

Nomok@non

WEB-JOURNAL

FÜR RECHT

UND RELIGION

FACHARTIKEL

CONTEMPORARY CATECHESIS: QUO VADIS?

A Comparative Analysis of the Latest Papal Teaching and Legislation and Diocesan Practice

VON BRENDA PRATO

ISSN 2749-2826, DOI [10.5282/nomokanon/276](https://doi.org/10.5282/nomokanon/276)

veröffentlicht am 13.11.2024

CONTEMPORARY CATECHESIS: QUO VADIS?

A Comparative Analysis of the Latest Papal Teaching and Legislation and Diocesan Practice

BRENDA PRATO

Abstract: This article explores the evolving role of catechesis within the Catholic Church, particularly under the papacy of Pope Francis, focusing on reforms since 2013. It examines how catechesis, described as a grave duty of pastors of souls in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, is being implemented in two particular churches: the Diocese of Malta and the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen. The study addresses whether universal laws and papal directives are adhered to and whether canon law is applied effectively in organising catechesis, concluding with five thematic recommendations.

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel untersucht die wachsende Bedeutung der Katechese in der katholischen Kirche, insbesondere unter dem Pontifikat von Papst Franziskus, und konzentriert sich dabei auf die Reformen seit 2013. Es wird untersucht, wie die Katechese, die im Kodex des kanonischen Rechts von 1983 als eine schwere Pflicht der Seelsorger beschrieben wird, in zwei Teilkirchen umgesetzt wird: in der Diözese Malta und im Vikariat Flämisch-Brabant und Mechelen. Die Studie geht der Frage nach, ob universelle Gesetze und päpstliche Richtlinien eingehalten werden und ob das kanonische Recht bei der Organisation der Katechese wirksam angewendet wird, und schließt mit fünf thematischen Empfehlungen.

1 Introduction

In the 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC/1983), catechesis is described as follows:

"Proprium et grave officium pastorum praesertim animarum est catechesim populi christiani curare, ut fidelium fides, per doctrinae institutionem et vitae christianae experientiam viva fiat explicita atque operosa" (c. 773).

Consequently, catechesis is a proper and grave office (and duty) of the pastors of souls. These individuals are responsible for ensuring the imparting of catechesis in all its aspects because, through catechesis, the faith of the Christian faithful becomes alive, clearer, and more elaborate. Several reforms have occurred under Pope Francis' papacy, including those affecting catechesis. This article examines the changes in catechesis since 2013 and highlights its key developments. It also evaluates the current catechetical practices in two particular churches: the Diocese of Malta and the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen within the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels.

The article addresses the following: First, whether universal laws and papal documents regarding catechesis are being followed at the diocesan level. Second, whether canon law is being used effectively in the organisation of catechesis. The recommendations section will answer these

questions in an in-depth analysis of both dioceses. The article concludes by offering five thematic recommendations.

2 The Methodology

The motives behind the choice of these two particular churches are several. First, Malta is geographically smaller than Belgium, and their dioceses vary in size. Consequently, how these dioceses manage their administration concerning catechesis varies on this level. Secondly, these dioceses tend to be considered as two extreme Catholic poles: Malta, the religiously 'traditional' country, and Belgium, the more 'secularised' one. Thus, exploring the repercussions such a context may have on catechesis is interesting. Thirdly, these two dioceses have a special connection with the author: Malta is her country of origin, and Leuven is her place of residence and tertiary education. Thus, the author is very aware that the catechesis she received in Malta will be significantly different from that which her children will receive in Belgium, not only due to the difference in the times but also due to the difference in the countries. The interviews were conducted in the second half of 2023 and the questions were gathered into six categories:

1. **General Details about the Respondent** (i.e. the person in charge of catechesis);
2. **General Details on Catechesis** (e.g. languages used, catechetical programmes);
3. **Delivery of Catechesis** (e.g. how is catechesis imparted, the resources and methods used);
4. **Delicate Situations Concerning Catechesis** (e.g. people with special needs);
5. **Questions on Catechists** (e.g. their vocation, tasks, requirements);
6. **Difficulties that May be Encountered Concerning Catechesis** (e.g. whether there are enough catechists).

The questions were designed on official church documents, mainly parts two to five¹. Part one aims to understand the background and knowledge of those responsible for catechesis. Part six was designed to understand what types of difficulties dioceses encounter vis-à-vis catechesis and whether it is difficult to implement what is suggested or required in this area of catechesis. Thus, part six aims to understand whether papal documents and legislation are utilised in these dioceses and to what extent.

3 Catechesis Updates under Pope Francis

Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has brought about several changes and updates in various areas within the Catholic Church, including in catechesis. Such reforms will be explored in this section. This analysis will grant a general overview of catechesis throughout the papacy of Pope Francis. It would then serve as a solid basis to analyse and understand what is happening in the two chosen particular churches in Malta and Belgium.

¹ Parts two to four were inspired by inspired by *Catechesi Tradendae*, *Christus Dominus*, the New Directory for Catechesis, and others. Part five was formulated on *Antiquum Ministerium*.

3.1 A Brief Comparison of the Directories for Catechesis

The new Directory for Catechesis (2020 Directory)² was published in 2020 and is the third directory for catechesis thus far. The General Catechetical Directory (1971 Directory)³ was the first to be published in 1971 by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. In 1997, the General Direct for Catechesis (1997 Directory)⁴ was published by the Congregation for the Clergy, making the 1971 Directory obsolete. These directories came out in a span of nearly fifty years, and changes were made. Various elements will be highlighted below to analyse what is expected of catechesis today. This analysis will be done with a brief comparison with the two previous directories. It is only wise to become acquainted with the past to understand why contemporary times look like they do.

The first aspect one notices is that the 2020 Directory is the only directory not published by the Congregation for the Clergy. The Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation published it. Two elements must be considered here. Primarily, Francis is sending a message to the whole Church that catechesis is the responsibility of every "single believer and the whole Church"⁵. In canonical terms, every baptised must catechise (c. 774 §1). Secondly, catechesis is linked to evangelisation to the extent that "the three parts of this Directory for Catechesis, therefore, develop the catechetical journey under the primacy of evangelisation"⁶. Alternatively, catechesis is not simply the mere teaching of the Good News, but it ought to be a lived experience. This pedagogical approach is encouraged throughout Pope Francis' papacy.

The second aspect is the reason why the 2020 Directory was written. The three directories were all written in response to a prior event or contemporary realities⁷. Their general aim has always been to provide theological-pastoral principles. "All three texts have the same questions in common, namely the goals and tasks of catechesis, while historical context changes and the Magisterium implementation characterise each"⁸. However, they differ in their approach. The 1971 Directory is rather theoretical because it was the first directory to be written on catechesis and focused on collecting and actualising the teachings of Vatican Council II⁹. The 1997 Directory was necessary after the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, so the directory could be adapted based on it¹⁰. The 2020 Directory was published as a response to the digital culture and, as a result, to the globalisation of culture¹¹. New realities, techniques and situations ought to be addressed as a result.

² *Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation*, Directory for Catechesis (2020 Directory), London 2020.

³ *Sacred Congregation for the Clergy*, General Catechetical Directory (1971 Directory), London 1971.

⁴ *Congregation for the Clergy*, General Directory for Catechesis (1997 Directory), London 1997.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Preface.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ The 1971 Directory was written as a response to the pastoral changes brought about by Vatican Council II (Cf. *Sacred Congregation for the Clergy*, 1971 Directory (note 3), Foreword). This directory opened up new realities such as the renewal interest in the Fathers' teaching, the catechumenate (Cf. *Congregation for the Clergy*, 1997 Directory (note 4), Preface) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Cf. *Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation*, 2020 Directory, (note 2), Preface). In light of these realities, the need for another directory was felt, thus the 1997 Directory was published. The major event that provoked the publication of the 2020 Directory was the Synod on The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith (Cf. *Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation*, 2020 Directory (note 2), Preface).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Sacred Congregation for the Clergy*, 1971 Directory (note 3), Foreword.

¹⁰ *Congregation for the Clergy*, 1997 Directory (note 4), 7.

¹¹ *Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation*, 2020 Directory, (note 2), Preface.

The third aspect is the practicality of the directories. These directories are shifting from theory (1971 Directory) to a more concrete language and greater awareness of the realities (1997 Directory) to a relatively easy terminology with a minor upgrade in the practicality and even greater awareness (2020 Directory). The parts on marriage will be used as an illustration. The 1971 Directory stated that,

"... special importance must be assigned to religious education on matrimony... catechesis must make matrimony the foundation of family life, concerning its values and its divine law of unity and indissolubility... and its duties of love, which by its natural character has been ordered towards procreation and education of offspring. In regulating procreation, conjugal chastity must be preserved... it is part of the family's vocation to become a community that is also open to the Church and the world"¹².

Reading the 1971 Directory, it seems like one is reading the canons on marriage. It reiterated what the conciliar documents stated systemically, but it stopped there. It offers no practical examples of how churches can pastorally assist married couples and their children. One might argue that it is not the aim of a directory to offer such examples or that it cannot forget the cultural realities of the particular churches. Perhaps not. However, a directory is there to direct in a particular direction; thus, illustrating with a few examples of some issues would certainly help the local churches' innovation.

The 1997 Directory states that special forms of catechesis are to be imparted in critical life events such as marriage¹³, similarly, for liturgical catechesis¹⁴. Marriage is mentioned for a third time when the 1997 Directory states that "with renewed courage, the proclamation of the Gospel to those alienated or who live in religious indifference must be planned. In this task, pre-sacramental meetings... can be fundamental"¹⁵. The 1971 Directory discusses the necessary catechetical education on marriage concerning the *tria bona*¹⁶. Thus, the focus is on Christian ethics. Consequently, marriage is acknowledged in the 1997 Directory under the heading of special forms of catechesis, and it is aware that the issue of religious indifference is real and urgent. These two points are precisely the upgrade from the theory of the 1971 Directory to more straightforward terminology and greater awareness of the realities of the 1997 Directory. One can conclude that the 1997 Directory encouraged the use of catechesis to address concrete contemporary issues concerning marriage, which have less to do with mere indoctrination but more to do with the imminent issues that need to be addressed.

