

# CHAPTER 11

## EVANGELIZATION, FAITH-FORMATION AND THE DIOCESE OF AUCHI: THE ROLE OF CATECHISTS AND LAY TEACHERS OF FAITH

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### Introduction

This paper focuses on the centrality of evangelization and the faith formation of people as key variables of the Christian community. The Christian community is composed of those who love Jesus Christ and fellowship with each other, having Christ as her head and the people as her members. It is an evangelical community; one that engages in missionary work. The Christian community is the Church. Evangelization is the very essence of the Church and it focuses on the ultimate end of the salvation of souls. All the activities of the Church are both directly and/or indirectly linked to the mandate of Christ: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (cf. Matthew 28: 19-20). It is this mandate that has informed the spread of the gospel in many parts of the world, teaching people the Good news of Christ, and witnessing to Christ’s transformative power working in and through us in the world. There is a need for continuous growth, promotion, and nurturing of the gospel message received in some form, especially through administrative structures and coordination. This is what further informs the formation of local churches or dioceses. It is this goal of proper coordination of the gospel message that necessitated the birth of the

Diocese of Auchi as an ecclesiastical circumscription in 2003, which will be 20 years in 2023. Therefore, the Catholic Diocese of Auchi is understood as a Christian community whose primary goal is to evangelize the people within her ecclesiastical circumscription by bringing the people to Christ and Christ to the people. One of the simplest pathways and/or ends of evangelization are catechesis and faith formation and both are inextricably tied together. The Congregation for the Clergy, in the document, “Bishops and Catechesis” alludes to this, in the following words:

while catechesis – understood as an initiation to the mystery of redemption and to a saintly way of life, is a responsibility involving the entire Christian community, the diocesan bishop does, however, play a fundamental role in its organization and promotion within the diocese, to the extent of being described in the *Directory for Catechesis*, as “the first person responsible for catechesis within the particular church”.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelization can be described as a broad *ecclesia* project that has one of its goals as faith formation and catechesis is a method or means. Catechesis is meant to bring about a rich appreciation and understanding of faith to achieve conversion, and from conversion make disciples and witnesses for the world. Given the diverse nature of a diocese, and in our context, the Diocese of Auchi, the Bishop alone cannot teach the faith; hence, priests are understood as collaborators with the bishop.<sup>2</sup> In teaching the faith, there are different teachers of faith; from the Bishop who is the chief catechist, to the priests who by their priestly ministry are called to the duty of *munus docendi*<sup>3</sup>(the ministry to teach) which should be exercised concretely through catechesis and preaching of the Word of God. However, this task is sometimes herculean alone for the priest, hence, the collaboration of catechists and lay teachers of the faith. All Christians are called to also teach in special ways the message of Christ, of faith and morals (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16, Colossians 3:16). This paper, therefore, seeks to give a

succinct working exposition on the context and contents of evangelization as a missionary obligation. It further exposes the subjects of catechesis and faith formation. It also clarifies the role of the catechists and lay teachers of faith and further succinctly discusses some extant efforts in the Diocese of Auchi. It concludes by advancing some future directions for faith formation exercises in the Diocese of Auchi.

### **What is Evangelization?**

The duty of evangelization springs from Christ. Christ was an evangelizer; therefore, Christians who walk after Christ must be evangelizers. Christianity should not be an isolated journey of seeking only personal salvation, but, a journey of seeking salvation for one another. One of the documents of the Church that robustly discusses the theme of evangelization is Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The document describes that evangelization springs from "the evangelizing Christ to the evangelizing Church"<sup>4</sup> There is some form of urgency associated with Jesus' evangelizing mandate and mission. In Luke 4:43, Jesus says, "I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God". The word "must" comes with a firm conviction of duty and Jesus adds in the second part of the same scriptural passage, "for this I was sent". This is the same kind of urgency that enveloped St. Paul in his mission when he says, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). If Christians are patterned after Christ and the Church must be seen as an evangelizing unit, it must equally inhere the kind of urgency with which Jesus undertook evangelization.

