



# *Seeing a way forward*

Diocesan Gathering of Catechists and Coordinators

## *Why the Gathering?*

On Saturday, December 3, 2011, the Emmaus Centre hosted a Diocesan Gathering of catechists and coordinators which took place at St. Joseph Church Hall, Port Hawkesbury. 31 people attended the Gathering from all across the Diocese. We came together to discuss how we are managing in our ministry and to meet with Bishop Brian and express our hopes and concerns for catechesis in the Diocese.

## *Preparation for the Gathering A Brief Questionnaire*

A questionnaire was circulated to all our coordinators in early November as a method of providing Bishop Brian and the Emmaus Centre with a snapshot of what catechesis looks like across our Diocese, this year. We asked the following questions:

- ▶ What programs are you using?
- ▶ How many children are taking part in your program?
- ▶ How have you structured your program this year?
- ▶ How many young people in your parish or pastoral unit are preparing for the Sacraments?
- ▶ How many catechists are working with you this year?
- ▶ What are the top three things that the Emmaus Centre can do to support you and meet the needs of your parish catechetical program?

We had 28 coordinators return questionnaires to the Office with at least one coordinator responding from each Deanery. Listed below are the comments you sent along:

- ▶ How the Emmaus Centre can support and meet your needs:
  - Have supplies on hand, sometimes we need things in a hurry, not time to order
  - Programs
  - Monthly gatherings
  - Sacrament preparation programs for those outside the usual age
  - Guidelines and programs for sacramental preparation
  - Workshops for catechists
  - Ongoing, regular, consistent, formation for catechists
  - Help bring parishes together to share programs and resources
  - Ways to facilitate adult faith groups
  - Relying on parents to form children using home programs, need good home programs

- Evaluate Finding God from Loyola press
- Spiritual growth sessions for catechists and coordinators, retreats
- Centre need to be located in a central area, Sydney Mines is too far away
- Ideas and ways to support new catechists
- Short simple workshop for new catechists
- Supply resources and available for questions
- Standardized Confirmation program for whole diocese
- Support and share groups
- Quarterly reports to pastors and coordinators

## *Small and Large Group Work during the Gathering*

We began the day with an Advent Prayer Service adapted from the Loyola Press website, which would be suitable for any catechetical session during Advent. Following prayer we broke into 6 groups and discussed the following questions:

- ▶ How do you approach the problems you encounter in your ministry?
- ▶ Where do you look for support?
- ▶ What resources do you have to work with?

From these discussions and the questionnaire responses, the following points emerged:

### **Support for Catechists:**

*“ongoing, regular, consistent formation needed for catechists, workshops for catechists, ways to support new catechists, short simple workshops for new catechists, gatherings with coordinators and other catechists for support and sharing”*

### **Opportunities for Spiritual Growth and Renewal:**

*“catechists and coordinators are suffering from burnout, spiritual growth sessions for catechists and coordinators, we need to develop and pay attention to our own spiritual growth by reading and prayer, we need retreats”*

### **Parishes need to provide adequate funding for catechesis:**

*“more financial support needed, catechesis matters and should be given proper funding”*

### **Programming:**

*“guidelines and programs for sacramental preparation, sacrament preparations for those outside of the usual age, evaluation of programs, quality programming, ways to help facilitate adult faith program, continuity needed in programming”*

## *Fr. Anthony's Comments*

Fr. Anthony opened the large group conversation by stating what he saw as the major factors we are contending with today as we carry out our ministry: the demographics of our diocese, our aging population and less volunteerism. He pointed out that almost any place or any activity can be used as a catechetical opportunity, our everyday lives are rich in these opportunities however we are not used to talking about the everyday as connected to the spiritual, nor do we have many places where these discussions can take place.

One venue where the everyday and the spiritual meet is within our catechism session, where catechists can be witnesses to the faith by sharing their experience and relationship with Jesus and help others to see Christ working in their lives. The role of the catechist is more than teaching a program, while important, the heart of catechesis lies in the witness value of a faith community.

He went to say catechesis matters and should be given proper support and funding. And in closing let us know the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) is working on revising the Born of the Spirit Program, which most parishes are using as a standalone program or in combination with other programs or as a resource, within our Diocese.

## *Bishop Brian's Comments*

Bishop Brian then shared with us many beautiful passages on catechesis from John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, from October 16, 1979.

18. *"Catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view of initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."*

*"Only in deep communication with Him [Jesus] will catechists find light and strength for an authentic desirable renewal of catechesis"*

*"...the deep desire to understand better the Spirit's action and to entrust oneself to Him more fully must bring about a catechetical awakening"*

In his own words Bishop Brian stressed the importance of the role of the catechist as a person who makes the good news come alive for others, a person who helps people come into relationship with Jesus, a person who helps people to see Jesus working in their everyday lives. Catechists initiate children, young people and adults into a relationship with Jesus, helping them to see Jesus is present with us and calling us into deeper relationship; 20. *"...giving growth at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit..."* Bishop Brian situated catechesis as a ministry of the Word.

He mentioned as he went through the questionnaires we submitted, that the Born in the Spirit program, Intergenerational Catechesis and/or a combination of the two, were the most frequently used methods of catechesis in the Diocese.

Bishop Brian then went on to say that with societal changes and the once ever-present Catholic culture gone, our ministry has lost a vital support structure and as a result the catechist faces many challenges. He commended the catechists and coordinators of the Diocese for their diligent work and perseverance and thanked the Emmaus Centre staff for their work in supporting those involved in this ministry.

### *Initiatives the Emmaus Centre will work towards*

The Emmaus Centre will work toward providing formation opportunities for our catechists in response to your concerns. We will also look to providing a retreat for our catechists and coordinators in the early Spring. These will be the immediate steps taken to respond to your needs as expressed in our gathering.

In closing, the staff of the Emmaus Centre, Fr. Anthony, Donna, Linda and Debbie would like to thank all those who work tirelessly in our parishes and parish clusters to help echo the good news Christ came to share. As we look to a way forward, may we be guided by the same star; to a baby who would change the world.

*To you and your loved ones, a very Merry Christmas.*