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## **Education and formation of catechists and teachers of religion in the Czech Republic. Challenges and perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents a view of the contemporary situation in the field of training and lifelong education of catechists and teachers of religion within the Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. The catechetical ministry always has a concrete form and a concrete addressee; therefore, it is useful to first address the context of this ministry in contemporary Czech society, and a short historical excursion should serve this purpose. This is the period since the fall of communism. The next part of the article deals with the issue of the legislative organisation of teaching in public schools and the resulting requirements for the professional qualification of a teacher of religion. The third chapter pays attention to catechetical formation, which from the point of view of the Church is crucial in the whole process of evangelisation (part of which is also catechesis). The fourth chapter analyses the system of education and formation of catechists and teachers of religion in the Czech Republic (basic and lifelong). The last part pays attention to some important challenges related to teaching religion and catechesis in the Czech secular environment. It also attempts to develop perspectives related to catechetical ministry in the Czech society.

### **Keywords**

Czech Republic, catechesis, catechist, religious education, religious teacher, education, formation, secularism, socio-cultural change,

## The historical and social context of catechetical ministry

The relationship between the Church and Czech society up to this time is burdened to some extent by the past. First, it concerns the teachings of Jan Hus, his burning, the subsequent events that culminated in the Battle of White Mountain<sup>1</sup>, the recatholization, the establishment of Czechoslovakia and Masaryk's associated political programme for the restoration of Czechoslovak statehood, which was based on a Reformation interpretation of Czech history that tended to point to the negative role of the Roman Catholic Church and led indirectly to the presence of anticlericalism in Czech society<sup>2</sup>.

The beginning of communism in 1948 continued the anti-Catholic attitudes of Czech society. The communist regime launched a brutal, targeted repressive policy against the churches, which was accompanied by aggressive atheist propaganda. The majority of society just stood silently by and did not react to this repression.<sup>3</sup>

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, major and fundamental changes occurred in the social, political and economic life of the Czech Republic. These changes were also reflected in the religious sphere. The space for religious freedom was opened up, and the credit of religion in general increased in society. After four decades of programmatic atheisation and restrictions on religious freedom, a new stage is now dawning for the churches, which have the ambition to be an important part of the new democratic society.

The renewal of religious institutions (church schools, theological faculties, charities), orders and congregations is gradually occurring. Religious associations, which in the past were an important part of Czech society, are being re-established. On the other hand, the churches were weakened structurally, materially, mentally and in terms of personal resources, and it became obvious that their renewal would take several decades. The problems went much deeper than they appeared at first sight. The communist regime had damaged not only the church structures but especially the cultural and spiritual background

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<sup>1</sup> See: T. Jarmara, *Náboženství a církve v politickém životě České republiky po roce 1989*, "Studia Theologica" 24 (2022) no. 3, pp. 105–124; P. Čornej, *Jan Hus v proměnách šesti století*, "Studia Theologica" 17 (2015) no. 3, pp. 19–35.

<sup>2</sup> See: M. Trapl, *František X. Halas o vztahu T. G. Masaryka k římskokatolické církvi*, "Studia Theologica" 19 (2017) no. 4, pp. 31–39.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Trapl, *Český politický katolicismus v letech 1918–1938*, in: P. Fiala et al., *Český politický katolicismus 1848–2005*, Brno 2008, CDK, pp. 183–195.

that the churches had co-created in Czech society in the past. Many activities were irreversibly lost and could not be restored. The churches also had to deal with many internal problems, such as the continued operation of the so-called hidden church, the occupation of individual bishoprics and parishes, the issue of StB collaborators from the church ranks, and polarising currents within the church.<sup>4</sup> These and many other complicated issues are slowly coming to a standardised form.

It can be concluded that the churches, despite all the difficulties and in spite of the entrenched secularism, strive to be part of today's Czech society and through their activities want to co-create a value-based society that can be aware of its Christian roots.

## Legal basis for teaching religion in schools

After the fall of communism, churches were again given the opportunity to work in schools. This action was anchored in modern legislation. Today, the teaching of religion in public schools is governed by the following legislation:

- Act No. 3/2002 Coll. on Freedom of Religion and the Status of Churches and Religious Societies and on Amendments to Certain Acts (Act on Churches and Religious Societies).<sup>5</sup>

This law provides that registration confers legal personality on a particular church or religious.<sup>6</sup> Currently, 21 churches or religious societies are registered under this law in the Czech Republic.<sup>7</sup> If the legal conditions are met, religious societies may also be authorised to exercise "special rights," which include the ability to teach religion in state

<sup>4</sup> See: T. Petráček, *Sekularizace a katolicismus v českých zemích: specifické rysy české cesty od lidové církve k nejateističtější zemi světa*, Ostrava 2013, Moravapress, pp. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. Jäger, *Církev a náboženské společnosti v České republice a jejich právní postavení*, Brno 2006, CDK.