The importance of tracing this basis of evangelization is for us to understand what evangelization meant for Jesus, and only within that context, can we properly situate what duties and tasks should an evangelizing Church and Christians be involved in. Although it is difficult to expose in detail what this means, this work will attempt to synopsise some of the important points of this understanding. First,

evangelization meant for Jesus an “announcement of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>5</sup> The kingdom of God is almost synonymous with Jesus. Therefore, it is the preaching of a personal encounter with Christ. The kingdom of God is also the reign of God. The Greek term for this is, “*Basileia tou Theou*”. At the time Jesus spoke, some thought it to mean, the Roman Empire, the Holy Empire, etc which was a notion known to them at the time. Jurgen Moltmann notes that nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus define the term “kingdom of God”. For him, however, “Jesus produced no old or new “notion” of the Kingdom of God – he brought the Kingdom of God itself.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, by this understanding, the Kingdom of God is the experience of Christ. So, if evangelization meant for Jesus, the preaching of the Kingdom of God, it means, therefore, the preaching of an encounter with Christ. It means experiencing Jesus personally.

Different senses are further derived from this concept of “encounter” and “experiencing” of Jesus as the Kingdom of God. It suffices to identify a few from scriptural usages. The first is from the Kingdom of God in the parables. Jurgen Moltmann explains a first sense which relates the Kingdom of God with new life, a new beginning, etc. In the fourth Gospel of Mark, a set of parables are developed: the parable of the sower, of the seed, etc. They all are images of a beginning, life processes of hope, etc. The one who sows spreads them to germinate, “so it is with the Kingdom of God: the seeds are spread in our lives so that they grow and bring fruit in us”<sup>7</sup> The kingdom of God is seen in this context as an eternal spring of new life, a new creation of all things to eternal life.<sup>8</sup> An important dimension of the concept of new life is the renunciation of an old life which is inconsistent with this new life. This conveys the whole concept of repentance and renewal. This means preaching the Kingdom of God, is giving new life in Christ which begins with repentance. An essential element of preaching the Kingdom of God as an evangelization mandate is, therefore, preaching a personal encounter with Christ for a new life, borne from deep personal repentance from our old and sinful ways of life. This understanding sheds light on the parable of Jesus on

the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. Evangelization as preaching the Kingdom of God, as Moltmann puts it is, “nothing other than the joy of God over the rediscovery of the lost creature, being found from alienation, becoming alive again and harmonizing in God’s joy.”<sup>9</sup> This sense will make a lot of meaning in catechesis later.

Be that as it may, evangelization for Jesus also meant the announcement of liberating salvation. At the heart of Jesus's evangelizing mission, was preaching of salvation and liberation. In his missionary mandate given, two summary words of his mission are “liberation” and “salvation”. Jesus offers this in Luke 4: 18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”. Any fruitful evangelization mandate must emphasize strongly the aspect of liberation leading to salvation. Both liberation and salvation in the task of evangelization are mutually inclusive. One should lead to the other, and if one does not produce the other, it becomes incomplete. The task of evangelization, just like Jesus’s, is not just an announcement of the Good News; it also means bringing them liberation. The concept of liberation must be seen holistically. It is not just only physical liberation or liberation from the powers of darkness, it is showing liberty to the whole man. Pope Paul VI writes:

With regard to the liberation that evangelization proclaims and strives to bring about, it should rather be said: - it cannot be limited to the simple and restricted economic, political, social, or cultural dimension, but must aim at the whole man, in all his dimensions, including its openness to the absolute, even the Absolute of God; - is therefore rooted in a certain conception of man, in an anthropology which can never be sacrificed to the needs of any strategy, practice or short-term effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

This form of liberation which focuses on giving liberty to the whole man is called evangelical liberation. Therefore, evangelization means

offering liberation to the whole man. The importance of this is that how we conceive of salvation is entirely interwoven with our entire life and being as an individual. The importance of liberation to evangelization is that the gospel message has sometimes been too fractured that its parts and dimensions are taken as a whole. The importance of evangelical liberation is that once a man is not free, there would be great obstacles to having the message of Christ penetrate or be understood. There are several reasons people seek Jesus, including seeking material provisions. The ultimate reason for seeking and finding Jesus should, however, be salvation. But, the concept of salvation is tied around liberation, including freedom from oppressive and repressive conditions. If these are not done, they will pose obstacles to why people cannot understand and comprehend the message of Christ. While one may not find all the material solutions to all one's problems through the preaching of the gospel, we can have an enduring spiritual solution that will carry us through the travails of material tensions and lack. This is what the gospel must offer, and this is what evangelization must target. However, evangelization must in some ways accommodate how the entire man can be liberated. It should not be reduced to only material liberation, financial prosperity, or psychological liberation, but, targeted at liberating the mind, soul, body, and spirit of the individual. When evangelization is focused on some aspect and discounts some others, it will certainly produce counterproductive effects. Therefore, evangelization apart from the preaching of an encounter with Christ also means, preaching the message of evangelical liberation which seeks to give freedom to the whole man.

