

JBL CASE STUDY FOR ADAPTATION OF THE CATECHUMENAL PROCESS:

IN: ACC, *The Catechumenate in the Chapel of Huron University College, Ontario*

**Background**

During the academic year of 2017/2018, the body of Christ which gathered in the college chapel of Huron walked with, prayed for, and did rituals over a young woman who had heard the voice of God and seen the face of Christ in those around her, asked to know more, responded affirmatively to every invitation along the path of pilgrimage, and by that willingness to be obedient to the call of God, was initiated into the church, changing her own life as well as those who had the honour of walking with her through prayer, catechesis, ritual and sacrament. This is a summary of the catechumenate in that particular setting and time.

*The setting which makes the chapel unique*

This experience of the catechumenate took place in the Diocese of Huron, an Anglican Church of Canada diocese in Southwestern Ontario. Huron College began as a theological college, founded by Bishop Benjamin Cronyn and incorporated in 1863. In 1878 the college, in turn, became the foundation of what is now known as the University of Western Ontario, a major research university, remaining as one of several religious colleges which form part of the larger university. Huron University College is composed of two faculties, FASS (the substantially larger Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences), and the original Faculty of Theology. The Faculty of Theology (remembering that 'faculty' in Canada refers to everyone in the program; teaching faculty, administrators, students and staff), offers the Master of Divinity, an MTS, various certificates, and an MA in theology, in addition to having a handful of bachelor students pursuing interests in theology and religious studies.

The undergraduate student body at Huron is primarily non-Anglican, but during the week the chapel hosted daily liturgies linked to the Faculty of Theology and open to everyone. On Sundays, during the academic year of 2017/2018, there were two eucharistic liturgies, one at 11:00 and one at 6:00 in the evening, both a mix of people from within and outside the university. With regard to the chaplaincy, this academic year in question was an interregnum, with two of us covering the duties of chaplain; one while being a student (a transitional deacon who did a tremendous amount of Monday-Friday conversations and consultations, all while being a fulltime MA student). The Revd Andrew Rampton is now a priest in the diocese of Rupert's Land (Winnipeg, MB). I was the other chaplain, while being a fulltime professor of liturgy, canon precentor for the diocese, and priest covering both of the Sunday eucharists and other sacramental/liturgical obligations.



*Four characteristics of this setting*

1. A worshipping community at a college chapel has different circumstances than many parishes – one key is the financial support at the university which means the given budget can be used in ways other than the maintenance of building and clergy
2. The chapel was still (in 2017/2018) a parish of the diocese and therefore had to meet those basic requirements (warden of the parish, record-keeping, and ritual permissions)
3. The liturgical year needs to conform to the academic pattern of the year
4. The consistent community was quite small (15-18), with others coming and going from university or outside on an occasional basis

*Biggest challenge of this setting:*

There are several challenges already embedded in the characteristics listed above, but perhaps the biggest challenge is the transitory nature of the community and, related to that, the lack of an extended period of mystagogy as students graduate and move away, often in the Easter season

**Pattern of the catechumenal process**

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

Canada is far more ‘post-Christian’ than the US, so the cultural connection to the church is less. Increasingly we met students (or the general population) who knew nothing of Christianity, whether that was fundamental beliefs or institutional structures. Part of this was reflected in an inherited tradition of no open invitation to explore Christianity at the school (in spite of being an Anglican College, the school has tried to emphasize a neutral secular stance in marketing and student recruitment). One striking example was to overhear the student tour guides (for prospective students and their families) explain that the chapel was no longer used, merely a lovely museum, at which point we would jump in and correct them “it’s used every day of the week!” This was met with a combination of surprise and resistance.

This means it is only through conversations with others, motivated by family members, friends, or changing circumstances, that individuals present themselves as interested. In the case of our actual catechumens, it came through social encounters and a willingness to listen and entertain questions – “what is that?” “what does that mean?” “do you actually believe that?” We did, in informal conversations, ask if anyone else was interested in finding out more – which elicited several expressions of interest, but because of schedules, time, work, studies those invitations did not bear fruit that year.



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With regard to additional members of the community who were seeking confirmation, the initial contact was varied. Two were thinking of ordination, one wanted confirmation as a reaffirmation of faith within Anglicanism, one was our catechumen. They asked (or were told of the canonical necessity) of confirmation in particular circumstances, and were catechized and prayed over at the college chapel, although the confirmation itself was a deanery celebration of the diocese (Anglicanism only recognizes episcopal confirmation).

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

Because the catechumenate is only for the unbaptized, we needed to ask (and there needed to be some checking) to be clear that our catechumen that year was not baptized. With regard to the others completing various rites of initiation, we asked, and they followed up with paperwork confirming their memory of infant baptism or other situations, as well as confirmation in non-episcopal situations.