<sup>6</sup> See: Zákon č. 3/2002 Sb. § 6 odst. 1; srov. také Z. Horák, *Církev a české školství*, Praha 2011, Grada, p. 222.

<sup>7</sup> H. Pavlincová, *Religionistická encyklopedie, heslo církve a náboženské společnosti v ČR*, [online]. Sociologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i., [cit. 18.12.2024]. Dostupné na [https://rg-encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/index.php/c%C3%ADrkve\\_a\\_n%C3%A1bo%C5%BEensk%C3%A9\\_spol%C4%8Dnosti\\_v\\_%C4%8CR\\_\(JKI-K\)](https://rg-encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/index.php/c%C3%ADrkve_a_n%C3%A1bo%C5%BEensk%C3%A9_spol%C4%8Dnosti_v_%C4%8CR_(JKI-K))

schools or<sup>8</sup> to establish religious schools.<sup>9</sup> The conditions for obtaining a “special right” include: a minimum period of 10 years since registration, a proven 10-year period of publication of an annual report on activities for each calendar year, proper performance of obligations to the state and third parties, and proof of a minimum of 0.1% of adult citizens or foreigners with permanent residence in the Czech Republic.<sup>10</sup>

- Education Act No. 561/2004 Coll. on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education, as amended (the latest amendment is effective from 27 February 2021)).<sup>11</sup>

The current law replaced various legal amendments concerning education that occurred after the fall of communism. These include, first of all, the School Act No. 29/1984 Coll., which has been amended several times, Act No. 564/1990 Coll., on State Administration and Self-Government in Education, and Act No. 76/1978 Coll., on Educational Institutions.

According to Section 3, schools must follow the Framework Educational Programme (FEP), prepared by the Ministry of Education, which is implemented in individual schools and supplemented by their own School Education Programmes (SEPs), which reflect the characteristics of one or another party and also contain curricula with elaborated contents of individual subjects. The optional subject of religion also has a curriculum in force, approved by the Ministry of Education on 2 June 2004 with effect from 1 September 2004 under No. 20 924/2003-22, ecclesiastically approved at the 49th plenary session of the Czech Bishops’ Conference on 9 April 2003.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See: Zákon č. 3/2002 Sb. § 7 odst. 1 písm. a.

<sup>9</sup> See: Zákon č. 3/2002 Sb. § 7 odst. 1 písm. e; srov. Také S. Přibyl, *Pojetí tzv. “zvláštních práv” církví a náboženských společností podle zákona č. 3/2002 Sb., “Revue církevního práva”* (2004) no. 1 (27), pp. 7–21;

<sup>10</sup> See: Z. Horák, *Církev a české školství*. Praha 2011, Grada, p. 227; J. Kříž, *Zákon o církvích a náboženských společnostech. Komentář*, Praha 2011, C.H. Beck, pp. 314–317.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561>

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Osnovy k výuce náboženské výchovy římskokatolické církve v 1.-9. ročníku základní školy*, Praha 2004, Sekretariát České biskupské konference; L. Muchová, *Curricula of religion in Czech state schools at present*, “*Studia Theologica*” 6 (2004) no. 1, pp. 74–89. Dostupné z: [https://www.studiatheologica.eu/artkey/sth-200401-0007\\_Osnovy\\_nabozenstvi\\_na\\_ceskych\\_statnich\\_skolach\\_v\\_soucasnosti.php](https://www.studiatheologica.eu/artkey/sth-200401-0007_Osnovy_nabozenstvi_na_ceskych_statnich_skolach_v_soucasnosti.php). [cit. 21.12.2024].

The Education Act also sets out the conditions for teaching religion in public schools in Section 15.

According to this section, religion may be taught in schools in accordance with the applicable principles and objectives of education in the Czech Republic.