There is a last sense of evangelization for Jesus, which is important to a clear understanding of the concept for us today and that is "tireless preaching". The document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI describes it in the following words: "Christ accomplishes this proclamation of the Kingdom of God by the untiring preaching of a word whose equal is found nowhere else: "Behold a new doctrine taught with authority!"; His words reveal God's secret, his plan, and his promise, and therefore change the heart of man and his destiny."<sup>11</sup>

Evangelization is, therefore, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus to every human situation and seeking to reconcile and convert people back to God, by the renewing of their minds and heart. This task is not a one-off event, but, a consistent, stable, and forceful engagement. The duty of evangelization involves some consistency in action. We can say, therefore, evangelization involves the preaching of the transformative power and salvation message of the Good News to others, for the renewal of their minds and hearts, for a personal encounter with Jesus, and a complete and personal liberation. The task of evangelization is the task to bring others to salvation. Salvation is gaining eternal life in Christ.

The mission of evangelization is different from the focus of evangelism. The latter involves proselytization for a church, whereas, evangelization involves introducing someone into the faith of the Church and the life of Christ. Evangelization is principally about proclaiming the person of Jesus Christ. Evangelization is an intersection between evangelism and catechesis. John Westerhoff exposes this understanding in a great deal in his paper, “Evangelism, Evangelization, and Catechesis: Defining Terms and Making the Case for Evangelization”. He states that “whereas the focus of evangelism is on attracting persons to the church and that of catechesis on life-long learning and growth, evangelization has to do with initiating persons into the faith and incorporating them into the life of the Christian community.”<sup>12</sup> The Church believes more in bringing Christ to the people and then, nurturing that faith, by catechesis. While evangelism is not an unimportant idea, the motives and goals of both evangelism and evangelization are different. While evangelism may be a goal to populate a church, either directly or indirectly, evangelization has the goal to make a population for heaven in a conscious way. When evangelization is done properly, it ends up bringing people into a church. However, there is a different dimension of evangelism adopted by some Pentecostals which is important to learn from. It is that the task of evangelism is not just about talking about the faith to people already in the faith but seeking people of other faith communities, even to hitherto, unknown persons. Evangelization should not only target

those who have already identified with a particular faith community or church but, also those who are yet to identify with any faith community. This is where faith witnessing is important for evangelization. This concept of extending the frontiers of evangelization is what the church teaches under the concept of New Evangelization.

The focus of the new evangelization is a call for all the baptized especially Catholics to be evangelized and go forth to evangelize others. Why do we need a new evangelization? What is wrong with the old? Since the time of Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, to Pope Francis, have all consistently referred to the concept of the new evangelization. The term “New Evangelization” is used to distinguish the first act of introducing someone into knowing Christ as a first encounter as different from a deepening and renewal of this understanding into building a deeper faith and personal conviction. During the time of the apostles, the message of Christ was taken to many parts of the world as a message hitherto unknown. In Acts of the Apostles chapter 19, when St. Paul passed through Ephesus, he asked some disciples, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They answered; “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). In this instance, we find people who are completely new to the message of Christ. A message to such people who have not heard of the message of Christ is evangelization. However, when, those who have heard or even been baptized are being evangelized, then, we talk of a new evangelization. This is an even more exigent work of evangelization today. There are quite many followers of Christ and few people have truly been disciples, many religious people, and few people who have truly been converted or are spiritual. There are many churches today, but, it appears as though, the message is yet penetrated. This is the task of the new evangelization, to make great inroads into the heart of those who have first heard the message.

The new evangelization is an imminent and exigent task. One can arguably say that many Catholics don’t understand deeply what it means to be a Catholic. There are also many Christians who profess Christianity only as a nominal content, not as a practical imperative.