The 2020 Directory focuses intensely on marriage as the domestic Church¹⁷, where the primary catechesis is imparted¹⁸. Moreover, the 2020 Directory is also aware of the family realities and challenges, which is why "catechesis with families is characterised by a style of humble understanding and by a proclamation that is concrete, not theoretical and detached from personal problems"¹⁹. Consequently, the community must accompany and support families in this area through catechetical education. New to this directory is the dimension of pre-

¹² *Sacred Congregation for the Clergy*, General Catechetical Directory, (note 7), 232.

¹³ *Congregation for the Clergy*, General Directory for Catechesis (note 8), 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 258. b).

¹⁶ *Sacred Congregation for the Clergy*, General Catechetical Directory, (note 7), 59.

¹⁷ *Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation*, Directory for Catechesis, (note 3), 226.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

sacramental and post-sacramental catechesis for marriage²⁰ and catechesis for children experiencing the wounds of broken marriages²¹. Among other prospects brought about by mobility is mixed marriages. The 2020 Directory reminds particular churches to be aware of the new realities of globalisation²². Practical examples are not concretely given in this directory either. However, it makes the local churches aware of diverse situations. Mixed and broken marriages existed in the time of the other two directories, yet they do not mention them.

Directories are starting to serve as checklists of persons that local churches should not forget to catechise. They should also provide practical examples for the local churches to help them be creative. Moreover, 'catechesis on canon law' should also be added to the directory. For instance, sticking to the illustration of marriage, marriage preparation courses might consider explaining what canon law entails. After all, other tips concerning finances, sexual intimacy and civil marriage law are given. It is evident in the 2020 Directory that the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation is well aware that the 2020 Directory has space for improvement. The local churches are encouraged to create their directories if they see fit²³. Consequently, it would be no surprise if another directory is issued in the near future, following innovations the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation gathered from the directories of the local churches. Such a hypothesis might be too realistic: it all depends on the reception of the local churches concerning the creation of their directories²⁴.

The fact that the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation (now merged into the Dicastery for Evangelisation) wrote the 2020 Directory instead of the Dicastery for the Clergy should not be underestimated. The first crucial point is that the Dicastery for Evangelisation is given prominence in *Praedicate Evangelium*. More importantly, it comes before the Dicastery for the Clergy. Secondly, this fact sends the message that evangelisation is not just the competency of the clergy, but it pertains to all Catholics. In other words, all the members of the Church have the right and duty to participate in evangelisation and, by extension, in catechesis. Consequently, one could notice the parallelism between the directory written by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation and the ministry for catechist being the realm of the laity, as portrayed in *Antiquum Ministerium*. This new reality will be discussed further below. Accordingly, having the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation as the author of the 2020 Directory instead of the Dicastery for Clergy makes it clear that evangelisation (and catechesis) must not be clericalised because it is the responsibility of all baptised.

3.2 The Kerygma and Mystagogy of Catechesis in *Evangelii Gaudium*

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* discusses several themes in Pope Francis' papacy, including catechesis. This document contains five chapters. Catechesis is given prominence in Chapter Three, "The Proclamation of the Gospel", in Part IV, "Evangelisation and the deeper understanding of the kerygma", particularly in the subsection titled "Kerygmatic and mystagogical catechesis"²⁵.

²⁰ Ibid., 233.

²¹ Ibid., 234.

²² Ibid., 343.

²³ Ibid., Preface.

²⁴ For instance, Cf. *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, *The National Directory for Catechesis*, Washington D.C. 2005, xiv + 314 p.

²⁵ *Francis*, Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), in: AAS 105 (2013) 1088-1090, nos. 163-168.

This section of *Evangelii Gaudium* starts by emphasising the importance of education in the magisterial documents, mainly *Catechesi Tradendae*²⁶ and the 1997 Directory; *Evangelii Gaudium* mentions other assistance related to catechesis²⁷. Francis states that the two pillars (i.e. education and catechesis) serve the Christian's growth in Christ²⁸. Focus is then put on the kerygma²⁹; it must be first and at the centre of evangelisation, and it is trinitarian because "[t]he fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father's infinite mercy"³⁰. The catechist must repeatedly proclaim the kerygma (i.e. Christ loves humanity and wants to free human beings)³¹. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the kerygma is the first announcement because it is the fulcrum of proclamation; Christ's love towards humanity must be preached at every level and occasion during catechesis. Consequently, even the priest should be aware that he must continually need evangelisation³².

The kerygma should not be seen as a first step that leads to a more concrete formation³³. The kerygma should be the main reason for the Christian formation. It must be reflected in the different methods of catechesis³⁴. God's love towards humanity should be at the centre and reflect today's needs; it should be less philosophical and more evangelical (e.g. "not impose the truth but appeal to freedom")³⁵. Consequently, the evangeliser must be ready to embrace "approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental"³⁶. Aside from the aspect of the kerygma, catechesis has a mystagogical³⁷ dimension with two functions: ongoing formation involving all of the community and a Christian initiation that renews recognition of the liturgical signs (e.g. suited environment, engaging presentation, and the utilisation of expressive symbols)³⁸. *Evangelii Gaudium* insists that the mystagogical aspect is not always given the attention it deserves in many programmes and manuals³⁹. Thus, catechesis must have adaptive methods of delivering its message⁴⁰.

26 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation: *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), in: AAS 71 (1979) 1277-1340.

27 *Evangelii Gaudium* came out in 2013. The 2020 Directory was not yet published, thus, the latest directory for catechesis at the time was that of 1997. The author notes that *Evangelii Gaudium* explicitly mentions the 1997 Directory in the following manner "the General Catechetical Directory (1997)". Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 163. However, the correct name of the 1997 Directory is the General Directory for Catechesis.

28 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (note 22), no. 163.

29 In Greek, kerygma or κήρυγμα (*kérugma*), means proclamation. Cf. Liddell, Henry George / Scott, Robert, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996, 214. In the theological context, it refers to Christ's love towards humanity and in redeeming it.

30 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (note 22), no. 164.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation: *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), in: AAS 84 (1992) 657-804, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html (accessed on 18.10.2024), 698.

33 Ibid., 165.

34 Ibid. The methods used should take into consideration the contemporary times and consequently, catechesis must reflect the times the pupils live in. For instance, politics (e.g. learning how to be catholic and a citizen). Cf. Okpaleke, Ikenna Paschal, *Catechesis for Children: A Methodological Review of Pastoral Responsibility in Nigeria*, in: *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 43 (2019), 262-272, 267.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 In Greek, mystagogy or μυσταγωγία (*mystagogia*) means 'initiation into the mysteries'. Cf. Liddell / Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (note 26), 2579. In the theological context, this initiation signifies the Christian initiation.

38 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (note 22), no. 166.

39 Ibid.

40 Among others, Vodičar speaks extensively on the assertive method that can be used in catechesis. This method divides the pupils during the learning process on the one hand and the catechist on the other, while recognising that each student is different. Cf. Vodičar, Janez, *An Assertive Method as Help in Catechesis?*, in: *The Person and the Challenges* 7 (2017), 45-58, 56.

Evangelii Gaudium encourages using *pulchritudinis* (i.e., the way of beauty)⁴¹. The way of beauty should not separate truth, goodness and beauty; new ways of beauty must touch the human heart to enable "the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it"⁴². Consequently, the *via pulchritudinis* means encouraging the use of arts in evangelisation through various forms to be attractive for the evangelised rather than for the evangeliser. Concerning morality in catechesis, while it serves to stimulate growth in fidelity to the life promoted by the Gospel, it must nonetheless reflect beauty and positivity. The Christian ought to appear as a cheerful messenger when faced with tough questions; the Christian is the custodian of goodness and beauty expressed in the Gospel⁴³. While the section on catechesis in *Evangelii Gaudium* concludes here, *Evangelii Gaudium* mentions two necessary elements concerning catechesis.

Firstly, the homily "surpasses all forms of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people which lead up to sacramental communion"⁴⁴. The exceptional value given to the homily is due to its eucharistic background; the homily resembles the dialogue God built with his people. Thus, the preacher should be aware of the community he is preaching to enlighten the desire for God. Secondly, studying the scriptures is essential for every believer, and it must cultivate catechesis to assist in passing the faith⁴⁵. Evangelisation necessitates this study to become familiar with God's word; thus, dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations are called to cater for a serious and continual Bible study. Moreover, the prayerful readings within these institutions, both individual and communal, ought to be encouraged⁴⁶.

One last remark is about a reference made in *Evangelii Gaudium*. *Evangelii Gaudium* speaks of the bishop who has to inspire and establish ways of having others assist him in fostering the missionary communion in his diocese "proposed in the Code of Canon Law"⁴⁷. Here, a reference is made to the below canons:

- cc. 460-468 (i.e. "The Diocesan Synod")
- cc. 492-502 (i.e. "The Finance Council and The Finance Officer" and "The Presbyteral Council and The College of Consultors")
- cc. 511-514 (i.e. The Pastoral Council)
- cc. 536-537 (i.e. a small part of "Parishes, Pastors, and Parochial Vicars")

Consequently, *Evangelii Gaudium* is reminding the bishops (and the *parochi*) that they have legal tools to assist them in fulfilling the obligation of catechesis. Through this reference, the author raises four points. Firstly, given that a bishop is not bound by a specific time to convoke a diocesan synod, holding more regular diocesan synods can be of great value for the bishop and the community. Secondly, diocesan bishops may use canonical instruments within their dioceses to enact catechetical norms and activities, and the diocesan synod can be one of them. Thirdly, the bishops (and parish priests) must remember to allocate adequate funds to develop catechetical programmes and materials such as communication channels. Fourthly, perhaps it

⁴¹ Ibid., 167.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

is high time that catechists and others involved in catechesis should be given some sort of remuneration for their services, for instance, to raise the quality of catechesis.

No remuneration is mentioned vis-à-vis the catechist, although the canon on decent remuneration could apply (c. 231 §2). Moreover, this reference suggests that the laity should participate in the bodies mentioned in those referenced canons unless explicitly stated that only clerics can participate⁴⁸. Furthermore, there are other legal instruments that a bishop can make use of for this situation, for instance, public associations (c. 301 §3), religious institutes (c. 678 §1 and §3) and ecclesiastical offices that the diocesan bishop can himself confer (c. 157) for spiritual purposes (c. 145 §1). The diocesan bishop is the first person in the diocese responsible for catechetical initiatives. However, he is also to recognise the involvement of others by inviting them to participate and, thus, entrusting them with responsibilities, each according to their vocation.