The teaching of religion may be provided by registered churches or religious societies that have been granted the “special right” to teach religion in state schools, also cooperatively, as appropriate, on the basis of a written agreement.<sup>13</sup>

In public primary and high schools, religion is taught as an optional subject.<sup>14</sup> The minimum number of pupils is 7. Registration for the course is provided by the particular church or religious society each year. Religious education may be taught in combined groups of pupils from different classes of a school. It may also be taught in combined groups of pupils from different schools by agreement. This agreement also regulates financial matters. The maximum number of pupils in a class is 30.

A religion teacher (catechist) may teach religion by agreement with a particular school. The authorisation to teach religion (canonical mission) is issued by the statutory body of the church or religious society.

- Act No. 563/2004 Coll. on Teaching Personnel and Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended, Sections 3, 4, 14 (22) and 32.<sup>15</sup>

This law deals with the conditions that are a prerequisite for the status of a teaching worker in schools, among which is also a teacher of religion.

§ Section 3 of this Act specifies the conditions necessary for the practice of the activities of a teaching worker. A person who qualifies the following prerequisites may be a teaching worker:

- has the full competence to perform legal acts,
- is professionally qualified to undertake activities directly related to the teaching he/she does,
- has an unblemished reputation,

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561#cast1>

<sup>14</sup> If religion is taught as an elective subject at the school, the religion teacher must submit a syllabus for the subject to the school principal, which becomes part of the school's educational programme (School Curriculum).:

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563>

- is in good health,
- has proven her knowledge of the Czech language.

§ Section 14 characterises the basic requirements for teachers of religion.<sup>16</sup>

A teacher of religion obtains his or her professional qualification through university studies in accredited master's degree programmes:

- in the field of theological sciences,
- in the field of pedagogical sciences, with pedagogical preparation for teaching religion,
- in the field of pedagogical or social sciences and with a university degree achieved in the frame of studies in accredited bachelor's degree programmes in the field of pedagogical sciences, with pedagogical preparation for teaching religion, or in the frame of accredited life-long learning implemented by a university (theological, pedagogical) with a pedagogical preparation programme for teachers of religion.

## Training of catechists and teachers of religion

The requirements for the training of teachers of religion and catechists are clearly expressed in the above-mentioned Education Act<sup>17</sup>. Further guidelines and recommendations can be found in the catechetical documents of the universal Church<sup>18</sup> and the documents of the particular church in the Czech Republic.<sup>19</sup>

Today is a time of great social and cultural changes, some of which have a global impact (the digitalisation of culture and the globalisation of culture) and some of which are specific to a given environment (the highly secularised Czech society). The described phenomena strongly influence each other and thus determine the processes through which rapid and radical changes in human

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563#cast1>

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Act No. 563/2004 Coll., § 3, § 14.

<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of this article, we will be inspired by the latest 2020 Directory for Catechesis (hereafter DpK).

<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of this article, we will be inspired by the Document for the Direction of Catechesis and Religious Education in the Czech Republic from 2015.

life occur in its various dimensions (social life, value orientation, attitudes, worldview, interpersonal relations, education).<sup>20</sup>

In the context of these great changes, in a time of cultural pluralism and the challenges that arise from it, Christian formation plays an important role. Formation should be focused on the individual so that they are able to face global tendencies that could overshadow the originality and individual journey of faith of each person.<sup>21</sup> Christian formation concerns primarily those who are ordained for catechetical ministry, although it is specific. It requires special attention, and local churches should devote sufficient energy and resources to it, because the quality and effectiveness of pastoral and catechetical activities depend on the quality of the persons involved.<sup>22</sup> The Directory devotes an entire, extensive Chapter IV to this issue. This emphasises to some extent the need for good and adequate catechetical formation. Catechetical formation is a lifelong process that takes place in the communion of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, formation cannot be limited to the acquisition of professional skills in basic studies or lifelong learning. It also has a transcendental dimension in which the baptised person experiences in the living community of the Church the life of faith, its personal and social dimension. Everything occurs in his inner self. The Holy Spirit accompanies him in the process of internalising the message of the Gospel, during which he discovers in himself the deepest identity of a child of God. In this way, the Gospel becomes for him the fundamental orientation for his life and missionary mission. This mission, based on God's call and free decision, can also be realised through the catechetical ministry in the community of the Church.<sup>23</sup>

In the latest Directory, we find other important suggestions and recommendations for catechetical formation, which, although for the purpose of this paper it is not important to analyse in detail, are worth at least mentioning that some of them build on previous documents and confirm their relevance and validity, while others respond to the challenges of our time and therefore bring new content, methodological and organisational elements.