The church's efforts are about evangelization, yet, it is not seen as impactful. However, as Pope Benedict XVI notes, "we can see a progressive process of de-Christianization and a loss of the essential human values, which is worrisome. A large part of today's humanity does not find the Gospel in the permanent evangelization of the Church: That is to say, the convincing response to the question: How to live?"<sup>13</sup> This is where the new evangelization is important. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, speaks of three principal settings in which the new evangelization should be carried out: (1) ordinary pastoral ministry (to inflame the hearts of the faithful) (2) outreach to "the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism" and (3) evangelization to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.<sup>14</sup> The setting of the new evangelization makes it not the exclusive preserve of the ordained or those in the religious life. The setting leaves a strong task on all the Christian faithful; both those who share the sacred ministry and those of the commonly baptized. Pope Francis in the opening of his Apostolic Exhortation clearly describes this, saying, "I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy..."<sup>15</sup> Evangelization has been seen as acts of preaching, catechesis, witnessing, conversion, encountering Christ, and liberation. The lay faithful can do all of these at different levels. However, I find catechesis as a swift key to the new evangelization.

Catechesis would involve a deepening of the faith, exposition, and pedagogical accompaniment in the faith. I consider catechesis as one of the finest keys to engaging a rising culture of faithlessness and unfaithfulness which has led to a fast downslope of de-Christianization in our day. The lack of faith, shallowness or incomprehension of the Christian faith, and sometimes a complete loss of faith are reasons that have led to a decline in both church participation and Christian apathy. It is not uncommon for instance, to find Catholics who have received the sacrament of confirmation but do not understand why they should go for the sacrament of reconciliation. It is even more common to find Catholics today who doubt or even at worst completely deny devotion to the saints, pray the rosary or even lack faith in foundational beliefs

like attending the Holy Mass. Furthermore, with the emboldening and growth of Pentecostalism in many parts of the world, there are many lukewarm Catholics who are easily won over to the Pentecostal fold. The simple reason for this easy drift reflects a lack of deep understanding of the Catholic faith. Hence, a strong catechesis is at the centre of a viable and fruitful new evangelizing mission and here, the lay faithful have so much to do and not just a task for the priests and religious.

### **Catechesis and Faith-Formation**

Catechesis is an aspect of the ministry of the word<sup>16</sup> and it is also a stage in evangelization. The *Apostolic Exhortation, Catechesi Tradendae*, of Pope John Paul II says that catechesis has a twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of Christ.<sup>17</sup> Catechesis is meant to lead the maturity of the Christian faith. It is meant to elicit a deeper awakening of the Christian fact. It is a systematic encounter that focuses on building the faith along lines of personal conviction, deepening articles of the faith, and doctrines, and also offering a guided direction in the journey of the faith. The purpose of catechesis is to give personal adherence to the gospel. It is the process that enhances the interiorization of what is professed.

Catechesis involves passing on our Catholic faith to form disciples of Jesus. The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus. Catechesis should lead one to a personal fellowship; a personal relationship with Jesus, not borne from just some rubrics, ritual acts, or general convictions. Catechesis should also encourage profound incorporation into the Church and nourish Christian living. Catechesis should also instruct in Christian prayer. Proper catechesis leads to faith formation. There are six important tasks of catechesis in catholicism:<sup>18</sup> (1) knowledge of the faith:- catechesis should here give attention to exploring the creed and church doctrines and beliefs. (2) Liturgical Education:- Catechesis here should expose one to fuller participation in

the sacraments of the Church. (3) Moral Education: Catechesis should lead to the forming of individual consciences to make one uphold Christian values. (4) Learning to Pray:- Catechesis should teach one how and when to pray, especially in a personal way. (5) Education for Community life:- Catechesis should form one to a realization of the basic Christian community, the ecclesial community of the living and the dead, and the church as a domestic family. (6) Missionary Discipleship:- Catechesis should open up one to a vocation of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world. These six tasks of catechesis are based on the four pillars of our Catholic Catechism: (i) The Profession of the Faith (ii) the celebration of the Christian Mystery (iii) the life of Christ (iv) Christian prayer. Clearly, catechesis is the soul of faith formation.

