

Foreword to The Lutheran Catechesis Series

A Change of Thinking About the Task of Catechesis

The Lutheran Catechesis Series represents a paradigm shift for most Lutheran pastors and congregations in their understanding of what catechesis is, how it is done, and the role of the Small Catechism. For most, catechesis is “confirmation class.” It is primarily academic in nature, the goal being to impart a certain body of religious knowledge that is to be mastered before admission to the Lord’s Supper. It often involves workbooks, quizzes, and tests, like any other academic course of instruction. While such “academic tools” might be utilized in some of the tasks of catechesis, the main goal of catechesis is the creation and sustaining of faith in Christ, and how that faith expresses itself in the Christian life.

Christians are disciples of Jesus—catechumens—for life, not just for a few years of confirmation instruction. Christians learn from His Word continuously as they sit together at Jesus’ feet in the Christian congregation and in the Christian home. From His Word they learn to believe that they are sinners, they learn repentance, they learn to confess their sins, they learn to trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins, they learn to call upon Him in prayer, they learn to confess their faith before the world, they learn to confess their sins to one another, they learn to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven them, and they learn to live faithfully in their vocation as hearers of the Word, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, citizens of the land, and workers of every kind. This life of faith all flows from the Word of God that is received and believed. Faith in Christ lives from the preaching of the Gospel and the reception of Christ’s sacraments (the Divine Service), and this faith expresses itself in the Christian’s life of prayer, confessing the faith before the world, confession and absolution in the home and congregation, acts of mercy toward the neighbor, and faithfulness in one’s vocation (the Table of Duties).

Catechesis, therefore, involves much more than an “academic classroom”; it involves doing those things that Christians will continue to do for the rest of their lives. It involves establishing “a culture of hearing the Word of God and prayer” in both the congregation and home. How does a Christian, whose faith is in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, listen to God’s Word, receive the Sacrament of the Altar, pray, confess, forgive, and live in his or her vocation? These are the questions of catechesis. When catechesis is approached purely as an “academic endeavor” there is often little connection to the Divine Service, and the Small Catechism becomes only a textbook, rather than a prayer book and handbook for the Christian faith and life. But when a “culture of prayer” is established in which the catechism can be learned by heart as one actually meditates upon the text of the catechism, it can begin to shape the way we think. It can also teach us how to listen to God’s Word correctly, what to expect from Him in the Sacraments, how to receive the Sacraments for our blessing, how to pray and confess the faith, and how to live in our vocations. This is how the catechism functions as a handbook and prayer book for the Christian faith and life.

“The Congregation at Prayer”

In order to establish the “culture of hearing the Word of God and prayer” in the congregation and home, *The Lutheran Catechesis Series* recommends the use of a weekly devotional guide called “The Congregation at Prayer.” *The Congregation at Prayer* is to be prepared by the pastor and distributed each week to the entire congregation. Although the supporting materials for “catechetical classes” are a very important part of *The Lutheran Catechesis Series*, *The Congregation at Prayer* is the single most important resource for establishing the culture of prayer in the congregation and in passing on the language of the faith to the next generation of Christians. *The Congregation at Prayer* is a weekly guide for daily meditation and prayer for the entire congregation and for the Christian and the Christian family to use at home. *The Congregation at Prayer* helps to establish the culture of prayer in the parish. This culture involves daily Bible readings, the singing of hymns, and meditation upon Bible verses and portions of the Small Catechism.¹ Each week, the material in *The Congregation at Prayer* is introduced during the Sunday School and Adult Bible Class opening. This catechetical introduction, led by the pastor, helps to gather the entire congregation together around the same diet of the Word of God in their weekly and daily devotions. *The Congregation at Prayer* becomes the principal instrument for assisting everyone in learning the text of the Small Catechism by heart, in the context of daily devotions and prayer. As much as possible, pastors may want to offer daily Matins or Vespers services in their parishes and, if they have a day school, daily chapel services. At these times of prayer, as well as for all other devotions in the congregation, material from *The Congregation at Prayer* is used.

All other “courses” in *The Lutheran Catechesis Series* flow out of the “culture of prayer and listening to the Word of God” that is established by the use of *The Congregation at Prayer*. A complete listing of materials and resources in *The Lutheran Catechesis Series* is available through the Concordia Catechetical Academy, Sussex, Wisconsin at www.peacesussex.org/CCA. The material in *The Lutheran Catechesis Series* represents “a change of thinking about the task of catechesis” that is summarized in the following points:

- ◆ Faith in Christ is the goal of all catechesis.
- ◆ Catechesis is God’s way of teaching the Word of God by which faith is established. God’s way of teaching always involves the preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- ◆ Catechesis establishes preaching and teaching the Word of God as the center of congregational life.
- ◆ Catechesis passes on the language of our holy faith as God’s gift that is received as a gift, rather than as something that is “force fed” into the catechumen.
- ◆ The Christian life of faith is lived from the Word of God that is received and believed.
- ◆ The Christian life of faith has concrete expressions:
 - ◇ in the ongoing reception of God’s gifts in the Divine Service through the hearing of Scripture, the hearing of preaching, and the eating and drinking of the Lord’s body and blood;

