



Office of Faith Education

POINTERS FOR
Child and Youth
CHRISTIAN LIFE TRAINING

March 2005

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Prêtres,
Diacres,
Agent-e-s de pastorale,
Communautés religieuses,
Mouvements,

Vous avez en main un document, préparé par madame Ginette Faubert, directrice de l'Office de l'éducation à la foi, intitulé : « *REPÈRES POUR LA FORMATION À LA VIE CHRÉTIENNE chez les enfants et les jeunes* ».

Plusieurs personnes ont été consultées afin d'enrichir le texte de leur expérience pastorale.

Les membres du Bureau de l'évêque ont aussi commenté le document pour qu'il réponde clairement aux interrogations exprimées par les personnes engagées dans la formation à la vie chrétienne.

Je souhaite que ces *repères* vous soient utiles et servent de référence concrète à l'établissement des parcours et services offerts dans votre paroisse.

Veuillez agréer, Madame, Monsieur, mes fraternelles salutations.



† Luc Cyr
évêque de Valleyfield

1) POINTERS FOR UNITY IN TRANSITION

Given our experience and the needs revealed by our practice in recent months under the new catechetical approach adopted by the bishops of Québec and the people in charge of catechesis in the Valleyfield Diocese, here are some pointers for child and youth Christian life training.

These indications are meant to unify little by little the movement of catechetical renewal begun last year and to assist as much as possible in the necessary change of mentality, among pastoral agents, priests, deacons and parish officials as well as Christians in general. We hope these pointers will help you respond to certain questions that are sometimes asked by parents facing new requirements from parishes when requesting sacraments of Christian initiation (First Penance, Eucharist, Confirmation).

2) ABOUT AWAKENING OF THE FAITH

There is no minimum or maximum age to begin pathways of awakening of the faith. Faith in God, Father, Son and Spirit can be awakened at any age, even in early childhood. It goes without saying that an awakening of the faith precedes initiation since initiation requires a desire to be initiated. And a desire to be initiated is impossible without at least glimpsing

at the goal.

3) ABOUT CHRISTIAN INITIATION

“Catechesis ... is a fundamental element of Christian initiation.” Catechesis however goes beyond Christian initiation and there is a permanent catechesis that follows initiation. Initiation is a grounding value. At this stage, the essentials of the Gospels, systematically set out in the confession of faith of the Church must be on offer. It is understood that catechesis “is more than teaching: it is the learning of all of Christian life, a ‘Christian initiation in full’ ”.

4) ABOUT CATECHETIC PATHWAYS

A pathway is a structured approach made up of several successive catecheses (some 4 to 8 meetings), centred on the Word of God. The approach calls for a personal conversion and for brotherly and community relationships. It fosters a meeting with God, Father, Son and Spirit, through personal and community prayer. It seeks commitment from people for the building of a more just and more humane world. It invites celebration of the Faith through Christian rituals and symbols.

To develop a personal bond with the catechized, groups on a human scale (a maximum of 8 to 10) should be established; this will facilitate dialogue, accompanying people and evaluating the ground covered by those becoming initiated to Christian life.

The pathways used at this time seem worthwhile to us. However, it would be important to respect them in their entirety in order to reach the objectives of the chosen approach. All these catechetical pathways are considered *ad experimentum* for the time being and will be the subject of evaluation on a timely basis.

5) SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Christian initiation is a spiritual itinerary that is progressive. The itinerary includes stages that allow for crossing of thresholds or stages that represent 'doors' to cross. The stages generally are expressed in liturgical celebrations, celebrations that are not necessarily sacraments. Consider the rite of profession of faith, the transmittal of the Gospels or of the Our Father, a pilgrimage, a vigil, a camp, a training session, etc.. Consider active participation in a major moment of the liturgical year: a Lenten celebration, the Easter Vigil, the Holy Thursday Vigil, a Pentecost vigil... The celebrations will integrate initiates into the Christian community.

