

JBL CASE STUDY FOR ADAPTATION OF THE CATECHUMENAL PROCESS

IN: *Episcopal Cathedral, Northern California; Sunday att: 300)*

Background

1. *What four characteristics best describe your church community, especially what makes you unique?*

White, middle class, with an active social outreach program in conjunction with other faith communities in the mid-town area. There is a significant number of unhoused people around the cathedral. Our population comes from the greater regional area – some people come from as far as 30 miles away.

2. *What is the biggest challenge facing your community?*

Money/budget. This will be exacerbated by the decreased income during the pandemic but we have had a deficit budget for the last 8 years.

Pattern of the catechumenal process

3. *How does an inquirer connect with your community? How is initial contact made?*

Currently: The Cathedral has an “Evangelizer,” a woman who makes a point of greeting all new people who show up for a service. She invites them to our New Comer’s class. There is a follow up welcome letter from the Dean.

Future: The Cathedral is starting an Invite.Welcome.Connect (I.W.C.) ministry. There will be emphasis on inviting people to our faith community and welcoming those who do come.

4. *How do you figure out what their background is? And what they are seeking?*

We ask during introductions at the New Comer’s classes. However, these Newcomer classes are more *talking to* the participants than *listening to* them. With I.W.C. the questions of identity and what a person seeks should come up during the Welcoming phase, which will include Newcomer’s classes that, hopefully, will be redesigned to emphasize listening to the newcomers.

5. *How do they get to know other inquirers? When do you have gatherings with them?*

During Newcomer’s classes. With I.W.C., additional opportunities may develop.

The Welcome phase of I.W.C is supposed to move into a Connect phase. The catechumenate process will start here. Hopefully the inquirer is linked up with a sponsor by this time. We hope that most newcomers will enter a “catechumenate” process. The exception would be Episcopalians who are joining Trinity because they



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have recently moved. Depending upon circumstances, others can be in the catechumenate or in one of the associated processes. We plan to have a ministry that will embrace all of these in an “initiatory” spiritual formation process.

6. *What is a typical format for a gathering?? How long does it usually last?*

Open with prayer; check-in (which includes response during the week to questions from last meeting’s *lectio*); announcements; *lectio*; closing prayers; meeting length: 90 minutes

7. *Who serve as their catechists and mentors through the process? Lay people? Clergy? Usually lay people*

8. *When do you provide them with sponsors as companions and support?*

Sometime prior to the Rite of Welcome. Part of the I.W.C. process is that new members are partnered with parishioners early in the process.

Stages of the growth in the catechumenal process

9. *When are they ready to be recognized by the congregation as seekers/hearers/catechumens?*

We usually celebrate the Rite of Welcome near the start of Epiphany. We call this the “Rite of Commitment” because, as an “open table” congregation, people are welcomed when they first enter the doors of the cathedral.

10. *How do your gatherings help them to encounter the Word of God, especially as it is found in the lectionary?*

See above. *Lectio* focused on the Sunday Gospel passage facilitates this encounter quite well over time.

11. *What additional topics from Christian tradition and practice do you try to share with them in your gatherings?*

We cover additional topics as they arise either through candidate questions or the text of the Sunday (e.g. prayer; Mary, the mother of Jesus; sin; reconciliation; the place of the BCP). We have a day-long retreat on the Saturday before Lent that focuses on the Apostles’ Creed. We focus on the five promises of the Baptismal Covenant on each of the meetings during Lent.

12. *When are they ready to be recognized by the congregation as candidates for Baptism? How do your gatherings use the Word to open their minds and hearts to a deeper sense both of repentance and of Jesus’s love?*



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We celebrate the Rite of Enrollment on Lent I. As to readiness, our discernment process needs more work. Currently, most people will move to the Period of Intense Formation at the beginning of the first Lent of the process. However, there is no assumption that everybody who is in the catechumenate at the beginning of Lent will automatically be enrolled.

13. How does the period of intense preparation prepare them to make the Baptismal Covenant/Promises?

See above. We have a one-day retreat on the Apostles' Creed just prior to the start of Lent and focus on the Promises during the meetings during Lent.

14. How have you best managed to involve the participants in the life of your community, especially in service to the world?

We encourage the candidates to join their sponsors in some apostolate. Some candidates have joined their sponsors in other ministries (e.g. Altar Guild, ushers, serving the free community meals, helping out at the food bank) but we have not insisted on this. As to other aspects of the life of the community, all come to one of the Sunday services (we have 4) and most will participate in parish social events.

15. How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected your participants?

From our reflections after the rites, I have perceived that they are profoundly affected. There is an immediate affirmation (often emotional), but, when we review the process after Pentecost, many have expressed a deeper impact from one or more of the rites.

16. How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected the congregation?

We do the signing at the Rite of Commitment with candidates and sponsors spaced out in the middle aisle and the presider at the altar. Many have expressed being affected by this. The Rite of Enrollment needs more catechesis for the candidates and the congregation. We do immersion baptisms at the Vigil. These impact on those in the congregation who are present.



Advice

17. What is the most important bit of advice that you have for another practitioner in your situation?

Involve the clergy as much as possible. Although the catechumenate is a “lay-driven” ministry, it is important that the clergy be involved in ways in which they and the candidates can get to know each other. This can be a challenge as the group(s) gain cohesiveness and trust with each other and the catechist(s) but there needs to be time for the clergy to interact as the journey proceeds and, especially, before each of the rites. We have a lunch with the bishop prior to the Vigil so that she and the candidates can meet.

