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## The Directory for Catechesis and Family Catechesis in Slovenia

### Abstract

The article's author presents family catechesis as one of the possible forms of catechising children. The foundations of family catechesis are found in the New Directory for Catechesis where it is clearly stated that catechesis starts in the family. In Slovenia, the family catechesis was born “from the bottom-up”, at the request of a group of parents. In the beginning, it was an alternative option, but today it is considered equal to other forms of catechesis. Children and young people, who participate in this catechesis together with their parents, may receive the sacraments of first Holy Communion, Confession, and Confirmation. After ten years of experience, the results are positive and open new catechetical ways and possibilities. This is a new approach, a new method, for which *the Directory for Catechesis* says: “Catechesis does not have a single method, but is open to evaluating different methods, engaging in pedagogy and didactics and allowing itself to be guided by the Gospel necessary for recognizing the truth of human nature” (*Directory for Catechesis* no. 195).

### Keywords

family catechesis, *the Directory for Catechesis*, parents, Slovenia

In this article, we strive to evaluate family catechesis in Slovenia in the light of the *Directory for Catechesis* from 2020. In the last century, many changes occurred in the Slovenian social-political and religious contexts. After the Second World War, Communism came to power which put the Church and faith on the sidelines. Thus, until the end of 1951, religious education was still taught in schools as a weekly, elective subject. Religious education students were monitored and counted and they were encouraged to stop attending religious education classes. This was followed by an encyclical from the Diocesan Ordinariate in Ljubljana, which on 25 February 1952 in Point 4 read: “Teaching religious education classes is, according to the order by the Government Council of the LRS for education and culture, cancelled in all school buildings as of the second semester of the 1951/52 school year, i.e. from 1 February 1952.” This was a huge shock for catechesis. The Church in Slovenia looked for ways to preserve catechesis and to reach children, adolescents, and families.<sup>1</sup> With the occurrence of secularisation, it came to be that both in Europe and Slovenia, religious education was increasingly becoming a domain of formal programmes,<sup>2</sup> since parents were no longer capable of assuming the responsibility for the religious formation of their children. On one hand, the Church strived to give value to the role of the family, while on the other, it was the family that was becoming more and more passive.<sup>3</sup> Today, families still feel the Christian tradition and are aware of their roots. Frequently, however, they are a long way from living a practical Christian life.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the historical development led to the point where many parents remain passive believers, while still wanting to provide their children with religious education. Hence, they ‘send’ them to religious education classes and Holy Mass. This means that parents basically assume the role of drivers. It is understandable then, that children consider the role of religious education to be the preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Namely, parents often encourage their children saying: “Stick with it until Confirmation, maybe these

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Šegula, *Katehetsko področje dela v slovenskem prostoru po drugem vatikanskem koncilu*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 73 (2013) 2, pp. 279–287.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. Kraner, *Sodobni učitelj, komunikacija in resonanca v odnosih*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 83 (2023) 1, pp. 227–239.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Stala, *Parents Catechesis: for Children, Families or for Adults?*, »The Person and the Challenges« 13 (2023) 2, pp. 37–51; H. Lombaerts, E. Osewska, *Family and Family Catechesis. A Matter of Diversification*, “Acta Paedagogica Vilenensia” (2008) 20, pp. 225–243.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. Kraner, *L'approccio pastorale dialogico alla luce del Sinodo*, “The Person and the Challenges« 13 (2023) Nr 1, pp. 173–187.

sacraments will be useful for you one day!” Therefore, we are dealing with two extremes: on one hand, there are families in which children grow up and foster environments without religious education and on the other, catechesis classes which are, considering the circumstances, frequently too short and not effective enough. This is a generation of parents who either have not had much religious education or were not involved in the life of their parish, by participating in married couples’ groups, or other ministries. Considering this, we can understand that in *the Directory for Catechesis* (2020), re-examine the role of catechesis and RE in our contemporary situation and the Roman Catholic Church strongly emphasised that catechesis is a process that lasts from birth until death. Here, we can see the gap between the guidelines of the Church and the actual state of catechesis in Slovenia.

Indeed, the field of catechesis is in a transitional phase. Some families live their faith and raise their children accordingly, while others do not live their faith but want their children to receive a basic religious formation. Hence, children are sent to religious education. As we contemplate this, we cannot overlook *the Directory for Catechesis*,<sup>5</sup> whose guidelines aim to help all who work in the field of catechesis. Every revised edition of the Directory for Catechesis indicates that the Church wants to monitor catechetical work and development and respond to actual challenges of the time.

