

A Message from Mike.....

“Growth in faith is related to human development and passes through stages. Individuals develop as human beings and faithful followers of Christ in different ways and according to their own pace. No matter what style or rate of growth in faith, such growth always means gradually becoming more like Christ. It means growing into communion with the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit through active participation in the sacraments, the prayer life of the Church, and generous service to others. The Church’s catechesis—and even more so, the catechist—must take into consideration all the human factors of a particular age level in order to present the Gospel message in a vital and compelling way” (NDC, 48).

The above paragraph from the *National Directory for Catechesis* is very interesting and has significance for several areas in a parish’s total faith formation program. I would like to look at one phrase in this statement:

“Followers of Christ develop in different ways and according to their own pace.” This statement has significance for every phase of a parish program or parish faith activity. In any program which is age or grade structured there exists the norm which is characteristic for that age or grade. However, different children learn in different ways. Some learn best by doing; some by seeing; some by hearing; some by sharing in large groups; and some by sharing in small groups. Most learn best by a combination of several of these ways. The implication is that one way will probably not meet the needs of everyone. Several ways of communicating are necessary.

But at this point we have only covered the part of the statement that they “develop in different ways.” What happens when one considers the rest of the phrase “according to their own pace.” This further complicates the situation because of the need for each individual to go at his or her own speed. This need has special significance when the group meets once

a week for about an hour. Practically speaking, do our catechists try to do too much in too short a time for too many participants?

If this is true for one age or grade level, what does it mean for a mixed age or grade group? The larger the group the more diverse the group and the more options that might be necessary, if our goal is to help the participants develop at their pace. Today this is further complicated by the varied level of religious practice in the homes .



How can we help our catechists with this situation? One way would be to take advantage of our own resource : *Knowing Jesus and His Message: A Tool for Parish Catechesis*. This tool is designed to help the catechist focus on the key concepts that need to be taught each year according to the understanding level of each grade or age level. It also gives several examples of activities which employ various learning styles to meet the learning needs of the children. Another way would be to encourage your catechists to take advantage of the *Diocesan Catechist Certification Program*, especially the three sessions called “*The Spirituality of the Catechist*” and the sessions on “*The Learner*” and those on “*Methodology*.” Catechists could be encouraged to attend the **Book Fair** in May with the fair exposing them to various approaches and creative ideas presented by the publisher’s representatives who attend. Another opportunity to assist your catechists would be to attend and participate in the regional **Journey with Christ** and the diocesan **Celebrate Christ** which are held on alternating years. Lastly, a visit to the **Regional Centers** to view all the various resources that are available would be a profitable experience.

Today’s catechetical landscape presents many challenges, but resources are available to help us meet these challenges if only we take advantage of them.

Peace.