Our catechumen began not by asking for baptism, nor did we go to that reality at the beginning. We answered her questions, talked about how God works in our lives, and eventually asked her how God might be moving in her life. The movement toward sacraments of initiation was very much a secondary conversation.

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

Sadly she was the only catechumen we had that year. When we arrived at the Triduum and Easter, we did have frequent meetings with those preparing for confirmation.

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

The primary gatherings were the liturgies themselves, and the unfolding of rituals beginning in Advent. Our conversations with the inquirer were sometimes quite informal, but gradually became scheduled meetings that often lasted for about an hour (which with different schedules was about the most we could manage at a time). We had three different types of gatherings outside of the actual liturgies:

1. informal opportunities to ask questions (in general from scripture, a few readings, and the prayer book (here, the *Book of Alternative Services*)
2. liturgical catechesis – which was partially preparation for or reflection on the rituals done – so using the liturgy itself as formation and source of theology
3. more formal gatherings which began and ended in prayer – gradually asking the catechumen to lead the closing prayer, and centred on the lectionary or a secondary reading we might be doing (we used several short texts in Lent, including Rowan Williams, *Being Christian; This is our Faith: a popular presentation of Church teaching* edited by Jeffrey John; and the catechism out of the BCP 1979). These latter meetings were central to the confirmation preparation in particular



*Who serves as their catechists and mentors through the process? Lay people?  
Clergy?*

Formally the catechists were the two clergy (one deacon and one priest). Informally, there were other conversation partners (two seminarians, and parishioners, plus the sponsor of our catechumen - a lay woman in the community). There were others who joined in the confirmation preparation sessions, as those interested in being supportive and those who simply wanted a refresher.

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

The sponsor was asked to join us when our inquirer responded affirmatively to the invitation to enroll in the catechumenate (so mid-November, having started conversations informally several months earlier). Those preparing for confirmation had more informal companions for about a month prior to the liturgy.

### **Stages of the growth in the catechumenal process**

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

We were both taking our cues from our inquirer (as far as listening to her and how her individual journey became part of the church's pilgrimage) and keeping an eye on the liturgical calendar. We were delighted that the two aligned so that we could enroll her in the catechumenate on the First Sunday of Advent (thereby keeping the 'traditional' schedule as it has been reconstituted for the past 60 or so years). We had, of course, been praying for her by name for about 4-5 weeks prior to that.

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

Because we had a small community, our catechumen was present for all of the liturgy (although did not receive communion), so heard the lectionary and preaching on it. In the gatherings (as mentioned above), the scriptural basis was always the lectionary readings of the week (sometimes adding weekday lectionary readings to the Sunday readings)

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

While not part of the initial conversations and meetings, we did eventually move to incorporate additional elements of catechesis. The Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed were ritually "given", handed over, in Lent, so we spent time on those (and made



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a decision to use the translation chosen by the catechumen throughout the whole catechumenate (she chose the contemporary translation of the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, not the Nicene Creed – hence the necessary alignment with what we were actually praying as a community).

We again used a number of liturgical texts that she was already hearing or would hear and experience as the source of catechesis – so the rite of enrollment, the rite of election, the scrutinies, the handing over of the two texts mentioned above, and the baptismal promises (in the *BAS* the interrogative form of the Apostles' Creed is augmented with a series of questions – the “Baptismal Covenant” adopted and adapted from the US BCP 1979). As we drew near to the rites of initiation at the Easter Vigil, we began to look at those texts in addition.

In addition to the liturgical catechesis, we reviewed – partially through the catechism – the theological fundamentals (Trinity, Christology, theories of atonement, salvation history, sacraments, Christian anthropology, ecclesiology)

*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?*

Our catechumen was elected to receive the sacraments of initiation on the First Sunday of Lent (in preparation for the Easter Vigil). The second question probably fits better with the response above on encountering the Word of God through the lectionary...the Word is broken open in the preaching, we used several forms of reflecting on scripture as prayer in our conversations (outside of liturgies – we used what Anglicans often call “the African method of reading scripture” or the Lambeth method... the deliberate reading-silence-sharing a word or phrase-more silence-re-reading reflection). We also encouraged – and taught – *lectio divina* methods from Christian history. We also had several lectionary studies which doubled as homily preparation for the coming Sunday, engaging confirmands and catechumen in the writing of the homily.

