

*F*orming those who form others.

Key Principles of Our Work

The Franciscan University Catechetical Institute works to help dioceses offer substantive, rich, and engaging catechetical formation at the local level. Our work is grounded in key catechetical principles put forth by the Church and honed in our on-campus setting for the past three decades.

As the questions and answers below show, although we have now expanded our work online and in local settings, the principles guiding us have not changed.

① Why does subsidiarity matter so much in evangelization and catechetics?

In his landmark social encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI gave the classic definition of subsidiarity:

“Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every *social activity* ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them” (QA, 79; *emphasis added*, see CCC 1883, 1894).

The Catechetical Institute takes seriously the principle of subsidiarity. We recognize that passing on the faith is a *social* activity. All conversion is *local*, which is why faith formation must remain a robustly supported local activity. As an Institute, we don't want to bypass those in the local community who have the responsibility for forming others in the faith, and we trust participants to take responsibility for their own learning (CL 63).

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① Why does subsidiarity matter so much in evangelization and catechetics? *(continued)*

Failure to honor this principle risks disempowering the local community in favor of a cult of experts. As the *General Directory of Catechesis* explains:

“Catechetical pedagogy will be effective to the extent that the Christian community becomes a point of concrete reference for the faith journey of individuals. This happens when the community is proposed as a source, locus, and means of catechesis. Concretely, the community becomes a visible place of faith-witness. It provides for the formation of its members. It receives them as the family of God. It constitutes itself as the living and permanent environment for growth in the faith. Besides public and collective proclamation of the Gospel, person-to-person contact, after the example of Jesus and the Apostles, remains indispensable. In this way, personal conscience is more easily committed. The gift of the Holy Spirit comes to the subject from one living person to another. Thus, the power of persuasion becomes more effective” (GDC 158).

All of the Catechetical Institute’s online formation is designed to support and complement the formation being undertaken *locally* and *personally* in parishes, families, schools, and communities. Never forgetting that formation in the faith is always first and foremost God’s attentive presence to us as *individuals*, our workshops address various aspects of what best fosters local competency. This includes encouraging personal accountability to excellence and creating tasks that demonstrate the effectiveness of soul-to-soul persuasion, dialogue, and genuine openness to others.

Likewise, we seek to honor the movements of grace within each person called to the work of catechesis, building people to serve people. In our workshops, we encourage relational ministry, challenge the prevalent “program-running” mentality, and support parish and school leaders in developing greater administrative efficiency, all with the goal of helping them to be more *personally available* to people.

Following this divine pedagogy, the work of forming souls must be attentive to the words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

“[I]n the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one’s personal experience of faith? It must not happen that the pressing need to proclaim the Good News to the multitudes should cause us to forget this form of proclamation whereby an individual’s personal conscience is reached and touched by an entirely unique word that he receives from someone else” (EN 46).

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② In light of this, how does the Institute support local parishes and communities as centers of learning and formation?

In Acts 2:41-42, Luke describes the first local Christian community:

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.”

As noted in this passage and echoed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, four pillars marked this early community’s way of being together: 1) The Apostles’ teaching (Creed); 2) Fellowship (Life in Christ); 3) The breaking of the bread (Liturgy, centered on the Eucharist), and 4) The prayers (Christian prayer).

Non-local efforts can aid or enrich these four pillars, but their essence is *fundamentally* local. Fellowship is profoundly proximal. The Mass, and all the sacramental celebrations, exist only when clergy and laity share a sacred space and a personal moment of offering and reception. And the prayers, always stemming from Jesus’ own emphasis, draw us together: “If we pray the Our Father sincerely, we leave individualism behind, because the love that we receive frees us from it” (CCC 2792).

The first pillar, however, the one that encompasses catechesis and formation in Catholic teaching, is less often recognized as a work self-evidently local. In current times, guest speakers from afar and high-quality audio and video teachings have threatened to replace local catechists. This presents numerous problems.

First, for all their talent and all they have to offer, these guest speakers and video teachers are not connected to the many local dioceses and parishes that use their services, nor are they involved with the ongoing work of forming and loving a particular people in a particular place. They are unable to participate in the struggles and graces involved with forming those people.

Likewise, an over-reliance on distant experts can undercut a diocese’s commitment to form people locally—a commitment that takes far greater effort, time, and resources, but which also is able to more fruitfully address the particular needs of a parish, region, or diocese.

Moreover, in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, this harder way is the Church’s way:

“The most precious gift that the Church can offer the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith” (Guide for Catechists, 8).

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To reemphasize, non-local helps and training can aid this first pillar, but its essence remains *fundamentally* local. The long-term goal should be forming a confident parent in *that* place, a competent catechist in *that* place, a capable lay leader in *that* place, and, most important of all, a clearly empowered chief catechist in *that* place. A priestly father whose vocation can become the locus of teaching, community fellowship, liturgy, and prayers allows the immanent hospitality of Christ to enliven catechesis with a spirit of human warmth and welcome around *that* particular altar.