- ✧ in the daily prayer of the Christian;
 - ✧ in the confession of one's faith in the world;
 - ✧ in the confession of one's sins to God or a brother;
 - ✧ in forgiving the sins of those who have sinned against him;
 - ✧ and in living "concretely" by faith in Christ in the vocation to which God has called him.
- ◆ God has His own language for learning how to receive God's gifts in the Divine Service, how to pray, how to confess, and how to live where God has called us.
 - ◆ The Small Catechism preserves for us the "pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13) so that it functions as both a prayer book and a handbook for the Christian faith and life.
 - ◆ The chief reason why the catechism is memorized or "learned by heart" is so that it can shape the faith and understanding of the catechumen and be used by him throughout his life as he learns to interpret Scripture, listen to preaching, receive the absolution, pray, confess, and live in his vocation.
 - ◆ Catechesis is, therefore, much more comprehensive and involves the actual doing of things that Christians will continue to do for the rest of their lives: attend Divine Service, listen to preaching, receive the Lord's Supper, confess their sins, receive absolution, pray, confess their faith, forgive one another, live as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, workers of every kind, etc.

I am indebted to my catechetical father, the Reverend Dr. Kenneth F. Korby, who was the principal catalyst in my ongoing study of catechesis and Luther's revolutionary work in this area. Dr. Korby introduced me to the riches of Martin Luther's catechisms, catechism sermons, personal prayer book, and other writings, which have broadened my understanding of catechesis to include not only the traditional classroom settings for adult and youth confirmation, but the entire culture of Scripture reading, prayer, and confession and absolution which needs to be part of every Lutheran parish and family. My good friend and colleague in the ministry, the Reverend Professor John T. Pless, has also offered invaluable support and guidance to me in my work.

The Concordia Catechetical Academy remains dedicated to the task of promoting Luther's Small Catechism and faithful Lutheran catechesis to the church at large.

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 Sussex, Wisconsin

¹ A detailed description of *The Congregation at Prayer* is found in both the catechumen and catechist editions of *Lutheran Catechesis* (p.19-23). The *Compendium to the Lutheran Catechesis Series* also includes the schedules, lectionaries, and directions for preparation of *The Congregation at Prayer*. Samples of *The Congregation at Prayer* from Peace Lutheran Church, Sussex, Wisconsin, are available online at www.peacesussex.org.

About the Cover

Jesus Christ, His person and work, is the very heart of the Christian faith. He is the center of Lutheran catechesis. This is depicted by the crucifix at the center of the cover design. All Christian doctrine flows to and from an understanding of who Jesus is, what He has done to save us from our sins, and how we are incorporated into Him so that everything that He is and has done becomes our own. His life of death, resurrection, and ascension to eternal life with the Father becomes the believer's own life in Holy Baptism and is captured in the Small Catechism's "pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13).

The Ten Commandments preach *repentance, or death to sinners*—the Law which kills and points to Christ, the fulfiller of all righteousness. The Creed preaches *the faith, or resurrection from the dead*—the Gospel which gives life and salvation through the forgiveness of sins which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Lord's Prayer preaches *the holy life, or ascension to the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit*—the life of faith which clings to the promises of the Gospel. This trinity of *repentance, faith, and holy living*, as taught in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, describes the dynamic of the baptismal life and is represented by the three intertwined strands of green (the color of new life in Christ). Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension become the personal story of every Christian who, by grace alone, has been *baptized* into Christ for *absolution* and *communion* with Him in the forgiveness of sins. The Christian dies daily to sin and rises to new life by the Gospel to claim the promises of salvation in Christ.

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Small Catechism, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," Romans 6:4). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Holy Supper create, nurture, and sustain the life of faith in Christ, as represented by the continuous circle of red and the trinitarian triquetra connecting the sacraments to that life. The color red represents the blood of Christ which was shed for us for the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of our lives to the Holy Trinity. Like the Christian's new life of faith in Christ, which is a gift of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Baptism, the Small Catechism is thoroughly Christological in its content and trinitarian in its shape.

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. (Small Catechism, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism")

The Lutheran Catechesis Series

The following list of materials in *The Lutheran Catechesis Series* may be purchased from the Concordia Catechetical Academy.

Phone: 262-246-3200 Email: cca@peacesussex.org

www.peacesussex.org/CCA

The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther

Lutheran Catechesis Learn-by-Heart Edition

Lutheran Catechesis

Catechist Edition

Lutheran Catechesis

Catechumen Edition

Luther Catechesis Compendium

Catechism Term Cards

Old Testament Catechesis

Catechist Edition

New Testament Catechesis

Catechist Edition

Old Testament Catechesis

Catechumen Edition

New Testament Catechesis

Catechumen Edition

Old Testament Term Cards

New Testament Term Cards

Family Catechism Charts

Learn-by-Heart Certificates

Learn-by-Heart Completion Charts

Bible Stories for Daily Prayer

10 Volume Set for use with the
Daily Prayer Bible Story Lectionary