In the Slovenian context, family catechesis was formed as a response to actual circumstances and is increasingly becoming the answer to the situation at hand. It is a form of catechesis that not only includes children and adolescents but also their parents. This could be called comprehensive or holistic education.<sup>6</sup> It does not involve only children and youth but all family members. This article will introduce the guidelines of the New Directory for Catechesis, pertaining to family catechesis and the creation, development, and the state of family catechesis in Slovenia.

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<sup>5</sup> *Directory for Catechesis*.

<sup>6</sup> I. Nežič Glavica, *Der Beitrag der integrativen Gestaltpädagogik nach Albert Höfer im Bereich der holistischen Religionspädagogik*, »The Person and the Challenges« 9 (2019) 1, pp. 205–223.

## 1. The Place of Family And Family Catechesis In the New Directory For Catechesis

The fundamental document in the field of catechesis is the Directory for Catechesis. Soon after the Second Vatican Council, a General Catechetical Guidebook was created, which was approved by Pope Paul VI on 18 March 1971. It was prepared by the Dicastery for the Clergy. St Paul VI perceived the entire Council teaching as “a great Catechism of modern times”.<sup>7</sup> On 7 June 1973, the International Council for Catechesis was founded, a group which, assisted by experts from around the world, helped the competent dicastery to recognise the needs of individual Churches, in order for catechesis to fit ecclesiastical, cultural, and historical circumstances. Thirty years later, Pope John Paul II published the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which was to serve as the basis for the composition of local catechisms. In 1997, *the General Directory for Catechesis* was published and remained in use until it was replaced by the current *New Directory for Catechesis*. The latter was approved by Pope Francis on 23 March 2020. We will use the name *Directory for Catechesis*.

These last two directories followed publications of certain important documents of ecclesiastic teachers. The first document was a response to Council teachings, the second one to *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, while the present one is a response to the Synod on the New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith and the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel—Evangelii Gaudium* by Pope Francis (2013). With all three editions we have to be aware of a wider social context that influences the content and form of the directory. A new feature of the last directory is a deliberation on the digital culture and globalisation.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter 8, entitled “Catechesis in the Lives of Persons,” presents catechesis as it relates to the family. It highlights that the family is a community of love and life shaped by different relationships—marital, paternal, maternal, those of children and siblings: all of these introduce every human being into the human family and into God’s family, which is the Church.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Pavel VI. *Govor članom splošnega zasedanja Italijanske škofovske konference* (23. 6. 1966), in: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, IV (1967).

<sup>8</sup> *Direttorio per la catechesi*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>9</sup> *Direttorio per la catechesi* 226.

The directory shows the importance of family catechesis and explains the following concepts:

1. Catechesis in the family. The family is the place of catechesis, the place of delivering the Gospel by placing it into the context of deep human values. Catechesis in a family has the task of enabling the protagonists of family life, primarily spouses and parents, to discover God's gift which is bestowed upon them through the sacrament of the holy marriage.
2. Catechesis with the family. The Church announces the Gospel to the family. A community of families refers to several families supporting each other. This means that they give each other support and strength. Thus, the Church announces the Gospel to families, which allows them to experience the Gospel as joy that fills the heart and one's whole life. The kerygma comes first, because in family pastoral care the first announcement must always resound; it is the most beautiful, the greatest, the most attractive, and also the most needed message and therefore must be at the centre of evangelisation.
3. Catechesis of the family. Here, the directory stresses that the family announces the Gospel. If a family is founded on the sacrament of a holy marriage, it becomes a domestic Church and has its missionary dimension and thus participates in the evangelical mission of the Church. Through natural service of child rearing, the family is called upon to participate in the formation of the Christian community and to testify for the Gospel in society.
4. Pastoral instructions. This title of the Directory encompasses wide topics. With pastoral instructions it hopes to move closer to all pastoral workers in the pastoral care of the family. Here, it speaks about the catechesis of youth and adults preparing for marriage. The Directory proposes the catechumenal model. It continues with the catechesis of the newlyweds, which is a mystagogical catechesis for recently married couples. In the context of sacramental pastoral theology, catechesis of parents who ask for baptism of their children is important. Then, there is intergenerational catechesis which foresees the path of faith marked with indirect educational experience for people of all ages. At the end, it emphasises that the catechists in married couples' groups and family groups are the married couples who are their members.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Direttorio per la catechesi* 222–233.