3.3 The Ministry of Catechist

Under Pope Francis, the catechist's role was given a new light. In *motu proprio*, Pope Francis made the role of catechist a ministry. This change was made for several reasons and brought new insights and responsibilities for the catechist and the priests, mainly for the diocesan bishops and the episcopal conferences. Moreover, the competent congregation issued in the same year of the *motu proprio*, a letter to the episcopal conferences to elaborate further on the *motu proprio*, and it also issued the rite of institution, also called by the Latin name *Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum*, which explained how the rite should take place.

3.3.1 The Ministry of Catechist in *Antiquum Ministerium*

In May 2021, Pope Francis established the ministry of catechist in *motu proprio* through *Antiquum Ministerium*. This document quotes the first letter to the Corinthians, where it mentions various roles the members of the Church are called for: "...first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various tongues" (1 Cor 12:28). In chapter 12 of the same letter, Saint Paul uses the image of the Church being Christ's Mystical Body: the body is made up of many members, and each member has a role to play in building up the Church⁴⁹. Consequently, the members should work in harmony, and no member should feel superior, nor should any member reject the gifts of the other⁵⁰. Thus, the Christian community has several different ministries, as visible in early Christianity⁵¹.

Antiquum Ministerium quotes Saint Paul again, saying, "Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches" (Gal 6:6)⁵². *Antiquum Ministerium* states that Saint Paul shows the crucial necessity of the communion of life due to catechesis⁵³. The idea that the

⁴⁸ Cf. the canons on the Chapters of Canons, which explicitly mention solely clerics (cc. 503-510). The laity are mentioned in connection with the pastoral council (c. 512), the diocesan synod (c. 463), and cooperation with the *parochus* in the parish (cc. 519, 524, 528 §1, and 529 §2).

⁴⁹ *Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain*, The Didache Bible, Ignatius Bible Edition, Midwest Theological Forum, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, 1551.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Francis*, *Motu Proprio: Antiquum ministerium* (10 May 2021), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html (accessed on 18.10.2024), no. 2.

⁵² Ibid., 1.

⁵³ Ibid.

student becomes an active teacher is also found in the Jewish tradition of *lernen*⁵⁴. However, the apostle also seems to suggest that the teachers of the time, called catechists today, were paid for their work by the community⁵⁵. Moreover, catechumens seemed obliged to sustain their catechists by sharing their goods⁵⁶. During the time of the early Christians, there were three main types of evangelising roles: the apostles, the prophets and the teachers. While the role of a teacher seems the closest in the definition of the three mentioned roles to today's catechist, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between teachers and prophets. Some authors argue that teachers used to transmit the faith⁵⁷.

In contrast, the prophets' role was more related to encouraging, consoling and reinforcing the faith⁵⁸. These different roles are recognised by *Antiquum Ministerium*, mainly when it quotes the CIC/1983 that all members, according to their role, have the duty to assist in catechesis under the direction of the legitimate ecclesiastical authority (c. 774 §1)⁵⁹. Consequently, catechesis' prophetic element is visible in *Antiquum Ministerium*. Additionally, lay persons who feel called through their baptism to cooperate in catechesis are to be recognised (c. 225)⁶⁰. This recognition is to be without prejudice to the fact that the bishop is the primary catechist in his diocese and that the parents have a unique role in their children's Christian formation (c. 774 §2)⁶¹.

On several occasions, *Antiquum Ministerium* emphasises that the ministry of catechist is a 'secular' one, that is, belonging to the laity due to the experiences of their lives through familial and social connections in the secular world⁶². Consequently, the ministry of catechist should be 'lay' in the sense that this work should not be a 'clerical' experience. The ministry of catechist is merely defined as the teaching of doctrine and dogma. However, it should be a joyous experience for the catechumen through the catechist's formation and daily life experiences. One wonders whether the term 'lay' is used legally or theologically in this context. Alternatively, one also wonders whether the ministry of catechist should be exclusively for lay persons (i.e. non-cleric members) or whether every member of the Church is allowed into the ministry with the condition that catechesis should be 'lay' in nature. It will later be noted that this ministry, as portrayed by *Antiquum Ministerium*, is ideally reserved solely for laypersons.

Consequently, two dilemmas are raised here from a canonical perspective. First, the fact that the ministry of catechist is strictly for laypersons goes contrary to the spirit of the principle of equality in the Church (c. 208). Secondly, since all members of the Church are baptised, by extension, all members are primarily *Christifideles*, including clerics. Quoting *Lumen Gentium* 33, *Antiquum Ministerium* adds that "the laity can be called in different ways to more immediate cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy..."⁶³. Alternatively, one can argue that a possible reason why the ministry of catechists is not open for clerics is that their sacred ministry has a catechetical

54 Heilman, Samuel, Lernen, Davenen, and Identifying Orthodoxy, The Torah, at: <https://www.thetorah.com/article/lernen-davenen-and-identifying-orthodox>.

55 Pérez Navarro, José María, Algunos momentos importantes en la historia del ministerio del catequista, in: SINITE: Revista de Pedagogía Religiosa 189 (2022), 13-28, 15.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 48), no. 5.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., 6. Pope Francis refers to this ministry as a lay one, particularly by the fact that he refers to "men and women", ten times throughout the document. Cf. Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 48), nos. 2-6, 8, 9.

63 Ibid.

aspect which is different from that of a layperson. Consequently, this newly established ministry can be seen as a broadening of the catechetical and evangelisation activities of the Church.

Moreover, Pope Francis seems to encourage the allowance of lay persons in the Church's organisation concerning catechesis based on the right they inherit through baptism. This might mean that the ministry of catechist, and perhaps other 'non-sacred' ministries, might be seen as part of the hierarchy in the future. It is difficult to say since, at present, hierarchy is linked to the power of governance, and to have the power of governance according to the CIC/1983 means to be a cleric (c. 129 §1). The link between the lay apostolate and the hierarchy might change given these changes and others that Pope Francis has done throughout his papacy. Indeed, it is already slowly changing. Given that the Church's members are all baptised, yet they also exist within a hierarchy, the catechist's role can currently be viewed as a delegated function by the hierarchy to the laity. At the same time, it is also a vocation and a duty of the laity.

Lastly, *Antiquum Ministerium* states that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments⁶⁴ would publish the Rite of Initiation of this newly established ministry⁶⁵. It was published seven months later, in addition to a letter to the episcopal conferences. The scope of this study is not to focus on the liturgical rite but on the responsibility the letter has put on the episcopal conferences. Thus, the letter will be discussed next.

3.3.2 The Letter to the Episcopal Conferences by the Congregation

The letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments immediately references Pope Francis' interventions brought about with *Spiritus Domini* in January 2021⁶⁶ ⁶⁷ and with *Antiquum Ministerium*⁶⁸. The letter states, "The Holy Father's interventions orient reflection on the ministries towards the future while at the same time deepening the reflection already begun by St Paul VI..."⁶⁹. Consequently, the letter hints that these ministries, and not only that of catechist, will be a topic of discussion, both theologically and canonically, because the pope's interventions set the future path of the Church towards a more deepened reflection and, thus, lead to further discussion, particularly about lay participation in Church ministries. The letter is divided into three parts:

1. The Ministry of Catechist
2. Requirements
3. Celebration

⁶⁴ The name has changed since March 2022 to 'Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments'. Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium*, (19 March 2022) in: AAS 4 114 (2022) 375-457.

⁶⁵ *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 48), no. 8.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, (10 January 2021), in: AAS 2 113 (2021), 169-170, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210110_spiritus-domini.html.

⁶⁷ With *Spiritus Domini*, Pope Francis changed the wording of c. 230 §1 from *virii laici*, 'laymen' to *laici*, 'lay persons'. This canon now allows all laity, regardless of their gender to participate in the ministries of lector and acolyte.

⁶⁸ *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of Institution of Catechists, December 2021, *Bollettino Sala Stampa Della Santa Sede*, at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/12/13/211213f.html>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* This sentence is clearer in other languages. Taking the official Italian version of the letter, the equivalent wording is "Gli interventi del Santo Padre mentre approfondiscono la riflessione sui ministeri che san Paolo VI aveva avviato... la (Chiesa) orientano verso il futuro.", Cf. *Congregation for Divine Worship*, Letter to the Presidents (note 65).

The first part reiterates some aspects *Antiquum Ministerium* mentions (e.g. "... this ministry is a lay ministry based on the common baptismal state and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism..."⁷⁰). However, it also gives further clarification on other issues. For instance, it mentions that through the rite of institution and the decree of the episcopal conference, suitable persons with the necessary qualifications may be admitted to this ministry⁷¹; it mentions catechists' co-responsibility in collaboration with the ordained priests and their guidance; it understands the different needs of different communities, thus the many forms of catechesis possible within this ministry; it distinguishes two types of catechists: those specifically involved in the task of catechesis and those participating in the different forms of the apostolate. Moreover, the first part explains who should not be admitted to this ministry. There are mainly four types of individuals:

1. those who have already started into the holy orders;
2. men and women religious unless they lead a parish community or coordinate activities related to catechesis;
3. those who have the exclusive function for the members of an ecclesial movement;
4. those who teach the Catholic religion in schools unless they are already involved in catechesis⁷².

Consequently, the letter identifies the catechist ministry as a lay ministry, specifically for lay persons qualified and chosen by the episcopal conference⁷³. The distinction between the ministry of catechist and an ecclesiastical office with catechetical responsibilities needs to be explored canonically because this distinction may impact several aspects (e.g. on the tasks, remuneration, governance, to name a few). It is up to the same conference to provide training, set a minimum qualification, and create a description of the catechist's ministry, role and forms⁷⁴. The most emphasis in part one of the letter remains on the collaboration between the laity and the ordained, which is mentioned again towards the end of the section⁷⁵.

