

The Ministry of Catechist: Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Who can apply for the Ministry of Catechist?

This Ministry is open to any adult member of the Christian Community who is interested in exploring Christian faith in a way that is meaningful for today and who is interested in helping others to explore these questions for themselves.

Q. What does a Catechist do?

The role of a diocesan catechist is to create opportunities for people to explore faith and to assist of various faith development programmes at both Parish and Pastoral Area Level especially around the moments of preparation for the Sacraments.

Q. Will the new Catechists work with children or with adults?

In the Sacrament of Baptism, parents are reminded that 'it will be your constant care to bring your child up in the practice of the faith'. So, parents are called to be the first educators of their children in the ways of Christ. They are called to help their children develop a relationship with God.

In reality, schools have taken up this role for the most part. We are blessed in this diocese to have so many excellent teachers in our schools who take up the role of forming children in faith and helping them to know God. But schools can no longer carry this on their own. They need support.

It is hoped that the newly formed Catechists will help support parents and teachers in this role according to the gifts of each person who applies for the role of Catechist.

For example, some will feel very comfortable visiting teachers in schools on behalf of the Christian Community and taking part with the teacher in some of the lovely rituals in the new Grow in Love Programme.

Others may feel less comfortable in schools but may work with adults in parishes and pastoral areas.

Q. What kind of work would a Catechist be doing with Parents?

You may be aware of the kind of programmes that are already in place in parishes to gather parents when a child is preparing for Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion or Confirmation. Programmes like 'Do This in Memory' and 'You Shall Be My Witnesses' already try to engage with parents.

The Diocese hopes that the new Catechists will accompany and help facilitate these programmes in parishes and pastoral areas. The role of the Catechist will be to gather and support groups to work on these programmes.

Often the only opportunities we have as Christian Communities to engage with families, parents and children, are through the sacramental moments. Indeed, many who approach for sacraments now have very little contact with Church. Often these are the only moments we have for engaging with younger families. They are moments of opportunity.

The programmes are a good way of involving parents, but they are not enough in themselves. Part of the role of the new Catechists will be to help us develop approaches that connect meaningfully with adults in our parishes. How can we open up conversations on what is important to them, on meaning to life issues, on the challenges they face living in a culture which is consumer focused and technologically driven?

Q. So far, you've spoken about parents and sacramental moments. Are there any other possibilities?

Most people have had little opportunity to reflect on their faith in any meaningful way since they were in school. We are aware of the need to create opportunities for people to explore faith and spirituality as adults, with the questions they now have. The Diocese hopes that the new Catechists will help to develop new approaches and opportunities for engagement with people around these issues.

Q. I often heard that the role of the Catechist is to hand on the faith? Is that what is envisaged?

The phrase 'handing on the faith' may lead us to think that Christian belief is a body of teachings about God that need to be learned. There's a difference between knowing about someone and knowing them personally.

Today we speak in terms of *Faith Development* which is about creating opportunities for people to explore for themselves, to reflect on their own lives and become aware that God is present to them and in them. The role of the Catechist is to create opportunities for people to become aware of God's presence in the 'bits and pieces of everyday'. When this happens, we open to the possibility of developing a personal relationship with God. At heart, faith is about this relationship. Like any other relationship, as it grows and develops

we want to know more about the person with whom we are in relationship. 'Knowing about' becomes important. The Catechist can help us to explore the questions we have with others who are interested.

Q. I am interested in this work but would not know how to go about it.

There is no blueprint for how to do this work. All of us are on a learning curve in this. But there are places where initiatives are being tried, even in our own diocese. For example, Fr Harry Bohan has worked for the past few years on developing meaningful conversations with parents on these issues.

The training and skills needed for this kind of work will form part of the Training Programme for Catechists. This will include developing skills for reflection, understanding today's culture and its impact on family life, and developing facilitation skills to help work in small groups.

Q. Would I be working on my own if I trained for this new ministry?

It is hoped that enough people will come forward for this new role to enable a few catechists to work together in Pastoral Areas. Catechists will also work collaboratively with priests and other lay people in Parishes/Pastoral Areas. Support for those working in this new ministry will also be put in place by the Diocese.

Q. What kind of commitment is expected of the new Catechists after they have completed the formation process?

On completion of the formation process, Diocesan Catechists will be formally appointed by the Bishop to a Parish or Pastoral Area. They will agree areas of responsibility that is feasible for them to take on in a voluntary capacity. They will be invited to commit initially for a period of five years. A review will take place at the end of that period where the Catechist will have an opportunity to reflect on their ministry and the context they are working in and on any issues that are arising. There will also be a chance to receive feedback from those s/he is working with. Each Catechist will be invited to meet with the Bishop or and Pastoral Development Team to discuss their experience and consider whether s/he is in a position to commit for a further period.

Q. When is the training for this new Ministry beginning?

Training for the first group of catechists in the Killaloe Diocese will begin this Autumn. The first year will be an exploratory one giving an opportunity for

both the person applying for the ministry and for the Diocese to mutually decide if this ministry is a good fit. The focus of the first year will be on enabling participants to develop reflective skills, to reflect on their own journey and their own spirituality and what has formed and shaped it.

It is hoped that this first year will be an uplifting and nourishing year for participants and one that will give them a good sense of the role as envisaged.

Q. Three years seems like a long time for the formation programme.

Why is it so long?

While it may seem a long time, the three years will go by very quickly. The experience of other courses of this length is that they help people to grow in confidence and a sense that they have a solid training behind them. Having a residential course also helps participants to get to know each other and to build up peer support so that when the course ends they will already have the support of each other.

Q. What will happen in Years Two and Three of the Course?

In years two and three, the reflective style of course will continue with input under these headings:

- Personal Development
- Spirituality
- Theology for Ministry
- Understanding Today's Cultural Context
- Skills for the Ministry of Catechist

The Skills for Ministry will include Working with Groups and Facilitation Skills, Creating an Environment for Reflection and Exploration and Approaches to Adult Education.

Other areas to be covered will be Creating Ritual and Leading People in Prayer.

During Year 3 there will be opportunities for practical engagement with support in Parishes and Pastoral Areas.

Q. Will the Course be Accredited?

The Diocese is in negotiation about accreditation of this course by a third level institute.

Q. What About Cost?

All participants who are accepted onto the course by the Diocese will have their course costs paid.