

Sowing Seeds on Fertile Ground – Towards a Catechumenal Model of the Christian Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke

Jason George Dedo

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Abstract

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Can moving toward a catechumenal model in the Christian initiation of children enable full, active and conscious participation of young families in the life and mission of the Church? This Doctor of Ministry thesis explores this question in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke as it continues the transition from a school based preparation model towards the catechumenal model. This study is of consequence to the Diocese of Pembroke in examining the current situation of the initiation process for children in parishes and may be significant for other Roman Catholic dioceses that are or will be making the transition to an initiation process toward the catechumenal model. As a work in practical theology, this thesis is framed in a practice-theory-practice method. Historical and contemporary theological perspectives that relate to the initiation of children were examined. Phenomenological research was utilized to gather data collected from the interviews of participants involved in the initiation ministry from five parishes in the Diocese. Interview participants included children, parents, parish catechists and pastors/parish administrators.

The findings from the research were analyzed and interpreted in conversation with the current theological vision of the Church concerning the catechumenal model. This analysis was viewed through the lens of five foundational components of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*: the RCIA as the model for all catechesis, the gradual nature of initiation, the significant role of the faith community in the process, liturgical catechesis and the integral roles of parents, parish catechists and mentors in the catechumenal process. From this analysis, recommendations for best practices were formulated. Conclusions drawn from this study affirm that adopting a

catechumenal model of the sacramental initiation of children can help to enable full, active and conscious participation of young families in the life and mission of the Church and further indicate the possibility of families, catechists and parishes to experience transformation in faith. The research study suggests that if the process is based on the catechumenal model, then transformation of families, catechists and priests and active, full and conscious participation of young families in the life and mission of the Church are more likely to occur.

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Introduction

The Project

The title of my thesis project is *Sowing Seeds on Fertile Ground – Towards a Catechumenal Model of the Christian Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke*. The image of the sower sowing seeds is taken from the Parable of the Sower from the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark.¹ I chose this image purposely as it is a powerful scripture account found in the opening pages of the *General Directory for Catechesis* and it speaks to the vision of catechesis.² Those involved in the catechetical ministry are charged not only with sowing the seeds of God's Word but also creating the conditions for the seed to take root and multiply a hundredfold. In reference to this parable, the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* states: "This [good] soil stands in contrast to the other three kinds of soil. The fate of the seeds sown in it also contrasts with the fate of those sown elsewhere. The point of the parable lies in these contrasts."³ The catechetical ministry involves the preparation of good, fertile soil as much as possible and then sowing seeds of faith hoping that they one day will bear fruit. In essence this means that effective catechesis is creating the best conditions possible to share God's Word and invite young families to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

I use the verb *towards* in my title intentionally. My study is about a parish-based process moving *toward* the vision of the catechumenal model. This initiation process is held up by the

¹ See Mark 4:3-8

² In *Catechesi Tradendae*, catechesis is defined as "... 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 to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life" (#18). John Paul II. *Apostolic Exhortation – Catechesi Tradendae – Catechesis in Our Time*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html (accessed December 16, 2013), #18.

³ *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 605.

Church as exemplary and, as such, no parish attains the ideal of such a process. Just as no disciple is perfect and must constantly work towards being a more committed disciple, parishes are working toward the process in an ongoing way. For many, using the catechumenal model as a prototype for initiation is a radical shift in thinking and acting – a shift that involves the entire Church.

This project addresses the issue of the sacramental initiation of children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke. At the request of the former Bishop of Pembroke, the Most Reverend Richard W. Smith, the process of the initiation of children is moving from a Catholic school-based model to a parish-based model in many places in the Diocese. The effort was established through a new diocesan policy, *Policy for the Sacramental Initiation for Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke* (see Appendix 1), which was promulgated by the Most Reverend Michael Mulhall, the current Bishop of Pembroke, on the Solemnity of Pentecost – May 31, 2009. With this new policy, the expectation was that any parishes not already offering a parish-based initiation experience would begin that transition within a year.⁴

My hypothesis is that adopting a catechumenal model of the sacramental initiation of children can enable full, active and conscious participation⁵ of young families in the life and

⁴ When I refer to a parish-based process, I am speaking of the Diocesan movement toward the vision of the Church in the catechumenal model described in Chapter I.

⁵ “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #14. Full, active and conscious participation in the Liturgy was explained by Pope John Paul II in his *Ad Limina* Address to the Bishops of the United States of America on October 9, 1998. In this address, John Paul II described full participation as meaning that “...every member of the [faith] community has a part to play in the liturgy...;” active participation as meaning that “...in gesture, word, song and service, all members of the [faith] community take part in an act of worship...;” and conscious participation “...calls for the entire community to be properly instructed in the mysteries of the liturgy, lest the experience would degenerate into a form of ritualism...” Source: John Paul II, “Ad Limina Address or Pope John Paul II to Bishops of the United States On Active Participation in the Liturgy”, *Adoremus Bulletin*, Online Edition, Vol. 4, No. 7 – November 1998. <http://www.adoremus.org/JPIIadlim1198.html>, (accessed December 19, 2013), 2-3.

mission of the Church⁶. The movement toward realizing the adoption of this model also makes it possible for families and parishes to be transformed in the process. Aspects of transformation will be explored in a more complete way later in this work when the transformation of parishes, pastors, catechists and young families is discussed.

When I refer to transformation, I mean that the process of initiation is meant to be transformational – not only for the candidates but for the entire faith community. For this thesis project, the transformation being observed is transformation in regards to the faith life of families, catechists, pastors and the faith community. Is anything different or changed regarding faith because of participation in a parish sacramental initiation process in the lives of parishioners and the parish itself? Thomas Groome states that the purpose of catechesis is to inform, form and transform persons and communities as apprentices in building the Kingdom of God.⁷

Thomas Groome offers the following commentary on what it is to transform with regards to faith:

To transform: I use this term to capture the lifelong nature of Christian conversion, that it is a journey more than an achievement, a dynamic process rather than a static state. Christian conversion calls us *personally* to lifelong growth in living the life of Jesus, and *socially* to help transform church and society towards God's reign. If we cease to grow in faith, we can readily lose it entirely. If we settle for the Church as anything less than "the universal sacrament of salvation for the life of the world (GDC # 83), we fail in the social responsibilities of Christian faith. Clearly, Christian conversion takes a lifetime.⁸

According to this explanation by Groome, I understand the transforming effect of the parish sacramental initiation of children process to be both personal and social. Transformation can be

⁶ By "Church" I mean the People of the Roman Catholic Church that God gathers in the whole world. This includes the clergy, the laity and the institution. Different models of Church as they relate to this thesis are referred to in section 1.4.1 of *Chapter 1 – Models of Church and Catechumenal Initiation*.

⁷ Thomas H. Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always" in *Horizons and Hopes – The Future of Religious Education*, ed. Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell. (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 6-7.

⁸ Thomas H. Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education", 8.

personal in the sense that individuals can be transformed in their life of faith (increase in prayer life, participation in the Sunday liturgy, growing in understanding of their ministry as a vocation, seeking faith formation opportunities, etc.). Transformation can also be social in the sense that the catechetical ministry has the power to call a faith community to conversion (a commitment to intergenerational catechesis, understanding that all members of the faith community are responsible for the initiation process, a parish is welcoming and inviting to young families, the impact on the community, society and the reign of God, etc.).

According to Groome, transformation is at the heart of Christian conversion. With regards to the initiation process, there are two meanings of conversion that are not unrelated. The first meaning has to do with the initial stages of the initiation process. When being evangelized⁹, people are invited to a manner of conversion to the Christian life and to follow Christ. The *General Directory for Catechesis* describes this understanding of conversion and faith:

The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ making, of oneself a disciple of him. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him and to live as he lived. In this way the believer unites himself [sic] to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church.¹⁰

When a person begins to show these initial signs of conversion to follow Jesus and His way, these are signs of readiness to enter further into the initiation process. In this explanation, the *General Directoy for Catechesis* also highlights the central role of discipleship in the conversion and initiation process. Conversion means becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, following Him

⁹ The *General Directory for Catechesis* defines evangelization as “the carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men (sic) and renew the human race.” (#46)

¹⁰ *General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for the Clergy. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1997), #53.

and in doing so, forming a community with other disciples of Christ. The second meaning of conversion takes this initial step further.

Unlike some fundamentalist Christians¹¹, the Catholic Christian understanding of conversion is that it is a lifelong process. The *General Directory for Catechesis* outlines this process of continuing conversion:

Faith is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers. Adhering to Jesus Christ, in fact, sets in motion a process of continuing conversion, which lasts for the whole of life. He who comes to faith is like a new born child, who, little by little, will grow and change into an adult, tending towards the state of the “perfect man,” [sic] and to maturity in the fullness of Christ.¹²

This process of continuing conversion to be more Christ-like is the normal journey for a Christian. As disciples growing into the “full stature” of Christ¹³, we are constantly challenged to better ourselves and to turn to Christ as a model. Thus, Christians are called to continually transform themselves as they strive daily to be genuine disciples who follow Christ and His teachings. Many facets of the Christian life can have a transformative effect.

The Church also recognizes the transforming effect of the liturgy, the sacraments and related ministries. The Liturgy is described as “...the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.”¹⁴ As such a fundamental part of the life of the Church, the Sunday Liturgy is a most significant place for the ministry of

¹¹ I understand “fundamentalist Christians” to be Christians to hold to a strict, literal interpretation of the Bible. A more systematic working definition of “Christian fundamentalist” comes from George M. Marsden: “A fundamentalist must be an evangelical. Essential to being an evangelical, in the dominant American sense, are at least three points derived largely from the Reformation. First, one must be a ‘Bible believer,’ having a high view of the Bible as the highest authority on what God says. Second, one must believe that eternal salvation comes only through the atoning work of Jesus Christ for our sins. And third, the kindest thing one person can do for another is to tell him or her this gospel promise of salvation. In addition, fundamentalists must be militant. They must not only believe these evangelical teachings, but they must be willing to fight for them against modernist theologies, secular humanism, and the like”. Source: George M. Marsden, “Defining American Fundamentalism” in *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon – A View from Within, A Response from Without*, ed. Norman J. Cohen. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 23.

¹² *GDC*, #56.

¹³ Ephesians 4:13

¹⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #10.

catechesis. Pope John Paul II explained that “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings.”¹⁵ This indicates that the sacramental initiation process can be transformative to all involved as well as to the faith community. The very nature of the catechetical ministry is to call to conversion. Therefore, transformation through the catechetical ministry should be apparent in both evident and less evident forms. An evident transformation could be full, active and conscious participation in the Sunday Eucharist.¹⁶ A less evident transformation could be a catechist sharing how her involvement in the catechetical ministry has caused her to learn more about her faith tradition and appreciate more deeply the symbols of the Sunday liturgy.

Transformation is at the heart of the catechetical ministry. The Church’s *General Directory for Catechesis* identifies the transformational nature of catechesis as it is experienced by the Christian community:

The Christian community not only gives much to those who are being catechized but also receives much from them. New converts, especially adolescents and adults, in adhering to Jesus Christ, bring to the community which receives them new religious and human wealth. Thus the community grows and develops. Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized but also brings the community itself to maturity.¹⁷

At its core, catechesis has elements that can prepare the soil for the Spirit of God to transform.

As identified by the *General Directory for Catechesis*, this transformation can happen in both the individuals involved and in the faith community in which the catechetical ministry is being exercised. Experiences of such transformations will be discussed in greater length in the “3.3 - Transformation” section which follows later in this thesis project.

In the parish-based process of the sacramental initiation of children, the main partners are

¹⁵ *Catechesi Tradendae*, #23.

¹⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #14.

¹⁷ *GDC*, #221.

the home and the parish. Parents, as the primary educators in the faith of their child, have a leading and fundamental role here.¹⁸ At the parish level, the catechists, pastors and entire faith community are to play an essential part in accompanying children and families on the journey towards initiation in the Church.¹⁹ My research examines what is occurring presently within those parishes that have experienced this change toward the catechumenal model for initiation for a period of time and those parishes that are in the formative stages of this transition. One of the fruits of my research will be to discover the best possible practices for the parish-based model. This refers also to the practice-theory-practice model of practical theology which will be discussed further in an upcoming section entitled *A Practical Theological Framework*.

My Background and Role in this Project

I am a teacher with the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board who has been seconded to work for the Diocese over the past eight years in the Office of Faith Formation. My professional role in this process is as Director of Diocesan Faith Formation and Leadership Development. For the last nine years, beginning with the Diocesan Faith Formation Symposium, which was held in the autumn of 2005, I have been involved in both the dialogue and the process which have led to the drafting of the *Policy*. My first responsibility was to engage the partners in dialogue and to gather the feedback in the process of drafting the *Policy*. In addition, I am also responsible for assisting parishes and catechists in implementing the *Policy*. For the past eight years, I have also been a catechist in my parish, supporting families who have children involved

¹⁸ *General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for the Clergy. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1997), #255.

¹⁹ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987), #9.

in immediate preparation for the sacraments of initiation as well as the sacrament of reconciliation.

Purpose of this Study

Through this research, I intend to show that it is possible for young families to be engaged in a full, active and conscious way in the life and mission of the Church by participating in the sacramental initiation process of children based on the catechumenal model. I further hope to show that both individuals and parishes can be transformed²⁰ by such a process. I expect that many of the challenges and accomplishments associated with this process will surface during my research.

The research I will conduct for my study will be of consequence to my work in the Diocese. It will be important for the Diocese and for me, the researcher, to discover how this transition unfolds for parishes. Do young families actually become more fully integrated into the life and mission of the Church as they participate in an initiation process based on the catechumenal model? Can this integration be observed and articulated? These are the central questions. The study will also be constructive for other Roman Catholic dioceses that are making the transition to a catechumenal model of initiation. It may also provide a helpful description of the process of the initiation of children in the Roman Catholic Canadian context where there is little research available. Identifying best practices will also be a useful concluding piece to this study.

²⁰ See explanation of transformation in the first section of this thesis, *The Project*.

A Practical Theological Framework

This thesis is a work of practical theology and the general framework that I will be using is the practice-theory-practice structure which is common to this field. The practice-theory-practice model generally means beginning with one's practice in ministry. In my case, my area of practice is in the ministry of initiation at both the parish and diocesan levels. Being cognizant of the practical part of one's ministry, the researcher then moves to the theoretical aspect of his or her area of inquiry to consult Church documents, Scripture and Tradition to get a sense of what the theological texts and experts have to say about the issue they are researching. After consulting these sources, the researcher then moves back to focus on the practice in their area of interest to apply the theological understandings he or she has acquired and to put them into dialogue with the practical aspect of their ministry.²¹ This cycle can be repeated numerous times as the researcher carries out his or her research. I will refer to work of four major practical theologians for this framework – Don Browning, Richard Osmer, and John Swinton and Harriet Mowat who co-authored their text.

This practice-theory practice structure is referred to by Don Browning in his book, *A Fundamental Practical Theology – Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*.²² In this work, Browning presents what he refers to as fundamental practical theology in four movements which he names descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology and strategic practical theology.²³ Browning also refers to these steps as the four movements of the hermeneutical circle. Osmer offers one way of describing the hermeneutical circle, which is "...the interpretive

²¹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Research Design* (London, England: SMC Press, 2006), 82.

²² Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology – Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996), 9.

²³ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 8.

process wherein the scholar moves backwards and forwards ‘from the whole to the part and back to the whole.’”²⁴ From my research situation, this back and forth movement means first looking at my own experience and that of the parishes of my Diocese concerning the initiation ministry. The data to examine this experience was gathered from interviews I conducted with participants in the parish initiation process in the spring of 2011. Then, the process moves to interpreting new experiences and examining theological and catechetical sources related to this ministry. The movement is then to put them into dialogue with the experience with which I began. New experiences and learning are always related back to the whole of the situation or original context of the initiation ministry.

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat offer a practical theological reflection model that, like Browning’s, involves four interrelated stages. These are the current praxis, cultural/contextual, theological and formulating revised practice.²⁵ Richard Osmer explains that practical theological interpretation “...constantly circles back to tasks that have already been explored.”²⁶ Osmer likewise proposes a model with four tasks which he identifies as the descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative and pragmatic. These three models differ somewhat but are related in that they all offer a way of taking a practical theological approach to a study which involves a method that generally adheres to a structure that utilizes the practice-theory-practice method and the hermeneutical circle which leads to transformed practice. These four authors and their three texts provide the basis for a practical theological framework as I will not be tied to one particular model. I will be using a combination of these models to frame my study. Thus, when

²⁴ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Research Design*, 116.

²⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 95.

²⁶ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology – An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 11.

appropriate, I will be referring to some of these three aforementioned models as they inform the various stages of my thesis.

I have chosen to use the phenomenological research method for my research study. The phenomenological method is used to serve the practical theological framework I have described above. The phenomenological method will provide me with the data necessary for a rich, thick description of the phenomenon which is the focus of my study, namely the process of the Christian initiation of children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke. This thick, rich description is necessary in order to provide the data needed for a comprehensive study in practical theology. The practical theological methods of Osmer, Browning and Swinton and Mowat insist on such a description in the first stage of their respective models. A detailed description of the phenomenological research method and how it serves my study appears in section 2.1 – *Research Method*, which is at the beginning of Chapter II of this dissertation.

The particular model of phenomenological research I used for my study is a method proposed by John Creswell in his book, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design – Choosing Among Five Approaches*.²⁷ Creswell's model begins with the researcher describing his or her personal experiences with the phenomenon and concludes with writing a description of what the participants in the study experienced and how they experienced it. Once the data is collected from transcribing interviews with participants in the study, organized and presented, the findings can be analyzed and point to renewed practice which fits in the latter stages of the practical theological methods I have alluded to above.

²⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design – Choosing Among Five Approaches – Second Edition*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 159.

Chapter I – Historical and Contemporary Theological Perspectives

In this Chapter, I will present the history and development since Vatican Council II of some of the main elements that are of consequence to the catechumenate in general and for the catechumenate for children in particular. Taking the practice-theory-practice model of practical theology²⁸ into account, this section will look at the theology and Church documents surrounding Christian initiation in light of past and current practice. According to Browning, “Historical theology asks, What do the normative texts that are already part of our effective history *really* imply for our praxis when they are confronted as honestly as possible?”²⁹ This segment of the thesis will include a selected historical review and some reflection on contemporary Church teaching regarding Christian initiation. Creswell’s model of phenomenological research does not ask for a historical or theological commentary concerning the issues being studied.

1.1 The Development and the Restoration of the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults

The present *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* has evolved over time with the liturgical renewal of the twentieth century. From the liturgical reforms of the Council of Trent that began in the sixteenth and seventeenth century up to the reforms that were brought about by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960’s and 1970’s, very little development occurred concerning the theological understanding, liturgical texts and format of the rites of Christian Initiation.³⁰ Over

²⁸ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 9.

²⁹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 49. Related to this stage of Browning’s is the third stage of a practical theological method provided by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat in *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, which they refer to as “theological reflection.” (p.95) At this particular stage a “critical reflection on the practices of the church in light of scripture and tradition...” occurs. (p. 95)

³⁰ Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation – Their Evolution and Interpretation, Revised and Expanded Edition*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 381.

time, there were several developments in pastoral practice that contributed to the call for liturgical reform prominent at the Second Vatican Council.

The first phenomenon worth noting is the issue of the order in which the sacraments of initiation were given and the resulting distortion of the meaning of these sacraments and their relationship with one another. Evidence illustrates that during the 1700's in several European countries, first communion was being received before confirmation.³¹ As this practice proliferated, the Church became concerned, and a preparatory document, *De Administratione Sacramentorum*, was readied for the First Vatican Council in 1870. The document stated: "...we absolutely want to correct the custom that is opposite to the perpetual practice of the Church, but that is practiced here and there. It concerns the practice that follows an inverse order by administering confirmation to those who have previously been admitted to communion."³² In essence, the Church wanted to move back to the practice of celebrating the sacrament of confirmation before first Eucharist which had a much longer tradition in the history of the Church. In 1910, through the decree *Quam Singulari*, Pope Pius X restored the reception of first communion to the age of reason. The pastoral practice of giving first communion before confirmation did not change as a result of this decree, and, if anything, it became more pronounced.³³ This practice continued during the twentieth century but the Church's understanding of the issue appeared to be consistent through Church documents and statements. It should be noted that in 1932, the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments said that children should not come to first communion before confirmation, and, in 1952, the Commission for

³¹ Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* 382.

³² Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* 382-383.

³³ Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* 383.

Interpreting the Code of Canon Law denied bishops the authority to delay confirmation until children were ten years old.³⁴

One of the problems that surfaced as a result of the sacrament of confirmation being out of order was a misunderstanding of the theology behind this sacrament. As Angela Darrow Flynn explains, the disorder of sacraments can cause a distortion of the understanding of the position of Eucharist as outstanding amongst the sacraments:

An initial pastoral question that arises is whether our current praxis risks diminishing for our children the pre-eminent position of Eucharist. Baptized as infants, children don't remember their Baptism, and they begin to receive Eucharist when their grasp on right and wrong has just blossomed. Furthermore, Confirmation is presented as a "mature" decision, an embracing of their faith. Confirmation, with its service hours, continued encouragement to choose a Confirmation name, and the ever-growing retreats, interviews, and meetings with the Bishop, becomes far more significant an event than either Baptism or Eucharist, the source and summit of the liturgical life!³⁵

Celebrating confirmation as the last sacrament of initiation can inadvertently give it some prominence among the sacraments which is a mistake given the theological understanding of the primacy of Eucharist among the sacraments of initiation. It seems that in many instances, choosing a confirmation name, becoming an "adult" in the Church, completing a service project and attending retreats have become the focus of the confirmation initiation process, and the strong connection to baptism, the renewal of baptismal promises and receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit are often overlooked. Given these practices and understandings, it is not surprising that the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* instructed that "the rite of confirmation is to be revised also so that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation may be shown more clearly."³⁶ More recently, the Canadian

³⁴ Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* 384-385.

³⁵ Angela Darrow Flynn, "Impact of a Renewed Order of the Sacrament of Initiation: A Review of Available Data" *Catechumenate – A Journal of Christian Initiation* (January 2010, Volume 34, Number 1): 8-9.

³⁶ "Sacrosanctum Concilium – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #71.

Conference of Catholic Bishops has endeavored to help clarify the Second Vatican Council's call to restore the order of the sacraments of initiation. In 2006, Most Rev. Gerald Wiesner, O.M.I., Bishop of Prince George, wrote the following as part of a summary on the Order of the Sacraments of Initiation:

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent teaching of the Magisterium lead to several conclusions about the nature of confirmation and its relation to the other initiation sacraments: namely, that confirmation is a sacrament of initiation, and that it is to be celebrated after baptism and in preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist.³⁷

Although the bishops of Canada have attempted to clarify the place of confirmation in the initiation sacramental process, many bishops and dioceses have yet to move toward the restoration of this order.

Another concern which materialized with regards to pastoral practice was the endeavour to restore the adult catechumenate. This was part of the liturgical reforms at Vatican II. Evidence from the sixteenth century onward, regarding mission activities in Asia, Africa and South America, reveals a more serious commitment for catechumens and attempts to restore the catechumenate.³⁸ Further developments occurred in the 20th Century. In 1951, Pope Pius XII restored the Easter Vigil to Saturday night, moving it from Saturday morning. This liturgy did not yet involve the rites of Christian initiation, but it did include a renewal of baptismal promises and, it focused on Easter as the celebration of the sacrament of baptism rather than centering the attention on original sin.³⁹ Aidan Kavanagh highlights the significance of Pope Pius' action:

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this event, for it set in motion the train of strategic overhauls in Catholic baptismal practice mandated by the Second Vatican Council from 1960 through 1963 and accomplished in the new orders for baptism of children (1969), for confirmation (1971), and for initiation of adults (1972).

³⁷ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Order of the Sacraments of Initiation", http://www.cccb.ca/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2325&Itemid=1172&lang=eng (accessed August 13, 2012).

³⁸ Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 385.

³⁹ Maxwell Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 386.

In a period of twenty-one years from 1951 the Roman Catholic baptismal liturgy was gradually shorn of many later non-Roman elements and restored to its original context in the Church's public worship at the paschal summit of the Christian year.⁴⁰

What evolved in this time period was a restoration of the catechumenal model in several stages and a reinstatement of the Easter Vigil Liturgy as the liturgy to initiate catechumens into full membership in the Church through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist in one ceremony. It was a restoration in that this practice was the norm in the early Church and had been lost over the centuries until its reestablishment by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's. Further, from Maxwell Johnston we learn that in 1957 an adult catechumenate was attempted in Paris, and in 1962 the Congregation of Rites, responding to advances made in Africa with the catechumenate, declared that adult baptism was to be carried out in stages.⁴¹

Johnson shares with us a third development in the Church, leading up to the Second Vatican Council that influenced the restoration of the adult catechumenate. He points to a "revolution" in sacramental theology and ecclesiology with a central tenet of this transformation being the understanding of Jesus as the "primordial" sacrament of God and the Church as the "sacrament" of Christ.⁴² This new understanding of sacramental theology had an effect on the discussion and thought circulating around the catechumenate as well. Maxwell Johnston comments on this effect:

Not surprisingly, then, with specific regard to the rites of Christian initiation, special attention to patristic theology and rite, especially as both were known from the recovery of the prebaptismal and mystagogical catecheses of the great "mystagogues" of the fourth and fifth centuries, where the various elements associated with the prebaptismal catechumenate and the meaning of the different ritual acts and gestures within the rites of Christian initiation themselves provided the subjects for detailed theological commentary and exposition, was highly influential in the modern liturgical revision of these rites.⁴³

⁴⁰ Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), 91-92.

⁴¹ Maxwell Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 386.

⁴² Maxwell Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 387.

⁴³ Maxwell Johnston, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 388.

The theologians of the Second Vatican Council researched and studied the theology and practice of Christian initiation in the early centuries of the Church in order to gain a solid understanding of the catechumenate and to restore to the Rite elements which were neglected or lost over time. Some of these neglected and lost elements included the gradual steps of the catechumenate, the role of mystagogy⁴⁴, the role of mentors and sponsors, and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation for catechumens at the Easter Vigil. The study of these practices in the first centuries of the Church had an impact on the discussions at Vatican Council II concerning the rites of initiation.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) was restored at the Second Vatican Council and was further developed thereafter. The restoration of the RCIA was promulgated in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*):

The catechumenate for adults, divided into several distinct steps, is to be restored and brought into use at the discretion of the local Ordinary. By this means, the time of the catechumenate, which is destined for the requisite formation, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated in successive stages.⁴⁵

This restoration of the RCIA was a move from a formation experience of catechumens that was often minimal in length, catechesis, content and mentorship or these elements were even perhaps non-existent. The restoration of the RCIA evolved into a process with four distinct stages: the precatechumenate or inquiry, the catechumenate, purification and enlightenment and mystagogy. The Council decreed that Diocesan bishops should have a special concern regarding catechetical instruction, and the bishops were given the responsibility of restoring or improving the adult

⁴⁴ The mystagogical period follows the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. The Church teaches that "...This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity. To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their parish priests (pastors) should give them thoughtful and friendly help." (*GDC*, #234).

⁴⁵ "Sacrosanctum Concilium – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #64.

catechumenate.⁴⁶ Following the Council, draft rituals and documents were written and sent out to various churches around the world for use. Feedback was gathered and eventually the new *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* was promulgated on January 6, 1972, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. The latest Canadian version of the RCIA was first printed in 1987.⁴⁷

1.2 Children and Initiation

Initiation is the process by which children (and adults) are welcomed into the Church through the reception of the sacraments of initiation – namely baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Children preparing for the sacraments are called catechumens. Once they receive baptism, confirmation and Eucharist – in that order, they are considered full members of the Church since the Eucharist is viewed as the sacrament that seals initiation. The catechumenate for children is governed by the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)* which guides the Church in receiving new members.⁴⁸

When children reach catechetical age (usually the age of reason, age 7-8), they can take part in the catechumenate for children, which is based on the *RCIA*, the normative and official guide for the faith formation for children.⁴⁹ A goal of the catechumenate is the conversion of neophytes through the preparation for and reception of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Initiation gives children the opportunity to have gradual catechetical formation as they discern their readiness for the sacraments of initiation. In our Canadian context, this usually means a catechetical process is experienced with peers for the celebration of confirmation and Eucharist, since most children are baptized as infants.

⁴⁶ “Christus Dominus – Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #14.

⁴⁷ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987).

⁴⁸ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987).

⁴⁹ *General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for the Clergy. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1997), #s 59, 90.

In early Christianity, the focus of initiation into the Church was on adults. At times, entire households were baptized – adults and children together. There is no evidence of a separate children’s catechumenate in the early Church, but there is much evidence to suggest that only adults were baptized.⁵⁰ The catechumenal journey toward embracing the Christian faith involved an experience of conversion and transformation. This same process of conversion and transformation, which is part of the Church’s current understanding of the vision of initiation, will be explored in more depth later.

The baptizing of infants is not recorded in the New Testament scriptures nor is there evidence of infant baptisms in the early Church. However, as Sandra DiGidio explains, the norm of infant baptism is a practice which began over time:

By the beginning of the fifth century, the catechumenate process itself had virtually disappeared. The sacraments of initiation became three separate sacraments celebrated at separate times. Soon adult Baptisms declined, infant Baptism became the norm and the process and theology of Christian initiation of adults as practiced in the early Church became a lost art.⁵¹

So, by the beginning of the fifth century, infant baptism became the norm. One may even ask why the Church initiates children today rather than adhering to an adult catechumenate. Perhaps the answer lies in the gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives great insight into the role of children in the gospel and the faith community:

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for

⁵⁰ Robert M. Grant, “Development of the Christian Catechumenate”, in *Made, Not Born – New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 34.

⁵¹ *Catholic Update*, “The Sacrament of Baptism: Celebrating the Embrace of God,” <http://www.americancatholic.org/newsletters/cu/ac0389.asp>, (accessed August 9, 2012).

you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.⁵²

Jesus saw something profound in the faith of children and noted the prominence of children in the Kingdom of God. This passage suggests several things: that greatness in the Kingdom is measured by childlikeness and not by status or power; that we should never cause children hardship or let them stray from the community; and that adults are called to be as trusting in God as children are to their parents.⁵³ Jesus calls the children little to highlight their simplicity and “...because their faith is more sincere.”⁵⁴ Further insights on this passage are offered by Gerard Pottebaum: “Such biblical texts are strong evidence of the central role children play in the gospel of Jesus... Equally important, they reveal Jesus’ attitude toward the place of children in the community.”⁵⁵ Matthew’s account also highlights the importance of becoming like children and having an unrestricted sense of gratitude and happiness for God’s gifts in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples are being told that like children, entire dependence on God is necessary to enter His reign and followers, especially the apostles, are called to Church leadership as humble servants.⁵⁶ RCIA consultant Elio Capra shares this commentary on Matthew’s passage:

For Matthew, it is not enough to welcome children. Jesus’ disciples must become like children if they are to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The essential characteristic of belonging to the kingdom is a total, unconditional sense of gratitude for the unexpected gift from God. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who know that they do not deserve God’s gifts but, like children, receive them with gratitude and joy.⁵⁷

⁵² Matthew 18:1-6 (*New Revised Standard Version Bible*).

⁵³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “New American Bible and Footnotes,” <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew18.htm> (accessed December 15, 2010).

⁵⁴ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Christian Community Bible – Catholic Pastoral Edition”, (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1988), commentary on “The Little Ones,” Matthew 18:1-6.

⁵⁵ Gerard A. Pottebaum, Sr. Paule Freeburg, D.C. and Joyce Kelleher, *A Child Shall Lead Them – A Guide to Celebrating the Word With Children*, (Loveland, Ohio: Treehaus Communications Inc.) 2.

⁵⁶ *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible – New Testament, Second Catholic Edition RSV* (San Francisco, Ignatious Press, 2010), Matthew 18:1-6.

⁵⁷ Elio Capra, SDB, “Do Not Keep the Children From Me,” *Catechumenate – A Journal of Christian Initiation* (November 2010, Volume 32, Number 6): 20.

Not only did Jesus teach that children have a place in the faith community, He taught that their place is special and that children have something to teach adults.

A faith community sorely needs children – not just for an assurance that there will be a next generation in the Church, but also so that adults can learn from their faith example. The Good News of Jesus gave these early Christians and their children hope for a better early life and life everlasting and was an invitation to follow Him – as it is for Christians today. As people of the Way (of Christ) they were called to live a life of prayer, communal worship, and charity and love for one another.⁵⁸ This call to the early Christians still beckons to present followers of Christ.

1.3 Foundational Components for the Initiation of Children

Several foundational components of the vision of the initiation for children will be examined in this section, as they relate to the initiation experience of the early Church and contemporary times. The following elements are essential for an effective initiation process: (1) the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* must be accepted and used as the norm⁵⁹ for children's initiation; (2) the gradual nature of the initiation process must be respected; (3) the significant role of the faith community in the formation of children must be realized; (4) there must be a strong liturgical catechetical element to the initiation process; and (5) the integral roles of parents, catechists and mentors must be recognized and be assured of serious commitment.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Acts of the Apostles 2:43-47

⁵⁹ By recognizing the RCIA as the norm for all initiation and catechesis, I am not necessarily suggesting that we treat children as adults but rather something deeper that involves growing in relationship with God over a lifetime. This lifelong call to conversion is at the heart of the RCIA process.

⁶⁰ I chose these five essentials to give a structure to this section of my thesis from research materials examined in a directed reading course in the summer of 2008. The culminating paper I wrote for the course was entitled, *A Vision for the Christian Initiation of Children*, and presented on August 25, 2008 to Professor Miriam Martin of the Faculty of Theology at St. Paul University, Ottawa.

These elements were determined from my work with and experience of such Church documents as the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults* as well as readings from various theologians, catechists and liturgists. Each of these elements will now be examined individually with focus on the following aspects: initiation in the early Church, the vision of the catechumenal model as outlined by the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*⁶¹ and, finally, key features of Vatican Council II's understanding of initiation.

1.3.1 The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as the Norm for All Initiation and Catechesis

Before devising a process for the initiation of children, there must be a firm understanding of the initiation and catechesis of adults since the Church considers the way adults are initiated and catechized as the norm. In his article, "The Catechumenate for Children of Catechetical Age: What, Who, How, Why?," Frank Sokol suggests that catechists make this connection between the initiation and catechesis of children and adults right from the beginning:

An enlightened way to begin the catechumenate for children is to read, study and experience the catechumenate for adults. The catechumenate principles that govern the adult rite are the norms for adapting the process to other groups, children among them. From this perspective, the initiation of children is connected intimately to the ongoing conversion of the adult community.⁶²

The understanding that the adult catechumenate is the norm for all other catechesis is made clear in the *Church's General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)*. In the *Directory*, the adult baptismal catechumenate is described as the inspiration for all catechesis in the Church:

⁶¹ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987).

⁶² Frank C. Sokol, "The Catechumenate for Children of Catechetical Age: What, Who, How, Why?," in *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, ed. Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 4.

“The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate when, by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the Paschal Vigil.” This catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism... Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it”. This implies that the catechesis of other age groups should have it for a point of reference and should be expressed in conjunction with it; in a coherent catechetical programme suitable to meet the pastoral needs of dioceses.⁶³

The initiation of children should be closely linked to and modeled on the adult catechumenate in both form and content. Pastors and catechists who have prior experience with the RCIA process should have an advantage when working with a process of the initiation of children that is based on the adult catechumenal model. Since the initiation and catechesis of adults is the norm for all other forms of initiation and catechesis, several elements of the adult catechumenate must be clearly understood.

The Church’s Congregation for the Clergy that the adult catechumenate should be the model for all other catechesis because it sees in it a strong and effective vision and process for initiation. Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly explain this reasoning:

The RCIA, as the *Order* is popularly called, holds a privileged place in shaping the church’s initiatory vision because of its nature as a liturgical document. As a *locus theologicus* (i.e., a source for theological reflection), the church’s liturgical experience has always enjoyed a claim to primacy. Vatican II called the liturgy “source and summit” of faith, thus capturing succinctly the wisdom of centuries of Christian experience in this regard. If one wishes to find the Church’s most authentic vision of initiation, where better to turn than to the document which sets the basic liturgical, theological and pastoral framework for our generation?⁶⁴

As a rite with a strong liturgical element centered on the Sunday Eucharist, the *Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults* provides a roadmap and vision for the process of the initiation of children. Thus, parish catechetical process should be developed with the characteristics of the

⁶³ *General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for the Clergy. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1997), #59.

⁶⁴ Robert D. Duggan and Maureen A. Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children – Hope for the Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 28-29.

adult model in mind so that all involved can be invited to participate in a lifelong journey towards a mature Christian faith and relationship with God centred around the Sunday Eucharist and supported by the faith community.

1.3.2 The Gradual Nature of Catechesis

One of the most important elements of the adult catechumenate is the gradual nature of the process of initiation. The *Introduction to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* states “the initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.”⁶⁵ The *Introduction* goes on to explain that “this journey includes not only the periods for making inquiry and for maturing but also the steps marking the catechumens’ progress, as they pass, so to speak, through another doorway or ascend to the next level.”⁶⁶ People need time for this journey – a journey toward conversion which requires engaging the head, heart and hands.⁶⁷ This is an integrative process for the whole person.

Part II of the *RCIA* concerns the *Rites for Particular Circumstances*. The first section of Part II is titled “Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age.” In this section, the importance of the gradual process of initiation is restated:

Accordingly, as with adults, their [children’s] initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments. Also as with adults, their initiation is marked by several steps, the liturgical rites of acceptance into the order of catechumens, penitential rites or scrutinies, and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation; corresponding to the periods of adult initiation are the periods of the children’s catechetical formation that lead up to and follow the steps of their initiation.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987), #4.

⁶⁶ *RCIA*, #6.

⁶⁷ Thomas H. Groome. *Will There be Faith? – A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 13.

⁶⁸ *RCIA*, #243.

As with adults, the initiation of children is to be a process that takes place over appropriate time and is to be experienced with marked steps. Envisioning initiation as a gradual formation is not a novel idea in the Church. Evidence exists that the catechumenate in the first centuries was indeed a progressive development as will be attested to below.

To restore the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the theologians of the Second Vatican Council researched the catechumenate of the early Church and looked at the best initiation and catechetical practices that began in those times and were then developed through the centuries. This looking back at the early Church and its practices is referred to as *resourcement*. Michael Swan identified *resourcement* as a central idea of the Second Vatican Council and offers the following description:

Resourcement was a movement back in time. For half a century before the 1962-1965 council, theologians and many ordinary Catholics had been calling the Church back to its roots in Scripture, the early Church and even the Judaism of Jesus and His apostles. The Latin war cry on behalf of *resourcement* at the council was “*Ad fontes!*” (“To the sources!”)...⁶⁹

Looking at these sources, theologians discovered that the gradual nature of initiation was apparent in the first centuries of the Church and was considered an important element in initiation. In the middle of the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem⁷⁰ gave six catechetical lectures. In one of these lectures, *The Procatechesis*, Cyril compares the measured character of catechesis to the stages of erecting a building:

Or consider Catechizing to be a kind of building: unless we dig deep, and lay the foundation, - unless by successive fastenings in the masonry, we bind the frame-work of the house together, that no opening be detected, nor the work be left unsound, naught

⁶⁹ Michael Swan, “The Church’s Past Weaved into the Future,” *The Catholic Register* (October 7, 2012): 18.

⁷⁰ St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) was an early Church theologian and Bishop of Jerusalem. His catechetical lectures were given during the fourth century, “...a time of rapid transition and great significance in the history of the Church”. (i) His lectures are important in that they were delivered to catechumens and neophytes and give a sense of Cyril’s pastoral approach to catechesis. (xxxiii) Source: F.L. Cross, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments - The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses - St. Cyril of Jerusalem* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977), i, xxxiii.

avails all our former labour. But stone must succeed stone in course, and corner must follow corner, and, inequalities being smoothed away, the masonry must rise regular.⁷¹

This metaphor presents a model that is steady and thorough. Like erecting a building, the initiation process is meant to evolve from the ground up, meeting candidates where they are and inviting them on a journey of sequential steps that achieves the intended goals. In the case of initiation, the catechumenate is “...aimed at training them [candidates] in the Christian life”⁷² and a time during which candidates are “...better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist”⁷³, the “...source and summit of the Christian life...”⁷⁴ With these understandings in mind, it can be said that the initiation ministry is a process in inviting candidates to live the Christian life, to a lifetime of conversion centered around the celebration of the faith community’s Sunday Eucharist. Robert Kelly and Maureen Duggan explain the aims of the catechumenate in this way: “A church that initiates has conversion as its agenda, community as its context, and discipleship as its goal”.⁷⁵ Thus, one could conclude that four goals of initiation are conversion, discipleship, participation in the Sunday Eucharist and living the Christian life. The present *RCIA* is intended to echo the wisdom offered by this step-by-step process from the early Church.

In this era, candidates were initiated not only progressively, but also in a manner that took into account their ability and readiness for conversion. Michel Dujarier in *A History of the Catechumenate* outlines the criteria for initiation into the early Church:

The brief survey of the New Testament has shown that the primitive Church only admitted to the sacraments of initiation those in whom it observed the faith of conversion

⁷¹ F.L. Cross, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments - The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses* – St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977), 46-47.

⁷² *RCIA*, #75.

⁷³ *RCIA*, #75.

⁷⁴ “Lumen Gentium – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #11.

⁷⁵ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 45.

and whose manner of life it had tested throughout the period of catechesis. It did not admit anyone without preparation, without tests, without guarantees.⁷⁶

In the early Church, candidates were admitted when they were deemed ready for the way of life the Church upheld and taught. The present *RCIA* aims to admit children who offer some evidence of the Church's faith in a similar way.

Children, like adults, are not likely to be ready to join the initiation process at a set time or place in their faith journey. This understanding is explained in the *RCIA*:

The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. The process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children's growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive.⁷⁷

Initiation in this way requires that children should be initiated and catechized according to their abilities. Aidan Kavanagh in his work, "Initiating Children: Historical Sketch and Contemporary Reflections," refers to the need to take into account the capabilities of children in the initiation process:

The initiatory norm applies to children no less than to adults. It means that they must be evangelized as they become capable, catechized so as to bring their nascent faith by appropriate stages to ecclesial term and (for those already baptized in infancy) initiated fully by confirmation and first holy communion in that order. One of the main principles in the *RCIA* is that one cannot proceed a priori in matters of catechesis: The endeavor must go according to the abilities of the catechumen.⁷⁸

Before catechizing, we accept children where they are in their faith journey. Judith Dunlap puts it this way: "We begin with a person's own experience, connect that experience with what we

⁷⁶ Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate* (New York: William H. Saddlier Inc., 1979), 25-26.

⁷⁷ *RCIA*, #243.

⁷⁸ Aidan Kavanagh, "Initiating Children: Historical Sketch and Contemporary Reflections", in *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, ed. Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 40.

hope to teach, provide the appropriate theological and scriptural references and then invite each person to apply the teaching to his or her own life.”⁷⁹

Envisioning this type of initiation is not easy. Offering initiation that meets the candidate where they are, often means breaking away from old models and more simplistic and less time consuming practices. For example, many parishes begin sacramental preparation classes on a certain date with candidates of a certain age, and preparation ends with the celebration of the sacrament. It is expected that all children will “make” the sacrament on a certain date. However, some children and families may not be ready to make this commitment and celebrate the sacrament at a given point and may require more time or formation as part of the initiation process. If we initiate children on the basis of faith-readiness and conversion, we have to be prepared for the process that will unfold. There will be both positives and challenges along the way. Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly describe what might be expected when a faith community commits to this type of initiation process:

A parish that commits itself to initiate its children on the basis of conversion and faith-readiness will be in for a very “messy” kind of pastoral care. Flexible structures attuned to discern individual and family readiness will have to replace scope and sequence charts, mass celebrations of sacraments according to grade level, and arbitrary sacramental guidelines that predetermine the age when a child will be “ready.” The trade-off for the inevitable messiness of such a system, of course, is that conversion will remain the heart not only of the initiation of children but of parish life at large. We will become more skilled in discernment, more focused and knowledgeable of the ways of God in ordinary human experience, more sensitive to the behavioral correlates of authentic faith at every age and stage of development.⁸⁰

The “messiness” and inductive and intuitive nature of beginning with the candidates’ lived experience are necessary parts of the initiation process. It is certainly “messy” – challenging and unpredictable when candidates for the sacraments are not ready at the same time and age to begin

⁷⁹ Judith Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis – Visions and Tasks for Catechetical Leaders* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 102-103.

⁸⁰ Robert D. Duggan and Maureen A. Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children – Hope for the Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 38.

the immediate preparation for sacraments as part of the sacramental initiation process.

Conversion and faith-readiness are significant factors not only when children first begin their initiation but throughout the entire process of initiation and indeed in our life-long learning.

Catherine Dooley explains that the catechumenal instruction's time frame cannot be predetermined:

The duration of the catechumenate is not determined beforehand but depends on children's growth in faith as well as personal and family circumstances. The initiation may be extended over several years, but a yearlong catechumenate may be sufficient for the children who have the opportunity to join the parish or school catechetical programs for an extended mystagogy.⁸¹

The duration of the catechumenal period depends on the candidate. If anything, the catechumenal period should be longer rather than shorter. This is the current thinking of the Church and it can be traced back to the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.), in which the necessity of a longer catechesis was stated, as opposed to a brief catechetical instruction.⁸²

It needs to be noted that factors such as grade level in schools and age should not determine the length of the initiation process. Kavanagh presents a sound understanding of this issue:

For some children it [the period of catechesis and initiation] may go more slowly or rapidly than for others, and it should not be governed by peer group pressure, educational grade level, age categories or ecclesiastical administrators who want to keep everything tidy. Symmetry and conformity are not nearly so important as nurturing the seeds of grace, a ministry that cannot be rushed or over-ridden. This is a common mistake that betrays a lack of discernment among catechists and risks turning out nominal Christians more fixed on conforming to others' expectations than on faith owned and viable. Graduating from some grade in school says no more about the quality of a child's faith and Christian identity than changing jobs says about the same factors for an adult. It is of the essence that catechists, parents and pastors not forget this.

⁸¹ Catherine Dooley, "Baptismal Catechesis for Children of Catechetical Age", in *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, ed. Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 49.

⁸² Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate* (New York: William H. Saddlier Inc., 1979), 69.

Children and families who feel ready to be involved in the initiation process will seek the process out when they are ready. A particular educational grade or age will not necessarily signal readiness for participation in this process. The opportunity for families and children to present themselves to the parish for initiation should be welcomed anytime. These same families and children should never be rushed through the process or pressured to celebrate the sacraments on predetermined dates. Ultimately, it is grace⁸³ – God’s loving presence and movement in the person’s life - that sets the rhythm for the process. Here, we are speaking about discernment which is a critical consideration of the RCIA process. A good question for parishes to consider is how ready are catechists and parents to discern with the children how God is moving in their lives? Parishes have to have a solid grasp on the elements that should and should not influence or govern the initiation and catechesis of children. Once these basic foundations of the initiation process are laid, the faith community is well disposed to support children and adults in their faith journey.

1.3.3 The Role of the Christian Community in the Initiation of Children

The Christian community is a vital setting for catechesis. The *General Directory for Catechesis* describes the Christian community as the locus and source of catechesis:

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.⁸⁴

⁸³ “Grace” is defined as “...the supernatural assistance of God bestowed upon a rational being with a view to his [sic] sanctification. Source: *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Edited by F.L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press), 1978, s.v. “grace”.

⁸⁴GDC, #158.

The Christian community provides the best catechetical foundation, support and environment possible for those being initiated. Without the support of the faith community, catechumens would find it most difficult to journey toward the sacraments of initiation.

The role of the Christian community is a fundamental part in the initiation of children. The *RCIA* makes it clear that initiation is the responsibility of the entire Christian community, not just a small catechetical group in the parish:

In light of what is said in Christian Initiation, *General Introduction* (no. 7), the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ. In the various circumstances of daily life, even as in the apostolate, all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading the faith according to their abilities. Hence, the entire community must help the candidates and the catechumens throughout the process of initiation: during the period of the precatechumenate, the period of the catechumenate, the period of purification and enlightenment, and the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy.⁸⁵

The entire Christian community is called to journey with catechumens on the road to initiation. By their example, members of the faith community have a wonderful opportunity to help catechumens experience the way of life that is membership in the Church. From fellow parishioners, children and families involved in the initiation process can learn the importance of prayer, an active participation in the liturgy, the richness of the symbols of our faith, the joy of living the Christian life and the many other important elements of our faith. This call for the community to support candidates is not something new.

The central role of the community in initiation was present in the early Church. In *I Peter*, there is a strong sense of belonging to a close, supportive community that built a sense of identity and dignity which shaped the early Church.⁸⁶ Further, Dujarier's assessment of the

⁸⁵ *RCIA*, #9.

⁸⁶ Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 79.

whole community's activity in the Christian movement of the 3rd Century describes the precatechumenate as living in a supportive Christian community:

What we would today call, very inexactly, the “precatechumenate” was then living contact with Christians. It was evangelical witness, with the Christians playing more the role of sponsors than of teachers. What was involved was the radiation of a Christian community inserted in the larger human community, not intellectual instruction by an institutional staff.⁸⁷

Concerning the nurturing of disciples of Christ, the Church had the sense then, as it does now, that time and effort spent by the Christian community toward supporting catechumens was a good investment for the future. We are baptized into the body of Christ – a living community so how could it be otherwise that the community plays a central role as the very context into which people are initiated.

Children deserve to experience the life of the Christian community. All in the community benefit from welcoming children. Berard Marthaler writes that “the point of the catechumenate, whether it enrolls adults or children, is to initiate Christians into the life of the community.”⁸⁸ As they journey to the sacraments of initiation, it is vital that children be supported as much as possible. At a young age, children benefit from interacting with people outside of their immediate family and discovering the link between their family and the wider community:

It is important for children, as for all Christians, to meet and interact with people outside their families who are faithful to God's word in everyday life and willing to stand up for what they believe. What's more, in the presence of an intergenerational community, children learn the relationship between their individual families and the larger community of the church, that their families' faith is part of a larger inheritance of faith. As children

⁸⁷ Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, 60-61.

⁸⁸ Berard Marthaler, “The Creed and Doctrine in Catechesis for Children” in *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, ed. Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 70.

become acquainted with believers of all ages, they come to learn that the movement of God's Spirit continues throughout one's life and, indeed, from generation to generation.⁸⁹

By participating in the faith community and interacting with its members, children will be able to more clearly recognize faith as not just an individual concern but a phenomenon that is nurtured and supported by an entire community of faith.

The *RCIA* recommends that children be initiated with a group of baptized companions so they can enjoy mutual support as they experience a gradual catechesis.⁹⁰ It must not go unsaid that adults, too, can benefit greatly from welcoming children in the Christian community. The *Directory for Masses with Children* offers a concrete example where this reciprocal benefit occurs:

In many places parish Masses are celebrated, especially on Sundays and feast days, at which a good many children take part along with the large number of adults. At these Masses the witness of adult believers can have a great effect upon the children. Adults can in turn benefit spiritually from experiencing the part that the children have within the Christian community.⁹¹

Members of the Christian community can have a positive impact on each other. Specifically, children can benefit from the faith example of adults and other children, and, in turn, they can be a blessing to the adult members of the Church. Don Neumann writes, "The whole parish is called to be companion, example, sister or brother to all who come to the church for faith."⁹² Christians learn from one another, and the Church could certainly be considered a learning community.

As the faith community journeys with families seeking the initiation of their children, it will also be affected by this process. Specifically, as the faith of the individual is being formed,

⁸⁹ Gerard Pottebaum, Sr. Paule Freeburg, D.C. and Joyce Kelleher, *A Child Shall Lead Them – A Guide to Celebrating the Word With Children* (Loveland, Ohio: Treehaus Communications Inc., 1994), 57.

⁹⁰ *RCIA*, #244.

⁹¹ *Directory for Masses With Children*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Ottawa: Concacan, Inc., 1996.), #16.

⁹² Don Neuman, "Companions: The Role of Peers" in *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, ed. Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 92.

the faith of the community is being formed. Relevant here is the point made by Thomas Groome in the first chapter of this work – that as both the individual and the faith community are being formed, they can experience growth and conversion that is interconnected.⁹³ The evolution and maturity of the faith community through the process of initiation are noted in the *General*

Directory for Catechesis:

Continuing formation in the faith is directed not only to the individual Christian, to accompany them in their journey towards holiness, but also to the Christian community as such so that it may mature also in its interior life of love of God and of the brethren as well as in its openness to the world as a missionary activity. The desire of Jesus and his prayer to the Father are an unceasing appeal: “May they all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou has sent me”. Approaching this ideal, little by little, demands of the community a great fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, the constant nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing education in the faith, listening all the time to the word.⁹⁴

It is possible, then, that not only the individual seeking initiation but the entire faith community can be transformed as a result of faith formation stemming from the initiation journey. By witnessing, the faith community mentors the catechumens in a certain way of life that has a marked spiritual and liturgical element.

1.3.4 The Liturgical Element of the Initiation of Children

Liturgy is an integral part of the catechesis and initiation of children. When we initiate children into the Church, we initiate them into a way of life and a ritual way of living. We are trying to achieve what Gabriel Moran and Maria Harris describe as the two aims of religious education – (1) learning how to practice a religious way and (2) learning to understand religion.⁹⁵

⁹³ Groome, “Total Catechesis/Religious Education”, 8.

⁹⁴ *GDC*, #70.

⁹⁵ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education – Conversations on Contemporary Practice*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 41.

As a faith community, we are attempting to teach children how to practice a liturgical way of life and to understand a liturgical way of life. Harris and Moran explain it this way:

But it is not an exaggeration to say that even the youngest child is shown a way of life and begins to respond to it. The example of adults and the repetition of rituals have a powerful formative influence on young children... The second aim, understanding religion becomes a practical possibility as soon as the child has the conceptual and linguistic ability to form abstractions, listen to reason, and compare cases. That ability to understand develops throughout childhood and into the teenage years...⁹⁶

Children generally learn rituals easily from a young age. As children mature, they are able to learn the reasons behind the rituals and the symbolic meanings of them. Rituals help children to grow into a way of life. In helping children to live a liturgical life and understand faith and liturgy, the best teaching method is helping them to live the liturgical year.

In essence, the liturgical year provides the framework and the rhythm for how Roman Catholics live their lives. Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly explain it this way: “Initiation involves a whole new sense of time: It must be the rhythm of the liturgical cycle, not the academic calendar, which governs our efforts to initiate children into the faith.”⁹⁷ The catechumenate for children, then, should be closely linked with the liturgical year and the ensuing rites thereof. The *RCIA* insists that catechesis be adapted to the liturgical year:

A suitable catechesis is provided by priests or deacons, or by catechists and others of the faithful, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.⁹⁸

Living the Christian life means living the liturgical year. It must be noted that living the liturgical year can be challenging, given the demands of modern calendars. Families in our society have to juggle the demands and commitments of the school year, the physical seasons,

⁹⁶ Harris and Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education*, 41.

⁹⁷ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 34.

⁹⁸ *RCIA*, #75.1.

employment schedules and involvement in sports and other activities and interests. The organization of time in the life of the Church provides the roots of what we might call “liturgical catechesis”⁹⁹ and was foundational to the catechumenate of the early Church.

Duggan and Kelly look at the account of the Road to Emmaus to illustrate what they term as “ritual catechesis” having a historical tradition in the Church. They present it this way:

Liturgy has long been regarded as the church’s “school of faith,” an expression which recognizes the formative impact of ritual celebration on participants. The Lukan community which preserved the Emmaus story was keenly aware of how powerful the liturgy can be in shaping the faith experience of an individual or a community. The thinly veiled liturgical structure of the narrative in chapter 24 of Luke’s gospel shows that it is precisely in the experience of the ritual breaking of the bread that the disciples come to know and understand. The story is careful to point out that they had already been told about the resurrection and had dismissed the tale as impossible. It was only in the context of ritual celebration that they were finally able to grasp not just the fact of resurrection but its meaning as well.¹⁰⁰

What begins to evolve is an understanding of how the ritual of the breaking of the bread makes Christ present while enacting the teaching of Jesus. The breaking of the bread became a weekly practice on the Lord’s Day, and so when the people gathered for the liturgy, they could learn by word and action the importance of the resurrection and its close relation to the Eucharist. The close connection between catechesis and liturgy persevered in the tradition of the Church.

During the first centuries of the Church, evidence exists of the catechetical nature of liturgy. Michel Dujarier illustrates that in third century Rome, catechesis was an expected aspect of the liturgy:

The catechesis was given during the community celebration, which normally took place in the morning before work. The catechumens thus do not seem to have been placed in a special group: they were already in the Church, even though they were not yet full members. They participated in the liturgy of the word at the same time as the faithful, but they were assigned a special place at the meeting and did not give the kiss of peace.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994), #1075.

¹⁰⁰ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 49-50.

¹⁰¹ Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, 51-52.

Another example of the close relationship between liturgy and catechesis is the five mystagogical lectures of St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century. If one looks at “Mystagogical Catechesis V,” for instance, Cyril of Jerusalem goes through the words and actions of the Eucharistic rite so they can be more deeply understood by the neophytes.¹⁰² In the fourth century, a practice developed whereby catechumens were not told central elements of the faith until after their sacraments of initiation. This practice of keeping certain elements secret from the catechumens gave rise to the formation of what is known as mystagogical catechesis.¹⁰³

Duggan and Kelly point out that for most of the Church’s history, the central place for catechesis was the liturgical assembly. Liturgical catechesis has been foundational to initiation:

This quick look back over the centuries is meant to remind the reader of the fact, that, for most of the Christian era, the primary place of catechetical activity was in the midst of the liturgical assembly, not in classrooms or their equivalent. One came to know what it meant to be Christian, what a Christian believed and how a Christian should act, by participating in the source and summit of our Christian experience, the liturgy. Immersion in the “world” created out of liturgical experience was the normal, ordinary way for adult and child alike to be formed in the faith.¹⁰⁴

The liturgy, then, as the work of the people, can be considered the core place and activity of catechesis. *The General Directory for Catechesis* builds on this understanding when it states “liturgical life is more profoundly understood as the source and summit of ecclesial life.”¹⁰⁵

Liturgical catechesis is so significant to initiation that the Church warns against separating the two. One caution comes from the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

“Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action.” Frequently however, the practice of catechetics testifies to a weak and fragmentary link with the liturgy: limited attention to liturgical symbols and rites, scant use of the liturgical fonts,

¹⁰² F.L. Cross, ed., *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments – Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s University Press, 1977), 71-80.

¹⁰³ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 51.

¹⁰⁴ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 54.