Parts two and three of the letter are relatively short. The second part speaks on the requirements of the ministry. Primarily, "it is the task of the diocesan bishop to discern the call to the ministry" by analysing the lay persons' abilities and considering the community's needs⁷⁶. Those lay persons who have received the Christian initiation sacraments and have freely requested in writing (and followed with a signature) to the diocesan bishop for admittance to the ministry can be accepted as candidates⁷⁷. The last part of the requirements section quotes *Antiquum Ministerium* paragraph 8, which lists other 'fitting' requirements. These are that candidates for the ministry of catechist should be:

- of deep faith and maturity;

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 3-6.

⁷² Ibid., 8.

⁷³ One wonders whether catechesis here refers to that which is imparted outside of the liturgy. It must be remembered that the homily, which is a form of catechesis, pertains to the presiding priest (c. 767 §1).

⁷⁴ *Congregation for Divine Worship*, Letter to the Presidents (note 65), 13.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

- active participants in the Christian community;
- skilled in welcoming other people;
- generous and live a fraternal communion type of life;
- suitably formed biblically, theologically, pastorally and pedagogically;
- a bit experienced in catechesis;
- faithful co-workers with clerics;
- ready to perform their ministry wherever necessary;
- impelled by genuine apostolic enthusiasm⁷⁸.

Notably, some of these requirements are personal to each catechist. In contrast, others are more concerned with the collaborative skill of the catechist vis-à-vis clerics, pupils, and parents. The last part of the letter, on the celebration, explains that the diocesan bishop or a delegated priest confers the ministry of catechist⁷⁹. The ministry is conferred through the liturgical rite *De Institutione Catechistarum*⁸⁰. It can be conferred during a Eucharistic celebration or a celebration of the Word of God⁸¹. An exhortation adapted by the episcopal conferences is presented after the liturgy of the Word; a prayer, a blessing and the handing over of a crucifix take place afterwards⁸².

The letter refers to three canons. Firstly, it reminds the episcopal conferences that the *editio typica*, which they can adapt according to the programmes which will reflect the needs of their community, must obtain the *confirmatio* or *recognitio* from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (c. 838 §§2-3)⁸³. As already noted, the creation of the ministry of catechist brought a sense of stability with it. This stability is further explained through the citation of the CIC/1983,

"Lay persons who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the Conference of Bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church" (c. 230 §1).

One point should be raised here regarding the last sentence of c. 230 §1. Although being admitted to the ministry of catechist does not *ipso facto* create a right for remuneration, it would be prudent to consider remuneration in particular cases. Since a catechist is a layperson, there is a higher probability that the catechist has a family to maintain. While this ministry, like the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Cf. *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, Ritus De Institutione Catechistarum (13 December 2021), Bollettino Sala Stampa Della Santa Sede, at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/12/13/0845/01772.html>.

⁸¹ *Congregation for Divine Worship*, Letter to the Presidents (note 65), 17.

⁸² Ibid., 18.

⁸³ These two paragraphs of c. 838 were amended by the *motu proprio Magnum Principium* to ensure that any adaptations any material issued by the episcopal conferences related to the sacred liturgy goes through the competent dicastery prior to be put to use. Cf. *Francis*, Motu Proprio: Magnum Principium (03 September 2017), in: AAS 109 (2017) 967-970, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20170903_magnum-principium.html.

presbyterate or the diaconate, is a vocation, it also deserves some monetary recognition. However, a distinction should be made between a ministry and an ecclesiastical office. A ministry has more to do with the volunteering aspect. At the same time, an ecclesiastical office means that remuneration becomes a right, not only ecclesiastically but also civilly under labour law (c. 231). The time the individuals dedicate to their ministry as catechists is deprived time from the family or a part-time job. Remuneration should be considered even more so if the lay persons dedicate many hours weekly to their ministry. This task requires preparation at home, resources and time to catechise; moreover, remuneration helps keep the motivation high.

Thus, a diocesan bishop has two options: 1) to admit lay persons to the ministry of catechist and 2) to appoint lay persons to ecclesiastical offices with catechetical responsibilities. The decision on when to choose which option can vary due to several reasons. For instance, a diocesan bishop can confer an ecclesiastical office if a person is willing to work full-time. Consequently, the ministry can be conferred to those willing to participate in parish catechesis, yet their time is limited. The decision can also be based on the nature of the duties of the office or ministry, which can vary from one diocese to the other. Moreover, the diocesan bishop must consider a catechist's personal requirements. Everyone who works with ecclesiastical entities has these requirements in an ideal world. However, a catechist must possess them, given the nature of the role.

The third canon mentioned in the letter concerns the laity's participation under the moderation of priests. The letter seems to suggest that the catechist's role is varied not only by baptism but also when it comes to assisting the Church in response to situations where there is a lack of priests. The below canon is quoted in the letter,

"If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care" (c. 517 §2).

Thus, the letter reminds the bishops that lay participation should be considered when there is a lack of priests as long as a priest is appointed with the same powers as a *parochus* to direct them⁸⁴. The first example that comes to mind here is a committee or a council of catechists or mixed ministries, including lectors and acolytes being directed by a *parochus* or his equivalent to direct and organise a parish or a group of parishes and activities related to catechesis and other pastoral works. A second option can be collaborative leadership with other ministers working together on different catechesis aspects. Consequently, the ministry of catechist has been given a new perspective. It still serves its purpose to catechise, but as a stable ministry, it can be involved in other areas of Church life and organisation. Being a lay ministry, it has also increased the opportunity for lay persons to participate according to each one's vocation in the life of the Church, which was instilled in each member through baptism.

⁸⁴ Lay participation cannot always replace a cleric, even in situations where there is lack of clerics (e.g. c. 965 on the sacrament of penance). Likewise, there are instances where clerics cannot replace the laity (e.g. c. 225 §2 on lay apostolate, and c. 226 on marital vocation). However, in the context of c. 517 §2, lay participation is an option, as a supplementary assistance, so long as a cleric coordinates the laity involved.

These opportunities are still unfolding, given that the establishment of the ministry is relatively recent. Additionally, such opportunities may vary from one particular church to another, depending on the individual needs and customs of each one. However, some ideas may be common to all particular churches (e.g. explaining the Gospel before Mass to mentally and spiritually prepare the congregation for the day's Mass readings). The establishment of the ministry of catechist created a 'new' organisational structure in the catechist's role. The catechist's role can now be divided into three main branches: the practical, the spiritual and the organisational. The practical branch is what is understood as the traditional role of the catechist (i.e. catechising the catechumens and children inside a parish building). The spiritual aspect has more to do with the catechist leading the catechumens (and children) to Mass, the sacraments and the liturgy in general (e.g. accompanying the catechumens during the sacrament conferral and taking the catechumens to the church building outside of Mass hours to provoke the catechumens to question and to experience God's presence). Thirdly, the organisational aspect concerns ecclesiastical offices with catechetical duties (e.g., creating catechetical resources, organising catechetical outings and other catechesis-related activities).

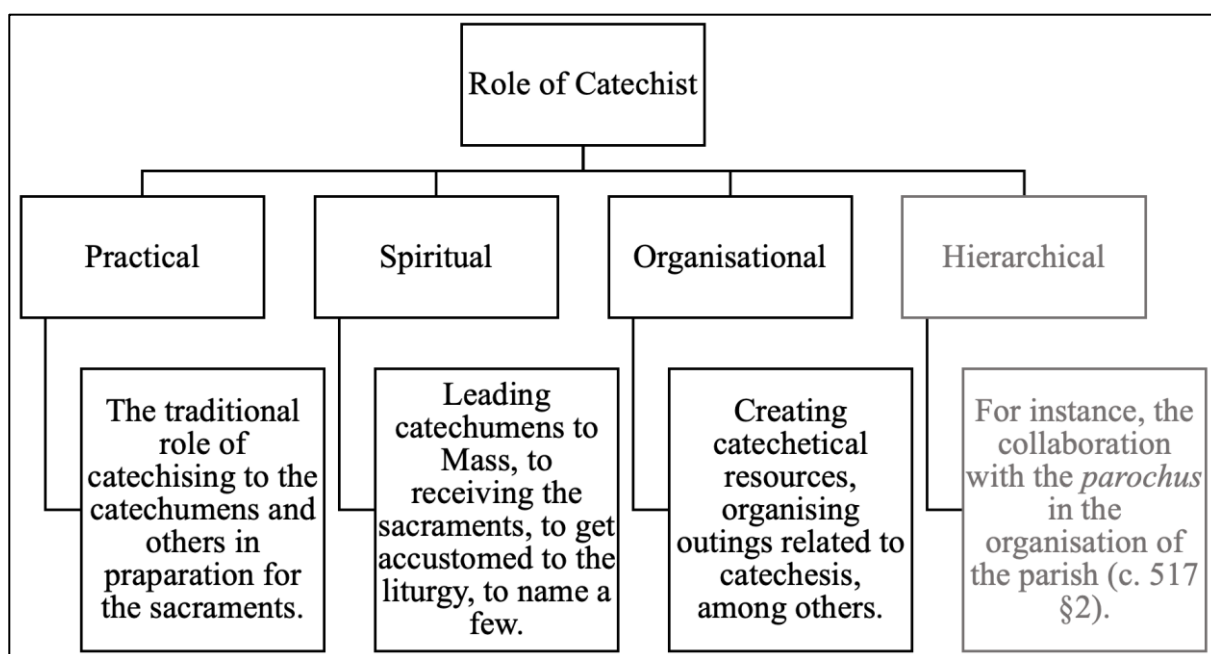


Figure 1: The Roles of the Catechist

The author foresees a fourth branch: the hierarchical one. The citation in *Antiquum Ministerium*, which seems to suggest that catechists can assist in situations where this is a lack of priests (c. 517 §2), gives the impression that the legislator is somewhat allowing the particular churches to be innovative in this area. For instance, the catechists may assist during Mass (e.g. lectors, acolytes, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and music ministers). Additionally, the catechist can be delegated by the *parochus* to attend meetings and other parochial events in his name. Catechists and lay persons can also administer some of the sacraments themselves (e.g. baptism⁸⁵ and, in exceptional cases, marriages⁸⁶). These are a few examples that can be explored further. These roles ought to be permitted based on the formation received by the catechists to

⁸⁵ Cf. c. 861 §2

⁸⁶ Cf. c. 1112 §§1-2.

guarantee professionalism and adherence to the magisterium. However, the establishment of this ministry brings a certain level of reassurance to the priests and the *parochi*, knowing that since a layperson is a catechist, they can be trusted to perform certain roles because they are 'certified' and approved by the Conference of Bishops. This reassurance is the stability, the author believes, that *Antiquum Ministerium* speaks about.

