

Making Adult Evangelization Primary

Introduction

- This talk is about making adult evangelization the primary form of evangelization and catechesis in your parish
- The first thing I want to do with this talk is establish that adult evangelization and catechesis are the primary forms of parish ministry
- Then we'll look at why this is and what we can do about it

What the Church Teaches

- The documents of the Church are very clear that evangelization and catechesis is primarily for adults:
 - **GCD 20 (1971):** "They should also remember that catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it."
 - **NCD 40 (1979):** "without neglecting its commitment to children, catechesis needs to give more attention to adults than it has been accustomed to do."
 - **CT 43 (1979):** "[T]he catechesis of adults ... is the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form."
 - **ACCC 25 (1990):** "Hence, it is not only legitimate, but necessary, to acknowledge that a fully Christian community can exist only when a systematic catechesis of all its members takes place and when an effective and well-developed catechesis of adults is regarded as the central task in the catechetical enterprise."
 - **GDC 258 (1997):** "In order that the parish may succeed in activating effectively the mission of evangelization ... Adult catechesis must be given priority."
 - **GDC 275 (1997):** "[T]he organizing principle, which gives coherence to the various catechetical programmes offered by a particular Church, is attention to adult catechesis. This is the axis around which revolves the catechesis of childhood and adolescence as well as that of old age."
 - **Our Hearts 42 (1999):** "[T]he Church wisely and repeatedly insists that adult faith formation is 'essential to who we are and what we do as Church' and must be 'situated not at the periphery of the Church's educational mission but at its center.'"

Why Adult Evangelization Is Primary (see [Our Hearts 38-44](#), [ACCC 20-25](#))

- Adults have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form
 - Adults are the ones in charge of families

- Adults are the ones in positions of power and authority in the secular sphere
 - “the role of adults is crucial in the workplace and in the academic, professional, civil, economic, political and cultural spheres, and wherever responsibility and power are exercised.” (ACCC, no. 22)
- Basically every sphere that so impacts our development and ability to flourish as human persons is impacted by adults
- Their formation in faith is essential for the Church to carry out its mandate to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the world.
- Adult faith formation also benefits children and youth.
 - An adult community whose faith is well-formed and lively will more effectively pass that faith on to the next generation.
 - Moreover, the witness of adults actively continuing their own formation shows children and youth that growth in faith is lifelong and does not end upon reaching adulthood.
- In addition, adult faith formation should serve as the point of reference for catechesis for other age groups.
 - It ought to be "the organizing principle, which gives coherence to the various catechetical programs offered by a particular Church."
 - Maturity of faith is the intent of all catechesis from the earliest years.
 - Thus, all catechesis is geared to a lifelong deepening of faith in Christ.
 - How necessary, then, that the catechetical ministry with adults set an example of the highest quality and vitality.
- What does this mean?
 - It's not immediately clear
 - What I think it means is that all other forms of ministry should either be preparing for an adult faith or deepening an adult faith
 - “Every Church ministry will be energized through a dynamic ministry of adult catechesis.” (Our Hearts 39)
- The Christian community is required to take on an adult faith (ACCC 23)
 - **Eph 4:11-15** And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers ... until we all attain to ... mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ
 - **1 Cor 13:11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.
 - **1 Cor 3:1-2** But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready,

- **Heb 5:11-13** About this we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child.

How to Make It Primary

- "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the U.S." is all about how to prioritize adult evangelization. **READ THIS DOCUMENT.**
- "While most Catholic parishes place a high priority on the faith formation of children and youth, far fewer treat adult faith formation as a priority.
- "This choice is made in parish staffing decisions, job descriptions, budgets, and parishioner expectations." (Our Hearts 43)
- **Staffing decisions**
 - Do you have a staff person dedicated to adult evangelization?
 - If you have a staff person who is responsible for adult and youth evangelization, is it expected that the majority of this person's time would be devoted to adults?
- **Job descriptions**
 - There are still a great many paid ministry staff who do not have job descriptions
 - In these instances, it's harder to be resolute in one's focus on adults
 - Without a job descriptions, other things get put on a person's plate
 - Before long he or she has trouble prioritizing anything!
 - It needs to be in someone's job description that they will prioritize adults
- **Budgets**
 - Which demographic in your parish do you spend the most money on?
 - If it's youth, then your budget is not reflecting the teaching of the Church
 - If the choice is between paying for a ministry initiative for youth and one for adults, then we must choose adults
- **Parish Expectations**
 - Do adults expect to be an afterthought, or the primary focus of ministry?
 - Do they expect to see many positive things happening for adults?
 - Do they expect that initiatives for youth will also include adults?
- **Mission and Vision**
 - Make adult formation essential and integral to the pastoral plan of the parish.
 - Clearly state that adult evangelization is the priority here, and repeat this often
- "Key Parish Roles of Leadership and Service for Adult Faith Formation"
 - This is a great section, from **Our Hearts 124-153**
 - It basically outlines what parish looks like that prioritizes adult evangelization
 - It outlines KPIs ("Key Performance Indicators") for:
 - **the Pastor and other pastoral leaders**

- **the Adult Faith Formation leaders**
- **the Adult Faith Formation team**
- **the Catechists of adults**
- I'll just read to you what it says **about the Pastor**:
 - The pastor establishes parish policies and procedures that give priority to the vision and practice of adult faith formation.
 - Personally, the pastor promotes the vision of mature faith in the normal course of his ministry
 - through working with the pastoral council and parish committees,
 - in supervision of the parish staff,
 - in his homilies, and
 - by encouraging everyone's active participation in the mission of the parish and in the Church's ministry of the word.
 - In keeping with their charisms and inclinations they are responsible for teaching adults, for priests are "educators of the faith" by virtue of ordination.
 - They assure that the parish budget funds staffing, training, and resourcing for adult faith formation to the fullest extent possible.
 - The pastor charges the adult faith formation leader and team to provide "multiple forms of ongoing education in the faith," well suited to the diverse needs of the parish.
 - He fosters their work through clear and enthusiastic endorsements of adult faith formation opportunities.
 - He encourages networking and collaboration across parish boundaries and with regional and diocesan initiatives.
- There are expectations for me, as a diocesan ministry leader, too!
- You could use these KPIs as a checklist for how well you're doing as a parish in prioritizing adult evangelization.

Any Questions?

Primary Source Documents:

- [Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community](#), Congregation for Clergy (1990)
- [Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States](#), USCCB (1999)