

## ***Share the Good News – 5 Years On***

A Progress Review of the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland

*Éanna Johnson PhD, June 2016.*

### **Introduction**

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC-1997)<sup>1</sup> is the Catholic Church's principal document giving guidance for catechetical pedagogy and methodology – *how* catechesis should be carried out. The Church's standard of reference for catechetical *content* is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC)<sup>2</sup>. The Church recommends the preparation of National Catechetical Directories to assist in implementation of the GDC-1997 at local level, while maintaining perfect harmony with the CCC.

*Share the Good News* (SGN) is presented as the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland<sup>3</sup>, and was prepared under authority of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference at the request of the Vatican. Preparation commenced eleven years ago in 2005, with a public launch of the final document in 2011.

*Share the Good News* made recommendations and included an Implementation Plan with a ten-year life-span<sup>4</sup>, satisfactory in principle. Periodic review is standard best practice for any plan of action, to evaluate progress and identify any necessary amendments. It is therefore appropriate to do a five-year Progress Review of *Share the Good News*, half-way through the envisaged 10 year life-span.

This five-year Progress Review of *Share the Good News* is offered by Dr Éanna Johnson. It follows on from his interest in the National Directory, which started with responding to the invitation for submissions when the project was announced in 2005. In 2006 he was one of those invited by the National Catechetical Office in Maynooth to study and comment on the Directory's first Draft; he later studied and reviewed the fourth draft.

Dr Johnson's Review of the final published document<sup>5</sup> found it unsatisfactory. This Progress Review finds that nothing of positive significance for Catholic catechesis has been achieved by *Share the Good News* in the five years since it was launched.

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Irish Episcopal Conference. *Share the Good News*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> SGN 129-169

<sup>5</sup> Éanna Johnson. *Share the Good News – A Review*. [www.eannaiohanson.org/wp/general-catechesis/share-the-good-news-a-review/](http://www.eannaiohanson.org/wp/general-catechesis/share-the-good-news-a-review/)

## Five Year Progress Review: 2011-2016

*Share the Good News* is presented as a 'National Directory for Catechesis', but this is false. A National Directory for Catechesis should centre on Catholic catechesis as an integral element of evangelisation, the Church's principal mission.<sup>6</sup> SGN would be more accurately described as a 'National Directory for Religious Education', because a secularised type of '*Religious Education*' is given priority, while marginalising Catechesis and Evangelisation.

SGN supplants Catholic Evangelisation with its own version of '*Faith Development*', which covers most of Church life and in which secularised '*Religious Education*' has a central role. All the Objectives in SGN's Implementation Plan<sup>7</sup> are expressed as '*Faith Development*', not catechesis and not evangelisation. SGN recommends secularised '*Religious Education*' for Catholic primary and secondary schools, but no Catholic catechesis (SGN145-152).

Periodic progress evaluation and learning assessment are essential in all educational endeavours. During the six-year preparation process for SGN no learning assessment was carried out in relation to Catholic catechesis, and no objective evaluation of progress, only unqualified endorsement of the deficient and defective programmes that had failed to pass on authentic Faith since the mid-1970s. No progress evaluation or learning assessment have been carried out in the five years since SGN's launch in 2011.

SGN's Implementation Plan hinges on employment of over 1000 'Faith Development' staff, embedded in every parish and diocese in Ireland. These 1000+ 'Faith Development' staff will be overseen and coordinated by a middle-management National Faith Development Team with no Bishop members (SGN144), with potential for usurping legitimate episcopal authority in a virtual 'take-over-bid' for influence over most of Church life. SGN offers no estimate of the cost of its Faith Development structure, which is probably well in excess of €50 million per year, and ongoing. No Faith Development staff have been recruited, and financial realities suggest that this key aspect of SGN's Plan is effectively un-implementable.

In 2012 an Implementation Committee was established with responsibility for developing and overseeing an operational plan for *Share the Good News*, but no plan was published. In 2013 the Committee issued seven leaflets, repeating some elements of SGN but not addressing implementation.

Pope Benedict XVI announced a Year of Faith for 2012/13. As principal reference the Pope strongly recommended the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,<sup>8</sup> along with its *Compendium* and *Youcat*. The Irish Bishops' Conference instead chose SGN as the framework for the Year of Faith. The Year of Faith made little impact in Ireland.

