer working, that we need to see a new vision. But nonetheless it serves to block any real creativity because it places blame. Someone might say, "If the parents would get more involved we wouldn't have the kind of discipline problems we are having." Or "If we had some of the money that is always being spent on the school, it would be possible to do something creative."

   This third kind of reaction is a response of defeat and withdrawal: if we could only change something else the breakdown wouldn't be happening; we could continue the way things are.

4. A similar effect is created in the final reaction: rigidity. By becoming more rigid, more structured, we hold back the anxiety that is produced by the impending or present dis-integration. Rigidity is a "circling of the wagons" response that thwarts creativity in the belief that one can safely weather the threat by holding tight to the present model.

These reactions are expressions of resistance. Markham writes:

> Resistance in and of itself is neither good nor bad. It is an *unconscious* process of retarding or blocking the process of transformation. No group or individual can withstand unimpeded change. Resistance serves the purpose of allowing an organism to consolidate its gains as it internalizes changes it has undergone.[5]

Let me be clear: resistance in itself is neutral, though unhelpful expressions of resistance, such as those listed above, are negative. All of these reactions have two things in common: (1) they focus on external problems rather than present challenges and opportunities and (2) they are time- and energy-consuming: whether those in leadership react that way or simply have to respond to others who react that way. In either case, such reactions keep the group from its main task, which is setting out an alternative vision and leading into a new future.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

1. What elements of this description of the process of and reaction to change corresponded to your experience? Where did you disagree or want to take exception?

2. Where would you place your own catechetical work in this cycle of the process of change? What reactions do you see in yourself or in others?

3. How are you in your own ministry
   - keeping things going so that others don't experience the breakdown?
   - making clear the signs of the need for genesis?
   - supporting others in their positive embracing of the reality of change?

WHAT'S A LEADER TO DO?

How does a leader respond with hope and effectiveness to the process of change and the resistance being expressed on a variety of levels? Resistance in whatever form it takes, when left unchecked, works against the changes being introduced no matter how many people within the institution have affirmed them as necessary and worthy. In the literature that examines this topic, four themes come through repeatedly:[6]

1. *Express with clarity the central vision and conviction of the group.*

In the process of moving from dis-integration to genesis, Mary, the new DRE at St. Odo the Good, spent extensive time talking with people in the parish about their hopes, dreams, and convictions about the life of the parish. She concentrated particularly, though not exclusively, on those committed to the religious education program. From these discussions and her own reflection, she articulated a clear statement of the vision of faith formation and the convictions that support them.

In talking about the nature of conviction, Craig Dykstra writes: "A conviction is something we cannot help believing because, if we did not believe it, we would not be ourselves anymore. In this way we can almost say we are our convictions."[7] Mirroring to a group the convictions and vision that serve as guide and goal for them is an important first step. It is in that context that the discussion of change is rooted.

2. *Speak the truth about the present reality.*

A leader counters the denial and blaming of resistance with a clear articulation of reality, saying clearly, when necessary, "This is not working" and inviting others to name the signs of breakdown and dis-integration that concerns them. While acknowledging the truth can be difficult and painful, it is through this that the motivation for genuine change arises.

3. *Engage as many people as possible in the process of naming the present reality and articulating the path of change.*

At the heart of the learning community is the conviction that all members are called to be actively engaged in learning.[8] That same perspective needs to be in play here as we talk about the process of change: involving as many people as possible, especially those whose voices are not often heard, is crucial to effective change.

Note, however, that an effective leader draws on the insights of the community not simply because it is expedient. From the Christian perspective, we are aware that the Holy Spirit works through all of the members of the community of faith and that gifts have been given to each for the building up of the whole community. It is in drawing on the wisdom of as many persons as possible that renewal can genuinely be effected.

4. *Be ready to let go.*

Back to St. Odo the Good for a moment: One of the most challenging elements of the genesis of a new way of thinking about faith formation and a new role for the REAB was the need to let go of elements and programs that simply did not support the renewed sense of conviction and vision. In many cases these elements had been successful in the past and were considered standard ways in which the parish operated. Many people found letting go of them an admission that the work done in the past had not been worthwhile.

Although Mary as DRE and others on the parish team had been central to the move for change, they too had to let go. They had to let go of what they had thought would be best for the parish in service to the vision and convictions of the whole. Change is often no easier for the leadership than it is for the membership—sometimes it is more difficult!