¹⁰⁵ *GDC*, #27.

catechetical courses with little or no connection with the liturgical year; the marginalization of liturgical celebrations in catechetical programs.¹⁰⁶

It is unfortunate when liturgical catechesis is lacking or absent from the initiation process. Two of the reasons for this may be a poor understanding of this element from catechists, pastors or other ministers and perhaps poor formation or lack of formation for these leaders, concerning the importance of liturgical catechesis. Another admonition comes from the *Directory for Masses with Children*:

A fully Christian life is inconceivable without participation in the liturgical services in which the faithful, gathered into a single assembly, celebrate the paschal mystery. Therefore, the religious initiation of children must be in harmony with this purpose. The Church baptizes children and therefore, relying on the gifts conferred by this sacrament, it must be concerned that once baptized they grow in communion with Christ and each other. The sign and pledge of that communion is participation in the eucharistic table, for which children are being prepared or led to a deeper realization of its meaning. This liturgical and eucharistic formation may not be separated from their general education, both human and Christian; indeed it would be harmful if their liturgical formation lacked such a foundation.¹⁰⁷

According to the Church, liturgical catechesis must be part of a child's initiation process.

Children benefit greatly from participating in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations and from taking part in a children's liturgy of the word. It is through participation in the Eucharistic liturgy with other participants that young people are able to learn the ritual words and actions of the liturgy, to appreciate the rhythms of the liturgical year and to begin to appreciate the deeper meaning of the signs and symbols of the faith. Many would say children learn best by example and it is through the example of others that effective liturgical catechesis can happen. If the young experience a Church that is faithful, prayerful and vibrant, they can't help but see the significance of the faith community in the life of their parents and others. Active participation in the liturgy is a genuine mentorship in the central aspect of living the Christian life. The Church,

¹⁰⁶ GDC, #30.

¹⁰⁷ *Directory for Masses with Children*, #8.

through the Second Vatican Council, made it clear that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life.”¹⁰⁸

Liturgical catechesis requires a lectionary-based catechesis. A lectionary-based catechesis flows from the idea that the catechumenal process has roots in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and thus enjoys a close relationship with the Church’s cycle of Sunday liturgies.¹⁰⁹ The lectionary is a book that contains the shape of the Word of God for children to experience the continuing process of liturgical formation.¹¹⁰ Liturgical catechesis aims to assist children in living the liturgical year and in helping them unpack the mysteries and rich traditions of liturgy, through use of the lectionary:

This form of catechesis also helps to train children from the earliest years in the rhythms of the annual cycle of the liturgy. Over time, children come to know as clearly as the professional liturgist the doctrinal resonances of each liturgical feast and season... Their language to describe just how the liturgical cycle “unfolds the whole mystery of Christ” (SC 102) may not be as precise as an answer memorized from a catechism, but they know that truth in their guts, because they have experienced it and celebrated it and explored it in catechesis year after year in powerful ritual form.¹¹¹

This type of catechesis is of great benefit to children and families in living the liturgical year and actively participating in the richness of the liturgy. As the liturgical year evolves, children easily intuit the changes in colours, symbols and sacramentals used in the liturgy. If the readings are presented and explained to children at their level, they can better grasp the essentials about the life of Christ and the various liturgical seasons, solemnities and observances.

¹⁰⁸ “Lumen Gentium – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #11.

¹⁰⁹ Steven Robich, “Christian Initiation of Children: No Longer a Class or Grade Issue” in *Readings in the Christian Initiation of Children*, ed. Victoria M. Tufano (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 114.

¹¹⁰ The Lectionary is the book of scripture readings used at Masses. Together with the Roman Missal, it forms the texts for celebrations of the Eucharist. Source: Rev. Peter Klein *The Catholic Sourcebook – A Comprehensive Collection of Information About the Catholic Church*, (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2000), 291, 297.

¹¹¹ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 75.

With a lectionary-based catechesis, the readings from the lectionary can be a source of prayer, instruction or faith sharing for catechetical sessions with children. The proclamation and preaching from particular readings of the lectionary is also the place where the features of the liturgical year and teachings from the liturgy of the Word are opened up for children and families. For instance, the colour purple, the lighting of the Advent wreath, the Advent hymns and the choice of service music enhance the readings on the First Sunday of Advent, signaling to children and in fact all of the assembly, that the present liturgical year has changed, and a new one has begun. The homily and other catechetical opportunities such as a celebration of children's liturgy of the Word, the prayers of the faithful, the hymn texts and the Advent markers mentioned above become a wonderful chance to reflect on this change in the experience and lives of children and adult parishioners alike.

One of the major challenges associated with the liturgical focus of catechesis is that so many Catholic families today are not actively involved in parish life and rarely, if ever, participate in the Eucharist. This does not make sense from the faith community's perspective. The role of parent and families in liturgical catechesis is crucial. Duggan and Kelly highlight the significance of this relationship:

We need to realize that our communities' liturgical experiences are the primary way in which catechesis is done for our children, from infancy through early childhood. All of the faith-sharing done by parents in the home should prepare for and flow from the community's liturgical gatherings. The great stories of our faith and the primary symbols used in our liturgies should be the core curriculum around which we build catechetical experiences... Initiation... involves a progressive immersion of the child into the entire range of a community's ritual life... It is unthinkable that a parent would decide not to bring the child to Sunday worship "until he learns to behave" (at age 5? 10? 15?). From infancy onwards, children's place is in the midst of the liturgical assembly.¹¹²

Children need to be a welcome part of the faith community. In order for children to benefit from the catechetical formation provided by liturgies, they must be supported by their parents and

¹¹² Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 59-60.

families. This means parents and guardians must make a commitment to bring their children to Mass, so they can experience all the benefits of their spiritual home. In this way, parents play perhaps the first of the many significant roles that are necessary for the initiation of children into the Church. As indicated, the *General Directory for Catechesis* refers to parents as the first catechists or primary educators for their children in the faith.¹¹³

1.3.5 Important Roles in the Initiation of Children

In a sense, the role of the community encompasses all of the important connections and relationships that engage children, as they journey in faith. However, there are several related roles within the community to consider in the initiation process of children into the Church, roles that are pivotal to the life and spirit of the initiation process. For the purposes of this study, four key roles will be examined: the role of parents, the role of catechists the role of mentors/sponsors/godparents and the role of Catholic schools. Other important players in the process will not be dealt with in depth such as: the bishop, parish priest, deacon, pastoral assistants and parish administrator. The Bishop has primary responsibility for catechesis in the diocese¹¹⁴ but is not usually involved in the parish process of the catechesis of families and children, which is the basis of this study. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, priests are called to educate the faithful and support and nurture the work of catechists.¹¹⁵ However, not all priests serve as catechists and some prefer to take a more passive role in the process excepting of course the central liturgical rites. Some deacons, priests, pastoral administrators and pastoral assistants serve as catechists and thus are included in the research section of this thesis.

¹¹³ GDC, #'s 226, 227, 255.

¹¹⁴ GDC, # 222

¹¹⁵ GDC, #224.

1.3.5.1 The Role of the Parent

Parents have the most fundamental part to play in the faith life of their child. On the day of their child's baptism, parents make the promise to be the primary educators in the faith for their child.¹¹⁶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* conveys the meaning of this call for parents:

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of *evangelizing their children*. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the “first heralds” for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life.¹¹⁷

Faith formation in the home is vital to the catechetical formation of children and their participation in the wider Church community. This is why the Church refers to the family as a “domestic church.”¹¹⁸ The home is, in effect, the child's first “church.” The *RCIA* is very clear that a child's progress in faith formation is dependent on the influence of his or her parents.¹¹⁹ Parents are meant to play a crucially supportive role for their children in the initiation process. The importance of parenting on the whole life of the child cannot be denied. This of course includes the spiritual development of the child.

¹¹⁶ *Rite of Baptism*, #39.

¹¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1994), #2225.

¹¹⁸ In *Lumen Gentium* #11, “domestic Church” is explained as follows: “From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state”. This traditional definition of family with two heterosexual parents joined in sacramental marriage raising baptized children is too narrow to be inclusive of many family situations today. Thus, in defining the “domestic Church”, some theologians may “...opt for recognizing the diversity of contemporary households and trust in the quality of interpersonal relationships lived out in them, whether in traditional marriage or any other living arrangement”. Source: Thomas Knieps-Port Le Roi, “The Domestic Church: Revisiting a Theological Concept at the Intersection of Family Studies and Ecclesiology” in *The Household of God and Local Households – Revisiting the Domestic Church*, eds. Thomas Knieps-Port Le Roi, Gerard Mannion and Peter De Mey (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 8.

¹¹⁹ *RCIA*, #244.

The expectation that parents are to take this supportive role seriously can be traced back to the first century. Parents were expected to train their children in the “Way of Life,” as seen in *The Didache*, a mid-first-century pastoral treatise for training converts:

In the case of children, they were trained from their earliest years “in the fear (photos) of God” (4:9)... Presumably, since the choice for the community was an adult decision prompted by the Spirit (4:10b), parents were expected to train their underage children in appropriate ways until such time as they came forward, in early adulthood, and asked for admittance. In any case, parents were not to withdraw their guiding and protecting hand from their children.¹²⁰

The same expectations of parents still apply today, as the Church most assuredly expects parents to bring children up in the faith. In the Rite of Marriage, the couple is asked this question from the Statement of Intentions: “Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?”¹²¹ So, for most parents, a commitment is made before the child is born or presented for baptism. These questions are asked and the promises made publicly.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* presents another clear explanation of the Church’s understanding of the parents’ role in their children’s faith life:

The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and parental respect. Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, “care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events”. It is deepened all the more when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive in the Christian community and help them to appropriate it. Indeed, “family catechesis precedes ...accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis”.¹²²

¹²⁰ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache – Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 60.

¹²¹ *Marriage – Ritual and Pastoral Notes*, The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, (Ottawa, Ontario: Concacon Inc., 1979), #51.

¹²² *GDC*, #226.

Family catechesis, then, is meant to be the core of all other catechesis. The Church considers this type of catechesis irreplaceable. It is most regrettable when family catechesis is lacking in the faith life of a child. Somehow the core is about relationships – so that the family’s relationship with God is primary. Of course, God works within and around our capabilities.

The Church recognizes that in today’s world, many parents do not take their role as primary educators in the faith seriously. At present there are obstacles for some children who both desire and deserve an active faith journey. Many of these obstacles originate with the parents. For different reasons, parents have various priorities in life, and often these do not include actively supporting their child on his or her faith journey. As the *Directory for Masses with Children* points out, one of the greatest challenges to a child’s faith growth is the reality that “...parents sometimes scarcely fulfill the obligations they accepted at the baptism of their children to bring them up as Christians.”¹²³ This is an enormous challenge. How might the Church begin to address this seemingly impossible problem?

As the role of the parent is crucial in the faith formation of the children, a first step to improving the experience might be in realizing that the parents must be catechized along with their children. The entire family requires catechetical support. In meeting with parents and catechists, Judith Dunlap recommends “every opportunity should be taken to evangelize parents, helping them reflect on their own faith and encouraging them to share it with their children.”¹²⁴ Parents can’t give what they don’t have, so they must first be evangelized if they are to evangelize their children. Dunlap insists that if parents are to be effective catechists, they first must be catechized:

Parents are the first people we need to reach. As in all areas of faith formation, we will have more success in effecting the faith life of children if their parents are part of the

¹²³ *Directory for Masses with Children*, #1.

¹²⁴ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 188.

process. Whatever approach your parish takes – parents preparing their children at home or parents and children catechized at the same time or children learning about the sacrament in parochial schools and religious programs – you need to talk to the parents before they talk to their children.¹²⁵

Parents are key in the whole process of catechesis. Aidan Kavanagh recommends that “...catechists and pastors would do well to expend as much effort in supporting parents of children in their catechetical efforts as they expend on the children themselves.”¹²⁶ Parishes often overlook this important issue. In today’s society, catechesis is most effective when there is a multigenerational approach. The parish - by means of time, money and energy - must support this type of approach if it is to come to fruition and be effective. Judith Dunlap sums up what is expected if the needs of parents are to be met in the initiation process:

We know parents have the primary role in faith development of their children. No matter how much time and money parishes put into Catholic schools and religious education programs, the effects will be minimal in comparison to the influence the child’s own home exerts. It would be to everyone’s advantage, especially the child’s, if parishes would start spending more time, energy and money on working with parents. We must take every opportunity to address parents’ needs, helping them grow so strong in their own faith that their actions and words will speak to their children. This is one way of guaranteeing that the faith will be passed on to the next generation.¹²⁷

Along with realizing the reign of God and living full discipleship in Christ, is sharing the faith not one of the primary goals of catechesis? Is it not pivotal that the next generation will be nourished by faith and life in the Church? Although parents are the primary players in this process, the role of catechist is also significant.

1.3.5.2 The Role of the Catechist

¹²⁵ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 102.

¹²⁶ Kavanagh, “Initiating Children”, 41.

¹²⁷ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 192.

The role of the catechist in the initiation of a child is one of accompaniment on the faith journey. At times, the catechist may act as teacher, guide, mentor or simply as a listener. The *General Directory for Catechesis* explains the role of catechist:

No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to him(*sic*) by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method. Only his(*sic*) own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other work instruments... The catechist is essentially a mediator. He(*sic*) facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community... Finally, the personal relationship of the catechist with the subject is of crucial importance.¹²⁸

A good catechist can have a tremendous effect on the faith life of a child. Andrew Greely's research on religious imagination has found that there is a high correlation between children coming to a positive, helpful view of life as a gift from God and a personal relationship with a good teacher or catechist.¹²⁹ It is vital that the Church realizes the integral part the catechist plays in the faith journey of a catechumen and what good catechesis involves.

The Church recognizes that being a catechist is first of all a calling – a vocation - and that catechesis is a fundamental ministry in the Church. This call to ministry is highlighted in the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

The vocation of the laity of catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism. It is strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation they participate in the “priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ”. In addition to the common vocation of the apostolate, some lay people feel called interiorly by God to assume the service of catechist. The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize. The Lord Jesus invites men and women, in a special way, to follow him, teacher and formator of disciples. This personal call of Jesus Christ and its relationship to him are the true moving forces of catechetical activity.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ *GDC*, #156.

¹²⁹ Andrew Greely, as cited by James Dunning, “Children’s Initiation: Are We Ready?” in *Readings in the Christian Initiation of Children*, ed. Victoria M. Tufano (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 32.

¹³⁰ *GDC*, #213.

Catechists too, must recognize that their work is a vocation and a ministry that they have been called to by God. This must be realized before any work can begin. From this realization, effective catechists can be called and formed and good catechesis can grow.

Looking back to the first centuries of the Church, we can see the importance of committed catechists and sound catechesis. In *The First Catechetical Instruction*, St. Augustine¹³¹ shares his thoughts with Deogratias, a deacon of Carthage: “...our chief concern is what means we should adopt to ensure that the catechizer enjoys his work; for the more he is able to do so, the more agreeable will he prove.”¹³² According to Augustine, those called to be catechists must be supported in their role and given the tools and wisdom they need to form others in the faith. Augustine points to the importance of liking what we do if we are to be effective teachers. In the fifth century, Augustine realized the importance of good pedagogy and well equipped catechists. Through his work in translating and annotating St. Augustine’s *The First Catechetical Instruction*, Joseph Christopher comments on Augustine’s insights regarding catechizing:

As for his contribution to the method of catechizing, Augustine was the first to appreciate the value of question and answer in studying the candidate and in sifting his motives for wishing to become a Christian. He likewise was the first to utilize for religious instruction many other sound principles of pedagogy and psychology, as, for example, not to confuse the candidate with too much matter, but to explain a little, clearly and thoroughly; to have but one central theme, the love of God; to give, as far as possible, individual instruction; to look to the candidate’s bodily comfort; to adapt the instruction to the candidate’s intelligence; to keep up interest, cultivate cheerfulness, and combat weariness.¹³³

¹³¹ St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) was a great writer, theologian, bishop and doctor of the Church and is considered one of the greatest theologians of Western Christianity. Source: “St. Augustine of Hippo,” *Living With Christ* Vol.36, No.8, (August 2012): 183-185.

¹³² Augustine. *First Catechetical Instruction (De catechizandis rudibus)*. Trans. Rev. Joseph P. Christopher (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1946), 17.

¹³³ Augustine, *First Catechetical Instruction*, 6.

Augustine's work can be seen both as a catechesis and a manual for catechizing. As Christopher emphasizes, the relationship between the catechist and catechumen was foundational. Paying attention to the physical and pedagogical needs of the candidate, Augustine adapted the teaching environment and method in order to best serve that candidate. It seems Augustine put all else aside and focused on the person of the catechumen, and his or her abilities, the requirements of the teaching and the ultimate goal of reaching the candidate through solid catechesis. Effective catechesis continues to be a main concern for the Church which must be committed to the formation of catechists and offer them every possible support to make their role a respected and pleasant one.

We know the importance of properly trained and supported catechists, and that the catechizers need to be catechized. Catechists need to be prepared for their ministry with effective formation which should include some background in sacramental theology and wisdom of how to effectively journey with children and families and how to provide the best possible conditions to make all this happen. The importance of the formation of catechists is outlined in the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

...the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel. The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists. Thus the adequate formation of catechists cannot be overlooked by concerns such as the updating of texts and the re-organization of catechesis... Consequently, diocesan pastoral programmes must give absolute priority to the formation of lay catechists.¹³⁴

Though the formation of catechists before they begin their ministry is crucial, ongoing formation is also a need that must not be neglected. Dioceses and parishes must commit themselves to the ongoing faith formation of catechists so they can effectively accompany children on their faith

¹³⁴ GDC, #234.

journey. Next to catechists and parents, the mentor plays a vital role in the faith formation of the child.

1.3.5.3 The Role of Mentor/Sponsor/Godparent

Mentors play a meaningful role in a child's initiation process. Some texts and sources, referring to the role of mentor, use the term "sponsor" or "godparent." These terms will be all grouped together in this section as mentor/sponsor/godparent and will mostly be referred to as "mentor" for the purpose of clarity. This grouping, like the other role players, has an essential part in the faith life of the child. For, as Stephen Robich identifies, "...the ministry of companion or sponsor is not primarily one of teaching but rather one of guiding in a common journey of faith."¹³⁵ The part of the mentor in catechetical formation has a long tradition in the Church.

The role of the mentor was clearly established in the early Church. *The Didache* of the first century gives evidence that novices were paired with spiritual mentors to help train them for the Way of Life.¹³⁶ *The Didache* also relays that the mentor not only shared with candidates the content of the Way of Life but also how to live the Way of Life and apply it to their particular circumstances:

Needless to say, while the *Didache* was an oral template memorized by mentors (and, with the unfolding of the training, by their candidates as well), no one ought to imagine that training consisted of merely repeating the words of the masters. On the contrary, each mentor was expected to illustrate, inquire, question, listen to, and challenge his/her candidate in such a way that not only the words but the deep meanings of the Way of Life were being suitably assimilated and applied at every step. As in the case of every wise "father" or "mother," the mentor was expected to use the oral template as a reliable

¹³⁵ Robich, "Christian Initiation of Children", 113-114.

¹³⁶ Milavec, *The Didache*, 48.

guide, but to present it in such a way as to take into account the particular circumstances, strengths, weaknesses, and fears being exhibited by the candidate.¹³⁷

The mentor was challenged with teaching the novice the Way of Life through word and example. Relationship was an important aspect in this arrangement. A great deal of mutual respect, patience and trust must have been necessitated between the mentor and the candidate. The mentor had to walk with the candidate in his or her faith journey, all the while acting as witness to the faith and showing in practical ways how to live the Christian life. As the Church grew and the period of the catechumenate was established, the mentor was called on to be an important witness for the candidate's entry into the catechumenate. Michel Dujarier explains the purpose of this witnessing in Rome circa 215 A.D.:

Admission to the catechumenate was already selective, and some candidates were refused because of the impurity of their motives. Those whom we now call sponsors, i.e. the Christians who evangelized these postulants and who accompanied them to the Church, had to witness to their aptitude to become catechumens. Did they have enough faith to "hear the word" during catechesis?¹³⁸

Mentors were not just evangelizers but had to provide witness to the candidate's faith life and his or her supposed spiritual growth. Deeper into the catechumenal process, mentors had to give witness in the process for admission to baptism.¹³⁹ These were indeed critical and highly active relationships for both parties. In recent decades, there has been a movement in the Church to glean some of the best catechetical insights from the early Church regarding the role of mentors in the *RCIA*.

Through the *RCIA* process, the Church affirms that the role of mentor is significant to the journey of the catechumen. The *Introduction* to the *RCIA* describes the roles of the sponsor/mentor and godparent:

¹³⁷ Milavec, *The Didache*, 87.

¹³⁸ Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, 48.

¹³⁹ Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, 52.

A sponsor accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witness to the candidates' moral character, faith, and intention... Godparents are persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community and approved by the priest. It is the responsibility of godparents to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates' progress in the baptismal life.¹⁴⁰

As sponsors and godparents walk in accompaniment with the candidates through the initiation process, deep bonds can ensue. Again, this is a relationship of trust, respect and support. To proceed on the journey, the sponsors must have faith in and assurance of the character and level of commitment in the candidates. Likewise, candidates must have trust in the sponsors as mentors and likely see in them a model of Christian living and fidelity to their faith and Church. In the section of the *RCIA* regarding the Period of the Catechumenate, the supportive role of sponsors for catechumens is reiterated.¹⁴¹ The present role of mentor strongly resembles its aforementioned predecessor in the early Church.

The part mentors have to play in the faith life of children becomes even more significant if the parents are not taking their role as primary educators of the faith seriously. When this is the case, the following message is directed to mentors: "Within the Christian community, godparents or other persons noted for their dedicated service can, out of apostolic zeal, contribute greatly to the necessary catechesis in the case of families that fail in their obligation toward the children's Christian upbringing."¹⁴² Sponsors are often obligated to be a constant faith presence for the child when so many families today are disconnected from parish life and choose not to actively journey with their child in his or her faith.

¹⁴⁰ *RCIA*, # 10.

¹⁴¹ *RCIA*, # 75.2.

¹⁴² *Directory for Masses with Children*, #11.

It is necessary for the child to see the love of the Church and an active faith, both in others and through relationships with others. A mentoring relationship gives a human and relational perspective to the faith experience of the child:

What is crucial for initiation, as opposed to religious education, is that there be relationships in which the child is invited to find embodied, in specific individuals, the Christian way of life that is being offered. Christian initiation is more like an apprenticeship or a mentoring experience than a course of studies; developing a sponsoring relationship is an indispensable element in the process. In the sponsoring relationship a human face is given to the Christian experience, and the universal values of the faith are mediated on a scale and with an individual sensitivity that allow a child to appropriate gospel values in deeply personal ways.¹⁴³

The sponsoring relationship in the initiation of children is fundamental. A child deserves every benefit he or she can receive from being mentored in the faith. The benefits of this relationship are of course mutual. It is quite possible that those accompanying the child will grow in faith as does the child. Bearing witness to their faith with the child, sponsors no doubt become more aware of and appreciative of the many riches and traditions therein. As a catechist, I always appreciate the great privilege of walking with a child or young family during the initiation process. Sharing the joys, challenges and celebratory moments with children and young families has done a great deal to form my own faith. The roles parents, catechists and mentors play, or do not play, in a child's initiation will have a lifetime effect on the child. It is evident that context and locus of the faith community is essential as well as the key roles within it for the initiation of children. Other important aspects to understanding initiation are the models of Church and types of leadership that shape the processes.

1.3.5.4 The Role of Catholic Schools

¹⁴³ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 33.

In this section, I wish to identify the catechetical role of Catholic schools with regards to catechesis. The Catholic school has an imperative role to play in the catechetical ministry of the Church since it is in the Catholic school that "...young people are helped to grow towards maturity in faith."¹⁴⁴ The *General Directory for Catechesis* states: "The Catholic school is a most important *locus* for human and Christian formation."¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most identifiable way that the Catholic school forms students is through their participation in programs of religious education. According to the *General Directory for Catechesis*, religious education and catechesis have "...a particular importance in the Catholic School..."¹⁴⁶ In order to explain the place of catechesis in Catholic schools, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between religious education and catechesis.

The relationship between religious education and catechesis can be described as somewhat complex as the two are linked yet diverse. This complex affiliation is explained by the Congregation for Catholic Education:

There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis... The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime.

The aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic; this happens most especially in a local Church community. The aim of the school however, is knowledge. While it uses the same elements of the Gospel message, it tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives. It is evident, of course, that religious instruction cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one's knowledge of the Christian message.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education (Ottawa: Concacan, Inc., 1977.), #51.

¹⁴⁵ GDC, #259.

¹⁴⁶ GDC, #259.

¹⁴⁷ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School – Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal*, Congregation for Catholic Education (Ottawa: Concacan, Inc., 1988.), #68.

From this explanation, catechesis can be described a lifetime commitment to faith formation, rooted in a faith community and focused on the saving power of God. Religious education may be understood as the sharing of religious knowledge focusing on what it means to be Christian, how to live a Christian life and usually occurs over a set period of time.

Another attempt at comparing religious education to catechesis is made by Thomas Groome. He says that catechesis "...focuses on socialization into Christian identity..." whereas religious education "...is the academic study of religion."¹⁴⁸ He then goes on to explain how catechesis and religious education might be married in a helpful manner:

...there is not much value in religious or theological education that does not enrich people's identity in faith. People should at least be encouraged to learn *from* such study, finding some spiritual wisdom for their lives. Likewise, I would be worried about catechesis that simply socializes people into Christian identity without offering sound instruction and encouraging people to understand the content of their faith.¹⁴⁹

Ideally, then, the Catholic school should be teaching students from a faith tradition that encourages students to adopt a Catholic way of life. Both faith content and faith practice are necessary for effective faith formation.

Yet another way of viewing how catechesis and religious education are related is through the lens of the new evangelization. This correlation is highlighted in the 2012 *Religious Education Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document Grades 1-8*:

...religious education... [is] a first step in the new evangelization which needs to be complemented by a further activity: catechesis... Catechesis, as the Directory itself specifies, is directed to believers; it helps them to understand their faith and to articulate it; its context is the believing community as it celebrates the sacred mysteries throughout the liturgical year; indeed, in many ways, the liturgy is its source and its end. The usual "home" of catechesis is the parish, though Catholic schools can certainly offer

¹⁴⁸ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 103-104.

catechetical activities, especially through the service of school chaplaincies and parish-school activities... No doubt, religious education will have a catechetical dimension for those believing students...¹⁵⁰

To situate this understanding in the catechumenal process, it could be said that religious education can be a significant method in evangelizing students who are searching or who have religious doubts. Through religious education programming, students can be introduced to the person of Jesus Christ and can be invited into forming a relationship with Him. Catechesis is a more effective process for those who are already believers or those who have already been introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although the two concepts are distinct, they can be used together in Catholic schools to form the faith of students. The role of the Catholic teacher is pivotal in bringing this working relationship between catechesis and religious education to fruition.

Catholic teachers can play a fundamental faith mentoring role in the faith lives of their students. Their vocation includes the dual role of religious educator and catechist:

The primary role for teachers with regard to religious education is the transmission of knowledge about the faith. The secondary role is to support the catechetical efforts of the parish and the home. This is a participation in the work of the Church in which they become ministers of the Word and teach on behalf of the Christian community. They are called to be transmitters of the faith as they help prepare young people to be “clothed in Christ” and to become “salt for the earth and light for the world.” Teachers teach not only the content of faith to pupils but by the witness of their lives, they help students discover what it means to live their faith.¹⁵¹

This description of the ministry of Catholic teachers concerning faith formation is one that includes both a didactic nature (religious education) and a faith witnessing nature (catechesis). Some teachers would find catechesis more challenging as it requires a teacher to go beyond the

¹⁵⁰ *Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document for Religious Education, Grades 1-8*, Institute for Catholic Education for the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (Toronto: Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 2012), 14.

¹⁵¹ *Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document*, 11.

confines of a program to find effective ways to be faith mentors. Both of these expectations are in service to the faith formation in the home and the parish and so the role of the teachers is educational but also supportive. The partners of the triad relationship of home, school and parish are called to work together to form the child in the faith. I now move to the discussion of the importance of models of Church and leadership as they relate to the ministry of the sacramental initiation of children.

1.4 *Models of Church and Leadership*

What are the models of Church and leadership that best support the vision of initiation for children that are offered by the Church? This section of the thesis will point to the use of certain models of Church and leadership that can best achieve the goals of initiation associated with the catechumenal model.

1.4.1 Models of Church and Catechumenal Initiation

What kind of a church community is necessary to best fulfill this vision of the initiation of children? Although Avery Dulles introduces various models of Church,¹⁵² there is no one model that holds all the elements for a complete vision, as each model expresses something important about the life, mission and meaning of Church. However, looking at Dulles' various models, the model of "Church as mystical communion" may be the most relevant one for bringing the vision of the initiation of children to fruition. Church documents support that claim. The 1985 Synod of Bishops affirmed that the communion model of Church is the dominant

¹⁵² Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*. (New York: Image, Doubleday, 2002), p. 1. The models of Church proposed by Cardinal Dulles are the Church as institution, the Church as mystical communion, the Church as sacrament, the Church as herald and the Church as servant.

image of Church in the Vatican II documents.¹⁵³ As Dulles notes, the model of Church as communion incorporates two related images of Church – Church as the People of God and Church as the Body of Christ:

The concept of Church as a communion harmonizes with several biblical images – most notably with two images that have figured prominently in modern Catholic ecclesiology, as summarized in Chapter I – those of the Body of Christ and the People of God. These two images, after a long period of neglect in Catholic theology, returned to favor in the present century.¹⁵⁴

These related images of Church are also prevalent in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - Lumen Gentium*. It is interesting to note that both the Body of Christ and People of God images appear and are explained in this document before the image of the Church as Hierarchy is introduced.¹⁵⁵ Placing these former models of Church first, gives them a certain prominence.

The relatedness of these two images is further explained by Dulles:

For many purposes the analogues of Body of Christ and People of God are virtually equivalent. Both of them are more democratic in tendency than the hierarchical models... They emphasize the immediate relationship of all believers to the Holy Spirit, who directs the whole Church. Both focus attention likewise on the mutual service of the members toward one another and on the subordination of the particular good of any one group to that of the whole Body or People.¹⁵⁶

With this model of Church, no member is greater than another – all have different but important roles to play in the building of the Kingdom of God. All are called to be disciples and are commissioned through baptism to disciple others. With reference to the initiation of children, this model of Church summons all involved – children, pastors, sponsors, catechists, liturgists and members of the assembly – to work together toward the common goals of building the

¹⁵³ Susan K. Wood, “The Church as Communion” in *The Gift of the Church – A Textbook on Ecclesiology*, ed. Peter C. Phan. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 160.

¹⁵⁴ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 42.

¹⁵⁵ The Body of Christ image is presented in *Lumen Gentium* #7 and the People of God model is presented in Chapter II of *Lumen Gentium*. The Church as Hierarchy model is not introduced until Chapter III.

¹⁵⁶ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 45.

Kingdom of God, encouraging a strong relationship with Jesus Christ and helping children and families become active, participating members of the faith community.

Avery Dulles notes the prevalence of the People of God model in Vatican Council II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - *Lumen Gentium*:

Vatican Council II in its Constitution on the Church made ample use of the models of the Body of Christ and the Sacrament, but its dominant model was rather that of the People of God. This paradigm focused attention on the Church as a network of interpersonal relationships, on the Church as community. This is still the dominant model for many Roman Catholics who consider themselves progressives and invoke the teaching of Vatican II as their authority.¹⁵⁷

At the heart of the initiation process is the faith community where interpersonal relationships are formed. Relationships among the Church community in the RCIA process are significant. Candidates must feel themselves being supported and encouraged by the faith community as they familiarize themselves with the Christian way of life. The entire community is called to walk with the candidate in the initiation process where interpersonal relationships based on faith sharing and mentorship are ideally formed. Since this model sees community as foundational to the meaning of Church, the model becomes more relevant for the process of initiation, and thus its preference as a model for this ministry is understandable.

The process of initiating members into the Church is a community-building one. All members of the faith community are responsible for the initiation of members,¹⁵⁸ and there are numerous opportunities for involvement. As Gerard Austin explains, the three sacraments of initiation are fundamental in building up the Church:

The three initiation sacraments are best considered as a whole. Each bestows the Holy Spirit, and in that sense each creates the Church, the body of Christ. They operate in a complementary way. While we are baptized but once, confirmed but once, Eucharist is celebrated time after time, Sunday after Sunday, year after year. It is Eucharist that our

¹⁵⁷ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 22.

¹⁵⁸ RCIA, #9.

U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy called the "repeatable sacrament of initiation."¹⁵⁹

Every time we are called to the Eucharistic table, we form a community of believers – a community of faith. The ministry of initiation benefits the entire faith community. Every time a faith community gains a new member, it is changed forever, and every time a faith community loses a member, it is changed forever. All members of the faith community are served by the initiation ministry.

The Church as sacrament is another model of Church with relevance to the ministry of initiation. Dulles states that a recurring theme in the Vatican II documents is that the Church is a sacrament through its relationship to Christ.¹⁶⁰ If we understand a sacrament to be a close encounter with Jesus Christ, then the Church can be viewed as a venue through which this encounter can be made possible. If the Church is a vehicle by which we meet and deepen our relationship with Christ, then the Church acts like a sacrament. Jesus is made present through the life and ministry of the Church. The ministry of initiation, then, is an opportunity to encounter Christ in tangible ways. Since one of the main goals of the initiation process is unity at the Eucharistic table, this experience in itself becomes a fundamental aspect of the model of Church as sacrament. As Dulles explains, "In several Council documents, especially in the Constitution on the Liturgy, the sacramental worship of the Church is given a certain primacy over all other forms of Christian life."¹⁶¹ The Sacred Constitution on the Liturgy directs us thus:

...the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavor is that all who are made children of God by faith and Baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Gerard Austin, "The Church as Worshipping Community" in *The Gift of the Church – A Textbook on Ecclesiology*, ed. Peter C. Phan. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 178.

¹⁶⁰ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 56.

¹⁶¹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 56-57.

¹⁶² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #10.

Christ reveals Himself through the Word, through the consecrated hosts and wine, through the person of the priest, *in persona Christi*, through the baptized members of the assembly as they sing and pray and through the sacraments.¹⁶³

In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, we are all called to full, active and conscious participation in this liturgy.¹⁶⁴ Cardinal Dulles expands on this point:

...we read that the Church “reveals herself most clearly when a full complement of God’s holy people, united in prayer and in a common liturgical service (especially the Eucharist)” actively participate in the official worship of the Church together with their bishops and priests. Thus the Council discerns a connection between the Church as primordial sacrament and the seven ritual sacraments that express, in privileged ways, the sacramentality of the Church as a whole.¹⁶⁵

As the assembly members gather for the Eucharistic liturgy, they not only partake in the sacrament of the Eucharist but experience the sacramentality of the Church in the locus of the faith community. In a sense, the participants become part of the sacrament as it is celebrated. As participants pray, sing, profess, reflect on and listen to God’s Word and partake in the Eucharistic meal, they become a living, breathing part of the celebration.

The model of Church as Herald also bears some relevance to the ministry of initiation. This model can be described as follows: “...(The Church as Herald) sees the Church as gathered and formed by the word of God. The mission of the Church is to proclaim that which it has heard, believed, and been commissioned to proclaim.”¹⁶⁶ When candidates are initiated, they are to be formed by the Word, since liturgical catechesis is intended to be an integral part of their formation.¹⁶⁷ As fully initiated members of the Church, neophytes are, too, called on to spread the Good News and share God’s word with others. Since Vatican Council II, there has been a

¹⁶³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #7.

¹⁶⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #14.

¹⁶⁵ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 57.

¹⁶⁶ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 68.

¹⁶⁷ *RCIA*, #75.

renewed effort to promote the understanding of evangelization as the baptismal responsibility of all Christians.¹⁶⁸ This involves sharing the actual Word and showing example by living the Christian life. Knowing the Word and stories of faith in scripture that we hear proclaimed from the lectionary is also important. As people of faith, we are called to be familiar with scripture – particularly the gospels so that we might see our own lives in light of them. A helpful practice is to use the *Living with Christ* missalette in a preparatory way and the readings of the day for mass as a daily prayer reflection. Spending time with the readings of the day brings a person not only into communion with the worldwide Church but also the calendar of saints and to prepare for a more complete celebration of the Eucharist. The practice of reflection on the daily mass readings can help a person to live the liturgical year and to be aware of the many facets associated with it.

All who are involved in the ministry of initiation – catechists, pastors, parents, mentors and others - have a very real mandate to share the Word of God as disciples of Jesus Christ. The model of the Church as herald has a heavy evangelistic call to those involved in this ministry:

The goal of the Church, in this style of theology, is simply to herald the message. This ecclesiology goes with a strong missionary thrust. The Church's responsibility is not necessarily to produce conversion (only God can do that), still less to build the Kingdom of God; but rather to evangelize all the nations in accordance with the "great commission" of Mt. 28: 18-20.¹⁶⁹

In the great commissioning of the disciples, Jesus calls on his disciples to "...make disciples of all nations..."¹⁷⁰ The making of disciples is one of the main goals of the RCIA process.

1.4.2 Models of Leadership and Catechumenal Initiation

¹⁶⁸ Thomas H. Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education" in *Horizons and Hopes – The Future of Religious Education*, ed. Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003), 3.

¹⁶⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 76.

¹⁷⁰ Matthew 28:19.

To fulfill the catechumenal vision of the initiation of children, certain styles of leadership are required. As stated, the initiation process calls for the involvement of many people from the faith community, and the entire faith community bears the responsibility of the total ministry.

Ian Knox, in his summary of the People of God model of Church, outlines some of the criteria necessary for leadership in this ministry:

Ideally, all should work for the good of the whole community and this work should operate on the principle of shared responsibility. The ideal proposed is that of service – service to one another and service to the whole body. This model fosters a more democratic approach to church and church governance than some others... Some form of authority is necessary but, again ideally, authority will be based on true leadership and not merely on rank and position.¹⁷¹

This type of service to the faith community and service to one another can best be described as servant leadership, a leadership style illustrated by Jesus Christ in the account of the Washing of the Feet from the Gospel of John.¹⁷² The leadership style of servant leaders involves serving others rather than being served. This type of leadership gives the indication that the leader is not greater than those she or he is leading.

Servant-leadership is unifying in that all members of a community are considered equal. In a spiritual sense, the Holy Spirit is the great equalizer. God sends the Holy Spirit to every soul as the great Advocate and Guide. Ian Knox explains this work of the Spirit in all members of the Church: “The Holy Spirit pervades the whole church. All members receive and possess the Holy Spirit, who fosters a true relationship of love among the members. God’s Spirit, therefore, is not only given to the leaders of the church.”¹⁷³ The Holy Spirit is called on in a special way in the sacraments to be with the one celebrating the sacraments.

¹⁷¹ Ian Knox, *Theology for Teachers – Revised Edition* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1999), 171.

¹⁷² See John 13:1-20.

¹⁷³ Knox, *Theology for Teachers*, 171.

The call to leadership in the initiation ministry begins at baptism. As baptized members of the faith community, catechists, pastors, pastoral assistants, mentors, liturgists and parents are called to share in the leadership of this process which is intended to serve the common good. A sense of unity in the initiation process must be fostered amongst members of the faith community. All are called to accompany the candidate for initiation and to work together towards mentoring and supporting the candidate on the various parts of the journey and beyond. Each member of the community should see both the importance of this ministry and its service to the whole People of God and beyond. An appropriate example is found in John's gospel, as he retells the account of the Washing of the Feet.¹⁷⁴ The type of leadership Jesus offers here calls for service to others and a rejection of power and prestige. It is essential that the members of the faith community realize that the same Spirit who came to them at their baptism calls them forth later in life to accompany others as they journey with the sacraments of initiation. This is part of the wider call of service to the Church and world that beckons to the Christian through the initiation process and into full discipleship.

In order to best serve the faith community through the initiation ministry, one needs to aim for humility and servant-leadership rather than notoriety. Achieving these aims is a summons for effective leaders. Being aware of the capacity for presence is one way to reach these goals. By presence, I don't just mean being physically present, but also being cognitively engaged: listening, reflecting and asking questions. All of these actions signal an active presence with a group. Sharon Daloz Parks in *Leadership Can be Taught*, reflects on the importance of presence, stressing its prominence in the chapter "Listening to the Music Beneath the Words – the Practice of Presence." Parks promotes the idea of adaptive leadership, of which effective presence is an essential part:

¹⁷⁴ John 13:1-20

In the practice of adaptive leadership, what really matters is the capacity for effective participation – ways of being present that foster the building of a collective strength. That is, even if one is standing in the spotlight, it is more useful to envision oneself as a resonant and responsive node in a dynamic network or field of energy and an agent of emergent possibility and progress, rather than imagining oneself as simply gifted and entitled to be on top and in charge.¹⁷⁵

For some, it is a challenge not to impose their thinking on a group, and the initiation process is susceptible to this type of leadership. Democracy of thought is a wonderful ideal but sometimes difficult to achieve. It is easy to share with others what we think or how we interpret something but being a companion in the initiation process means stepping back and allowing candidates to reflect and think for themselves. In this ministry, we are invited to share our faith in a non-threatening manner, meeting candidates where they are. Moving away from a model of an authoritarian style of leadership can be difficult since it has been the experience of many people that the hierarchal mode is the norm of most institutions. Many institutions operate from a “top-heavy” model that is bureaucratic in nature and neither democratic nor conciliatory. The traditional hierarchal model contains a “boss” figure who expects those under him or her to do as instructed with little discussion, questioning or debate. Decision-making and visioning are often done at the top level and rarely trickle down to the people below.

A domineering leadership style is indeed not dead. In her book, *Finding Our Way – Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, Margaret Wheatley asserts, “I’m sad to report that in the past few years, ever since uncertainty became our insistent twenty-first century companion, leadership strategies have taken *a great leap backward* to the familiar territory of command and control.”¹⁷⁶ Wheatley continues:

¹⁷⁵ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 99-100.

¹⁷⁶ Margaret Wheatley, *Finding Our Way – Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2007), 4.

Most of us were raised in a culture that told us that the way to manage for excellence was to tell people exactly what they had to do and then make sure they did it. We learned to play master designer, assuming we could engineer people into perfect performance. But you can't direct people into excellence; you can only engage them enough so that they want to do excellent work.¹⁷⁷

Engagement is a key feature in the initiation process. By engagement, I mean giving candidates the opportunity to experience what it is like to live as people of faith. This may involve inviting them to pray with us, to celebrate liturgies with us, to suggest spiritual readings or to discuss questions of faith that challenge us. Engaging means giving others the opportunity to experience what it is we are doing and living, by inviting them to join with us. All are invited to be members of the community, and for those who choose to pursue initiation, engaging them becomes a significant task. Those seeking initiation need to find companions for the journey who will involve and encourage them in living the Christian life. Such companions must be leaders who help to create an atmosphere of collegiality and who recognize and honour the gifts of others in the group.

Sharon Daloz Parks refers to the “command-and-control” and “heroic” image of leadership as a “deep and abiding myth.”¹⁷⁸ As she explains further, “Those who look to others for leadership and those who aspire to be leaders themselves are vulnerable to a deep belief that leaders are most recognizable when they ride tall in the saddle with an unquestioned, clear and steady purpose, taking decisive, unambiguous action.”¹⁷⁹ However, Parks is hopeful in that she sees evidence of other, more inclusive models of leadership surfacing. She explains, “Alternative images of leadership that are more congruent with this new reality have begun to emerge – for example, “flattening the pyramid” and “servant-leadership.” Both of these

¹⁷⁷ Wheatley, *Finding Our Way*, 71.

¹⁷⁸ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 201.

¹⁷⁹ Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 203.

metaphors are attempts to modify the shepherd-warrior-king myth.”¹⁸⁰ These collegial and service-oriented styles of leadership are more effective in working with children and families.

To avoid the temptation of operating from an overbearing style of leadership in the initiation process, we must attempt to meet parents and children where they are. This means beginning as most catechetical processes would dictate by connecting with the experience of the participants. What is it that has brought them to this point in their faith journey? What kind of family dynamics and support are they experiencing? What is their relationship with the parish? Do they understand the process they are about to undertake? Does the family or child have any special needs? Catechists, pastors and mentors may have a valid agenda, lesson or message to bring forth, but getting a sense of the make-up and needs of the group before beginning a session may be a more important way to start.

Sharon Daloz Parks points to the benefits of case-in-point teaching¹⁸¹ to help in this regard. This method is one way of beginning with the experience of the catechumen. Parks describes the method in this way:

In case-in-point teaching, what goes on in the classroom itself is an occasion for learning and practicing leadership within a social group... The teacher has a set of ideas and frameworks to offer. But instead of presenting a lecture, or starting with a written case from another context that may or may not be relevant to the learning of the people in the class, the teacher waits for a case to appear in the process of the class itself. Every group generates its own set of issues, shaped in part by what is set in motion by the context and content provided by the teacher-presenter and the events of the day... The challenge is to make use of both the explicit and underlying issues that surface in the group by connecting those issues to the course content.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 207.

¹⁸¹ I want to clarify my reference to the model proposed by Parks. Parks’ model of case in point teaching is used within a classroom setting that is not the ideal context I suggest for effective catechesis throughout my thesis. I am not proposing the use of a classroom model but rather a model of engagement where the leaders draws on the experience, needs and situations of the people in the group to guide the process. This is the essence of case in point teaching, not the physical atmosphere of the classroom.

¹⁸² Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 7.

For Christian initiation leaders, this means being flexible enough to take risks and to, at times, put the agenda aside and really examine, listen to and journey with the wisdom and experience of the candidates and their families. It does not mean letting go of the core content of the gospel message or the Church's teaching. Rather, it means deep listening and such familiarity with the key components to be shared that the leader is able to integrate them and connect them to the real lives of those to be catechized. Catechesis is not meant to be simply a scholastic exercise of filling minds with knowledge, but a means instead to offer people the tools to live a way of life. William Harmless notes, "the catechumenate is not a school, but an initiation: the school has some students who learn a lesson; initiation has some disciples who discover a life."¹⁸³ Some explanation may be required for clarity on this point.

Living a way of life or faith as a lived reality are in relationship to forms of knowledge and the knowing process in general. Something comes to be known at the end of the catechetical process but it is meant to be much more than filling minds with knowledge. Miriam Martin and Ramon Martinez de Pison have noted that knowledge is "...one of the dimensions of being human, and not the *only* or even the *most important* one."¹⁸⁴ Martin and Martinez de Pison warn against religious education that is solely knowledge based: "The...negative consequence that we present consists in considering religion, and the relationship with the Divine, more as a transmission of doctrines, norms, morals, traditions, and so on. Often, the emphasis is on things to be learned and practiced, and this frequently is in individualistic way."¹⁸⁵ The same concern can be expressed for catechesis. Learning has to be taken further in order to be of consequence to one's way of living. Martin and Martinez de Pison argue that wisdom differs from knowledge

¹⁸³ William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 17.

¹⁸⁴ Miriam K. Martin and Ramon Martinez de Pison, "From Knowledge to Wisdom: A New Challenge to the Educational Milieu with Implications for Religious Education", *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, Vol. 100, No. 2, (Spring 2005), 158.

¹⁸⁵ Martin and Martinez de Pison, "From Knowledge to Wisdom", 159.

in that “wisdom requires the integration and transformation of knowledge into human experience.”¹⁸⁶ It is through the human experience of mentoring relationships that a candidate in the catechumenal process learns how to live the Christian life. This is why Martin and Martinez de Pison argue that “..the educator is not considered a means for the acquisition of factual knowledge, but a living model in the whole process of acquiring wisdom.”¹⁸⁷

Referring again to the case-in-point teaching method, Parks adds, “Case-in point teaching engages people on the lively and disturbing edge of their own learning because it encourages a high degree of active participation. It meets people where they are...”¹⁸⁸ Considering the ministry of initiation, active participation is the aim not only in the catechetical process but also in the Sunday Eucharist. Active engagement in a process helps maintain interest and momentum in the activities or issues at hand. When participants are engaged, they feel they are part of the process and are more likely to share when given these opportunities.

Catechesis is not a job or task that simply has to be done around the parish. Rather it is a ministry that serves the common good and all members of the faith community engaging people in the life and meaning making aspects of their faith. Margaret Wheatley shares the following reflection concerning the importance of this type of work: “I have always been astonished by the deep meaning people ascribe to their work. Most people want their work to serve a greater good, to help other people. It doesn’t matter what the work is; we’d rather be doing it in service to other people.”¹⁸⁹ The work of catechists and others involved in the initiation of children is labour with a deeper meaning – some would say a *calling* or *vocation*. Alison Berger offers the following assessment of the ministry of catechesis as a vocation:

¹⁸⁶ Martin and Martinez de Pison, “From Knowledge to Wisdom”, 163.

¹⁸⁷ Martin and Martinez de Pison, “From Knowledge to Wisdom”, 166.

¹⁸⁸ Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 71.

¹⁸⁹ Wheatley, *Finding Our Way*, 128.

God calls people to the ministry of catechist in many different ways, but the calling is always a vocation rooted in the catechist's baptism. Through baptism every Christian shares in the prophetic mission of Christ, to be spokespersons for God. Catechists are spokespersons because they carry out a form of ministry of the Word. The invitation to this ministry might come through another catechist, through a parish leader, through an event that inspires a person to serve others in some way.¹⁹⁰

Catechists and others involved in this ministry are called on to journey with children and families in the initiation process, as an important focus in their lives of faith. In this regard, they are by necessity called to deepen their own sense of faith and to become more conscious of the ongoing nature of their faith journey and God's ongoing revelation.

Leaders in the initiation ministry must be well aware of the experience of participants in the initiation process and must be willing to meet the children and the families where they are. We know that the initiation process is gradual in nature, and candidates for the sacraments participate when they are ready. Readiness is not something that happens at the same time for all. As Sharon Daloz Parks explains, case-in-point teaching is an approach that understands this reality, and its relevance lies partly in appreciating readiness in child candidates for initiation:

Experience and readiness differ, often significantly, among learners. Thus, part of what is going on here rests in the deep conviction that people – and particularly adults – learn from their own experiences at the edge of their own readiness to learn. As it has been developed in this instance, case-in-point teaching seeks to bring action and reflection together in the most immediate way possible for each person.¹⁹¹

Giving children the opportunity to reflect on the issues and situations that have shaped and are shaping their lives is a helpful approach in the process. In doing this, those journeying with candidates have the opportunity to get to know them better. But mentors also have the chance to better understand and appreciate the experiences that have shaped candidates' lives and what has brought them to the point of seeking initiation in the Church. Those involved in the initiation process would also do well to reflect on their own experiences as participants in the process of

¹⁹⁰ Alison Berger, *Catechist*, (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 2002), 8.

¹⁹¹ Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 49.

their own faith journey. Part of this reflection and spiritual growth is the realization that ongoing faith formation is essential for those involved in the initiation ministry.

The ministry of catechesis calls for a commitment to lifelong learning and ongoing faith formation. The Church recognizes the need for the formation of catechists and priests both at the parish and diocesan level:

All of these tasks are born of the conviction that the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel. The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists... Consequently, diocesan pastoral programmes must give absolute priority to the *formation of lay catechists*. Together with this, a fundamentally decisive element must be the *catechetical formation of priests* both at the level of seminary formation as well as at the level of continuing formation. Bishops are called upon to ensure that they are scrupulously attentive to such formation.¹⁹²

Catechetical training for catechists and pastors would help to ensure that they are better prepared to serve the needs of candidates for initiation and the faith community with regards to the ministry of catechesis. Catechetical formation is necessary not only for those beginning in the ministry of catechesis but also for those more experienced. The Church highlights the importance of this ongoing formation for catechists within the Christian community:

Within the community other formative activities can also be realized: courses in awareness of catechesis, for example, at the beginning of the pastoral year; retreats in living in community at the important liturgical times of the year; dissertations on more pressing and necessary themes; systematic doctrinal formation, for example, studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These are activities of continuing formation, which together with the personal work of the catechist, would appear very useful.¹⁹³

These types of ongoing formation opportunities for catechists give them the chance to further immerse themselves in issues of faith and to perhaps be better informed as they try to meet the needs of those they are called to serve. Such activities assist catechists in realizing the importance of life-long learning and reflection. Sometimes this learning is achieved by simply

¹⁹² GDC # 234.

¹⁹³ GDC, # 247.

leading and participating in an ongoing learning process, whereas other times learning is achieved by standing back and watching others as well as evaluating our own involvement.

Parks uses a metaphor to explain this reflective method.

The metaphor of the dance floor and the balcony is used by Parks to explain the reflective approach grounded in experience that is case-in-point teaching. According to the metaphor, there are some things that can only be learned by dancing – being an active participant and yet if you move to a balcony to observe the dancing, things can be gleaned that might not be apparent on the dance floor.¹⁹⁴ Parks continues the exploration of this metaphor:

This is one way of talking about action and reflection, practice and theory. The learning milieu is designed to encourage students to move continually back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony. The intent is that they will begin to learn what they most need to see in the midst of a dynamic social context and harvest insights that do not present themselves in neat, outline form. Rather they emerge primarily as student-practitioners learn to read in real time the political-economic, cultural-historical, and psychosocial patterns of which they are a part.¹⁹⁵

Obviously this level of reading the situation requires skill and practice yet it is crucial to effective leadership. Catechists, pastors and other leaders in the initiation ministry can learn much as participants in and observers of the process. Again, openness, good listening skills and flexibility are required of these leaders. And, part of taking the risk of this type of reflection is the reality that leaders can be transformed as well by this process.

Good catechetical leaders are good listeners and as a result have the capacity to build good relationships. The initiation process is all about building relationships. Margaret Wheatley outlines the importance of effective listening and building relationships – even with those whose views differ from ours:

If you're willing to be disturbed, I recommend that you begin a conversation with someone who thinks differently than you do. Listen as best you can for what's different,

¹⁹⁴ Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 50.

¹⁹⁵ Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught*, 50.

for what surprises you. Try to stop the voice of judgment or opinion. Just listen. At the end of this practice notice if you've learned anything new. Notice whether you've developed a better relationship with the person you have just talked with. And the greatest benefit that comes to those who listen is that we develop closer relationships with those we thought we couldn't understand. When we listen with less judgment, we always develop better relationships with each other.¹⁹⁶

This is sound advice for leaders in the ministry of initiation. When working with parish leaders, families and other stakeholders in this ministry, catechists will undoubtedly have to work with people who think differently than themselves and with whom they will disagree. Being able to work with such differences in viewpoint is important for the catechetical leader. At any time, leaders may be called to address thorny questions or challenges, to resolve conflicts and to maintain an invitational and welcoming atmosphere amid tension or chaos. Listening to others, who think differently from themselves, often means taking risks. However, if dialogue ensues, and relationships are strengthened as a result, the risks are worth it. Effective leaders in the initiation process step back and take risks by observing the situation at hand, by listening actively and by putting their own agenda aside.

Leaders also must be prepared for the unexpected challenges and opportunities that can surface in the initiation process. As previously noted, catechesis and initiation are often “messy” experiences. Margaret Wheatley advises that leaders have to be ready for this actuality:

As leaders ensure that the organization knows itself, that it's clear at its core, they must also learn to tolerate unprecedented levels of “messiness” at the edges. This constant tinkering, this localized hunt for solutions, never looks neat. Freedom and creativity always create diverse responses. If conformity is the goal, it will kill local initiative. Leaders have to be prepared to support diversity, to welcome surprise, to expect invention, to rely on highly contributing employees.¹⁹⁷

Initiation is not about conformity. The initiation process is about invitation, formation, openness and flexibility. There must always be room for dialogue, listening, and new ways of seeing and

¹⁹⁶ Wheatley, *Finding Our Way*, 212.

¹⁹⁷ Wheatley, *Finding Our Way*, 69.

doing. There must be opportunity for discovering and pondering the moment of grace and the movement of the Spirit in the lives of everyone involved.

Leadership for catechetical ministry requires the realization and understanding of the baptismal call to evangelize and be witnesses of the faith. Catechetical leaders are called to be servant-leaders, rejecting the often popular authoritarian and domineering leadership styles. Initiation ministers are called to meet children and families where they are, by listening, by being flexible in approach and by sharing, not imposing their Christian way of life. Serving in this ministry is a vocation which much be fostered by ongoing faith formation and reflection. Effective leaders need to take risks, step back and observe what is happening – to both themselves and the participants in the process in order to effectively plan for the future. This initiation journey calls for leaders to be attentive listeners who are willing to minister to and work with others, even the independent thinkers and the intractable.

In this first chapter, I have attempted to outline some of the main elements of the catechumenal process that are of consequence to the catechumenate for children. This included the historical and theological development of these fundamental understandings of the catechumenate since the Second Vatican Council. In this chapter, I have also introduced a discussion on different models of Church and types of leadership that are desirable for an initiation process based on the catechumenal model. I now explore the current experience of the movement toward the catechumenal model of initiation in the Diocese of Pembroke by presenting a phenomenological study of representative parishes.

Chapter II – Research Method and Context

2.1 Research Method

In order to achieve my research goals, the method I will use is phenomenological research. An elaboration on the methodology is necessary before explaining how the phenomenological method is the most appropriate method for my study. Examining the perspectives of several phenomenologists is helpful in offering an explanation of my choice for this method.

For E. Husserl, “...the aim of phenomenology is the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience.”¹⁹⁸ Husserl’s method calls for the researcher to focus on the experience of people without reflections or interpretations.¹⁹⁹ To achieve such an ends, Husserl promoted the idea of “bracketing”, which John Swinton and Harriet Mowat define as “...the suspension of a person’s beliefs and preconceptions in an attempt to look at the phenomenon ‘as it is’, that is, without any intrusion from the researcher.”²⁰⁰

The phenomenology of Martin Heidegger differs from Husserl in that Heidegger method uses hermeneutics that looks at lived experience in an interpretive manner.²⁰¹ Heidegger offered

¹⁹⁸ Maura Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen. A Review of Different Phenomenological Approaches,” *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 44 (2007): 132.

¹⁹⁹ Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen, 132.

²⁰⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 111.

²⁰¹ Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen”, 133.

the concept of the “hermeneutical circle” that puts the description of Husserl’s method into conversation with understanding or interpretation.²⁰²

Hans Georg Gadamer built on the work of Heidegger and rejected Husserl’s insistence of bracketing. Gadamer “...presents a perspective that assumes our pre-understandings or prejudices to be necessary in order for us to make sense of the world.”²⁰³ In Gadamer’s version of phenomenology, “...understanding is derived from personal involvement by the researcher in reciprocal processes on interpretation that are inextricably linked with one’s being-in-the-world.”²⁰⁴ Thus, his method involves dialogue as interpretation by the researcher is constantly informed by social and cultural factors.²⁰⁵ This dialogue causes the researcher to consider the data he sees before him and his own experience. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat explain that in order to fully comprehend a study, a fusion of horizons is necessary:

In order to understand a text we need a fusion between the horizons of the world of the researcher/interpreter and the world of the text. From this perspective, the task of the researcher is not to bracket their prejudices, but to fuse their horizons with the horizons of the research participants in a way that will deepen and clarify the meaning of the experience being explored. Horizons are closely connected with prejudice in that they contain an individual’s and a society’s underlying assumptions about the way the world is and how people and things should function within it.²⁰⁶

As the researcher is immersed in the world of the participants in a phenomenological study, he or she has an intimate connection to the object of the study. The challenge is to find the balance of exploring both realities and then allowing the meaning come to the surface once the horizons have been fused.