Before approaching the end of this section, it is prudent to briefly mention that the Dicastery for Evangelisation is competent for catechesis⁸⁷. This dicastery is now the first of all dicasteries, as is evident in the index of *Praedicate Evangelium*. Its role is to assist the particular Churches in their mission to catechise⁸⁸. The existence of this dicastery is to ensure that catechesis is adequately imparted⁸⁹. Moreover, it has competence in granting the *confirmatio* of the Apostolic See not only for catechisms but also for other catechesis-related texts; this *confirmatio* needs the consent of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith⁹⁰. Consequently, the approval of any material and resources related to catechesis falls under the competence of this dicastery. In contrast, the norms of the episcopal conferences related to the ministry of catechist fall under the competence of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Next, the two chosen particular churches will be compared and contrasted to get a clearer picture of what happens in the particular churches in the domain of catechesis and how they apply these new updates.

4 Contemporary Catechesis: *Quo Vadis?*

In this part of the article, the author prepared a set of questions that were asked during an interview with two contacts from two separate dioceses who work in catechesis. The two chosen dioceses are the Diocese of Malta and the Diocese of Mechelen-Brussels. The answers to the two dioceses will be extracted below to draw the distinctions between the two chosen dioceses. The ultimate scope is not to achieve a representative result but to gain deeper insight into the relationship between canon law and catechesis at a micro level. After presenting the two dioceses separately, the author will draw her conclusions and offer her canonical suggestions at the end of the article.

4.1 The Diocese of Malta

The contact for Malta was a married laywoman. Her highest qualification is a Doctorate in Sacred Theology, and her function with the Diocese of Malta is 'Episcopal Delegate⁹¹ for Evangelisation'. Catechesis in the Diocese of Malta is organised in various ways. In canonical language, they can be called ecclesiastical offices through a diocesan initiative⁹² or associations (c. 298). Some diocesan ecclesiastical offices related to catechesis include:

⁸⁷ *Francis*, *Praedicate Evangelium* (note 61), art. 58 §1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, art. 58 §2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Canonically speaking, the function is that of an office not of a delegation. Consequently, the author is of the opinion that the word 'Delegate' should be avoided, and instead, the role could be named for instance 'Episcopal Officer' or 'Episcopal Director'.

⁹² The diocesan bishop can erect ecclesiastical offices to assist him in fulfilling his pastoral function as bishop, he is also competent to amend or suppress them as he sees necessary unless prohibited by law (Cf. cc. 148 and 157).

- **Lifelong Catechesis:** encompasses materials for sacramental preparation for children aged between six and twelve years old – it intends to expand to ages between five and sixteen years old; a sub-group focuses on providing materials for adult formation;
- **Christian Initiation for Adults:** responsible for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and prepares individuals ages twelve years old and over for the sacrament of confirmation;
- **Malta Catholic Youth Network (MCYN):** responsible for offering catechetical material to youth aged between thirteen and thirty-five years old.

Associations that also offer catechesis include but are not limited to:

- **Cana Movement:** responsible for marriage preparation courses;
- **BELONG:** responsible for marriage preparation courses;
- **Dar tal-Providenza:** offers catechetical instruction to adults with special needs;
- **The Society for Christian Doctrine – M.U.S.E.U.M.:** responsible for catechesis in parishes (together with other catechists);
- Other lay movements, such as the **Catholic Action**⁹³ and the **Neo-Catechumenal Way**⁹⁴, are also international.

Catechesis is mainly delivered in the Maltese language. However, there has been an increasing need for catechesis in English; thus, some centres cater for this need. There is a higher demand for catechesis in English for RCIA; however, the demand for the Maltese language is also increasing. Catechesis in other languages is most likely offered. However, there is uncertainty as to who delivers it. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, catechesis started to be delivered online. However, things are now back to normal (i.e. face-to-face catechesis). There is still online catechesis related to the sacrament of confirmation for adults. The delivery choices are often based on what is convenient, mainly for the parents or the catechumens, given their committed schedules. Most of the resources are built by the individuals within the ecclesiastical offices or associations. Catechesis mainly occurs in the catechetical centres; however, some catechesis for children is also imparted in independent schools⁹⁵. On the other hand, catechesis related to youth ministry and sometimes also by the Society of Christian Doctrine can be delivered outdoors.

The catechists are not all lay persons. Priests and religious deliver catechesis to different categories. Concerning the requirements to become a catechist, the diocese attempts to provide formation so that, eventually, a specific mandate to catechise is issued. Training takes place at the Pastoral Formation Institute and other types of training. However, as a movement, the Society of Christian Doctrine has its formation programme for its members. The function of the catechist is based on voluntary commitment, so it is not a paid function. Most catechists are parish volunteers and choose to catechise in their free time. Thus, the catechist is solely

⁹³ A reference to the Catholic Action can also be found in *Vatican Council II*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November 1965), in: AAS 58 (1966) 20, 837-864.

⁹⁴ Their statutes were approved in 2002. Cf. *John Paul II*, Decree of the Pontifical Council for the Laity: Approval of the Statutes of Neocatechumenal Way 'Ad Experimentum', at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_pc_laity_doc_20020701_cammino-neocatecumenale_en.html.

⁹⁵ In Malta, these are schools with a 'Catholic' ethos which are not recognised as Catholic Schools.

connected with the role of imparting catechesis. Ultimately, the *parochus* is responsible for permitting individuals to impart catechesis. Finding catechists is difficult because people nowadays have busy schedules. Parish priests find it challenging to find catechists for children's catechesis. Additionally, some lay movements note that no new (and young) members are joining. Thus, most members are seniors, with very few people to take their place.

When asked whether parents today need help to catechise their children before they come of age to start attending catechesis in the diocese, the respondent for Malta stated that there is an initiative to target families through an online platform⁹⁶. Creating resources to cater to every special need is complex, and there is a lack of trained staff and volunteers⁹⁷. It is harder to build resources for adults, to adapt them and to make these resources known. It is somewhat more challenging to train catechists in this regard. Some lay movements, however, manage to do this.

The author believes the respondent's answer to the question raised three crucial issues. The first issue relates to the historical impact of the Church in Malta⁹⁸, which has inevitably intertwined with the current context:

"Malta has become very digital; it is now multicultural but with no integration; more Maltese are anti-Catholic (because of our history), and the challenge is to become a 'healthy' secular without too much backlash from the 'traditionalists' or 'conservatives'"⁹⁹.

The second issue relates to the particular Church's difficulty adapting catechesis to the contemporary local context because "...the hardest challenge is the reinculturation of the Gospel in these rapidly shifting times. How to lead change – rather than let change drag you where it wills – is a huge challenge"¹⁰⁰. Catechesis can be the means to the adaptation of the gospel inculturation according to the needs of the contemporary communities in the particular churches; consequently, not only does it need to be inculturated, but it also needs to be inculturating – ontologically (i.e. catechesis about inculturation), objectively (i.e. inculturation in catechesis) and subjectively (i.e. catechesis for inculturation)¹⁰¹.

4.2 The Diocese of Mechelen-Brussels

The Diocese of Mechelen-Brussels is organised into vicariates to cater for the area's large population and dominant language. The author communicated with the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen, where Dutch is the primary working language. The vicariate is divided into pastoral 'domains' (*domeinen*), one of which is the *Domein Catechese*, which is this study's

⁹⁶ The initiative started as a result of the pandemic. The need to also catechise to parents in the process was felt, thus, resources started to be created to cater for the children in a way that the parents can assist their children as part of the learning process. Cf. *L-Arċidjoċesi ta' Malta*, beKIDS, homepage, at: <https://bekids.mt/>.

⁹⁷ BeKids was aimed at creating 'catechesis in images' to cater for as many special needs as possible. The idea was to include everyone in the room while no child feels inferior or left out. The author was involved in this part of the process since the start of project. Cf. *L-Arċidjoċesi ta' Malta*, Catechesis in Images, beKIDS, at: <https://bekids.mt/catechesis-in-images/>.

⁹⁸ In the early 1960s, an interdict was imposed in Malta. Unfortunately, this study cannot go into detail about this major historical event; this event deserves a canonical-pastoral study of its own. However, it must be said that it had a draconian impact on the Maltese people as a nation which ultimately, according to the author's view, created a huge animosity towards the Catholic Church as a whole up until this very day. Undoubtedly, this reality has had and continues to have repercussions on the delivery and reception of catechesis. For further reading, *D'Amato, Anton*, Healing a Turbulent Past: Reconciling Church and Politics in Malta, 2019, at: https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/53299/4/19LSTH001%20D_Amato%20Anton.pdf.

⁹⁹ Cf. Interview with Maltese Representative, Q.31.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Anthony, Francis Vincent*, Inculturazione e catechesi, in: *Itinerarium* 12 (2004), 157, 145-170.

area of interest. The contact person for the vicariate is also a married laywoman. She is a qualified primary school teacher. She is certified in theology, a course organised by the diocese. Her role in the vicariate is coordinating any project or activity related to catechesis (e.g. providing resources and assisting priests who ask for help related to catechesis, to name a few).

There is catechesis for different categories of individuals; consequently, it is delivered by different persons. For instance, catechesis in preparation for the First Holy Communion and Confirmation is mainly imparted by lay persons. Conversely, catechesis related to baptism and marriage are mainly imparted by priests. There is also the Marriage Encounter Movement, which volunteers run regarding marriage preparation. However, it originated through the initiatives of priests in the 1960s¹⁰². In merger parishes, one of the merging parishes is usually chosen for catechesis. Especially when they come from different backgrounds, communities question the merger and find it difficult to integrate. Consequently, catechesis tends to be challenging to adapt based on the new reality of mergers. The vicariate meets with priests at times to offer assistance. In contrast, while some priests appreciate this initiative, others prefer to work independently.