Catechesis takes various forms. *The General Catechetical Directory* identifies that catechesis can take different forms like religious instruction given to children and adolescents or even adults. This takes different forms like those preparing for the sacrament of baptism or reception of the Eucharist or confirmation<sup>19</sup>. There is also the form given to those who have just received a sacrament or post-baptismal catechesis called *mystagogia*, or even those who are just welcomed into the faith. It should also take religious dialogues and discussions such as retreats, parish faith formation programs, and seminars to help illumine the faith. It also could take the form of continuous Christian education of the faithful through different forms of religious education one engages in formally or informally. It also could take the form of a proclamation of the gospel. However, a more traditional form of catechesis, and sometimes what is mostly only emphasized at the gross discount of other forms is that of a catechumenate program and Christian initiation processes which often involve mostly young children who are preparing for the sacrament of initiation: baptism, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation.

There is a point worthy of note that the method of communicating this catechesis for catechumens is important and can tell whether the faith will thrive afterward or not. One can arguably say, that a rote form of teaching catechism where children are meant to

memorize prayers without a deep understanding has not allowed for deep penetration of the faith. One of the problems identifiable is sometimes the mental capacity of the children at that stage to receive some of the teachings offered to them, unlike adults when they learn similar content. This may account for why children who took early catechism classes may know many things, yet, lack sufficient understanding of them, only to question them at an older age and even completely abandon the Church afterward. When catechesis is not deep, the faith becomes shallow. Proper faith formation should take note of the critical ages of the faithful. People are generally inquisitive between the ages of 16-35. This is a time people raise a lot of questions and even interrogate church positions. Observably, taking Nigeria for the most in context, the aforementioned period is when many of our youths leave the Church. The reason they leave the Church is that they have a lot of questions and few fora offer them answers, and the subsequent thing is they get answers from either people who are not vast in the faith, those struggling with understanding Catholicism, or non-Catholics. The consequence is that they become vulnerable to disjointed and convoluted theology from other people which makes them sometimes abandon the Catholic faith. The offering of catechesis at a more mature age is important.

Another aspect of catechesis that is important to be emphasized is what can be called having well-trained lay teachers. This is so because the function of catechesis which is the soul of sustaining and passing on the Catholic faith requires a lot of work and particularly education by lay teachers. The teachings of the Catholic faith are founded on three pillars of scripture, the teachings of the Church in the magisterium or what is known as sacred tradition and reason. Therefore, the catholic faith is both a spiritual and revealed truth that is grounded both in the scripture and reason. This requires that those who pass on the faith must equally be well-equipped and knowledgeable in scripture, have a deep sense of church documents, and have a well-formed reason. If the Catholic faith is not properly taught, it will not be properly understood. This does not require just the recitation of set prayers or teachings, but the ability to interpret and break down these

teachings in forms that can be understandable. This should not only be the work of priests and religious. It means that there should be strong, forceful, and consistent teachers of the catholic faith. This is where I find the work of catechists and lay teachers of faith as important variables in passing on the Catholic faith. Since priests have the duties to teach, preach and administer the Church, etc they certainly require several lay people who are properly trained with the task of passing on the faith as collaborators. Lay Catholics should rediscover their spiritual authority in teaching as equally a baptismal mandate that must be exercised in building the kingdom of God. One of the dangers of the Church which seem to shrink it is clericalism. Too many things are tied around the priests that once the priest is not taking the lead, it is fated not to thrive. If our churches work towards a more inclusive church that is highly involving of the lay faithful, the Catholic Church would be on a path of rediscovery.

### **The Role of Catechists and Lay Teachers of faith in Faith Formation**

A catechist is a teacher of the faith according to the official teachings of the Church. A catechist witnesses to the faith by sharing his or her commitment through the teaching of the word of God, catechetical instruction, prayer, and assisting in liturgical preparations. (S)he usually teaches the faith in formal settings, especially for those preparing for catechumenate programs, and gives moral instruction to people who are preparing to receive other sacraments. The *General Directory for Catechesis* has a vivid description of the catechist which is of importance:

The catechist is essentially a mediator. He facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community. For this reason, his cultural vision, social condition, and lifestyle must not be obstacles to the journey of faith. Rather, these help to create the most

advantageous conditions for seeking out, welcoming, and deepening the Christian message. He does not forget that belief is a fruit of grace and liberty. Thus, he ensures that his activities always draw support from faith in the Holy Spirit and from prayer. Finally, the personal relationship of the catechist with the subject is of crucial importance.<sup>20</sup>