All of this is, of course, related to the love of God – whose self-giving in the incarnation is essential to Christian theology (not just about ‘Jesus’ love’, but the love of God who is the source of love, the beloved, and the lover). Repentance was not the key word we used, but rather the breadth of *metanoia*, of ongoing transformation. I think the key for all of us (in the body of Christ and coming to the body of Christ), was not repentance as a preparation for initiation, but rather transformation as a lifelong journey into union with God, which is salvation. The catechumenate in its very nature is to apprentice oneself to Christ, to change in actions, mind, body, spirit, emotions, relationships, and more so that one, having rehearsed what it is to be a disciple, confirms that through the church's rites of initiation.



The scrutiny gospels with their powerful imagery pointing to the implications of initiation into death and resurrection were themselves extraordinary opportunities for the whole community to reflect on as Easter drew near (the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus), and provided a trajectory of forward movement into the Easter Vigil.

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

This is partially addressed in the response immediately above, but in addition, here the public scrutinies of Lent III, IV, and V (and their preparation and reflection) had a tremendous impact. Being part of the Anglican Church of Canada meant using the basic pattern of the existing catechumenate: *Making Disciples: The Catechumenate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. We adapted several elements, but it was with the scrutinies that we went back to the more fulsome focus of the early church. Young people are very aware of evil in the world, of sin and brokenness, and trying to avoid any language of evil seems misguided. The scrutinies with their acknowledgement of sin and evil, our dependence on God, and our hope in the promises of God impacted all of us. Together with the choice of the contemporary (and for us, alternative) confession\* during Lent, I think we had an opportunity to think about sin in both individual and in corporate ways.

\*God of all mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you, opposing your will in our lives. We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world you have created.

We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf.

Forgive, restore, and strengthen us through our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may abide in your love and serve only your will. Amen.

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

Our catechumen was very much involved in our various outreach activities. Partially because of the financial support mentioned at the beginning of this survey, we were able to use all the collections during Lent and Easter for the London Food Bank, for our own food drive, to support hungry students, and to contribute financially (as well as time) to a program serving dinner to the homeless on a weekly basis. In addition, we linked into the refugee resettlement project through the diocese.

*How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected your participants?*

I think the physicality of the rituals together with the words (the sacramentality in other words) and the public nature of vows – so hence the solemnity of the vows – had a huge impact on all engaged; our catechumen, the sponsor, the clergy, and the lay liturgical ministers. I was particularly struck by the sponsor breaking down and crying



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after the *epiphatha* of the enrollment (making the sign of the cross in various places on the catechumen)\* and the scrutinies' effect on the catechumen. The enrollment was less impactful (perhaps because it is more "common" to write one's name in a book?)

*\*The inquirer is made a catechumen by anointing with oil and the sign of the cross*

Celebrant: *name*, receive the cross on your forehead. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love. Learn to know him and follow him.

**ALL: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!**

*The sponsor marks each stated part of the body with sign of the cross*

Deacon: *name*, receive the cross on your ears, that you may hear the Gospel of Christ

Receive the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.

Receive the cross on your eyes, that your way may be illumined by the light of Christ

Receive the cross on your hands, that the mercy of God may be known in all your work

Receive the cross on your feet, that you may follow where Christ leads the way

Receive the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ

Receive the cross on your heart, that Christ may dwell in you by faith

Celebrant: I sign you with the sign of eternal life, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Catechumen: Amen

Celebrant: Almighty God, we have signed this catechumen with the sign of Christ's cross. Protect her by its power, so that, faithful to the grace which has begun in her, she may keep your commandments and come to the glory of rebirth in baptism. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**ALL: Amen**

*How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected the congregation?*

Again and again parishioners were struck by the reality of an adult professing faith in Jesus Christ and asking to be part of the body of Christ. Mainly cradle Anglicans, this was the first experience of the catechumenate for many, and the excitement of feeling like they were part of the whole process seemed palpable. When we finally arrived at the Easter Vigil, we were joined by a number of guests (including family members of the newly baptized), and the parishioners were so excited to tell them about the whole process that had been brought to fruition at the Easter Vigil. The vigil, with its many moving parts, was also an amazing event which, two years later, many were still talking about.



**Advice**

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

Our situation, as a university college chapel, is probably quite different than the average parish experience for a number of reasons. Having said that, being part of a few partial catechumenates in similar settings, universities are ripe for more catechumenal situations because they are increasingly peopled with young people looking for meaning, spirituality, connection, who come without religious connections, presumptions, or family histories. While many universities are even more secular than Huron, the proximity of some parishes near universities also might have an avenue into the larger 'pool' of potential adults who may be drawn by God and through the catechumenate to new life in Christ. University students have enough of 'classes' – part of what is so effective in the catechumenate is that it is not an 'inquirer's class' – coming to Christ is not an intellectual exercise, it is a fully human stretch through word, ritual, experience, apprenticeship, and above all, community!