²⁰² Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen”, 134.

²⁰³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 111.

²⁰⁴ Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen”, 134.

²⁰⁵ Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen”, 134.

²⁰⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 114.

The phenomenological method will provide the data for the thick, rich description which is at the heart of my question. This data will then be put into conversation with the wisdom of the Church's documents and theologians in the concluding chapters of my thesis. The conversation is part of the hermeneutical circle of the theological method. Creswell states that "... a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon".²⁰⁷ It intends to focus on the meaning of an aspect of their everyday existence.²⁰⁸ The meaning that phenomenology seeks to understand in this particular study has to do with the Christian understanding of making meaning and sense of our lives, which is the essence of the Christian faith. In a sense, the faith journey of children and families is part of the "ordinariness" of life – certainly the Christian life, and in this instance, examining the transition processes may provide very useful information for the ongoing catechesis of children. Living the Christian life and full discipleship in Christ are goals of the catechumenal process. To be fully initiated into the Roman Catholic Church means developing a Catholic way of living and Catholic Christian worldview.²⁰⁹

Another explanation of the phenomenological method is offered by Mark Bound:

Simply, the phenomenological method interprets an experience or fact, by listening to the different stories of the participants. The method examines the phenomena through the subjective eyes of the participants. "Phenomenology (is) focused on the subjectivity of reality, continually pointing out the need to understand how humans view themselves and the world around them (Willis, 2007, p. 53)."²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design – Choosing Among Five Approaches – Second Edition*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 57.

²⁰⁸ *Phenomenology as an Educational Research Method* – van Manen, <http://otal.umd.edu/~probinso/Dissertation/methodology/phenomenology.html> (accessed April 23, 2010), 1.

²⁰⁹ Thomas Groome in *What Makes Us Catholic – Eight Gifts for Life* talks about a distinctive Catholic imagination (or worldview) that responds to the great questions in life: Thomas H. Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic? – Eight Gifts for Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 34. An example of a Catholic worldview could be the formidable Church teaching of the sacredness of life from conception to natural death (CCC #2258). This belief of the sacredness of human life for the Roman Catholic person should affect the way they view issues of life and death.

²¹⁰ Mark Bound, *Qualitative Research: Phenomenological Method*, http://www.academia.edu/1526812/Qualitative_Research_Phenomenological_Method (accessed May 15, 2013), 2.

Using a phenomenological method for my research makes sense as the interviews of human subjects engaged in the initiation process are the foundation of my research. The “story” of the phenomenon of the parish-based sacramental initiation of children process in my Diocese will be told through the reflections of the participants I interviewed from various parishes directly involved in the process.

Phenomenology involves a twofold process – the description of an experience and the description of the meaning of the experience to better understand the phenomenon being studied:

Phenomenology is both the “description of the lived-through quality of lived experience and the description of meaning of the expressions of lived experience”. The description of meaning is a mediated expression and is more interpretive. It is through the use of some type of text or symbolic expression that interpretations are made of life experience. Phenomenological text is descriptive “in that it names something. And in the naming, it points to something and it aims at letting something show itself”.²¹¹

For my research, the phenomenon to be studied and described is a parish-based process of the sacramental initiation of children. My goal in doing this research is not to discover a theory to explain the initiation process (grounded theory) or to examine one or more cases regarding my issue (case study research) but to better understand the process that is actually unfolding before me by looking at the experiences of participants and gaining insights into the phenomenon. Thus phenomenological research is the best method for this particular study. Max Van Manen explains the goal of phenomenological research:

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other kind of science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively... So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world.²¹²

²¹¹ *Phenomenology as an Educational Research Method* – van Manen, <http://otal.umd.edu/~probinso/Dissertation/methodology/phenomenology.html> (accessed April 23, 2010), 1.

²¹² Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience – Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ontario: Althouse Press, Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario, 1990), 9.

I want to gain insights into the current state of the initiation of children in the Diocese by describing the experiences of several parishes during this transitional time period. Ideally, my research will lead to a better understanding of the initiation process and its effect on the faith transformation of those engaged. I will then be able to suggest best practices which will be drawn out of my research findings.

Reflecting on best practices, I will be engaged in the latter stages of the practical theological method – identifying best practices, assessing what should be happening and making future recommendations. As Creswell’s phenomenological method does not ask the researcher to make recommendations or best practices as part of the final stage, I will engage the methods of Browning, Osmer, and Swinton and Mowat in practical theology and make proposals for renewed practices.

Phenomenology serves a practical theological method in that it provides a strategy for offering a thick, rich description of an experience thereby compiling data that can be used to engage the hermeneutical circle that in the end can result in making recommendations and offering suggestions for renewed practice or best practices. How might we better understand this relationship between practical theology and the social sciences? John Swinton and Harriet Mowat write that “Practical theology takes human sciences seriously.”²¹³ Swinton and Mowat also explain that “...qualitative research is one way in which we can begin to look behind the veil of ‘normality’ and see what is actually going on within situations.”²¹⁴ With regards to my thesis, the data provided from Creswell’s phenomenological method will allow me to see what is occurring in parishes with regards to the ministry of children’s initiation. The phenomenological method will help me to not only look at the situations described in the interviews but will also be

²¹³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Research Design* (London, England: SMC Press, 2006), 5.

²¹⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, vi.

useful in identifying transformative and effective ways of living the catechumenal model in parishes. Swinton and Mowat explain this function of phenomenology as being action-oriented and in service of God:

For the practical theologian, all qualitative methods are necessarily action-oriented. Even the most apparently observational method is used with an action orientation aimed at providing information that will inform the development of faithful and transformative practices. All of the aspects of qualitative research... [including] phenomenology... when utilized by the practical theologian become critical action-oriented tools as they are converted, sanctified and drafted into the service of God. When converted in this way, they become vital tools that are significant for the creation of meaningful and rigorous data that will enable the development of new and revised modes of action; modes of action that will enable faithful participation in the continuing mission of God.²¹⁵

The data from my interviews will point toward actions to be taken to more effectively offer a process of parish initiation for children that is inspired by the catechumenal model. At the heart of the initiation process is inviting candidates for the sacraments into an active relationship with the Church and with Jesus Christ and apprenticing them in living the Christian life. This call to discipleship in Jesus Christ surely can enable, as Swinton and Mowat profess, "... faithful participation in the continuing mission of God".²¹⁶

One of the challenges of my research is to try and somewhat remove myself from the initiation process – to remain as unbiased as possible and leave the findings to the phenomena studied. I am already a participant-observer in this process and it is difficult at times to maintain an objective role. Phenomenology attempts to "...ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project".²¹⁷ In attempting to be an unbiased methodology, phenomenology is also useful in this regard.

²¹⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 258.

²¹⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 258.

²¹⁷ *Phenomenology as an Educational Research Method* – van Manen, <http://otal.umd.edu/~probinso/Dissertation/methodology/phenomenology.html> (accessed April 23, 2010), 1.

To remain totally unbiased is impossible, especially since I am deeply immersed in this phenomenon. Groenewald says that “the aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts.”²¹⁸ This will be part of the challenge: to present the phenomenon as described by the participants with the intention of being as unbiased as possible. As Groenewald states, “phenomenologists... believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise.”²¹⁹ Before I present the research findings, I plan to describe my personal experiences in the process of the sacramental initiation of children. This initial step is recommended by Creswell in his phenomenological approach²²⁰ so that the researcher can lay out his or her own presuppositions.

This method involves identifying a phenomenon, collecting data from those who have experienced it, and then developing a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals (the description consists of “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it).²²¹ Creswell expands this method into several steps which will be described more in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis in the section entitled 2.6.1 *Outline of the Study*. Two of the main steps as outlined by Creswell are to provide a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred.²²² These two steps are included in my thesis project, namely the textural description (description of the experience) and the structural description (context).

²¹⁸ Thomas Groenewald. *A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated*. (*International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1). Article 4. April, 2004), 5, http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/html/groenewald.html (accessed May 15, 2013).

²¹⁹ Groenewald, *A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated*, 7.

²²⁰ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²²¹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 58.

²²² Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 116.

My data were collected from interviews I conducted with people engaged in the ministry of the initiation of children, which was the significant part of my research work. Stan Lester explains what is involved in conducting interviews for phenomenologically-based research:

If there is a general principle involved it is that of minimum structure and maximum depth, in practice constrained by time and opportunities to strike a balance between keeping a focus on the research issues and avoiding undue influence by the researcher. The establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of knowledge.²²³

In conducting the interviews, I attempted to follow Lester's general principle. The interviews were conducted with the parishes involved in the initiation process. During the entire process of the study, I endeavored to keep my influence to a minimum. Some of the participants would have known me from my work at the Diocesan Faith Formation office, but during the interviews, I was faithful to the predetermined interview questions and tried to ascertain a level of trust, understanding and active listening during the interviews.

Getting at the essence of the experience means having participants share what they have undergone in the process - emotions, challenges, achievements - and what the experience involved - learning, faith sharing, listening. As Max Van Manen states, the essence is the deeper meaning of the lived experience:

The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of a structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and discover the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience. A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience.²²⁴

²²³ Stan Lester. *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research*. (Stan Lester Developments, Taunton). <http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2013).

²²⁴ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 10.

The essence of the phenomenon is garnered by “...eliciting in-depth individual storytelling”²²⁵ from research participants. These particulars will be the data examined in the study. The lived experiences will be those articulated by the people I interviewed, namely pastors, catechists, pastoral coordinators, parents and children involved in the ministry of the sacramental initiation of children.

The following general approach is recommended for phenomenological studies which seek to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about a phenomenon:

Furthermore, individuals are selected who have experienced the phenomenon, and they are asked to provide data, often through interviews. The researcher takes the data and, through several steps of reducing the data, ultimately develops a description of the experiences about the phenomenon that all individuals have in common – the essence of the experience.²²⁶

An in-depth understanding of these experiences is key to appreciating the unfolding phenomenon and to developing a deeper understanding of the initiation process itself with the passage of time. The focus of my research will be five parishes in the Diocese that have undergone a change to a parish-based process for the sacramental initiation of children. The dynamics of these parishes will be explored in a later section of this work.

2.2 Describing the Current Situation

This section of the thesis is a commentary on several issues that pertain specifically to the research, parishes and subjects of this study. In this section of the thesis, a thick description of the current practice of the sacramental initiation of children in the Diocese of Pembroke will be given. I will be presenting what appears to be occurring regarding this phenomenon.

²²⁵ Bound, *Qualitative Research: Phenomenological Method*, 4.

²²⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 94.

2.3 Description of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke

The Diocese of Pembroke is divided into five zones or regions. The Pembroke, Renfrew and Barry's Bay Zones are in the Province of Ontario. The Mattawa Zone includes four parishes in Ontario and one parish with a mission in the Province of Quebec. The Pontiac Zone is entirely in the Province of Quebec. In the Mattawa and Pontiac Zones, the sacramental initiation of children has been a parish-based process for some time. There have not been any publicly-funded Catholic schools in the Province of Quebec for over ten years and there are no private Catholic schools operating in the Diocese.²²⁷ Since the schools in Quebec are no longer religiously affiliated and function as language-based instead of faith-based schooling, there is no involvement of the publicly-funded schools in the initiation process. In the Province of Ontario, there are publicly-funded Catholic schools operating in the Diocese of Pembroke.

The Diocese has a longstanding tradition of the parochial Catholic school taking on much of the responsibility for the process of the sacramental initiation of children. In most cases, the parish and school have a very good working relationship, and it has been convenient for parishes to leave significant responsibility for this process with the school. Pembroke is a rural diocese and in many instances, the Catholic school is contiguous to the parish church. This proximity has made it advantageous for Catholic schools to use the adjacent churches for liturgical celebrations and to have easy access to pastors, deacons and lay pastoral assistants.

At least one parish in each of the Pembroke, Renfrew and Barry's Bay Zones has had a parish-based model of initiation for children since 2008. Other parishes have begun the

²²⁷ In 1997, the National Assembly of Quebec submitted a resolution to the federal Canadian government regarding Section 93 of the B.N.A. Act to amend the Act which would exclude Quebec from granting denomination rights for Roman Catholic schools. The resolution was approved later that year. *Catholic Schools Across Canada – Into the New Millennium*. John J. Flynn, Ed. (Toronto: The Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association, 2003), 40-41.

transition, and some are still considering the move. But, there have been indications from a few parishes that they do not intend to change the process of school based formation at this time, in spite of the request of Bishop Michael Mulhall and the promulgations of the diocesan *Policy*.

Since this study is located in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke, describing the context of the Diocese is important. The Diocese of Pembroke is a rural English Diocese with some French parishes and bilingual parishes within its borders. Approximately one-third of the total Catholic population is French-speaking while the remaining two-thirds are English-speaking. The Diocese is located in a primarily conservative,²²⁸ homogeneous area with few racial or religious minorities. A long tradition of strong connections exists between ethnic groups and the Church in parts of the Diocese. For example, some parishes are known as the English, French, Polish or Irish parishes in a community. In certain cases, these ethnic groups have not had warm relations with one another, a problem stretching back generations to an era when there was much conflict between such cultural groupings. Overall, the Diocese can be described as pre-modern because there are clear indicators of a homogeneous, cohesive and conforming society.²²⁹

The dynamics of individual parish life are at an interesting point in time. Some autonomous parishes resist working with other parishes on issues such as adult faith formation opportunities, sacramental initiation of children and marriage preparation. At times, this reluctance to collaborate has to do with strong personalities either in pastors or laypeople or perhaps a tradition of conflict or competition between some parishes. Conversely, several parishes have been forced to cluster together in recent years due to a shortage of clergy and the neglect in the calling and formation of lay pastoral associates – a practice that is common in

²²⁸ I use the word “conservative” here both in the political sense and in the religious sense. Religiously, I understand “conservative” to mean “traditional” and at times, “rigid in scope and practice” with a “narrow” viewpoint.

²²⁹ Luc Tardif, “Postmodernité”, *Reflets* v 12. Ottawa: Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques: 236-238.

other dioceses. Regarding the ministry of the laity only two lay pastoral associates are working in the Diocese, and, furthermore, it is just in the last several years that laypeople have been hired to work in the Diocesan Chancery Office in leadership positions. Three religious sisters and two deacons work as pastoral assistants or pastoral agents in parishes.

Some parishes are perceived as being not very welcoming to children and young families or not very family-oriented. For example, some pastors and parishioners prefer parents with young children to sit in crying rooms instead of with the assembly seeing children as a distraction rather than part of the community. This perception may be due to the fact that many parishes do not have any programs, social events, ministries or groups that address the needs of young families. These missing components may include Children's Liturgy of the Word, youth groups, family formation programs or child servers. Children are often discouraged from participating as lectors, choir members, collectors, greeters or servers during the Sunday Liturgy. Visual displeasure expressed by parishioners or pastors when a baby cries or when children create a distraction also conveys a lack of acceptance. Sometimes there is not enough flexibility regarding Mass times or catechetical sessions for children and families, so that young families can participate. Many parishes do not take the time to consider the needs of children and young families.

I have heard many people over the years say how the pews are often filled on Sundays by middle-aged and elderly people. According to author Michael Adams, such realities are a sign that "...in Canada, most mainstream Judeo-Christian denominations are losing their grip on the population."²³⁰ In general, parishioners and clergy are mostly middle-aged or older. Numbers are dwindling in many areas and so are financial donations. These parishes are struggling to find

²³⁰ Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow – The Surprising Revelation in Canadian Social Values* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006), 66

enough money and people to keep the parish functioning. This trend was identified in an article in *Celebrate!* magazine:

Canadians who grew up in the traditional Roman Catholic “home-school-parish” framework are mystified by what is currently going on in their Church. They witness declining membership and attendance in their parishes, the critical shortage of priests, a dearth of vocations in religious communities, and indifference to the faith among youth.²³¹

Such challenges continue to plague not only the Church of Pembroke but also the Canadian Church. It seems that the generations beginning with the baby boomers have become less and less involved in organized religion and association with churches. In many Catholic schools, for example, many or even most students come from families who have little or nothing in the way of association or involvement with a parish. Many children have been baptized Catholic but there is often little connection with the Church following the celebration of this sacrament.

Despite these problems, certain parishes are vibrant and alive. Many factors support such an observation. Numerous young families participate at the Sunday Eucharist; laypeople are actively involved in the parish ministries, administration and general upkeep of the parish; a sense of joy infuses liturgies and inspires homilies; social activities, youth groups and family-centered ministries and activities are well attended and pastors are committed and genuinely happy with their vocation. When offered the opportunity, there are laypeople who will come forward to provide leadership and serve in ministries at the parish level if they are called or feel called that there is a role or place for them. From my observations and experience, it appears that only in a few parishes is the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* (RCIA) practiced as it is intended by the *Rite*.²³² In many cases, initiation or being received in full communion in the Catholic Church involves an adult having several private sessions with the pastor before

²³¹ David Seljak. “The Changing Face of the Catholic Church in Canada,” *Celebrate!* Vol. 38, No. 1 (January-February 2009): 6.

²³² *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987).

acceptance into the Church, rather than a process that is liturgical based and supported by an engaged faith community.

Home-schooling is a practice that is popular in a few areas of the Diocese. While it is not known exactly how many families choose to home-school, the presence of many home-schooling families in some parishes is noticeable.

The clergy continue to have a significant influence in the Diocese through their ordained ministry. Members of the clergy have particular rights, duties and decision-making power that they are not mandated to share with others. The Diocese of Pembroke does not have a diocesan pastoral council. The *Code of Canon Law* calls for the establishment of such a council “...to the extent that pastoral circumstances recommend it.”²³³ A pastoral council is to be established in each parish if the bishop “...judges it opportune.”²³⁴ In theory, then, every parish could have an active pastoral council to consult and collaborate with the pastor. In reality though, not every parish has an active pastoral council. Parishioners have commented that, at times, some pastors collaborate very little, if at all, with their parishioners, let alone a parish pastoral council. Over the years, several laypeople have shared with me their opinion that some clergy seem to be uncomfortable with laypeople. On the other hand, some pastors are quite comfortable with and collaborate regularly with laypeople.

The following statistics regarding the diocese, parishes and priests were taken from the 2011-2012 *Diocesan Directory*:

Some facts about our diocese and parish:

- The Diocese of Pembroke has 65,000 Catholics
- 49 parishes and 8 mission churches
- 54 incardinated priests belong to the Diocese

²³³ *The Code of Canon Law*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Publication Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983), Can. 511.

²³⁴ *The Code of Canon Law*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Publication Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983), Can. 536.

- 11 of those priests are retired
- 9 of those priests belong to Madonna House
- 5 of those priests are on special leave
- 2 of those priests work outside of the diocese
- 1 priest is on a sabbatical
- 26 out of 54 of those priests work in parishes
- 15 parishes priests are 60 years old or older
- Average age of the 26 parish priests is 58.80
- Only 3 of our priests are under the age of 40
- Majority of our priests care for more than one parish
- 6 priests are on loan to the diocese
- 7 seminarians are discerning a vocation
- 9 incardinated deacons belong to the Diocese
- 1 candidate is in the diaconal formation program
- In May 2012, the Diocese celebrated its first priestly ordination in seven years
- Several congregations of priests, brothers and women have a presence in the Diocese
- There is one Public Association of the Faithful – Madonna House in Combermere²³⁵

These statistics are helpful in gaining a sense of the context of the Diocese of Pembroke – particularly the layout of parishes and the current circumstances of our diocesan priests.

Sadly, it must be noted that at present time, three diocesan priests have been charged with sexual abuse of minors in the past six years. The priest in the first case was found guilty of multiple counts of sexual assault on minors and was dismissed from the clerical state. He has since served time in prison and has been subsequently released. At present, civil litigation is in progress with regards to this case. The criminal trial for the second priest concluded in November, 2011. The priest was found guilty of two counts and in April of 2012 received a nine month conditional sentence followed by two years of probation for these crimes. In February, 2012 a third priest was arrested for alleged sexual assault offences. In the spring of 2013, he pled guilty to several offences and was sentenced to nine months plus ten days in prison and three years of probation for these crimes. A fourth diocesan priest was charged in July of 2013 with sexual assault of a minor but the charges have since been withdrawn and he is now again a

²³⁵ 2011-2012 *Diocesan Directory* – Diocese of Pembroke.

priest in good standing and fully able to practice his ministry. Many people are confused and hurt over these cases and will continue to bear that burden for some time. In the years ahead, the realities and challenges noted in this section will no doubt continue to affect the unfolding sacramental initiation process for children in the Diocese of Pembroke.

2.4 Structural Description – Setting and Context²³⁶

In this section, I will give a detailed description of the setting and context of the parishes which were the focus of my research for the thesis project. Each parish will be described individually. Interviews for this thesis project were conducted in May and June of 2011. This section addresses the fifth stage of Creswell’s phenomenological method by describing “how” the experience happened by reflecting on the context and setting in which the phenomenon was experienced.

2.4.1 St. Leo Parish

This parish was finishing the first year of its experience with a parish-based process when I conducted interviews for my research in the spring of 2011. I wanted to assess this experience from at least two parishes that were in the beginning stages of the process.

St. Leo Parish was established in 1921. There are presently approximately 1100 families registered at the parish. The parish is located in an urban area, one of four parishes in the same town. Families are mostly middle class; however, there are a number of poorer neighbourhoods

²³⁶ I have moved Creswell’s fifth step of his method, “structural description”, to this first chapter of my thesis as it fits better into the discussion of context in Browning’s movement of descriptive theology.

within the boundaries of this parish. In July of 2012, a new pastor was appointed to this parish. The new pastor came from a parish with many years of experience with a parish initiation process for children.

At the time of the interviews, several catechists were teamed up to lead the catechesis for the sacraments of reconciliation, Eucharist and confirmation. Catechists were male and female laypersons. The pastor was present for the initial information sessions with parents but was not a catechist in the catechetical sessions nor was he present during most of the sessions. Sessions were held on a Sunday morning after the 9:00 a.m. Mass to encourage participation by families in the Sunday Eucharist. Parents were required to participate in the sessions with their children. Initially, the information about the parish process was shared with children in families in the neighbouring parochial school. In the 2011-2012 pastoral year, “passports”²³⁷ were used in the catechesis process. The current pastor decided to abolish this process during the 2012-2013 pastoral year. The former pastor shared with me several times that very few young families participate in the weekly Sunday Eucharist. Eight children celebrated their First Eucharist and twenty-one children celebrated their confirmation the year I conducted the interviews.

2.4.2 St. Brigid Parish

When I conducted the interviews in the spring of 2011, this parish was in the second year of a parish-based initiation process for children. I chose this parish because of its more recent move to a parish-based process.

²³⁷ The issue of “passports” will be addressed in the research interview section of my thesis under the theme of “challenges”. See section 4.5.10. “Passports” are an attendance card carried by children involved in the initiation process to be signed by a pastor after the celebration of Sunday Eucharist to prove that the child has participated in the weekly Sunday Eucharist. Some pastors have chosen to use these “passports” to coerce parents and children into attending Sunday Mass. In some parishes, the pastor will not allow a child to celebrate their first Eucharist if they have not been attending Mass regularly.

St. Brigid Parish is located in an urban area in the same pastoral zone as St. Leo Parish. The parish was established in 1856. There are approximately 550 families registered at St. Brigid Parish. Families are mostly middle class.

At the time of the interviews, there were several lay catechists who shared the catechesis of the sacraments of first Eucharist, reconciliation and confirmation. Only one of the catechists was male. According to some of the catechists, the pastor chose the catechetical program²³⁸ for use and led the information sessions for parents. The pastor did not serve as a catechist nor did he attend most of the sessions. He did assist on occasion when asked at sessions and was present at a retreat near the end of the sessions. Catechetical sessions were held on a Sunday morning before the Sunday Eucharist to encourage families to participate in the Sunday Liturgy. Parents were not required to participate in the sessions with their children. Information about the parish process was shared through the parochial school. Twenty-four children celebrated their First Eucharist and fifteen children celebrated their confirmation during the year I conducted the interviews at this parish. In July of 2012, a new pastor and parochial vicar were appointed to this parish.

2.4.3 St. Monica Parish

In the spring of 2011, St. Monica Parish had many years of a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process – perhaps fifteen or more. No one whom I interviewed could say for sure how long this parish process had been established. I chose this parish because of its long standing practice of offering a parish-based initiation process for children.

²³⁸ I want to be clear that my focus in this thesis is not to critique catechetical or sacramental initiation programs but rather to comment on the use of the catechumenal model of initiation for children in parishes.

As I stated earlier in this work, St. Monica Parish is actually a parish unit of three parishes, all in bilingual communities. The parishes were established in 1882, 1902 and 1920. There are approximately 600 families who belong to this parish unit of three parishes. Sunday Eucharistic celebrations are bilingual. There is a Sunday Eucharist celebration at each of the three parish churches. There is one priest appointed to be administrator of this charge. Two permanent deacons act as administrators and assist in two of the parishes. These parishes seem to work very well together and some catechists minister to all three parishes. St. Monica Parish is located in a rural setting in a zone of the Diocese which includes parishes in both Quebec and Ontario.

Catechetical sessions were offered in the evening at the parish churches. Parents or guardians were invited to participate in the catechetical sessions. Grandparents were welcome to bring their grandchildren to formation sessions. Catechists were mostly women. The two deacon administrators assisted with the catechetical ministry and served as catechists. The priest administrator did not serve as a catechist in this ministry. Nineteen children celebrated their First Eucharist and twenty-one celebrated their confirmation during the pastoral year in which I conducted my interviews.

2.4.4 St. John the Baptist Parish

In the spring of 2011, St. John the Baptist Parish was finishing its tenth pastoral year with a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process. I chose this parish to be part of my study because of its many years of experience with a parish-based process. A deacon has assisted at this parish for many years as did a pastoral assistant who played a major role in the catechetical ministry at this parish but left this position in 2010 and has not been replaced.

St. John the Baptist Parish is an urban parish but like all urban parishes in the Diocese, has parishioners from rural areas as well. The parish was established in 1852. There are approximately 800 families in this parish. Parishioners are mostly middle-class and there are several financially marginalized neighborhoods within this parish boundary.

Many catechists were involved in the catechetical ministry. There were both male and female catechists. The pastor served as a catechist as well, mainly leading sessions with parents. Parents were required to be involved in this process. Catechetical sessions were held on Sunday mornings and on weeknights. Information about the initiation process was shared through the school at the time I conducted the interviews. Twelve children celebrated their First Eucharist and three children celebrated their confirmation during the year in which I conducted the interviews. A new pastor was appointed to this parish in July of 2012. This pastor had previous experience with a parish-based initiation process for children at his former parish.

2.4.5 St. Mary Magdalene Parish

In the spring of 2011, St. Mary Magdalene Parish was finishing its ninth pastoral year with a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process. The former pastor of this parish began a parish-based initiation process a couple of years after he was appointed pastor of this parish.

St. Mary Magdalene Parish is an urban parish which is located near a Canadian Forces Military Base and thus many military personnel and their families are parishioners. There are 400 families registered at this parish. The parish was established in 1940. Parishioners are mostly middle class.

Many catechists were involved in the initiation ministry at this parish. This team was led by a volunteer religious education coordinator who keeps regular office hours. Catechists were all women except for one man and several had come to this ministry after having been involved previously as parents of children in the process. The pastor was quite involved in the process at this parish. He led the parent information sessions at the beginning of the process. He usually came to the parish hall before Mass to talk with the catechists and had a question and answer session with the candidates for the sacraments. He attended the retreats for each of the sacraments.

Catechetical sessions were on Sunday mornings. The sessions for reconciliation, and First Eucharist were held during the Sunday Eucharist. The sessions for confirmation were before Mass. Parents were required to participate in the catechetical sessions with their children. Information about the catechetical sessions was shared through the parochial school. There is a strict deadline for registration for the sacramental initiation process in June but there is a September registration deadline for military families who move into the area during the summer months and thus would have been unaware of the June registration deadline. Thirty-two children celebrated their first Eucharist and twenty-six children celebrated their confirmation at this parish during the pastoral year in which I conducted the interviews. A new pastor was appointed to this parish in July of 2012. The new pastor had a couple years of experience with a parish-based process at his former parish.

2.5 The Evolution of the Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke

The foremost reason for the shift in the sacramental initiation of children in the Diocese of Pembroke is the fact that, in many parishes, most children being prepared under a school-based model of initiation come from families who have little or no connection to the parish and are not actively engaged in parish life. In many of these cases, it appeared that parents were not playing an active role in the faith formation of their children. This realization came after several years of study, dialogue and discernment on the part of the Diocese. The process of reflection began with the Diocesan Faith Formation Symposium in October 2005, when representatives from the home, school, parish and Diocese met for a day of reflection concerning the area of faith formation.²³⁹

The symposium included a presentation highlighting the Church's rich vision for catechesis and provided processes for identifying faith formation practices and needs across the Diocese. Several compelling points in this presentation began raising one's consciousness that perhaps there was a better way to initiate children into the Church. The speaker was Carol Kuzmochka, then Director of Adult Faith Formation for the Archdiocese of Ottawa. She spoke of the transformative nature of catechesis, the important relationship between liturgy and catechesis, the vital role the faith community plays in initiation, the catechumenate as the norm for initiation, the gradual nature of the catechumenate and the practice of candidates entering into the catechumenate when they are ready. These points are fundamental to the vision of catechesis and initiation that the Church has been promoting since the Second Vatican Council.²⁴⁰

After reviewing the findings from the Symposium, the former Bishop of Pembroke, Richard Smith, announced that one of the concerns the Diocese needed to address immediately

²³⁹ The Diocesan Faith formation Symposium was held on October 5th, 2005 at St. Columbkille Cathedral Parish Hall in Pembroke.

²⁴⁰ "Sacrosanctum Concilium – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy", "Lumen Gentium – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church", *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996).

was the area of faith formation and the sacramental initiation of children and young people. Following the Symposium, surveys were sent out to representatives across the Diocese from the home, school and parish, to ask opinions on how to address the needs of young people and the young families of which they are a part. Certain strong statements in the survey results were repeated throughout the comments of respondents. Of these twenty-six key statements, a significant number focused on the issue of the sacramental initiation of children. From his position as the leader of the Diocese, Bishop Smith also shared his experiences of the initiation rites in the Diocese. During the sacrament of confirmation and other sacramental celebrations, he frequently observed that family members and friends of those celebrating the sacraments could not participate fully in the Eucharist because it was obviously not something familiar to them. He added that he often sensed the frustration of pastors, teachers and principals with the challenge of preparing candidates for these celebrations when so many were notably disconnected from the parish and did not know how to participate at a Eucharistic celebration.²⁴¹

Responding to these challenges in the autumn of 2006, Bishop Smith asked the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation to begin drafting a policy for the sacramental initiation of children. After significant consultation and feedback from participants in the Symposium, survey respondents and representatives from the Diocesan Council of Priests, Bishop Smith felt it prudent to change the sacramental initiation of children from a Catholic school-based context to a parish-based process for those parishes that had not already done so. What followed was a process of over two years of research and consultations with pastors, Catholic school personnel, parents, catechists and the Council of Priests. During this time period, a diocesan policy for the

²⁴¹ These comments were made by Bishop Richard Smith at a meeting of some delegates as a follow-up to the Faith Formation Symposium at the Diocese of Pembroke Chancery Office on December 13, 2005.

initiation of children began to evolve. After undergoing numerous drafts, the completed policy was promulgated in 2009.

One of the central goals of the new process of initiation is to assist parents in becoming the primary faith educators for their child.²⁴² For too many families, the sacraments have become a momentary rite of passage rather than markers on the journey to the way of life they are intended to be. The difference of these understanding of rites of passage is explained by Ronald Grimes:

A rite of passage is more than a mere moment in which participants get carried away emotionally, only to be returned to their original condition afterward... By contrast, when effective rites of passage are enacted, they carry us from here to there in such a way that we are unable to return to square one. To enact any kind of rite is to *perform*, but to enact a rite of passage is also to *transform*.²⁴³

Sacraments are meant to be transformational and, as such, are much more than a ceremonial event or change in status. The diocesan *Policy* outlines the problem with viewing sacraments as “rites of passage”:

Sacraments should not be viewed as “rites of passage” with no relationship to the rest of one’s life. Rather, they insert one into the Church’s life of faith, which gives meaning and direction to every aspect of who we are as members of the baptized. The sacraments, therefore, presuppose a commitment on the part of the recipient to live as members of the Church.²⁴⁴

The *Policy* tells us clearly that celebrating the sacraments is not simply a one-time event with little or no relevance to the ongoing life of a person. Living the sacraments is a life-long process. Once a person is fully initiated into the Church through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, they are considered full members of the Church and are called to be active members of the faith community. Members of the faith community are called to gather around

²⁴² *Rite of Baptism for Children*, #39, *General Directory for Catechesis*, #255.

²⁴³ Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone – Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002), 6-7.

²⁴⁴ *Policy*, I 3.3.4, p. 4.

the Eucharistic table on the Lord's Day which is the focal point of the Christian life. As they are sent forth at the end of Mass, Catholics are expected to live the liturgical year, to be people of prayer and to live the Christian life with commitment to Gospel values and social justice in their homes, workplaces, schools and places of recreation.

2.6 The Phenomenological Study

In this section, I begin with a description of the phenomenological study. Then, I provide a brief outline of how my interviews were formed and undertaken. A portrayal of the parishes and their context that were the focus of my study appeared in section 2.4 of my thesis – *Structural Description – Setting and Context*. My next part illustrates my own experiences in the catechetical ministry.

2.6.1 Outline of the Study

For my study, I am choosing to follow a structured method of analysis for phenomenological research presented in several steps by John Creswell.²⁴⁵ I will be using this phenomenological research method in order to provide data which will give a thick description and will serve the practical theological approach which was explained in the Introduction of this thesis project. Creswell's steps will be outlined and explained as they relate to the unfolding research in this thesis. The following chart highlights Creswell's stages of his phenomenological approach:²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²⁴⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

Stage	Description
Stage One - Description of Personal Experiences	Researcher gives full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon. An attempt is made to set aside the researcher's personal experiences so that the participants can be the focus of the study. The researcher names his or her biases.
Stage Two - Developing a List of Significant Statements	The researcher finds statements in the research data regarding how individuals are experiencing the phenomenon. These statements are listed (horizontalization of the data) and each statement is treated with equal worth.
Stage Three - Developing Themes	The significant statements are grouped into larger units of information called "meaning units" or themes.
Stage Four - Textural Description	A description is written of "what" the participants experienced in the study and includes verbatim examples.
Stage Five - Structural Description	A description of "how" the experience happened. The researcher reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.
Stage Six – The Essence	A composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions is written. This piece is the "essence" of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of the phenomenological study. It tells the reader "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon and "how" they experienced it.

The first step of Creswell's approach involves describing personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. Creswell explains this step: "The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so that the focus can be

directed to the participants in the study.”²⁴⁷ This full description of my experiences is given in section 2.6.3 of my thesis under the subtitle, *Description of My Own Experiences*.

In the second step of Creswell’s process, a list of significant statements is developed. For this stage, “the researcher then finds statements (in the interviews or other data sources) about how individuals are experiencing the topic, lists these significant statements (horizontalization of the data) and treats each statement as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements.”²⁴⁸ Compiling a list of significant statements involved going through the interview transcripts one at a time and highlighting statements that I felt were of interest or consequence to this study and statements that spoke specifically to the experience of individuals in the sacramental initiation of children ministry. Interview transcripts were assessed several times during this stage.²⁴⁹

The third phase of Creswell’s method calls on the researcher to “take the significant statements and then group them into larger units of information, called “meaning units” or themes.”²⁵⁰ In order to assemble these themes, I reviewed the notes and highlights I made on the interview transcripts several times and made additional notes to further my thinking. Becoming more familiar with the interview responses after every reading, I began to discern similar or related comments concerning various topics or themes. What evolved was a list of themes accompanied by significant statements with references to the specific interview participants and their responses. The “themes” list facilitated further analysis of participant responses. This list was extensive with fifty-one various but sometimes related themes.

²⁴⁷ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²⁴⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²⁴⁹ I provided my thesis director, Dr. Miriam Martin, pbvm, with a copy of these transcripts so she could review my data for coding.

²⁵⁰ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

After evaluating the list again several times, in order to make the data more manageable, I condensed this number, avoiding overlapping themes and grouping some together under a single theme or a theme with various subthemes. The three major themes I present in this study are (1) comparing the process of sacramental preparation in Catholic schools to the parish catechumenal process of sacramental initiation²⁵¹, (2) challenges²⁵² and (3) transformation²⁵³. Numerous subthemes appear under each of these three themes. The main themes and subthemes will be explored more deeply in a later part of this work.

Creswell's fourth stage of phenomenological research is "... a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. This is called a "textural description" of the experience – what happened – and includes verbatim examples."²⁵⁴ The textural description of the experiences of parishioners I interviewed provides the major material for this section of the thesis. In this segment, I present the experiences of pastors, parents, children, catechists and parish coordinators under the three main themes identified previously: (1) comparing the process of sacramental preparation in Catholic schools to the parish process of sacramental initiation moving toward the catechumenal model, (2) challenges and (3) transformation. Several subthemes are presented under each theme.

For the first theme, comparing the school and parish experiences, the following subthemes will be explored: the involvement of family in the process, the quality of catechesis, the involvement of Catholic schools in the process and what is more expedient for families?²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ This is the movement toward the catechumenal model I have referred to in Chapter I of the thesis.

²⁵² By challenges, I mean challenges that were identified in the interviews with relation to the parish-based sacramental initiation process or moving toward a more catechumenal parish sacramental initiation process.

²⁵³ My meaning of "transformation" was described in the first section of this thesis, *The Project*. By transformation, I mean "change." Is anything different in the life of parents, children, pastors, catechists and the faith community because of participation in a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process?

²⁵⁴ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²⁵⁵ By "more expedient", I mean what is more convenient for families. Many interviewees commented on their experiences or observations that many parents have found the school model of sacramental preparation "easier" or

Under the theme of challenges identified in regards to moving toward a catechumenal mode, subthemes are scheduling and timing for families, the need for the formation of catechists, maintaining catechists, lack of commitment from parents and families, the loss: children who are not able to be involved in the parish process, the limited number of children involved in the catechetical process, the parish becoming a “school” in the process, lack of involvement of the faith community, inconsistencies among parishes, and mass “attendance” and “passports.”

The last theme of transformation includes the subthemes of transformation of families, transformation of catechists and pastors and transformation of the parish. The subthemes are further divided by parish since it made sense to present experiences of parishioners by parish in order to better understand how transformation is occurring in their particular parish circumstances.

The fifth stage of Creswell’s phenomenological method is to “...write a description of “how” the experience happened. This is called “structural description,” where the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. This stage will give further explanation and insights on the context and setting of the sacramental initiation process at each parish that was included in my research, *Structural Description – Setting and Context*. This stage is found in section 2.4 in this chapter of my thesis.

The sixth and final step in Creswell’s approach is a summary reflective piece that is “... a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This passage is the ‘essence’ of the experience and represents the culminating

more convenient for their lifestyles or family situations than the commitment involved in the parish sacramental initiation of children process.

aspect of a phenomenological study.”²⁵⁶ This sixth step of Creswell’s will come under the last section of my thesis which is entitled “Conclusions.”

2.6.2 Conducting Interviews

In the autumn of 2010, I finalized the design of my interview process and decided in order to pursue my research question, I would interview people who were involved in the sacramental initiation of children ministry in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke. At this point, I will recall my hypothesis - that adopting a catechumenal model of sacramental initiation of children can enable full, active and conscious participation²⁵⁷ of young families in the life and mission of the Church. The movement toward realizing the adoption of this model also makes it possible for families and parishes to be transformed in the process.

In the spring of 2011, I conducted the interviews which were done at each of the five parishes chosen for this study. The interview questions can be found in *Appendix 3*. These studies were conducted according to the guidelines in my Research Proposal approved by the St. Paul University Research Ethics Board in the autumn of 2010 and with the permission of the Bishop of Pembroke, Bishop Michael Mulhall. The parishes and participants in this study will remain anonymous. Each parish was chosen for reasons which will be outlined in the next section.

Catechists, parish priests, deacon-coordinators and parents from the parishes were interviewed individually. The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of each interviewee and then transcribed by me. In three of the parishes, groups of children who were presently in the sacramental initiation process or who had recently been involved in the process

²⁵⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²⁵⁷ “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #14.

were interviewed with the permission of their parents. Two of the parishes showed little parental interest in conducting interviews with children. In total, fifty-two people were interviewed for this study. The participants included four pastors, two deacon-coordinators, eighteen catechists, eighteen parents and ten children. The following chart shows how many from each of these groups were interviewed at each parish:

Parish	Number of years the parish has had a parish-based children's initiation process at the time the interviews were conducted in the spring of 2011	Pastor	Parents	Catechists	Children
St. Monica	15+	2 deacon coordinators	1	3	0
St. Mary Magdalene	9	1	5	5	4
St. John the Baptist	10	1	5	4	2
St. Brigid	2	1	2	2	0
St. Leo	1	1	5	4	4

2.6.3 Description of My Own Experiences

This section contains a full description of my own experiences in the process which is the first step of Creswell's method:

First describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon. This is an

attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study.²⁵⁸

What follows in this section, then, is a description of my experiences as they relate to the sacramental initiation of children in my Diocese.

First of all, I am the Director of Faith Formation and Leadership Development for the Diocese of Pembroke. In this role, I have acted generally as a support and resource person for parishes and catechists involved in the process of the sacramental initiation of children. My responsibilities have also included the formation of parish catechists. I have participated in several *North American Forum on the Catechumenate* institutes to help me better understand the Church's vision of initiation.²⁵⁹ Since 2006, I have been involved in the discussions and writing (formally, with the Bishops of Pembroke and representatives of the Council of Priests) of the *Diocesan Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke* which was promulgated in 2009. Since that time, I have been asked to explain, and sometimes defend, this policy to many individuals and groups: Roman Catholic school board trustees, Catholic school principals and teachers, catechists, pastors and parents.

I have been serving as a catechist for six years in my own parish unit which consists of two parishes and one mission. I belong to the Parish of St. Pius V in Osceola, Ontario. Sacred Heart Mission in Cobden and St. Michael Parish in Douglas are part of this parish unit as well. Sacred Heart is a mission of St. Pius V Parish. For the past nine years, one pastor has been serving this parish unit. For the first few years as a parish catechist, I worked with parents and children who fell into one of three categories: 1) children who attended a public school, 2)

²⁵⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 159.

²⁵⁹ I participated in the following institutes: (1) *Beginnings and Beyond Institute*, sponsored by the Diocese of Thunder Bay on August 16-21, 2009; (2) *Focus on Initiation: Concerning the Baptized*, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Ottawa on May 7-8, 2010; and (3) *The Evangelizing Parish*, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Ottawa on October 14 and 15, 2011.

children who were home-schooled or 3) children who attended a Catholic school that was not associated with the abovementioned parishes and mission. During these years, more than three-quarters of the children from the parishes received sacramental preparation²⁶⁰ at the parochial Catholic school. As a parish catechist, I worked occasionally with the teachers at the school who were charged with providing a sacramental preparation program.²⁶¹ My work with those teachers primarily involved planning the details of the celebration of the sacraments, “practicing” with students for the ceremonies and, sometimes, giving them a tour of the church and explaining the parts of the Mass to children preparing for First Eucharist.

For the 2011-2012 pastoral year, my former pastor decided to move to a solely parish-based process for the sacramental initiation of children.²⁶² This decision was made for several reasons but was done mainly because of an increasing number of families at the parochial school who had little or nothing to do with the parishes or mission. With the school program, most children were prepared by the teachers and the families expected their children to celebrate the sacrament regardless of the family’s affiliation and connection with a parish. Over time, my former pastor’s disappointment with the attitude of some families along with other reasons convinced him to begin a new parish-based process as outlined in the diocesan *Policy*.

In the autumn of 2011, I was involved with a parish-based sacramental initiation process for the sacrament of confirmation in my parish unit. I worked with a team of other catechists as we assisted parents and young people in this process. In the spring of 2012, I worked with two other catechists on a parish-based process for the sacramental initiation of children who were

²⁶⁰ I use the term “sacramental preparation” here and in other parts of this work intentionally. Since the school model focuses mainly around a program rather than a process, devoid of many aspects of the Church’s vision of initiation, I use the term “sacramental preparation” which points to the program and the goal of completing the program. The term “sacramental initiation” points to the parish-based process of using the catechumenal model of initiation with many aspects of the RCIA process.

²⁶¹ I want to be clear that it is not the program in either school or parish based process toward the catechumenal model that I am examining. I am analyzing the catechetical tools and the catechetical process – not the curriculum.

²⁶² A new pastor was appointed to my parish unit by the Bishop of Pembroke in July 2012.

journeying toward First Eucharist. In both instances, parents were present for the catechesis. Generally speaking, I believe this transition has gone well, although I know there were “whisperings” in the community by those who were grieving the role that the school traditionally played and blaming the former parish priest for the change rather than the diocesan *Policy*. A smaller number of children celebrated the sacraments during the 2011-2012 pastoral year, but the parents participated in the catechetical sessions and were coming to the church with the children for the more practical aspects of the catechesis.

In December of 2012, my current pastor held a registration meeting for parents of children wishing to begin the immediate preparation for the sacraments of reconciliation and first Eucharist. At the meeting, he announced his intention to revert to the former model of having the Catholic school taking on the main role of preparing children for the aforementioned sacraments. A few days before this meeting, my pastor called to inform me that he was considering this move back to a mainly Catholic school-based model but offered no reasons for this change in process. I did not expect this change and chose not to say anything over the phone, as I was not ready for such a comment. Teachers from the school were present at the meeting, and so it appeared that the pastor’s mind was made up before the meeting began, to revert to a school-based model. After the registration meeting, I was still upset with this change of direction and took a few days to think it all over. There were three reasons for my discomfort: (1) we worked over the years to build and move towards a parish-based process; (2) the school-based model deviates from the Diocesan *Policy* and the vision of the Church; and (3) the pastor did not consult me or any of the other catechists, to my knowledge, about reverting to a school-based model.

Deciding I needed to share my feelings with my pastor, I asked to meet with him a few days later. At the meeting I gave him the background of the parish sacramental ministry for children and my involvement with it, and I shared with him our former pastor's decision to move the former year to a fully parish-based process and the reasons behind it. I wanted to be sure that he understood how the process had evolved since he had just months before been appointed our pastor. I also spoke of the vision of the Church regarding initiation and the central role parents and the parish were to play in this ministry. Finally, I asked him why he had decided, unilaterally, to make this change. He gave me the following reasons: (1) one of the catechists told him she was not able to help out this year; (2) personnel at the school expressed their disappointment at not being involved in the catechesis last year; (3) having a parish process toward the catechumenal model to involve parents in the process and encourage them to be more active in the faith journey of their child didn't work anyway; and (4) it didn't matter who did the upcoming catechesis since all of the children who registered for the sacramental initiation process were from families who were active and regular participants at the Sunday Eucharist.

I left the meeting somewhat feeling better having had a chance to tell my pastor how I felt, but continued to be disappointed in this change of direction. It was, in my opinion, a step backwards. Another frustrating point is that this type of retrogressive step makes it difficult for parishes that have already moved to a parish-based process toward the catechumenal model and it leaves people confused. For the last few years, parishioners in my parish had heard from our former pastor that a parish-based process was in keeping with the Bishop's vision and the diocesan *Policy*. Ironically, my son, George, was the only registered child for these sacraments that year who was not enrolled at the parochial school since he attends another Catholic school, and the pastor told me we could prepare him at home. Unfortunately, my son did not have the

benefit of formation with his peers as he journeys towards the sacrament of First Eucharist. As indicated previously, the Church encourages that children enjoy the mutual support of their peers in the initiation process.²⁶³ And, if my son were part of the initiation process during the 2011-2012 year, he would have benefited from a parish-based process where he would have journeyed with his peers.

For reasons unknown to me, my pastor began a parish based process for the 2013-2014 pastoral year. I was asked by my pastor to serve as a parish catechist again for the sacrament of confirmation and I agreed to serve in this ministry.

Another way I am deeply engaged in the catechetical process is that I am blessed to be a father of four children. Our youngest, son, Henry, was born in February of 2014. My oldest daughter, Charlotte, has celebrated her first reconciliation, first Eucharist and confirmation. While my daughter was in grade two, her teacher presented sacramental preparation programs in class but, unfortunately, the programs never came home. When I asked her teacher at the time why they had never been sent home, she replied that she was afraid they would be lost. Because I was familiar with these programs, I asked her teacher if she knew that they were family-based. She stated that she had not realized this, and I relayed my disappointment that the family programs were never brought home. I was a parish catechist at that time and my daughter was part of the parish catechesis process.

As parents, my wife, Tina, and I chose to have my daughter participate in this parish process even though she was following a preparation program at the school. We had several reasons for involving my daughter in the parish-based process at this time: (1) we were not satisfied that the school preparation was sufficient; (2) we wanted our daughter to get to know the other children with whom she would be celebrating the sacraments; (3) we felt that she would

²⁶³ RCIA, #244.

develop a stronger relationship with fellow parishioners and her parish through this process; and (4) our daughter was quite eager to be part of the parish process.

The parish process consisted of about five catechetical sessions before the celebration of each sacrament. Parents were expected to be present for the sessions. Families were given a catechetical program for their use and learning at home. Generally speaking, the sessions were a chance for the children and their parents to gather, share and learn with each other. The catechetical sessions began with a prayer. Children were sometimes asked a question or were invited to discuss a point that came up in the catechetical programs, but the program was not followed rigorously during the catechetical session. Children and parents were brought into the church to explore and understand many facets of our faith. I always gathered the families around the baptismal font when we talked about baptism, and I went through the ritual, and asked the children to help me unpack the meaning of the ritual words, actions and symbols. For the sacrament of Eucharist, we examined the parts of the mass by going into the church and moving about as the participants in the Sunday liturgy do. For example, the children gathered around the ambo as we talked about the Liturgy of the Word, and they held and looked through the Lectionary. The catechetical sessions were a time for children and parents to ask questions or voice concerns. The catechists also shared their faith with the families through prayer, activities and stories from their own faith lives. The latter sessions were used partly to focus more on the celebration itself, and the children were invited to “practice” the celebration of the sacrament so they were not fearful or anxious on the day of the celebration.

In the summer of 2011, when our former pastor placed in the parish bulletin a call to parents of children in grades seven and eight to register their children for confirmation, my wife and I approached him about registering our daughter who was in grade six. He told us that there

would be confirmation next year as well. We then informed our pastor that our daughter was showing signs of readiness²⁶⁴ to begin the initiation process for confirmation and shared with our pastor our understanding that a child had to be the age of reason to celebrate this sacrament. At that point he responded that as parents we knew what was best for our daughter and that it was up to us. So, of course, we proceeded to involve our daughter in the formation process. In the autumn of 2012, my oldest daughter, Charlotte, celebrated the sacrament of confirmation.

Our younger daughter, Olivia's, story is like that of our oldest daughter, only she has celebrated her first Reconciliation and First Eucharist and is currently involved in the initiation process for the sacrament of confirmation. It should be noted that in our Diocese, the sacraments of initiation are not in their proper order. Generally speaking, the process for the sacramental catechesis for Eucharist is at age 7/8 or grade two and the age for confirmation varies from age 10-14 or grades six to nine.

Our eight year old son, George, celebrated his first communion in May of 2013. He had been displaying signs of readiness to be involved in the sacramental initiation process for the sacrament of First Eucharist for some time previous to his engagement with the process which began in the autumn of 2012. He has since begun altar serving as there is a tradition in our parish of children beginning to act as altar servers after they have made their first communion.

It has been both a great privilege for me and a great joy to serve as a catechist in my parish and to minister to many children and families, including my own. Overall, these

²⁶⁴ I want to clarify the term, "signs of readiness." I understand this to mean that a child is demonstrating a willingness to be a part of the sacramental initiation process. These signs may be different from child to child. Signs of readiness could consist of but are not limited to the following: expressing an interest in celebrating the sacrament, asking questions about the sacrament such as "why are you going up to the front of church for that bread?", yearning to participate more in the Eucharist or in their life of faith (for example, a child telling a parent, "I want to receive communion just like you and Mommy and everyone else" or "I want to belong" or "I feel left out when everyone else gets something and I just get a blessing"), seeing a friend or older sibling enjoying the celebration of a sacrament and wanting the same for themselves or outright telling a parent or pastor, for example, "I want to make my first communion."

experiences have been life-giving for me and have certainly enriched my own personal faith journey.

Chapter III - Textural Description - Organization of the Findings

This section of my thesis project will present the findings from the interviews I conducted in the spring of 2011. This is the longest section of this thesis project and is the fourth step of

Creswell's phenomenological approach.²⁶⁵ Here, I will present what the participants in my study experienced with the phenomenon known as a parish-based process toward the catechumenal model for the sacramental initiation of children. Quotes from research participants will be used to give examples of phenomena and to help develop a sense of what occurred for these participants and in the catechetical ministry in the respective parishes. This aspect of the phenomenological method allows the reader to hear the actual voices of the participants in the study. As previously explained, the parishes which were the focus of my study will be referred to with fictional names in order to maintain anonymity. Similarly, when including a comment from those interviewed, I will refer to participants by using letters to indicate their parish and their role in the initiation process.²⁶⁶

The findings will be presented in three sections according to the three major themes: (1) comparing the process of sacramental preparation in Catholic schools to the parish process of sacramental initiation, (2) challenges, and (3) transformation. The first section, comparing the school sacramental preparation process and the parish process of initiation, will be introduced by subtheme, whereby pertinent comments from various individuals in various parishes will appear under the appropriate subtheme. I chose to present the findings for this first comparison section in this way since many individuals in various parishes noted common experiences relating to the various subthemes. The second major theme, challenges, will be presented in the same way. The third major theme, transformation, will be presented using various subthemes as well, but under further subthemes of the names of parishes to help better gauge if or how transformation is

²⁶⁵ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design – Choosing Among Five Approaches – Second Edition*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 159.

²⁶⁶ No actual names will be used to protect the identity of interview participants. For example, a comment from a parent of St. Mary Magdalene Parish will have the following letters after the quote: SMM P3. These letters indicate that this parent is from St. Mary Magdalene Parish (SMM) and that she or he is the third (3) parent (P) whom I interviewed.

occurring at each respective parish and to better assess each situation as we look ahead to the evolving process and to identify best practices.

3.1 Comparing the Process of Sacramental Preparation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process

The first group of findings from the interviews has to do with the comparison of the initiation process in Catholic schools (often referred to as sacramental preparation) to the parish initiation process. Many interviewees were asked to compare the Catholic school-based process to the parish process. Parents were asked the following question: If you have had children involved in the past in a Catholic school-based sacramental initiation process, how does it compare with the current parish-based process? (See Appendix 3 – *Interview Questions*). Pastors and catechists were asked the following question: Can you compare the experience of the former Catholic school-based process to the current parish-based process experience? (See Appendix 3 – *Interview Questions*). Since there were many responses relating to this comparison, they warranted a subsection in the interview results.

As stated previously, some parishes have had a parish-based process for many years, some places still have a process that is mainly based in the Catholic school and some parishes are in transition, with a process that is led partly by the Catholic school and partly by the parish. Since Catholic schools have and continue to have a role in the sacramental initiation of children in some parts of the Diocese, I thought it would be insightful to compare the school and parish-based processes. This comparison is also helpful in finding data to examine my hypothesis. These processes will be compared under the following subthemes: the involvement of family in

the process, the quality of catechesis, the involvement of Catholic schools in the process and the question of what is more expedient for families?

3.1.1 Comparing Sacramental Initiation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process – The Involvement of Family in the Process

Pastors, parish administrators, catechists and parents who were interviewed for this study were asked to compare the former Catholic school-based process to the current reality of a parish-based process (See Appendix 3 – Interview Questions). Most of these interviewees were able to offer a response but some were not able to because they did not have children who had experienced a Catholic school-based process prior to involvement in the parish process. When asked to compare the school and parish process, twenty-three research participants said they believed the family was more involved in the parish process than in the former school-based program.

Several parents shared that they experienced an increase of participation in the sacramental initiation process of their children because of the parish process. When asked what the benefits of being involved in a parish-based process have been for her child, her family and her, a parent offered the following answer:

I think it just goes back to having the family more involved than what it was with the other three [children]. You're more involved, you're more hands on with this type of setting than at the school... Overall, as I say I think it's a better program. Through the school, if there was(sic) any questions, really you had to write them down and send them into the school that way and this situation, we're present so if there is(sic) any questions we can ask them at the time. And, I think it helps the children a lot to see that as well because there is(sic) times when there are questions the parents want to ask but in the school setting they never got a chance to. But in this setting, you get a better one on one personal time to ask questions. (SL P5)

This parent appreciated the opportunity to dialogue with the catechists and ask questions during the catechesis – something that according to her was easier or more accessible at the parish

sessions. Her comment gives a clear indication of the value she placed on being an active part of the parish process.

Another mother from the same parish conceded that she was more involved in the parish catechetical process. In her answer to the same question, she too stated that she had a much more active role in accompanying her son on this sacramental journey:

I think there's more parent involvement in the one at the parish. When it's done at school, it's fine when it's done at school and things like that but I don't think a lot of the parents are aware of what the kids are doing per se. At least with first communion they had a little booklet, and they brought it back and forth so you could still be involved in your son or daughter's work but I found with the confirmation the only involvement we had was when we came to church [for the celebration of the sacrament] ... (SL P1)

This mother went on to say that because she was a part of the confirmation catechesis, she knew what was happening in the formation and was able to better support her son in the process and as such could enter into the process in a more profound way. (SL P1)

A parent at a different parish shared a similar sentiment. She felt uninvolved in the school process and was expected to simply show up for the celebration of the sacrament:

First of all, when it's school based... we did receive books and so on, so we did talk about it but it wasn't quite as involved as far as having to go and talk about the different things that were in the book and really involve the children in understanding. And again, I think it really forced the parents to take a closer look at their own belief systems if you want to call it that and determine really what it means to be a Catholic. With school-based, that was the teacher, the teacher's job and they took care of that and we just went to a really nice ceremony and enjoyed that. Maybe not as participants but more as onlookers. Whereas with _____ [names children who were involved in the parish process], I really felt I had more of a role in bringing them to this... to this sacrament. (SJB P1)

Some parents appreciated the chance to learn more about the faith through the parish process. A significant piece here is that the parent felt confronted to think more seriously about her own faith and to learn more about it. It appears from this mother's comments that the teacher in the Catholic school had a major role in the process. The mother's statement about feeling more like

an observer than a participant in the process is significant and is in direct opposition to the Church's understanding of the parents' catechetical role as being the primary educator in the faith.²⁶⁷ Interestingly enough, a parent from another parish pointed out the problem with this sort of "role-reversal" between parent and teacher:

In the school, from what I remember, we had religion on a regular basis and the teacher would teach the class. The parents weren't involved in that very much. We would have our homework and were involved sort of. But I think the teachers played a primary role, right? And, the parents would kind of play a secondary role. I may have had that a little mixed up. The parents should have taken a primary role... (SMM C5).