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<sup>20</sup> See: DpK, Introduction.

<sup>21</sup> See: DpK, Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> See: Dpk, 130.

<sup>23</sup> See: DpK, 131; 318; T. Reimer, *Katechéza v súčasnej dobe. Podnety a výzvy nového Direktória pre katechézu*, Bratislava 2021, Don Bosco, p. 50.

The principles according to which today's catechetical formation should function must not only reflect the principle of fidelity to God and man but also take into account new findings in the humanities and social sciences, especially in the area of digital culture and social communication. These changes are justified precisely because of the changes in the socio-cultural context into which the catechetical ministry of the church is entering.<sup>24</sup>

The current and valid catechetical document issued by the Czech Bishops' Conference in 2015 is the document about the direction of catechesis and religious education in the Czech Republic.

The text is inspired by the official catechetical documents of the universal Church.<sup>25</sup> It reminds us that the responsibility for the evangelising mission of the local Church, including education in the faith, lies with the Christian community as a whole under the leadership of the diocesan bishop. The other persons who are officially ordained by the Church for this task (priests, deacons, religious and lay persons) exercise their mission in a particular way, according to their position in the Church, in communion with the bishop.<sup>26</sup>

Catechesis should accompany a person at every period of his life and is also essential for the growth of the Church community. Therefore, it should not be offered only privately. This is also why some members receive an official mandate from the Church to serve within the community in the process of faith formation. The lay catechist should inwardly feel a call to this ministry from God.<sup>27</sup>

The document underlines that ongoing formation is an essential part of the ministry of the catechist and teacher of religion. The aim of this formation is to prepare the catechist for evangelising and catechetical ministry in the Church. The text speaks of so-called competences (theological, spiritual, communicative and cultural).<sup>28</sup> We can speak of theological competence when the catechist

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Z. Marek, *Formacja katechetów w ujęciu dyrektorium o katechizacji*, "Studia Katechetyczne" 19 (2023), pp. 335–346; A. Zellma, *Formation of Catechists – Inspirations from Directory for Catechesis*, "Studia Warمیńskie" 58 (2021), pp. 285–300; L. Dřímal, *Nové direktorium pro katechezi. Další výzva pro vychovatele víry na všech úrovních*, "Caritas et Veritas" 12 (2022) no. 2, pp. 108–116; R. Czekalski, *Tożsamość katechety i jego formacja w dyrektoriach z lat 1971–2020*, "Studia Katechetyczne" 17 (2022), pp. 81–98.

<sup>25</sup> It includes an overview of all Church documents related to the topic under discussion (in alphabetical order CIC, CiV, CT, DCE, DV, EG, EN, GS, GE, LF, LG, RH, SC, VDK).

<sup>26</sup> Comp. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze a náboženského vzdělávání v České republice*, Praha 2015, Sekretariát České biskupské konference, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 32.



and religious teacher has acquired theological education and can apply it adequately in practice. Spiritual competence is based on human maturity and personal experience of living the faith. The catechist and teacher of religion is to be given maximum support by the Church. Only on the basis of his own experience of faith can he accompany those entrusted to him. Communicative competence includes a set of knowledge and skills that enable the content of religious education and catechesis to be conveyed clearly, distinctly and appropriately for the age of the addressee. It includes knowledge of the principles of faith pedagogy and of today's educational approaches and practices in the field of pedagogy and didactics of religious education. The catechist and teacher of religion should be able to work as a team in the team in which he/she works. Cultural competence is acquired by the catechist and teacher of religion by gradually deepening a profound awareness of belonging to people. Together with them, she shares the conditions of life and together with them, she seeks ways to make her faith beneficial to the whole culture of individual and social life.<sup>29</sup> All these competencies are achieved by the catechist in the context of higher education at theological and pedagogical faculties, and in addition by the ability to live actively in a concrete Christian community (e.g., parish) and by deepening the communal and personal dimension of spiritual life. Having acquired the required training for catechetical ministry, the formation of catechists and teachers of religion occurs throughout life in a system of continuing education and related formation.<sup>30</sup>

## **Organisation of education and formation of catechists and teachers of religion in the Czech Republic**

On the basis of the requirements of the Education Act<sup>31</sup>, the requirements and recommendations of the ecclesiastical documents of the Vatican dicasteries and the Czech Bishops' Conference, the formation of catechists and teachers of religion is organised in the Czech Republic in cooperation with churches, theological faculties and educational institutions. This system includes several stages of training and ongoing formation. The preparation should respond

