Earlier this year the Holy See published the new Directory for Catechesis. In many parts it is not an easy read. But it does provide us with the opportunity to look at our catechetical endeavours in the light of changing times, demonstrated, of course, by the lockdown and the journey to a new and undetermined normal.

Over the year I will be summarising the Directory, with some suggested pointers for reflection. A summary is, by its nature, subjective. I will try to include the sections that I feel have most to say to ourselves and our parishes and communities at this time.

Please feel free to share with parish catechists, sacramental programme coordinators, parish leadership team members; in fact anyone who wants them! I hope you find them of benefit.

1. **Introducing the Directory for Catechesis**

**What and Why?**

In a nut-shell, if the Catechism of the Catholic Church expresses the ‘content’ of the Church’s teaching (the ‘what’), the Directory for Catechesis expresses the ‘how’ that teaching is handed on in our time.

Given that the present ‘our time’ is different from the ‘our time’ of 1971 when the General Catechetical Directory was published, and different even from 1997 when the General Directory on Catechesis was published, it is not surprising that Pope Francis has approved a new Directory, looking at the challenge of handing on the faith in a digital and globalised culture.

To start us off on our journey, four quotations from the Introduction, with an invitation (written by myself and in italics) to reflect and respond, based on your own experience and context.

1. Catechesis is an essential part of the broader process of renewal that the Church is called to bring about in order to be faithful to the command of Jesus Christ to proclaim always and everywhere his Gospel.

*In our context of gradually reopening our churches to worship, how can we be renewed in our proclaiming ‘always and everywhere his Gospel?’*

1. A catechesis which goes to the very heart of the Christian message,……manifests the action of the Holy Spirit, who communicates God’s saving love in Jesus Christ and continues to give himself so that every human being may have the fulness of life.

*This kerygmatic (from the Greek word for proclamation) catechesis is the very heart of the process, its source, summit and golden thread. How do we keep it at the very core of all our catechetical programmes?*

1. A catechesis which introduces the believer into the living experience of the Christian community, the true setting of the life of faith. This formative experience is progressive and dynamic…..According to a pastoral practice, becoming more urgent, catechesis should be inspired by the catechumenal model.

*How do we, in a gradual way, introduce believers into an experience of the parish? Or do we just tell them to ‘come to Mass?’*

1. *Intimate communion with Christ,* the ultimate goal of catechesis,….should be brought about through a process of *accompaniment*……Only a catechesis that strives to help the whole person in his/her unique *response of faith* can reach the specified goal.

*How do we accompany others to meet Jesus? Is that the goal of our catechesis?*

1. **Running through the Directory**

*The Directory lists six themes that are present throughout the document ‘almost to constitute its narrative thread.’ What strikes you as you read each of these themes? What grace might you ask for from the Lord for yourself, for the parish and for those receiving catechesis?*

i) Firm trust in the Holy Spirit, who is present and active in the Church, the world and in the human heart. This brings to the catechetical effort a note of joy, serenity and responsibility.

ii) The act of faith is born from the love that desires an ever-increasing knowledge of the Lord Jesus, living in the Church, and for this reason initiating believers into the Christian life means introducing them to the living encounter with him.

iii) The Church, mystery of communion, is enlivened by the Spirit and made fruitful in bringing forth new life. This outlook of faith reaffirms the role of the Christian community as the natural setting for the generation and maturation of Christian life.

iv) The process of evangelisation, and of catechesis as part of it, is above all a spiritual action. Catechists must be true ‘evangelisers with the Spirit’ and the pastors’ faithful co-workers.

v) The fundamental role of the baptised is recognised. In their dignity as children of God, all believers are active participants in the catechetical initiative, not passive consumers or recipients of a service, and because of this are called to become authentic missionary disciples.

vi) Living the mystery of faith in terms of relationship with the Lord has implications for the proclamation of the Gospel. It requires, in fact, overcoming any opposition between content and method, between faith and life.

Catechesis has an essential role within the whole process of evangelisation. ‘This requires the commitment and the responsibility to identify new languages with which to communicate the faith…..The Church is committed to deciphering some of the signs of the times through which the Lord shows her the path to take. Among these multiple signs can be recognised:

1. The centrality of the believer and of her/his life experience
2. The considerable role of relationships and the affections
3. Interest in that which offers true meaning
4. The rediscovery of that which is beautiful and lifts the spirit.