This parent is suggesting a reclaiming by some parents of the role of primary educator in the faith. For many, the Church's understanding of the parents as primary educators of the faith is a teaching that involves a change in attitude. In many cases, the teacher has seemingly played the primary role in the faith formation of the child and breaking out of this understanding is not easy since it has been the long-standing reality of many families and schools. In acting as the primary educators in the faith for their child, parents' faith can grow along with the faith of their child.

There are many opportunities for parents to be renewed in the faith and for ongoing faith development in a parish-based sacramental initiation process. One parent described the parish catechesis as "...a learning experience for the parents... this way we're learning as the children go along through it too." (SJB P2). Another parent admitted that "... I found really important... to be able to be there [at the catechetical sessions] and to learn a little bit more along with my children. (SJB P1) It seems that these parents genuinely appreciated the learning aspect of the catechesis which was probably not available through the school catechetical program. It should be noted that in this parish, parents must participate in the catechetical sessions with the children. It is my understanding that at times, the pastor of this parish offered catechetical sessions around the sacraments specifically for the parents as part of the process.

²⁶⁷ *GDC*, # 255.

Catechists are able to see the benefit of parents being actively involved in the parish catechesis. One catechist stated the importance of parental involvement in this process:

...people are coming back to church in many instances because their child has to be brought forth and the onus is on them so they have to participate. The way that that happens most often is in the parishes where the parents don't just drop off the children for the class and they pick them up at the end. When that happens, you miss the opportunity. In our programs now for here, we insist that you have to have at least one parent present for the program with the child. (SM C2)

This catechist is part of the parish unit that has had a parish-based process for the longest. After many years working with such a process they have witnessed the benefits of having parents actively engaged. The same catechist also identified the challenge of a school-based process, where all or most children in a given grade would be preparing for the sacraments, many coming from families with little or no participation in the parish community:

The difference now is that at least half of the classroom don't go to church so if you were doing it now by the classroom, all of them would be receiving the sacraments but with no foundation and nothing else about it so it would be just like a drop in the bucket and it would go in one ear and out the other whereas now with the parish-based, the parents have to initiate that their children are going to receive the sacraments... (SM C2)

Many participants said that giving parents and families a foundation or formation in the faith was a missing component in the school-based process.

A parent from a parish new to the parish-based process shared this comment: "I think you feel more of a connection to your parish as opposed to something you are doing with your friends at school... more than a school function – a school function could be graduation or something else." (SB P1) This same parent relayed the challenges the school process presented to parent involvement:

The school process... the parents weren't involved in the sense that we really didn't know or were kept informed about their [the children's] preparation. We knew they were being prepared but it wasn't... I'm sure it wasn't as extensive as this was... there were some good points to it I'm sure, but this was more extensive and just the work coming home, we knew what they were doing every week... [with] the school model really the

only involvement for the parents is what time to be there [for the celebration of the sacrament] and what's the appropriate attire to wear and that type of thing. (SB P1)

It seems that this parent appreciated the deeper involvement the parish process offered and felt a sense of disconnection from the school preparation program. Many parents who were surveyed shared the sentiments of this parent. They shared some disappointment that their only involvement with the school process was basically showing up for the celebration.

When asked to compare the experience of a Catholic school-based process to a parish-based process, a pastor shared his observations on the roles of teachers and parents in the process:

From my experience... with the school program ... it was the teacher's responsibility and when things didn't work out, it was the teacher's fault. Blame the teacher because the young people were not participating, the young people did not know their prayers, the young people didn't know anything... I think that was totally unfair to educators. It's not their role to develop the faith life of the child; they are there to educate... and help the young people to develop a broad religious knowledge base but when it comes to sacramental preparation, there is a faith dimension here that has to be experienced in the context of the family. And it has to begin at baptism. That can't happen in the context of Catholic education. (SJB Pas.)

This pastor identifies the problems with a teacher having most of the responsibilities for the catechetical role and correctly states that the primary role in the process lies with the parents . The Catholic school and the parish are called to support the family in the catechesis of their child – the parish being the most important locus for catechesis.²⁶⁸

An area to consider when monitoring this shift from a school-based process to a parish-based process is that of increased participation. Specifically, it is significant to note whether there are more families involved in the parish or more people in the pews because of participation in a parish-based process. One catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish noted that more families are visible in the church during the “catechetical years” of their children's lives as

²⁶⁸ GDC, #257.

a result of the parish-based process. (SJB C4) The question this catechist points to is a valid one – will the presence and participation of more children and young families at the Sunday liturgies and in the life of the parish sustain itself? At this time, the question cannot be answered, but her final comment regarding teenagers is most interesting.

It is clear in many parishes that teenagers do not regularly participate at the Sunday Eucharist and many times, not at all. At another parish, a catechist noted that after the sacraments are celebrated, some families do return – including young people:

I do notice that there are a couple of families that I didn't notice in church before. And, after the sacraments I've seen them in church, maybe not every Sunday, but it is bringing them back as a family and I have actually seen some of the young people coming on their own. And some of the parents I find are really interested and get involved and help them with the homework and some are just going through the motions. Once the sacrament is done, you never see them again. (SMM C3)

It can't be an easy thing for young people to enter a church and participate in the Eucharist by themselves, but if they are doing so due to their faith being formed in the catechetical sessions, there are clearly some healthy faith experiences occurring. Of course, this catechist points out the obvious – that there are also families who are involved during the catechetical period but who choose to be absent after the sacrament is celebrated. This alienation from the parish is not restricted to the post-sacramental period.

Many families are disconnected from the parish up until the point of engaging with the sacramental initiation process. Participation in this process provides opportunities for families to reconnect with the life of the parish. A pastor acknowledged that children and families are given the prospects of bonding with a parish community:

The children are experiencing greater familiarity with the parish itself by coming to the parish for these sessions. There's I believe more home-based work being done between child and parent. It gives more opportunities for children to tour the church – things like that. (SB Pas.)

Just offering the catechetical sessions at a parish gives families the chance to be present at a parish church and to get to know the parish as their spiritual home. Inviting families into a greater awareness of and a deeper relationship with the faith community is a vital part of the catechetical ministry. Effective catechesis cannot happen if its quality is compromised.

3.1.2 Comparing Sacramental Initiation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process – The Quality of Catechesis

When asked to compare the Catholic school experience and the parish experience during the initiation process, several respondents commented on the quality of catechesis involved.

Some of the interviewees identified differences between the two approaches. A deacon who oversees the catechetical ministry in his parish reflected on the difference between the school and parish process with the following answer:

Times have changed... the problem today is they [Catholic school teachers] used to teach catechesis instead of proclaiming their faith. I think that's the difference between the program we have at the parish... it's an area where you profess your faith and you learn from your actions and from your words. It's not a teaching of the law and that's what it is... today it's more of an experience in your life (SM D2).

This answer points out that a school-based process can involve more of a traditional classroom-like approach with students in desks receiving a more didactic style of religious education even though the Catholic school has a catechetical role which was explained in section 1.3.5.4 of this dissertation which is entitled, *The Role of Catholic Schools*. This is reminiscent of the “banking method” described by Paulo Freire.²⁶⁹ This is not to say that a school-based process is only didactic in nature and scope and void of any catechetical nature. The catechumenal model that the parish base is moving towards is a method that is more about faith witnessing and faith

²⁶⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 58.

sharing. In Chapter I of this work, I referred to the catechetical nature of the Catholic school in section 1.3.5.4 which concerns the role of the Catholic school in the process of the Christian initiation of Children. The ministry of catechesis requires catechists who are dedicated to the catechetical process and passionate about their faith.

Several interviewees acknowledged their experiences with the school process as lacking in commitment and priority. According to one catechist, a benefit of the parish based-process is the amount of time and effort they are able to give to the initiation process:

I think in all fairness to both sides, I think that probably we are a little more organized and we have the time... we make the time. Whereas, when you're in the school system, you have so many subjects to teach in a day and you have so much time allotted. Where does religion fit in there? It's common knowledge... I shouldn't say common knowledge, but some of us know that if something's going to be cancelled for the day, it's going to be religion or music because they are seen by some people as they're not really necessary. And I feel that it's great that we've been able to take the teaching of religion out of the school and into the church because you have dedicated people in the process. (SMM C1)

The sentiments of this catechist point to another challenge with religious education as a whole, and that is the integrity of religious education as a course discipline.²⁷⁰ It is disappointing when religious education is not given the time, commitment and passion it deserves as a course discipline in Catholic schools. Over the years, sacramental preparation programs have evolved into becoming part of religious education programming. Another catechist who also identified himself as a Catholic teacher, had similar observations regarding the lack of priority given religious education in Catholic schools:

Even in the school... this is pretty subjective on my part but there are certain courses given value and certain courses that are not. I think it would be safe to say, even in this

²⁷⁰ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran outline two aims of religious education: to teach people to practice a religious way of life and to teach people to understand religion (*Reshaping Religious Education – Conversations on Contemporary Practice*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). This understanding of the aims of religious education is similar to that of Thomas Groome. Groome explains that Christian religious education involves learning from their faith tradition about how to live their lives as well as "...offering sound instruction and encouraging people to understand the content of their faith." Source: Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 103-104.

school over here... I think if something came up, let's say literacy... well, we're going to have to prepare for a literacy test, so we're not going to do religion this week or religion becomes a time when we colour, or we do art, and we cover both. Certain courses are given precedence, and other ones are not, and it's just the way it works sometimes because they're driven by a curriculum demand and the province and legalities, but sometimes religion is the add on that if it's missed, no one really knows, and we need to get finished the math the English, they need their 20 minutes of phys. ed. every day and those kind of things. (SMM C2)

According to this teacher and catechist, curriculum, time and scheduling demands can result in religious education losing priority to other subject areas. Since it is not the focus of my study to determine how often such a scenario surfaces, this challenge is not explored any further, but the fact that several interviewees mention it illustrates that the situation exists. In a parish-based process, there are no other subjects and curriculum demands to “compete” with the process of initiation. In a Catholic school, the subject of religious education is one of many subjects that must be delivered by the classroom teacher. A parish catechetical process focuses solely on the sacraments of initiation and reconciliation.

A parent interviewed from St. Leo Parish also brought up the concern with religious education not receiving the priority it deserves. She has eight children – all educated in Catholic schools. Seven of her children were part of the school sacramental preparation programming and the youngest child was the first one to be involved in the parish-based process. Like other parents, she expressed feeling more involved in the parish-based process and having little involvement as a parent in the school process other than preparing for the celebration of the sacrament itself. She also had much to say regarding the priority religious education receives in Catholic schools:

I think the fact that we've had to take this step to have to move it [sacramental initiation] into the parishes is a statement of the huge failings in our school system... you know the lack of formation. It's such a disservice to them [children], you know... I think the number one thing in the Catholic school system should be to impart the faith, you know, what you believe in... I mean when the [religious education] books come home at the end

of the year, I've opened the religion workbook and – two pages in it! One is something about self-image and the other nothing because they never have enough time for religion. And that's just sad. (SB P1)

Religious education's seeming lack of importance in Catholic schools, as indicated by this mother is certainly regrettable and points to further challenges for Catholic education which are significant but are not the particular concern of this thesis project.

The same parent shared another interesting comment worthy of mention. She relayed her pleasure with the change to a parish-based process: "...[my son] was being prepared in our parish... our children attend a different school than the parish[school]...so in the past... they made their sacraments in a different parish than the parish we belong to..." (SB P1). It meant something to her that her child was initiated in their home parish. This observation is important because it again identifies the significance of the parish being the most import locus for catechesis.²⁷¹ For this mother, being a part of the immediate preparation for the sacraments and celebrating the sacraments in their own parish rather than another had deep meaning for her. Furthermore, the practice just makes sense as it speaks to a quality of catechesis which occurs as a child is being formed in his or her own parish. If a goal of initiation is to welcome a person into a faith community who will support him or her in becoming a disciple,²⁷² then a process that takes place in another parish or school does not offer the same opportunity for that important community engagement. However, just because the ideal process is put into place, does not mean that all participants will feel the experience has been a success.

While not the majority, two parents shared their displeasure regarding several facets of the parish based process. It is noteworthy that they were from the same parish, and this parish was in the first year of a parish-based process. One mother felt the school was much better at

²⁷¹ *GDC*, #255.

²⁷² *RCIA*, # 41.

communicating with parents than the parish. She also wondered why the process couldn't have stayed in the school system since some of the catechists in her parish are teachers in the Catholic school system. In a particular response, the mother says that she feels her other daughter was better prepared at the school but was soon to add that this feeling may have to do with the personality difference of the daughters rather than the parish process itself (SL P4).

The concern of the other parents, a husband and wife, had to do with the ability of the catechists to communicate with the children. For these parents, this element was lacking in the catechesis:

I can understand what they're [catechists] trying to do but I did think it [the catechesis] was better in the school... a couple of reasons... in the school, the teachers are at the same level as the children, they know what the teaching level is and I found when it came to the parish the teachers that were teaching them at the parish weren't at the same level... they were teaching them as if they were quite a bit older than what they actually were. Just some of the terminology.... The other thing is that with first communion, there would be booklets that they would bring home on a weekly basis as part of their routine. They would do homework together at that level, so it would really initiate an interaction between the parents and the students, whereas I find there isn't that sort of chat afterwards... there isn't a lot of stuff that comes home with them from their confirmation stuff. (SL P2 and P3)

The sentiments expressed by this couple suggest that there are also some difficulties with the parish-based approach. Catechists involved would benefit from some formation that gives them the suggestions and tools necessary for effective communication with parents and children although the actual catechetical programs are not the issue in this thesis. This comment may also point to the need to explore what materials and approaches catechists are using in the parish-based process toward the catechumenal model. If they are continuing a more didactic informational curriculum then just the location has been changed – not the model. Catechists must be able to meet children and families where they are at and to address any special needs they may have. When the parish process is experiencing complications or is perceived not to be

addressing the needs of children or families, there can be a tendency to long for the process that was previously based in the Catholic school.

3.1.3 Comparing Sacramental Initiation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process – The Involvement of Catholic Schools in the Process

During the interviews, several respondents wanted Catholic schools to somehow continue their involvement in the process. For each of them, there was something in the school experience that would enhance the parish-based process. However, overall, only six of the interviewees expressed a hope or interest in continuing some sort of a formal connection with Catholic schools during the initiation process. One catechist, who is also a Catholic school principal, spoke of the benefits of working with Catholic schools for the initiatory catechesis:

I think I struggle to... that I see a big plus in many ways in having this [sacramental initiation catechesis] go on in the school with the parents. But I also see a role for the school to be some sort of bridge or partnership piece there. And so, that's a personal piece for me coming from my perspective as a principal and as a teacher and as a parent. (SJB C4).

For someone heavily involved in Catholic education, this woman's feelings are understandable. She admits that she sees the benefits of both the school and parish processes. These comments certainly suggest that the Catholic school can play a role in the initiation process. A positive parish-school relationship can work to the benefit of both. This type of thinking resonates with the Church's teaching that the whole Christian community is responsible for the formation of the Christian.²⁷³ A question remains as to how involved parents are in a Catholic school-based process and what role the faith community plays, if any, in a school-based process?

²⁷³ RCIA #9.

In an earlier section of this work,²⁷⁴ many parents and catechists imparted that with the school model, parent participation is often lacking. However, in comparing the school and parish process, this same catechist, who is also a principal, had the following response:

I have experience with both [school and parish catechesis]. As a parent, my children were at school, and they were receiving preparation at school, receiving sacramental preparation, but I was at church too. But for me, they were meshing. I know that's not the reality for many of the families, and I know that's one of the blocks for families and for the Church. There's (sic) kids getting ploughed through the sacraments and barely come at Easter or Christmas. I understand that that's an issue. There is a significant more amount of onus on parents to step up, and many do, but many don't. But it is a change for them – a change in their way of thinking. But, I still see some room for some kind of bridge [with the school]. You know, not bridge but invitation or something (SJB C4).

This catechist recognizes the fact that many families have little or no connection to the parish – even during the time of sacramental preparation in the Catholic school. She knows that many parents do not make participating in the Eucharistic community a priority in their family life. She continues to pine for some sort of a catechetical partnership with the school but makes a significant point in that a huge challenge regarding parent involvement is “...their way of thinking.” This, perhaps, is one of the greatest challenges facing parishes that have moved to a parish-based process. For years, perhaps for decades or for generations, the schools have been responsible for most of the initiatory catechesis. With the process shift, parents suddenly feel there is a large change in expectations, and a challenge to change their thinking and their own involvement in their faith. Many have a difficult time comprehending the reasons for the change. The Diocesan *Policy* has been made available to all parents through the parishes on the diocesan website and in print form through the parishes, but it is important that parishes

²⁷⁴ See the section, 3.1.1 - *Comparing Sacramental Initiation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process – The Involvement of Family in the Process.*

communicate effectively with families about the change in approach and the reasons for this change.

The change in mindset is a challenge not only for parents but for catechists as well. Another catechist I interviewed identified himself as a Catholic school principal. Like the principal above, he too saw the benefits of maintaining a school sacramental preparation model. He explained why he felt the parish-based process moving toward the catechumenal model was challenging, given his involvement in Catholic schools:

As you know I'm a principal in a Catholic school. There's a little bit of fear of losing sacraments at the school. To me, it embodies our Catholic school. We have them, and I know the kids are very well taken care of by their teachers. That was a fear or a constraint... my fear is that the Church has to do evangelization... we have to start evangelizing our Catholics... re-evangelizing them I guess, and the more you pull this out of the school, my fear is that there are going to be a lot of children not receive this. It's an excellent opportunity and I think the Church... the Diocese is missing that... . (SJB C2).

One can't help but notice how many times this catechist uses the word "fear." Clearly, he is afraid of missed opportunities in having a solely parish-based model. He offers a good point about the need for evangelization of many families who have little or no connection to a parish community. He feels that the school's sacramental preparation process is an opportune time for evangelization. A major concern for this catechist is the number of children enrolled in the parish initiation process. Much can be said regarding this issue of the concern with numbers, but it will be addressed in a later section.

A major challenge another catechist identified is the fact that many parents and children don't receive the communication about the parish sacramental catechesis because the information is only available from the parish. She shared, "...I think the school should make the parents know or the church somehow that this [the sacrament] is what they're [the children] to celebrate next... I don't think children that age should have a choice... it seems like the child

is... not letting partake in it [the sacramental initiation process] because they don't belong to the [parish] church" (SJB C and P). As both a parent and a catechist, this woman obviously feels for the children who are not involved in the process because of their parents' disconnect from the parish. The fact that she wants to make the sacraments as accessible as possible to all children is admirable, but her point about the children not having a choice is contrary to the Church's vision for initiation. Children, and all candidates for the sacraments for that matter, are to come when they feel called. Preparation for the sacraments should never be forced and should always be invitational.

A catechist at another parish was also dismayed also that the information regarding the parish sacramental preparation process does not reach all families. Her concerns echo those of the catechist above, in that she feels the schools should be used as a venue to communicate with families:

...they [the parish] don't tell them [the parents] about it [sacramental initiation] much in the schools anymore; it's only if they're coming to church that they know about it. So, if it's not announced in the schools... there are some people I know who have come back to the church since it's taught in the schools, and they've been informed by the schools and... oh gee, I didn't know about that... they don't come to church on a regular basis, but if they're told about it through the school, those are the years where we've received a few more children, and parents come back to the church because they've had to start taking their children to church. (SMM C3)

Like the former, this catechist expresses her worry about the number of families who are being missed by the process not being "advertised" in the schools. Some pastors have shared with me in the past that the reason they do not send information home with families through the school is to help people realize that the initiation process is parish-based and not school-based. This has to do with the "mentality shift" mentioned previously. From these pastors' perspectives, even "advertising" the process through the school can give some people the mistaken notion that this is a school-based process, as perhaps had been past practice. Regardless of these perspectives,

the catechist above makes a good point – certain families are not connected to parishes, but may be open to reconnecting if they were informed of the sacramental initiation process at the associated parish. Some parents will no doubt be evangelized and catechized through their children and may even become participating members of the parish because of being involved in the process.

A parent from the same parish as the abovementioned catechist responded that she would like to see more involvement with the school as well. Her comments are as follows:

I'm a little bit discouraged when some of it [the initiatory catechesis] left the school system and I guess because it's the way I learned... I maybe wish that it still would have stayed in the school system, and we would have picked up this component to enhance it a bit more... I already know what I'm imparting to her at home, but I hoped that sending her to a Catholic school would reinforce what I'm already doing at home. (SMM P4)

What this mother is describing, I believe, is the optimum partnership of home-school-parish working together to form the child in the faith. She identified the strength of this relationship when she was a child and feels that the school's absence from the process is a piece missing in the current parish process toward the catechumenal model when it comes to the issue of sacramental initiation.

The *Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke* highlights the role of Catholic schools in the sacramental initiation process: "Catholic schools can play a supportive role in parental and parish preparation of students for the sacraments. Each teacher in the Catholic school is called to be a witness to the Catholic faith through his or her regular contact with student candidates for the sacraments."²⁷⁵ The role the Catholic school plays in the parish catechetical process often depends on the relationship between the school and the parish and often the principal/teachers and the pastor. A catechist

²⁷⁵ *Policy*, III, 1, 1.1

from a different parish expressed her hope in having a closer relationship with the parochial school:

I think that as catechists in the parish, we should have more connections with the school. I feel that we don't know in religion what they're learning in the school or what stage they're at, and I would like to think that we're not in opposition with the school. Like, they can help us out if necessary, you know, so, I don't want it to feel like we are an entity on our own. I would like to see some connection (SB C2).

This catechist seems genuinely interested in strengthening the relationship with the Catholic school. She did not elaborate on what she felt this relationship would look like in concrete terms. Perhaps an initial meeting between parish catechists and classroom teachers would be helpful in understanding the respective roles when it comes to the faith formation of children.

3.1.4 Comparing Sacramental Initiation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process – What is More Expedient for Families?

Many respondents disclosed in the interviews that the school sacramental preparation model was more expedient for families than the parish based process toward the catechumenal model. This view of the school model being advantageous for families relates to the point made in the previous section, regarding attitude. In other words, some parents have found the school model of sacramental preparation more convenient for them since, in many respects, the Catholic school did the majority of the catechetical work at the school. Thus, many parents may find the shift to a parish based process toward the catechumenal model a shift in their workload and expectations. According to a parish catechist, this was the outlook of many parents involved in the school process: "...our children are going to a Catholic school, and I don't have to do anything." (SMM C1) As some participants in my interviews acknowledged, many parents were simply expected to show up for the celebration of the sacraments, and little or nothing was

expected of them otherwise. Catechists, pastors and parents shared this observation in the interviews.

In reflecting on the shift from the school to the parish-based process, one catechist offered the following statement: “The way it was before [at the school], here, we’re dropping off the kids... let the teachers teach them. OK, great thanks. Again, no interaction with the parish at all.” (SL C2) In the parish process, parents are not only expected to engage with the parish but with the catechesis and their children, as they journey through the process. I asked the pastor of St. Mary Magdalene parish to share with me why he decided to change to a parish-based process. This parish has been working with such a process for a number of years. His answer pointed to the challenge of disengaged parents:

I looked what was happening in the schools over a number of years. I didn’t just start when I came here and then also looking at parents’ participation and how parents were leaving it up to the schools to do all the work with sacramental preparation... the importance of meetings with parents, and sometimes they didn’t cooperate... they just presumed their child was making first communion... I decided what was happening in the school system and what was happening in our local school after three years of being here, I decided that I would go ahead and start planning something else. At first, we worked with the school and then I saw that something deeper had to happen... had to go to something else, so we did it and are still doing it. (SMM Pas.)

The “something deeper” evolved into a completely parish-based initiation of children process. This pastor identified the problems associated with a situation where parents expect their children to celebrate the sacraments because of a given age or grade they attain. As stated in a previous section of this work, such thinking is not in keeping with the vision of the Church. The pastor’s comments point to the troubling realization that for many parents, a school-based process is more convenient or easier for them.

There may be many reasons why some parents like the school process better, but one of these reasons is likely the reality that many families lead busy lives and so a process requiring

minimal effort on their part is more attractive to them. The pastor of St. Leo Parish made this observation in one of his responses:

The easiest path for some is to take the easiest path they can... and maybe I would do the same if I was a dad with kids, maybe you know... in the Catholic world, our Catholic identity begins and ends with the fact that we are a Sunday Eucharistic community and even though membership in another grouping or especially membership in a Catholic school is a nice thing, it is not a replacement for the parish... (SL Pas.)

In admitting that, if he were a parent, he might choose the easier path, this pastor is being realistic in his understanding of where some families are with this issue. However, his point about the centrality of the Sunday Eucharistic community in the life of the faithful is the challenge with which many parishes are faced. Some parents don't see the significance of this core piece, and inviting them to accept this understanding does indeed involve a mentality shift if not a conversion.

I interviewed another parent who was very supportive of the parish process, but admitted in her comments, that "... I did find ... a little bit of a time challenge and wishing it was school-based because it does take away from your time." (SJB P3) Time pressures, then, have a significant impact on parents' decision making. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons why many parents are choosing not to be involved in the parish-based process. The sacramental initiation process does not become a priority for them. Another catechist from the same parish made the following statement:

I'm being judgmental, but Catholics today always send them [children] to school, and everything's taught at school, and we don't have to worry about it, whereas now the commitment you have to actually do something. The parents have to be involved. They're taking part in the commitment that they've made at baptism. (SJB C2)

This catechist acknowledges the importance of the level of commitment needed for families to be involved in the sacramental initiation process. Her statement concerning the covenant parents entered into at their child's baptism is also significant. Perhaps many parents have forgotten that

promise made many years ago. Notwithstanding parental mindset, it is incumbent on the faith community to support the parents in their role. This is one of the reasons why the parish-based process is imperative.

Another catechist from the same parish indicated that as a retired Catholic school teacher, she had a good sense of the thinking of many parents associated with the school-based process. In comparing the former Catholic-school based process to the parish process, she imparted this answer:

I taught in a Catholic school so, religion was a big part for me because I knew that parents, a lot of parents who send their children to Catholic schools, think they are excused, and the only faith instruction they [the children] get is what they get in the schools. So, it was a big responsibility for me knowing that because I heard parents verbalizing that... even teaching the prayers (SJB C5).

Certainly, Catholic schools are responsible for forming children in the faith, but when parents openly state that this excuses them from acting as primary educators in the faith, there are some serious concerns. Clearly, a change in understanding is needed when these types of comments surface, but helping parents to understand their primary role is often challenging.

A parent at the same parish has several children and, as such, has experienced both the school and parish processes. Her three older children were involved with the school process, and the two younger children participated in the parish process. During her interview, she alluded to the parental state of mind needed to realize the importance of the parish-based initiation process:

I found with my older three... it's a kind of different perspective... for lack of a better way of describing it, it was taken care of at school whereas with _____ and _____ [names of two younger children], the onus was on us as parents to make sure that we went through what confirmation, is to be a member of the Church and historically how all that is important.... (SJB P1).

“A different perspective” – this is the change in thinking referred to earlier. The comments from this mother also illustrate the possibility of parents growing in their own faith and learning as

they journey with their children in the process. Her response reveals the significant impact that the catechetical process can have on the family when parents are actively engaged with their children. The benefits of a parish initiation process can be many, but the challenges associated with the same process can be equally striking.

3.2 Parish-Based Process for the Sacramental Initiation of Children - The Challenges

One of the questions I asked interviewees concerned the challenges with their involvement in the parish-based process (See Appendix 3). Many of the participants spoke emphatically about the concerns they met during the sessions. I have categorized the many difficulties: family scheduling and timing, better formation for catechists, maintaining catechists, lack of commitment from parents and families, the loss: children who are not able to be involved in the parish process, the limited number of children involved in the parish initiation process, the parish becoming a “school” in the process, the lack of involvement of the faith community, inconsistencies among parishes and mass “attendance” and “passports.” Each of these challenges with comments from the five parishes’ participants will be discussed in the following subsections.

3.2.1 Scheduling and Timing for Families

Twenty-six participants in this study made reference to the challenge of finding the time and reorganizing family schedules in order to participate in a parish-based initiation process. All of the children whom I interviewed identified this challenge as a difficulty. Families today lead busy lives and setting priorities for various commitments is often necessary. Most parents I interviewed had difficulty prioritizing their involvement in the parish process. For one mother,

the most significant struggle for her family was physically getting everyone to the catechetical sessions:

I think the biggest thing with us personally as a family is that it's [the catechesis] on a Sunday morning. We normally attend Mass on Saturday because they [the parish] run a bus that comes here [to her neighbourhood]. My husband had been sick for a long period of time, so to walk the distance that we do, it's difficult... especially in the winter, so we've been lucky enough that we have another family that we can hook up with to bring us actually on Sunday morning for confirmation class but we usually attend Mass here Saturday evenings. So it's been a challenge to get transportation and stuff arranged. (SL P5)

This family found it challenging to attend the parish formation sessions on Sunday mornings since there was no transportation provided by the parish on Sunday mornings and their personal circumstances made driving a non-option.

The issue of Mass times was a challenge for another family of this parish as well. While admitting it was not a significant challenge, these parents had to juggle schedules to participate in the catechetical sessions:

The only thing I can say... it's not really a negative thing... we always take Saturday evening mass so we can ski on Sunday and we did readjust our times as a family to do this for one person which, in the big scheme of things wasn't a big problem. That's how it affected us. Other than that it wasn't a big inconvenience... This was a priority for our family, so it wasn't a big issue for us. It was a bit challenging too because _____ [name of father] has unpredictable hours in the winter to start with, and we had to make a point of trying to have a family day. (SL P2 and 3)

It must be noted that the catechesis at this parish was offered immediately following the Sunday morning 9:00 a.m. Mass. This family chose to make the sacramental initiation a main concern and acknowledged that other sacrifices had to be made.

Another parent from St. John the Baptist Parish shared that involvement in the parish community meant making it a priority for his family:

I guess we've had to reschedule some of our previous plans. When there's a hockey tournament one weekend, we had to pull him out of that. We had to make the decision and he was good with it too. I know some of the parents didn't, but we decided that

when we were going to do it, we'd do it... And we really kept a firm foot about that too. Either we're going to do it or not going to do it. And we did it. (SJB P2)

It should be noted that many of the participants mentioned the importance of hockey in the lives of their families.²⁷⁶ For some families, Sunday morning hockey takes precedence over Sunday morning Mass. Hockey is extremely popular in all communities in the Diocese of Pembroke. Various people involved in parish life have relayed to me over the years the frustration they feel in “competing” with Sunday morning hockey. A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish admitted his frustration in dealing with parents who use hockey as an excuse to miss parish catechetical sessions. He confessed, “I think my negativity comes from some parents who say, ‘oh, he’s got hockey that day.’” (SMM C2)

Not all of the families were as firm as the abovementioned family and as consenting as his son when it came to choosing catechesis over hockey. A mother from St. Leo Parish stated that making this type of choice resulted in tension in her household:

My son is involved in hockey and other things and sometimes you get busy and a lot of times if we couldn't go to church on a Sunday we went to church on a Saturday night. I just found that there were a couple of times when there were things that conflicted and I had to explain to my son that this is more important... So, sometimes there was a pull and tension that almost made him resent coming more because he enjoys hockey so much more and then not being able to understand, well I can go Saturday but you're still not getting your class on Sunday. (SL P1)

For this mother, the faith formation of her child was more important than his participation in hockey, but, obviously, this can be much more difficult for a child to understand and accept. She challenged her son to make a commitment to his faith; however, some children would indeed resent such a statement from a parent. Several of the children shared that missing or being late for hockey was a struggle for them. (SL Child.) Families who find themselves overwhelmed

²⁷⁶ Hockey has become an important part of Canadian culture and Sundays. In many communities, hockey rinks are packed on Sunday mornings whereas many churches are empty.

with too many activities in their lives may have to choose whether or not to involve themselves in a parish initiation process.

People are invited to come to the initiation process when they are ready. Many families do not choose to take part in a parish-based process in a given year, and there is nothing wrong with that. Some families are not ready to commit to a process at present but may be in the future. One of the catechists acknowledged that this had been her experience:

The other thing that I noticed is that you have a child who sometimes comes and then they can't commit, they have too much going on, and then they come the next year. I've had families who wait and have two children do it at the same time. And for families... there's a connection to want to be there. (SJB C4)

Families like those mentioned by this catechist need to make the sacramental initiation process a priority before becoming involved.

Some parishes have attempted to find reasonable times for families to meet. A catechist from St. Monica Parish shared that in her parish, "...[they] have to place the times of the sacraments [sessions] strategically so [they] don't impede too much in the extracurricular activities of the family." (SM C3)

Finding the right time to have catechetical sessions is a huge challenge unto itself. When asked about the difficulties associated with the parish process, another catechist from St. Monica Parish outlined the struggle in finding a time to meet with families:

The other challenge would be time... you have to work with these kids after school and the school buses being in the country, so they aren't home till 5:00 p.m. sometimes and if you're meeting with them for more than an hour, it's too much. But really, what can you accomplish with them in an hour because it can't be just talk for an hour, you have to have some activity there... and an activity can't be done in five, ten minutes... so that's the big challenge is to try and find the time. Don't ask anybody to come on the weekends because they're all booked in all sorts of things. So, the earliest we can consider is 7:00 p.m., and by 8:00 p.m. they're all ready to go home... it's hard with the little ones especially... we try to get them there earlier, even 6:30 p.m. An hour is plenty... (SM C2)

Often, there are no easy answers. However, it is clear that this catechist and her team have thought this through and are doing their best to accommodate the busy schedules of many families.

Another issue to consider is the demands of working parents. Sometimes one parent does not have much support from the other. A parent from St. Mary Magdalene parish expressed the difficulty she sometimes faces regarding the demands of shift work and her husband's lack of interest in the process:

My husband, he isn't Catholic, so it's a bit of a challenge for him. He'll bring her [the daughter] to the meetings because I work shift work, and it's been one aspect. I work every other weekend guaranteed, so I can only come to half of the meetings because they're held on weekends. You know, so I expect he will bring her. (SMM P4)

These types of situations are no doubt frustrating for a parent and require some flexibility and accommodation on the part of the parish. Some parishes are quite strict about attendance at sessions (a matter that will be explored further in this work), and some parish leaders do not seem to appreciate the challenges parents face like the challenge expressed above. It sounds like this mother is doing the best she can to participate in the sessions when her work schedule allows and to ensure her daughter makes it to the sessions the mother is not able to attend.

3.2.2 The Need for Formation of Catechists

A number of research participants made comments in the interviews that point to the need for the ongoing formation of catechists. Interviewees identified the necessity of both support and formation for parish catechists to ensure they have the tools, experience and foundations necessary to be successful in this ministry.

An important part of the ministry of catechesis is receiving children and families as they are. In their delivery and exchange with families, catechists may come across as condescending

or use terminology and teachings that are foreign to their audience. The catechists and parents of St. Leo Parish were interviewed during the first year of the parish-based process. Two of the parents, a husband and wife, acknowledged that the parish was in the nascent stages of its program but still wished that the catechists were more effective communicators who could relate to parents and young people at their level. In an earlier section of this work, the same couple said they believe Catholic school teachers were more effective communicators in this regard than parish catechists. The parents shared these sentiments:

...it was nice to see it [sacramental preparation] in the school because at least it was taught and gone right through at their [the children's] level... It's not like the two of them [catechists] are doing a bad job by no means, but I found that some of it was over my head... For the kids, if you could just get things to their level. (SL P2 and 3)

When catechists are unable to relate to families, there is a breakdown in communication. These comments underline the importance of a catechist's ability to connect with the recipients of their ministry.

A parent from St. Brigid Parish shared his concerns about the catechists working with his child. The son who has special needs found the material and the process to be challenging. The father explained:

...my son is learning disabled, he's dyslexic. It was more intensive for us because working with new material and language is... much more intensive. So, but it worked... it just meant we had to work with him a little extra. The other thing... my sense about the program was that the instructors... all of them weren't seasoned, so they were kind of feeling their way along, and I noticed the first couple of sessions were quite slow moving, and I know _____ [name of son] felt more involved near the end. I don't know what that means mechanics wise, but it has to really be something that involves the kids and gets them motivated. I don't know what that means in terms of preparation but maybe something in terms of mentoring... I'm not sure. (SB P2)

Catechists require the training and tools necessary to be able to accommodate the special needs of children, and, as this parent points out, some catechists may not be well equipped to meet these needs. Realistically, few catechists would know effective strategies in dealing with special

needs children, unless the catechists had prior experience working with such children in such professions as special education.

A catechist from St. Brigid Parish conveyed her frustration with a lack of direction and vision in their first year of the parish process. As she relays, the catechists from this parish were just “thrown into it” with little or no formation before beginning:

There have been many challenges because I don’t think that we were properly instructed to begin with as to the process of what we would be doing, and I don’t believe there was enough initiation as a group to allow us to work together effectively with the children. I feel that... the first year was really difficult because we were just coming together as a group, and for me the biggest drawback was not having someone in charge, really, because we were a group of six people who had no person to direct us, really, we were doing our own thing... even splitting up the lessons and for me I found that very... frustrating. (SB C2)

This group of catechists would have benefitted from leadership in their catechetical ministry, and better preparation of catechists by those leaders, particularly at the outset of their parish process.

Later in the interview, this catechist continued to share her frustrations at how the process evolved but also highlighted the benefit of formation for catechists. In reflecting on what effect the process had on her, she had the following to say:

It has been both frustration and satisfaction through the process. Well, I feel that I have enriched my faith in this process. I also see so much more that could be done. Personally, I think that it’s really good that we have had some workshops. If we had had that before we started, it would have been very helpful. Personally, I feel we were just thrust into the whole process – here it is, no direction, here’s the manual – the one we have chosen for you. I think if we had been involved in the process of setting it up, that it would be working better than it is. (SB C2)

The workshops she is referring to were offered by the diocesan Office of Faith Formation in May of 2011, to continue to support the catechists in what was, for many of them, the first year of a parish-based process. This catechist’s comments also point out the folly of not involving catechists in the initial planning process.

Bishop Michael Mulhall and I meet regularly, and we often discuss the importance of the formation of catechists. We have had some formation workshops and sessions for them up to this point and plan to have more in the future. The pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish expressed his appreciation of these formation opportunities:

The other thing is I appreciate the efforts the Diocese is doing in having some training for catechists and putting out some support. I think there's some good programs out there, and I think we need some guidance and direction to how to select even good programs that are appropriate for this... age appropriate and things that are realistic and what the expectations are for catechists and parents. (SJB Pas.)

It is most helpful when pastors and catechists can identify what type of formation/workshops suit their needs so the Diocese can offer effective preparatory activities. It is also gratifying to hear that the catechist formation opportunities that have been offered to date by the Diocese are appreciated.

3.2.3 Maintaining Catechists

It was noteworthy that three of the pastors who were interviewed for this work underscored the concern of maintaining good catechists for their respective parish processes. All three identified this as one of the major challenges they faced as pastors in the process.

Some parishes have difficulty finding a sufficient number of quality catechists and enough people who are well suited to serve in other parish ministries. The pastors of St. Leo Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish both felt that finding good catechists was a challenge. The nature of their concerns was somewhat different though. The pastor at St. Leo Parish affirmed that his primary concern was to "... get good catechists." (SL Pas.) It should be noted that this was the first year of the process at St. Leo Parish. St. John the Baptist has had the parish process active for many years now, and the pastor of this parish admitted, "...the current challenge is maintaining good catechists... we're going through a transition time of finding some good

catechists again because some people who have done it over the years have devoted a lot to it, but it's time for them to move onto other ministries too.” (SJB Pas.) From this pastor's comments, I am inferring that he feels there is need for “new life” and “fresh air” in the ministry of catechesis at his parish. The challenge, then, is finding suitable candidates to replace the catechists who are moving on. Yet another task is the ongoing support of parish catechists and their ministry.

Once a parish has established a good catechetical team, supporting catechists in their ministry should then become a focus for parish leaders. The pastor from St. Brigid Parish stated his concern regarding the catechists' abilities to handle the demands that come with their ministry:

...I'm concerned about burning out the catechists because ... they really do work very hard, and I recognize they work very hard. And it's the same core group who are doing both sets of sacraments, so basically it's a commitment they're having from September till May, and so I'm concerned about the level of momentum they are able to maintain. (SB Pas.)

Often it is the same people who commit to a given ministry for long periods of time. It is commendable that this pastor appreciates the work ethic and devotion of the catechists at this parish and is concerned with their well-being. In many parishes, catechist support and recruitment are ongoing challenges.

3.2.4 The Lack of Commitment from Parents and Families

When asked about the challenges they faced in the parish process, over twenty of the participants in my research noted the ongoing complexity of working with families and parents who showed little enthusiasm for the parish process. Their concern illustrates the serious nature of this particular problem with the parish-based process. To help with clarification, the

discussion of this difficulty will be divided into the following subsections: a) attempting to engage families in the process; b) the struggle to be primary educators in the faith; c) parents wanting the school to be responsible for the catechesis; d) the need for parents to be actively involved in the process; e) inviting families to participate in and understand the vision of the initiation process; f) the mystagogical period and beyond; g) and concerned grandparents.

3.2.4.1 Attempting to Engage Families in the Process

There are some families who choose not to be involved once they sense what is required of them in the parish process. The pastor from St. John the Baptist Parish acknowledged that once some parents gain an understanding of what is being asked of them in the catechetical process, they decide not to get involved:

Parents would come and look at this program and basically shake their head and say, 'It's not going to happen,' and we never see them again. They may come to some initial meetings and things, but that's where it's going to end because the concept of being here at Mass, the concept of investing this much into doing things in their home that have to do with prayer and sacramental life... they don't buy into that. (SJB Pas.)

As this pastor has stated, part of the catechetical ministry is calling candidates to a way of life, being mature Christian disciples. This way of life is involvement in and feeling the support of a faith community whose central gathering point is the Sunday Eucharist. Not all families are ready to commit to such a way of life.

In some cases, the lack of commitment is evident not only with the parents but with the children as well. One of the catechists from St. Leo Parish offered the following assessment of the situation when asked about the most significant challenge she faced in the first year of the parish process:

...the biggest challenge seems to be no interest in the role of the parent. The other challenge is the kids don't want to be there and I understand they have other things on... like, the first few classes, there was text messaging going on... and when they were here,

they knew nothing... or they just didn't want to say the Our Father or what I would call the basic things that you learn from a toddler on. That was I think one of the biggest challenges to come to terms with that not everyone is at the same faith level that I am but there are some you think, why are you wasting your time? ...is it because you want to get married in this church? It was difficult... there were a handful of kids who were eager to guess even at the questions and there were some who were just wasting space. (SL C3)

These comments clearly illustrate the frustration that this catechist felt with the group to whom she was ministering – both parents and children. One interesting point from her reflection is the surprise she expresses at many children not knowing the “basic things that you learn from a toddler on” – in regards to faith. We might say that this is indeed a generation that needs to be evangelized before it is catechized. They need to come to know and understand who Jesus is before we can start immersing them in Church teaching about sacramental theology. This catechist admitted she had to “...come to terms with [the fact] that not everyone is at the same faith level that [she was]...” (SL C3)

3.2.4.2 The Struggle of Parents to be Primary Educators in the Faith

It would seem that the role of parents as primary educators in the faith is not always present. In the interview, the pastor of St. Brigid Parish identified the problem that often surfaces around this issue – that of parents not clearly understanding their role as primary educators:

But one of the big things that this process calls for [us as] priests and catechists is really to keep reminding parents as to what they themselves have asked of from the Church... that we are not asking anything more than what they have obligated themselves to by bringing their children there for baptism... It's very tough to use the language around that. It's very tough for people to come to that understanding themselves because they don't have... a deep understanding of the implications of what it means in the time after bringing their children for baptism. (SB Pas.)

As this pastor has identified, it is difficult to get many parents to understand the seriousness of the promises they made at the baptism of their child, especially if this is something that was

never explained to them or explained poorly. And another reality is that some parents do understand these promises.

A catechist from St. Leo Parish presented a beautiful explanation of what it means to be the primary educator in the faith for their child:

When you look at our faith and when you're a parent... I take it more and more seriously that helping our children with their faith life...it's more important even than all of the other basic needs in life. As parents we provide our children with food, clothing and recreation but the message really to parents is their faith formation.... If our children have grown up and we have not nourished that then we have failed them and if you could see on a diagram that it has to be equally important... more important. ...if parents can't commit to come for mass then followed by the session, then they're not ready to make that commitment that mass is part of our Roman Catholic faith... as parents we are the first teachers of the faith and that we really have to take on that role very seriously. We provide all those other things, but it has to take an important first place. (SL C1)

This catechist has a solid comprehension of what is expected from parents in raising their child in the faith. A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish stated that "it's up to the parents as their prime responsibility with us as catechists helping with that process... that's a challenge, to keep them dedicated and to realize how important that is." (SMM C5) A challenge indeed, and this is why those involved in the catechetical ministry have to keep reinforcing the importance of the parental role as primary educator in the faith.

3.2.4.3 Parents Wanting the School to be Responsible for the Catechesis

The "let the school and parish look after the children's faith formation" mentality among parents was identified by catechists in other parishes. A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish relayed that their foremost difficulty was getting parents to commit to the process:

[The] Number one [challenge] is getting the parents involved... they really felt that it was the schools or church or somebody else was supposed to do it [catechesis]. That was the big issue in the beginning. And then the other thing was we found for the attendance ... I think it was ten sessions we would do... I do not know the percentage of kids that would come for the ten sessions but it certainly wasn't 80%. It wasn't 80% for sure. But I don't know the numbers. I didn't keep track that way. (SJB C5)

Parents are certainly forced to prioritize and make a choice between Sunday Eucharist preceded by catechetical sessions and other activities.

Some of the quandary over some parents' attitude has to do with past experiences with sacramental preparation in the schools. As one of the catechists from St. Mary Magdalene Parish pointed out, "I think one of the drawbacks is to get the parents to understand what their involvement is because for so many years the school has done it... just exactly what they say: 'Why do we have to become involved?'" (SMM C4) It was interesting to note the following comment from one of the children at St. Leo Parish: "About half our class isn't doing it [the parish catechesis] because they don't want to make a commitment, so they'd rather do it during school." (SL Child.)

3.2.4.4 The Need for Parents to be Actively Involved in the Process

Many interviewees recognized the importance of parent involvement in the process. At St. Brigid Parish, the dilemma of the lack of parent participation was identified by a catechist through her explanation of how the process was set up:

Dealing with the confirmation class, the children were dropped off for their lessons for the class, and then the parents would pick them up for mass. Some of them did, some of them didn't. Personally, I never got to know any of the parents... We really need to involve the parents more in the process... it's not good enough to give them a manual and say, OK we're working on a lesson, and your parents are going to go over it with you this week and so forth. (SB C2)

This catechist's observations are quite insightful. She recognizes the folly in not having the parents more involved in the sacramental initiation process. Looking back on her experiences, this catechist is also very aware of the value of being welcoming to parents and families, inviting them into the participatory life of the Church. As she admits, there are often no easy answers to

some of these challenges, but beginning with the right attitude and process is the correct approach.

3.2.4.5 Inviting Families to Understand and Participate in the Vision of the Process

The initiation process is certainly more significant than any program since the process embodies the vision of the Church. In initiating candidates, the Church aims at helping them become disciples of Christ and inviting them to participate in their local faith community and the life of the Church. A catechist from St. Monica Parish identified the challenge of working with families who have little involvement with the parish. But in the same breath, she gave a glimpse of the type of initiation process that the Church's vision calls for:

I guess the biggest challenge is working with children whose families feel that they have to be confirmed, but they have no involvement in any way with church or anything spiritual, so you've got those kids who are just there because they have to be there... they were told that... if you ever want to get married, you have to get confirmed or whatever... and for some of them, there's no development of their own spirituality coming into it, and even for their confirmation program there was not much that they left with I felt. But now we're trying to look at it more from the RCIA process where it's a process rather than instruction... listing the gifts [of the Holy Spirit] and all that stuff... we mention them, but it's not a matter of memorizing or doing homework type work. It's more of trying to touch their hearts... one of the good results is that in the evaluation with the parents, a few of them did indicate that they were thinking of coming back to the church so that really worked. It's encouraging for us. (SM C2)

Making the catechetical process into an academic exercise, rather than a faith experience is a challenge that will be further explored later in this work. These comments seem to point to an evolution in the way the catechetical sessions are offered in this parish unit. From these comments, it appears the process has moved from a program-based activity to a process that attempts to meet families as they are (“touching their hearts...”) and inviting them into the life of the faith community.

3.2.4.6 The Mystagogical Period and Beyond

A huge challenge for all involved in this ministry is dealing with families who seem to simply want the celebration of the sacrament but not much beyond that. The research participants were asked if they believed families had been changed as part of the parish process. A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish offered the following response:

To be honest, I haven't really seen that much change. The families who are strong supporters are there at the meetings. And the families that are not that strong seem to be going through the process to get it done, then they move on. You do see a lot of these latter families in the church around the time the sacrament is given, and then after that, they seem to disappear back into the woodwork. I don't know if the process is that effective. There seems to be a lot of people doing it just to get the rubber stamp and just moving on. (SJB C3)

The "I just want my kid done" mentality²⁷⁷ is certainly apparent in parishes, and this concern was voiced by thirteen catechists in the interviews.

Many of the research participants identified the difficulty of maintaining family participation in parish life after the sacraments are celebrated. To some, it is a great mystery why so many families decide not to stay connected to the parish and participate in the Sunday Eucharist once their children have celebrated the sacraments. A catechist from St. Monica Parish identified this phenomenon as the most significant difficulty she has experienced in her ministry as a parish catechist:

Getting people out, the time... it's consistent commitment... I feel that once they have had their sacraments, we rarely see them again... it's my personal heartache – people not following through with the preparation of their sacraments. It's something that they know in their hearts and minds that they need to do, but they get involved in the quick pace of life, and it's hard for them to see the importance of cutting out some time to stay committed to all of the preparation of the sacraments... we have to place the times of the sacraments strategically so we don't impede too much in the extracurricular activities of

²⁷⁷ I have often heard catechists and pastors describe the attitude of many parents as the "I just want my kid done." This describes a certain mentality. By this, they mean that some parents seem to want the celebration of the sacrament for their child but are not enthusiastic or often willing to engage in an initiation process that calls them to participate not only in the catechesis but in the life of the faith community centred around the Sunday Eucharist both during the catechetical process and after the sacraments are celebrated.

the family. They just don't see that it is a screaming importance as other things in their lives. (SM C3)

When one considers the amount of time, effort and love many catechists devote to the initiation ministry, it is not surprising that they feel deeply the disappointment that this catechist names as “heartache” when families become disengaged after the sacraments are celebrated.

In answering another question, this same catechist continued to reflect on the challenge of the noticeable absence of many families in parishes, following the celebration of sacraments:

Well, they [families] come out in big, big numbers when it's time for the sacrament which is wonderful. There are all these families and their extended families, and the church is full and packed, and it's beautiful and the days leading up to that is (sic) beautiful... we have a lot of attendance and participation and lots of joy, but the Sunday after and all of the Sundays after that, we don't see hide nor hair of any of them... because of the scheduling perhaps, but that's for me the one million dollar question. I know in some communities it's always full and in our community, it's not the case, so I don't know what the reasoning [is] for that. (SM C3)

The pain in this catechist's description of the situation is palpable. She points to other communities of faith where many families seem to continue to be engaged in post sacramental celebrations. Interestingly, sociologist Reginald Bibby cites General Social Survey data from Statistics Canada in 2010 illustrate that “...a majority of Canadians both engage in personal religious and spiritual practices as well as view related religious and spiritual beliefs as important to the way they live.”²⁷⁸ Specifically, 41% reported they have engaged in personal religious practices or spiritual activities weekly, 9% monthly, 11% a few yearly and 4% yearly.²⁷⁹ When asked about the importance of religious or spiritual beliefs to the way you live your life, 34% said “very”, 31% said “some” and 17% said “not very”.²⁸⁰ These are remarkable points considering many families choose to disengage from the parish after the sacraments are

²⁷⁸ Reginald W. Bibby, *A New Day – The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada*, (Lethbridge, Alberta: Project Canada Books, 2012), 17.

²⁷⁹ Bibby, *A New Day*, 17.

²⁸⁰ Bibby, *A New Day*, 17.

celebrated. A valid question, then, is to ask why so many families are disengaged if, according to Bibby's research, a high number of people have indicated they have a spiritual hunger.

Defining "spiritual hunger" is difficult as Reginald Bibby explains that the meaning of this term is vague:

When we have asked Canadians, "What do you mean by spirituality?" about the best our coders have been able to do is to classify the responses into "conventional" and "less conventional" categories, and then add subcategories. The first refers to expressions of spirituality that have fairly traditional religious connotations. The second refers to – well, essentially everything else. What stands out about the "less conventional" responses is how subjective and individualistic they tend to be. One searches largely in vain for threads of commonality.²⁸¹

Taking Bibby's explanation into account, one could assume that some people could be searching for more conventional forms of spirituality and others for less conventional types of spirituality.

Forms of conventional spirituality listed by Bibby are "...living in fellowship with Christ... believing in God and the Bible... that God is there for us, hears our prayers and answers them... need God's spirit to guide, protect and support me in good times and bad... building a personal relation with Jesus Christ... nourishing our souls so we can be closer to God..."²⁸² Less conventional forms of spirituality that Bibby gleaned from participants in his study include the following: "...a matter relating to our inner-self and soul... peace of mind... a feeling of oneness with the earth and with all that is in me... the existence of an immortal soul that has to be cared for... positive thinking and excitement... appreciation for the beauty of nature... the love of family and friends... inner awareness..."²⁸³

²⁸¹ Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back – Religion's Demise and Rise and Why it Matters*, (Lethbridge, Alberta: Project Canada Books, 2011), 120.

²⁸² Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 120.

²⁸³ Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 120.

In many cases, the children are open to continued participation in parish life, but it is the parents who need convincing. As a catechist from St. Monica Parish pointed out, “It’s the parents you have to reach, the children are already there... the children are so good.” (SM C1) No doubt much work is put into the sacramental initiation process leading up to the celebration of the sacraments, but how much planning is put into the time that follows?

Another catechist from St. Monica Parish outlined the importance of this mystagogical period that follows the catechesis:

The thing that is important is the follow up. If we just have the program, and then the children are confirmed or make their first communion, and then you don’t get in touch with them after that, they might start with some enthusiasm but if nothing happens after that, it peters out, so I think that that is one of the biggest things that we’re lacking, is the follow-up. Some kind of... I don’t want to call it a program, but something that will bring them back... family events or some events that you can plan or organize to have them come back on a regular basis... these parents, they need something that’s more church oriented, whether it’s a fundraiser or something that we can bring the confirmation class parents together again or the first communion class or all of them... so that’s something we have to think on. (SM C2)

This catechist’s comments are insightful. How indeed might parishes maintain the joy and engagement that often comes with participation in the catechetical sessions and the celebration of the sacraments? When the catechetical sessions end and there is, as this catechist says, no follow-up, the mistaken impression might be given that after the sacrament is celebrated, nothing more is expected of the candidate and their family regarding engaging with the faith community and gathering around the Sunday Eucharistic table. Families need to be invited into the ongoing life of the worshipping community.

3.2.4.7 Concerned Grandparents

I would like to make a final note in this subsection concerning several of the research participants who identified themselves as “concerned grandparents.” Some of them were

catechists, and some of them were interviewed as “parents” because they were the adults who were bringing their grandchildren to the catechetical sessions. It is due to the lack of commitment by parents that so many grandparents are concerned for the faith formation of their grandchildren and thus are choosing to take an active role in this formation. On the positive side, the grandparents have a commitment and a lived understanding of the faith tradition that makes their contribution valuable. This is an occurrence we are seeing more and more, and it would certainly be a solid topic for another thesis. However, I want to comment on the participants who raised the issue or identified themselves as grandparent and the primary educator in the faith for their grandchild.

During the interviews, I asked all of the catechists how they came to be involved in the ministry of catechesis. A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish shared that her entry into the catechetical ministry came out of a concern for her grandchildren and their faith formation:

I approached _____ [name of parish catechist coordinator] because I was concerned about my grandchild at that time. This is kind of personal, but it’s the truth... I was concerned that my son is not really a churchgoer, and I wanted to make sure that the little ones would be brought up in a Catholic Church and that they would be prepared for first reconciliation and first communion, and I thought that if I became a catechist or if I could help in some way, that I could help guide my grandchildren and that would help them go back to church and possibly simply receive first reconciliation and communion. (SMM C5)

Disappointment in her son’s lack of commitment as the primary educator in the faith to his child transformed into an opportunity for this catechist to offer her gifts to the catechetical ministry, hoping to be able to mentor her own grandchildren in the faith.

For many grandparents, it is painful to see their grandchildren not being mentored in the faith in the same way they mentored their own children. During the interview, a catechist from St. Brigid Parish revealed her disappointment in her children’s lack of faith practice:

...neither of my children go to church on a regular basis, and that is kind of disheartening for me as a mother and grandmother, who also observed my granddaughter who is now sixteen coming through the school system, making her first communion, confirmation... she lives with her mother... my son is separated from her so, like I see all of the struggles there and church again has gone by the wayside. (SB C2)

It is often said that parents want what is best for their children, and perhaps the same can be said for grandparents. Many grandparents simply want their grandchildren to have the opportunity to practice their faith, and to be formed in their faith and to experience the joy the grandparents themselves feel in actively journeying in their faith.

A catechist from St. Monica parish spoke of a grandmother who is taking the place of the parents in the catechetical sessions. She referred to this woman as "...a grandmother, and she's raising her grandchildren, and she's very moved by all this [parish catechesis], and you can see it's serious for her." (SM C1) Many grandparents are willing and able to make the commitment of accompanying their grandchildren on the sacramental initiation journey. A grandparent who was interviewed for the role of "parent" shared how she was bringing her grandchildren to church and accompanying them on the sacramental journey because the parents have no interest in this and the children are with the grandparents at mass every Sunday. (SM P1)

3.2.5 The Loss: Children who are Not Able to be Involved in the Parish Process

Six of the participants regretted the fact that many children were not involved in the parish process but could be. When parents bring children who want to participate in the sacramental initiation process, the parish should be ready to work with them. However, when the parents do not bring the children to the parish, there is not much that can be done. The choice is ultimately the parents'. However, this does not diminish the fact that many children would choose to be engaged if they were given the chance. A parent from St. Leo Parish

expressed her concern for children who want to be involved in the parish sacramental process but do not have the chance because their parents are not interested in engaging in the process:

... [In] my son's class there are a few of them [children] that aren't making their confirmation..., and I understand that's a choice thing and I'm not judging them, but I feel bad for some of the kids because some of them want to be confirmed, but the parents aren't bringing them. The parents say, 'I don't want to go to church' and 'I don't want to give up my Sunday'... sometimes I feel like we're closing the door of the Church for that child... So, if the parents aren't going to bring them, he has no way of getting here... That's my only negative thing... I understand it's a parent's responsibility, but sometimes kids are parenting themselves, and these kids lose out, and we end up losing these kids.
(SL P1)

This mother feels genuine concern for the children she described. She also expresses a tone of frustration that some children may not have the opportunity to participate in the initiation process because of the disengagement of their parents in the life of the parish centered on the Sunday Eucharist. This issue of some children not being involved in the process will be discussed further in the next section. Other participants in my research expressed their dismay at the absence of so many children in the parish process.