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> See: Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 33.

to the type of environment and the specific addressees to whom the religious teacher or catechist will be appointed.<sup>32</sup> In a similar spirit, the Document on the Direction of Catechesis and Religious Education issued by the Czech Bishops' Conference in 2015 expresses itself about catechetical formation.<sup>33</sup>

### Fundamental formation and education for teachers of religion and catechists

The new Directory for Catechesis speaks of the three dimensions of catechetical formation, which are inherently linked and cannot be separated from each other, since man as such is an indivisible unity. The most profound of these relates to his vocation to “be” a catechist, a formative process that helps the catechist mature on a human level. Above all, it is about emotional balance, the capacity for inner self-reflection, personal integrity, the ability to establish relationships and dialogue, constructive thinking and cooperation in a group, which contributes to the development of respect and love for the persons being catechised. The natural dimension of the catechist should also be complemented by a spiritual dimension, so that he maintains a strong awareness of the presence of God, who guides him, transforms him inwardly and empowers him to be a catechist – a missionary who is not passive in his catechetical ministry, but is able to meet people, their expectations and needs in an active way. His task is to develop an attitude of accompaniment of the catechised, i.e., to be their close guide on the journey of faith.<sup>34</sup>

An important characteristic for a catechist is docibilitas, or receptivity to God's grace, and openness to life and to people. This openness is conducive to lifelong self-development and inner growth. He can thus apply the methods acquired in formation to himself and to his ministry in the Church.<sup>35</sup>

The Directory for Catechesis places new emphasis on ensuring the safety of children and young people. The catechists are to protect the recipients of catechesis from any form of abuse. To have great respect for the personality and

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. E. Alberich, L. Dřimal, *Katechetika*, Praha 2008, Portál, p. 216; L. Dřimal, *Fundamentální katechetika*, Olomouc 2023, Univerzita Palackého.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze a náboženského vzdělávání v České republice*, Praha 2015, Sekretariát České biskupské konference, 33; 44–45.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. DpK, 132.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. DpK, 135.

conscience of each catechised person. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to avoid any kind of coercion, especially in the areas of freedom, economy or sexuality.<sup>36</sup>

Another important element mentioned in the document is ensuring the safety of children and young people, particularly protection from any form of abuse. Catechists should show the utmost respect for the other person and their conscience in their behaviour and avoid any kind of coercion, especially in the area of freedom, economics or sexuality. They should be able to “be with” or be able to establish deep interpersonal relationships within their ministry. Furthermore, catechetical formation should be devoted to the theoretical and practical training of catechists, or the dimension of “knowing” and “knowing how to”, according to the principle of fidelity to God (fidelity to God’s message) and fidelity to the person (to the context of his or her life, the environment of circumstances in which he or she lives).<sup>37</sup>

This document emphasises the importance of acquiring professional religious-pedagogical knowledge in the process of catechist formation. It is obvious that the biblical-theological sciences have a key place in this process. These should also be complemented by the study of the humanities and pedagogical sciences, which can broaden and deepen the basic formation stage.<sup>38</sup>

Biblical-theological formation is to be based on knowledge of the Christian message of faith, centred around the central mystery of salvation—the person of Jesus Christ. At the centre of this formation are the Holy Scriptures and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Directory for Catechesis reminds us that during theological study, it is not only theoretical knowledge that is at issue, but the study is a holistic process of preparation for the important catechetical mission and is intended to lead to the development of a synthesis and inner coherence in the understanding of the Church’s teaching. This coherence allows for a deep and contextual understanding of the theological

<sup>36</sup> Cf. DpK, 141–142.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. DpK, čl. 136–150; R. Czekalski, *Tożsamość katechety i jego formacja w dyrektoriat z lat 1971–2020*, “Studia Katechetyczne” 17 (2022), pp. 81–98; L. Muchová, *The teacher of religion – missionary and evangelist, but also a professional and expert. Above all, however, a Christian experiencing a deep internal relationship with God through Christ*, “Caritas et veritas” 7 (2017) no. 2, pp. 104–120.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. R. Czekalski, *Tożsamość katechety i jego formacja w dyrektoriat z lat 1971–2020*, “Studia Katechetyczne” 17 (2022), pp. 92–93.