Initiation is an original mode of transmission. The accent is put on the transformation of the initiate who through an initiation process similar to a new birth acquires a new status or a new identity and is accepted as a member of a group. The sacraments of first Penance, of the Eucharist and of Confirmation are rites of the Church to integrate more and more deeply the committed person in an initiation pathway and so

become a full member of the Church.

6) ABOUT PARENTS' REQUESTS FOR THE SACRAMENTS

We are in a period of transition. As much as possible, **we should no longer register a youngster for a sacrament with only an immediate preparation for the sacrament as we did previously.** Those in charge should foster in a youngster a desire to live fully the process of initiation to the Christian life with catechetical pathways, in which a sacramental step will be inserted at the appropriate time. The utmost support of parents should be sought to this effect so the youth will persevere in his/her Christian development. Parents should also be made aware that catechetical pathways must be freely pursued by their youngster. If forced by anyone, he/she will not have the open-mindedness necessary to develop in the faith. On occasion, everyone should be reminded that adhering to Jesus Christ always means accepting an offer in full freedom.

In order to promote some time to integrate the sacramental experience, which should be a major moment in a person's development, it would be preferable in the future, inasmuch as possible, that each youngster be initiated to **a single sacrament in one year.**

7) ABOUT AGE

Age cannot be the only criterion for first access to the sacraments of Christian initiation. However, since pathways of initiation to Christian life require some understanding of the faith as well as some personal development, the **minimum age** for first access to first Penance and to the Eucharist is normally eight years of age (at September 30th of each year).

With respect to Confirmation, eleven years of age is the **minimum** (at September 30th of each year).

There is no maximum age for first access to a sacrament of Christian initiation. After eleven, this can be done at any age.

Even if the sacraments are within a development of faith, an immediate preparation to each sacrament related to the age of the persons involved must be offered by Christian communities so that each sacrament may be experienced in depth.

8) ABOUT INITIATORS

Since our Church must in future ensure that catechesis is available for all age groups, more and more people must be called upon to commit themselves in a more stable manner to what may be called a 'mission' as catechists and must be encouraged to train. To initiate, it is not sufficient to be an initiate, i.e. to have 'entered into the faith'. It is necessary to know how to initiate the

other person, i.e. how to introduce the person into the mystery of the faith, freely and gradually.

9) ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Since the Christian community that meets on Sundays for Holy Eucharist should be the Assembly of those who have developed their faith and who aspire to see others develop theirs, young people who wish to partake in a sacrament should go through a rite of request to the community or to a representative core of the community. This measure would make the community responsibility to integrate these young people more evident and would develop in the young people, a feeling of belonging to a Christian community larger than the catechetical group.

During the years of initiation to Christian life, it is important to allow for moments of celebration with the Sunday community of celebration: the transmittal of the Word of God (Gospels or Bible), the transmittal of the Our Father, the solemn renewal of Baptism promises in the form of the Creed or profession of faith, a presentation to the Sunday community of volunteers commit to being accompanying children, a thank you at the end of the year to all those involved in catechetical pathways - children and parents - because they will have fostered more life in the community.

Finally, the community should also be able to recognize the value of the social commitment of young people who, in the course of Christian initiation pathway, bring joy and comfort to the needy. This community recognition should stimulate the Christian practise of transforming the world for more justice, and show the young person that being a Christian is also reaching out to others, which is also a way that leads to God.

10) BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The involvement of the whole Christian community is necessary to the success of the vast undertaking that is catechesis. Not everyone will commit in the same way, but all have a part to play: praying for the catechists and the catechized, welcoming the novelty and the freshness that children and young people bring, bearing witness to faith in daily life, committing to the needy, preparing meetings carefully, members of the pastoral team encouraging and supporting each other, etc. The task is not always easy, concrete results do not always reward the efforts expended, but the Spirit is active, and sometimes, we will have to cling to this conviction to experience in the flesh the faith that we proclaim.



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