A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish, in comparing the Catholic school experience to the parish-based catechesis, stated, "...I love the idea of the parents having the responsibility [for involvement in the parish process], but I feel badly that all children don't have access to it because of the parents for whatever reason." (SJB C5) This parish communicates with families by announcements at Mass, and through the parish bulletin, bulletin boards and website. So, in essence, the only families who know about the catechesis are the ones regularly participating in Sunday Eucharist or who are informed by someone regularly participating in Sunday Eucharist. As the pastor from St. Brigid Parish noted, "...we're going to definitely have children who go through our entire [school] system without receiving the sacraments... that's a decision that those parents have made." (SB Pas.) In the interview, the same catechist also refers to the

particular problem for families in her area who are confused because the other parish across town “...does it all at the school, so why isn’t it consistent there?” (SJB C and P) The challenge of inconsistency among parishes will be introduced later in this work.

A parent from St. Mary Magdalene Parish mused about the numbers of children involved in the parish process and wondered about the many children who are not. Here are her thoughts on this phenomenon:

...the only other thing I want to add is when I see numbers of children making their first communion, and there might be ten, maybe right now parents aren’t involved in their kids’ lives, and maybe they aren’t bringing them to church, but I feel bad for the children who don’t get to experience that because when they’re twenty-five, are they really going to come back and make all those steps that it takes to get into full communion with the Church? Whereas if they are exposed to it now, then they might make that decision when they are older and able. (SMM P4)

This catechist is certainly concerned with numbers and suggests that a process involving families who are not regular participants in the life of the parish would be a good idea. The concern with numbers is an issue that will be explored in the next section.

3.2.6 The Limited Number of Children Involved in the Parish Catechetical Process

Several of the participants in my interviews made comments related to the number of children who are involved in the parish sacramental initiation process. Reports from various parishes over the years indicate that the number of children participating in this parish process is lower, at times significantly lower, than the number of children who were part of a previous Catholic school-based process. For some of the people I interviewed, the number of children involved was a concern while others admitted that it was not a concern for them.

Two pastors stated that low numbers in the initiation process was not a point of anxiety with them. The pastor of St. Leo Parish was quite clear that low numbers did not bother him:

... I'm happy within myself which didn't totally surprise me that numbers didn't concern me and that this year there are eight children for first communion... we're a city parish, it's a good sized parish, but I don't care about numbers. No doors have been closed, everyone is welcome. I'm happy I feel that way... I'm comfortable with it. (SL Pas)

The children whom I interviewed from this parish also noted that "...half of our [school] class is in confirmation [catechetical sessions]..." (SL Child.) When I met with pastors and catechists in the spring of 2010, I shared with them the likelihood that they could expect lower numbers in the parish-based process. Also, since some parishes had already established a parish-based process for some years, it was even more evident that lower numbers of children involved in the process was a probable outcome.

The pastor of St. Brigid Parish also indicated that he was not concerned with numbers and offered the following comments around this challenge:

Certainly the first year the numbers were lower. But this year the numbers are back to what they were. The word has gotten out. The first year in the whole transition to this process, there were some people that were not thrilled. They had to make a choice between in some cases sacramental preparation or sports activities; some of them chose sports activities or other events. This year we're back to the same level, numbers we had a couple of years ago. Interestingly enough in the parish next door, this is their first year and they too are experiencing very low numbers. (SB Pas.)

Not all parishes would see their numbers rebound to what they were when the school looked after the catechesis but this parish did. However, not everyone is unconcerned with numbers.

Three catechists, all from St. John the Baptist Parish, made mention of how the low numbers of children involved in the parish process bothered them. One of the catechists mentioned, "We don't get 100% of the children even coming or even remotely interested in coming [to the catechetical sessions]." (SJB C5) Another catechist from the same parish was

dismayed with the low numbers in the parish process and challenged the Diocese to take this concern seriously:

...two year ago, I was a catechist for my son who was in grade six. He had thirty-three people in the classroom and only six of his classmates received the sacrament of confirmation. There's twenty-seven lost sheep there and I don't know if they'll ever be found again. And to me, that's a concern – a big concern. And again I think it's a piece that the Diocese or Church is missing out on. (SJB C3)

The third catechist lamented what she perceived to be low numbers of children involved in the parish process as she mused, “This year the first communions, how many was there in a group? There might have been I don't know how many families...not near enough, not near enough children that are in the school.” (SJB C and P) She continued her comparison of the number of children in the parish process to the number of children in a certain grade at the school: “...and I think the _____ [name of other local parish that did not have a parish based process] way has a lot more children doing it because it's the school and as a church community.” (SJB C and P). This catechist and parent believes that if children who are at a certain age or grade in school are not involved in the parish sacramental initiation process, there is something wrong.

3.2.7 The Parish Becoming a Solely Didactic Educational Experience in the Process

The catechetical environment that is set up and the language we use to describe what we do are significant factors in fashioning an understanding and creating a vision of the sacramental initiation process. Many of the research participants, when describing or speaking about the parish process at their respective parishes, used descriptors that gave the impression that the catechesis was presented in a classroom-like environment where religious instruction and information sharing occur void of many catechetical experiences. It appears that in some

instances, the catechetical sessions resembled such a setting – particularly in one parish involved in this study.

The initiation process is not meant to be simply an academic exercise but rather a faith experience. The process calls for faith sharing and faith witnessing rather than a solely didactic approach. A catechist from St. John the Baptist parish offered some advice concerning the instructional nature that sometimes evolves in the catechetical process: “If you want to engage families, you don’t ‘put them back in school.’ If someone’s had negative experiences, you don’t take them and memorize saints’ names – they hate that. That’s not going to engage the parents.” (SJB C4) This particular catechist should know school environment and teaching methodologies, since she also identified herself as a Catholic school principal. In modern classrooms, usually numerous teaching methods are utilized and there are many cases of good catechesis that occur in classroom contexts. The catechumenal model offers more than an academic experience.

The parish process at St. Brigid Parish consisted of a number of catechetical sessions where children were dropped off by their parents. Comments from a parent and from a catechist point to a program and a mainly academic environment rather than a process for the catechetical sessions. In describing the challenges he faced as a parent in the process, one father said, “...the only challenges I think were working with my son on his homework, just making sure that we put in the extra time to fulfill the obligations of a program.” (SB P2) It is possible that parents are simply used to using this type of language from their experience with schools. However, this father’s comments point to the probability that the catechetical sessions were set up like a classroom where the catechists led the children through a program and assigned “homework.” Remarks from a catechist at the same parish reinforced my assessment that the catechetical

environment was school-like in character: “Dealing with the confirmation class, the children were dropped off for their lessons for the class and then the parents would pick them up for mass. Some of them did, some of them didn’t. Personally, I never got to know any of the parents.” (SB C2) Words like “class” and “lessons” certainly denote a school-like structure.

Many research participants made reference to “homework” that was part of the parish catechetical process. One mother mentioned working on her daughter’s homework with her between catechetical sessions. (SMM P4) A catechist from the same parish gave the following response to the question of what the most significant challenges have been for her in this ministry:

That’s easy – getting the kids to do their homework. I’m doing confirmation now and because they are older students... to them, they just feel it’s more homework, and it’s getting them to do it. As long as we have time in class, we’ll work with them and get it done, but if they’re left to do it on their own, and it seems the longer the time in between the classes, the less they do. They just forget about it, but that’s the biggest challenge. (SMM C3)

The children from this parish were asked what they found hardest about their time getting ready to make their First Reconciliation and First Communion. One of the children shared that “...it was a lot of reading... you always had to do a ton of reading and quite a bit of work too.” (SMM Child.) This comment suggests a school-like setting where homework and assignment expectations would be a part of a regular classroom experience. A catechist mentioned that during the sessions, “...we grab their [children’s] books and mark their books...” since the children “...have exercises in their book that must be completed.” (SMM C5) From these comments, it appears that “homework” from the program was a significant part of the catechetical sessions at St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

Another catechist from the parish offered the following description of what the catechetical process involves:

One of the things we do in confirmation is give homework, and the parents have to sign the homework sheet that says I looked at all of that stuff, and they'll sign it. Now, we've come across that stuff and in some cases, people blindly sign it. And you ask people, did you actually check it to make sure, and they say, 'no, we just signed it'. (SMM C1)

These statements further illustrate the importance placed on "homework" and the catechetical program in this process at St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

It should be stated that several of the parents commented on how they enjoyed the parish process or how their children looked forward to the "classes." However, one of the parents, who also identified herself as a parish catechist, was critical of the process, feeling that it was not child-oriented and was too much like school:

I would like to see the process change a little bit to get more kid friendly. I find we throw so much information at them... they're young people, and it's overwhelming. And, as a catechist, we're pushing this information because we know it won't get covered at home probably... the odds are. We give them so much, and I would like to make it more fun or more kid friendly in a sense. I don't know how you can because you are in such a tight time frame to cover so much material. But that's what I feel as a parent and as a catechist. (SMM P1).

The question, then, must be asked – how well is this approach working, according to this parent's summation? Later in the interview, she added the following comments: "At our group meetings it's just the catechist going through the book... let's get going and get this done, and I would like to see more time for group discussion... less formal time and more creative time." (SMM P1) Suffice to say that many of these comments from this parish's parents and catechists point to the prominence of the program and "homework" in this parish process. Another difficulty identified in the interviews was the limited involvement of the faith community in the catechetical process.

3.2.8 The Lack of Involvement of the Faith Community in the Process

Each catechist and pastor was asked the following question in the interview: “What role has the faith community played in this process of the sacramental initiation of children?” (see Appendix 3 – Interview Questions). I was surprised at the number of people who did not have an answer to this question, or who couldn’t think of a concrete way in which the faith community was a part of the process, or who said the role of the faith community was minimal. This is not to say that the faith communities were not involved, but if they were, it wasn’t apparent to many of those interviewed.

One of the catechists at St. Brigid Parish reflected on the role of the faith community in the parish initiation process in this way:

I would say it has played a minor role. I think that is one of the things that we have to work on – is getting the faith community more involved. Basically, they knew that we were there preparing the children because we had some comments about them seeing us in the basement with the children and we did involve members of the community with praying for the children before their confirmation and before them receiving first communion, but really, apart from that, I don’t think there was that much involvement. (SB C2)

None of the research participants offered a lengthy explanation of how the faith community was involved in the initiation process. Perhaps this was because, in some cases, there wasn’t much to say. However, some of the participants were able to point to instances where they believed members of the faith community were engaged with the catechetical process.

Some parishioners acted as prayer partners during the process. Groups such as the Knights of Columbus and Catholic Women’s League gave gifts to children at the celebration of the sacraments. Parishioners were present at Sunday liturgies where there was a commitment/enrollment ceremony where the children stand in front of the assembly and are publicly acknowledged as being involved in the parish initiation process. At some parishes, parishioners prayed with the children and for the children at Mass. And, in every parish of

course, parishioners volunteered to serve as catechists. These are all effective ways in which the faith community can accompany, support and celebrate the children during the process.

3.2.9 Inconsistencies Among Parishes

Some of the research participants referred to the challenge of parishes not being consistent in offering a parish-based process for the sacramental initiation of children. At the time the *Diocesan Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children* (see Appendix 1) was promulgated at Pentecost of 2009, only one parish in the Renfrew Zone, one parish in the Pembroke Zone and two parishes in the Barry's Bay Zone of the Diocese had a solely parish-based process. As stated earlier, the parishes of the Mattawa Zone and Pontiac Zone had long established parish-based processes for some years. A letter from Most Reverend Michael Mulhall, Bishop of Pembroke, was printed on the inside cover of the *Policy*. The letter stated, in part, that "It is the intention of the Diocese of Pembroke that this policy be integrated into the life of the parish in the coming year."²⁸⁴ Although this intention was clearly stated, a number of people made comments to me that they were doubtful all pastors and parishes would initiate a parish-based process in the near future.

Regarding the most significant challenges involved in the parish initiation process, the pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish offered the following response:

Getting parents' cooperation is a big challenge because sometimes they look around at other parishes... they come from other parishes and say this isn't happening in our parish, nobody told us we had to do this... we send our kids to a Catholic school, and we presume the school is going to teach the children, and so you don't get the cooperation from parents because of their past, and they themselves didn't go through this process, and they don't feel they should have to do it, so it's a difficult thing to get parents on board. (SMM Pas.)

²⁸⁴ *Policy*, p. 2.

A discrepancy in the initiation process among parishes is one problem and the need for a shift in orientation is a second problem pinpointed by this priest. For parents to make this shift, they must realize and accept that the present norm of the initiation process for children is a parish-based process in which they are to play an active role. The parish-based model likely differs from the school-based model that families may have previously experienced. The situation is particularly difficult when there are two different models of initiation in the same town.

For many years, St. John the Baptist Parish has offered a parish-based process for the sacramental initiation of children while the parish on the other side of town has had a model where most of the catechesis was done by teachers in a Catholic school. This difference in models has, over time, created some divisions and conflicts between the parishes, pastors and parishioners of the two parishes. A parent from St. John the Baptist Parish described the process at his parish as "...a learning experience for the parents instead of the other parish where parents aren't involved...", and he concluded, "we're learning as the children go along through it too." (SJB P2)

And yet, not all parents at St. John the Baptist Parish believe the parish process is the best process. A parent and catechist questioned the inconsistency between the parish processes and the effectiveness of the parish process at St. John the Baptist:

It's always on my mind, why is it so different between parishes, between the schools... I don't understand... they obviously make time for it at _____ [name of other parochial school]... why can't we here?... I'm not sure. In one aspect I can see how it brings the families together within the Church and that sort of thing, but to me I think it does chase a lot of families that way over towards _____ [name of other parish] for whatever reason. (SJB P and C)

People who question the existence of two different models of initiation at parishes in the same town are voicing their confusion as well as their concern.

3.2.10 Mass “Attendance” and “Passports”

Earlier in this work, reference is made to the problem with the language that is used around the ministry of the sacramental initiation of children. How we name and describe something often gives it an associative or connotative nuance. At times, the words we use to name something can distort the intended meaning. Speaking about the initiation ministry and the importance of participation in the Sunday Eucharist, some people refer to “mass attendance.” Perhaps they mean full, active and conscious participation in the Sunday Eucharist, but the word “attendance” can alter this sense. Saying “mass attendance” gives the impression that the concern is simply with showing up. However, the Eucharist calls us to much more than just being there – we are called to full, active and conscious participation in the Liturgy. It was interesting to discover that several participants in my research at St. Mary Magdalene Parish referred to “mass attendance” and “passports” in their interviews. This is the same parish where the catechetical sessions were most didactic according to the comments of the people involved whom I interviewed.

I asked catechists if their parish has been changed as a result of the parish-based sacramental initiation of children process. A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish gave the following answer to this question:

I’ve noticed that more people are attending church... so, I guess it’s helping because it’s got them [families] started coming back. It’s bringing parents back to the church because they’ve been bringing their children because it’s mandatory... your children must attend mass, or you can’t receive the sacraments... we’ve seen some parents drop the kids off for an hour and then pick them up, but it has brought more adults back to the church.
(SMM C3)

It appears from these comments that more families at this point are attending the Sunday Eucharist but the important question to consider is this: are they engaged in other aspects in the

life of the faith community and in the Eucharistic liturgy as a result of the parish initiation process?

A practice in some parishes is the issuing of a “passport” to children and families who are involved in the parish sacramental initiation process. Several of my research participants from St. Mary Magdalene Parish referred to these passports, and so I asked one of the parents to explain to me what passports were. The parent provided an explanation as to what a passport was in this context:

He [her son] has to have it stamped when he goes to mass. So, if he goes to mass anywhere else, he has to have it stamped. It forces him to be accountable... it's not saying I'm going to confirm your child but he's not going to mass. And I support it 100%. There are situations that arise, but it's not a problem. There's too many parents who want their child to celebrate the sacraments, but they never darken the door of the church, and I don't agree with that either. (SMM P3)

In the parishes where the passport is used, the child must have the document stamped by a priest or catechist after participating in a weekly Sunday Eucharist to indicate their presence at the celebration. This process is usually followed during the time of the catechetical sessions leading up to the celebration of the sacrament. If a child is at another parish for the Eucharistic celebration, he or she is asked to have the other pastor sign the passport. Some pastors do not agree with this process and as such refuse to sign a passport.

In her comments above, this mother states her approval of using passports, since many parents want the celebration of the sacrament but do not choose to be involved in the Sunday liturgy or perhaps other events in the faith community. This is a valid point. It must be noted that not all parents whom I interviewed at St. Mary Magdalene Parish complained about the use of the passports. Some mentioned the process without saying how they felt about it.

Catechists were asked if they believed families had changed as a result of participation in the parish sacramental initiation process. One of the catechists pointed to the use of the passports and the process involved:

... she [name of catechist] stamps their card when they attend Mass. She identifies the number of times that they come to Mass, and it's important for them to attend Mass in order for them to receive their first reconciliation and their first communion. And that might be a challenge for some families, so that may be a change there if they've never attended or there's been sporadic [participation]... then all of a sudden, they are made to go... not just the parents but the children as well... It's important for the mother and/or father to be there for the child... After the first reconciliation and first communion, the question is, will they still be attending? And I think that's a primary concern, a major concern for all of us. But, we can only do what we can do. It's their obligation as parents to keep bringing their children to mass. (SMM C5)

In these comments we again see the use of the word “attend” when it comes to participation in the Sunday Eucharist Liturgy. It is vital for families to be present at the Sunday Eucharistic, but it is more important if families are fully participating in the celebration.

I asked the children from this parish the following question: “What did you find the hardest about getting ready to make your First Communion and First Reconciliation?” (see Appendix 3). One of the children responded by saying, “We had that little passport thing and you had to get it stamped every week and you have to go to church every week and stuff and get your homework done.” (SMM Child.)

The parents of these children were present during my interviews with the children and listened to their answers. Following the interviews with the children, I interviewed one of the mothers who wanted to share her feelings about the passport process. She questioned the effectiveness of the passport process and her displeasure with the practice was clear:

At my age, I feel my faith is being questioned. Now they have the contracts [passports] of going to Mass every Sunday. We were diligent in going to Mass every Sunday and I hear it through the kids that it seems like... the trust is not there with the parish and the kids... the ones who do go regularly or almost every week, they will continue to do that... their stepping stones have already been established. It might bring some of the

ones who don't go to mass often... back but over the last number of years, I haven't seen it, so I don't think that works... I know as a parent and as a catechist from past experience that that's not the solution... I find it's like I'm back in grade school too and my father's watching... I have to go to mass every Sunday sort of thing and sometimes there are circumstances in this day and age... sometimes our lives are so busy we don't take the time [to participate in the weekly Sunday Eucharist]... (SMM P and C)

The passport process has made this mother and catechist to feel resentment toward the parish and the process. Not only is she offended by the expectation that her family have a passport stamped when they are already participating in the Sunday Eucharist, she feels that if the goal is to gain the participation of more families in the Sunday Eucharist, then the goal is not being achieved. Her sentiments seem to suggest a rather condescending tone on the part of the parish with regards to passports and perhaps can be construed as contributing to the infantilization of the laity.²⁸⁵ At least one other parish has adopted a process that uses passports.

In September of 2011, a catechist at St. Leo Parish shared with me some materials he was preparing for the upcoming initiation ministry. Included in these materials was a copy of a passport he had created for use in the upcoming pastoral year. A copy of this passport can be found in Appendix 2 of this thesis work. The following statements caught my attention:

The bearer of this passport is responsible for attending Mass every weekend for the days marked on the pages herein and getting it signed by the priest celebrant of that Mass.

On Sundays when formal confirmation sessions take place after Mass at _____ [name of parish], the bearer will present his/her passport to the catechist to be stamped "Confirmed" for each completed Sunday since the last session.

A completed Sunday in the passport includes the presiding priest's signature for the Mass plus a brief personal reflection on the liturgy by the bearer.

Failure to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation is a mortal sin and thus requires the sacrament of confession before receiving Holy Communion.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Paul Lakeland, *Catholicism at the Crossroads – How the Laity Can Save the Church* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2007), 7-10.

²⁸⁶ See Appendix 1 – Passport at St. Leo Parish

After reading these statements, I thought about it and made some notes and then I felt that it was my responsibility as the Diocesan Director of Faith Formation to return this catechist's email and outline my concerns with this material.

The concerns I had with this passport draft were numerous. Firstly, was the pastor aware of this passport the catechist wanted to give to the families and did he support it? Secondly, is demanding mass "attendance" a helpful approach? Is an attendance check all that we are asking of the families - to show up for the liturgy? Third, is it prudent to ask children to give a written reflection of each liturgy and what purpose is behind this? Fourth, what does this indicate regarding calling the families to participation in the liturgy after the sacrament is celebrated? Fifth, several pastors at other parishes refuse to sign such passports and this would put children and families in an awkward position. Six, there is much controversy associated with this passport process and many feel that it is not effective – meaning that it is doubtful whether the passport practice results in families being actively involved in the Sunday Eucharist and in the life of the parish after the sacraments are celebrated. Seven, mortal sin is a theological concept that not all people would understand. I questioned whether not attending Sunday Mass was a mortal sin and that according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in such instances, the conditions of committing a mortal sin may be absent – namely the object of the sin being a grave matter and the sin being committed with "full knowledge and deliberate consent."²⁸⁷ Also, the problem with telling children they committed a mortal sin by not attending Mass is problematic when it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure their children are participating in the Sunday Eucharist. In essence, we don't want to punish the child for the apparent neglect of the parents.

The catechist responded to my concerns by saying that the pastor was indeed aware and supportive of the passport. He had read my concerns but felt he was obligated to "teach the

²⁸⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1857

truth” to the parents and children he was entrusted to work with, in the initiation ministry. To my knowledge, the passport process was used that year at St. Leo Parish but I have no data to illustrate how the practice unfolded or how it was received by the families at the parish.

3.3 Transformation Through a Parish-Based Process of the Sacramental Initiation of Children

A central question in both my hypothesis and the analysis of my research is what transformation has taken place as a result of participation in the parish-based initiation process? I hope to find evidence that adopting a catechumenal model of the sacramental initiation of children can enable full, active and conscious participation of young families in the life and mission of the Church. Realizing the adoption of this parish-based process moving toward the catechumenal model can make it possible for families and parishes to be transformed in the process. By transformation, I am referring to any changes as a result of the process.²⁸⁸ Is anything different in the lives of families, catechetical leaders and the parish overall because of a parish initiation process? In this section, I will focus on the following: transformation of families, transformation of catechists and pastors and transformation of the parish.

One of the difficulties in assessing transformation has to do with the issue of parishes adopting a catechumenal model. It has been my experience and observation that some parish processes of the sacramental initiation of children are missing a number of the features of the catechumenal process and the movement toward the catechumenal model is not consistent. However, as these parish initiation processes evolve over time, more characteristics of the catechumenal model begin to appear. Several parishes presently have a process with

²⁸⁸ See the first part of the introductory section of this thesis project, *The Project*, for further explanation of what I mean by “transformation.”

characteristics that are not in keeping with the catechumenal model. The process is problematic when it is set up like a school, using grades and ages to determine readiness to begin involvement in the process. Parents and sponsors/mentors have negligible roles. Often there is no “follow-up” or mystagogical time for reflection after the sacrament is celebrated. Catechists focus their efforts on a sacramental preparation program rather than a full process of initiation moving toward the catechumenal model in which they actively accompany families and act as witnesses to the faith. Candidates and their families are not invited into participation in the Sunday Eucharist or the life of the faith community during the catechetical process or after the sacraments are celebrated.

Some of the participants in my research were from parishes that were in the first or second year of the parish process and thus felt it was too soon to comment on any transforming effect the process might have. As a consequence, participants from St. Leo and St. Brigid parishes generally had very little to offer in way of a reflection on transformation.

Regardless of how closely or loosely the parish children’s initiation process followed the catechumenal model of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, participants in my research offered comments which led me to believe that there were signs that at least some form of transformation was evident, especially in the parishes that have had a parish-based initiation process for some time.

3.3.1 Transformation of Families

This section of the transformation of families will be presented in subsections to aid with clarity and organization of thoughts. The subsections are Participation in the Parish, Building

Community and Relationships in the Parish, Faith and Relationships in the Home and Formation and Growth in Faith.

3.3.1.1 Participation in the Parish

Interview participants were asked to reflect on how engagement with the initiation process may have had an effect on their faith life and participation in the parish. (See Appendix 3, *Interview Questions*) Some parents did not feel their involvement in the parish catechumenal process to be transformative for them. These include three parents from St. Leo Parish who said that their involvement with the parish did not change as a result of involvement with the initiation process because their families were participating in the Sunday Eucharist and parish activities previous to their engagement with the parish catechetical process. Most of the responses concerning faith practice were related to the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.²⁸⁹ In fact, twenty-three research participants from all five parishes, including all of the children, had remarks concerning participation at the Sunday Eucharist as a transformative result of a parish initiation process moving toward the catechumenal model. Regarding the practice of the faith, one of the catechists from St. Leo parish relayed, "...I have seen three families in church [at Sunday Eucharist] when there is no confirmation class, where I didn't see them before." (SL C3) The children at this parish also shared that their participation in the parish initiation process included being involved in the worshipping community. I asked the children from this parish if anything was different in their life or in the life of their family since they began the parish

²⁸⁹ When asked to reflect on the participation of families in the parish as a result of engagement with the initiation process, most people I interviewed from all parishes made comments about the Sunday Eucharist. There may be many reasons for this. Two reasons may be that (1) many Catholics consider regular participation in the Eucharist as the norm regarding faith practice; and (2) since the Eucharist is the central event in the Catholic's life of faith, many people would see the Sunday Eucharist as the most important, common and visible faith activity and expression that Catholics are involved with. Participation in the Sunday liturgy is one aspect of conversion toward discipleship and that so many participants commented solely on families' participation in the Sunday Eucharist, this study is somewhat limited in exploring families' living out discipleship in other ways.

process (see Appendix 3). Some of the children answered that they were “coming to church more often ...” (SL Child.) Children from St. Mary Magdalene Parish offered the following responses to the question of change in their lives:

...you feel so much different when you're in mass. You're paying attention more and understanding it... trying to understand the readings that are happening..., and it's just become much more of a routine of going to mass every week then ... we went a lot, but it's because of classes since we started you expect it and understand the mass so much more of what's going on and everything. You have the will to want to pay attention to it and make connections with the class...We have been getting into the routine of finding the meaning of something in the Bible... (SMM Child.)

As well, a father from St. Brigid Parish mentioned that his son, because of the parish process, “...saw more value in being at mass because of the explicit sacramental initiation instruction he was getting...” (SM P2) It appears from these comments that the faith lives of some of these children were impacted by their participation in the parish catechetical process. By striving to be a more active and conscious participant in the Sunday Eucharist and using Scripture as a prayer and study tool, these children are becoming more dedicated disciples to Christ and His Church. These comments point to ongoing conversion experiences in their faith lives.

A mother from St. Leo Parish said that the parish process has had an effect on her daughter: “She [the daughter] serves Mass... she did serve Mass even before, but now she's been coming every Saturday evening to help out, and she will continue that now once the sacrament is over. It's gotten her to attend [Mass] more regularly...” (SL P5) A grandmother from St. Monica Parish also shared that her granddaughters “...like to come here [on the weekends] because they like to serve at Mass.” (SM P1) In the mother's comments, the word “attend” is used to describe participation in the liturgy. I think, perhaps, many people use the word “attend” when they mean “participate in.” Nonetheless, according to this mother, not only is her daughter involved in the Sunday Eucharist more regularly because of the parish initiation

process for children, but the mother seems convinced that this level of participation will continue once the sacrament is celebrated.

The presence of more people at mass was also highlighted by the pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish. He believed that as a result of participation in the parish initiation process, more people are participating at the Sunday liturgy:

I think the rewards... is (sic) that some of them [families who have been involved in the initiation process], not all of them, continue to come to Sunday mass... out of a group of twenty, you may have ten who will continue to come to Sunday mass and that's the blessing... when I looked out yesterday and I saw twenty-five teenagers at mass who have gone through the program, I say hey, maybe it's working, and they still have an interest in coming back, and they've been united with the parish... so I think long term, that's going to work... When you bring all the other masses together, there's close to forty teenagers who have gone through the process so that's pleasing. (SMM Pas.)

To have young people and families participating in the Sunday Eucharist as a result of being involved in the sacramental initiation for children process is inspiring and encouraging for this pastor. His reference to the presence of teenagers at the Sunday Eucharist is interesting as interview participants from other parishes noted the absence of teenagers at their Sunday liturgies.

A mother from St. Mary Magdalene Parish shared that as a result of participation in the sacramental initiation process, her family is participating in the Sunday Eucharist more frequently:

We go to church more often, I know that. When I was younger... before I had children I kind of left the Church for awhile until I had my first [child] and then I didn't come to church and then I started thinking... I think you need some kind of faith in your life, and you need to go to church... at first I thought they're [her children] going to be a handful in church when they're little, but they seem to enjoy it now, and it's not pulling teeth to go. They know it's a regular thing Saturday night. If we have something planned, we're always home in time to go to church. (SMM P2)

Participation in the process was the catalyst that prompted this family to embrace regular worship with their faith community. These comments also illustrate the reality that the presence

of children in some families is a cause to seek out a connection with the Church. This connection often concerns the sacraments of initiation. Sacraments are much more than rites of passage. However, in Reginald Bibby's research, he equates sacraments with rites of passage and confirms that "Canadians young and old are continuing to look to religious groups for rites of passage."²⁹⁰ In 2008, Bibby's research with youth indicated that regarding religious rites of passage in the future, 84% will be looking to religious groups for their wedding ceremonies, 83% said they would turn to religious groups for future funerals and 65% would require birth-related ceremonies.²⁹¹ Bibby's findings illustrate that many youth are open to connecting with the Church through significant life events and sacraments. For young families, this association may lead to engagement with the sacramental initiation process.

The pastor of St. Brigid Parish had comments to offer regarding transformation. He observed that some new families were more involved with the parish as a result of the parish catechesis:

...there are a few families who we now see in church that we didn't see before. But we still have a long way to go. By no means are we getting all these families continuing practicing... last year a family that I know very well in the parish who were practicing their faith – you know who come to Mass – but whose children are extremely busy. They're involved in all kinds of activities, yet they make the effort to get to mass quite often. The mother said to me after the first communion how much they enjoyed the process. And of course it was our first year and for me to even hear that comment unsolicited, to hear her say that her daughter really got a lot out of it... I was really pleased to hear that. (SB Pas)

Having more families present and hopefully involved at the Sunday Liturgy certainly can be construed as a positive change in this parish. This pastor's comment about the family who appreciated the parish process is interesting. He identified them as a family who had many commitments but who were happy to work into their schedule the parish catechetical sessions –

²⁹⁰ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 52.

²⁹¹ Bibby, *A New Day*, 18.

in essence, they made this a priority. My experience as a catechist is that very often, feedback from parents is lacking concerning the process, unless they are explicitly asked. And so, I can appreciate this pastor's pleasure at having positive feedback from these parents.

A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish acknowledged that more families were participating in the Sunday Eucharist at this parish due to involvement in the parish initiation process:

I do see particularly around the time of first communion preparation that there are more children in the church. It seems to be sustained in some ways for a few years anyway... I know I used to do children's liturgy and I'd have six, seven kids maximum. And now there's way more kids that go down [to the basement for the Children's Liturgy of the Word]... So that parent involvement must have an effect... But I don't know if that's going to sustain itself because I don't see teenagers in the church. (SJB C4)

This same catechist added later in the interview, "I do think there are more little kids in the church... that's a transformation." (SJB C4) From this catechist's comments, it seems that there are more families participating in the Sunday Eucharist at this parish. She asks a pertinent question about this kind of family participation sustaining itself and the participation of teenagers in the faith community's Sunday Liturgies. Her comment about the lack of teenagers at the Sunday Liturgy is in contrast to the observation of the pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish who noted the presence of many teenagers at the weekend Eucharistic celebrations. Participation in the life of the parish can extend beyond the Sunday Liturgy.²⁹²

When asked if families have become more engaged in the life of the parish because of participation in the parish's initiation process for children, one of the deacon coordinators of this parish offered the following response:

²⁹² This study would be more thorough if transformation and conversion were not as limited to participation in the Sunday Eucharist and other church activities, as expressed by many interviewees. A question I didn't ask in the interviews was about engagement in the larger community which points to a mature Christian discipleship. I chose to stay in the realm of home, parish and school communities since these are the major communities that children of catechetical age are normally engaged with.

I would say yes because here in _____ [name of parish] in particular, we have our church picnic every year. I remember when I was a kid we used to come to the picnic and we would always see old people to work at the picnic or people with grey hair... but today, it's all young people with their children who come to help. I think it's the best way to support their community or to support their parish as a family because on Sunday collection, they don't have it to give because they're young families and they need everything they have so it's their contribution. I would give a certain credit that that's the effect of the [children's initiation] programs done at the parish... (SM D2)

All members of the faith community have gifts to offer to the People of God, and not all of the gifts have to be monetary.

More active involvement in at the Sunday liturgy was a transformation not limited to the children involved in the initiation process. Parents noted changes in themselves as well with regards to participation in the Sunday liturgy. A mother from St. John the Baptist Parish offered her reflection on this question:

I would say after confirmation there was not a huge change, but after communion there was. And so that would be that all three children after finishing communion were interested in altar serving in church and, quite frankly, that meant we were coming more regularly ...And Fr. _____ [name of pastor] would speak separately to the parents from the kids [at the catechetical sessions], and it's because of that that I started to feel like I should be doing something, and so I told Fr. _____ [name of pastor] that I could play the organ, and if you ever need an organist... so he took me up on that a few times and that got me involved in the parish... _____ [name of daughter] ...would like to read. And so, I think if we hadn't done the program the way we did, it does tie you into the parish, and it does make you want to be here, do stuff and help. (SJB P3)

These comments suggest that the family was happy to serve in various liturgical ministries as a consequence of participation in this parish process. The daughter's desire to continue in some ministry also seems to indicate her comfort and sense of belonging to this faith community. The commentary also suggests that the participation of the children directly challenged the parent to become more engaged in the life of the worshipping community.

A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish admitted he became more involved in parish life because of his participation as a parent in the process and suggested that the transformation for others may be subtle:

...having two daughters going through the parish based [process]... I found myself being attuned to what the readings were doing at church, those kind of things... willing to discuss things and go to some of the events... willing to go to retreats... and now they're mandated.... When they [families] have to go for something else, maybe you'll see them going a bit more. But again, it's not something I see a dramatic change, all of a sudden people are participating in terms of wanting to read or things like that... nothing to that extent that I've noticed... it's like a doctor's office... if you're there enough times, you're not as nervous and you become familiar and are willing to speak and be comfortable. Our daughter is in the chapel right now... she's been here so many times she knows where to go and where to find me. So, there's a familiarity process, and sometimes just getting them in the building is the change that starts something. (SMM C2)

Since many families have little connection with the parish, helping them become more familiar with the parish church as part of the catechetical process makes sense. The more time families spend at the parish, the more chances they have at building relationships with other members of the faith community and actively participating in parish celebrations and activities. As this catechist has identified, just getting families to the church building can be monumental but it is perhaps the first step in a much longer and richer process of engagement.

The pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish also acknowledged the increased involvement of parents in parish life. As the pastor notes, some parents participated in the Sunday Eucharist more, and their own faith has been more developed as a result of engaging with their child in the process:

One of the biggest changes is seeing parents coming back to Sunday mass because of the preparation of their children for these sacraments. They themselves have had to help their children learn about the sacraments, and, in teaching their children, they themselves have learned a lot because I've heard parents say it. I heard one mother say I'm coming to Sunday mass because my daughter went through the confirmation program and I've learned so much... the children are bringing the parents back to mass, and that's the beauty part of it. (SMM Pas.)

The comments from this pastor also point to the importance of the intergenerational approach when it comes to catechesis.

An additional point of significance is that at St. John the Baptist and St. Mary Magdalene Parishes, inviting families into participation in liturgical ministries and other parish activities was built into the catechetical process. One of the catechists from St. John the Baptist Parish explained how the parish invited families to be more involved in parish life:

...now that they[children] were being confirmed... we [parish leaders] would have a session after the confirmation and asked them[families] that they become involved to help out with church activities, whether it be reading or Eucharistic minister or helping at the parish dinner... We had a list of things that they could do to be more involved.²⁹³ (SJB C5)

A catechist at St. Mary Magdalene Parish describes the effort at their parish to engage families in the life of the parish:

...we ask the parents at our first parent meeting, could they become greeters or take up the gifts? Sometimes the older children become altar servers, and then they stay involved. And it's great to see when you come in on a Sunday morning or a Saturday night these kids lined up saying, "Good morning or good evening"... it gives the kids something to look forward to and I think that's the rewarding part – when you see that happening. (SMM C4)

Findings from these interviews have revealed that at both St. Mary Magdalene Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish, the tradition of inviting families to be involved in the Sunday Liturgy and other parish activities through their parish sacramental initiation process has met with some success. Some thought has obviously went into the question of how to maintain participation of families and extend the participation of families in the parish once the sacraments were celebrated. For example, the idea of confirmation as “graduation from the Church” is often a way of thinking that is difficult to overcome. Some people need to be asked to do something

²⁹³ Some people I interviewed mentioned “helping out” in various ways at the parish as a result of being involved in the parish catechetical process. It must be noted that there is a distance between simply “helping out” at the parish and providing a service or ministry that comes from one’s baptismal commitment.

before they consider doing it. They may consider giving time to a ministry or activity, only after having been asked to be involved.

A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish made an observation concerning this parish's efforts to engage families in the life of the parish:

I just know that there was one family in particular that both parents are Catholics... and I am not out to judge but I don't know that they were practicing Catholics. But after that program, I noticed that the kids were very involved [in ministries], and the mother became very involved in things that she – her gifts that she could give to the parish which I thought was just wonderful because... parents had gone to the Catholic schools and just sort of drifted away. You know what happens. (SJB C5)

Here we have a good example of how parents can be catechized and even welcomed back to a faith community through the participation of their family in a parish initiation process for children and an invitation from the parish to become involved in parish ministries and other activities.

An additional effort at St. John the Baptist Parish to involve children in the Sunday Liturgy must be noted. A father explained that this initiative is on "...the first Sunday of every month – they call it the children's Mass." (SJB P2) He went on to say that his son "... volunteers for readings and cantors and as much as he can do. He's more and more involved with it – the church – every chance he gets." (SJB P2) The children's Mass the father references is a tradition at this parish wherein the ministries at one Sunday Mass a month are fulfilled by the children of the parish. So, the children are serving as lectors, commentators, gift bearers, greeters, collectors, servers and choir members.

Some of the parishes have intentionally held catechetical sessions either immediately before or after the Sunday liturgy. The thinking behind this practice is that families would be more likely to participate in the Eucharist if they are already "on site." A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish shared that "...most times you will see them [families involved in the parish

catechesis] go from the hall into the church [for the catechesis] as opposed to just meeting and going home... so that's brought them into coming to church more for sure... I think it's better that families are involved." (SJB C and P) Later in the interview, this catechist admitted, "...you see them [some families] here more often after they have celebrated" [the sacraments].

According to this catechist's observation, then, some families do actively participate in the faith community after the sacraments are celebrated. Five interviewees from this parish noted the work of many young families from the catechetical process at the annual parish supper.

There is evidence that the initiation process was fundamental in engaging parents in the catechumenal process. At St. John the Baptist Parish, there was an intentional effort to ensure parents took an active part in the catechetical sessions. A catechist from this parish highlighted ways in which parents were engaged:

When I worked with the confirmation, I would give the parents a role so they were part of the talking process, part of the answering process, part of giving their experiences of their own baptism and their own children being baptized... They were involved with making charts and posters with the kids. The kids were mostly presenting, but the parents were part of the discussion... They'd help their parents formulate answers. They'd go home and there would be little homework things like.... bring in an article of clothing that's special to you – and that was in relation to the white [baptismal] garment... so they would go home and they would bring something and some of the parents would bring something... Things that were not just in a book but that were alive in some ways and they were centered around symbols, so it was tangible in some ways for the kids and probably started a discussion too. (SJB C4)

There were many opportunities in this process for parents to be dynamically involved in the catechetical journey. The work around symbols is another example of the formative aspect of transformation. By bringing in articles from home and connecting them with symbols of the faith, the families are being formed in the symbols and traditions of the faith. Such was the case of those involved in the catechesis around the explanation of the white baptismal garment as stated by this catechist.

Another catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish shared her opinion of the importance of having parents involved in the process by beginning with her own experience as a parent:

I honestly feel the religion is taught at home. My husband is not a Catholic. My children went through the public school system. Whereas it would have been nice to have had them have the religious background at school, the bottom line is it's taught at home and it's one of the very nice things about this program because... I'm being judgmental but Catholics today always send them [children] to school and everything's taught at school, and we don't have to worry about it whereas now the commitment is you have to actually do something. The parents have to be involved. They're taking part in the commitment that they've made at baptism. Yes maybe the numbers are smaller now but I think it's going to keep growing and growing. A side benefit – a couple of my friends who've had daughters-in-law who were not Catholic have gone through the program [parish initiation process for children] and have become Catholic because they learned so much working with their own children, and I think that's a wonderful thing. (SJB C2)

A significant point offered here is the connection between baptism and the other sacraments of initiation. Taking an active part in the initiation process for one's child is being true to the commitments made at the child's baptism. According to this catechist these mothers showed interest in the RCIA process because of their experiences in the parish catechetical process for children. This was not an isolated case. During the interviews, one of the parents disclosed that she, too, chose to be a part of the RCIA journey, resulting from her participation as a parent in the parish catechetical process for children:

My children were Catholic, and I wanted to be Catholic with them and celebrate, you know, go through the journey with them. My husband was... the Catholic person when we got married, and he passed away and that's one of the main reasons why I decided to grow with my children and do it together, and it was part of my life... I felt like an outcast because they were growing, and I wasn't growing with them, and this gave us the chance to grow as a family. (SJB C and P)

What makes this mother's experience even more significant is that since being fully initiated into the Church herself, she has also chosen to serve as a catechist in the children's initiation process.

The pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish also emphasized the transformation of parents concerning their involvement in the process:

The transformation has been to see parents buying into this [process] and seeing that this is the way it has to be. And having parents that truly believe that they are developing the faith life of their children and so they enter into this with a sense of conviction. That's a radical change in my experience of priesthood over the years. (SJB Pas.)

These comments point to the change in orientation, thinking and actions that has been referred to many times in this project.

3.3.1.2 Building Community and Relationships in the Parish

Many interview participants identified transformation in families that related to building community and relationships in the parish. A parent from St. John the Baptist Parish was asked about the benefits of being involved in the parish process for his son and him (see Appendix 3), and he responded that he appreciated “Getting to meet and talk to other parents going through the same thing... Talking about their beliefs and maybe our beliefs getting a little stronger with it too.” (SJB P2) The chance for families to dialogue and grow in faith with others certainly can help establish relationships and build a sense of community.

Parents of a child in St. Leo Parish noted a transformation in their daughter because of her engagement in the initiation process:

_____ [name of daughter] has shown a lot more maturity since she started... I think she recognizes more things... like there's a lady who's ninety-two who she walks home after mass, and she tells _____ [name of daughter] all these little stories... what she did to help the school kids and _____ [name of daughter] sort of recognizes how this ninety-two year old was charitable her whole life and gee, maybe that's a good reflection, and I think the whole confirmation and more awareness of your faith has helped her to grow in that aspect. (SL P2 and 3)

According to these parents, the parish process formed the faith of their daughter and perhaps called her to a more mature discipleship which has led to her forming a relationship with the elderly parishioner. A mother from St. John the Baptist Parish stated that “there has been

personal faith growth, but almost more as a sense of belonging... [to] the faith community... and I do have personal satisfaction from that, and I want the kids to share in that.” (SJB P3) Active participation in the faith community and the building of relationships are certainly fruits that are born of the initiation process.

In his assessment of the parish process, the pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish recognized the importance of children being involved in the catechetical process and forming a relationship with the parish through engagement in ministries:

My experience in a previous parish to this one... and it’s really proven itself again, is that it encourages the young people of this parish to involve themselves and to sustain a relationship with the parish. We do have young families - young people that participate in the program for the year but they fade away but we have a good number of them sustain their relationship with the Church for years and, you know, we’re relying on them now to come into a sense of ministry. If not working on the catechetical roles, then certainly becoming involved in some way in ministries in the parish. (SJB Pas.)

This is the key – for parishes to invite and engage young people in the life of the parish.

Involvement in the parish goes beyond participation in the Sunday Eucharist. Even though many interviewees focused their answers on involvement around the Sunday Liturgy, young families should be invited to participate in other ministries and parish mission activities. These could include but are not limited to visiting the sick and immobile, vacation Bible school, parish pastoral council, parish suppers and fundraisers, soup kitchens, prayer groups, Catholic Women’s League, Knights of Columbus, youth groups, family formation programs and other events.

One of the deacon coordinators of the St. Monica Parish unit identified that transformation is often not instantaneous and can evolve in a very measured way. He offered the following assessment on the transformation of families:

I think there is some change, otherwise, why would I be doing it [catechesis]? But the change happens very slowly... the most evidence I see in the parents, particularly parents

of the younger child... parents bringing their child for baptism... we welcome them and communicate with them that this is my faith and I want to share it with you and if we communicate with them in that way... and there's some particularly difficult situations because sometimes you may have a single parent bringing their child... And it makes all the difference how you are received at the church... they continue to come to the church if they are well received. If they're received with love and understanding... and the parents of confirmation candidates... you're often seeing them ask their kids to come to church, not demanding... it indicates to me in some way that they realize, that they are reaching out to a young adult as opposed to a child in the faith. (SM D1)

This deacon's comments provide a good road map on *how* to receive families. His comments suggest that we meet families where they are and receive them warmly with a welcoming, accepting approach. Such positive and inviting initiatives can only help but strengthen relationships and the faith community. Families are more likely to engage with a faith community that they feel comfortable with. This deacon also recognizes that growth in faith is a lifelong journey.

A mother St. Mary Magdalene Parish reflected on her family's participation in the parish process and offered the following answer to the question of what kind of effect it has had on her family:

My son who made his confirmation last year altar serves... so I think it has helped us to participate... It's helped us feel even more involved, but it's something that's always been important to us as a family. We do go to church more regularly, and we did before they prepared for the sacraments... we felt really attached to the church here, and we really feel we've grown stronger in faith since we've been here and just the activities that they plan for the children... retreats that they do... it was all new to us... My children come to family formation and they love it, they always want to come... I can see the good it's (sic) done for my family. (SMM P5)

That this family is more involved in the life of the parish as a consequence of the parish sacramental initiation process is worth noting. And engagement is not limited to the Sunday Eucharist in that this mother identifies retreats and family formation sessions as parish activities her family has been participating in. She speaks of their faith growing stronger – this is one of those less tangible signals that are also very important as they may point to a deeper relationship

with God. At the end of this response, the mother refers to family formation, a particular program offered at this parish which is meant for catechizing parents, youth and children on various faith topics and is offered separately from the sacramental initiation process.²⁹⁴ This is a program offered by the parish to augment and support the movement towards the catechumenal model.

It is significant that this mother has felt a strong sense of welcome and warmth from the parish. In another part of the interview, she spoke of the sense of belonging and warmth she enjoyed from being involved in parish activities, including the sacramental initiation process, when her husband was away with his military job:

When he's [her husband] here, he comes to church with us... he's involved with everything, but in his absence the children and I kept coming and just being a part of things and I felt that really kept me going. I found it made a really big difference in my life, and I found for the children and I it was something for us to look forward to and if it was a night that there was family formation or it felt like it was a dreary day, we were all missing him or worrying about him, knowing that we could come here made a big difference for the children... coming here and being involved... being greeters and bringing up the gifts and... it kind of helped keep us going... as a family. (SMM P5)

These comments illustrate the support and comfort this family experienced through their association with their faith community. There is also something deeper about the sense of belonging that links to living faith and commitment.

Another parent from the same parish remarked that she, too, was grateful for the family formation program:

From doing this [sacramental initiation process], I decided to put them [her children] into the church's family formation program because from this experience with my boy going through it I learned stuff that I thought I already knew, and then when the family

²⁹⁴ The Family Formation Program used by this parish comes from the Catholic Church of St. Paul in Ham Lake, Minnesota. The following description of the program is found on their website: Family Formation provides a unique, challenging, and creative curriculum that is family-based, includes adult catechesis and training for parents, is founded on the Truth and teachings of the Catholic Church, and is designed to make living the Faith a way of life and a life-long learning adventure. The website for the Church of St. Paul is <http://www.familyformation.net/ForParishesOverview.asp>.

formation came up she [daughter] could probably learn more stuff... So, I thought, maybe they're not going to like it; they're going to say "mommy, I don't want to go." I have three of them in it, and they all seem to enjoy it, so I thought to put them in that because of the first communion preparation. (SMM P2)

This mother, like the former, sees the benefit of an ongoing parish formation program for families beyond the sacramental initiation process in which both the parents and children are formed in the faith. Such a program also has the ability to foster a sense of community among young families in the parish and to offer formation opportunities for all members of the family.

3.3.1.3 Faith and Relationships in the Home

In the interviews, parents were asked about the benefits for them, their child and their family with regards to the sacramental initiation process. (see Appendix 3) Several people I interviewed acknowledged that faith and relationships in the home were transformed as a result of the active participation of families in the initiation process. Parents of a child from St. Leo Parish stated that "We definitely grow closer any time you do something in the church and with the church..." (SL P2 and 3) Another mother shared her observation that her son's involvement in the parish catechetical process gave he and his father the opportunity to bond and discuss some of the learning and issues brought up in the sessions: "...different times after the confirmation class, we'd go home, and my husband would ask, "What did you do?" And my husband's not Catholic... and it kind of involved him a little more into our church because he's Lutheran so it gives them another connection." (SL P1) Children from St. Leo Parish said that involvement in the initiation process resulted in them "...talking about what... [they] learned and sharing what... [they] learned with... [their] family..." One child continued, "I sometimes talk with my parents on the way home about confirmation lessons... my dad would ask me questions

on the way home because he would listen during class.” (SL Child.) A father from St. Brigid Parish also added, “...I noticed he [his son] was asking more questions about the Holy Spirit because he [his son] was in confirmation classes, and I think we just found that there was a little more conversation around these issues in the home.” (SM P2) A father from St. John the Baptist Parish added that, as a result of participation in the parish process, talk about faith in the home has been a side effect: “..._____ [name of son] brings up a lot more stuff at home... we talk about religion with him more often. (SJB P2)

A mother from St. Mary Magdalene Parish relayed her experience of the parish process as it relates to the faith life of her family:

He’s [her son] asking us questions that my older guy never asked. So is that a result of this involvement? I certainly think so. There are some heavy questions... he’s all of a sudden asked, what would life be like as a priest? Pretty heavy question for a fourteen year-old... it opens up the discussion at home and... we are talking more about faith at home. We were always a spiritual family, but the discussions are richer now and it’s been very good for him... it keeps the moral compass focused. (SMM P3)

These comments illustrate how this family has been affected by the parish catechetical process in regards to living the faith in the home. Seemingly, the family’s involvement in the process has caused a change in the son’s faith life. This mother’s comments also point to a contagious and transformative effect that the son’s active faith life has had on other members of the family, including her.

Outlining the importance of an intergenerational approach to catechesis, the pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish affirmed, “...when it comes to sacramental preparation, there is a faith dimension here that has to be experienced in the context of the family... and it has to begin at baptism.” (SJB Pas) The catechetical process is certainly enriched when the formation in the sessions is shared in the home. In this way, parish and home are working together to support the

child in the initiation process and all involved can benefit from the dialogue and learning that resonates from the catechesis.

One of the children from St. Mary Magdalene Parish stated that her participation in the sacramental initiation process caused a change in her prayer life: “I didn’t really pray a lot before confirmation and now I pray and my family does grace now. That’s what changed a lot. Because I know that by praying that God will hear you and forgive you if you ask...” (SMM Child.) A mother at St. Mary Magdalene Parish related that “...we’ll pray [at home] for all the kids that are making their sacraments in nightly prayers and especially if it’s getting closer to the time [of the celebration of the sacrament] and if we know we have a [catechetical] meeting coming up...” (SMM P4). Another mother from this parish highlighted the enhanced prayer life of her son and her family as a result of being involved in the catechetical process:

_____ [name of son] is a very spiritual child, and as he has grown through this spiritual process... it’s been pushing us. So if we sit down to dinner and forget grace, he’s our conscience. He will stop us... doesn’t matter if we’re mid bite, and he didn’t do this before this process, so I think that if you look at the four of us as a whole, it’s had a huge impact. (SMM P3)

These remarks suggest a strong link between the growth of faith in children and to the family – the domestic Church.

A catechist from St. Leo Parish also appreciated the many opportunities for enhancing the family’s prayer life:

In my own family, for sure a lot of the things that were taught were incorporated in our home life... things like having a prayer corner and having the things in that corner that connect you with God. Those concrete things really helped us as a family. If you look at the liturgical year, around Advent, we still do an Advent wreath, and that’s a time of year that we as a family come together and read scripture and do prayer every day during Advent and Lent, and I think it was that preparation for the sacraments that really started us on that path that incorporated it into family life. (SL C1)

These comments suggest that the seeds for living the liturgical year in the home were planted in the parish initiation process. This is how the rhythms of the liturgical year are meant to be celebrated, experienced and prayed – with the family in the context of the home and in and with the parish faith community.

3.3.1.4 Formation and Growth in Faith

Several of the parents pointed out that their participation in the catechetical sessions with their children had an effect on both their personal faith growth and the practice of the faith in their home. One mother from St. Leo Parish shared how she appreciated the learning aspect and was able to bring some of these learnings into conversation with her son at home:

I think for me it's just kind of going over some of the things [learned and mentioned in the catechetical sessions]... you know them, but if you don't keep going over them, you forget them... like the virtues and different things like that. Just everyday occurrences, you don't really think about them. So I think going has enhanced me more so it makes me more aware of them than trying to show an example to my son... (SL P1)

According to Groome's analysis, this type of learning would be both informational and formational.²⁹⁵ On the surface, the learning about the virtues could be informational but when applied to one's life or when being reflected on, the learning becomes formational. A parent from St. John the Baptist Parish also shared how he appreciated the opportunity to learn and grow in faith with his son, as he accompanied him in the process:

We've also been involved in the parish, but seeing how Fr. _____ [name of pastor] has it set up, it's a learning experience for the parents instead of the other parish where parents aren't involved. This way, we're learning as the children go along through it too. They're talking about the holy water and sacraments and everything else. (SJB P2)

²⁹⁵ Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education", 6-7.

These comments point to the significance of lifelong learning and faith formation. The other parish this father is referring to is another parish in the same town that had a school-based process for the sacramental initiation of children.

It was interesting to note the comments of a catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish who described his experience of faith formation through the parish process when he had to accompany his daughter in the initiation process. His comments are as follows:

The biggest change that happened to me is that my daughter... was going through for confirmation and all of a sudden as a parent, I had to talk about this at home, and initially I said why aren't they doing this at the school, like most parents... and then I found myself sitting down... going through that with her and oh, I didn't know that. And learning little things like why we genuflect and the sign of the cross and the simple prayers and their meanings. I forgot about this... I didn't know this... (SMM C2)

This catechist identified that his parental participation in the parish program was a big change – but not an insurmountable one. As mentioned throughout this project, this change often requires a shift in thinking and orientation.

The catechetical process at St. John the Baptist Parish was developed to address the formational needs of both parents and children. A mother from this parish acknowledged her appreciation of the learning aspect of the catechesis, particularly the sessions led by the pastor for parents:

I think that the discussion was also very beneficial for myself and for the kids. ... I'm from an older generation, and I went to Catholic schools as well..., but you sort of get lost in really what your faith truly means and why it is the way it is... So, I think that having Fr. _____ [name of pastor] lead us and talk to us about how all these traditions evolved and why and then bringing it back into how the Jewish roots... I don't think many of us think about that sort of stuff. I personally felt that I learned a lot that I probably didn't even think about before. (SJB P1)

At St. John the Baptist Parish, the pastor would regularly lead the parents in an adult faith formation session while the children were in another room for their own catechetical session.

A parent from St. Mary Magdalene Parish shared her observation that both parents and children are learning together as they participate in the parish catechetical process:

... they're [the parents] learning themselves. In fact _____ [name of parish secretary] told me there was a parent in Tuesday... I wasn't here, and she said how pleased she was with the program because the children were learning so much and the parents were learning, perhaps re-learning their faith, so I think that's a big difference there. (SMM C4)

These intergenerational catechetical approaches are part of the Church's vision for catechesis and will be explored in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

A mother from St. Mary Magdalene Parish offered the following answer to the question of how the parish sacramental process has benefitted her family:

I just think they [children] learned a lot from the [catechetical] classes they attended on Sundays, and they talk about it at home, they talk about it with their catechists... When they're talking with me at night and talking about what they've learned, that's been a benefit for them and shows me that they are positive about it and learning from it. My children love coming to church, and on the Sundays when they come for their classes, they've never said I don't want to go. I've been very lucky that way, so it's benefitted them. (SMM P5)

This mother appreciated the informational and formational learning aspect of the catechetical sessions and the way in which the learning weaved its way into conversations in the home and in family life. Here is another example of the contagious effect that learning and faith formation can have on the child as the learning and discussion from the parish permeate into the home.

One of the deacon coordinators at St. Monica Parish conveyed his belief that the parish catechetical sessions gave parents the opportunity both to be more informed about their faith and to articulate their faith to their children:

...I notice in particular for parents for their children, they are more informed, and I think for themselves, they feel much better with their faith. And sometimes I'm surprised to see how they express their faith. At the parish level, parents have the chance to express their faith with their children because at the sessions that we have, parents are called to express their faith which they probably don't do at home... and we're there to support

and help them also, so I think that's what the most [important] thing is for the program in the parish. (SM D2)

Ideally, the parish catechetical sessions provide a comfortable environment for parents to grow in faith and share this faith with their children, as they support them on their faith journey in an active way.

A mother from St. Mary Magdalene Parish shared how her involvement in the catechetical sessions had an effect on her personal faith growth:

I think for me it was so long ago since I went through these, so it's been a good refresher for myself. So, I certainly learned along with _____ [name of daughter]. There's (sic) been things she asked me that I don't know the answers to, so I've either gone to the Bible myself and looked or sought out Fr. _____ [name of pastor] or my own family to find the answer. But, I certainly think that I've grown as well. (SMM P4)

The process of sacramental initiation gave this mother the opportunity to learn with her daughter about the faith while seeking out resources along the way. Such learning and seeking have been a benefit to this mother who is striving to effectively be the primary educator in the faith to her child.