The above description bestows on the catechist a moral obligation as a teacher of the faith. Catechists like all faith formators are called not only to teach in words but, also by an exemplary living. This is the life of witnessing which is a more vivid form of preaching or teaching the faith. The office or ministry of a catechist is not a clerical ministry. It is a spiritual vocation to offer pastoral assistance, and preach the gospel as a member of the laity. A catechist is often a trained pastoral worker, who assists in the pastoral ministry of teaching the word of God. Hence, catechists in our parishes must be “practicing Catholics with a thorough knowledge of the Christian message and the ability to communicate it completely, faithfully, and enthusiastically; they should also meet diocesan standards for certification as a catechist.”<sup>21</sup>

The essential difference between a catechist and a lay teacher of the faith is that while both are essentially vocations for the laity, the former is a formally trained person who undertakes this vocation while the other may not necessarily be formally trained, but, through personal study, interest and voluntary services engage in promoting sound teaching of the catholic faith in the Christian community. Catechists should be people who are morally and mentally stable and who can communicate the faith properly with a corresponding enthusiasm. Catechists should be people whose faith is well-formed before they could be certified to be entrusted with the faith of future generations to them. Hence, catechists should be people who have a fair knowledge of the scripture, the catechism of the Church, and even church history, as well as some training in learning and teaching styles. They should be people who can impart knowledge to other people, especially

children. Catechists must have a solid understanding of Catholic doctrine and worship. Care must be taken that catechists must have the necessary communication skills that enable them to impart the faith. Catechists must pay attention to teaching the faith and other ancillary duties that may overwhelm this duty can be distributed to other people. For instance, the catechist should not necessarily be the sacristan of a parish. In some churches, particularly, in Nigeria, catechists double on several fronts, which makes the primary duty of teaching the faith, almost secondary to his roles. Lay teachers of the faith are sometimes trained locally or are drawn from people who have deep knowledge of the faith and who can impart the message of the Catholic faith to others. They form part of the overall catechetical or faith formation team. Some of them could function as marriage counselors, youth mentors, and spiritual coaches in parishes or even spiritual directors. The absence or shortage of lay teachers of faith and trained catechists leaves a heavy burden on the priest to be many things at a time: pastor, counselor, teacher, etc. without being effective in some other areas that are important for the nurturing of the faith at different stages. There is an exigency for a very robust investment in the training of catechists and lay teachers of faith in our parishes if we must satisfactorily fulfill the mandate of effective evangelization and making disciples of all nations.

### **Faith Formation and the Diocese of Auchi: Extant Practices and Future Directions**

The Diocese of Auchi, like every Christian community, is called to be a light to all people and to bring the Good News to all people under her care and beyond. Therefore, like every Christian community, evangelization is both a missionary mandate and catechesis should be imperative. Several efforts are being done in this evangelization mandate in the Diocese of Auchi. An attempt to examine the overall aspects of this experience would be incomplete. However, there are common efforts in evangelization that can reflect what is being done in the Diocese.

As a missionary mandate, evangelization is carried out in many ways, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*; that is, evangelizing efforts that look inward and those targeted to other people outside the Church. Much of the efforts in evangelization are those that target the members of the Christian community, nourishing and building on the catholic faith. While the Bishop is the Chief teacher of the faith, priests are teachers of the faith in their respective parishes. The teaching ministry is mostly through homilies at Masses, seminars, retreats in parishes, catechumenate programs, marriage counseling sessions, spiritual directions, spiritual counseling in the offices, and the life of Christian witnessing. Most parishes in the Diocese have catechists that assist the priest in the teaching of the faith and catechism. The Diocese of Auchi, being located in a semi-urban area has a handful of semi-literate people and so the challenge of teaching, communication, and comprehension of the faith would need extraordinary means and methods, including interpretation of catholic beliefs, doctrine, and practices. The challenge of finding committed and learned tutors of the faith or even those who can serve as catechists is another issue that cannot be left to silence. The next major challenge is since the ecclesiastical circumscription of the Diocese is mostly a semi-urban setting; there is also a syncretic challenge from traditional religion and beliefs. This sometimes leads to apathy for the Catholic faith and the growing invasion of Pentecostalism further compounds this challenge. Yet, these make the imperative for improved faith formation a pastoral emergency. The consequences of these challenges include that some of our Catholics are challenged with a deep conviction of the Catholic faith in the Diocese, and some members of our parishes are yet to be convinced or comprehend what it means to be true Catholics, as they still flirt around in other religious groups and faith. Also, there is a gradual youth decline and participation in some parishes. It must be stated too that this is not just a challenge for Auchi Diocese alone, but for most orthodox churches, which is rather mostly linked to modern relativism and liberalism of this age. Furthermore, there is also the challenge of nominal Catholics; those who are Catholics by name, not by actual profession. It should also be noted that some of our catechists are not