In these and the other movements of contemporary culture the Church grasps the possibility for encounter and for proclamation of the newness of the faith. This is the linchpin of her missionary transformation which drives pastoral conversion. (Dir4-5)

*Talking with someone in a language they do not understand hampers effective conversation! In looking at these four signs of the times, how might they help us find a language that can be more easily understood in order better to communicate the faith? Are there other signs of the times you might add?*

1. **Revelation and its Transmission (Directory 11-16)**

All that the Church is, all that the Church does, finds its ultimate foundation in the fact that God…wanted to reveal the mystery of his will by communicating himself to human beings….From the very beginning of creation, God has never ceased to communicate this plan of salvation to human beings and to show them signs of his love. *What signs of his love does God continue to show me? Can I ask for the grace of courage in sharing my experience of God’s goodness with others, when appropriate? How might I enable others to pause and recognise the signs of God’s love in their lives? Maybe using and helping others to use the Ignatian Examen might help? See* [*www.pathwaystogod.org*](http://www.pathwaystogod.org) *for resources.*

God manifests and puts into action his plan in a new and definitive way in the person of his Son….Revelation is an initiative of God’s love and is directed towards communion…..

The novelty of the Christian message does not consist in an idea but in a fact: God has revealed himself. Precisely because it unveils a new life – life without sin, life as his children, life in abundance, eternal life, this proclamation is beautiful.

The divine plan is:

* A mystery of love: human beings, loved by God, are called to respond to him, becoming a sign of love for their brothers and sisters;
* The revelation of the intimate truth of God as Trinity and of humanity’s vocation to a life in Christ, source of our dignity, as God’s sons and daughters;
* The offer of salvation to all through the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, gift of God’s grace and mercy, which implies liberation from evil, from sin and from death
* The definitive call to reunite scattered humanity in the Church, bringing about communion with God and fraternal union among people already in the here and now, but to be fulfilled completely at the end of time.

Jesus inaugurates and proclaims the kingdom of God for every person. He is the complete manifestation of God’s mercy and of the call to love that is in the heart of humanity….Entering into communion with him and following him offers fullness and truth upon human life.

There is a close connection between the recognition of God’s action in the heart of every person, the primacy of the Holy Spirit and the universal openness to every person.

*As I read the above, I am struck by………….*

*Three of my reactions to the above:*

*It is God’s work; we are helping the Holy Spirit, not replacing the Spirit.*

*The divine plan, in those four points, is something massively exciting. How can we communicate that excitement?*

*God is already present in the hearts of those who come to us for catechesis, drawing them (and us) deeper into communion. How can we help them recognise the already action of God in their hearts?*

1. **Faith in Jesus Christ: the response to God who reveals himself. (Directory 17-23)**

*There are several rich images in these next passages. Read them prayerfully. How does it speak to you of God’s action in the world, in the lives of people, in our lives?*

*‘*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you.’ When a human being comes within God’s reach, he or she is called to respond….Faith responds to that ‘waiting’, often unconscious and always limited in its knowledge of the truth about God, about humanity itself and about the destiny what awaits us.

The Christian faith is, first of all, the welcoming of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ, sincere adherence to his person, and the free decision to follow him….. We *believe* Jesus when we accept his word, his testimony, because he is truthful. We *believe in* Jesus when we personally welcome him into our lives and journey towards him, clinging to him in love and following in his footsteps along the way, on a dynamic journey that lasts a whole lifetime…. To believe is an adherence of the heart, of the mind and of action.

Faith is certainly a personal act and, nevertheless, it is not an individual and private choice; it has a relational and communal character… The faith of the disciple of Christ is kindled, sustained and transmitted only in the communion of ecclesial faith where the ‘I believe’ of Baptism is married to the ‘we believe’ of the whole Church. Every believer joins the community of disciples and makes the Church’s faith their own. Together with the Church which is the people of God on a journey in history and the universal sacrament of salvation, the believer is part of her mission.

The Church carries out in history the same mission that Jesus had received from the Father.

The Holy Spirit, true protagonist of the whole of the Church’s mission, acts both in the Church and on those whom she must reach and by whom, in a certain way, she must also be reached, since God works in the hearts of everyone. The Spirit continues to enliven the Church, which lives by the word of God, and makes her grow always in the understanding of the Gospel, sending her and supporting her in the work of evangelising the world. The Spirit himself, from within humanity, sows the seed of the Word; supports good desires and works; prepares the reception of the Gospel and grants faith, so that, through the Church’s witness, human beings may recognise the loving presence and communication of God.

*As I read this I am encouraged by…………*

*As I read this I am inspired by………..*

*As I read this I am challenged by……..*