



Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference

DEPARTMENT FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION LITURGY AND CULTURE COMMISSION FOR CATECHETICS

26TH November 2019

Greetings to all,

Attached to this letter you will find a sample for the Annual Commissioning of Catechists in 2020.

Commissioning Sunday is an opportunity for the Christian Community, together with the Catechists, to reflect on the role that each person plays, by virtue of their Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel.

The most important vocation of every Christian is the call to holiness. There are many ways to live out this calling. **For catechists, their call is to serve the community through *teaching* and *witness of life*.** To be a catechist is a *gift*, a *promise*, and a *demand*.

- It is a *gift* because they have been *called* to serve as Catechists, and to be God's instruments in order to make His Word and the Faith of the Church known and loved.
- It is a *promise* because their teaching will pass on the message of Jesus as contained in the Good News.
- It is a *demand* because the work of the catechist entails much more than the hour spent teaching once a week.

In a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis reminds us that Christian formation "consists in entering more deeply into the kerygma (*essential proclamation of the Gospel message*) and incorporating it ever more fully in our lives".

What is Commissioning Sunday and how did it originate:

In 1935, the Church published a document entitled: "*On the Better Care and Promotion of Catechetical Education*", asking every country to acknowledge the importance of the Church's teaching ministry and to honor those who serve the Christian community as Catechists. It suggested that such a day exist in every parish. It was only in 1997 that our Bishops passed a resolution instituting the annual celebration of *Commissioning Sunday* to be held at a time suitable for each Diocese, preferably before the beginning of the new Catechetical Year.

From paragraph 25 of this instruction, the day is one in which:

- a) "*The faithful should be called together in the parish, and having received the Holy Eucharist, they should pray to obtain greater fruit from catechesis*".
- b) "*A special sermon should be preached to the people on the necessity of catechetical instruction. Parents are to be reminded of their duty to instruct their children in the Catholic Faith and to send them to parish catechesis*".
- c) "*Books, pamphlets, and other material suitable for the purpose should be distributed.*"
- d) "*A collection may be taken up for the promotion of catechetical works*".

What the Word "Catechetical" means:

Often people struggle to get their tongue around the word 'catechetical' and sometimes it is simplified into something like "*Sunday School*", which is a total misnomer (contradiction) of what we are about.

Catechesis has nothing to do with school or a schools approach. It is a distinct and specific ministry in the Church. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church clarifies, "Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life. Her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis" (CCC 7).

The root word, "catechesis", is from a Greek word meaning "to echo, or resound". Catechesis, therefore, is the act of resounding or bringing the Word of God and the Church's teachings to the world. A Catechist is one who passes on the Faith in the name of the Church.

How are parents, the primary teachers of their children, recognized on Commissioning Sunday?

Parents are truly the primary teachers of their children. They prepare the soil and plant the first seeds of faith. On Commissioning Sunday, we not only highlight the work of Catechists in Parishes, but we also commend parents and guardians and encourage them to take seriously their role of making their homes a place where the Faith is passed on to the next generation. Therefore, the Rite of Blessing of Catechists used on Commissioning Sunday includes an optional blessing of parents/guardians.

How to prepare Catechists for Commissioning Sunday:

It is highly recommended that all Catechists participate in some form of evaluation before they prepare to be *re-commissioned*. This evaluation could be done in a prayerful context which is non-threatening and conducive to the spiritual growth of the catechist.

Wherever possible and according to circumstances, it is also recommended that the Parish Priest, or Priest in charge, has an opportunity to meet with the Catechists and share in a constructive way their duties, responsibilities and expectations. This would also be an ideal time to read through the Catechetical policy of the Diocese and apply it to the local situation.

The specific focus for 2020:

Every year, for the past couple of years, we have proposed a theme based on a significant event or events that will take place within the territory of the SACBC during that specific year.

You may recall that for Commissioning Sunday 2019 we explored the theme of being "missionary disciples", which culminated in the extra-ordinary Missionary month of October with the theme: "*Baptised and Sent*".

In 2020 there are two significant events that we will be hearing more about as the year unfolds.

The first event is *The Year of the Word of God*, culminating with the 1600 Anniversary of the death of Saint Jerome on the 30th September.

The second event is the *2020 Eucharistic Congress* that will take place in Budapest. This one-week congress has been held regularly since 1881, every four years in recent times, and celebrates the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist according to the teaching of the Catholic Church.

For both these events you will most probably be receiving more specific and detailed information and suggestions from your Arch/Diocese.

As you wind up the catechetical activities of your Arch/Diocese may I once more express a word of gratitude for all that you do to encourage and support Catechists and the Ministry of Catechesis in general. It is never an easy task, but you carry it out to the best of your ability.

May God bless and reward you.

Kind regards,
Sr Patricia Finn

