



EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS... BEYOND THE 500 YOC

The British poet Alfred Lord Tennyson (1802-1892) wrote: *“Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”* We continuously confront the challenges in our catechetical ministry brought about by the covid-19 pandemic. For the second time in a row, we will be celebrating Catechetical Month, Catechetical Big Days in our dioceses and parishes in ways we never imagined. What we catechists love doing- teaching catechism face-to-face in schools, in our parish-based Sunday Catechism Schools with all our heart, soul, strength and mind suddenly were taken away from us because of the pandemic. I learned though of catechists braving the protocols to make their presence felt in the closed-down churches, many of them helping in food- assistance operations for those adversely affected by the lockdowns. The festive activities lined up for the grand celebrations of the **5th CENTENARY OF CHRISTIANITY (500 YOC)** in our country suddenly all became virtual. The circuitous quarantine protocols around the country make uncertain even more the time we can encounter again our beloved schoolchildren for their catechism classes. Reflecting on A. Tennyson’s words, the graces of the 500 YOC tucked in our spiritual belts sans the attending festivities are enough to make us strong and strive to be strong in our evangelization and catechetical endeavors. We are being given the grace to be rejuvenated in recognizing the importance and need for effective evangelization and catechesis. Why can we not?

For one, Pope Francis through the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization gave us the timely gift, the new **DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS (DC 2020)** clearly laying the guidelines for catechesis and presenting universal norms to guide those involved in catechetical ministry in the work of evangelization. Prevented as we were by the on-going pandemic from “celebrating” the 500 YOC, we can still possess the strong will not to yield to the pandemic restrictions. We will still traverse the path of New Evangelization by which we catechists in unity with our bishops and pastors proclaim and spread the Gospel even ‘ad intra’ for the hearers to become Christians (*National Catechetical Study (NCS) 2016 – 2018 dealing with the catechists*). The raging pandemic is becoming an opportune time to traverse the path of catechesis through which those who already became Christians (*NCS 2021 dealing with the catechized*) can teach the teaching of the faith (catechesis) inasmuch as they themselves had an encounter of the living Jesus. So, this DC 2020 rightly places catechetical instruction within the ambit of evangelization; teaching us that the two are intricately connected. We will continue what those Spanish missionaries labored for that necessarily brought us to our 500 YOC. DC 2020 is telling

us present-day catechists of the need to teach the faith (catechesis) like spreading or proclaiming the Gospel (evangelization). We just don't tell the kerygma (life, death and resurrection of Jesus) but do kerygmatic proclamation/catechesis: how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus afford us salvation from sin and death and how it should affect our life of witnessing to that same kerygma (DC, 2).

The *NCS 2016-2018* spearheaded by CBCP-ECCCE and University of Santo Tomas' Research Center for Social Sciences and Education revealed the often-insufficient tools, materials and even formation of the front-liners of our faith, our always joyful, faith-driven servant-catechists. The corresponding theme of our nine-year preparation for the 500 YOC will pretty soon become an *NCS 2021: Research-based Intervention Outcome (RIO)* book, entitled **CATECHETICAL MODULES CHRISTIAN FAITH: CALL, GIFT, MISSION**. This is inspired by the findings of *NCS 2021: Pastoral Action Research and Intervention (PARI) Project* and at the same time, a tall order, I should say of the 500 YOC Bishops-Executive Committee, of producing catechetical modules that can be used even after the celebration of the 500 YOC. The project has been through the rigorous process and has started hitting the printing press. This will be launched hopefully on our **KWENTONG-KATEKISTA 10: PISTA NG PANANAMPALATAYA** this coming **September 28, 2021**, from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, via *CBCP News* and *NCS 2021* Facebook pages. This is the culmination of our *Catechetical Month 2021*, the feast day of *San Lorenzo Ruiz*, one of the patron saints of Filipino catechists. We hope as well that this Catechetical Modules will help in the on-going formation of our catechetical teachers/ catechists in ways acceptable to the realm of evangelization as envisioned by DC 2020 which relies on solid resources for teaching the faith.

We can stay the course of Evangelization and Catechesis through our faithful reading of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which DC 2020 affirms as a trustworthy reference for catechetical instructions together with the Sacred Scriptures, Papal writings particularly Pope Francis' *"The Joy of the Gospel"*. Again, our very own *NCS 2021: PARI Project* through our *RIO initiatives* are very much in sync with the DC 2020 as far as the various sources it underscores from which one can learn the faith (DC Part 11, The Process of Catechesis). Thus, we implemented interventions on *Family Catechesis*, *Kuwentong Bibliya*, *Katesismo kay San Jose*, *Mga Tulang - Pananaliksik*, *Katekistang Malikhain*, *Adult Catechesis*, *Local Catechetical Histories*, and, a *Catechetical Human Resources Handbook*. Moreover, in this time of pandemic, the digital platform surfaces as a great avenue for the many Catholics to reinvigorate the work of catechesis. Another RIO, *Digital Catechesis - God's Park* offers opportunities and challenges for kerygma and serves as a mission field for catechesis in the new digital culture (DC 213-217 Digital Language and Tools).

We will stay the course of Evangelization and Catechesis as we will be guided by the Revised National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines (still in the process of revision). This work we hope will elucidate even more the importance of catechetical renewal in

our Christian communities integrating the many catechetical insights of DC 2020 which actually offers guidelines to assist in the creation of local directories.

Furthermore, Pope Francis' **ANTIQUUM MINISTERIUM** is a pat on the back, morale-boost for our "faith-driven servants, front-liners and the hidden treasures of the Catholic Church- our beloved catechists" as this Motu Proprio affirms their well-loved ministry. Archbishop Rino Fisichella of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization said that "*the institution of the ministry of catechist by the Church is confirmation that the person invested with that charism is performing an authentic ecclesial service to the community*". With our catechists as now formal active participants in the life of the Christian community, the Church in the Philippines can really look far beyond the 500 YOC having among us catechists dedicated to the transmission of the faith through proclamation and instruction - through evangelization and catechesis.

Over all, our 500 YOC echoes what the new Directory for Catechesis reminds us of: that we must be a Church that is perpetually on mission, that our identity is that of a missionary Church. This is our nature, and to experience the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must share His Good News. It is indeed not for nothing that our 500 YOC culminates in **Missio Ad Gentes**, challenged as we are to lower the nets of our evangelization and catechetical passion and zeal for much greater haul for the Kingdom of God (Luke 5:4-6).

With all these, we are somehow assured that with the good resources at our disposal to help us best in sharing and teaching the faith, we will be "*like seeds that fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as much*" (Luke 8:8). May Our Lady, the Star of Evangelization help us to be fruitful in our catechetical endeavors. Invoking her, we shall not grow weary, we shall not yield to challenges and obstacles. With her, we shall reach our goal far, far beyond the 500 YOC. 500 years of Jubilee, *500 years of graces unto life everlasting!*

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