



An Ancient Ministry with a New Face

Bishop of Elphin, Kevin Doran gives an encouraging approach to the ministry of lay catechists in a parish. Bishop Kevin was the co-ordinator of the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, 2012.



Pope's Intention (evangelisation): Let us pray for the catechists, summoned to announce the Word of God: may they be its witnesses, with courage and creativity and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

were the gift of God, just like the fish in the Sea of Galilee. It was their responsibility, they said, as Christians and as fishermen, to

share that gift fairly and to protect it for future generations.

Two thousand years ago, St Paul wrote to the people of Corinth: 'There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord' (1 Cor 12:4). The Catholics in the Amazon seemed to realise that a Christian community needs more than the gift of a priest if it is to 'make disciples' (Mt 28). In a mature Church, the

As a young priest, I spent some time in Brazil. One evening we were introduced to two fishermen, Joao and Sebastiao, who also served as catechists in a Christian community. Their mission was to help Christians reflect on the Word of God, in the light of what was going on in their own lives. They shared with us a reflection on the gospel of the miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5). For them, the fish in the Amazon

A parish is more correctly understood as a community in which people are formed as disciples and called to mission.

Catechist is not there to replace the priest. He or she is part of an essentially missionary team, incorporating a variety of charisms so that Christians can achieve together what cannot be done alone.

For many years, we operated a model of Church in Ireland that saw the priest as someone who has all the gifts that are necessary for the parish. This understanding has not gone away. During the recent pandemic, the mission of the Church was routinely described in terms of 'religious services'.

A parish is more correctly understood as a community in which people are formed as disciples and called to mission. The contribution of religious sisters in forming disciples has been significant, but it was 'discovered' too late. Some pioneering lay catechists, together with permanent deacons, have brought new charisms into the mix in recent times.

The sharing of faith needs to begin in the family home. Faith is given a deeper understanding in the Catholic school. It is not realistic to think that Catholic schools alone could provide the formation in faith that would sustain a person through a lifetime of discipleship. The National Catechetical Directory, *Share the Good News*, tells us that 'The catechesis of adults is the chief form and model for all catechesis and for faith development at every level in the Church' (SGN, 69).

Five years ago, the Diocese of Elphin invited over thirty lay people into formation as 'Partners in the Gospel' (cf Phil 1:4). Their formation did not just involve attendance at lectures. They lived, worked and prayed together for many weekends each year, deepening their own sense of discipleship and community. The first group of fifteen 'Partners' was commissioned in September 2020. In the midst of the pandemic, they began providing support for parents who, in turn, were trying to support their children in preparing for the Sacraments. The plan for the future is that, each year, one or two specific catechetical projects will be developed and offered to parishes and parish clusters throughout the Diocese, so that we all grow together.

In May 2021, Pope Francis, with his letter *Antiquum Ministerium*, gave fresh impetus when he formally established the lay ministry of Catechist as a stable ministry within the Church. He asked bishops to give effect to this ministry by 'determining the necessary process of formation' and the 'criteria for admission' and 'devising the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise' (AM, 9). In communion with Pope Francis, we pray this month for catechists, who are called to be faithful, creative and courageous witnesses of God's Word. ❤️