The Church does ignore new circumstances brought about by life. The view of the family is changing, in some cases even the definition of the family is changing. The number of marriages and families experiencing various crises is increasing. Families are wounded and fragile, the family connection with the divine is disappearing. Despite great confusion, there are still many people who desire an ordered family, with settled relations, and the correct attitude towards the transcendent.<sup>11</sup>

The important thing is that the Church wants to be with these families regardless of how wounded or imperfect they are. It wants to accompany them and restore their trust and hope.<sup>12</sup> The Directory underlines that every community is aware of various family realities with all of their positive and dark sides, accompanies them in an appropriate manner, and recognises the complicated circumstances without resorting to idealising or negativity.<sup>13</sup> Catechesis does not aim to be elitist, not reserved for the chosen ones, but meant for everyone. In truth, catechesis is about reciprocity. We are not passive receivers, we enrich one another.

## 2. Family As the First Place of Catechesis

The family has always been the place of the first catechesis.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps there was a time, when faith was much more common and practical than today, people

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. I. Platovnjak, *Družine s predšolskimi otroki potrebujejo pri svojem poslanstvu posredovanja vere več razumevanja, sprejetosti in bližine v Cerkvi na Slovenskem*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 80 (2020) 2, pp. 358–369; I. Platovnjak, *The Importance of Marriage Groups for Marriage and Family Life. A Survey of Our Way Marriage Groups*, »Obnovljeni život« 78 (2023) 4, pp. 480–490; E. Osewska, *Društvena kohezija: sadašnje stanje obrazovanja i trajne stručne izobrazbe vjeroučitelja u Poljskoj u kontekstu društvenih promjena*, »Kateheza« (2012), pp. 152–158; H. Lombaerts, E. Osewska, *Family and Family Catechesis. A Matter of Diversification*, »Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia« (2008) 20, pp. 225–243.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. T. Stegu, *Lepota in kerigma v tehnološki dobi*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 83 (2023) 4, pp. 1024–1025; B. Simonič, E. Osewska, *Experience and Consequences of Growing Up in a Family with Alcoholism in Adult Children of Alcoholics*, »The Person and the Challenges« 13 (2023) 1, pp. 63–81.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. I. Nežič Glavica, *Družina—„skriti“ potencial Cerkve*, in: J. Vodičar, *Vemo namreč, da ste izvoljeni! Od klerikalizacije do sinodalnosti v pastoralni in katehezi*, Ljubljana 2022, Teološka fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani, pp. 49–57.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. H. Lombaerts, E. Osewska, *Family and Family Catechesis. A Matter of Diversification*, »Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia« (2008) 20, pp. 225–243; *Religious Education/Catechesis in the Family: A European Perspective*, eds E. Osewska, J. Stala, Warszawa 2010, UKSW.

lived their faith (morning prayers, a prayer before work, a prayer before a meal, a prayer during a storm...) and catechesis simply “happened,” so to speak. In this tradition we seek inspiration for the home catechesis of today.

Things were changing rapidly in the time after the Second World War. The socio-political situation led catechesis into a great crisis. First, there came the separation of the state and the Church. Religious education was moved from schools to parish premises.<sup>15</sup> We must realise that there were no catechisms or other catechetical aids at the time. Borders were closed and many priests tried to do what they could with their own ideas for catechesis. In this context, the catechesis in the family also suffered. The division of state and Church led to the classification of the people. People of faith became second-class citizens overnight. Consequently, they were becoming increasingly frightened. Faith became a ‘private matter’ and moved from the public sphere to the ‘sacristies’.

During the transitional period, many parents became passive Christians because they were afraid to expose themselves or publicly admit that they were Christian. People in certain professions (teachers, doctors, nurses etc.) were prohibited from publicly declaring their faith. People searched for their ‘modus vivendi’ and gradually became tepid Christians, Christians behind walls. It should be said that grandparents played an important role in catechetical upbringing, since they had time for it and were deeply rooted in faith. Hence many people, who no longer practiced their faith, were baptised and religious upbringing (catechesis) became merely an external commitment. Many parents said: “We’ll send our child to Religious education until Confirmation, since it may come in handy one day (e.g. to be able to get married in a church), but after that...” This is the environment and the atmosphere in which the domestic “Church” was slowly extinguished. Family prayer time was decreasing, and there were practically no discussions about God and religious matters, all that was left were major religious holidays, such as Easter, Christmas, and parish feast days. This situation continued for many years, even decades. It created two worlds, two poles: on one side there were families who still declared themselves Christian but in which many traditions had already died out. On the other side was the parish and parish catechesis trying to evangelise them. The problem was that children, and everybody else coming to catechesis, came without any basic knowledge. For catechists this presented a great dilemma—what to do about

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Okrožnica škofijskega ordinariata ljubljanske škofije* 3 (1952) 1, tč. 4.

it and how to achieve the goal? The span of knowledge and religious experience is vast, sometimes too vast.