Another mother from St. Mary Magdalene Parish reflected on the important role of parents as the primary educators in the faith:

I think people might be scared sometimes of teaching their own children, but we're their best teachers sometimes, you know, or their first teacher, and I think we should embrace that a bit. Even though we don't have all the answers, and we might be a bit scared to do it but still do it. (SMM P4)

Like the mother above, this mother is humble in recognizing that no one holds all the answers and the value of lifelong learning. It is important for parents to realize that the entire faith community is there to support them and offer resources for them to help form the faith of their children and them.

3.3.2 Transformation of Catechists and Pastors

Each of the catechists and pastors/administrators were asked in the interview if they have experienced some sort of transformation themselves as a result of their participation in a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process. They were asked the following question: Have you changed in your role as pastor/administrator/pastoral assistant/catechist? (Have you experienced any personal transformation?) What effect has your involvement in the ministry of catechesis for the process of the initiation of children had on your faith growth? (See Appendix 3). This section on the transformation of catechists and pastors will be divided into subthemes to aid with clarity and organization. These subsections will be Spirituality, Learning and Faith Formation and Communicating, Building Relationships and Sharing Faith with Others.

3.3.2.1 Spirituality

Several of the pastors and catechists I interviewed commented on how their involvement in the catechetical process had an effect on their spiritual life. A catechist from St. Leo Parish offered the following answer in response to the question of transformation for her personally:

...I think I took a lot for granted... that I was going on the right path, and then you start to think... not that I was going down the wrong path, but I was forgetting and not putting God first. And of course I teach my children that you have to put God first, and I'm thinking, I'm becoming a hypocrite here because you're telling them that He's number one, and you're not living the same... not that I was bad, but I was blaming Him for a lot of things that were happening in my personal life... and then I remember in confirmation class we got to the virtues, and I thought, you know, I'm not doing some of these, and I noticed a change in myself, and I was a happier person ...it's almost like God was guiding me to come to this because I would have just led my merry life and not paid any attention... and I started reading Catholicism and... I think I have changed. (SL C3)

She relates this change in her spiritual life directly to her ministry as a parish catechist and a parent in the initiation process. Her comments suggest that journeying with others in this process

and being formed in the faith can lead to a process of internal reflection and spiritual transformation. In her own words, her experience as a parish catechist caused her to become a better mother, a happier person and a more dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ.

When asked to reflect on the transformative effect his involvement in the parish sacramental initiation process had on him, the pastor from St. Mary Magdalene Parish gave this answer:

It's nice to have other people involved because I don't take it as my own responsibility now because I know it belongs to the parish, and the parishioners are taking their responsibility seriously by the fact of having more adults involved, catechists... you know, having people step forward to do things... Has it changed my own spiritual outlook? Yes it has because when I see people who are becoming on fire, really on fire, I start to get built up... start to get on fire too for preaching, for celebrating the mass, and you see all these little ones whose eyes are wide open... they're excited about Eucharist, they're excited about confirmation, not just preparing but they're also excited about seeing the Bishop... that sort of thing... so, it's changed me, it's changed the parish. (SMM Pas.)

Although the transformation of parishes will be discussed in the next section of this work, according to the comments from this pastor, the enthusiasm generated by the catechetical ministry can have a contagious effect on the parish and on the pastor himself.

3.3.2.2 Learning and Faith Formation

Some of the pastors and catechists I interviewed highlighted the learning and faith formational aspect of transformation that occurred in their lives as a result of their engagement in the initiation process toward the catechumenal model. Two catechists from St. Leo Parish mentioned the transformative effect their catechetical ministry had on their own learning and faith journey. The first catechist gave the following assessment of her own inner change:

I would say I absolutely feel that for catechists, it does enrich your own faith life. I have felt that in other ministries... that I have been involved with before like children's liturgy, vacation bible school. I feel I learned more than I give. It really enriches your own foundation of your faith. (SL C1)

This appreciation of new learning was also conveyed by the second catechist. She offered the following answer:

I'm much more aware. When you have to study the material, and the lessons before you teach someone else, I think it makes you stop to realize what exactly what you know or what you don't know. But there's one or two things thrown into each lesson that you didn't know about. (SL C4)

These comments highlight the significance of lifelong learning in the ministries and lives of catechists. One of the benefits of serving as a catechist is that new learning and faith growth can be constant companions in the initiation process.

A catechist from St. Monica Parish reflected on how her participation in the catechetical ministry has had an effect on her, and she offered the subsequent reflection:

I am a perpetual student in a sense... I would have to look up and understand and read... it got me to read the Bible more, going through the internet and making copies of some pope's letter on something... so it really helped me in the education department... it helped my prayer life... it gives you a closer connection... you are always connected to God but it makes you more aware of God's hand in your life... I've really been grateful for the opportunities I've been given. You come away having learned so much more than you ever thought you could ever share with anybody else. That's what's so lacking in these outlying areas, you don't have many opportunities to feed yourself, to learn. You are asked to give all the time, and you have to do your own learning. (SM C2)

This catechist recognizes the chance to grow in her faith and prayer life and increase her daily awareness of God's presence. These comments suggest that catechists would benefit from ongoing formation. The importance of ongoing formation for parish catechists will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Two catechists from St. John the Baptist Parish expressed their appreciation for the informational, formational and transformational learning aspect of serving in the role of

catechist. One of the parish catechists offered the following reflection on the effect his involvement in the ministry of catechesis had on him:

There's absolutely no doubt that it's had a profound effect on my growth in the faith in that every time I go before a group of candidates, I learn something new about the Church, about the rituals, about all the different symbols that we use in all the rituals. It's been as much an enriching experience for me as I'm sure it's been for them... after I joined the Church, I wanted to get involved in the Church because... I wanted to learn about every aspect of it. I wanted to give something back to this faith community for welcoming me into it... So it's certainly had an enriching effect on me. (SJB C1)

Here is yet another example of the importance and appreciation of lifelong learning. This particular catechist's response is interesting as it comes from a man who went through the RCIA process some years ago and was not raised in the Catholic faith from a young age. Another catechist, herself a participant in the RCIA process some years ago, offered the following answer:

I think it's [involvement as a catechist] had a huge impact on myself... why you do what you do and for me... I'm still growing, I'm still learning, I'm still actively participating..., and I love to see the children and how they're doing and when I come here to celebrate, hopefully I'm here to see them celebrate and grow with them as a church community and family as well. (SJB C and P)

Growing and learning with children and families seems to be a common experience among many of these catechists.

A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish highlighted the importance of her ministry in catechesis for her own learning and faith growth:

I have received a tremendous amount of gratification in being a catechist. And when I first started, I thought heck, I don't know a lot of these things... it's been a long time. And not only that, children were more knowledgeable than what I was about certain things, and... I'm supposed to be more experienced and more knowledgeable, and I think it helped me grow in my faith as well... being with the younger children and forcing me to know the things that I should know as a Catholic person and to be able to grow in that... These little ones, they are phenomenal... we think that they're young and naïve but sometimes they know more than we know. I'm truly blessed to be a part of this process because I'm really enjoying it. (SMM C5)

Learning can be a humbling process when those younger than us appear to know more than we know or seem to exhibit wisdom beyond their years.

An additional catechist from this parish reflected on her experience and how it was formational and transformational in that she became more of an active participant in the Eucharist:

It's brought back things that I had long forgotten and learned years ago. I find now, because of what we're teaching the children, I'm participating a lot more in church itself. It seems to give me more satisfaction. I can remember going when we were younger and it just felt good because it was a peaceful, quiet hour, but you can sit there and you're not really paying attention... now I find I really pay attention a lot more and listen a lot more, and the words mean a lot more and it's through the teaching. You have to remember a lot more – the parts of the mass – I pretty well know all the parts of the mass now. (SMM C3)

We see from these comments that her involvement in the catechetical ministry has called this woman to a deeper appreciation and experience of the Eucharist as a member of her faith community.

3.3.2.3 Communicating, Building Relationships and Sharing Faith with Others

For some catechists and pastors, serving in the catechetical process has had an influence on the way they communicate, forge relationships and share their faith with others. As a result of his involvement in the initiation process, one of the deacon coordinators of St. Monica Parish described the transformation in himself as being profound and multi layered:

Oh, it changed me completely. I learned to trust people. The most important thing my faith taught me is that... you find God in actions. Also, being involved with people, I learned to express my faith more freely and in my own words – not to depend on textbooks... and also the way I pray, I have the ability now to involve more people in it because they're there, and I'm with them, and I notice that the way that they act and the way they respond I think we have something in common there. (SM D2)

These comments illustrate that faith experience moves beyond simply being in church.

Dialoguing and praying with other Christians can not only be transformative but are normative aspects of being a disciple and living the Christian life. Others involved in the catechesis told of their own forms of transformation.

The second deacon coordinator of this parish stated that his contribution to the initiation process has had a revolutionary effect on him in the following way:

...we need to offer them [children] our faith and I guess it's taken some time for me to realize that, and that's why I like to tell stories because the stories come from real events in my life, and I tell them and I love telling them and sometimes I tell them again and again... And so it's hard to explain what happens to one... it draws you in and if it doesn't draw you in, you need to look at why you are doing this and... I suppose that's how I've been transformed. My faith has become more real, more open. My father used to tell me, "I don't talk about Jesus, that's personal." I do exactly the opposite. I talk about this because it's personal. (SM D1)

Both of these deacons have reflected on the way their involvement in the catechetical ministry has caused a change in the way that they share their faith and interact with others in this ministry and in the diaconal ministry generally.

A catechist from this parish shared that her involvement in the process caused her to appreciate the simplicity of her faith:

And teaching these little kids, it brings back the simplicity of it. It re-energizes your faith, it's lighting a little flame in there that was almost going out, and it's making it stronger. When you see and hear all these things, I remember learning that and pass it onto the kids... it's a growth and having this privilege to be with them even if it's for a little bit because it's a special, special time, and it has helped me... it's made me simpler in my faith. God is there all the time... it's something steady and deeper and working with these children, they are so joyful and precious, and I just love it. (SM C1)

There is certainly a sense that as adults, we tend to complicate things more – things of faith included. It is clear that this catechist has experienced the richness of a simple faith and is genuinely happy to share this gift with the children to whom she ministers. This catechist has

illustrated that the presence of God moves beyond the Eucharist and is very real in her work with children in the catechetical ministry.

The pastor of St. Brigid Parish felt that the initiation process had a transforming effect on his vocation as a priest. He explains it in this way:

...this process has allowed, has reminded me as a priest that it's my vocation to be a teacher – that one of the key aspects of priestly ministry is that priests are entrusted with the care of souls. But the interaction between myself as a priest and these children who are preparing has allowed me to feel confident in living out my priesthood as someone who's been put in charge of the care of their souls and to use my teaching ministry as a part of that... with the process being rooted in the parish it seems like this is what the life and mission of the Church is – that children are being brought to the parish for formation and I really feel like we are starting to do what we are called to do both as priests and as a parish in forming these children for the sacraments. (SB Pas.)

This reflection calls to mind the teaching of the Church that all members of the Christian community are responsible for the faith formation of members.²⁹⁶ These comments also say something about the role of the priest in the catechetical ministry. Priests are called to be educators in the faith, to assist catechists and to form the faithful.²⁹⁷ The *General Directory for Catechesis* also states that “Experience bears out that the quality of catechesis depends very largely on the presence and activity of the priest.”²⁹⁸ It is also important for the pastor to form relationships with the catechists and families involved in the process. Thus, the priest has a pivotal role in the catechetical ministry, not only by his support of catechists and the ministry but by his active participation in the process.

A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish remarked that the experience of being involved in catechetical ministry compelled her to display some vulnerability in sharing her faith. She explains:

²⁹⁶ RCIA #9.

²⁹⁷ GDC #224.

²⁹⁸ GDC #225.

I think I have a clearer or more cerebral picture of baptism... a connection there. And every time you go through the lessons, you re-evaluate and rearticulate it for yourself. And I've always grew up and went to church and went to Catholic university, but I've never been particularly vocal about my faith – that's not my way. So, it's forced me to give personal examples and make connections for the kids. You're pretty vulnerable when you're talking about faith. I don't particularly like to put myself in vulnerable situations. I've had a few moments where especially when dealing with the symbols and making connections for children that have been transformative – small “t.” But I've had those working in my school – giving communion to kids in a school, teaching grade twelve English in a class and you're making a connection to faith... had the same feelings too... (SJB C4)

This catechist describes a change in the way she interacts with fellow parishioners regarding faith. Her response indicates that she has moved from information to formation and transformation. The organization of material from lessons can be considered information. The formational aspect comes to the fore when the catechist engages with the families during the sessions. Admitting that she has had to be more vocal about her faith which has caused her to be vulnerable is the transformative piece in that she had to push herself to share her faith with others, something with which she was previously not comfortable.

Another catechist thought about how she has been transformed through her participation in the catechetical ministry and offered the following response: “I think being more accepting of people where they are. Not having a line that they must come up to... that there's different ways of doing things. We don't all have to follow the same path. I think just being more accepting. Everybody's standard is different.” (SJB C2) This is an example of real attitudinal change towards God's hospitality in this catechist realizing that God calls people in His time in His way. If we initiate people according to the catechumenal model, then we accept them as they are and agree to journey with them and mentor them when they are ready to proceed with various stages of the process.

A catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish spoke of the transformative effect his involvement in the catechetical ministry had on him as well:

...there's one young lady I talked to years ago whose father died in Afghanistan, and dad became a topic of conversation during our sessions... I want to see my dad one day... absolutely you're going to see your dad... you know, the raw faith of the child, and it's pretty powerful. It takes me out of the circus that I call my life with all the things I deem important but really aren't. You talk to a small child that says here's the pain in my life that blows mine out of the water, and you can't help but benefit from things like that. So, as a catechist it's probably what keeps me coming back... you're dealing with little kids who are so honest and just yearn to learn. There's a want there, a thirst. So you see them getting it, and they enjoy learning about it, and you hope you plant a seed because if that seed doesn't get nurtured because of the environment you're in, then maybe down the road. (SMM C2)

The beautiful faith and trust of a child can no doubt have a transforming effect on a catechist as this man has identified. There is also something significant about the thirst – the desire for God that needs to be recognized and encouraged. Yearning to deepen one's relationship with God is at the heart of discipleship.

3.3.3 Transformation of the Parish

All of the pastors, deacon coordinators and catechists were asked the following questions in their interviews: “Do you believe your parish has changed as a result of a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process? Has some sort of transformation occurred? Please explain.” (see Appendix 3) There was little in the way of responses to these questions from participants at St. Leo and St. Brigid parishes, since they only had a parish-based sacramental initiation process for one year and two years respectively at the time the interviews were conducted. In order to aid with organization and lucidity, this section has been organized into the subsections of Building Relationships and Strengthening the Faith Community, Active

Participation of Families in the Parish and Shift in Orientation and Thinking About the Catechetical Ministry.

3.3.3.1 Building Relationships and Strengthening the Faith Community

Many people I interviewed commented on how the parish was transformed in that relationships were constructed and the faith community was strengthened as a result of the catechetical process moving toward the catechumenal model.

Three of the catechists at St. Leo Parish felt they could not answer this question as they were just finishing the first year of the new parish process and did not have enough time to gauge any transformation at the parish level. However, one of the other catechists offered the following answer to the question regarding transformation of the parish:

I think we will [be transformed]. It's a new process for this church and for a lot of parents. This might be a first initial step in getting them more involved, maybe something as simple as the breakfast club [traditionally held at the parish for children in the school who may not have had breakfast before school]. Hopefully when they [parents] are older, they will get their kids more involved as well. The way it was before, here, we're dropping off the kids... let the teachers teach them. OK, great thanks. Again, no interaction with the parish at all... It's a small step, but it is a step. (SL C2)

This catechist sees change happening over time at St. Leo parish. He feels there will eventually be an increase in participation of young families in the life of the parish. This is also a hint toward participation in the Eucharist reaching out into the community. At the end of mass, the faithful are encouraged to “go in peace to live and serve the Lord,” a central aspect of the Christian community.

A catechist from St. Monica Parish answered the question about parish transformation in this way:

See I haven't been in this parish for a long time, but I do know they [parishioners] come out for special times like that, and they do support the children, and they congratulate them, and they go out of their way, and that's very welcoming for new people and the family who was baptized a few weeks ago, everyone was there for them... everybody waited at the back of the church to congratulate them, so that's something. They do reach out, and they do support all these things, but probably like the rest of us, they don't know what to do the rest of the year to... you know... you can invite people to pray, you can invite people to come to this or that, but if they don't want to take that step, it's very difficult (SM C1).

If a parish is more welcoming and willing to support young families through prayer and participation, this can indeed be transformative. The sense of belonging – owning their place as members of the parish community – speaks of discipleship and not simply card carrying membership.

One of the deacon-coordinators of this parish unit offered the following response to the question:

I think for the parish, the programs make young parents realize that religion is something more in their lives... I think young people realize more today that they are more spiritual beings, and I know in this community in particular when we have a fundraiser for people in need or the food bank, misfortune, something like that, people get involved, and young people get involved a lot more than in the past, I would say. When I was a kid, most of people involved in those activities were older people. Today, younger couples, if they have something they like, they get involved so if you have something to fit their need, for them to respond or to accept them as they are. (SM D2)

His point about accepting young families as they are is important and cannot be stressed enough. It is insightful when the people involved in this ministry, like the deacon, recognize this and are able to name it. His comments indicate that involvement in the parish catechetical process has resulted in greater participation in other facets of parish life such as parish fundraisers. This deacon states that young people are more spiritual beings today. This comment resonates with Reginald Bibby's research that points to more Canadians seeing themselves as spiritual beings and are expressing spiritual needs and interests.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 190.

The other deacon-coordinator of this parish unit highlighted the change in the parish affected by the people involved in the process:

...we have more than one catechist... We have one from our parish besides myself. She's very dedicated. ... she has lived in that parish for decades and knows everybody, and that's important too... she knows who has children and who should have been ready, so she goes out seeking them. She doesn't just wait for them to come, and that transforms in a sense, brings people back to our church, and they in turn draw people back... it's a constant work of the heart really. How exactly it changes the parish... I think the parish is a happier place to be. If there are children running around and babies crying in the pews... I tell people, "So your baby cries, that's great," and they say, "We're bothering other people." And I say, "no it won't," they're just as happy as I am... to have those people come back. It is in itself transforming the attitude of people around them, and we should never give up because only just one comes back. We do like Jesus, we get them one at a time. (SM D1)

It is amazing how the commitment of one individual has the ability to transform individual lives and an entire parish. Parishes are changed when young families participate in the Sunday Liturgy and as many people comment, babies and children are a healthy sign of new life in the Church. From what this deacon has shared, it seems as if this parish is being very proactive when it comes to being welcoming and inviting to young families.

When asked if the parish had been transformed as a result of the sacramental initiation of children process, a catechist from St. Brigid Parish noted that the parish was in the first years of the process but then shared this response:

Once again, we've just begun, and change takes time, but I do believe for the fact that Fr. _____ [name of pastor] knows a lot of the parents, and they've had some kind of personal contact with him, and with the priest of our parish that they would feel a little more, individually, part of the parish. In the future, the parents may be more involved in the program which would even help more. (SB C1)

Like others, this catechist is hoping for more participation from parents in the future. However, her comments about interaction with the priest point to the importance of relationships and building them, a key aspect of the catechumenal process. If the participation of families in the Sunday Eucharist and in the life of the Church increases, there is a possibility of transformation

taking place. The change being sought is more than just numbers and attendance. Families are called to full, active and conscious participation in the Sunday Liturgy and to being involved in other facets of parish life. Parishes can be changed if members of families are active disciples seeking a greater relationship with God and the parish family.

Another catechist from this parish thought about the question and gave the following answer regarding the effect the initiation process has had on the parish:

...the CWL agreed to have the reception after the Mass.... They [CWL Members] were very interested in learning how many children were there and... who are they? ...one member commented... they would come to confirmation or whatever, and they didn't know anybody and going through this [parish] process, she felt that she knew more of the parents and children. I mean, that's something that we really have to work on also, and we're planning to do something more about that next time. Even having their names up in the church beforehand – this is who we are working with or introducing them to the congregation or... having them as greeters... (SB C2)

These comments point to the importance of involving the faith community in the initiation process. In her reflection, this catechist identifies several ways in which the faith community can actively support families in this process.

A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish also answered the question about whether transformation had occurred at the parish due to the sacramental initiation process in this way:

I think it has... a lot of what I have come to know as “cradle Catholics,” I think have a tendency to just go through the motions in terms of Sunday worship. I think that bringing this program to the church and involving the whole congregation as a parish family sort of shakes these people out of ... I don't know if you can use the word apathy, but it sort of brings the focus of the faith back to the forefront, and it helps people to realize that... this is part of it or that is part of it. It's not just... coming to Mass... kneeling and genuflecting and praying and then going home. So, I think that in those terms it has probably helped a lot of people to realize that this is a faith community – that this is a parish family, and what happens to one member of the family affects every member of the family. (SJB C1)

The “more” being pointed to here is building a strong sense of relationships and community.

The same catechist went on to provide a specific example of this type of community support:

...two of the people I know from the community through this program, the one being the lady with the two sons... other members of the parish approached her about wanting to offer... if she ever had any questions about the faith or the program or if she ever had any issues about the Church that she wanted to discuss.... I don't want to compare it to AA, but these people were there for her if she ever had any serious doubts or wanted to know more or whatever. So I think by those people approaching her and saying, "Look, we're here for you... the confirmation process is just one aspect... So I think that is an example of that [transformation]. (SBJ C1)

Here we see another good example of how members of the faith community can accompany and support families in the initiation process through mentorship.

A catechist at St. Mary Magdalene Parish, when asked if some sort of transformation had occurred at the parish, offered this answer:

I think so. I think that people like me who have never been involved previously... now I'm a catechist and other parents have stepped forward and other people in the community... it's nice to see when you drive by on a Wednesday night that there's(sic) cars in the church parking lot, and lights are on in the basement, and if it's just a meeting for teens because they're going through for confirmation or it's a parent meeting, the parish becomes the center of activity again, as opposed to just the rink or the shopping center. And maybe we have to go back to that for a certain extent. It's not just an empty building and half full on a Sunday morning. It's just during the week, it's an active place... (SMM C2)

These observations suggest that the catechetical sessions have had an effect on interpersonal relationships and the life of the parish. The building of relationships and active participation of parishioners on an ongoing basis point to the parish being a hub of the faith community as this catechist suggests.

Another catechist highlighted the way that the process is causing transformation through relationships:

I think it helps the parents to become more involved with their children because they have to. They have exercises in their book that have to be completed. The parents have to take the responsibility to help them do the exercises. And I think it also helps the parish to come together to help the little ones receive their sacraments, to help them in a process that is, in my opinion, a very good process. We spend a lot of time with their children, and it's not just a few of us – there are a lot of people involved here. It helps us

as catechists to get to know each other as well and to help get to know families that we may not have met before, so it's kind of nice. (SMM C5)

This sense of belonging and building community through relationships may be part of the reason behind the increased participation of young families in the Sunday Liturgy.

A further catechist from St. Mary Magdalene Parish offered the following answer to the question of transformation at the parish level:

I think the congregation is much more aware of what's going on. We also have the RCIC [Rite of Christian Initiation of Children] program, and we had a young boy, he was in grade two, he had not been baptized... Well then he was baptized at the Easter Vigil... He went right up there... and answered those questions, and it was really something for the congregation to hear and they comment on it when these things are going on. So, I think it's made them more aware of what's going on, plus that fact that at the end of every mass, when father makes announcements, and he'll sometimes say, "We had a retreat today, pray for these young people"... And the other thing is, it's not hard to get catechists... you just have to ask. (SMM C4)

These comments identify the ways in which the faith community was actively involved in the initiation process at this parish. It is through these ways that members of the faith community can actively accompany and support children and their families in the process and fulfill their responsibility for the catechesis of new members.

3.3.3.2 Active Participation of Families in the Parish

The active participation of families in parishes because of their involvement in the catechetical process was noted by several people I interviewed. When asked if the parish sacramental initiation process for children had transformed her parish, a catechist from St.

Monica Parish gave the following assessment:

As far as attendance, no... I can only give you personal feedback here in regard to that. I can remember my son, there were thirty-six in his class, and out of the thirty-six, thirty-six were baptized and had their sacraments after that, and when I look in the grade three this year in one school, one of the schools where I worked, about half of the class had their first communion, and about half of the class had their confirmation...(SM C3)

This catechist has equated transformation with Mass “attendance.” She is bothered by the lower numbers of children celebrating the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist and thus does not see any transformation of the parish as a result of low participation in the life of the parish by young families. She did not talk about any other kind of transformation in her response other than participation in the Sunday Eucharist and the celebration of other sacraments.

I must make note of a dilemma identified here. The concern this catechist has is with numbers of children celebrating the sacraments and being involved in the catechetical process. If children and families are actively participating in the catechetical process and in the Sunday Eucharist and other parish activities, it can be said that transformation is certainly occurring in various ways. With the catechumenal model, there is a different kind of participation. It’s not about how many are involved but rather that those involved are engaged in the process and are experiencing conversion and deepening their understanding of discipleship.

Another catechist at this parish agreed with the assessment of the last catechist and the pastor when it comes to parishioners’ acceptance and understanding of the new process. But he also asked a pertinent question:

I do think it [parish-based catechesis] has improved the parish that the parishioners are coming around to understanding their role and becoming more involved. I mean some Sundays we don’t have big numbers. I don’t know but how do you judge? Do you judge by whether or not they are there on a Sunday morning for church or not? (SJB C2)

This question challenges the thinking around numbers of attendees, whether that criterion alone is an appropriate measure for determining success and the realization that success is more than people coming to the Sunday Eucharist.

A catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish acknowledged that the parish process has been accepted over time and that more children are participating in the Sunday Eucharist as a result:

The process has gone through. At the beginning there was hesitance... gritting and gnashing of teeth, and the sky is falling... and now it's become more of an accepted practice. But I think you would find there are less kids every year doing the sacramental preparation. But there are less kids [being born]... so I don't mean percentage-wise. So, I don't know if that's significant or not. There's been an acceptance of it [a parish-based process], and it's the norm now, as opposed to some great horrible thing that's been forced upon people. There are more little kids in the church. Whether or not we can sustain that, I don't know. (SJB C4)

The point about more children in the church is noteworthy given the fact that a number of interviewees expressed concern with the number of children and families involved in the process.

Not all of the catechists observed positive changes as a result of a parish-based process.

One of the catechists from St. John the Baptist Parish shared the following observations regarding transformation:

When we do the church supper, maybe we see a lot of those families come back and come together when the parish is needing them most... The negative spin on that is I see some families going to _____ [name of other parish in town] because they don't like the way it is run... which is saddening, but for whatever reasons they have I've also seen some come this way as well, but I've seen a lot being chased away because of the strictness here because you know, I want to see you at mass and... if there's(sic) not actively(sic) participating... from the families, from the kids, he [pastor] can say, "You know, I don't really think you're ready at this time," and that has happened. (SJB C and P)

This reflection illustrates a catechist's concern about the numbers of families involved in the parish process, their participating in the Sunday Eucharist and the way in which families are received by the pastor.

In a sense, St. Mary Magdalene Parish had an advantage when it came to assessing transformation, for at the time I conducted the interviews, it had already employed a parish based process for several years. It is interesting how people from this parish observed different kinds

of transformation. The pastor of the parish noted the change that has occurred with parishioners participating in the process:

Has it [the parish] been changed? Yes, because now we have people participating who have never participated, and that way they are now using their gifts to help others including helping me 'cause I have some who have volunteered to do things for me that they would never had done had they not been involved in the sacramental preparation program. And also, in helping other children which is a blessing, so they've been a positive to the parish. There's no doubt about it. (SMM Pas.)

The pastor was not the only person who noted a change in the parish as a result of the catechetical ministry.

A catechist from this parish notes change occurring with regards to numbers of young children participating in the Sunday Eucharist:

As I said, our attendance has gone up and I think it's because the parents have found their children are being looked after. At one time everyone said, "Our children are going to a Catholic school, and I don't have to do anything." Well, the evolution has [occurred]... a lot of the religion has been taken out of Catholic schools, and we do it here, and I think you yourself will know that this is what is happening throughout the Diocese. I just think that there's a different aspect of why I go to church ... not myself, but people are asking themselves that question – why am I going to church? And, it's to bring their children along and to help them. (SMM C1)

Another catechist noted the increase in church "attendance" and the participation of parents in the process:

I've noticed that more people are attending church... so, I guess it's [parish-based process] helping because it's got them [young families] started coming back. It's bringing parents back to the church because they've been bringing their children because it's mandatory... your children must attend mass or you can't receive the sacraments, so the parents... some, not all... because we've seen some parents drop the kids off for an hour and then pick them up, but it has brought more adults back to the church. (SMM C3)

This parish, St. Mary Magdalene, is one of the parishes with the "passport" process. Children must have the passport stamped to prove they have "attended" Mass. The problem with these statements is that increased attendance alone cannot be equated with transformation. More bodies in the pews do not mean that individuals and parishes are being transformed and that

active participation in the Eucharist and in the life of the parish is occurring. Being a disciple is an active process that calls people to a way of life.

3.3.3.3 Shift in Orientation and Thinking about the Catechetical Ministry

Many people I interviewed referred to a shift in orientation and understanding regarding the initiation process by parishioners, parents and the parish in general. The pastor of St. Leo Parish had a definite answer to the question as to whether his parish had been transformed as a result of the parish sacramental initiation process. He gave the subsequent response to this question:

Definitely. The awareness of parishioners in knowing that and for the parents to know that if they wish to have their children participate in the life of faith that they not only need to be on board, they have to be proactive. That is a very important change, and even the tone amongst the groups in the individual sessions where you see people gathering to talk or to share or to sing... those kinds of things are very positive. Naturally, it would be a lie to say that there are some parishioners who may be totally enthralled, and they want to know what this means and will the children be left out and does this mean the Catholic school system is going to disappear... there's been a little bit of that, not a lot. Especially since this is an on deck diocesan matter with the bishop's full push behind it... that takes away the danger of one parish or even one priest feeling like a lone ranger who's swimming upstream and that's been a great benefit. (SL Pas.)

The remarks from this pastor point to the shift in thinking discussed in many sections of this work. The pastor sees the transformative nature of parents realizing and living the fundamental part they play in both the faith formation of their child and in the sacramental initiation process. Perhaps this phenomenon will develop and spread over time.

The pastor of St. Brigid Parish hesitated to give an answer to this question too soon as this parish was just in the second year of the process. However, he did give a brief reflection after pondering the question:

I think transformations in things like that, you have to take the long view. What I can say is that in the two years, we have had what I would more specifically say is a shift in the

mentality of how children are prepared for the sacraments. I think that now we have finally moved over those rough waters of the initial transition to there being a common expectation and understanding in the parish that this is what's being done and hopefully an understanding as to why it's being done. So I'm willing to say that the shift has solidified in the minds of the parish. The transformation – that will be left up for other priests to answer down the road. (SB Pas.)

The pastor identifies a “shift” in thinking about the parish process moving toward the catechumenal model being the new norm for the sacramental initiation of children.

A transformative modification in thinking was observed as well by the pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish. His summation of this transformation is noted here:

The transformation I would say is certainly around the struggle we had initially... people who didn't have children to be involved in sacramental preparation not understanding this, perhaps not even buying into it, negative about it, discouraging the program ...Whereas now, the older people, more and more, people have been educated around it.... They would be the ones challenging their children and grandchildren saying, “You know, you shouldn't even be going there and asking if you're not willing to invest something in it.”...I've had parents and grandparents saying, “You know, I tell my kids there's responsibility that goes along with being a Catholic and the responsibilities to live your faith, and so that's what it's there for.” So, to me, that's a real shift. (SJB Pas.)

Changes of this magnitude take time and so much patience and finesse is required to help members of the faith community understand such a vision. The shift is far greater than a simple mindset. The change requires an understanding of the Church's vision for initiation and a precise understanding of the process needed to bring this vision to fruition.

Chapter IV – Interpreting and Analyzing the Findings

This culminating section of the thesis project includes the sixth and final step in Creswell’s phenomenological approach: the “essence” of the phenomenon which is the focus of my research – the parish based process of the sacramental initiation of children moving toward the catechumenal model. This stage of the practical theological process involves what is referred to as the “the normative task” in the work by Richard Osmer. In this section, I will present what Osmer calls “theological interpretation.” He defines theological interpretation as “...the use of theological concepts to interpret episodes, situations and contexts, including those in which we are actors.”³⁰⁰ A final analysis will be given, incorporating both the structural and textural descriptions presented previously. Essentially, this means that I will be taking the insights that were generated from the data I gathered in the phenomenological method and will put them into conversation with the best possible theological and catechetical vision of the Church concerning the catechumenal model. This is the hermeneutical dialogue between my findings and the norms and visions of the catechumenal model I highlighted in Chapter I.

This chapter will be organized according to the five foundational components of the vision for the initiation of children which were outlined in section 1.3 – *Foundational Components for the Initiation of Children*, in Chapter I of this thesis. The five components are: (1) the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults as the norm for children’s initiation; (2) the gradual nature of the initiation process; (3) the significant role of the faith community in the

³⁰⁰ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology – An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 131.

formation of children; (4) the liturgical catechetical element to the initiation process and (5) the integral roles of parents, catechists and mentors in the process.³⁰¹

4.1 *The Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults as the Norm for Children's Initiation*

Many of the insights I gleaned from the data produced from the phenomenological study were related to the Church's teaching that the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is the model for all catechesis and initiation, including that of children. To help with coherence, I have organized these insights under the following headings of themes that surfaced in my findings: the quality of catechesis, the involvement of Catholic schools, the parish becoming a mainly academic environment in the process, the issue of scheduling and timing for families, inconsistencies among parishes, the challenges of mass "attendance" and "passports" and transformation of the parish.

4.1.1 The Quality of Catechesis

During the interviews, parents, pastors and catechists were asked to compare their experience of the sacramental initiation process in Catholic schools to that of the process moving toward the catechumenal model in the parish. In doing so, many respondents commented on the quality of catechesis in both the school and parish processes.

The Church, in highlighting the importance of the formation of catechists, states that "All of these tasks are born of the conviction that the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed

³⁰¹ It is possible that there are other important components related to the Christian initiation of children, however, this analysis will be limited to the five components identified.

at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel.”³⁰² Thus, the Church insists that catechists be properly trained to be able to effectively serve in the catechetical ministry. This is essential in forming a process that uses the *RCIA* as the model.

Several of the interviewees pointed to problems with the quality of catechesis in the school-based process. Both catechists and parents questioned the priority sacramental catechesis, in particular, and religious education, in general, were given in Catholic schools. The comment from the parent at St. Brigid Parish about having her child’s religious education workbook come home at the end of the year with nothing written in it is particularly revealing. (SB P1) The experience of this parent points to religious education’s lack of prominence in some Catholic schools and to several other challenging issues. One is the formation of teachers and administrators. Fr. James Mulligan insists that “[ongoing] Faith formation must be available to sustain those [teachers] who consider the Catholic school as a sacred place and teaching as a vocation.”³⁰³ This is especially true for religious educators who need ongoing formation to be effective communicators and witnesses to the faith. Ongoing formation also points to the importance of and commitment to lifelong learning which has been identified by the Ontario Catholic community as one of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations.³⁰⁴

For some teachers and administrators another difficulty may be a lack of commitment to religious education and faith formation. One might add a lack of accountability for these groups in the same processes. Although these are major concerns for Catholic school supporters, they are not the direct focus for this thesis project.

³⁰² *GDC*, # 234.

³⁰³ James T. Mulligan, CSC, *Catholic Education – Ensuring a Future* (Ottawa: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 2005), 224.

³⁰⁴ Institute for Catholic Education, “Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations,” <http://www.iceont.ca/page17862747.aspx> (accessed December 29, 2013).

A further troubling issue that surfaced in my findings was the prevalent feeling that the school process was often an experience of information sharing with little faith formation or faith witnessing. Much of how a religious education program is delivered depends on the person of the teacher. If the teacher is genuinely passionate about his or her faith and sharing that faith, this will be obvious in the classroom. Parker Palmer insists that “Passion for the [school] subject propels that subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle – and when a great thing is in their midst, students have direct access to the energy of learning and of life.”³⁰⁵ Energy is contagious and when a teacher exhibits positive enthusiasm for their faith, students can’t help but be affected by a teacher’s honest love for and commitment to their faith journey.

Although the Catholic school is supposed to have a catechetical element, the school approach to sacramental initiation can seem more didactic by including information sharing, memorization and the repetition of ideas, while the parish process has the possibility of being more pastoral and engaging the whole person. In his discussion on what he refers to as “total catechesis,” Thomas Groome proposes “...that we replace the didactic school paradigm with a sharing faith community.”³⁰⁶ The parish process involves the faith community accepting candidates and their life situations and forming the whole person in an inviting manner by engaging them in relationship and providing opportunities for experiencing the sacred and reflecting on that experience. Parishes that offer effective catechesis have invested in significant time and effort. Such a comprehensive approach involves calling forth catechists who are much more than information sharers, relying solely on the content and delivery of a program. John H. Westerhoff III writes that “Persons embrace the faith not through learning doctrine but by

³⁰⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach – Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, (San Francisco: Josey Boss Publishers, 1998), 120.

³⁰⁶ Thomas H. Groome, “Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always” in *Horizons and Hopes – The Future of Religious Education*, ed. Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell. (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 13.

participating in a liturgical community that symbolically shares and celebrates its sacred narratives.”³⁰⁷ From these stories from the faith tradition, people are able to reflect on their own stories and how they relate back to the faith tradition. Thomas Groome calls this practice the “shared Christian practice approach” and explains that it is “...a pedagogy that encourages people to bring their lives to their Faith and their Faith to their lives.”³⁰⁸ The catechetical ministry should enable people to see the relevance of their faith tradition in their own lives. Catechists have to be knowledgeable and flexible in order to relate to families and understand the current dynamics of family life. They must also be comfortable enough with their faith to share it with others. Catechetical sessions are intended to be more about faith sharing, coming to know God and the message of Jesus, living the liturgical year and inviting families to live the Christian life rather than just imparting information or memorizing dogma.

It must be acknowledged that three parents from St. Leo Parish dissented from the view that the quality of the parish process was higher than that of the school process. These parents felt that the students were better prepared at the school and that the school communicated more effectively with the children and parents. Perhaps the parents were uneasy with the newer parish process or perhaps the particular teachers at that school did a better job than the catechists at the church. Regardless, the ongoing formation of catechists and some processes of evaluation where catechetical teams ask themselves whether they are meeting the needs of families regarding faith formation effectively. This includes providing valuable communication with families and especially communicating with children, young people, and parents at their level where their concerns and hopes are most real. However, parents are obligated to inform catechetical teams

³⁰⁷ John H. Westerhoff III, “The Formative Nature of Liturgy: Cultic Life and the Initiation of Children”, in *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, ed. Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol, 103-113. (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 153.

³⁰⁸ Thomas H. Groome. *Will There be Faith? – A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 262.

when they feel that there are problems with communication or if they feel their children or families are not being served well by the catechetical process. It is a dialogical process that requires good relationship skills. Communication must be honest, ongoing and open and all parties should feel comfortable sharing questions, concerns and reflections with one another.

It is noteworthy that no other parents from this parish shared these observations and that, when I conducted the interviews, St. Leo Parish was in the first year of a new process with many issues still being resolved. Perhaps the fledgling formation of the catechists and their overall lack of experience with the process had something to do with the concerns these parents expressed.

The quality of the catechetical process must be evaluated regularly. At the end of every catechetical year, parishes should take the time to assess the vision, structure and effectiveness of the initiation process. It would also be beneficial for parishes to give parents the opportunity to provide feedback concerning their experiences in the catechetical process. In that way, parental concerns such as those mentioned above could be brought forward and discussed, as catechetical teams deconstructed and vetted their own process. It would be helpful if there was such a time for feedback, reflection and adjustment midway through the process, so that the experience could be improved as it was happening. Important feedback could also provide helpful insights for catechetical teams.

4.1.2 The Involvement of Catholic Schools in the Process

The subject of Catholic schools and their place in the initiation process was a central discussion point in my interviews. Catholic schools form an important partnership with the home and parish in the faith formation of children in many parts of the Diocese. The *RCIA* as

model for all catechesis gives a vision of the role of the faith community in the catechetical process. As Catholic schools share in the evangelization and formational work of the parish, the Church recognizes that they have an important role to play in catechesis and religious education.

The Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke outlines the responsibility of Catholic schools in the sacramental initiation process. It states:

In many parts of the Diocese of Pembroke, publicly funded Catholic schools exist. Catholic schools can play a supportive role in parental and parish preparation of students for the sacraments. Each teacher in the Catholic school is called to be a witness to the Catholic faith through his or her regular contact with student candidates for the sacraments. In this sense, each Catholic school teacher, especially the classroom teacher, shares responsibility for the child's sacramental preparation. The Catholic school teacher is therefore an important role model of adult faith for the candidate seeking the sacraments – through prayer, participation in parish liturgical celebrations, faith sharing and religious education.³⁰⁹

“Supportive” is the key word in this statement. The Catholic school and Catholic teacher are called to support children as they are formed by the parish, the most important locus of catechesis,³¹⁰ and parents, the primary educator in the faith for the child.³¹¹ But Catholic teachers are meant to be much more than adults who impart information. Ideally, they should see this work as a vocation, should endeavor to share their faith and support their students in an active faith journey. Fr. James Mulligan highlights the importance of Catholic teachers understanding their work as a ministry and vocation:

Catholic education works best in those schools staffed by teachers who consider teaching to be ministry and vocation just as much as profession or job. The vocation of the Catholic educator that is part of the evangelizing ministry of the church is rooted in an understanding of baptism and in deep faith in Jesus and the gospel. Teachers in the Catholic school see themselves as part of a community of adult believers participating in the ministry of doing Catholic education with young people.³¹²

³⁰⁹ *Policy*, p.8.

³¹⁰ *GDC*, # 257.

³¹¹ *GDC*, #255.

³¹² Mulligan, *Catholic Education*, 112-113.

The important work Catholic teachers do is indeed meant to be so much more than a mere job or career. Understanding and living their work as a ministry or vocation enables teachers to more effectively engage students in their faith and be authentic witnesses to the faith in Catholic schools.

Although the link with the schools is important, only six interviewees expressed an interest or hope in maintaining some kind of a formal partnership with the Catholic schools for the sacramental initiation process. Although they were small in number, they were generally insistent that the loss of a formal place for Catholic schools in the initiation process was something regrettable. Perhaps the reason why so few participants expressed disappointment in the initiation process no longer being school-based is because it has been over four years now since the Diocesan *Policy* has come into effect. Another contributing factor could be the fact that several of the Ontario parishes, have, for many years, had a parish-based process. It is also possible that many of the people I interviewed see the benefits of a parish-based process and are not longing for the return of a process that is Catholic school-based.

Two catechists in particular who identified themselves also as Catholic school principals were particularly upset about the diminished role of the Catholic schools in the parish catechetical process. One catechist shared his concern over the lower numbers of children in the parish process. He feared the children who were not part of the parish process were “lost sheep,” and he concluded by saying, “I don’t know if they’ll ever be found again.” (SJB C2)

The reality is that there are many children who are “lost” in the sense that their families are disconnected from parish life, and the parents may not be taking their responsibility as primary educator in the faith seriously. Another aspect is that the problem may sometimes lie

with the ability of the Church and parish to reach out and engage the spiritual hunger that

Reginald Bibby identifies as being so strong among Canadians.³¹³ Bibby explains this dilemma:

All is well on the demand side. It's the supply side that poses the problem. The belief systems and programs offered by churches and other religious groups are simply not connecting with the people who need them or think they might need them at some point in the future... There is consequently a great need for Canadians and religious groups to discover each other, for a connection to take place.³¹⁴

And so, it is necessary for parishes to look inward to discover what they could be doing better to connect with the disconnected and meet their spiritual needs. If parishes offer little or nothing for young families in the form of ministries, engagement with the Liturgy or outreach, why would they connect? If a parish cannot satisfy the spiritual hunger of young families, they will certainly not form bonds with the parish.

The above catechist fails to mention the fact that in every year of schooling, religious education programs are being offered to students, even if sacramental preparation no longer occurs in the school. Ideally, evangelization and catechesis should be happening in these programs, in the Catholic classroom, and, school at large. Thus, the Church identifies the Catholic school as "...a most important locus for human and Christian formation."³¹⁵ However, the reality is that in many parishes of the Diocese of Pembroke and in all parishes in the Province of Quebec, Catholic schools do not exist.

The catechist's point about the number of children not celebrating the sacrament of confirmation is also interesting. Bringing this concern forward, he gives a bleak interpretation of the numbers in the process – specifically that only six of thirty-three students in his son's class were part of the parish catechetical process for confirmation. It appears that he is equating the

³¹³ Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods – The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, (Toronto, Ontario: Novalis/Saint Paul University, 2004), 225.

³¹⁴ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 225.

³¹⁵ *GDC*, #259.

success of a catechetical process with the number of children who came forward for the initiation process. But the question can be asked conversely: if thirty-three students celebrate confirmation but only six out of those thirty-three are actively involved in their parish community, is this really a signal of success?

This discussion of Catholic schools relates to an event that occurred in September of 2009 which may open up other aspects of the underlying tensions involved with moving towards the catechumenal model. I was asked to address a meeting of our local Catholic school trustees who had questions about the new diocesan *Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children*. After giving a brief presentation on the policy, I listened to comments and fielded questions from the trustees for over an hour concerning the *Policy*. Every trustee had something to say and many were clearly upset and angry with this change. An observer shared with me afterwards that it was unusual for this group of trustees to display such emotion and vigor in school board meetings. During our exchange, many trustees referred to the *Policy* as “Your Policy” when they addressed me. The chair began by stating that he felt “your policy is regressive and negative.” Other points, questions and comments followed: “Many parents are upset by this – they are stopping me on the street to tell me so... how can our schools maintain our Catholic character if we are not preparing students for the sacraments?... does this mean that children will not be able to make sacraments if they are not going to church?... why were we not consulted on this?... is there a possibility this *Policy* will be revoked?”³¹⁶ Given the tension in the room, it was most difficult to address the questions and concerns. However, I remained calm and responded as best I could, all the while trying to explain to them the Church’s vision of the

³¹⁶ Taken from notes I made following the October 5, 2009 meeting with trustees of the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board.

initiation process, which calls for parents to act as the primary educators in the faith and for the parish to be the most important catechetical locus.³¹⁷

At the end of our time together, I offered to share their concerns with the Bishop. When I invited the trustees to put their concerns on paper and forward them to me, I was asked for my email address which was provided. But, to date, I have received no electronic information from the trustees to share with the Bishop. Why the trustees decided not to forward their concerns to me I do not know. I did, however, share my observations from the trustee meeting with the Bishop shortly after this presentation. After some thinking about this meeting, I concluded that part of the trustees' frustration came from their dual perspectives. Some trustees were speaking not only as elected officials but as parents and grandparents of children and grandchildren who were looking forward to Catholic schools continuing with sacramental preparation. And, perhaps, some trustees had children and grandchildren who were disconnected from parish life. The other perspective, that of Catholic school trustees worrying about maintaining the Catholic character of the Catholic school, caused them to feel perhaps slighted by the Diocese for taking what they saw as a radical change in direction. It is also possible that the trustees felt the Diocese was being critical of the school model and that what was offered by many Catholic schools in the past was somehow insufficient or poorly presented. Catholic school principals and senior school board administrators were consulted during the process that led to the writing of the diocesan *Policy*, and the expectation was that they were informing the Catholic school trustees with regards to this process.

No communication effort is perfect, and so perhaps the Diocese could have communicated more effectively with Catholic families, parishes and the Catholic school community. Certainly, the Diocese could have explained better, particularly early on, the

³¹⁷ GDC, #255, #257.

reasons for the shift towards the catechumenal model, the vision of the Church regarding initiation and the prominent place of parish and parents in this process.³¹⁸

Following the meeting with the trustees, I returned home exhausted from the demanding, tense and lively exchange. But, this meeting was a good experience for me, as I came to some important realizations about what moving ahead with this *Policy* would mean. There would be many well-intentioned people upset with this change, and we would have to be prepared to address their concerns. And, there would be much work to do in communicating with people the vision of the *Policy* and the Church and the reasons behind it. Regardless of how well we attempted to communicate the vision and the change, some people would still be unhappy with both the new direction and those of us involved with it. And for many, a significant challenge would be attempting to change or at least confront their own intransigence on the issue. These early realizations have been confirmed throughout this study.

A number of interviewees felt vital information was not being disseminated by some parishes and, since this information did not get to the schools, children and families were not made aware of the parish-based process. These people longed for a process in which the school and parish worked together to communicate with the home, regarding the sacramental initiation process. A call for a better relationship among home, school and parish is certainly worthwhile. This is an area of great significance for the Catholic community and of great concern to me personally, but it is not the direct concern of the thesis project.

³¹⁸ From my own perspective, my understanding of the initiation process and the vision behind it has become clearer with time. Even since the *Policy* was disseminated in 2009, my own comprehension on issues concerning the initiation process has evolved and expanded.

4.1.3 The Parish Becoming a “School” in the Process

In using the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* as a model for catechesis, the Church gives a vision of the atmosphere and character of the catechetical process. A parish process that is moving toward the catechumenal model should not be established in a traditional academic manner. Nonetheless, this occurrence, at multiple parishes, came to the surface in different ways in the interviews I conducted.

Many people whom I interviewed referred to a parish initiation process as one of memorization and formal didactic style of learning, placing this kind of knowledge against the experience of God which is another form of knowing. Schools have their place in the faith formation of children as indicated previously.³¹⁹ Of course, there must be some place for memorization of key prayers, responses and other teachings of the faith, so catechumens can more actively participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy and other aspects of the faith. Knowing is also a part of faith formation. While it is important to recognize that learning and memorizing dogmas and traditional teachings of the Church may be helpful to a person’s faith journey, they are not the core of the initiation process. The essence of the initiation process is discipleship with Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the faith experience of children themselves is critical. The *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity* offers a description of what the catechumenal process is:

Those who have received from God the gift of faith in Christ, through the church, should be admitted with liturgical rites to the catechumenate, which is not merely an exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the entire Christian

³¹⁹ See section 3.1.3 - *Comparing Sacramental Initiation in Catholic Schools to the Parish Sacramental Initiation Process – The Involvement of Catholic Schools in the Process.*

life, an apprenticeship of suitable duration, during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher.³²⁰

When we are calling children to a catechumenal model of initiation, then, we are calling them to an apprenticeship in the Christian life. Central to the catechumenal process is the involvement of both parish and family supporting children as they become more committed disciples of Jesus Christ. While a religious education model is more focused on the curriculum, the key part of the catechumenal process is the forming of relationships.³²¹ As disciples of Jesus Christ, our relationship with Him is of prime importance. So, too, are learning to live the gospel and forming right relationships with others.

Not everyone involved in the sacramental initiation process understands that the catechumenal process is not an academic process. Steven Robich addresses the issue: “The academic classroom design is based on student readiness and teacher skill. This does not fit a catechumenal process that is more suited to individual readiness, personal maturity and group bondedness.”³²² In order to avoid such an academic classroom design, catechists need to offer a process that is true to the vision of the catechumenal model. My findings indicate that there are instances where the parish process is too much like a traditional academic model. A particular example of the problem occurs in St. Mary Magdalene Parish. Analyzing the interviews of research participants from St. Mary Magdalene Parish, I noticed that ten of the interviewees’ remarks included classroom terminology that was used more strongly and consistently than from participants from other parishes.

³²⁰ “*Ad Gentes Divinitus* – Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #14.

³²¹ My focus in this thesis is not to evaluate religious education and catechetical programs and curriculum. Rather, my concern is with assessing the effectiveness of an initiation process of moving toward the catechumenal model.

³²² Steven Robich, “Christian Initiation of Children: No Longer a Class or Grade Issue” in *Readings in the Christian Initiation of Children*, ed. Victoria M. Tufano (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 113.

An aspect of schooling that is also problematic, when introduced to the catechetical framework, is homework. From my experience as a teacher, most children do not enjoy homework, and many teenagers do not regularly do homework. It is little wonder then that the children involved in this parish process are equally unexcited about completing homework for the catechetical sessions. (SMM Child.) Comments from parents at St. Mary Magdalene Parish indicate that the “book” or catechetical program played a major part in this parish’s catechetical process. The impression is that the process became more of an educational exercise, focused on a text rather than a faith experience. While it is beneficial that parents are engaging with their children as they work through the program together, this engagement is much the same as parents helping their children with school homework. If the sessions instead involved catechists exploring teachings of the faith by with addressing the experience of families, these encounters would be of a faith sharing experience.

I am unsure of how much faith-sharing and witnessing by the catechists occurred in this particular parish process. Did the children hear any of the Sunday gospels proclaimed and did they have a chance to reflect on them? Were they brought into the church to learn about the liturgy and the changes that occur with the celebration of the seasons in the liturgical year? Were the symbols of the sacraments explained to them in a tangible way, where they could engage directly with the elements rather than reading about them from a book? Another parish catechist talked about “...[her] role in teaching these children their religion.” (SMM C1) This comment makes one think the catechesis is about relaying information to children, rather than faith sharing. A parent at this parish identified the same concern with the process. She said that the catechesis sessions consisted of the catechist going through the program in a didactic manner, so she asked for more discussion and time for creativity. (SMM P1)

Present and future catechist formation must address this challenge by forming catechists in the vision of the catechumenal model so that they can develop the tools and access the resources necessary to offer a parish process that is inspired by the catechumenal process. Catechists must realize that a catechetical program is just a tool and should not drive an entire process. Discipleship with Jesus Christ and relationships with those directly involved and the entire faith community must be omnipresent in the process. Catechists also need to learn that the didactic model is not the most helpful in establishing a catechumenal process for children. It is a great challenge to transform the thinking and behaviour of many involved who feel comfortable operating under such a didactic model. This is, perhaps, why the transition to the catechumenal model is so difficult. Reflecting on such complex issues with regards to forming a Christian community, Thomas Groome advises that “...parish programs should stop thinking of themselves as confined to *informing* people in Christian faith and expand their horizon to become communities of *formation* and *transformation* in Christian living as well.”³²³ By attempting to form and transform people and parishes, the catechumenal process moves beyond the simple task of information sharing.

4.1.4 The Issue of Scheduling and Timing for Families

As the model for all catechesis, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* inspires the catechesis of children to be a process that welcomes children and families who seek the initiation journey as they are. This spiritual journey varies in many respects for families and thus the

³²³ Thomas H. Groome, *Educating for Life – A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Allen, Texas: Thomas More, 1998), 211.

catechetical process should be accommodating to them.³²⁴ The matter of the scheduling and timing for families with regard to the initiation process surfaced in many interviews.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* identifies as one of the duties of catechesis for the enculturation of the faith “to know in depth the culture of the persons [being catechized] and the extent of its penetration into their lives.”³²⁵ Familiarity with the demands on family life is part of knowing the culture of families. Twenty-six interviewees mentioned the challenge of making the time for commitment to a parish initiation process in their family schedules. All of the children interviewed said that this was difficult for them. Families in our culture are increasingly busy, and most children seem to be involved in numerous organized sports and other activities which sometimes “compete” with the practice of the faith. The popularity of organized hockey in the communities found within the Diocese of Pembroke³²⁶ and the priority that participation in this sport seems to take over faith practice for many families is a concrete instance of these competing activities. For other families, their participation in the parish process is also stressful, but not solely because of being involved in numerous events.

For a family in St. Leo Parish, just getting to the parish for the catechesis was a challenge. A mother I interviewed shared with me that her family relied on the Saturday evening bus provided by the parish to get to mass. (SL P5) The mother also said that another family in the parish offered them rides to the catechetical sessions. I made the assumption that this family did not own a vehicle, and so transportation was indeed an issue for them. However, this family’s commitment was noteworthy, and it was also significant that another family reached out

³²⁴ *RCIA*, #5.

³²⁵ *GDC*, #203.

³²⁶ Hockey is part of a larger Canadian experience. In September 2013, a CBC report gave statistics gathered from Hockey Canada regarding participation in hockey. In 2011, over 600,000 Canadians under 18 years of age were registered with hockey Canada as hockey players. 22% of children ages five to fourteen were playing hockey in 2010. 48% of Canadians said hockey is an important source of personal or collective pride in Canada. Source: CBC, “Hockey, Canada’s Game, Not it’s Most Popular,” CBC News Website, <http://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/sports-junior/> (accessed December 29, 2013).

to help this family get to the parish sessions. When such strains for families appear, parishes should be enablers, helping families to fully participate in the sacraments. This particular parish's commitment to accessibility, providing a bus to Saturday evening Mass, is commendable. However, it appears some other parishioners would benefit from a similar service offered for Sunday mornings. There may also be a place for more engagement with other families offering to share transportation. This kind of cooperation would build the sense of community and discipleship, more than providing another bus.

A situation may occur where a family has made little effort to participate in catechetical sessions or has missed sessions because of other family commitments. It may be that they are sending a message that the initiation process is not a priority for them at this time and that they are not ready to commit to this process. These realizations should be discussed, but it is important that the approach taken is pastoral and one that assures the family is welcome to be a part of the process at another time when its members are able to make the necessary commitment. The intention of involvement in such a process is not to take away from family time but to enhance it. Parents in particular must be given the opportunity to actively journey with their children toward the celebration of sacraments and to become participating members of a faith community.

It is crucial that parishes be aware of the unique situations of today's families so that the parishes can better address their needs, minister to them and invite them into active participation in the faith community. Judith Dunlap says that "The catechetical leader is the one who must inspire trust and build community, listen well and accept people where they are. The catechetical leader is responsible for being open to adapting, bending and changing... to be

inclusive of people's culture or people's needs."³²⁷ In order to meet these particular needs of families, all of whom face various demands and challenges, parish catechetical teams must take these realities into consideration when facilitating a parish catechetical process. Given the complexities and schedules of family life, realistic questions need to be asked. How many catechetical sessions should be offered? Should masses and catechetical sessions be scheduled in direct conflict with known family activities? Many parents work shift work and others are single parents who have particular constraints on the time and resources they can give to an initiation process. Children of divorced or separated parents may be with one parent one week and another the next week. Some parents willingly take their child to catechetical sessions while others do not. For children in situations where one parent is not cooperative, parishes must employ flexibility and the skills to handle these situations pastorally. A child should never be penalized for a lack of parental support or the constraints that may be operative in a family unit. If children miss a session at St. Mary Magdalene Parish, they must attend a "make up session" in lieu of the missed session. Not all parishes have such a stringent stipulation. Situations such as these should be handled pastorally, on a case by case basis and require thoughtful and well-formed catechists.

4.1.5 Inconsistencies among Parishes

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* offers a vision for the initiation process that is most effective when understood and lived by all faith communities. One of the concerns that surfaced in the data I collected was the discrepancy among parishes in offering different models of the initiation process. Some were much closer to the catechumenal model than others.