After a time of experiencing and naming the dis-integration, a *genesis* followed at St. Odo the Good. The REAB was recon-

ceived as a working committee where coordinators of different elements of the parish catechetical endeavor meet monthly for prayer, conversation, and strategizing for the future. The members of the committee served as an essential resource for facilitating change and *growth* at every level of parish life.

LEADERSHIP IN TIME OF CHANGE

Our discussion of change and the way in which we and others respond to—and resist—change serves as an important foundation for the second core topic of the chapter: how we understand the role of leadership. Behind the description of how a leader can effectively deal with change is a theological sense of the place and role of the leader.

As it was important to name our experience of change before launching into a discussion of the theory of change, taking care to engage our experience of leadership is the first step here as well.

Naming Our Experience of Leadership

Reflect on your own experience of leadership—either as a leader yourself or in experiencing the leadership of someone else. Name an event that stands as an example of effective and life-giving leadership; something that you can point to and say "When I think of effective leadership, this is what I mean."

Take time to sink yourself into that situation: Who was involved? What was the setting? What were the dynamics of the situation? What role did you serve? Jot down the basic description of this experience—enough that you can effectively tell a couple of other people about it in a coherent way.

In conversation with others, gather in groups of three; each person takes a turn "chairing" the conversation.

- Briefly state the experience that speaks most clearly to you of the nature of leadership.

- After a brief pause, invite your companions to reflect back to you what they see as the presumptions about leadership underlying your account. You may be surprised by what they say!
- Conclude with observations on your own insights concerning the nature of leadership.
- When each has had a turn, reflect back on the presumptions that were set out. Are there some that all held in common? Are there places where certain characteristics seemed to be seen as essential—without this effective leadership doesn't happen? Be prepared to report that to the full group.[9]

The Leader as Prophet

As we look to the resources of the Christian tradition for insight into the nature of leadership, particularly in time of change, the role and task of the prophets seems to be a good starting point. They, too, have been most active in times of crisis, challenge, and change. How might their understanding of their role give us some insight for the role of leader in the Church today?

In considering the role of the prophet and the voice with which the prophet speaks, we can turn for insight to the lives and times and proclamations of Hebraic prophets. From Moses through Jeremiah and Ezekiel to Jesus of Nazareth, it is possible to explore the task of the prophets and the implications of their work for the vision of prophetic ministry in our own time. While each prophet spoke to his own time and people, there are themes common to all of the prophets that can enhance this discussion of the nature of the prophetic voice.[10]

First, the role of the prophet is both clear and complex: to articulate and nurture a vision of reality that, while running contrary to the contemporary perceptions, is in keeping with the action of God.[11] With intimate knowledge and personal engagement with the plight of the community, the prophet speaks

of alternative ways to understand the present and to imagine the future. Whether addressing those in oppression and exile, or those experiencing apparent freedom and contentment, the prophet highlights the contradiction between the present experience and the vision of God.

Second, the insights of the prophets are rooted in their ability to recognize and to name the assumptions that serve as foundations for the status quo. By giving expression to tacitly held presumptions about power and authority, relationships and privilege, the prophet's voice brings to consciousness the underlying forces—many unjust and oppressive—that serve as grounding for maintaining things as they are and have always seemed to be. Making explicit that which has been implicit is a central task and challenge for those giving voice to the prophetic.

In the prophet's task of articulating an alternative view of the present by exposing the generally held presumptions about reality, the third common theme of the prophetic voice comes to light. The prophet speaks not only of a new way to understand the present but of the promise of a new future. Things do not have to be as they are; they cannot remain as they are for those who hear and hearken to the prophet's voice. But the new future is not the result of the prophet's words alone. To claim and nurture the possibility and promise of the prophet's proclamations requires a willingness to enter into a process of letting go and holding on—a process of relinquishment and reclamation.[12] The believer and the community of faith must be willing to let go of the present which they know and, holding on the promise of God's fidelity and love, lay claim to a renewed future set out by the prophet.

Those prophets to the Israelites, major and minor alike, had the ability to recognize the infidelity of the present interpretation of reality, the perceptiveness to articulate the assumptions that served to fix firmly that interpretation, and the imagination to propose a new future and ultimately to convince people of the accuracy and adequacy of their prophetic viewpoint.

Contemporary prophets have these same tasks; in fulfilling them the prophets contribute to the continual renewal of the community of faith.

What's a Prophetic Leader to Do?