To make this possible, in our workshops we encourage participants to grow in self-knowledge, offering tasks that increase awareness of faults and problematic comfort zones in relationships. We also offer personality/temperament analysis, help learners discover common needs and motivations in their communities, and create workshop tasks that hone participants' ability to listen, show authentic interest in another's good, and practice empathy.

③ Why are mentors so important in this process of formation?

As we have seen, the Institute's overarching priority is forming those who have the responsibility for forming others in the faith, not replacing those people with distant experts or high-production-value video and audio resources. We want evangelization and catechesis to remain appropriately situated with those who can be in authentic ministerial relationships in the field.

To accomplish this, the online workshops designed by the Institute rely upon *mentorship*—and we envisage that this be as local as possible, with mentors in local families, parishes, schools. By offering workshops that are best taken with a local guiding figure, the Catechetical Institute seeks to encourage dioceses in the direction of mentored formation. The Institute's approach allows for a person-to-person engagement over extended periods of formation, guided by the tasks and assessments in the workshops.

While this asks for greater time commitments by both learners and mentors, there are clear advantages. Learners become better ministers and are enabled to take more creative ownership of their own call to serve and form souls. Likewise, mentors and diocesan officials can develop deeper relationships with those they are called to lead and form, as well as grow in their own formation skills and ministerial competence.

④ How does this approach allow us to be co-workers with God as he forms his people?

The Church teaches that God's own educational activity is at the heart of all catechetical formation, and this education, first and foremost, takes the form of evangelization (see CT 72; CL 61, 63; GDC 33, 138, 238, 244). The basic Gospel message is always necessary, desired, and able to transform. Whatever the time or the place, the Gospel can penetrate *any* culture.

If local sources of formation are not familiar with the *kerygma*, a parish or school runs the risk of teaching the unconverted. Therefore, in our online workshops we encourage an articulation of the *kerygma* for different types of groups, and create tasks that help catechists learn to discern to what degree those they are teaching have accepted the basic Gospel message.

As St. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, “We are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). We collaborate with God, who educates and forms us for eternal happiness. God’s formation of us is rooted in sacramental grace, which elevates nature. Accordingly, authentic spiritual formation is fundamentally liturgical and eucharistic, and thereby manifestly *local*.

In our online workshops, we support this local formation by encouraging times of adoration, by creating tasks that stress the importance of Mass and confession, and by helping participants articulate how various doctrines relate to the liturgy.

⑤ How does the Catechetical Institute support formation in community?

The Institute wants to help local communities develop ongoing formation at all levels and ages (CT 43, 57; GDC 59). Part of this ongoing formation is ongoing conversion. Spiritual formation is our *first* priority. The goal for every catechist is to “become what you teach”—to become a witness. The person of the catechist—not their skill or the program they run—is what makes for effective catechesis.

For this reason, in our workshops we encourage a personal inventory of how participants are seeking God, create tasks to help them grow in specific virtues, recommend the use of *lectio divina* and guided meditations, and encourage specific prayer habits and forms.

We also stress the importance of family. In both our teaching and assessment, we strive to recognize vocational callings and encourage students to live those out. In our workshops, we encourage participants to clearly articulate their vocation, and we create tasks that invite them to prioritize and distinguish between ministerial and vocational callings and then apply what they’ve learned about vocations to practical situations in their own communities.



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*Congregavit nos in unum
Christi amor.*

*The love of Christ has
gathered us into one.*

⑥ How is the Franciscan charism present in the formation offered by the Catechetical Institute?

A spirit of Franciscan joy permeates our academic life here at Franciscan University, and in our online workshops we encourage just such a joyous response to ministerial challenges. The closer we grow to Christ in his Church, the more joy we experience.

This entails a radical openness to God's will and an acceptance of the refining and transforming role of suffering. We recognize that such joy flows from great trust, generosity, and personal sacrifice.

Moreover, in the workshop tasks, we aim to foster an instinctive loyalty to Mother Church through the graced channels of the Church's hierarchy and an acceptance of the faith, whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor.

We hope to encourage those who take our workshops to welcome the guidance of the Spirit's voice in the magisterium and the ministry of Peter. Everything we do, we strive to do *for* the Church and *with* the Church.

Above all, the spirit of discipleship we seek to foster in our Institute is deeply *personal* and *local*, with one soul reaching out to another.

In all we do, we seek to follow St. Teresa of Calcutta's advice:

"Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time, and always start with the person nearest you."

To learn more about how the Franciscan University Catechetical Institute can help form faithful, joyful, and effective catechists in your diocese, contact:

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