structure, which facilitates the catechist's orientation on various fundamental doctrinal issues.<sup>39</sup>

The consequence of a well-ordered formation should be the deepening of the catechist's faith, so that he can live it in a conscious way and be able to relate the theological knowledge acquired to everyday life. In this way, the catechist can better assess the situations of individuals, better catechise them and, above all, present faith to them as a living and inseparable part of human reality.<sup>40</sup>

The Education Act clearly specifies the requirements for the preparation of teachers of religion.<sup>41</sup> The law implies that persons who intend to become teachers of religion in schools have three options for obtaining the necessary training. The first option is to obtain a master's degree in theological studies from a university. Next, they can obtain a master's degree in pedagogical sciences, focusing on the preparation of teachers of religion. As a third option, the law offers the option of earning a master's degree in any educational field, and in addition to that, earning at least a bachelor's degree in pedagogical sciences with a focus on religious teacher preparation or education through accredited continuing education programmes offered by colleges with a focus on religious teacher preparation.

If someone does not meet these educational requirements, he or she may not practice teaching in a school. In extraordinary situations, the law allows principals to dispense with these basic requirements, such as when a particular educator teaches a subject at a school for which he or she has a college degree and it is his or her primary activity and teaches religious education to supplement his or her full-time teaching load. In such a case, the principal may employ a teacher without the necessary qualifications to teach religion. In addition, the principal may employ an unqualified teacher of religion if he or she demonstrates that he or she does not have another qualified teacher in that area. A third possibility where, by law, a principal may dispense is when a religious education teacher has reached the age of 50 and has been in direct teaching for a minimum of 15 years.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. R. Czekalski, *Tożsamość katechety i jego formacja w dyrektoriach z lat 1971–2020*, "Studia Katechetyczne" 17 (2022), pp. 92–93.

<sup>40</sup> DpK, 144–147.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Act No. 563/2004 Coll., § 14

<sup>42</sup> Act No. 563/2004 Coll., § 22 a § 32

Currently, theology can be studied at three theological faculties in the Czech Republic: the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University (hereinafter KTF UK)<sup>43</sup>, the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology of Palacky University in Olomouc (hereinafter CMTF UP)<sup>44</sup>, and the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (hereinafter referred to as TF JU)<sup>45</sup>, where one can obtain a bachelor's and master's degree in theology and thus qualify for the requirements of the Education Act.<sup>46</sup> For an overview, we present the number of graduates of Master's programmes at individual faculties.<sup>47</sup> In 2022, 17 students graduated from the theological faculty of Charles University, 79 students graduated from CMTF UP in 2023, and 1 student graduated from TF JU in 2023.

In addition to Catholic theology, students of other churches can obtain qualifications for teaching religion in schools by studying theology at the Husite Theological Faculty of Charles University (HTF UK)<sup>48</sup> and the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Charles University (ETF UK).<sup>49</sup>

In addition to theological faculties, it is possible to obtain qualifications for teaching religion in schools at other faculties in the Czech Republic, e.g. The Faculty of Education at the University of Hradec Králové (hereafter referred to as the Faculty of Education at the University of Hradec Králové) offers students a three-year Bachelor's degree programme in Religious Education, but a graduate of this programme can only be employed as a teacher of religion if he or she has completed a follow-up Master's degree in theology or has already

<sup>43</sup> Cf. KTF UK, Annual Report on the Activities of the Catholic Theological Faculty in 2022, [online] [cited 4 January 2025], available from: [[https://www.ktf.cuni.cz/KTF-193-version1-vyrocní\\_zpráva\\_o\\_cinnosti\\_2022.pdf](https://www.ktf.cuni.cz/KTF-193-version1-vyrocní_zpráva_o_cinnosti_2022.pdf)]

<sup>44</sup> Cf. CMTF UP, Annual report on the activities of CMTF UP for the year 2023, [online] [Cit. 4. 1. 2025], available from: [<https://files.upol.cz/sites%2Fpub%2FpubNormy%2F2023%20-%20VZ%20CMTF%20o%20C4%8Dinnosti.pdf>].

<sup>45</sup> Cf. TF JU, Annual Report on Activities for 2022, [online] [Cit. 4. 1. 2025], available from: [[https://www.tf.jcu.cz/images/TF/fakulta/dokumenty/strategicke-dokumenty-tf-ju/vz-tf-ju-2022\\_final.pdf](https://www.tf.jcu.cz/images/TF/fakulta/dokumenty/strategicke-dokumenty-tf-ju/vz-tf-ju-2022_final.pdf)]

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Act No. 563/2004 Coll.