very deep in the Catholic faith. Although most of them have undergone catechetical training, there is a need to have more experienced or more knowledgeable people who teach other aspects of faith formation in our parishes, or most of our catechists are meant to engage in further sporadic studies and training in theology, church doctrines and church history. Also, care must be taken on the quality of persons who are admitted into this special and important ministry, even if they volunteer for such services.

In light of these, the following can be suggested as ways and means that can improve faith formation as an important aspect of the pastoral life of the Diocese.

1. Evangelization can be further systematized with a set vision, objectives, and directions. To this effect, there should be a Diocesan office for faith formation and evangelization which will in turn have corresponding parish units. The Diocesan faith formation team can be made up of the Bishop, Episcopal Vicar for Faith Formation, Director of Faith Formation and evangelization programs, Catechetical Leaders, consultants, and coordinators of different aspects of faith-formation.
2. The Directorate of faith formation or Diocesan organ for faith formation should be involved in drawing out particular goal targets for formation, responsible for evangelization missions, systematic planning and teaching of the faith at the Diocesan level, and serve as an administrative organ for different Parish faith formation organs in parishes.
3. Each Parish should have a Parish Faith formation organ with a clear mandate for the new evangelization and building of the faith of the people. The Parish faith formation organ should comprise people who are moral exemplars and are capable of teaching the Catholic faith. The faith formation programs in a parish should be organized systematically to target age groups within the church and different aspects of the faith, including bible study programs, a moral and doctrinal formation which could also help to direct small mentorship groups, etc. The parish faith formation program which should be drawn from the

Diocesan template to reflect both the particular needs of the Diocese should also be further structured in a manner to reflect the peculiar needs of the parish. The Parish faith formation team is recommended to be made up of the Pastor as head, Parish Director of Religious Education, lay faith formation ministers, catechists, and marriage counselors, where there is no separate marriage unit in the parish.

4. Faith formation programs both at the diocesan levels should have a strong target to the youths who are most endangered and therefore require a robust collaboration with the youth ministry in the Diocese and at parish levels. If a parish lacks a robust youth ministry, it makes the catholic youths vulnerable to different religious ideologies and values.
5. Faith formation requires a clear road map of evangelization and developing the faith, therefore, the Diocesan faith formation directorate should target deep training of all faith formation instructors within the Diocese in other to be well equipped with the directions and demands of this noble ministry. An essential aspect of this program must be leadership training. It is recommended that there can be a leadership training center or a school of evangelization or a catechetical centre whose curriculum embodies training in leadership and evangelization for lay people and even young priests. This is important because the lay leaders will assist the priest in mentorship and journeying in the faith with different people at different levels.
6. There is a need to improve catechetical training for catechists. While it is true that most of the catechists are trained at the basic level, there is a need to periodically have further training and certifications for catechists which can be sponsored by the parish. There is a need to change the sometimes misleading impression and outlook about catechists as people who are fairly educated or immediately are out of jobs. In fact, since the role of a catechist involves a robust teaching ministry, it should be occupied by people with a basic educational qualification and therefore, equally paid a remuneration corresponding to

their educational background. In this case, the role and duties of catechists would have a new appraisal.

7. There is a need to review the catechumenate curriculum at the Diocesan level which should in turn be passed to the parish levels. Teaching catechesis at the parish level should go beyond rote memorization, rather, involving explanation, and scriptural foundations of beliefs, and it should be taught with a well-developed curriculum to reflect the age, sacrament, and kind of catechesis intended or the sacrament an individual is intending to receive. It is proper that a catechumenate program for children as different from youths and adults must have different approaches and curricula. This is so because the levels of comprehension and appreciation are different.
8. Since catechesis is at the centre of effective evangelization, it must be approached also systematically and each parish stemming from the Diocesan Directorate on Faith formation should have these interests and focus. Some of the different dimensions of catechesis include (i) Sacramental preparation and liturgical formation. (ii) catechesis programs for returning to active church practice. (iii) retreats on special programs like moral education, etc. (iv) catechesis for situational needs (v) Catechesis for various ministries in the Church (vi) bible instructions and study programs (vii) online parish programs.
9. The Diocesan Directorate must involve in the organizational administration of the entire process including drawing up manuals, and guidelines, offering clear directions, identifying target groups, and drawing up effective methodologies and approaches. A robust evangelization program apart from improving the faith of those who are Catholics should also target making disciples from people who are yet to even embrace the Catholic faith. It means that the spiritual and pastoral approaches should be attractive enough for someone to seek the Church as a place of spiritual solace and home in his/her Christian journey.