How does one gain and speak out of the prophetic vision? How does a catecehtical leader bring the eyes of the prophet to the work of faith formation? That really is the quintessential question for each of us in our apprenticeship to Jesus Christ. While the response of each will vary, I set out here two proposals that are worth attention: First, the prophetic leaders need to attend to their own inner life, and second, they need to hold on to their life preservers as they feel themselves falling out of the raft.

Attend to Your Inner Life

In an important article on leadership, Parker Palmer makes a convincing and challenging case for the absolute necessity for leaders to attend with special care to their inner life. He writes:

> A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being, conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader must take special responsibility for what's going on inside his or her own self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.[13]

Palmer is clear and compelling in his call to recognize the importance of leaders in doing their own inner work, to recognize that there are a variety of influences on their decisions and directions.[14]

Reflecting back to the notion of Mezirow's framework of meaning perspectives and meaning schemas,[15] it is essential that

leaders be particularly attentive to distorted meaning perspectives: Those that limit, are exclusive, and fail to account for the variety and diversity of experience.

In the final analysis, Palmer warns us away from the variety of "shadows" that can influence leadership and the lack of light that leadership can cast—fear of chaos, thinking that everything depends on me, lack of trust, fear of failure. And at some level, as we move into times of change—white-water times as Hawkins would say[16]—we are reminded of the second directive to prophetic leaders.

Hold Firmly to Your Life Preserver

In the end we are called to hang on to nothing other than our confidence of God's love expressed in Jesus Christ. As leaders in the Church, that is the life preserver that serves as a firm foundation when the raft is heading for the rocks or rushing through the rapids. We have been gifted to be present in the Church at this time and in this place; we can trust in God's presence now and always.

NOTES

1. Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997) 19.
2. Larry Spears, *Reflections on Leadership: How Robert K. Greenleaf's Theory of Servant-Leadership Influenced Today's Top Management Thinkers* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995),19
3. Building on the work of Arnold Toynbee, an English historian who died in the late 1800s Donna Markham proposes the basic outline of this cycle of change in "Psychological Aspects of Change,' *Human Development* 5 (fall 1984). However, I don't think she gives enough attention to the period of stability or to the dynamics that contribute to breakdown. In her later writing, particularly *Spiritlinking Leadership: Working Through Resistance to Organizational Change* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), she explores more closely the relationship among dis-integration, chaos, and resistance.
4. *Spiritlinking Leadership*, 98–105
5. *Spiritlinking Leadership*, 24.

6. Several theorists have examined this area. Those I have found particularly helpful include Donna Markham whose main works are cited in the above footnotes. Also Parker Palmer (particularly in *Spirit at Work*, which we will discuss a bit later in the chapter); much of the work in learning organizations deals with the role of the leadership, and indeed all of the members, in facilitating change (Here see the writing of Peter Senge cited in Chapter 4, particularly *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* [New York: Currency, 1994].) Finally, writing in the area of servant-leadership, a term coined and advanced by Robert K. Greenleaf, includes a discussion of the leader's role in supporting the growth and development of the organization.
7. Craig R. Dykstra, *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlberg* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 52.
8. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
9. This is an adaptation of a model of critical reflection on significant experiences proposed by Stephen Brookfield.
10. A resource that has served well the pastoral life of the church is the writing of scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann. With keen insight into the cultural and ecclesial realities that shape and challenge contemporary ministry, Brueggemann delves into the role of the prophets, particularly in the Old Testament, for insight into what it means to speak with a prophetic voice today.
11. This theme comes through clearly in Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) as well as *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).
12. For a development of this idea, see Brueggemann's examination of the role of the prophets in the context of exile. See *Hopeful Imagination*, "Introduction: Exile and the Voice of Hope." For Brueggemann, the role of the prophet in postexilic Israel is to help the people relinquish the old ways of doing things and receive God's power as source of hope.
13. Parker J. Palmer, "Leading from Within: Out of Shadow, into the Light," in *Spirit at Work: Discovering the Spirituality in Leadership*, ed. Jay Alden Conger (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 24–25.
14. This issue of the understanding of the human person that Palmer reflects is an important one to take into account. It reminds us that the way in which we think of ourselves as humans needs to be tempered with a recognition of our sinfulness. Within the Catholic context that is often referred to as Christian realism. Coming from the Protestant perspective, Palmer tends to emphasize human sinfulness more and serves as a helpful reminder of the complexity of human reasoning.
15. See Chapter 3 for this discussion.
16. Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation.*

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