In the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen, catechesis is usually organised as follows:

- **Communion:** conferred at the age of eight years old; catechesis is delivered in a span of five to nine months (i.e. September – January/April) in a total of around ten meetings;
- **Confirmation:** conferred at the age of twelve years old; catechesis is delivered in nine months (i.e. September – Easter and/or Pentecost), once a month (or every three weeks); The Godly Play Approach sometimes is organised separately voluntarily¹⁰³.
- **RCIA:** catechesis is imparted within the parishes in one or two years. Given the different backgrounds of the recipients, individual catechetical programmes are usually formulated. Multiple persons usually support the catechumens to instil the sense of a community. The bishop meets the catechumens and catechises them for around one hour. The local priests, provided with the necessary faculty by the bishop, confer the initiation sacraments.

As already hinted above, catechesis is delivered in Dutch. For adults, it is mainly delivered in Dutch, followed by English, for which there is the highest demand. French and Spanish are also possible. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, catechesis was only delivered online. It has now returned to being delivered in person. However, some parishes opt for a mixed type of delivery. During the pandemic, there was no option but to deliver catechesis online. However, it was realised that opting for a mixed delivery is convenient because children can be exposed to various resources and platforms that keep them engaged and make the catechetical process fun. Aside from the 'structural' catechesis, some parishes communicate with the parishioners via email (e.g. sending them an inspiring activity to do as a family, such as biblical reflections).

¹⁰² Cf. *Encounter Vlaanderen, Over Ons*, at: <https://www.encountervlaanderen.be/over-ons>.

¹⁰³ This method originated in America and has been adopted by several religions and Christian churches. This approach encourages spiritual creativity and imagination. Cf. *Godly Play Foundation, Our Founder*, at: <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/the-foundation/our-founder>.

Many resources have been developed. Some resources (and activities) are found on the vicariate's website¹⁰⁴, and other material is handed out as hard copies (e.g. catechetical books). Nowadays, resources are no longer developed by the vicariate but are found online. Moreover, most of the catechesis takes place in the parishes. At school, religious education is taught; however, after school hours, catechesis sometimes takes place in schools¹⁰⁵. While catechesis usually takes the form of a 'lesson' in a fixed place like the parish, there are 'short pilgrimages' for families organised by the vicariate at times. The catechist usually organises the activity, and the vicariate provides the material. The family carries out the activity (e.g. having several stops where the family finds activities such as reflective questions, lighting a candle, and saying a prayer together, to name a few).

Regarding persons with special needs, special schools also prepare children for the sacraments. At times, priests visit these schools. However, for such schools, particular qualifications are mandatory. Thus, the vicariate does not expect the catechists, who are volunteers, to attend such formation. Catering for children or adults with special needs is not an easy task. Although there are no specific programmes for non-baptised children whose parents are lapsed Catholics, the respondent pointed out in reality,

"Children are influenced by their peers and can get interested in being 'friends with Jesus'. We've seen this happen. Most parishes do extra catechesis for these children to prepare them for baptism. Sometimes the other children celebrate with these children (to get a sense of the community)"¹⁰⁶.

Catechists are mostly lay persons, but not all of them are. Some priests are very attached to [catechesis]¹⁰⁷. There are various scenarios: permanent deacons deliver catechesis at times. Sometimes, it is the parents themselves that ask to become catechists. There are occasions when the local priests allow someone to become a catechist. The ministry of catechist is not established. Anyone can become a catechist without being designated as a minister, and there are no formation requirements. Furthermore, there are no formation programmes in place for catechists. The vicariate offers basic formation for which attendance remains voluntary.

Additionally, there is a formation institute, the *Hoger Instituut voor Godsdienstwetenschappen*, which offers various formation types, not just for catechists. Should a catechetical issue arise in a particular parish, it is usually tackled individually. It is not permissible to keep specific data due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). However, the government has suggested presenting proof of the good conduct of the catechists, given that they work with children. This list was helpful in understanding who is catechising, but the vicariate was not allowed to keep the list, nonetheless. Everything occurs voluntarily, so while being a catechist is not an established ministry, the role of the catechist as such is to catechise. However, the same person can help voluntarily in other areas of the Church.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Vicariaat Vlaams-Brabant en Mechelen*, Pastoraal domein Catechese, at: <https://www.kerknet.be/vicariaat-vlaams-brabant-en-mechelen/informatie/catechese-en-gemeenschap>.

¹⁰⁵ It is crucial to point out that although an overlapping might exist, there is a significant difference between catechesis and religious education. For further reading on this topic, Cf. *Sultana, Carl-Mario*, Catechesis and Catholic Religious Education. Distinct Nonetheless Complementary, in: *Verbum Vitae* 37 (2020) 367-371.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Interview with the respondent for the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen, Q.19.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Interview with Malta's representative, Q.20.

When asked about contemporary concerns, the respondent answered that concerning parents, there is usually contact with the priests, the sacraments in general and catechesis around the time of the children's baptism and communion. In between the two sacraments, there is little to no contact. It has been noted that there has been higher demand from parents inquiring about an ideal Bible to buy and catechetical material for children. Another concern is the difficulty in finding catechists. In addition, it is not easy to find parents willing to help in the area: parents think they do not know enough about catechesis. They know their faith but were never taught how to deliver it to others. Consequently, some parents do not even try to catechise. On rare occasions, parents ask to catechise (i.e. to become catechists). A third difficulty is in adapting material for catechumens with special needs. They are catered for in special schools, but catering for a particular material is challenging as a vicariate. When asked about the challenge of adapting resources for adults, the respondent stated that adults are somewhat tackled differently: family weekends are organised, youth camps are held, and several programmes are scheduled for World Youth Day every year, to name a few. All the information is also available on the vicariate's website¹⁰⁸.

Lastly, when asked whether she thinks more precise guidelines from the Apostolic See should be issued to assist dioceses better in catechesis, the respondent replied that it is a matter of inspiring individuals to catechise. She mentioned that she finds the International Congress for Catechists extremely fruitful because it allows catechists to speak with others and learn from them. "I learned that you are not alone with your problems. They are not the same problems, but they are yet very similar. The learning process there is very inspirational"¹⁰⁹. Instead of guidelines, she finds Apostolic Letters like *Desiderio Desideravi* more inspirational. Although she finds the organisation of catechesis chaotic, she tries to inspire those involved to change their ways positively, which is a challenging task. These people are not only lay persons but also include priests who are used to doing things in a certain way and are somewhat resistant to change, "I am not happy about the chaos, but I am happy that people work in good faith. It is sometimes what their communities have known for generations, and they are happy about it. And if they are happy about it, we are also happy"¹¹⁰.

5 Author's Comments and Suggestions

This part of the article will attempt to answer the two questions previously posed by the author:

1. Are universal law and all papal documents related to catechesis being adhered to?
2. Is canon law being used to organise catechesis?

The short answer is 'no' for both. Before going into the comparison details and the canonical suggestions based on these two questions, it is worth noting some limitations that should be considered in such comparisons. These limitations may shed light on possible future studies, qualitative and quantitative.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Vicariaat Vlaams-Brabant en Mechelen*, Graag Samen, at: <https://www.kerknet.be/organisatie/graag-samen>. There are other initiatives for the youth where dioceses come together to organise events, Cf. *Vicariaat Vlaams-Brabant en Mechelen*, IJD, at: <https://www.kerknet.be/organisatie/ijd>.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Interview with the respondent for the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen, Q.30.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Ibid.

5.1 Evident Limitations

Firstly, the sample size is relatively small. As previously stated, the study is qualitative, which is interested in understanding the current situation of catechesis in a particular church and how long it takes for the local church to apply the instructions of the Apostolic See. The reason for choosing two dioceses is to comprehend whether some issues (e.g. the delay in applying the instructions, the lack of uniformity in the organisation of catechesis, to name a few) could be an aspect that affects a particular church directly, or whether the historical, cultural and demographic dimensions play a role – or perhaps both.

Secondly, the author spoke with one respondent from each diocese. These interviews gave the author a clear insight into the current situation of both particular churches, particularly on whether canon law is utilised for the organisation of catechesis and whether the law is being adhered to. These interviews were sufficient for this research. However, discussing with other individuals (e.g. the catechists, the bishops themselves, the parish priests, the parents, the catechumens, to name a few) will help provide more profound understanding of others' perspectives. Gaining insight into a larger group of people in a given situation will surely be more fruitful and gives a more accurate picture of things. After all, the catechesis' recipient is the one receiving it, the catechumen. Consequently, their insight would surely have a lot to offer.

Thirdly, both respondents have a background other than canon law. Consequently, the author tried to adapt the questions from a pastoral perspective. Yet, the challenge was to sift the canonical essence of the answers. The author believes that the lack of awareness of canon law is one of the significant issues in the Catholic Church. On the one hand, there is the pastoral dimension, and on the other, there is canon law¹¹¹ (which should be seen as an assisting tool, not a hindrance); however, there is rarely a link between the two. As a result, dioceses have persons leading in the Church who are hardly aware of the juridic tools available. Moreover, through the interviews, the author got the sense that when lay persons are being put in high ecclesiastical offices to lead, they receive much resistance from others, especially clerics. This reality ought to be addressed with urgency.

5.2 Canonical Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommended Changes in the 1983 Code of Canon Law

Book II of the CIC/1983 states that every member has a right to the sacraments (c. 213). Given that catechesis is one of the main pillars which the existence of the Church rests upon, the author suggests that another paragraph is added to c. 213, which includes the right of the catechumen and all the members of the Church concerning catechesis. Catechesis is an ongoing formation (i.e. mystagogical¹¹²); it is a process, a journey. The imparting of catechesis is also a grave duty (c. 773) and ancient¹¹³, as already seen. Consequently, the author believes that catechesis is a right that needs to be explicitly protected by canon law.

¹¹¹ It would also be interesting to analyse what the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches of 1990 says about catechesis and compare it with the CIC/1983. It was not possible to explore this perspective since it would go beyond the scope of this study. However, such a comparison would be an interesting complementarity to this study.

¹¹² *Francis*, *Evangelii Gaudium* (note 22), no. 166.

¹¹³ *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 48), no. 1.

