

JBL CASE STUDY FOR ADAPTATION OF THE CATECHUMENAL PROCESS

IN: *ELCA, urban, San Francisco, 385 members*

Background

1. What four characteristics best describe your church community, especially what makes you unique?

- Diverse, inclusive, especially in terms of age groups/generations (intergenerational activities) and open reception of LGBTQ+ community; members come from all over the Bay Area- not a neighborhood church
- Strong lay leaders and variety of ministries open for lay participation
- Active Social Ministry
- Strong in liturgy and music, rooted in tradition

2. What is the biggest challenge facing your community?

It's San Francisco, in 2020. The racial make-up doesn't match the Bay Area in that there is an over-representation of white members.

Pattern of the catechumenal process

3. How does an inquirer connect with your community? How is initial contact made?

- Once someone has been a visitor to St Mark's, we have the traditional pew cards where inquirers could indicate interest. Often the referral is made by the pastors after pastoral consultation.
- We make announcements during service (when we are able to gather) and have a team member visibly present after services to be available for questions and discussion.
- We have readily available printed materials, such as brochures in the narthex of the church.

4. How do you figure out what their background is? And what they are seeking?

The best way to find out is to ask. The best way to ask is to have a one-on-one conversation over coffee or tea.



5. How do they get to know other inquirers? When do you have gatherings with them?

We have informational gatherings where we invite potential participants to ask questions about the process. We host a Welcome Retreat where inquirers meet other inquirers, make a meal, and explore the church, both physically and historically. We make a point to share our faith journey stories early in the cycle. We ask the inquirers what their questions are. We try to use the questions that are generated by the inquirers to organize the meeting topics for the cycle. We try to lift up the questions from the inquirers for our later catechesis. We try to emphasize that there are no bad questions. We are all journeyers together.

6. What is a typical format for a gathering?? How long does it usually last?

We have built an inquiry phase into our general cycle. The gatherings are about an hour. They start with prayer and Dwelling in the Word (Lectio Divina) and then move into discussion around a question of the week, topically chosen to be connected with the Gospel Reading.

7. Who serve as their catechists and mentors through the process? Lay people?
Clergy?

Lay people, a strong team of lay leaders. The clergy are invited to lead a gathering.

8. When do you provide them with sponsors as companions and support?

Ideally, they are matched with sponsors as soon as they indicate strong interest in participating in Journeys in Faith. That way the sponsor can help with the discernment process and introduce them to being involved in the church.

Stages of the growth in the catechumenal process

9. When are they ready to be recognized by the congregation as seekers/hearers/catechumens?

At the first rite, the Rite of Welcome. They are ready for the Rite of Welcome by virtue of choosing to join Journeys in Faith.

10. How do your gatherings help them to encounter the Word of God, especially as it is found in the lectionary?

We use the lectionary as the basis of our Dwelling in the Word.

11. What additional topics from Christian tradition and practice do you try to share with them in your gatherings?



JOURNEY TO BAPTISMAL LIVING

NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE CATECHUMENATE

Journeytobaptism.org

12. When are they ready to be recognized by the congregation as candidates for Baptism? How do your gatherings use the Word to open their minds and hearts to a deeper sense both of repentance and of Jesus's love?

They are welcomed as candidates for Baptism or Affirmation of Baptism. Additional rites help the congregation to continue to recognize and pray for the candidates for Baptism.

We would hope that using the Gospel in our Dwelling in the Word, every time we would open our hearts and minds to a deeper understanding of scripture and Jesus's love. We trust in the Holy Spirit to do this work.

13. How does the period of intense preparation prepare them to make the Baptismal Covenant/Promises?

We follow the church year for our period of preparation. We start in Advent and journey together to the Easter Vigil. It is over Lent that the discussion becomes more in depth and in these deeper conversations they are able to discern if they are ready to make the Baptismal Covenant/Promises.

14. How have you best managed to involve the participants in the life of your community, especially in service to the world?

The leaders of the ministries of the congregation are invited to our gatherings. In the best case, sponsors also help invite our journeyers into the life of our community. It has also often happened that people are participating in ministries of the congregation, such as the food pantry or homeless shelter, and then are drawn to join in worship.

15. How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected your participants?

It gives a full opportunity to appreciate the depth of the tradition and connect with the congregation in worship, experiencing the welcome of the congregants. Many are overcome during the Rite of Welcome. They feel blessed. The rites are transformational connections to the process, even if we don't see the whole journey.

16. How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected the congregation?

People are even drawn to participate by the rites. It gives the congregation a connection to the journeyers with a face to look for and to pray for. The physicality is important. It is a chance for the congregation to accompany the journeyers while also remembering our own baptismal covenant.



Advice

17. What is the most important bit of advice that you have for another practitioner in your situation?

Focus on the questions. Never stop asking and learning.

It needs to be a longer period of time. It cannot be done in 4 Sundays, even though people think they want a shorter period of time. There is richness and reward in the longer period of time.

You are forming a community as part of a larger community- the body of Christ. We journey together.