³²⁷ Judith Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis – Visions and Tasks for Catechetical Leaders* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 20.

In the introductory letter to the diocesan *Policy*, Bishop Michael Mulhall stated, “It is the intention of the Diocese of Pembroke that this policy be integrated into the life of the parish in the coming year.”³²⁸ Over four years later, not all parishes have adopted the *Policy* and subsequently have not moved to a parish based process for the initiation of children. Many pastors and catechists have shared their frustration with me concerning those who have not moved to a parish-based model. Due to this lack of uniformity, they are often faced with negative comments: “But in such a parish, the sacramental preparation is still in the school, so why is it different here?” Such an inconsistency among parishes has created problems for the parishes that have attempted to implement a parish process and has caused much confusion among parents and parishioners.

This conflict points to a deeper, more significant issue regarding the vision of the parish-based model of initiation. The core of the difficulty is not simply about obeying the *Policy* – it is about the vision of the Church. Some understand the importance of an initiation process that involves the faith community, engages parents as the primary educators of the faith and is centered on the Sunday Eucharist. Others do not and are happy to continue with a Catholic school-based model which has been the status quo for many years.

If all pastors, administrators and parishes were convinced that the diocesan *Policy* called for a helpful vision of initiation, consistency would not be a problem, and pastors and catechists would not hear the complaint from parents that “This isn’t happening in such a parish.” It is certainly frustrating for the pastors, catechists and parishes who are following the *Policy* when they are met with such comments. Some families may consider changing parishes because less is asked of them in a school-based process and much of the catechesis is offered through the school. Again, this is a situation where these parents make choices they believe are more

³²⁸ *Policy*, Introductory Letter.

beneficial for them and/or their children. If all parishes followed the diocesan *Policy*, I suspect this phenomenon would occur less frequently. If the *Policy* were adhered to by all parishes, it would afford a larger opportunity for diocesan engagement in the formation of catechesis. In this circumstance, parishes in the same zone or region, sharing a parish process, could also share their expertise, resources and personnel. A common focus has the prospect of much collaboration among parishes.

Another problem related to irregularities among parishes is the fact that in a school-based process, there are often children who technically belong to a parish other than that of the one associated with the parochial school. Therefore, some children in the catechetical group celebrate the sacraments of initiation in the parish of the parochial school, not the parish to which they belong. These children, then, are being initiated into unaffiliated parishes, a situation contrary to the vision of the Church and initiatory catechesis. In these instances, the children are not being formed according to the vision of the catechumenal model which has at its heart the parish as the most important locus for catechesis. The Church teaches that candidates for the sacraments of initiation are to be initiated into their own faith community.³²⁹

4.1.6 The Challenges of Mass “Attendance” and “Passports”

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is established for people who “...consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts.”³³⁰ Thus, celebrating sacraments, such as the Eucharist, is always invitational. The issues of mass “attendance” and the use of “passports” are problematic, in my opinion, since they

³²⁹ CCC, #1248, GDC # 253, 254.

³³⁰ RCIA, #1.

work against the vision the Church offers with regard to inviting people to participating in a full, active and conscious way in the Sunday Liturgy.

It is pleasing to see children and young families at celebrations of the Sunday Eucharist. The Church desires that families be participating members of the Eucharistic Liturgy and faith community rather than simply being in attendance. As indicated in the findings of this work, I alerted pastors and catechists to the issue of the language we use around the initiation ministry and the power it can have in the understanding of important faith teachings. One of the concrete examples I used was the wording surrounding this exact problem – preferably we should be using “participation in the Sunday liturgy” rather than “mass attendance.” Twelve research participants used the phrase “mass attendance” in their comments. The Church calls people to much more than “showing up” – the ideal is full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy³³¹ and indeed in the life of the parish. True discipleship in Jesus Christ extends beyond the Sunday Eucharist and calls the Christian to live according to Christ and His ways in all realms of life.

The phrase “mass attendance” surfaced most often in comments of those I interviewed from St. Mary Magdalene Parish. The statement from one of the catechists, “...your children must attend mass or you can’t receive the sacraments...” (SMM C3) is a concern. What begins to evolve, then, is a kind of “attendance check” mentality with just showing up as the only expectation. Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly challenge us to “...re-conceptualize sacrament in our Catholic experience, so that we will no longer see it as a “prize” for good behavior, nor as routine ritual...”³³² This type of thinking could, perhaps, be a factor in some families choosing to disengage from the parish, once the children have celebrated the sacraments. If there is a

³³¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #14.

³³² Robert D. Duggan and Maureen A. Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children – Hope for the Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 85.

strong insistence of “mass attendance” during the initiation process but little in the way of invitation to participate in the Sunday Liturgy and the ongoing life of the faith community, many parents may see such an expectation as an incentive to get what they want – the celebration of the sacrament for their child. In such a situation, parents may not see the relevance of continued worship and involvement with the faith community once the sacraments have been celebrated. However, being there – showing up – is the first step to participation.

What has developed at St. Mary Magdalene Parish is a very strict process of children’s initiation – in essence, if one is not at Mass every Sunday, one cannot celebrate the sacraments – as was noted by the catechist. (SMM C3) This expectation is reinforced by the “passport” process in place at this parish. I would think that parents could resent being forced to attend Mass in order to have their children celebrate the sacraments. At times, there seems to be more insistence than invitation. And given the lack of choice regarding attendance – what is the spirit they come to celebration with and, do they find a welcoming community? This is an important question, not just for St. Mary Magdalene Parish but for all parishes. If parents are dropping their children off for Mass and picking them up afterwards, they are indeed missing the point. And so, we see a recurring concern: the strict Mass attendance rule may be hindering rather than inviting families to a full, active and conscious participation in both the Sunday Liturgy and the life of the parish. The same catechist wondered about family attendance at Mass after the child’s celebration of the sacrament is completed, and this is a problem for all parishes. Of particular concern to me is the amount of time and effort put into dialoguing with families about the importance of ongoing faith practice and involvement in the life of the parish after the sacraments are celebrated. At this parish, Mass attendance is stressed during the catechetical

process, but no one mentioned attempting to engage families after the celebration of the sacraments or in other activities of discipleship.

The use of “passports” at this parish also raises concerns. One parent at St. Mary Magdalene Parish felt insulted at being forced to have her child get a passport stamped when they are already participating in the Sunday Eucharist. (SMM P and C) Her words give the impression of an outdated, punitive atmosphere and a process that appears to be dictatorial and condescending. Not all parents felt this way, and this parent was the only one who strongly opposed the passport process during her interview. Significantly, she doesn’t see more families returning as a result of the passport process. Seemingly, the passport is issued at this parish to ensure children are regularly participating at the Sunday Eucharist during the catechetical process. If another goal of the passport system is to encourage ongoing participation in the Sunday Eucharist and in the life of the parish once the sacraments are celebrated, one wonders how effective the system is. This mother feels that it is not.

I continue to question the prudence of using “passports,” as I don’t believe them to be a successful means of encouraging ongoing participation in the life of the parish after the sacraments are celebrated. I believe this practice gives the impression of dictatorial supervision, and worse still, it can be insulting to many, especially those parents who are already actively engaged in the parish in general and in the Sunday Eucharist in particular. At the time I conducted the interviews, “passports” were not in use at St. Leo Parish but were introduced the following year. The new pastor of St. Leo Parish has since decided to discontinue the use of “passports” at this parish. My understanding is that “passports” are still in use at St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

As a summative comment to this section, the issues of “mass attendance” and “passports” run deep in that they relate to the vision of initiation. Candidates and their families should always be invited to participate fully in the life of the Church and should never feel forced to engage with a worshipping community. The Church imparts that “...evangelization invites men and women to conversion and faith.”³³³ Further, the Church teaches that “The aim of catechetical activity consists in precisely this: to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of the faith.”³³⁴ Inviting and encouraging participation in the Christian life is what the vision calls for— not demanding or insisting. As Thomas Groome asserts, some of the stringent methods used in the past to assure participation are perhaps not as effective in today’s reality: “Although a socialized faith from family or village or one embraced out of obedience to authority appears to have been effective in a more enchanted era, the disenchantment of our time makes unlikely that a passively accepted faith will endure.”³³⁵ Taking attendance at mass will cause a family to practice the faith in a passive way at best. I am not aware of any evidence that points to the active participation of families in the parish as a result of the use of “passports” or attendance checks.

4.1.7 Transformation of the Parish

Pastors and catechists were asked if they felt that their parish has been transformed through the initiation process for children moving toward the catechumenal model. All of the transformations noted in this subsection relate in some way to the image of catechesis outlined in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

³³³GDC, #53.

³³⁴ GDC, #66.

³³⁵ Groome, “Will There be Faith?,” 294.

The Church recognizes the transformative effect that the catechetical ministry has on the parish:

The Christian community not only gives much to those who are being catechized but also receives much from them. New converts, especially adolescents and adults, in adhering to Jesus Christ, bring to the community which receives them new religious and human wealth. Thus the community grows and develops. Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized but also brings the community itself to maturity.³³⁶

The transformative nature of the initiation ministry was noted by participants at each of the parishes that were the focus of my study. Research participants were asked to reflect on how their particular parish may have undergone a change due to the work of the initiation ministry in the parishes.

One aspect of parish transformation noted by several interviewees had to do with the parishes being welcoming and hospitable. Thomas Groome states that "...the parish is called to be a real 'communion' of faith hope and love. The more a parish is such a community, the more likely that it will educate in faith effectively."³³⁷ Building a sense of community is essential to being openhearted. A catechist noted that the people at her parish were welcoming and supportive of candidates for the sacraments of initiation and their families, congratulating them and sharing in their joy. (SM C1) Through their work on intergenerational faith formation, Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber and Leif Kehrwald identify the importance of intergenerational learning sessions as being "...a welcoming environment for all ages to participate..." and "...inviting flexible atmosphere"³³⁸ In such an environment, the faith community must play a key role in the catechetical process and parishioners must be aware of their responsibility in the

³³⁶ GDC, # 221.

³³⁷ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 167.

³³⁸ Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber and Leif Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation – All Ages Learning Together* (New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008), 81.

process. However, the above catechist's latter point, that parishioners "don't know what to do the rest of the year" is also telling.

Good parish catechesis must fill this gap. Parishioners have to be educated about the catechetical process and helped to understand what is expected of them and what their ongoing role in the initiation process is. First and foremost, they need to learn that the entire Christian community is responsible for the initiation of its members.³³⁹ What follows should be some creative planning and dialogue on how this particular faith community can support and accompany candidates and their families in the initiation process. However, comments from a catechist at St. John the Baptist Parish point to a faith community that better understands its responsibility for the catechesis of members.

The catechist said that the parish initiation process has a tendency to invite them to be participants in, rather than being observers of, the process. (SJB C1) He also verbalized a key fact: what affects one member of the parish has an effect on every member of the parish family. And if this faith community has a stronger sense of being a parish family and supporting one another, as this catechist has said, then a positive change has taken place. The same catechist also spoke of parishioners offering support to a mother of children in the parish process, by giving her their help and encouragement. When parishioners go out of their way to make parents and children involved in the parish initiation process feel welcome, a positive change is taking place. By offering their help, these parishioners were taking on a mentorship role, an ideal in the initiation ministry. Here, the mentors act not only as teachers but also as witnesses to the faith and offer an apprenticeship in living out their faith to those they are mentoring.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ *GDC*, #220.

³⁴⁰ *RCIA*, #75.

One particular catechist illustrates the active and visible way that the faith community was invited to be part of the children's initiation process at St. Mary Magdalene Parish. (SMM C4) She described how the faith community supported a boy during the Rite of Acceptance. As he made his baptismal promises, they prayed for all the children involved in the parish process. The catechist also mentioned the many parishioners who came forward to serve in the ministry of catechesis. If the faith community gets to know the children and families, journeys with them in the process and takes responsibility for the initiation ministry, then transformation has certainly taken place.

Comments from one of the deacons on being welcoming and inviting are significant. He emphasizes the important work of the catechist who goes out into the community seeking children and families often not at the Sunday Eucharist. (SM D1) The zealous commitment of even one individual involved in this ministry is a powerful force for change that can act as a leaven in the whole parish. As Jane E. Regan asserts, "Through catechesis the parish is formed and transformed into an evangelizing community."³⁴¹ Through the work of this woman, other catechists and members of the faith community, families are evangelized and invited to participate in the life of the parish, with the Sunday Eucharist as its focal point. The deacon sees the presence of more children and families at the Sunday liturgy as a sign of transformation and thus describes the parish as a "happier place to be." (SM D1) When the faith community gains new members or welcomes back former members, it can't help but be changed in some way.

The example of this catechist highlights the importance of reaching out to the alienated and inviting them to their parish "home." Eighteen interview participants referred to the challenge of families who were disconnected from the parish. These families were seemingly

³⁴¹ Jane E. Regan, "The Aim of Catechesis: Educating for an Adult Church" in *Horizons and Hopes – The Future of Religious Education*, eds. Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003), 36.

uninterested in or disengaged from the parish catechetical sessions. I am not aware of any “Catholics Come Home” initiatives at parishes in the Diocese of Pembroke, but given the fact that many baptized Catholics do not participate regularly in the Sunday Eucharist³⁴² this type of outreach ministry may be an important one to consider. In fact, I would recommend that such an initiative be spearheaded at the diocesan level so as to provide resources for parishes. Thomas Groome tells us that many parishes and dioceses have had success with such programs but warns that the welcome must be authentic:

I’m convinced, however, that for a successful “return” program, a parish must be ready to truly welcome people home. There’s no point in saying, “You’re welcome home as long as...” and then lay down, either explicitly or implicitly, a list of conditions, the very things that may have driven people away. Here the story of the Prodigal Son – or the Forgiving Father – should be our model.³⁴³

This is sound advice in welcoming estranged or “lukewarm” parishioners back. It impresses upon parishes the importance of a point mentioned throughout this work – that families need to be accepted with their unique circumstances and at their own point in the faith journey. Many families have situations that demand a pastoral and compassionate response from parishes.

One catechist from St. Brigid Parish spoke of parents requesting that the Catholic Women’s League host a luncheon after the celebration of first Eucharist to accommodate children with divorced or separated parents who may be in a dilemma over who should host a reception. (SB C2) This parental request gives a snapshot into many families where there is conflict between separated or divorced parents. It is also a concrete example of how members of the faith community can support and celebrate the experience of children and young families in the parish sacramental initiation process. The Catholic Women’s League members also spoke of wanting to get to know the children. One member said that, through the parish process, she

³⁴² Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 81. In Reginald Bibby’s Project Canada 2000 study, he identified that only 32% of Roman Catholics outside Quebec and 20% of Roman Catholics in Quebec participate in weekly Sunday Mass.

³⁴³ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 172.

got to know some of the parents and children – an opportunity she didn’t have with the school-based process. Research participants highlighted the many opportunities the parish process allowed for the building of relationships between pastor and families and between families and catechists and other parishioners. There is definitely more to be done to welcome and involve children and young families in the Sunday Eucharist and life of the parish. Parish leaders need to find ways to actively engage all members of the faith community in the catechetical process and offer opportunities for relationships to develop. This should be a major concern of all parishes.

Three of the pastors I interviewed stated that parishioners have begun to own and act out of a new vision of this parish initiation process for children. Here we have a definite change in outlook: moving from an understanding that most of the responsibility for catechesis is left to the Catholic school teachers in the former, school-based model, to the parish based process of moving toward the catechumenal model in which parents are recognized as primary educators of the faith and the parish is identified as the most important locus for catechesis. As Thomas Groome explains, this shift in thinking can be immense, but parishes are not incapable of making this transition:

It is a big shift from a “schooling model” of religious education to a “community of faith” approach. My experience is that parishes grow into it the more they try it. Total community catechesis becomes a community *habitus*. Meanwhile, an approach I’ve found helpful to intentionally harness the faith-education potential of a parish is to review all of its ministries, imagine how each can educate in faith, and then take advantage of every opportunity.³⁴⁴

Parishes have to make the effort to offer a model of catechesis that is parish-based if the change is ever going to happen. Groome’s suggestion to evaluate the catechetical dimension of parish ministries is a good place to start. Such an examination would also help parishioners involved in these ministries to better understand the responsibility they have as baptized members of the faith

³⁴⁴ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 165.

community to form new members and provide ongoing formation for one another. Groome takes this a step further and asserts that “All members [of the faith community] are responsible for the mission and ministries of this faith community.”³⁴⁵ As I have expressed, the ensuing alteration in thinking is in itself transformative.

In many cases, what is needed to ensure a transformation of practice and approach is a solid understanding of the vision of the catechumenal process and practice. Parishes and dioceses must work together to offer formation opportunities for parish catechists and parishioners that aid in the understanding of this vision. A concrete example of such formation occurred in 2003 in the Archdiocese of Montreal which released a pastoral plan regarding evangelization and catechesis. This pastoral plan called for a more full understanding of the catechumenal process and how it relates to the initiation ministry.³⁴⁶ Having gained a concrete comprehension of the catechumenal process, parishes and dioceses would be better equipped to invite families’ participation in the initiation journey. This journey revolves around active participation in a faith community that has as its foundation the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.

Twenty of the participants in my study referred to the presence of more children and families at the Sunday Eucharist as a result of their involvement in the parish sacramental initiation process for children. These people were not involved before a parish-based process. The catechist who admitted he was never involved in his parish before participating with his children in the sacramental initiation process as a father provides such an example. (SMM C2) Through time, he was approached about helping in the catechetical ministry and has now served

³⁴⁵ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 168.

³⁴⁶ *Proposing Jesus Christ Today – as the way to freedom and responsibility, A Diocesan Faith Education Project for all Ages*, <http://www.diocesemontreal.org/en/the-church-in-montreal/proposing-jesus-christ/a-project-promoting-a-catechetical-journey.html> (accessed November 1, 2013), 21-26.

in it for several years. Another catechist pointed out that there are more young families involved in the life of the parish despite there being smaller numbers of children celebrating the sacraments. (SJB C4) As some participants in my research have noted, large numbers of children celebrating the sacraments through a school-based program does not necessarily mean commensurate numbers of these young families are also regularly participating in the Sunday Eucharist and other aspects of parish life. So, these families may also be absent from involvement in sick and shut-in visitation, the Catholic Women's League, the Knights of Columbus, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, parish suppers and fundraisers, vacation Bible School, prayer groups, scripture study groups and ecumenical groups. Many people I interviewed highlighted efforts by the parish to invite family participation in liturgical ministries and other parish events and initiatives. Thomas Groome advises, "Besides participation in the liturgy, every parish should have dozens of ways to get people actively involved, ways by which they can serve the whole community."³⁴⁷ The fact that some families have become and continue to be involved in parish life as a result of the initiation process is indeed evidence of positive change.

An obvious conclusion is that the many examples of transformation highlighted in this section would not exist in a school-based model of sacramental preparation. Parishes cannot be transformed or even affected if the catechesis is not parish based and the majority of families are not engaged in the parish.

4.2 The Gradual Nature of the Initiation Process

³⁴⁷ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 169-170.

The Church maintains that the progression of catechesis and the process of Christian initiation are to be gradual in nature: “Faith, moved by divine grace and cultivated by the action of the Church, undergoes a process of maturation. Catechesis, which is at the service of this growth, is also a gradual activity. ‘Good catechesis is always done in steps’”.³⁴⁸ Findings from my phenomenological study indicate that the gradual nature of catechesis is an area in need of attention and understanding when implementing an initiation process for children moving towards the catechumenal model. I present two subsections here to address this concern: beyond ages and grades and the number of children involved.

4.2.1 Beyond Ages and Grades

As a solution to the problem of the “loss of children” she identified in her comments, a catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish proposed that children of catechetical age should not be free to choose the timing of their own participation in celebrating the sacraments. (SJB C and P) In other words, the child should be forced into the process and should celebrate the sacraments at a given age. This practice is problematic: no one should ever be forced into being a part of the sacramental initiation process or any celebration of the sacraments. Candidates are to begin a gradual formation process when they are ready.³⁴⁹ The question of readiness is a dilemma that must be addressed by many parishes in the Diocese of Pembroke. It is common practice for parishes to announce, at the beginning of a catechetical year, that registration for the first Eucharist initiation process is open to all children in grade two and that children in grades seven and eight can register for confirmation.

This idea of readiness to engage in the sacramental initiation process at a given age or grade rather than the readiness described by the *Rite* is so entrenched in peoples’ experience of

³⁴⁸ *GDC*, #88.

³⁴⁹ *RCIA*, #'s 3-5.

Church that it is very difficult to change. While addressing Catholic school trustees on October 5, 2013,³⁵⁰ Fr. James Mallon warned against determining sacramental readiness by a certain age or grade. The *Catholic Register* noted his remarks:

Mallon urged Catholic schools to stop preparing students for sacraments but to leave that to the parishes. In his parish, St. Benedict's in Halifax, he has stopped automatically preparing young people for sacraments because they have reached a certain age. The present approach of catechizing students who come for their first Holy Communion even though their parents never attend Mass, and confirming them, without their having had a transformative religious experience is not working...³⁵¹

An experience of transformation or conversion is integral in the RCIA process,³⁵² and as this process is meant to inspire all others, transformative occurrences should be common in children's catechesis as well. An experience of conversion is an indicator of readiness to proceed in the sacramental journey. Parishes need to think about ways to identify such readiness and invite children into the process or further into the process, preferably in a way that does not call children forth by age or grade. Robert Duggan speaks clearly to the difficulties involved: "Discernment always challenges individuals to further growth, but God's time is not human time, and neither the rhythm nor the pace of forward movement can be predetermined."³⁵³ This is an important point for catechetical teams to remember.

Catechetical teams should be ready to work with any children who express interest in the process, as long as they are the age of reason. Not every child will be ready to engage at a given age, and not every child will be ready to celebrate a sacrament at the same time as the rest of a group. The catechetical process should be measured and never rushed to meet a certain deadline

³⁵⁰ Fr. James Mallon was the keynote speaker at the annual Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association which was held in Ottawa on October 5, 2013.

³⁵¹ Deborah Gyapong, "Catholic Schools Failing at Making Disciples," *The Catholic Register* (October 20, 2013): 13.

³⁵² RCIA, #37.

³⁵³ Robert D. Duggan, "Discerning Conversion in Children" in Kathy Brown and Frank C. Sokol, eds. *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 189.

or date. This approach requires a depth of understanding on the part of priests and catechists. They must show respect for the children's experience of God and for their desire to make for a deeper connection with the whole Church community. The catechist mentioned above describes situations where some may feel God's call to join the faith community as an adult as she herself chose to do. (SJB C and P) For children who are not able to be involved in the parish process, the call to join the faith community may come at a later time in life when they themselves are ready to make a commitment to active participation in the initiation process and growing in the discipleship of Jesus Christ.

4.2.2 The Number of Children Involved

The challenge regarding the number of children who participate in the parish process is connected with the issue of readiness determined by ages and grades. Eight research participants highlighted their concern with the low numbers of children involved in the process. It is difficult for some catechists to move beyond the smaller numbers of children who present themselves and to minister to the families who have come forward. This attitude was confirmed in a formation session for parish catechists that I led in the Diocese when the diocesan *Policy* was first promulgated. Some of the participants were voicing their concerns about the participation of families in a parish-based process and felt that such a process would cause many families to choose not to become involved. They were worried about the process having lower numbers of children in years to come. As catechists, we are called to work with the children and families who come to the process, no matter how small or large that number may be.

Two catechists from St. John the Baptist Parish felt very strongly that a parish process with expectations of families causes the Church to "lose" people. Of course there are those who

would say that we can't "lose" people we never had. This issue will continue to be a challenge for many people. Both the parishes and the Diocese must consider several questions with regards to the problem of numbers. How do we reach out to and connect with the many disconnected families known to us? How do parishes call families and children forth to consider the sacramental initiation journey? Can we focus our efforts on ministering to the families who choose to become involved with the parish catechesis rather than dwelling on those who choose not to engage in the initiation process? How can we reach out to families who are not ready to be involved in the catechetical process at the present time but may be open to being involved in the future? This question relates to the findings by Reginald Bibby discussed earlier in this thesis that point to many Canadians being open to greater involvement with faith communities if they find it to be worthwhile.³⁵⁴

4.3 The Significant Role of the Faith Community in the Formation of Children

The role of the faith community in the initiation process was a topic of reflection in the interviews I conducted. Catechists and pastors were asked what role the faith community played in the catechetical process and if the parish had been transformed through the process. (See Appendix 3) This section presents many of the responses from people concerning these two questions. The analysis of these responses will be presented in the following subsections: the challenge of disengaged families and how to engage them, challenging the faith community to actively participate in the initiation process and transforming the faith community through the participation of families.

³⁵⁴ Bibby, *A New Day*, 19.

4.3.1 The Challenge of Disengaged Families and How to Engage Them

The reality of the present situation in the Diocese of Pembroke is that many families have little or no connection to parish life, and, as well, there is often little evidence of active faith formation happening in family life. My present research confirms this situation. The Church recognizes this reality and addresses it in the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

There are indeed many gravely disadvantaged children who lack adequate religious support in the family, either because they have no true family, or because they do not attend school, or because they are victims of dysfunctional social conditions or other environmental factors. Many are not even baptized; others do not bring to completion the journey of initiation.³⁵⁵

How does the faith community respond to the many challenges created by the weak engagement of families to the ordinary life of the Church community? The Church gives one compelling response toward addressing this problem:

It is the responsibility of the Christian community to address this situation by providing generous, competent and realistic aid, by seeking dialogue with the families, by proposing adequate forms of education and by providing catechesis which is proportionate to the concrete possibilities and needs of these children.³⁵⁶

What the statement says clearly is that it is fundamental for faith communities to welcome and receive families as they are and to provide catechesis which effectively meets the spiritual and social needs of today's families. This may mean reaching out and beyond the normal structures of catechetical sessions and engaging families with a process that is more about evangelization or perhaps pre-evangelization. In a homily at a mass with bishops, priests, seminarians and religious, Pope Francis I told them that "We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, in our parish or diocesan institutions, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel! To go out as ones sent. It is not enough simply to open the door in welcome because

³⁵⁵ GDC, #180.

³⁵⁶ GDC, #180.

they come, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people.”³⁵⁷ This call from Pope Francis I is a challenge for many involved in the catechetical ministry. Catechetical teams must find creative ways to reach out to families who are not regular participants in the faith community.

A concrete example of what both the Church and Pope Francis I are suggesting can be found in the catechist from St. Monica Parish who goes out to seek the children of catechetical age from the community to invite them and their families to become involved with the initiation process. Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote that catechetical works “must be linked with the real life of the generation to which they are addressed, showing close acquaintance with its anxieties and questions, struggles and hopes.”³⁵⁸ In order to effectively minister to families, parish catechetical teams must be able to relate personally and through their catechesis to the life situations of families who come to the parish seeking involvement in the sacramental initiation journey of children.

The comment from Pope Francis I certainly points to the reality that the Church has been limited in its responses to reaching out to people and engaging actively in the concerns of those who are marginalized from our faith communities. Reginald Bibby has identified that “...the majority of Canadians say religious groups have a role to play in Canadian life – with that role involving the addressing of spiritual, personal and relational needs.”³⁵⁹ He goes on to say that “The belief systems and programs offered by churches and other religious groups are simply not connecting with the people who need them or think they might need them at some point in the

³⁵⁷ Pope Francis I, *Homily at Mass with Bishops, Priests, Religious and Seminarians at the Cathedral of San Sebastian, Rio de Janeiro*, July 27, 2013.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-omelia-rio-clero_en.html (accessed September 10, 2013)

³⁵⁸ John Paul II, *On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1979, #49.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html, (accessed July 28, 2013)

³⁵⁹ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 225.

future.”³⁶⁰ Bibby’s findings and the challenge from Pope Francis should cause parishes to rethink how they can be more relevant to people and for the purposes of this study, to young families in particular.

Both my experience with children and findings from my study indicate that those around the age of reason, seven to eight years of age, are genuinely open to faith and to the parish. I believe most children enjoy being a part of a parish and participating in the Sunday Eucharist. They are at an age and stage of development where belonging and participating with family members and peers are important. John H. Westerhoff III states that children are particularly important to liturgy:

Children are especially suited to the vocation of liturgy. They have a natural sense of trust. They are open to the mystery of nature. They learn through play. They are imaginative and creative. They love the arts and are natural artists. They approach the world intuitively.³⁶¹

This observation is supported by faith development theories. The parents have to make their children’s involvement a priority. It appears, then, that in some parishes more time and effort should be put toward engaging families after the celebration of the sacraments. Aidan Kavanagh advises that “... pastors and catechists would do well to expend as much effort in supporting parents of children in their catechetical efforts as they expend on the children themselves.”³⁶² The needs of both parents and children should be considered by the parish leadership.

Thus it is critical that parishes should be welcoming to young families and offer ministries, supports and appealing activities. I can give a concrete example of a church community that attempted to offer a formation experience attractive to young families. Some

³⁶⁰ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 225.

³⁶¹ Westerhoff, “The Formative Nature of Liturgy,” 156.

³⁶² Kavanagh, “Historical Sketch and Contemporary Reflections”, 41.

years ago,³⁶³ I was asked to lead a session for a parish on the meaning of Advent. This event was advertised in the parish with the needs of young families in mind. While I gave my presentation, volunteers from the parish had Advent activities for the children in another room so the parents could participate in my presentation. Following my presentation, the children rejoined their parents for an Advent wreath making activity and were treated to refreshments which were provided by parishioners. This type of intergenerational offer would certainly make such an initiative attractive to families who would appreciate the evening of formation and faith community building with the whole family together.

Several research participants pointed to examples of both children and parents serving in liturgical ministries and participating in the Sunday Eucharist more regularly, as a result of partaking in the parish initiation process. Transformation of an observable experience such as participation in the liturgy is perhaps easier to gauge than an inner experience change such as more devotion to one's prayer life or development of one's relationship with Christ. However, transformation certainly moves beyond outward behaviors. Families also became involved in non-liturgical events such as parish suppers, parish pastoral councils and a family formation program. Interviewees noted the presence of former parent participants becoming involved in the process on current catechetical teams as catechists. This indeed signals a longer term commitment and perhaps a desire to continue the faith sharing process for other families.

Three parents from St. Mary Magdalene Parish highlighted their appreciation of the family formation program offered in the parish, a process which is separate from the sacramental catechesis. These comments about the benefit of the family formation program illustrate the significance of such initiatives for parishes. I believe that if parishes want to attract young families, they have to offer something accommodated to their needs and situations. One of the

³⁶³ This Advent reflection evening occurred on November 27th, 2006.

mothers stated she heard about the program through the sacramental initiation process, an indication of the evangelizing nature of the catechesis. (SMM P2) As Thomas Groome asserts, "...the formative function of catechetical education makes imperative that it engage the family and parish."³⁶⁴ Such programs can certainly enhance families' experience of Church, engaging them with the faith community, and can provide many opportunities for information, formation and transformation.

At St. John the Baptist Parish, there is a "Children's Mass" one Sunday each month at which the children take on leadership roles in the various liturgical ministries. It is important to involve children in such liturgical ministries since "...rituals draw children into the life of the Church and give children their identity as Christians."³⁶⁵ This identity is always a part of the wider faith community. The participation of children in liturgical ministries gives the faith community a chance to witness and appreciate the many gifts children have to offer to our Eucharistic celebrations. When children and families become active participants in the Sunday Liturgy, they themselves can be transformed and the assembly and liturgy are changed because of their participation.

During one of the catechist interviews, I gained another insight into how a parish can be welcoming to young families in a very concrete way. At St. Monica Parish, baptisms occur during the Sunday liturgy. I am only aware of a few parishes in the Pembroke diocese where baptizing during the Sunday liturgy is a regular activity.³⁶⁶ This is unfortunate since baptizing during the liturgy is in keeping with the practice of the RCIA process, the normative guide for the

³⁶⁴ Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education," 7.

³⁶⁵ Sister Paule Freeburg and Joyce M. Kelleher, D.C., *A Child Shall Lead Them – A Guide to Celebrating the Word with Children*, ed. Gerard A. Pottebaum (Loveland, Ohio: Treehaus Communications Inc., 1994), 19.

³⁶⁶ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1989), #153.

sacramental initiation of all Christians, including children.³⁶⁷ When a baptism occurs on a Sunday afternoon with just the family and friends of the child to be baptized, the community is absent and cannot participate in the event. This practice is not in keeping with the important role indicated for the faith community in the *Rite of Baptism for Children*.³⁶⁸ Baptizing during the Sunday Eucharist also highlights the centrality and significance of the Sunday Eucharistic celebration in the lives of the faithful and the primary role of the sacrament of baptism into the life of the faith community. For these reasons, celebrations of confirmation and First Eucharist should also be celebrated at the Sunday Liturgy where the faith community is present. A catechist at St. Monica Parish presented a glimpse into the welcoming nature of her parish at the time of children's baptisms:

See I haven't been in this parish for a long time, but I do know they [parishioners] come out for special times like that [celebration of the sacraments], and they do support the children, and they congratulate them, and they go out of their way, and that's very welcoming for new people, and the family who was baptized a few weeks ago, everyone was there for them... everybody waited at the back of the church to congratulate them, so that's something. (SM C1)

This is indeed something essential to the initiation process - parishioners who take the time to welcome a new member of the faith community. It is also significant that they welcome the whole family so that families can feel they are vital to the life of the parish.

4.3.2 Challenging the Faith Community to Actively Participate in the Initiation Process

As indicated in Chapter III,³⁶⁹ I was surprised that five interviewees did not have any responses to the question of what role the faith community played in the initiation process.

³⁶⁷ GDC, #'s 59, 90.

³⁶⁸ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Ottawa: Conccacan Inc., 1989), #4.

³⁶⁹ See research section 3.2.8 - *The Lack of Involvement of the Faith Community in the Process*.

Other interviewees offered answers that illustrate the faith community played a very minimal role in the catechetical process. And yet there were some instances where parishioners were invited to play a more active role such as prayer partners for children involved in the initiation journey. When the people involved in the catechesis are unable to see the role the faith community plays in the process, it seems reasonable to assume that the role of the faith community is indeed absent, weak or at the least not reflected upon. These revelations highlight that the role of the faith community in the initiation process is an area in need of attention and enhancement.

Inviting parishioners to taking an active role in the process takes time. The first step should be to share with them that part of the Church's vision of initiation, that all the baptized are responsible for the initiation ministry.³⁷⁰ This aspect of community life is something parishes need to consider and perhaps improve. Judith Dunlap states that "The most direct way in helping the parish become more responsible for its role in catechesis is to explain it to them as often as possible."³⁷¹ The faith community can be formed about their role in catechesis through homilies, adult formation sessions, commissioning ceremonies for parish ministries and helpful reading material. These methods could help engage the transformative process that moves toward the catechumenal process.

One of the challenges in helping members of the faith community realize their significant role in catechesis is, for some, attempting to change their way of thinking about who is responsible for catechesis. As Sheila O'Day explains, this involves understanding a viewpoint that places the responsibility of catechesis on the faith community:

The whole community is responsible for those seeking initiation. For many of us, exercising that responsibility involves a real conversion. To ignore that call – by

³⁷⁰ RCIA, #9.

³⁷¹ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 174.

allowing a few people to do the work of all and thereby containing, limiting or controlling the spiritual journey of those seeking initiation – is to ignore our own baptismal responsibility. Newcomers are initiated *into* the community, *in the midst* of the community, *by* the community.³⁷²

It is indeed through baptism that we are called to evangelize and share our gifts in the ministries of the Church. The catechetical ministry calls on every member to support candidates and assist them as best they can on the sacramental journey.

If the faith community is not aware of children and families journeying to the celebration of the sacraments until the celebration itself, they do not have the chance to be a part of the process. If the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is the model of all catechesis,³⁷³ then there are opportunities for presenting candidates to the faith community to be welcomed, to be prayed for and prayed over.³⁷⁴ St. Mary Magdalene Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish included in their process a welcoming/enrollment ceremony for child candidates at one of the Sunday liturgies that were inspired by the rite of election of the *RCIA*. Such ceremonies give the faith community a chance to see, engage with and support the candidates and their families in the initiation process. These are of course an integral part of the *RCIA* process.³⁷⁵

Another example of faith community members concretely mentoring children in the catechetical process was given by one of the catechists from St. Mary Magdalene Parish. (SMM C4) She described the work of parish members who were prayer partners for children in the initiation process. They were asked to send the children a series of letters or cards throughout the process, to let the children know they were praying for them. They were also asked to introduce themselves to the children so that a relationship could be established. As this

³⁷² Sheila O'Day, R.S.M., "The Community of the Faithful: Focus for Initiation Leaders," *The North American Forum on the Catechumenate Institute Resource Packet* (2007): 18.

³⁷³ *GDC*, #90.

³⁷⁴ *GDC*, #256, *RCIA* #9.

³⁷⁵ *RCIA*, #'s 6,7.

relationship developed, one can envision the prayer partner taking on a mentoring role and apprenticing the child in the Christian life, perhaps simply through a commitment to praying for the child.

My research indicated that there was often an intentional effort to encourage participation of candidate families in the Sunday Eucharist by having times for catechetical sessions either immediately before or after the time for Sunday Eucharist. The intention of such a strategy was not only to encourage more active and regular participation of families in the Sunday Eucharist but also to allow them to engage with the faith community. Sunday Eucharistic celebrations should be welcoming and flexible enough to accommodate young families. These celebrations should be conducted with the necessities of the candidate families in mind. For example, is there a Children's Liturgy of the Word ministry to engage young children during the Liturgy?

Attending to these needs reaches beyond the Sunday Eucharist.

Twelve people I interviewed emphasized the importance of parishes being welcoming and inviting to young families, receiving them warmly into the community. The catechetical years are an awesome opportunity to engage families in the life of the Church, and so it is disappointing when these opportunities are missed. Judith Dunlap challenges parishes to consider various factors when attempting to be more openhearted:

Hospitality is crucial. Everything, from the message on our answering machines to the furniture in our meeting rooms, is important. Everyone, from the parish secretary to the pastor, needs to be welcoming. We must be deliberate in designing opportunities for people to meet and to get to know each other. We must be creative in developing new rituals and rites to mark important occasions and events in people's lives. Since the Church is truly the Body of Christ, what better teacher can there be?"³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 33.

Pastors and parishioners need to ask themselves how welcoming and accommodating they are in these ways and others. First impressions are lasting, and the initial reception of families can be a determining factor in their deciding whether or not to engage with a faith community.

Very often, parishioners are very good at being hospitable to one another, but what about the visitor, newcomer, returning parishioner or seasonal participant in the Eucharist liturgy?

Thomas Groome asserts that faith communities have an obligation to be hospitable to all:

Every Christian community is mandated to welcome into full and equal membership anyone who desires to belong; otherwise it is not *catholic*... Jesus practiced such inclusion; he welcomed all into the community of disciples, with special outreach to the socially marginalized – women, people of foreign races, public sinners, tax collectors, lepers and others considered unclean. Jesus went out of his way to make the point of inclusion.³⁷⁷

As Groome emphasizes, faith communities should learn how to be inclusive from the example of Jesus in His ministry. In the ministry of catechesis, inclusiveness is crucial, as many families who come to be a part of the initiation process are unknown to parishioners or perhaps have been disconnected for some time.

4.3.3 Transforming the Faith Community Through the Participation of Families

Participation in a parish sacramental initiation process for children can be transformative for families' faith practice and participation in parish life. The Church reminds us that "The Christian community accompanies catechumens and those being catechized, and with maternal solicitude, makes them participate in her own experience of the faith and incorporates them into herself."³⁷⁸ Thus, the initiation process in itself calls those involved into active participation in the Christian life. Being an active Catholic Christian means living one's faith as a disciple of

³⁷⁷ Thomas H. Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic? – Eight Gifts for Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 255.

³⁷⁸ *GDC*, #254.

Jesus Christ centered on regular participation in the Sunday Eucharist and other facets of parish life, such as social justice outreach, pastoral and liturgical ministries. I want to clarify that transformation in the practice of the faith and in participation in the faith community is not measured simply by people attending mass. Transformation can also be observed if a person experiences small steps in the continuous conversion to a way of life in discipleship with Jesus Christ. For example, a committed prayer life shows that a person is actively expressing his or her relationship with Jesus. (SMM P5) Another example is the family who wanted to become more involved in the Sunday liturgy – the mother as an organist and the children as servers who wanted to express their growing faith by serving the parish community. (SJB P3, Child.)

The pastor of St. Brigid Parish makes two important disclosures concerning families practicing their faith and connecting with the faith community. (SB Pas.) The first is as a result of a parish process, there are more opportunities for families to come to the parish church itself and, by their presence and participation, to become more familiar with the church building, the worship rituals and the faith community. In doing so, they feel more a part of the parish family, and the sense of belonging, critical to the initiation process, is enhanced. Thomas Groome asserts that “Every disciple of Jesus should be welcome at the table, have a voice and be heard, be invited to participate actively in the Church’s life and mission, not just as a recipient, but as an agent of their faith.”³⁷⁹ Families should always feel a strong sense of welcome at the parish. In the former, school-based process, normally the only time all the children and parents were in the church building was on the day of the celebration of the sacraments. As stated by participants in my research, only at the end of the process were the parents and children introduced to the parish community. (SM C3, SB P1, SJB C5) This “end-loaded” participation makes no sense since the

³⁷⁹ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 169.

vision of the initiation ministry calls for the family to engage with the faith community throughout the process.

A second key comment by this pastor suggests that the parish process has allowed more opportunities for parent involvement in the catechesis, something which may have not been the case with a school-based process. Also insightful is the pastor's reference to the family who told him how much they enjoyed the parish process. (SB Pas.) Maureen Kelly and Robert Duggan emphasize that "It is the parish community which offers our best hope of providing the milieu in which Christian initiation of children will be supported and enhanced."³⁸⁰ All members of the family can benefit from being engaged with the faith community during the initiation process and beyond. These instances point to a transformative experience for families regarding faith practice and engagement in parish life.

4.4 The Liturgical Catechetical Element to the Initiation Process

Although liturgical catechesis is a significant component to the catechumenal process, it did not surface directly in the data I collated from the interviews I conducted.³⁸¹ However, what did come to the fore was the issue of engaging families in the mystagogical period and beyond. Mystagogical catechesis should involve the use of liturgical catechesis since the celebration of the sacraments and their meaning in the lives of neophytes is the subject of reflection.

³⁸⁰ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 115.

³⁸¹ Perhaps the reason why the importance of liturgical catechesis did not surface directly in the data I generated from the phenomenological study is because the questions I asked did not provide this opportunity. This is a limit of my thesis that would require further study.

4.4.1 Engaging Families in Post-Celebration Catechesis and Beyond

The importance of the mystagogical period is often overlooked. Some parishes never gather the catechetical group together again after the sacraments are celebrated. In omitting to do so, we miss a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the celebration of the sacraments and to continue to engage families in parish life. The process is enriched if the experience is recalled so that its depth can be appreciated as participants dialogue about the experience and unpack its meaning for them. The Church articulates the following about the postbaptismal or mystagogical period: “The neophytes are, as the term ‘mystagogy’ suggests, introduced into a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned and above all through their experience of the sacraments they have received.”³⁸² A catechist from St. Monica Parish highlighted the importance of such a follow-up or time of mystagogy, to maintain the enthusiasm and commitment that is often demonstrated by families leading up to the celebration of the sacraments. (SM C2)

Don Neumann states that the mystagogical period, the celebration of the sacraments of initiation are “...so fresh in the experience of children, [and so] they can share weekly with their peers what they have come to understand about Jesus and the kingdom through their own initiation, and their peers can share what they have come to know about Jesus in the experience of life and faith.”³⁸³ This is true if the symbols and rituals have been celebrated well with full agency. Neumann continues: “It [mystagogy] can be a time of celebrations, storytelling about ‘new birth’ experiences and what they meant for us, celebration of eucharist (sic) with the Sunday assembly and making connections with the family of faith to which they have now

³⁸² RCIA, #235.

³⁸³ Don Neumann, “Unbaptized Children: What Can We Do?” in Victoria M. Tufano, ed. *Readings in the Christian Initiation of Children*, (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 101.

become most concretely connected.”³⁸⁴ In my experience, most children’s initiation processes do not involve these important mystagogical experiences highlighted by Neumann. In neglecting to offer any mystagogical catechesis, the parish may indirectly give the incorrect impression that the faith formation process ended with the celebration of the sacraments. Rather, the process is to be only part of a lifelong commitment to a relationship with Jesus, centered around the Sunday Eucharist and supported by the faith community.

4.5 *The Integral Roles of Parents, Catechists and Mentors in the Process*

The fifth and final fundamental component of the Christian initiation process for children moving toward the catechumenal model that I am using to frame this chapter is the integral roles of parents, catechists and mentors in the process. There was a significant amount of data from my interviews available for reflection concerning the roles of parents and catechists. However, the term “mentor” is not commonly used and as such, did not enter into the responses given by the people I interviewed. The role of mentor is explored indirectly in section 4.2 - *The Significant Role of the Faith Community in the Formation of Children*. All members of the faith community are called to mentor children and families engaged in the catechumenal process.³⁸⁵

4.5.1 The Role of Parents

The role of parents in the catechumenal process was a major area of focus and reflection in my research. This section is subdivided into the following subsections: the involvement of the family in the catechumenal process as compared to the Catholic school process, the initiation

³⁸⁴ Neumann, “Unbaptized Children: What Can We Do?”, 101.

³⁸⁵ RCIA, #9.

process and expediency for families, engaging parents in the process, the role of grandparents in the process, the children who are not able to be involved in the parish process and the transformation of parents and family faith life.

4.5.1.1 The Involvement of Family in the Catechumenal Process as Compared to the Catholic School Process

In the interviews, parents were asked to compare their experience of the Catholic school process to the parish initiation process moving toward the catechumenal model. (See Appendix 3) The reflections on this question provided some commentary on the significant role of parents as primary educators in the faith or lack thereof.

The Church's vision of catechesis places the family in a foundational role. The Church calls the family the "domestic Church" in that parents "...by word and example, are the first heralds of faith with regard to their children."³⁸⁶ The Church teaches that "The parish is the Eucharistic community and the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents."³⁸⁷

Twenty-three of the participants in my research interviews suggested the family was more involved in the parish-based initiation process than during the Catholic school-based process. That so many participants made this assertion is significant. Parents who had children taking part in both the school and parish processes noted an increase in their involvement in the process with the parish based process towards the catechumenal model. The simple fact that four parish processes in my study required parents to take an active part in the catechetical sessions would in itself lead to an increase in parent participation. Parents are not at school with their

³⁸⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, #11.

³⁸⁷ CCC, #2226.

children to partake in the catechetical sessions, and as eight of the research participants indicated, there was often little opportunity for parents to engage with the school process. With the school process, parents were simply expected to show up for the celebration of the sacraments and little else was asked of them. Eleven parents said their involvement with the school process was minimal at best.

With so many parents admitting a disengagement from the school process, it becomes clear that part of the problem is a lack of understanding by Catholic school personnel of the integral role parents are to play in the catechetical process. Over time, it seems that Catholic school personnel took over the primary educator role which is proper to parents.³⁸⁸ One of the catechists from St. Mary Magdalene Parish pointed out the problem of this role reversal with the school personnel acting as the primary educator in the faith. (SMM P5) Perhaps this was an area forgotten or overlooked in the formation of school teachers, delivering sacramental preparation programs in their context.

The Catholic school attended to all or most of the sacramental catechesis in many parishes, and this had been a long-established practice, sometimes over several generations. Yet the Church's vision of initiation outlines the importance of the family as the foundation for faith formation³⁸⁹ and the parish as the most important locus for catechesis.³⁹⁰ Understanding this vision of the family as the domestic church³⁹¹ and the parish as the most important locus for catechesis can be difficult for many, including pastors and catechists. A reframing of the meaning of membership in the Church community is needed before some can move away from the comfort of the established school-based model. In reflecting on what Catholic theologians

³⁸⁸ *GDC*, # 226.

³⁸⁹ *CCC* # 2226.

³⁹⁰ *GDC*, # 257.

³⁹¹ *Lumen Gentium*, #11.

since Vatican II have written on the Church as community, Avery Dulles offers the following summation concerning Church membership:

They [Catholic theologians] would wish to see the Church in our time become a place in which one can establish rich and satisfying primary relationships – that is, person-to-person relationships founded on mutual understanding and love. The Church, according to this view, is a great community made up of many interlocking communities. Thanks to the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit, the many families of Christians are woven into a single large family.³⁹²

This image of Church membership as interwoven relationships begins with the family, the primary place for catechesis. The experience of the family is then enriched by active participation in the parish community where worship and living the Christian life are shared with other families. As the pastor of St. Leo Parish pointed out, the proper attitude for owning a vision for faith formation has to be experienced in the context of the family and is rooted in baptism. (SJB Pas.)

My research findings affirm that many families have become more involved in the parish sacramental initiation process of their children than they were during the school-based process. Parishes must do all they can to support families' active participation in this catechesis. Judith Dunlap suggests that "By helping families grow in their commitment to the faith, parishes reaffirm the family as the center of Christian experience."³⁹³ With the former school-based process, this center shifted, in some cases, to the classroom.

4.5.1.2 The Initiation Process and Expediency for Families

The Church calls on parents to be actively involved in the parish sacramental initiation process and specifically refers to the task of transmitting the faith as "...the primordial mission

³⁹² Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 49.

³⁹³ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 45.

which parents have in relation to their children.”³⁹⁴ Ten people whom I interviewed expressed the opinion that some families found the Catholic school process more convenient than the parish process.

Five of the interviewees suggested that with the school model, most of the “work” of catechesis is done by the Catholic teacher. It appeared that many parents were happy to have the Catholic teacher take the brunt of the responsibility for this catechesis, and so, indirectly, the teacher became the primary educator in the faith for their child.

The parish process calls for active participation by parents. This was one of the main reasons why the decision by former Pembroke Bishop Richard Smith initiated the creation of a policy for a parish based sacramental initiation process. Bishop Smith, reading the signs of the times,³⁹⁵ was well aware of the fact that many families were not engaged in the school process, nor were they involved in parish life. In his interview, the pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish shared that the main reason he moved to a parish process so many years ago: the lack of parental participation in the school-centered process and in the Sunday Eucharist, leaving most of this formative work in faith development up to the Catholic school. (SMM Pas.)

As little was asked of parents in a school based process, it is understandable that many were upset with a parish process that had more rigorous expectations of them. This new process called for a change in their way of thinking and challenged their practices of faith, and many could not understand why the school no longer took responsibility for this process as it had done in the past. Challenging this parental viewpoint is a major difficulty for many parishes and catechetical teams. Helping parents to understand their role as primary educator in the faith is

³⁹⁴ *GDC*, #221.

³⁹⁵ “*Gaudium et Spes*,” *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), #4.

something faith communities need to work on throughout the catechetical years but beginning with the initiatory process for the sacrament of baptism.

There is also the importance of ongoing adult catechesis and the Church providing faith development opportunities for adults. Jane Regan asserts that “Adult faith formation with the parish as learning community is an integral part of parish life at all levels”.³⁹⁶ Parishes that commit to ongoing adult faith formation give adults the opportunity to learn, dialogue and journey with fellow disciples in faith. Parents who experience their own growth in faith over time are much better equipped to support and encourage the ongoing faith development of their children. A commitment to ongoing adult faith formation illustrates an understanding of the vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* as not only the norm and model for all catechesis³⁹⁷ but also as “...an integral part of ordinary Christian life”.³⁹⁸

The pastors of St. Mary Magdalene Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish told me that as the parish process was established over time, the resistance from parents lessened with the realization that the parish process was the new norm. Parishes who are currently undergoing the growing pains of the first few years of a parish process for children’s initiation may find that parents and parishioners are more receptive to the new model through time. This situation relates also to the Church’s responsibility for the ongoing faith formation of adults. Parishioners could benefit from ongoing formation regarding the initiation ministry and the role various partners have to play in this ministry. The Church has the vision of the initiation ministry but it must have the will and the resources to carry it out.

For various reasons, some parents have found the school process to be more effortless than the parish based process moving toward the catechumenal model. Looking forward, I

³⁹⁶ Regan, “The Aim of Catechesis”, 46.

³⁹⁷ *GDC*, #’s 59, 90.

³⁹⁸ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 2.

believe it will take parents time to realize the benefits of the parish sacramental initiation process. As Judith Dunlap explains, “Often our first task is to convince parents of their essential role in the faith formation of their children... We need to take every available opportunity not only to remind parents of their role but to offer support and resources for them to live it.”³⁹⁹ The parish catechesis must indeed be practical and helpful to parents as many do not have the background or resources required to effectively fulfill this fundamental role. Parish catechetical teams that address the needs of both parents and children are better able to offer a process that is affirming and less likely to solicit negative reactions from parents.

With regard to adults in particular, Thomas Groome suggests that the method used to form adults in the faith is often ineffective:

I wager that many people who “lose their faith” do so because the conventional version that they encountered as children fails to meet the complexities and pressures of postmodern life. Often this reflects a failure of their church to provide effective education toward mature faith. If people had ready access to good ongoing religious education, they would be likely to negotiate their way into a more nuanced faith – instead of all-or-nothing choices – and they could embrace the paradoxes that constitute mature faith.⁴⁰⁰

Parents in the process should be treated like mature adult believers and should never be approached in a condescending manner. The catechetical process should provide creative ways in which parents can engage with their faith at an adult level and thus have the opportunity to become more committed Christians who can support their children on the catechetical journey. Faith enrichment processes for adults that speak to their issues and concerns today could provide a solid support for adult faith development which in turn would encourage the parent role as first teachers of their children. This reflects the Church’s wisdom in stating that the initiation of adults is the frame for all catechesis.

³⁹⁹ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 188.

⁴⁰⁰ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 79-80.

4.5.1.3 Engaging Parents in the Process

During the interviews, twelve of the catechists indicated how difficult it was to engage some families in the initiation process. Their comments suggest parents and children did not seem very interested or committed. Consider the catechist from St. Leo Parish who made the important observation that "...not everyone is at the same faith level that I am..." (SL C3) This is a significant statement as she realized something vital – something that every catechist needs to understand. We need to meet children and families at their place in their faith journey without judgment. There is something important about seeing the presence of families at the parish as the first step and finding some common ground of meaning on which to engage them. As this catechist learned, her location on the road of faith is often not exactly where all Catholics are in their journey. Thomas Groome gives some helpful advice in this regard: "Because communication of the Faith should be crafted 'according to the mode of the receiver,' that educators take into account *who* is involved is an ancient wisdom of the Church."⁴⁰¹ When the catechesis is tailored to the needs and situation of the families involved, the process can be more effective and relevant. Not every individual or family learns or engages in the same manner.

Some parents who dropped off their children for the catechetical session at St. Leo Parish and did not accompany them may have demonstrated a lack of commitment to the process and a failure to understand the pivotal role they are to play in the process of initiation and indeed in the faith lives of their children. And yet, it is important to note that they did make the effort to get their children to the catechetical sessions. If we demand very little of parents and families, sometimes we get very little commitment from them. Here again we notice the difficulty of dealing with a change in approach among many parents who say, "I'll drop my children off at the

⁴⁰¹ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 53.

school or parish so they can do the religious education and faith formation.” I believe that when a parish does not require parents to play an active, ongoing role in their children’s initiation process, a vital opportunity is missed. The Church reminds us of this opportunity for intergenerational catechesis: “Pastors should remember that, in helping parents and educators to fulfill their mission well, it is the Church who is being built up. Moreover this is an excellent occasion for adult catechesis.”⁴⁰²

A compelling challenge for the initiation ministry is the reality that many parents are not taking their role seriously as primary educators in the faith or at least it is not reflected by participation in parish activities. As the pastor of St. Brigid Parish outlined in his comments, parents have obligated themselves to this primary role at their child’s baptism. One of the important facets of the initiation process is to remind parents of this obligation and for the church community to continually find ways to support them in this role. (SB Pas.) Inviting parents to own this primary role should begin at baptism and be re-explained and re-introduced at various points throughout the child’s sacramental journey. This problem also reinforces the need for good baptismal preparation where parish leaders and catechists take the time to help parents understand the commitment involved in the promises they will make at the baptism of their child and their own promises of growing and journeying in their own faith. The Church in general and parishes in particular should be committed to engaging the religious imagination and faith development of young couples.

If parents have been conditioned to very little participation in the school process, they may expect the same in the parish process. This is understandable as well if parents see faith as something static – as something they “get” with bits of knowledge they acquire from a process. Part of the challenge is inviting parents to come to an understanding of the vision of the Church’s

⁴⁰² GDC, #179.

process, as outlined in the *General Directory of Catechesis*, not an easy task if the parents' only exposure to the sacramental initiation process has been a limited didactic model.

When we give parents the opportunity to be actively involved in their child's journey of sacramental initiation, we are inviting them to evaluate their own faith journey and practice. As Catherine Dooley explains, "...parents need a sense of welcome and a setting characterized by openness in order that they can work through their own relationship to the church."⁴⁰³ Hopefully, we are also sharing with them tools to engage with their child's faith growth.

Comments from interviewees at St. Monica Parish illustrate the effectiveness of engaging parents in the process. Of particular significance is the statement from a catechist who shared that in planning the parish initiation process, the catechetical team tried "...to look at it [catechetical process] more from the *RCIA* process where it's a process rather than instruction." (SM C2) This catechist felt that basing the process on the *RCIA* model was fundamental in involving parents in the catechesis. James Dunning insists that "Christian Initiation is a *process not a program!*"⁴⁰⁴ Understanding this, for some, requires a major shift in orientation.

The catechist indicated that some of the families wanted their children to be confirmed but were not interested in being active in the parish. (SM C2) She was pleasantly surprised to receive evaluation feedback from parents who stated that they were now thinking of being involved in the parish in a more active way, following the celebration of the sacrament. When catechetical leaders begin the planning of the sessions with the vision of the *RCIA* in mind, they are in line with the vision of the Church. Catherine Dooley reminds us that "It is necessary to keep the *RCIA* within the perspective of a lifelong process and not expect the rite to accomplish

⁴⁰³ Catherine Dooley, "Catechumenate for Children: Sharing the Gift of Faith" in Victoria M. Tufano, ed. *Readings in the Christian Initiation of Children*, (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 72.

⁴⁰⁴ James B. Dunning, *New Wine: New Wineskins – Exploring the RCIA*, (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1981), 20.

a total formation.”⁴⁰⁵ Inviting parents into an understanding of this enduring process will encourage their ongoing participation in their child’s faith journey – a journey that is ideally centered around the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist supported by a community of faith.

4.5.1.4 The Role of Grandparents in the Process

Many grandparents play a significant role in the catechetical journey of their grandchildren. The Church acknowledges, “In this family catechesis, the role of grandparents is of growing importance. Their wisdom and sense of the religious is often times decisive in creating a true Christian climate.”⁴⁰⁶ Five catechists shared examples of the fundamental role grandparents were playing in the faith lives of their grandchildren, mainly because the parents did not appear interested in such a commitment. Catherine Dooley explains that “if the parent gives permission for the child’s initiation but is not willing to enter into the process, then the catechist should carefully explain the role of the sponsor and of the godparent.”⁴⁰⁷ This could also apply to grandparents who are willing to take on this sponsoring role and support their grandchild in his or her faith journey.