In both particular churches analysed in this article, an ecclesiastical office is clearly in charge of the established catechesis (c. 775 §3). The issues start arising in the context of the organisation of catechesis. Both respondents seemed innovative and enthusiastic about their work. Yet, both seemed to have their hands tied, especially when their ideas were resisted by others involved. The CIC/1983 clarifies that catechesis is a proper and serious duty 'especially' for the pastors of souls (cc. 528 and 773). As previously noted, "pastors of souls" seems to include all those involved in catechesis. Yet, it remains unclear whether it refers specifically to the bishops and *parochi* (and the religious) or whether it should be extended to the laity. The laity, however, shares in Christ's *tria munera* by virtue of baptism (c. 204). Thus, they are responsible for imparting their faith – under legitimate supervision (c. 774 §1) – and parents are obliged to teach their faith to their children (c. 774 §2). Therefore, one would assume that "pastors of souls" refers to all the baptised, to all the members of the Church.

Moreover, the *parochus*, who is responsible for catechesis in his parish, is to seek the help of others, whether clerics, religious or lay (c. 776). As noted, with *Antiquum Ministerium*, it is evident that in the actual imparting of catechesis, Pope Francis has instructed that catechists must only be lay persons because the ministry should remain lay. Consequently, c. 776 needs to be reformulated. While the author suggests that c. 776 should not be narrowed down strictly to lay persons, it should prioritise lay people¹¹⁴. This argument is because in cases where there are no suitable lay persons to catechise, c. 776 would not forbid others to catechise.

The author is aware that changing a mentality takes time. However, the basis remains the *salus animarum* (c. 1752). The salvation of souls is the Church's mission. All members involved (clerics, religious and lay) must collaborate to accomplish this mission. To an extent, canon law caters for collaboration as it puts the bishop as the overseer (e.g. c. 780 vis-à-vis the formation of catechists) and the *parochus* as the person responsible in the parish – who seeks the aid of others. The author believes that the CIC/1983 should present catechesis as a collaboration instead of simply who is responsible for what, especially since there is often overlapping (e.g. parents are responsible for their children's faith, but so is the *parochus*). Ideally, parish priests regard the other members of the Church as being there to help and not to replace them. On the other hand, the other clerics, religious and laity, should remember that their mission is to assist the *parochus* in building and sustaining the Church and not to start making individual decisions without consulting with the *parochus*¹¹⁵.

114 In Malta, the lay movement Society of Christian Doctrine has a strong foundation in the delivery of catechesis. While the author finds this initiative commendable, she advises caution since the same lay movement also promotes celibacy. Consequently, married laity for instance, are excluded from imparting catechesis in places where the Society of Christian Doctrine is established. Alternatively, a separate lay movement could be established (i.e. either including all those excluded by the Society of Christian Doctrine or including everyone). Known for their sound knowledge and experience in catechesis, the Society of Christian Doctrine could perhaps offer its own training courses to all those involved, and this can take place in the Pastoral Formation Institute established by the diocese. Notably, these suggestions depend on the statutes of each entity. For further information on the Society of Christian Doctrine, Cf. *Society of Christian Doctrine, Who We Are, Society of Christian Doctrine*, at: <https://www.sdcmuseum.org/Page.aspx?menu=1&pv=lzn29VzbHV0=>.

115 Ordained and non-ordained ministries both have a place in the Church, and the Church recognises that together they both have a lot to offer. Cf. *Ambrose, Merlin Rengith, Stable Lay Ministry of Catechist. Intent and Impact of the Apostolic Letter Antiquum Ministerium*, NomoK@non 2023, at: DOI 10.5282/nomokanon/250, 11.

5.2.2 Collaboration as a Legal Tool

Collaboration is not easily achieved, but it can be promoted and exercised among responsible adults¹¹⁶. Firstly, all those involved in catechesis should be open for ongoing formation. No person is ever knowledgeable enough. Thus, formation is crucial. In this context, the author finds it essential to point out that formation should go hand in hand with education¹¹⁷. The two terms should not be used interchangeably: formation means always becoming a better catechist, a better *parochus*, a better parent, a better catechumen; education is learning about the entire subject holistically and learning to ask the right questions to receive a correspondingly fulfilling answer. Consequently, it is not enough to have formation programmes for catechists without truly guiding them to be critical and innovative. There are currently no specifications on the catechists' formation in the law; it is up to the bishops' discretion. Consequently, the bishops need the right tools to implement such formation programmes¹¹⁸. For instance, an ecclesiastical office can care solely for catechist issues, separate from those in charge of catechesis. This office can also be part of the office mentioned in c. 775 §3. The idea is to have a separate office or sub-office¹¹⁹ focusing solely on the catechists. Below, the author provides an example of how a catechetical office can be organised:

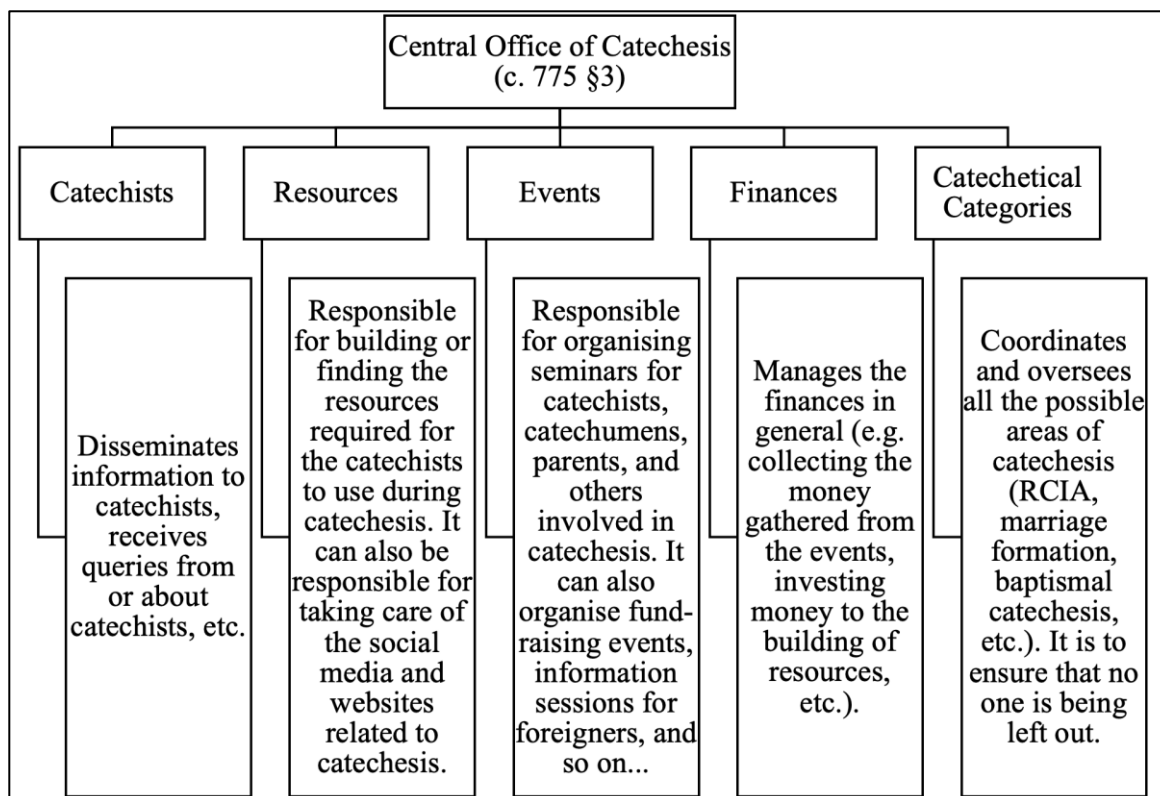


Figure 2: An Example Model of the Organisation of a Catechesis Office

¹¹⁶ As noted previously, collaboration among lay persons and clerics is being encouraged by the Apostolic See. Cf. paragraphs 4, 6 and 12 of *Congregation for Divine Worship*, Letter to the Presidents (note 65).

¹¹⁷ Pope Francis' insistence on the education of those responsible for catechesis was already noted earlier in the study (Cf. *Francis*, *Evangelii Gaudium* (note 22), no. 163).

¹¹⁸ *Francis*, *Antiquum Ministerium* (note 48), no. 9.

¹¹⁹ The author recommends a fourth paragraph to this canon (c. 775 §4) which would mention these sub-offices as examples. Such a paragraph can be inspirational for bishops in the organisation process of catechesis (and for other areas).

While each sub-office has its roles and duties, the central office should oversee whether any of these sub-offices need assistance. The main office should also monitor tasks to ensure they are properly carried out within a reasonable time frame. Moreover, the central office ought to ensure that the organisation runs smoothly and that collaboration between the sub-offices is succeeding. Consequently, the author has two suggestions here: first, the help of a canon lawyer makes the entire process easier since their legal suggestions ensure conformity with canon law and consequently, the ecclesiastical officers are aware of all the canonical tools available to them (or at least, they know they can refer to the canon lawyer for assistance)¹²⁰. Second, the central office should hold meetings among the sub-offices¹²¹ to familiarise all involved with each other's ideas and challenges.

For instance, those in charge of the resources must understand whom to build or find resources for. Thus, they must collaborate with those in charge of the catechetical categories. Those creating the events must collaborate with those responsible for finances to understand the financial limitations. They also need to discuss with those in charge of the catechists to understand, for instance, what topics the catechists would like to explore in the seminars. Moreover, the central office must collaborate with the parishes and their *parochi*. Ideally, there is a representative for parish priests (e.g. who is also a member of the Presbyteral Council, c. 495) who is either part of the central office team or who is at least invited for the collaboration meetings. The *parochus* has the duty and the right to know and have a say in anything related to catechesis¹²². In addition, outside ideas should always be welcomed despite this structure (e.g. resources from a primary school layperson). It would then be up to the resources team to format them according to the agreed rubric and template of the particular church). The ultimate scope is to have a centralised office with a uniform structure, from which anything related to catechesis is issued while remaining open for other outer ideas and involvement¹²³.

5.2.3 Catechists in Canon Law

In an ideal context, all those involved in catechesis ought to have sound knowledge of the subject. They should be prepared to research further and learn more. The mentality that 'I know enough' or 'I have always carried out my tasks in this manner' should be avoided as this mentality harms the Church. Consequently, frequent meetings, team-building activities, and seminars, among others, can be fruitful tools that allow all the people involved to get to know one another with the hope of reducing any existing friction or 'fear of the unknown'. The author questions the current quality of catechesis. From the answers of the interviews, it seems that since most of those involved are volunteers, not much can be expected of them (e.g. they cannot be forced to attend formation programmes, create resources or change their ways of imparting

¹²⁰ Canon lawyers can apply canon law for the juridical organisation and formulation of ecclesiastical offices and consequently supports the diocese to organise catechesis.