As years passed, a model of catechesis formed which had previously lost all its life strength. Catechetical groups were preserved while parents grew distant from the Church and disappeared from the realm of religious education. Often, one could hear that religious education is the task of the parish (catechesis in the parish). This meant that the fundamental structure in the catechesis field was demolished.

In this Slovenian catechetical landscape, family catechesis was “born”, which is in its own way original and interesting. It is interesting because the initiative came from parents. Hana Strajnar, a mother of several children, considers family catechesis an excellent alternative to ordinary religious education classes because it promotes a connection with the parish which is why they are happy to participate in various activities that it offers. Their family members discover new talents in each other and together they search for God in their lives.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Family Catechesis in Slovenia

Family catechesis (*Veseli kristjani*—Joyful Christians) started developing in the parish of Domžale prior to the 2012/13 religious education year, when the first family catechesis group started operating in Domžale. At the beginning, three sisters from the Podjavoršek family participated in the creation of the programme. The idea came from the parents and “permission” was given by the local priest. Today, family catechesis is alive in several parishes.

Family catechesis is catechesis for the whole family at the same time. It presents an opportunity for all the parents who want to deepen their religious knowledge together with their children. Meetings take place every week of the religious education school year and last 60 minutes. Every year, in addition to the opening and closing meetings, there are approximately 24 regular meetings and 8 special ones. Catechesis is prepared for parents and all children through eighth grade, while older children participate in family catechesis as mentors of preschool children.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Družinska kateheza (nov pristop k verouku) se uspešno širi tudi po Ljubljani*, <https://www.iskreni.net/druzinska-kateheza-nov-pristop-k-verouku-se-uspesno-siri-tudi-po-ljubljani/> (03.05.2024).



Children participating in family catechesis do not have to attend “traditional” religious education classes. The exception are those years in which children prepare to receive the sacraments (First Communion, Confirmation), when they join other students at the parish for sacramental preparation. Initially, First Communicants attended religious education classes with their peers for six meetings before receiving First Communion. However, since First Communicants at the parish attend a weekend retreat, they join them for this occasion. Confirmation students from family catechesis also join the Confirmation groups that take place in the parish in addition to their regular classes.

Regarding the content, children and adolescents in family catechesis cover all the important life questions. A noticeable difference is also in their report card, which is similar to the report cards of all other religious education students but does not include grades because knowledge in family catechesis is not graded. One of the reasons for this is that faith cannot be graded, while at the same time the families do not want catechesis to be considered just another school class. The entire programme of family catechesis is designed in such a way that children and adolescents learn as much as possible. They receive the knowledge and awareness of what it means to be a Christian, how to interpret the Bible, and form opinions on matters happening around them and within them. After all, the latter includes understanding of feelings, which is a crucial part of overcoming life challenges and insecurities and is also key to understanding the Bible. This accompanies faith with feelings and is directed to solace, devotion, or hope.<sup>17</sup> “If the path from physical contact with the holy to the hermeneutics of hope is walked fruitfully, a person will be able to recognise God’s signs in everyday life.”<sup>18</sup> Occasionally, their knowledge is “checked” with quizzes.

Family catechesis does not involve traditional homework. The main homework is active participation in the parish and attentive listening to the Sunday gospel. In the parish, they can participate as singers, altar servers, lectors, actors in the Passion play, collectors of the offering, church cleaners, landscape workers, etc. Every person participates in the way that most suits them and their family.

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<sup>17</sup> M. Centa Strahovnik, *Čustva in vloga telesa v kontekstu biblijskih zgodb*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 83 (2023) Nr 3, pp. 581–595.

<sup>18</sup> J. Vodičar, *Holarhični model celostne resonančne pedagogike za novo katehezo*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 82 (2022) Nr 3, pp. 691–704.

Every year they prepare a weekend retreat, where they have an opportunity to go deeper together. During this weekend second graders prepare for their first holy confession. During the parish First Communion retreat, children from family catechesis make their second or third confession while others make their first.