- 10.** There must be a periodic evaluation of the catechetical efforts and journey in parishes by the Diocesan Faith Formation Directorate or commission and even at the parish levels. This is the only way that catechesis would lead to deepening the faith of the people and bringing alive the Catholic faith in our parishes. Attention must be paid to Christian witnessing by the life of the priest and lay teachers of the faith. In an atmosphere where the moral character of teachers of the faith is in question, efforts in evangelization will produce counterproductive effects. This is an essential aspect of evangelization and catechesis. By the life of witnessing and genuine Christian living, teachers of faith would make more tremendous inroads in making more disciples for Christ in our parishes.

In conclusion, this work has brought to the critical importance of evangelization and highlighted the pivotal place of catechesis in the entire process. It has been noted that with the rising trend of relativism, liberalism, and Pentecostalism, there is an urgent need to give attention to the deepening of the catholic faith which is the focus of new evangelization. While this cannot be overemphasized, care must be taken to undertake this task in a more systematic, goal-directed, and purpose-oriented manner. Catechesis should go beyond catechumenate programs, but also involve other aspects of moral, doctrinal, and religious education, including a deeper study of the word of God. This task should not be left to priests alone, but, the lay faithful have a solemn obligation by virtue of their baptism to teach and make disciples of all nations. If we must evangelizing efforts as a Diocese must be evaluated as effective with the character of Jesus's evangelizing outlook; preaching the kingdom of God, preaching repentance and new life, advancing evangelical liberation, the continuous building of the Kingdom of God, and backrolling the tide of dechristianization and Pentecostal inroads, then a more robust effort at catechesis is imperative. A catechesis that is hinged on teaching a sound knowledge of the faith, promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ, teaches the Christian how to pray, prepares him for an active life in the Church,

promotes knowledge of the liturgy and sacrament, and equips the faithful for Christian disciples. Looking into the future as a Diocese, this should be a strong imperative that priests and lay faithful give pride of place to this endeavor if we must keep fulfilling the purpose for which the church exists. While the suggestions above may not be exhaustive, this contribution could set the tone for an improved direction in this pastoral exercise of evangelization and faith formation.

## End Note

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<sup>1</sup> Beniot Malvaux, “Bishops and Catechesis” in *Congregation for the Clergy*, retrieved from <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2004-07/14-13/04CCCEEn.htm> on November 20, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, #28.

<sup>3</sup> The priest by his ordination shares in the three munera of Jesus Christ: *Munus Docendi* (the task to teach, based on Christ’s role as Prophet), *Munus sanctificandi* (the task or duty to sanctify, based on Christ’s role as Priest) and *Munus regendi* (the duty to shepherd, based on Christ’s role as King).

<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nutiandi*, 8 December, 1975, #6.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nutiandi*, #8.

<sup>6</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God” *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 48 (1), 1993, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God”, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God”, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God”, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nutiandi*, #33.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nutiandi*, #11.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Westerhoff, “Evangelism, Evangelization and Catechesis: Defining Terms and Making the Case for Evangelization” in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Volume 48, Issue 2, 1994, 156-166.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers on the New Evangelization” on the occasion of the Jubilee for Catechists, December, 2000, retrieved from

<https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/5032/documents/2014/0/ADDRESS%20TO%20CATECHISTS%20AND%20RELIGION%20TEACHERS.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, #14.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, #1.

<sup>16</sup>Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium Catechisticum Generale*, AAS 64 (1971), #17.

<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation, Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979, #19.

<sup>18</sup> The Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997, #85-86.

<sup>19</sup>Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium Catechisticum Generale*, AAS 64 (1971), #19.

<sup>20</sup> The Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997, #156.

<sup>21</sup>*Faith Formation Policy and Guideline*, Diocese of Arlington, 2020, 6.