¹²¹ It is noteworthy to mention that volunteers ought to be included in the process as much as the paid ecclesiastical officers are, keeping in mind that the aim is always that of assisting the Church in achieving its mission to save souls.

¹²² The *parochus* is, after all, responsible for catechesis in his parish. The diocese does not take away his responsibility but is there to support him in this ministry (c. 528 §1).

¹²³ Given that the author has researched intensely on the topic of synodality, it can be noted that the proposed structure is modelled on the author's concept that synodality and collegiality need to go hand in hand as one does not exclude the other, but both are instrumental for a successful synodal church. Thus, collaboration among all the members of the Church is key. Cf. *Prato, Brenda*, *The Synod of Bishops. An Instrument towards a Synodal Church through Baptism*, Master of Society, Law and Religion Thesis, Leuven 2021, at: https://www.academia.edu/80133508/The_Synod_of_Bishops_An_Instrument_towards_a_Synodal_Church_through_Baptism, 23-25.

catechesis). This approach is not ideal and needs to be urgently addressed. On the other hand, by establishing the ministry of catechist, Pope Francis has only started to address this issue: making it a stable ministry gives it autonomy, and hopefully, it starts to be taken more seriously (i.e. carrying canonical rights and obligations).

Antiquum Ministerium has made a significant impact on canon law. Consequently, the author suggests that one or more canons should be included in the CIC/1983 catechesis section echoing *Antiquum Ministerium*. For instance, a canon after c. 774 (mentioning all members' responsibility, particularly that of parents) could be added to define the word 'catechist'. It should include the proper tasks, allowing the episcopal conferences to adapt the function according to the community's needs. The canon can also include, either as a separate canon or, in subparagraphs, other legal implications (i.e. that a person becomes a catechist through the rite of institution, that the bishop or someone delegated by him is to confer the rite, that ongoing formation is necessary, that collaboration with the *parochus* is obliged, among others). The author recommends that other conditions or requirements of *Antiquum Ministerium* (and the letter on the Rite of Institution of Catechists) must be included in the code (e.g. who must not be admitted to the ministry of catechist). For two reasons, the word 'catechist' should also be included in c. 230 §1, together with the ministries of lector and acolyte. First, because the catechist is now a minister, like the lector and the acolyte and second, to emphasise that laypersons (not simply laymen) can become catechists. Enforcing these changes in canon law will, hopefully, encourage dioceses to begin conferring the ministry of catechist according to the new procedures suggested by the Apostolic See, which will create a certain stability to this ministry. These additions to the code will also mean that catechists can challenge decrees through a hierarchical recourse (c. 1737 §1) should they feel aggrieved by a decree after their conferral decree.

5.2.4 Information Technology to be Promoted Juridically

In a digital age such as the contemporary one, catechesis has much to benefit from. From the interviews, it could be noted that both particular churches use information technology extensively. They both have their own websites and social media pages. Resources can also be found online. The author has two suggestions to make. Firstly, the websites of both particular churches are commendable. However, the author suggests the dioceses should stick to one website domain (e.g. Malta's katekezi.mt), which contains all the possible information about catechesis in Malta. Currently, in Malta, there are several domains catering for the various categories of catechesis (e.g. bekids.mt, behold.mt, to name a few), thus leading to other websites of the same diocese. The author suggests sound organisation on the websites as well. Such an organisation helps page viewers understand the structure and where to search for what they want¹²⁴. The help of web designers and IT specialists is suggested in this regard.

The author visualises one domain per diocese, which is ultimately linked to the Apostolic See website. This way, those in charge of building the resources, for instance, can access the material of other dioceses. The author illustrates this with an example below:

¹²⁴ For instance, an alternative solution in the case of Malta would be to amalgamate the two domains (e.g. katekezi.mt/bekids). Again, the scope is to have a centralised structure leading to a better coordinated organisation.

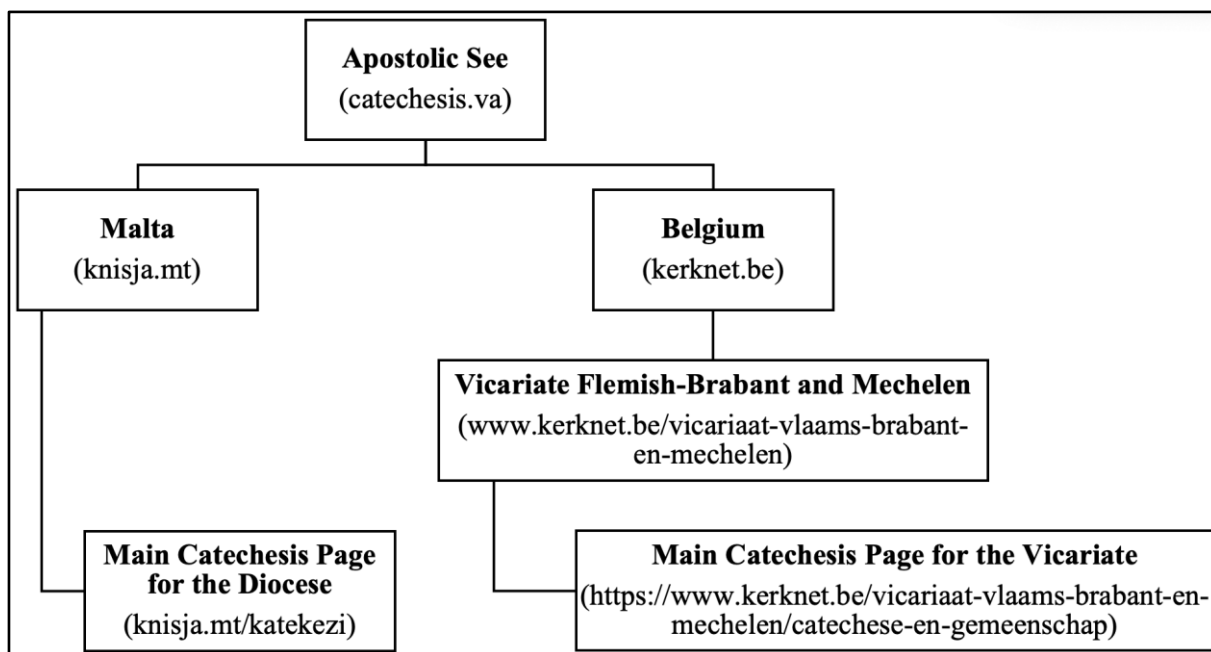


Figure 3: An Example of a Website Domain System Centralisation

It was previously noted that information technology and various media are to be used in catechesis¹²⁵. However, there is no mention of this in canon law. The author believes that canons on the use of information technology ought to be created, including the need for statutes, codes of ethics, and codes of conduct (on the internet), to name a few. This addition would fit best either after the canon mentioning the catechists (c. 780) or else as a separate book which involves all areas concerning information technology (e.g. the liturgy broadcasted, the conduct of church officials when interviewed on the television, regulating written language on social media, among others).

5.2.5 Canon Law and Catechetical Resources

Moreover, canon law should include laws on the material used in catechesis. Among other competencies, the Dicastery for Evangelisation is competent in granting the *confirmatio* for catechisms and other catechetical texts¹²⁶. However, the resources are neither mentioned at the Apostolic See level nor the dioceses' level. As a result, similar resources are often created, even within the same particular church, without anyone monitoring them.

Consequently, it sometimes happens that children, for instance, receive resources that are either theologically inaccurate or not age appropriate. For this reason, proper formation (and education), sincere collaboration and centralisation ought to be present. A canon concerning the vetting of resources can be placed between the canon on the different categories of catechesis (c. 777) and the canon mentioning the superiors of religious institutes (c. 778). Logically, it first makes sense to understand whom catechesis should cater for before creating the resources.

Lastly, it is often worrying that while individuals with special needs are included in the catechetical programme, they are inadequately catered for (if they are catered for). This lack of

¹²⁵ Cf. *John Paul II*, *Catechesi tradendae* (note 23), 46; *Paul VI*, *Decree Christus dominus* (28 October 1965), in : AAS 58 (1966), 673-701, 13.

¹²⁶ *Francis*, *Praedicate Evangelium* (note 61), art. 58.

service often occurs because no church officers are specialised in the area or due to lack of funding¹²⁷. The author believes that most needs can be catered but requires extra effort, with and without the input of professionals. The main concern is that individuals with special needs might feel more excluded when intentionally included. To illustrate with an example, when handing out resources (e.g. a paper to fill in), the resources need to be adapted in a way that no one feels inferior to the other (e.g. creating multilevel resources regarding the same topic where children can choose from with the assistance of the catechist).

6 Conclusion

In reviewing the catechetical developments since the beginning of Pope Francis' papacy, this article has identified significant shifts in catechesis. The analysis of the Diocese of Malta and the Vicariate of Flemish-Brabant and Mechelen revealed both conformity and divergence from the universal laws and papal documents concerning catechesis. While both dioceses have tried adapting their catechetical programs to align with broader ecclesial reforms, challenges remain in the practical application of canon law at the diocesan level. In particular, it was observed that while there is a commitment to implementing Pope Francis' reforms, practical limitations and local contexts have impacted the extent to which these changes have been fully realised.

Examining current practices also raised questions about the efficacy of specific organisational structures in ensuring that catechesis remains a dynamic and vibrant expression of faith. In both dioceses, there is a need for further reflection on how catechesis can be better integrated into the broader pastoral framework, particularly in addressing the evolving needs of the Christian faithful. In light of these findings, five thematic recommendations were made to guide future catechetical initiatives. These recommendations emphasise the need for greater collaboration between diocesan bishop and ecclesiastical officers in charge of catechesis, including the catechists, the use of canon law as a more flexible tool in the organisation of catechesis, and the importance of continued adaptation to contemporary pastoral realities. By addressing these areas, the particular churches can enhance their catechetical programs, ensuring they remain true to their mission of fostering a living and explicit faith among the Christian faithful.

¹²⁷ It was previously noted that what is now named the Dicastery for Evangelisation, can assist in the funding for the formation of catechists. Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 17.