Within family catechesis there are also numerous informal gatherings (bicycle trips, hiking, camping at the sea, Shrovetide celebrations, etc.). Informal gatherings are not mandatory but help people get to know each other better and recognize that in this big family they are called into community. It is suggested that every family join at least one such gathering. Parishioners who are not part of family catechesis are also invited to these activities. They are aware that family catechesis must never become a closed group within the parish. It must always be open to all parishioners.

Family catechesis can also be joined by families in which Christian education is provided by only one parent. One-parent families and families in which parents have not yet decided to get married can also join. The only condition is that in addition to a child, at least one parent attends catechesis and that they have the desire to deepen their faith.<sup>19</sup>

Family catechesis mostly meets weekly. In Gornja Radgona, they decided to have monthly meetings, each grade separately. The general flow of these meetings is: first, they all pray and sing together. Then they divide: children go to a classroom with a catechist while the priest remains in the main meeting space with the parents. After 45 minutes, children return and present what they have learned and show the crafts that they made. Parents are handed the material for catechesis at home for the next three weeks. They end with a prayer and a blessing of families. The children perceive this type of religious education less school-like and are more involved than in traditional classes. With this type of work, the weight of responsibility for religious education is shared. Parents are a child's primary catechists. The priest is the parents' support since at the meetings they discuss the church year and answer questions arising from homework. The parish priest says that after five years of family catechesis, results are already showing, but will be even more visible in the future. Working with parents on monthly basis for a few years in a row and regular celebration of Masses will certainly help to make them more aware of their mission. This helps Christian

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Kaj je to družinska kateheza (Družinska kateheza Veseli kristjani)*, [https://natalijapodjavorsek.splet.arnes.si/?page\\_id=2535](https://natalijapodjavorsek.splet.arnes.si/?page_id=2535) (22.03.2024).

families and the Church, the foundation of which are families. The parish also gains through this since new volunteers are “born” among parents.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The model of family catechesis proves that this is one of the most effective ways of comprehensive catechesis. In 77 of *the Directory for Catechesis* we read that the catechesis of adults is the crucial form of catechesis if it is intended for people who are capable of a truly responsible consent.<sup>21</sup> This means that, first and foremost, family catechesis is intended for children, while parents are simultaneously included in the process (at least one of the parents). *The Directory* explores the importance of catechesis in the family, with children, parents and members of families. This is a clear invitation to the local Churches to give consideration to catechesis with all the various people and groups. This form of catechesis is also the response to the invitation of Pope Francis in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of Love—Amoris laetitia* (19/03/2016), in which he wrote: “Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for “an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, family catechesis is becoming a parallel form of catechesis. This means that it does not abolish the set classical form but rather brings a new approach that, within a short time, proved to be a good alternative. Not only is it better in approach and content, but also in the method which includes parents, consequently including adults in the process of catechesis. The head of the secretariat of the Slovenian Catechetical Office and the head of the pastoral service in the Murska Sobota Diocese Dr Franc Zorec believes that family catechesis is the original form of catechesis and is an encouragement for the entire family to live a life according to their faith. Thus, family catechesis is a privilege for those children whose parents want something more in the spiritual field.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Družinska kateheza—primer dobre prakse*, <https://www.druzina.si/clanek/druzinska-kateheza-primeri-dobre-prakse-foto> (03.05.2024).

<sup>21</sup> *Pravilnik za katehezo no 77*.

<sup>22</sup> *Amoris Laetitia* 200.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Družinska kateheza—primer dobre prakse*, <https://www.druzina.si/clanek/druzinska-kateheza-primeri-dobre-prakse-foto> (03.05.2024).

In the future, this model of catechesis could be used in the preparation of adolescents to receive the sacrament of Confirmation.<sup>24</sup> This method could be introduced a year or two prior to Confirmation for the entire family (and if possible, also for the Confirmation sponsors). Hence, Confirmation catechesis would include not only one or two meetings prior to Confirmation but rather a thorough, in-depth comprehensive preparation including the entire family. This type of preparation could justifiably be called ‘new’ evangelisation. However, the realisation of such initiatives is still greatly dependent on pastoral workers in parishes, their catechetical teams, and their courage.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Šegula, *Catechesis for confirmation as a pastoral challenge in Slovenia*, in *Challenges to religious education in contemporary society*, eds J. Garmaz, A. Čondić, Split 2017, Crkva u svijetu, pp. 196–209.

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