

Historic Milestones

The following events and documents played a significant role in development of adult faith formation over the past 80 years.

1926—The American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) is founded in order to gather and disseminate information concerning adult education aims and methods. Its research and publications gradually influenced thinking about approaches to adult religious education, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

1943—*Divino Afflante Spiritu* is published. Encyclical of Pope Pius XII that promoted modern biblical studies. For the previous fifty years, the use of emerging methods of textual criticism was under a heavy cloud of suspicion, thereby curtailing scripture's emergence as a vital force in pastoral ministry, especially the ministry of the Word, where catechesis properly belongs.

1948—The Christian Family Movement (CFM) is founded. The movement was very popular in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council and proved to be a highly successful approach to adult faith formation. Entirely lay-run, CFM produced an array of study materials based on the Jocist method of "Observe, Judge, Act," pioneered by Canon Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Worker Movement in the 1920s. Other movements, such as Cursillo, Focolare, and Marriage Encounter, also began to play important roles in educating adults in the faith.

1954—*Triptych of the Kingdom: A Handbook of the Catholic Faith* by Van Doornik is published in Holland. This book laid the foundation for what later becomes *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults* (1967), which had a major impact as a content resource in adult faith formation.

1962–1965—Second Vatican Council meets. The various decrees coming from the Council spark a strong interest in and a need for adult faith formation as changes in Church life begin to occur. Of particular importance was the decision in *Christus Dominus* (#44) to produce a directory for catechesis.

1968—The U.S. Bishops establish a Division for Adult Education at the U.S. Catholic Conference, which begins to produce *Focus*, a newsletter for adult education, and other publications.

1970—*The Modern Practice of Adult Education* by Malcolm Knowles is published. This book introduces the concept of "andragogy," the education of adults as contrasted with "pedagogy," the education of children. Andragogy becomes a major conceptual framework within religious adult education circles.

1971—*General Catechetical Directory (GCD)* is published in response to the directives of the Second Vatican Council. It establishes adult catechesis as the "chief form of catechesis" (#20).

1972—Latin version of *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* published, followed in 1974 by the English translation. The Rite has a profound impact on the formation process of all adults, not just catechumens.

1974—Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops addresses the topic of evangelization. The following year, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is published, which configures catechesis as a part of evangelization.

1978—Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops addresses the topic of catechesis. The following year, *Catechesi Tradendae* is published, which reiterates and expands on the centrality of adult catechesis. The document puts great emphasis on the need for a catechesis that is organic and systematic.

1979—*Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States* is published. The directory is developed through a groundbreaking national consultation process, which utilizes adult learning principles.

1979—The National Advisory Committee on Adult Religious Education is established within the Department of Education, USCC. The committee produces a number of adult education resources and hosts a national symposium on adult faith formation in 1983. It later plays a major role in the development of both *Serving Life and Faith* and *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*.

1985—Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops calls for “a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals” to be composed.

1986—*Serving Life and Faith: Adult Religious Education and the American Catholic Community* is published. This the first major national document on adult faith formation to be issued by the USCC, with the approval of the Committee on Education.

1988—The International Forum on Adult Religious Education meets for the first time in London, England, through an initiative of the adult religious education personnel of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. The forum, which meets every two years, is a network of adult religious education personnel and members of national advisory committees. Meetings have been held in locations ranging from Europe and North America to India, Thailand, and Chile.

1990—International Council for Catechesis publishes *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*. The document offers guidelines for effective adult catechesis, with particular emphasis on the Christian community’s dependence upon systematic adult catechesis.

1994—*Catechism of the Catholic Church* is published and becomes the chief content resource for bishops, catechetical leaders, and publishers.

1997—*General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* is published. The new general directory considerably expands the 1971 version. It highlights enculturation as a major issue, and reemphasizes catechesis as a moment within evangelization and adult catechesis as a top priority. It also underscores the RCIA as the model for all catechesis.

1999—*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* is published. This is the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral plan for adult faith formation in the United States. It lays out both principles of good adult faith formation as well as suggested steps for parishes and dioceses to put the plan into action.

2005—*National Directory of Catechesis* is published. This document is a U.S. adaptation of the *General Directory for Catechesis*. As such, it includes sections on the catechetical implications of United States society and the organization of pastoral ministry in accordance with the structures and systems of the Catholic Church in the United States. It also reiterates the long-held directive that adult catechesis is the Church’s chief form of catechesis.

2006—*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is published. Provides an adaptation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for both Latin and Eastern Catholics living in the United States. Unlike the CCC, which was addressed to bishops and catechetical leaders, the USCCA is intended for general adult use.