Rev Gareth Byrne, SGN's lead author, recently attributed credit to SGN for a number of elements that had been put in place,<sup>9</sup> but these claims are not valid:

- A 'National Faith Development Team' has been set up, but not as proposed in SGN. As noted above, SGN's National Faith Development Team (NFDT) was to have no Bishop members, and its purpose was to oversee and coordinate the proposed 1000+ Faith Development staff throughout Ireland (SGN144). The NFDT which has been set up includes two Bishops as joint-chairs, which is good, but there are no 'Faith Development' staff for the Team to oversee and coordinate. The new NFDT has organised some good events, but they could equally have been organised through existing structures of the Bishops' Conference.

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi – On Evangelisation in the Modern World*, 1975. 14. 'Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.'

<sup>7</sup> SGN 129-169. Objectives in 7 areas: Parish, Diocese, National, Schools, Organisations, Education, Materials.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI. *Porta Fidei*, 2011, & accompanying *Pastoral Recommendations* of Congr for Doctrine of Faith.

<sup>9</sup> Gareth Byrne. *The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland: An Outworking of the Council*. Essay in: Niall Coll, Editor. *Ireland & Vatican II – Essays Theological, Pastoral and Educational*. Dublin: The Columba Press, 2015. 298-314.

- The *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*<sup>10</sup>, adapted from the US Bishops' *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*<sup>11</sup>, was published in 2014. However, credit cannot be claimed for SGN, because our Bishops wisely decided to produce an Irish Catechism after publication of the US Catechism in 2006, making a request for permission of the US Bishops in 2008, well before SGN's launch in 2011.
- The position of National Director for Catechesis was not proposed in SGN144, but was an existing post, established in 2005.
- The new Religious Education curriculum for Catholic primary schools could not be credited to the recommendation in SGN164, because preparation of this syllabus/curriculum had been ongoing since it was announced by the Bishop Chairman of the Catechetics Commission in 2002.

## Conclusions

Nothing of positive significance for Catholic catechesis has been achieved by *Share the Good News* in the five years since the document was launched. This indicates problems in the original document, because a good tree is expected to produce good fruit<sup>12</sup>. Some positive elements in SGN and its approval by the Irish Bishops and the Vatican, may give the impression that the document is satisfactory, or at least can be used selectively. However, SGN is so intrinsically flawed, so contrary to the Church's teaching, that it is better set aside.

Authentic reform and renewal of Catholic catechesis in Ireland remain an urgent need – the 'little ones' with faith in Christ hunger for the Truth<sup>13</sup>. Progress will be extremely challenging, given the catechetical failures of the past four decades, and our current secularised environment. However, we can take heart that the resources for catechesis were never better, most particularly Sacred Scripture, the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* – with the help of God all things are possible.<sup>14</sup>

Catechesis thrives in an environment of dynamic evangelisation, but signs of this are lacking in the institutional Church in Ireland. Evangelisation is not a headline responsibility of any Commission, Council or Agency of the Bishops' Conference. The Bishops' Conference commendably issues a press release on matters discussed at each Quarterly Meeting, but, going back to 2004, Evangelisation has never featured. (Foreign missions have received attention, which is good, but not evangelisation in Ireland). In a commendable initiative in 2010 the Bishops' Conference set up a Task Group to study evangelisation in Ireland and prepare a framework document for evangelisation action. However, the Task Group's 2014 Report did not present a plan for evangelisation action nor meaningful recommendations. Advancement of Evangelisation should be given urgent priority by the Church in Ireland.

*Note on Author:* Éanna Johnson BE MIE CEng FIEI PhD is a parent and grandparent with wide experience in education, at second and third level and as a professional consultant in education and training to major public and private sector clients. His PhD in Theology at St Patrick's Pontifical University Maynooth involved an in-depth analysis, theological and pedagogical, of the *Alive-O Programme* in Catholic primary schools. He has personally given, planned and supervised education in the Faith to children, youth and adults.

<sup>10</sup> Irish Episcopal Conference. *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Washington DC: USCCB, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Mt.7:16-18.

<sup>13</sup> Mt.18:5-7

<sup>14</sup> Phil.4:13