Some pastors are reluctant to work with such situations, citing the promises the parents made at their child’s baptism to be the primary educators in the faith. These pastors fear that working with grandparents somehow fails to call parents to this responsibility. That outlook notwithstanding, if the child is open to being involved in the process and expresses a desire to engage in the sacramental journey with the support of grandparents and if the parents give their

⁴⁰⁵ Catherine Dooley, “The Lectionary as a Sourcebook of Catechesis in the Catechumenate” in James A. Wilde, ed. *Before and After Baptism – The Work of Teachers and Catechists*, (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 49.

⁴⁰⁶ *GDC*, #255.

⁴⁰⁷ Catherine Dooley, “Catechumenate for Children”, 72.

consent, I see no pastoral reason why this type of situation should not be permitted to proceed. In reflecting on the role of grandparents in the faith formation of their grandchildren, Thomas Groome says, “I’m convinced that all grandparents have a great story of faith to tell; they can be confident in sharing it with their grandchildren, even if it didn’t take very well with their own children.”⁴⁰⁸ It is grandparents who, for so many children today, are very effective in apprenticing their grandchildren in living the Christian life and being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

4.5.1.5 The Children who are not able to be Involved in the Parish Process

Seven of the research participants expressed disappointment that so many children were not involved in a parish initiation process which calls for families to be dedicated to this journey. From my research, it appears that such a commitment is one some families are not able and/or willing to make. It is the parents who fail to take leadership, not the children, when the parents choose to forego the initiation process. The problem is that the children have to be part of the catechetical sessions, and the parents have to consent to this and accompany them. Hopefully, the children do not look at such a situation as a “closed door.” Later in life, when they may be willing and ready, these children might seek to be a part of the sacramental initiation process. The fact of the matter is that for children in such situations, preparing for the sacraments at a Catholic school would make little difference in their faith life if the family chooses to have no connection to the parish. I make this statement based on the testimony of the interviewees. They reported that although there were often a large number of children being prepared by the Catholic school for the sacraments, the families of these children were often not actively engaged

⁴⁰⁸ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 227.

in the Sunday Eucharist or other aspects of parish life, both during the catechesis and after the celebration of the sacraments. However, one could also hope that this faith formation, although not supported and nurtured by parents, might have sown some seeds for development later in the child's life. This formation cannot be without some promise or merit. I can appreciate the point made by the catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish (SJB C and P) who felt the child was being punished for the family's disconnection from the parish when it chooses not to be involved in the parish process. Ultimately, the decision of the parents is determining the experience of the child. It would also appear that parents are not taking seriously the promises they made at their child's baptism.

4.5.1.6 Transformation of Parents and Family Faith Life

When a child is catechized, the parents and perhaps the entire household are catechized as well. The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that, "...in giving attention to the individual, it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it."⁴⁰⁹ Catechesis is meant to have a contagious effect. As candidates for the sacraments are apprenticed in the Christian life, it is hoped their experience is an inspiration to others and that they will become mentors for others in the future. Such a vision can come to fruition when parents and children are given opportunities to learn, pray and become more faithful disciples together. This is what is possible in the parish based process moving toward the catechumenal model of the ministry of sacramental initiation for children when it incorporates an intergenerational approach.

⁴⁰⁹ GDC, #168.

The Church recognizes the primary role of parents in the faith formation of their children when it refers to this role as an “...educational activity which is both human and religious... ‘a true ministry’, through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated so that family life is transformed into a journey of faith and the school of Christian life.”⁴¹⁰ The Church also highlights the necessity of collaboration between the home and the parish in the catechetical formation of the child.⁴¹¹ Being a disciple of Jesus and growing in this relationship are ideally begun in the home, the domestic Church, and then further developed and supported in the catechetical process.

So important is this relationship that the *General Directory for Catechesis* goes on to say “...the Christian community must give very special attention to parents. By means of personal contact, meetings, courses and also adult catechesis directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their responsibility – which is particularly delicate today – of educating their children in the faith.”⁴¹² A catechetical ministry is more effective when taking into account the formational needs of parents and families. The authors of *Intergenerational Faith Formation – All Ages Learning Together*, highlight the importance of giving parents the opportunity to engage in learning sessions with their children:

One of the best ways to reach parents [adults] is through their children. Many of us as parents will do things for our children that we seem unable to find time to do for ourselves. The intergenerational learning context pushes parents to invest time in their own faith formation through the requirement of attending with their children.⁴¹³

Intergenerational catechesis is preferable as parents benefit from engaging with their child in the process. My findings have shown that parents appreciate the many learning and formational

⁴¹⁰ GDC, #227.

⁴¹¹ GDC, #226.

⁴¹² GDC, #227.

⁴¹³ Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber and Leig Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation – All Ages Learning Together* (New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008), 65.

opportunities available in an intergenerational catechetical setting. Eleven research participants made this assertion, eight of these being parents.

The need for the ongoing faith formation of parents and adults is significant. Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber and Leif Kehrwald emphasize that “Faith formation is lifelong...”⁴¹⁴ and their research project confirms that “...the intergenerational learning model creates an atmosphere of trust and safety for adults and people of all ages.”⁴¹⁵ Thus, catechetical sessions that engage both parents and children have the ability to form parents and other adults in their faith with the possibility of also having a transforming effect. Parents who otherwise would not be introduced to the faith community or formed in the faith or invited to participate in a more active prayer life or faith journey have the opportunity for these through the parish catechetical sessions.

Four of the parishes in my study required that parents be present for the catechetical sessions but St. Brigid Parish did not. When parents are not expected to partake in the process, the message that may be communicated to parents is that the parish catechists are solely responsible for the formation of children. This type of thinking is contrary to the Church’s understanding of the primary role parents are to play in the faith formation of their child. Parents can be evangelized and catechized with their children, and so intergenerational catechesis is strongly recommended through my research findings.

At St. John the Baptist Parish, there was an intentional effort to catechize the parents, as they were often given an additional catechetical session led by the pastor. Two parents I interviewed from this parish shared their gratitude in having these sessions. Opportunities for intergenerational catechesis in the initiation process should not be overlooked by parish

⁴¹⁴ Martineau, Weber and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, 64.

⁴¹⁵ Martineau, Weber and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, 65.

catechetical teams. Some parishes may have to examine their approach and goals in providing a catechetical ministry that is family-oriented. Richelle Pearl-Koller writes, “Faith for everyone, but especially for a child, is more caught than taught. This is why, at first, our catechumenal ministry needs to focus more directly on the parents and family system than on the child.”⁴¹⁶ Developing a process with a family catechesis or intergenerational catechesis model in mind is a major step in inviting families to become more involved.

Parents also valued the formational aspect of the catechesis that occurred at the parish. Thomas Groome explains that to form people in the Christian faith is to: “Grow people’s identity through a formative pedagogy and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community.”⁴¹⁷ The initiation process forms identity by involving children and families in the faith community and encouraging ongoing formation in the home. The dynamic method used to engage people in the catechetical process in St. John the Baptist Parish was not solely academic, and it challenged parents and children to reflect on a meaningful experience. Often, the catechesis was presented in an experiential manner. For example, in recalling baptism, candidates were asked to bring a special garment with them, one that could be related to the significance of the white baptismal garment. (SJB C4) This type of faith sharing and dialogue is effective at involving families in the process as it helped them to understand their identity as baptized members of the faith community. Through the activity, candidates were able to link their story to their membership in the faith community. Three parents from this parish said they enjoyed the learning aspect of this particular catechetical method. The ongoing engagement of parents at the parish was not limited to the initiation process.

⁴¹⁶ Richelle Pearl-Koller, “Unbaptized Children: A Parish Challenge” in Victoria M. Tufano, ed. *Readings in the Christian Initiation of Children*, (Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 189.

⁴¹⁷ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 12.

Four people I interviewed from this parish said that some parents were drawn to the *RCIA* process because of their involvement in the sacramental initiation of children catechesis. Taking an active part in the process obviously had a transformative effect on some families and parents, who then became inquirers in the *RCIA* process. Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly point to how being involved in such a process can be transformative:

Crucial to the process of a child's initiation is a set of celebratory experiences that are powerful enough to be transformative. The ancient Catholic understanding of sacrament as effecting that which it signifies is at the core of this vision of initiation... Ritual experience itself is catechetical and formative, at a level and with a power that no formal instruction can emulate.⁴¹⁸

The celebration of their children's sacraments and the process leading up to and following these celebrations surely had a powerful effect on the parents, who then chose to seek out the *RCIA* process. One of these mothers also went on to become a parish catechist after being asked to serve in parish ministries as part of the initiation process. Some parents began to view their role in the initiation process differently or began to look at it with a new understanding.

The pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish has observed parents taking the role of primary educator in the faith more seriously, as a result of being involved in a process that demanded a commitment from them to actively accompany their children. (SJB Pas.) He witnessed parents developing a sense of conviction and commitment towards the catechetical process. Perhaps these parents felt supported and encouraged by the parish process to take on the primary role in the faith formation of their children. Many parents today do not seem to have this same sense of conviction as the parents identified by the pastor. Other parish leaders also expressed their belief in the altering effect the sacramental catechesis had on many parents.

Remarks from one of the deacon coordinators of St. Monica Parish revealed that, in his opinion, participation in the parish initiation process gave parents the opportunity to be more

⁴¹⁸ Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, 34.

informed of their faith, to be more comfortable with their faith and to be more at ease with sharing their faith with their children. (SM D2) In essence, his comments point to the opportunity parents were given to engage with their children concerning the faith and to become more effective communicators with their children in matters of faith.

Six parents I interviewed said that topics and discussion from the catechetical process found their way into the family home. According to Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber and Leif Kehrwald, “When the church carves out time for families to learn together in the parish, then sends them home with resources to continue their journey at home, there is a greater chance for faith-sharing to happen.”⁴¹⁹ Children I interviewed mentioned working on the family catechetical programs with their parents in their homes, parents shared that they engaged with their children in faith based activities in the home such as making an Advent wreath together. Others said that their involvement in the catechesis caused them to grow closer as a family. One mother highlighted the warmth and welcome she received from the parish when her military husband was serving in Afghanistan. (SMM P5)

My findings from the children indicated that they were working on the family catechetical programs with their parents in their homes, developing a more regular prayer life, and turning to Scripture in a more meaningful way because of their involvement in the parish process. These are indicators that the faith experience of families extended beyond attendance at mass to other aspects of family life. The remarks of these parents illustrate how the initiation process has enhanced their faith lives and encouraged them to practice the faith in their homes making the relationship with God more a part of their way of living.

⁴¹⁹ Martineau, Weber and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, 21.

4.5.2 The Role of Catechists

As catechists have a fundamental role in catechesis, their ministry was the subject of much commentary in my research. Many pastors serve as parish catechists and by their priestly vocation are called to the catechetical ministry and as such are represented in this section concerning the role of catechists. This section will include the following subsections: the formation of catechists, maintaining catechists and the transformation of catechists and pastors.

4.5.2.1 The Formation of Catechists

Six of the research participants made comments concerning the need for proper formation for catechists. Two parents from St. Leo Parish felt their catechists did not communicate effectively with young people. (SL P 2 and 3) Also relevant in considering catechumenal formation is the statement by the father from St. Brigid Parish who acknowledged that his son had a learning disability and that the process was challenging for the boy. (SB P2) The onus is on the parents to inform catechists of the abilities of their children and to work with catechists to find ways of best ministering to children with special needs. Motivating children is another important factor that has been identified. Catechists must be able to engage children in the process by making the catechetical sessions enjoyable, interactive and meaningful. The comments from these parents point to the possibility that some catechists have not received adequate formation. Such training would assist them in facing the challenges of effective parent communication and accommodating the catechesis to the needs of children with learning disabilities.

Catechists can benefit from theological, spiritual and experiential formation. Marie Seaman says that catechist formation is essential for those who minister to families and recommends the following:

Those catechizing children and parents need skills as well as goodwill and deep faith. Growth in these areas most effectively happens when the adult catechists have time and opportunity to share their own journeys of faith with each other. Catechist certification programs ensure that those who minister are qualified to do so.⁴²⁰

Effective catechist formation should include not only necessary theological background but also give catechists the opportunity to dialogue with others and share their faith. In this way, their experiences and best practices can be shared, as they put the experiential into dialogue with the theological. There is also the need for catechists to develop human caring skills such as active listening, openness to differences and compassion. The Church outlines the importance of the catechist improving such social abilities through the catechetical ministry:

On the basis of this initial human maturity, the exercise of catechesis, by constant consideration and evaluation, allows the catechist to grow in a balanced and in a critical outlook, in integrity, in his(sic) ability to relate, to promote dialogue, to have a constructive spirit, and to engage in group work. It will cause him(sic) to grow in respect and in love for catechumens and those being catechized...⁴²¹

To be effective, catechists must have a genuine respect for the families being catechized and be able to communicate with them and accept them as fellow members of the parish family. It is also important for catechists to understand children and how they learn so that they will have the ability to communicate with them in order to nourish their religious imaginations. In this way, relationships can be formed and a sense of community strengthened. Catechists themselves are more likely to flourish in an environment of mutual support. Too often, catechists work in isolation since many parishes do not regularly share resources and ministry personnel.

⁴²⁰ Marie Seaman, "Catechizing Families with Infants and Preschoolers" in James A. Wilde, ed., *Before and After Baptism – The Work of Teachers and Catechists*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 75-76.

⁴²¹ GDC, #239.

It is also vital for catechists to foster a healthy prayer life and spirituality. Colleen M. Griffith says that “Formation that doesn’t provide access to the tools and practices that can deepen a catechist’s own spirituality is inadequate formation.”⁴²² People can’t give what they don’t have. And so, if catechists are not nurturing their prayer and spiritual life, how can they accompany others and support them in their development of spirituality? It is also imperative that catechists support each other.

Good leadership and ongoing formation are necessary for the success of the catechetical ministry and should be offered at both the diocesan and parish levels. A catechist from St. Brigid Parish shared her frustration about being thrown into the process with little direction or leadership. She herself also identified the need for the ongoing formation of catechists. (SB C2) Her comments suggest that the pastor simply handed the portfolio over to the catechists, and they were overwhelmed with this responsibility.

The Church recognizes the necessity of effective formation of parish catechists. The *General Directory for Catechesis* outlines the importance of this formation:

The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists. Thus the adequate *formation of catechists* cannot be overlooked by concerns such as the updating of texts and the re-organization of catechesis.

Consequently, diocesan pastoral programmes must give absolute priority to the *formation of lay catechists*. Together with this, a fundamentally decisive element must be the *catechetical formation of priests* both at the level of seminary formation as well as at the level of continuing formation. Bishops are called upon to ensure that they are scrupulously attentive to such formation.⁴²³

The vision of the Church indicates that the formation of catechists should be a principal concern of both dioceses and parishes. Catechists can benefit not only from theological and spiritual formation but also from learning *how* to be effective catechists. Both content and method are

⁴²² Colleen M. Griffith, “Spirituality and Religious Education”, in Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell, eds. *Horizons and Hopes – The Future of Religious Education*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003), 60.

⁴²³ GDC #234.

important. It is significant to note that the *General Directory for Catechesis* emphasizes the need for the ongoing formation of priests as well. This is an area that often seems lacking and in need of attention.

Through the sacrament of holy orders, priests are also called to exercise a catechetical ministry and to collaborate with lay catechists in providing an effective catechetical ministry.⁴²⁴ Some priests have a very minimal role, usually by choice, in the catechetical ministry. The Church recognizes that only some members of the Christian community are called to be catechists,⁴²⁵ and thus not all priests are called to be catechists in the formal sense. However, according to their vocational call and ecclesial leadership role, their active participation in the ministry is vital. Many priests would also benefit from some formation regarding the vision of the initiation ministry as outlined in the Church's *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. I suspect at least some priests have very little familiarity with or training regarding these two fundamental initiation texts. I also question how much time is spent in seminary educating candidates for the priesthood on these two essential texts of the Church and their collective vision concerning the initiation ministry. My research has illustrated the benefit of priests who serve in catechetical roles and who take an active part in the catechetical ministry. In particular, the pastors of St. Mary Magdalene and St. John the Baptist Parishes seem to have had a positive and collaborative working relationship with many of their parish catechists.

The Church envisions priests and catechists working cooperatively in the catechetical ministry.⁴²⁶ The vision also highlights the vocational aspect of catechesis. This is an area in need of improvement in some parishes, as six catechists and parents identified that pastors were

⁴²⁴ *GDC*, #224.

⁴²⁵ *GDC*, #221.

⁴²⁶ *GDC* #'s 224, 225.

not actively involved in the process, and catechists were expected to assume a leadership role for which they were not prepared. It is also very difficult for the relationship to be concerted when priests are uncomfortable with laypeople, seem unapproachable or are not present at significant community events and are not involved in parish ministries like catechesis. All of these issues point to a need for ongoing formation of catechists, both clergy and lay.

The leadership roles of priests and catechists in the catechetical ministry should correspond with the vision of the Church and leadership models inherent to the catechumenal model. For example, if a priest has a leadership role counter to the growth of the community or if a catechist has a very hierarchical style of leadership, they are operating from a vision and model contrary to the catechumenal process. In reflecting on the model of Church as communion and leadership, Edward Hahnenberg states that “Ideally, leadership in the church is not domination but direction. It is not power but service.”⁴²⁷ Serving in the initiation process moving toward the catechumenal model, catechists and priests are called to be servant-leaders⁴²⁸ who are willing to minister to other members of the faith community. In this way, catechists and priests are providing a ministry that emanates from the model of Church as communion as described by Avery Dulles⁴²⁹ and the model of adaptive leadership as described by Sharon Daloz Parks⁴³⁰

Both catechists and priests can profit from ongoing catechetical formation. Recognizing this need, Bishop Michael Mulhall, in cooperation with the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation, planned catechist formation sessions for all Diocese of Pembroke catechists in September of 2013. Formation opportunities such as the *Summer Institutes in Religious Education and*

⁴²⁷ Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Ministries – A Relational Approach*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 133.

⁴²⁸ John 13:1-20.

⁴²⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 45.

⁴³⁰ Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught*, 99-100.

Pastoral Liturgy, which are offered through St. Paul University in Ottawa,⁴³¹ should continue to be promoted at both the parish and diocesan levels. Dioceses and parishes should also encourage ongoing catechist formation by providing financial support for other initiatives, educational opportunities and symposiums at the local, provincial and national levels.

4.5.2.2 Maintaining Catechists

Pastoral care of catechists is highlighted in the *General Directory for Catechesis*. The Church acknowledges that “To ensure the working of the catechetical ministry in a local Church, it is fundamental to have adequate pastoral care of catechists.”⁴³² Parishes are encouraged to foster a vocation for catechesis, to provide full and part-time catechists and to organize a balanced distribution of catechists.⁴³³ All of these elements help support and maintain good catechists and a healthy catechetical ministry. Retention of good catechists is a concern of all parishes.

Three of the pastors whom I interviewed identified the challenge of maintaining catechists. Judith Dunlap identifies that catechetical leaders are sometimes the most susceptible to burnout.⁴³⁴ Recognizing that people in the parish possess the gifts necessary to serve in the catechetical ministry, Dunlap advises parish staff and catechetical leaders to support catechists, encourage them to develop and use their gifts and to continuously call others forward to serve in this ministry.⁴³⁵ Parish catechetical teams must be alert to the catechists who may be overwhelmed and be ready to offer supports and encouragement to them. Catechetical leaders

⁴³¹ See the St. Paul University Website at <http://ustpaul.ca/> for more information regarding the *Summer Institutes in Religious Education and Pastoral Liturgy*.

⁴³² *GDC*, #233.

⁴³³ *GDC*, #233.

⁴³⁴ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 167.

⁴³⁵ Dunlap, *Practical Catechesis*, 167-168.

should invite these candidates forward to serve in this ministry regularly and consider who in the parish may have the gifts necessary to be effective catechists. It would be helpful if there was some process of discernment available in the parish to call forth the people who may have the necessary gifts to be effective catechists. Some parishes have identified the parents as a pool from which to draw potential catechists.

In both St. Mary Magdalene and St. John the Baptist Parishes, six of the catechists who have come forward to serve in this ministry were formerly parents of children in the process. It is also important to note that in both of these parishes the participation of families and parents in parish ministries, including catechesis, is encouraged. It seems, then, that the catechetical process is an opportune time for parish leaders to discern whether some parents merit an invitation to the catechetical ministry. If a healthy catechetical ministry is to flourish in a parish or diocese, people have to be identified, called, formed and supported for this important work.

4.5.2.3 The Transformation of Catechists and Pastors

Catechists and pastors who are involved in the catechetical ministry can be transformed through this engagement. The Church teaches that “The ministry of the priest is a service which forms the Christian community and co-ordinates and strengthens other charisms and services. In catechesis, the sacrament of Holy Orders constitutes priests as ‘educators of the faith.’”⁴³⁶ The Church also recognizes the importance of lay catechists in this ministry:

The vocation of the laity to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism. It is strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation they participate in the ‘priestly prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ.’ In addition to the common vocation of the apostolate, some lay people feel called interiorly by God to assume the service of catechists. The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ *GDC*, #224.

⁴³⁷ *GDC*, #231.

For both priests and lay catechists serving in the ministry of catechesis, the ministry is a vocation, a ministry, a calling. The nature of a vocation is in itself meant to be transformative. Priests and catechists are to work together collaboratively in the ministry of catechesis. The call to this ministry comes through our baptism. Through their baptism, Christians are invited to grow in their faith as disciples of Jesus Christ and to share their faith with others. Lay catechists and priests who serve in the catechetical ministry are living out this baptismal call.

Several catechists shared that they had experienced transformation in a personal way. One catechist said the work in this ministry caused her to look inward and reevaluate her own faith commitment, relationship with God and devotion to catechesis. (SL C3) Another catechist shared how working with children caused her to appreciate the simplicity of her faith, as she learned with them. (SM C1) A further catechist also mentioned that her commitment to prayer life was strengthened, and she developed a greater awareness of God in her life. (SM C2) A fourth significant statement from a female catechist was that her work with the parish process caused her to be more accepting of people. (SJB C2)

Many catechists spoke of how their involvement in the initiation process gave them the opportunity to learn more about their faith, enriched their own faith formation experience and confirmed the value of lifelong learning. These revelations point to a type of learning that, according to Groome, is formational, informational and transformational.⁴³⁸ By this I mean that the catechetical experience could provide participants with education regarding the faith, give them the opportunity to be formed in their faith through family and parish and finally allow them to be changed or transformed towards full mature discipleship in Christ over a lifetime because of their engagement in the ministry.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education," 6-7.

⁴³⁹ Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education," 7-8.

Two of the catechists said their involvement in the catechetical ministry caused them to become more effective communicators with families. One deacon felt he was better able to communicate with families, could relate more easily with them and became more comfortable with sharing his faith. (SM D2) The other deacon became more comfortable with faith sharing due to his work with children over the years. He spoke of his love of storytelling and how storytelling has been transformative for him because it forced him to be more open with his faith and to interact with others. (SM D1) Nine catechists stated that they appreciated the engagement with children and the opportunity to build relationships with families.

One catechist from St. John the Baptist Parish admitted that her work in catechesis made her feel vulnerable in faith sharing and faith witnessing. This was a practice with which she was not comfortable. (SJB C4) What the catechist described is, I believe, something at the core of what all catechists are called to do – allow themselves to be appropriately vulnerable and authentically share their own faith journey with the children and families to whom they are ministering. According to Kathy Brown, “The authenticity of the adult community’s witness reveals itself in living out the gospel in daily life. It is this authentic witness that attracts children to desire to become one with the company of Christians.”⁴⁴⁰ Part of living out the gospel message is sharing one’s faith journey with others, an integral task for the catechists. Transformation may be a natural consequence for catechists and pastors when they share their faith with others in a genuine, meaningful way.

The pastor from St. Brigid Parish focused on his priestly vocation as he considered the transforming effect of his involvement in the ministry of catechesis. His work in this ministry gave him the opportunity to interact with children and thereby exercise his teaching ministry. It also brought him to a greater awareness of his priestly call to concern himself with the care of

⁴⁴⁰ Brown, “Companions: The Role of the Adult Community”, 106.

souls. (SB Pas.) In addition, the pastor highlighted the importance of priests working in collaboration with lay catechists who, he said, are called through their baptism to serve in the catechetical ministry. This significant statement from the pastor indicates there is much work to be done in educating members of the clergy and laypeople concerning the collaborative nature of the catechetical ministry and the vocational nature of catechesis. Part of this collaboration is nourishment of catechists in their ministry, by priests, so it can indeed continue to have a transformative effect. The *General Directory for Catechesis* states that “The figure of the priest is fundamental in the task of assuring their [catechists’] progressive maturation as believers and witnesses.”⁴⁴¹ The parish priest is called to support the vocation of catechists in the midst of the Christian community. Edward Hahnenberg states that “The ministerial leader’s role is to foster and guide other ministers...”⁴⁴² It is possible that experiences in the catechetical ministry can have a transformative effect on a priest’s spirituality.

The pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish described a change in his own “spiritual outlook.” (SMM Pas.) His explanation indicated that he appreciates the value of collaboration when catechesis involves parishioners in the process. In saying that catechesis “belongs to the parish,” (SMM Pas.) he was recognizing that the responsibility for initiation is indeed the responsibility of the entire faith community. This responsibility is made clear in the *General Directory for Catechesis*.⁴⁴³ The pastor’s personal experience is also interesting on another note. He said that engaging the process of and being excited about the formation of faith creates a contagious and exciting energy for all those involved. (SMM Pas.) His comments illustrate the joy and enthusiasm that can be shared among children and families with those who are

⁴⁴¹ *GDC*, #246.

⁴⁴² Edward Hahnenberg, *Ministries*, 135.

⁴⁴³ *GDC* #220.

ministering to them. And, as he states, this can have a transformative effect not only on the ministers but on the parish as well.

My research has shown that pastors and catechists can be transformed through their participation in the sacramental initiation of children. This can also be substantiated by research on the effects on the *RCIA* process in parishes. Thomas Groome affirms that the *RCIA* process can be a powerfully transformative experience for parishes in three ways: by renewing the faith of the parish itself as the parish is actively involved in the formation of new members, by getting parishioners actively involved in sharing their faith and by the participation of neophytes who bring new enthusiasm to the life of the parish.⁴⁴⁴ The initiation process for children can have the same transformative effect on the parish in these ways. Participants in my research noted that they were changed in many respects, mentioned in this section, through their work in the catechetical ministry. They acknowledged being committed to lifelong learning and engaged in relationships with children and families. According to Robert Duggan, “Conversion is interpersonal... it is about the establishment of a network of saving relationships.”⁴⁴⁵ A parish process based on the *RCIA* invites pastors and catechists to minister to children and families on a personal level. Through dialogue, faith sharing and learning, catechists and pastors can’t help but be affected by interpersonal relationships. The more catechists and pastors engage with the process and with families, the more likely they are to be transformed by the catechumenal process.

⁴⁴⁴ Groome, *Will There be Faith?*, 176.

⁴⁴⁵ Duggan, “Discerning Conversion in Children”, 190.

Chapter V – Recommendations for Best Practices

This section will also encompass the latter stage of the practical theological method which includes the formulation of revised practices⁴⁴⁶ to establish “...the norms and strategies of concrete practices in light of analyses of concrete situations.”⁴⁴⁷ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat refer to this last stage as “formulating revised forms of practice” and offer the following description of it:

At stage 4 we return to the situation that we began with. Here we draw together the cultural/contextual analysis with the theological reflection and combine these two dimensions with our original reflections on the situation. In this way the conversation functions dialectically to produce new and challenging forms of practice that enable the initial situation to be transformed into ways which are authentic and faithful.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Research Design* (London, England: SMC Press, 2006), 96.

⁴⁴⁷ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology – Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996), 58.

⁴⁴⁸ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 96-97.

Having analyzed the situations presented in the researched five parishes, I will now make recommendations for the future and suggest best practices concerning the catechetical ministry. This section is divided into the following subsections: the catechetical process, the role of Catholic schools, the role of parishes, the role of parents and the role of catechists. Recommendations for best practices will be listed and briefly explained under each of these subsections.

5.1 The Catechetical Process

5.1.2 Christian Initiation is a Process, Not a Program

The title of my thesis contains the phrase “...toward the catechumenal model...” As I stated in my introduction, I used the verb “toward” intentionally as no parish holds the ideal process that is intended in the catechumenal model. And so, parish processes are constantly moving toward the catechumenal model which, according to the Church, holds the best possible vision of initiation. Christian initiation is meant to be a process, not a program. This must be understood by all involved in the catechetical ministry. The goal of the process is not the completion of a catechetical program. Catechetical programs should never drive the catechetical process. Catechetical programs are tools and resources that may provide helpful information, activities and formational opportunities for families or catechetical groups.

5.1.3 Intergenerational Catechesis

The importance of intergenerational catechesis in the catechumenal process cannot be overlooked. Numerous parents I interviewed relayed how they appreciated the opportunities for informational and formational learning in the catechetical process. When parents are learning with their children, there are many occasions for dialogue with other families and relationships can be strengthened between parent and child. Parents can be challenged to confront their own beliefs and be provided with opportunities to grow in their understanding of faith and how to live it. They can then enter into a more mature adult discipleship which will help them become more comfortable with their role as the primary catechists for their children.

5.1.4 Mystagogy

Mystagogical catechesis should be provided to help children and families reflect on the meaning of the celebration of the sacraments and their life of faith. Reflection on rituals well celebrated provides an opportunity to appreciate the presence of God in the experience, to make meaning of that experience in such a way that faith becomes more integrated with life. Parishes should also make the effort to engage families in the Sunday Eucharist and other parish ministries and activities once the sacraments are celebrated to encourage ongoing active participation.

5.1.5 Information, Formation and Transformation

The catechetical process should be much more than an occasion for information sharing. The process should provide opportunities for formation and transformation. Through their engagement in the process, children, pastors, catechists and parents should be challenged to share their faith, actively journey and dialogue with others, and allow themselves to be formed and

transformed by the process. The process is not meant to be solely didactic but one of faith sharing and apprenticing others in the Christian life. This is a faith which is brought to the Sunday Eucharist and where all are sent forth to serve as disciples in the world.

5.1.6 Accessibility, Flexibility and Accommodation

Catechetical sessions should be made as accessible as possible to families. This means organizing sessions and related activities at times and in places that are as convenient for families. Parishes should, within reason, do whatever is feasible to accommodate the needs of families, whether it is providing transportation for families who do not own a vehicle, adjusting length of catechetical sessions or any other reasonable needs. Flexibility is also required for unique family situations such as a family where a child lives with one parent one week who refuses to participate in the process. The dynamics of family life have to be understood and addressed in a pastoral manner. Families must be received as they are, without judgment.

5.1.7 Feedback and Assessment of the Process

There should be an opportunity for parents to give feedback to the parish concerning the effectiveness of the catechetical sessions and process in meeting their needs. Their input and suggestions should be integrated as much as possible in the flow of the sessions. In fact, parishes should regularly evaluate the process with all the participants both during and once the catechetical sessions have ceased.

5.1.8 Be Attentive to Language

Catechetical leaders have to be attentive to the language they use concerning the catechetical process as the language used helps to shape the experience. For example,

“participation in the Liturgy” should be used instead of “attendance at Mass.” “Sacramental initiation process” should be used instead of “sacramental preparation.” Such school terms as “homework”, “classroom” and “lessons” should never be used to refer to the catechetical sessions. The misuse of such terms can cause misunderstanding of the vision of the catechumenal process and can interfere with its effective implementation.

5.1.9 “Passports”

The use of “passports” is not recommended as legislating participation proves ineffective. The practice can be insulting to families and can confuse people regarding the invitation to full, conscious and active participation in the Liturgy. I am not aware of any evidence that proves that the use of passports is helpful in this regard, especially following the celebration of the sacraments.

5.1.10 A Gradual Process

The catechetical process should be gradual and not based on ages or grades. Restoring the sacraments to their proper order would help in this regard, especially assessing readiness for involvement in initiation process for confirmation any time after the age of reason. This may prove challenging as the norm in the Diocese is to celebrate confirmation several years following the celebration of First Eucharist. All children should be invited to journey in the initiation process once they reach the age of reason or anytime thereafter. The catechetical process should never be rushed to meet a certain deadline or date simply to accommodate schedules and the high points of the liturgical year such as the Lent/Easter/Pentecost season need to be respected.

Families must always know that they are welcome to join the process when they are ready and not at a certain age or time.

5.1.11 Active Involvement of Parents

There is an expectation in normal circumstances that parents should be actively involved in the catechumenal process and their participation should be welcomed and supported. The idea should never be given that the parish catechists are solely responsible for catechesis. By being actively engaged in the process, parents can be encouraged and supported to be the primary educators in the faith to their children.

5.2 *The Role of Catholic Schools*

There are two main recommendations I have regarding the role of Catholic schools in the sacramental initiation process. Both of these proposals would be most effective where there is a strong relationship among the home, the school and the parish, but unfortunately, as my research has shown, such is not always the case.

5.2.1 Supportive Role

First, the Catholic school should be strongly encouraged to play a supportive role in the faith journey of children, including the process of sacramental initiation. This would honour the role of the Catholic school as a significant partner in the faith development of young people. Even though the catechesis is parish-based, Catholic schools can be supportive in finding creative ways to journey with children in the process. Some examples of such support could include the school classes remembering the candidates and their families in prayer during the catechesis and

after the celebration of the sacrament, reinforcing the learning of prayers, creeds and other traditions of the faith from the catechetical process in the classroom and allowing children to be brought to the parish during school time for retreats, practices for the celebrations and other catechetical events. Teachers can play a significant role in the faith life of students through the dual role of the transmission of faith knowledge and being authentic witnesses to the faith.

5.2.2 Communication

Second, I would recommend that parishes utilize the communication resources of the Catholic schools where applicable to inform families about the parish sacramental initiation process. Catholic schools have ready access to many families who may not be known to the parish. The school provides an excellent venue by which to invite families to consider involvement in the initiation process. My research has confirmed that often a significant number of the children in Catholic schools are not involved in regular worship or other parish activities. Yet many baptized Catholic children are enrolled in publicly funded Catholic schools in the Diocese of Pembroke.⁴⁴⁹ Parishes and Catholic schools should work together on communication, sending families an invitation to be part of the parish initiation process.

5.3 *The Role of Parishes*

5.3.1 Building Relationships

⁴⁴⁹ I do not have any concrete data to substantiate my claim that many baptized Catholic children are enrolled in publicly funded Catholic schools in the Province of Ontario. This is my assumption based on observations I have made through my involvement in my parish and through my work in Catholic schools and for the Diocese of Pembroke.

There are numerous opportunities for parishes to build relationships with children and families. The more children and families are engaged in the process, the more likely they are to continue an active relationship with the parish. Prayer partnerships can be formed with children and parishioners, children can be invited to work with members of the liturgy committee and serve in liturgical roles and families can be invited to work with parishioners on various other outreach ministries.

5.3.2 Being Welcoming, Inclusive and Inviting

Parishes must ensure that liturgies and activities are directed toward children and young families if they hope to have the participation of young families in these.⁴⁵⁰ If young families do not feel welcome or do not find anything in the liturgies, ministries or other parish activities that appeals to them, they most likely will not engage with the parish. Everyone at the parish and the parish in general should strive to be inclusive, inviting and welcoming to all, especially young families.

5.3.3 Reaching Outward to Families

Parishes need to look inward to discover what they could be doing differently or better to meet the spiritual needs of families, many who have been disconnected from the parish for some time. The research of Reginald Bibby suggests that there is a great opportunity for the Catholic Church regarding evangelization and growth:

The time has come to quit belittling the health of Canadian Catholicism. Large numbers may show up only occasionally for seasonal services, for rites of passage, or because they think they are overdue to share in a Mass. But they still show up. And they are still Catholic... Large numbers are open to greater involvement if they find it to be

⁴⁵⁰ For very helpful guidelines, see the *Directory for Masses with Children*.

worthwhile. The challenge lies with the supplier. If the Catholic Church comes through, who knows what could happen?⁴⁵¹

Such an assertion is interesting considering what my research has indicated. That is, that many families are disengaged from family life but according to Bibby, many are open to involvement if they find their needs will be met. In reaching outward, the parish must be aware of the needs of others and must decide whether or not it is capable of meeting such needs.

Considering what Pope Francis has been saying about reaching out to the alienated,⁴⁵² parishes should find creative ways to connect with the many families not known to them. Parishes can no longer expect families to be aware of the sacramental initiation process and come to the parish seeking engagement with this process. In fact, reaching out to disconnected Catholics may be a ministry unto itself that could be pursued at both the parish and diocesan levels.

5.3.4 Consistency Among Parishes

Parishes must be consistent in establishing an initiation process that is moving toward the catechumenal model. It has been over four years since the diocesan *Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children* was promulgated calling all parishes to offer such a process. Not all parishes have made this shift and so, it is difficult for parishes that have when families see a school-based model in other parishes with all the implications that means as presented above.⁴⁵³

5.3.6 Sharing Resources and Personnel

⁴⁵¹ Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 195.

⁴⁵² Pope Francis I, *Homily at Mass with Bishops, Priests, Religious and Seminarians at the Cathedral of San Sebastian, Rio de Janeiro*.

⁴⁵³ See section 4.5.1.2 – *The Initiation Process and Expediency for Families*

Parishes in the same zone, area or pastoral unit can share resources, expertise and personnel. More collaboration between parishes is necessary as we move forward instead of parishes or catechists working in isolation. This would lessen the burden on some parishes that may be limited in resources or people willing to serve as catechists. It would also encourage an appreciation for the larger diocesan Church community.

5.3.7 Celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation during the Sunday Liturgy and at the Proper Times during the Liturgical Year

Celebrations of baptism, confirmation, first Eucharist and reconciliation and other rites associated with these sacraments should be celebrated during the Sunday Liturgy. They should also correspond to the Lent/Easter/Pentecost season as this is the proper time to celebrate these sacraments.⁴⁵⁴ Such adherence to the liturgical year ensures that the initiation process has a “...markedly paschal character, since the initiation of Christians is the first sacramental sharing in Christ’s dying and rising...”⁴⁵⁵ In this way, the faith community is present to journey with and welcome the neophytes and their families. Celebrating these sacraments without the participation and witness of the faith community is contrary to the vision of the *RCIA*.

5.3.8 The Role of the Faith Community in the Catechumenal Process

All members of the faith community are responsible for the catechesis and initiation of new members. Parishioners need to be formed about their responsibility and given creative ways to journey with and support families in the catechetical process. One concrete example that has proven helpful in this regard is celebrating a welcoming or enrollment ceremony for candidates

⁴⁵⁴ *RCIA*, # 7,8.

⁴⁵⁵ *RCIA*, #8.

and their families during a Sunday Liturgy. It is imperative to celebrate the steps of the catechumenal process in the appropriate adapted rites during the Sunday Eucharist.

5.3.9 Baptismal Initiation Process

It is crucial that every parish have a good baptismal initiation process for families. Parents need to be made aware of their fundamental role in the faith life of their children and they need to be reminded of this throughout their child's formative years. Helping parents to realize their role as primary educator in the faith to their children and providing supports for them in this role are integral parts of the baptismal initiation process.

5.3.10 The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Ideally, all parishes should ensure a vibrant and effective *RCIA* process is established not only to meet the needs of inquiring adults at present but to meet the needs of many adults who may seek full communion with the Church. The parish's participation in the significant rites of the *RCIA* which are celebrated during the various seasons of the church's year deepens the sense of initiation as a process which belongs to the whole community. The adaptations for the initiation of children can then become a more anticipated and appreciated process.

5.4 The Role of Parents

5.4.1 Active Participation

Parents are expected to be active participants in the catechetical process and in the life and mission of the Church. Passive engagement is not desirable or helpful for their children. However, as I have identified in my research, just getting parents and families to the parish is the first step. And so, there is a tension between just being present and active engagement. The process must start with an invitation and affirmation of being present and then once the process commences, families should be invited and encouraged to be more actively involved in the process, the Sunday Liturgy and in other ministries and parish activities. Resources should be shared and supports given for parents in order to grow and enrich the domestic Church.

5.4.2 Adult Formation

Ongoing adult formation and catechesis should be provided by parishes and the Diocese, not just for parents involved in the process but for any interested adults. Providing such formation fulfills part of the vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* as the norm for all catechesis and recognizes that continuing formation opportunities for adults acknowledges the importance of and commitment to lifelong learning and growth in mature discipleship.

5.4.3 The Role of Grandparents

Recently, it seems to be more common to have grandparents who seek to play an active role in the faith formation of their grandchildren when the parents are not interested or not able to do so. Parishes and catechetical teams should embrace such situations and be willing to assist grandparents in journeying with their grandchild in the initiation process.

5.5 The Roles of Catechists and Pastors

5.5.1 Formation of Catechists and Pastors

The formation of parish catechists and pastors is imperative and opportunities for ongoing formation should be provided by both the parishes and Diocese. Properly trained catechists and pastors and those committed to such ongoing faith formation are more likely to be more effective in the catechetical and serve the needs of families well. Candidates for the diaconate should also study these topics as part of their diaconal formation. Effective formation for deacons and priests would help ensure that they are ready to work collaboratively with lay catechists in this ministry. The spirituality of catechists also has to be nurtured and catechists need to be given opportunities to dialogue with one another. As with adult formation, a commitment to the ongoing formation of catechists and priests is an acknowledgement of the importance of lifelong learning and the deepening of one's sense of vocation.

5.5.2 Catechesis as a Vocation and Ministry

Catechists need to be supported and nurtured in their ministry so that they can exercise their ministry effectively. Pastors and catechetical leaders must always be aware of the issue of catechist burnout/fatigue and be discerning who else in the parish might be worthy of an invitation to think about serving in the catechetical ministry. It is significant that catechesis is envisioned and lived as a vocation and a ministry and not be perceived as simply a job or a volunteer task within the parish. When catechists begin to appreciate their work in the catechumenal process as a calling, their experience is more likely to be enriched and meaningful and hopefully this will be reflected in their commitment to this ministry.

A Final Summation - Sowing Seeds on Fertile Ground...

The title of my thesis project is “*Sowing Seeds on Fertile Ground – Towards a Catechumenal Model of the Christian Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke.*” This title has provided a constant roadmap for the journey through the research, interviews, reflection and writing of this project. As the opening page of this thesis states, the image of sowing seeds on fertile ground is taken from the Parable of the Sower from the fourth chapter of Mark’s gospel.⁴⁵⁶

In the parable, although some seed falls on the path, on rock and among weeds, some seed falls on good soil and the yield is abundant. Such is the ministry of catechesis. Not all children and families will continue with active faith journeys once the sacraments are celebrated but some will. For some families, the apprenticeship in the Christian life, catechesis and engagement will be temporary and superficial and they will not continue with an ongoing relationship with other Christians and a commitment to discipleship. Such situations are like the seed that falls on the path, the rocky soil and among the thorn bushes. Those families who continue to enjoy an active faith journey and who have been transformed and are open to a life of ongoing formation and conversion, are like seed that falls on good soil. Through their ongoing relationship with the People of God and devotion to an active faith journey, their faith life can be nourished by the Word of God and supported by others who share in their journey.⁴⁵⁷

It remains significant that what my research has shown is if families are well received and if the movement towards the catechumenal model is the basis for the parish initiation for children process, families are more likely to be full, active and conscious participants in the life and mission of the Church. My hope is that more parish processes move toward this

⁴⁵⁶ See Mark 4:3-8

⁴⁵⁷ And even with all this – the mystery remains that we may plant and water but it is God who gives the growth. It is not certain that participation in Sunday Eucharist and involvement in the parish are the only markers of faith – or the only signs of catechetical formation being effective.

catechumenal model of initiation so that like in the parable of the sower, the seeds we sow in the ministry of catechesis have greater possibility to fall into good soil and bring forth fruit in abundance.

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Policy for the Sacramental Initiation for Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke



Policy for the Sacramental Initiation of Children in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pembroke



Pentecost 2009

Dear Faithful People in Christ,

I am pleased to present to you a *Diocesan Policy on the Sacramental Initiation of Children*. This work is the culmination of many years of reflection, dialogue and research which began with the Faith Formation Symposium in the autumn of 2005.

This policy is intended especially for parents and parishes as they become more directly involved in the sacramental initiation of children. It is the intention of the Diocese of Pembroke that this policy be integrated into the life of the parish in the coming year.

I wish to thank all of those who have contributed to the process leading up to the completion of this Policy. May this document be a means to advance a unified and common approach to sacramental initiation in the Diocese of Pembroke and may it also lead to a profound awareness of the many ways our Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself to us through the sacraments of the Church.

Yours in Christ,

†Most Reverend Michael Mulhall
Bishop of Pembroke

I. Responsibility of Parents in Sacramental Preparation

1. Parents as the Primary Educators in Their Children's Faith

- 1.1 Parents are their children's primary educators in matters of faith. Therefore, they are responsible for the sacramental preparation of their children. In the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, the celebrant speaks to the parents of the child with the following words:

You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God

and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking? (p. 94, *Rite of Baptism for Children*, CCCB)

- 1.2 The promise to be the primary educators of the faith by parents for their children may go back even farther if the parents have a sacramental marriage (married in the Roman Catholic Church). In the *Rite of Marriage*, before the Declaration of Consent, or vows, comes the Statement of Intentions and the couple is asked a series of questions. The third question is the following:

Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church? (*Rite of Marriage*, p. 52)

When a couple answers “yes” to this question, they agree to take on the awesome responsibility of being the first faith formers for any children they are blessed with.

- 1.3 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* also highlights parents’ important role as primary educators of their children in matters of faith:

The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. (#2221)

Parents have the first responsibility for the education for their children...

Parents have grave responsibility to give good example to their children. (#2223)

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years...

Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. (#2226)

2. Commitment to Sacramental Participation Journey and Membership in the Church

- 2.1 Parents and their children must understand the level of commitment needed for the journey of sacramental preparation and full membership in the Church. The Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) and the Sacrament of Reconciliation prepare candidates to become life-long, active members of the Church in the parish community. Receiving the sacraments are never a kind of “graduation” from the Church.
- 2.2 One cannot live a fully Christian life without participating in the life of the worshipping Church community. This is because the Church is, as the Scriptures tell us, the Body of Christ: He is the Head, we are the members of this Body (*see 1 Cor 12:12-31; Col 1:18; 2:18-20; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19; 4:13*). This means that to separate oneself from the Church is to distance oneself from Christ, the Head of the Church.
- 2.3 Parents have been entrusted by Christ and His Church with the task of teaching their children how to live the Christian life. They are called to do this by word and example. Concretely, this means:

- attending and participating in weekly Sunday Mass with their children,

- frequent reception of the sacrament of reconciliation,
 - growth in knowledge of God’s Word and of the teachings of the Church,
 - serving the poor,
 - leading a moral life,
 - fostering an active prayer life.
- 2.4 The Church expects fully initiated members to gather weekly for Sunday Eucharist in their parish and to involve themselves in other facets of parish life. The Eucharist is central to our Catholic faith and is referred to as the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, #11). By such participation in the life of the Church, Christians support one another as together we seek to grow in faith. This is especially important in our present culture which has many positive characteristics however, some societal values are at odds with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. The Sacraments and Commitment to the Christian Life

- 3.1 The celebration of the sacraments initiates us into the life of the Church and strengthens us for the challenges of Christian living. Some members of our parish communities have grown accustomed to bringing their children to Church only when it is time to celebrate Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion or Confirmation. Unfortunately, they and their children have little or no regular participation in weekly Sunday Mass or in the life of the parish. This practice does not make sense for persons who have become – through Baptism – members of the believing community.
- 3.2 Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are the three Sacraments of Initiation, through which one becomes a member of the Church. They draw the recipient into union with Christ and the other members of the Church. They endow him or her with the gifts and strength needed to live as a disciple of the Lord. Therefore, these sacraments are properly celebrated when the one receiving them has made a decision, proper to his or her age, to:
- believe in the Lord,
 - live according to His teachings, and
 - participate in the life of the Church.
- 3.3 Parents and guardians are expected to make the same commitments since their child will need their support to live a vibrant life in the Catholic Church.
- 3.4 Sacraments should not be viewed as “rites of passage” with no relationship to the rest of one’s life. Rather, they insert one into the Church’s life of faith, which gives meaning and direction to every aspect of who we are as members of the baptized. The sacraments, therefore, presuppose a commitment on the part of the recipient to live as a member of the Church.

4. Active Participation in Children's Preparation for Sacramental Life

- 4.1 Parents have a leading and major role in the sacramental preparation of their children. It is parents' responsibility and task to catechize (instruct in the faith) their children at home. They should take time to pray with their children each day, especially when they are young, and make a serious commitment to being involved in their children's sacramental preparation in the parish setting. This includes attending with their children, all meetings and catechetical sessions related to children's preparation for receiving the sacraments. For their part, the parish and its catechists will provide support to parents as needed. They will be in regular contact with parents during the year to verify that the children understand the important elements of their catechetical programs.
- 4.2 Parents' most important task in preparing their children for full initiation into the Catholic faith through the Sacrament of Eucharist is to bring them to the weekly celebration of Sunday Eucharist. Children learn to be comfortable with the celebration of the Eucharist by attending from a young age. By taking an ongoing active role in their children's preparation for the sacraments, parents are also guiding them to live as adult members of the Church.
- 4.3 Families are expected to attend weekly Sunday Mass and be involved in the life of the faith community on an ongoing basis, and not just during the time of preparation and formation for the sacraments.
- 4.4 Catechetical sessions will be organized at each parish for parents and children to attend. Parents are expected to make a serious commitment to see that their children attend each scheduled session and that they, themselves, attend any sessions for parents. If an unforeseen situation occurs and sessions must be missed, parents are to:
 - contact the parish before sessions to explain the situation and,
 - contact the catechist to ensure they and their child can keep up-to-date with the program.

II. Responsibility of the Parish in Sacramental Preparation

1. Catechetical Instruction

- 1.1 The Church recognizes that many parents need assistance in preparing their children for initiation into the Church. Thus, each parish in the Diocese of Pembroke is responsible for offering sacramental preparation programs. Pastors and catechists will assist parents in their role as primary educator of their child. Parish sacramental preparation programs may be offered in partnership with a local Catholic school depending on the agreement between the parish and the local school. Church Law (commonly called Canon Law) states that both the pastor and all members of the Church have the duty to ensure that

there is proper catechetical instruction for children as outlined in the following references from the *Code of Canon Law*:

Can. 528 §1 The parish priest has the obligation of ensuring that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish. He is therefore to see to it that the lay members of Christ's faithful are instructed in the truths of faith, especially by means of the homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation and by catechetical formation. He is to foster works which promote the spirit of the Gospel, including its relevance to social justice. He is to have a special care for the catholic education of children and young people. With the collaboration of the faithful, he is to make every effort to bring the gospel message to those also who have given up religious practice or who do not profess the true faith.

Can. 843 §2 According to their respective offices in the Church, both pastors of souls and all other members of Christ's faithful have a duty to ensure that those who ask for the sacraments are prepared for their reception. This should be done through proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, in accordance with the norms laid down by the competent authority

1. Location of Sacramental Preparation

Immediate sacramental preparation will take place at the parish since it is the spiritual home of all the baptized and the place where the sacraments are celebrated. This ensures ongoing opportunities for candidates to become more familiar with and comfortable in their parish. The Church's *General Directory for Catechesis* recognizes the parish as the proper setting for catechesis:

The parish is, without a doubt, the most important locus in which the Christian community is formed and expressed. This is called to be a fraternal and welcoming family where Christians become aware of being the people of God. In the parish, all human differences melt away and are absorbed into the universality of the Church. The parish is also the usual place in which the faith is born and in which it grows. It constitutes, therefore, a very adequate community space for the realization of the ministry of the word at once as teaching, education and life experience. (#257).

2. Parish Enrollment

Normally, families residing within the geographical limits of a parish are members of that parish. Therefore, parents who intend to have their children participate in the sacramental preparation during a given year should make their intention known to the pastor and/or to the Parish Sacramental Preparation Committee by completing a registration form supplied by the parish.

3. Expectations and Readiness for Sacraments

- 4.1 It is the responsibility of the parish, in consultation with parents, to assess the readiness of children for admission to the sacraments. Admission to the sacraments should not be granted without some clear indications that the one seeking to receive them is committed to following Christ through participation in the life of the worshipping Catholic community. The same commitment is expected from parents of children preparing to receive the sacraments, to ensure that children will be supported in their faith journey.
- 4.2 The ultimate responsibility for discerning whether a child is ready for admission to the sacraments has been entrusted to our parish priests. They will follow objective and measurable criteria, which will give them a good indication of a child's readiness for a particular sacrament. Such criteria include full participation in a catechetical program, adequate knowledge of the faith and attendance at the weekly parish celebration of Sunday Mass.

III The Responsibility of Schools in Sacramental Preparation

1. Role of Catholic Schools

- 1.1 In many parts of the Diocese of Pembroke, publicly funded Catholic schools exist. Catholic schools can play a supportive role in parental and parish preparation of students for the sacraments. Each teacher in the Catholic school is called to be a witness to the Catholic faith through his or her regular contact with student candidates for the sacraments. In this sense, each Catholic school teacher, especially the classroom teacher, shares responsibility for the child's sacramental preparation. The Catholic school teacher is therefore an important model of adult faith for the candidate seeking the sacraments - through prayer, participation in parish liturgical celebrations, faith sharing and religious education.

2. Other Situations

- 2.1 For children attending public schools, sacramental preparation is the entire responsibility of parents and parishes. (see II, 3)
- 2.2 For children who are home-schooled, sacramental preparation is the entire responsibility of parents and parishes. (see II, 2)

Pentecost 2009

Appendix 2 – Draft copy of Passport from St. Leo Parish

This passport is valid for all Roman Catholic parishes.

Issuing Parish:

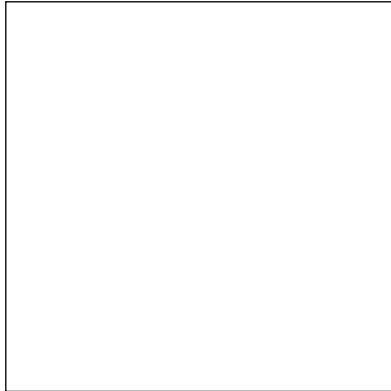
Surname: _____

Given Names: _____

Date of Baptism: Month _____, Day _____, Year _____

Place of Baptism: _____

Place Picture below:



Date of Issue: September 11th, 2011

Signature: _____

This passport is the property of _____ Parish, Pembroke. It must not be altered. You must take every precaution to safeguard it.

This passport may be used only by the bearer in whose name it is issued and is not valid unless signed by the bearer on page 1.

If your passport is lost or stolen in the Diocese of Pembroke, notify the _____ Parish Office immediately.

The bearer of this passport is a Child of God.

The bearer of this passport is responsible for attending Mass every weekend for the days marked on the pages herein and getting it signed by the priest celebrant of that Mass.

On Sundays when formal confirmation sessions take place after Mass at _____, the bearer will present his/her passport to the catechist to be stamped “Confirmed” for each completed Sunday since the last session.

A completed Sunday in the passport includes the presiding priest’s signature for the Mass plus a brief personal reflection on the liturgy by the bearer.

Failure to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation is a mortal sin and thus requires the sacrament of confession before receiving Holy Communion.

Appendix 3 – Interview Questions

Research Questions – Interview Guide

1. For Pastors and Pastoral Assistants
 - a. How long have you been the pastor/administrator of this parish?
 - b. How long has your parish had a parish-based sacramental initiation process for children?
 - c. What role has the faith community played in this process?
 - d. What have been the most significant challenges in your role as pastor/administrator/pastoral assistant with regards to this process?
 - e. What have been the rewards of serving as a pastor/administrator/pastoral assistant in this process?
 - f. Can you compare the experience of the former Catholic school-based process to the current parish based process experience?
 - g. Do you believe families have been changed as result of their participation in this process? Has some sort of transformation occurred? What are some of the signs and signals of this change?
 - h. Have families become more engaged in the life of the parish as a result of this process? If so, can you give some concrete examples.
 - i. Do you believe your parish has been changed as a result of a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process? Has some sort of transformation occurred? Please explain.
 - j. Have you changed in your role as pastor/administrator/pastoral assistant? (Have you experienced any personal transformation?) What effect has your involvement in the ministry of catechesis for the process of the initiation of children had on your faith growth?
2. For Parents
 - a. How many children do you have involved in the sacramental initiation process at your parish? What ages are they?
 - b. Have you had other children in the parish-based process before? How many? How long ago were they involved?
 - c. Explain how participation in the parish-based children's initiation process has had an effect on you and your family regarding the following (Please explain in detail):
 - i. involvement in your parish
 - ii. personal faith growth
 - iii. family life in general
 - d. If you have had children involved in the past in a Catholic school-based sacramental initiation process, how does it compare with the current parish-based process?

- e. What have been the challenges for you, your child and your family of being involved in a parish-based sacramental initiation process?
- f. What have been the benefits for you, your child and your family of being involved in a parish-based sacramental initiation process?

3. For Children (small group of 4-5)

- a. What are some of the things you learned about in the sessions with your catechists this year?
- b. What was most interesting or exciting for you to learn?
- c. What did you enjoy the most about your time getting ready to make your First Reconciliation and First Eucharist?
- d. What did you find the hardest about getting ready to make your First Reconciliation and First Eucharist?
- e. Do you feel at home and comfortable in your parish? Can you tell me why or why not?
- f. Do you think that anything is different in your life or in the life of your family since you started preparing for your First Reconciliation and First Communion? If so, can you tell me about these differences?

4. For Catechists

- a. How long have you been a catechist at your parish?
- b. How did you come to be involved in the ministry of catechesis?
- c. What role has the faith community played in this process of the sacramental initiation of children?
- d. What have been the most significant challenges in your role as catechist with regards to this process?
- e. What have been the benefits of serving as a catechist in this process?
- f. Can you compare the experience of the former Catholic school-based process to the current parish based process experience?
- g. Do you believe families have been changed as result of their participation in this process? Has some sort of transformation occurred? What are some of the signs and signals of this change?
- h. Have families become more engaged in the life of the parish as a result of this process? If so, can you give some concrete examples.
- i. Do you believe your parish has been changed as a result of a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process? Has some sort of transformation occurred? Please explain.
- j. Have you changed in your role as pastor/administrator/pastoral assistant? (Have you experienced any personal transformation?) What effect has your involvement in the ministry of catechesis for the process of the initiation of children had on your faith growth?

5. For Other Parishioners

- a. Are there any challenges your parish has faced by having a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process.
- b. Are there any benefits your parish has gained by having a parish-based sacramental initiation of children process.
- c. Have you observed any changes in your parish as a result of the parish-based sacramental initiation of children process? If so, what kinds of changes have you observed?
- d. What does it mean for your parish to have children and young families as active members of the parish?
- e. What does your parish offer to support the ongoing faith experience of children and families?

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