<sup>47</sup> Data from the annual reports of individual schools.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. HTF UK, Annual Report on Activities in 2023, [online] [cited 2025 Jan. 4], available from: [[https://htf.cuni.cz/HTF-46-version1-vz2023\\_final.pdf](https://htf.cuni.cz/HTF-46-version1-vz2023_final.pdf)]

<sup>49</sup> Cf. ETF UK, Annual Report 2023, [online] [Cit. 4. 1. 2025], available from: [[https://web.etf.cuni.cz/ETFN-429-version1-2023\\_vyrocní\\_zpráva\\_final.pdf](https://web.etf.cuni.cz/ETFN-429-version1-2023_vyrocní_zpráva_final.pdf)]

obtained a Master's degree in another field, e.g. at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University.<sup>50</sup>

Another Faculty of Education of Masaryk University (hereafter PED MUNI) offered until 2024 an accredited course in Teaching Christian Education for Primary Schools, which offered training for primary school teachers in the general education field of Christian Education. A graduate of the Master's degree in Christian Education with an additional combination of majors can later become an elementary or secondary school religious education teacher.

### Continuing education and formation for teachers of religion and catechists

The Directory for Catechesis considers the lifelong (permanent) formation of catechists an essential part of their ministry. It follows seamlessly from the basic formation. After obtaining a university degree and the ecclesiastical credential for catechetical ministry, the catechist is automatically included in the permanent formation phase. It is a lifelong process of education and spiritual growth that helps catechists acquire the art of responding to the changing needs of society, the ecclesial community, and the persons being catechised.<sup>51</sup> It is not a form of self-study, so it is not an individual matter, but is to be provided by the local church. It is a sharing of experience, mutual learning and support between the catechists.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, according to the document, the Church is to provide catechists with adequate tools and opportunities for permanent formation. These are most often professional courses, seminars, workshops, retreats, or study programmes.<sup>53</sup>

According to the 2015 Catechetical Guidelines of the Czech Bishops' Conference (CBC)<sup>54</sup>, a necessary part of the ministry of the catechist and teacher of religion is permanent formation<sup>55</sup>. It is a lifelong study. After obtaining a uni-

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. PdF UHK, Annual Report 2023, p.15, [online] [Cit. 4. 1. 2025], available from: [<https://www.uhk.cz/file/egee/pedagogicka-fakulta/pdf/uredni-deska/vyrocní-zpravy/2023/vyrocní-zprava-o-cinnosti-pdf-uhk-za-rok-2023.pdf>]

<sup>51</sup> Cf. DpK, 135.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. DpK, 139.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. DpK, 154–156.

<sup>54</sup> Česká biskupská konference, Dokument o směřování katecheze a náboženského vzdělávání v České republice, Praha 2015, vyd. Sekretariát České biskupské konference.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 33.

versity degree, formation continues in the system of continuing education and formation. Permanent formation is provided by individual dioceses through catechetical centres in collaboration with theological and pedagogical faculties. The standards for continuing education and formation of catechists and teachers of religion are provided according to the document of the CBC<sup>56</sup>.

### Current diocesan formation programmes for catechists

According to data obtained by the Department of Church Data Analysis (CBA) in 2022, there are 1,600 catechists and religious teachers appointed in parishes and schools throughout the Czech Republic<sup>57</sup>.

Therefore, there are a relatively large number of people appointed by the Church to work in the field of evangelisation within the catechetical ministry. Individual dioceses provide for them permanent catechetical formation or lifelong education. As an example, we will mention only one diocese, namely the Ostrava-Opava Diocese, which has been established in this field for a long time and offers the largest variety of programmes, of which we will present only the main ones.

The Diocese of Ostrava-Opava offers several forms of support to catechists and teachers of religion through the Catechetical and Pedagogical Centre (KCP).

A three-year lifelong learning programme. The programme offers a basic overview of the theological, pedagogical and psychological sciences, deepens them about current topics in the contemporary Church and society and focuses on didactic applications for all ages<sup>58</sup>.

- Religious Teaching. This is an accredited programme for graduates of a Master's degree in Education or Social Sciences. The study to acquire competence and qualification to teach the subject of Roman Catholic religion at the 1st and 2nd level of primary school and at secondary school according to § 14 of the Act No. 563 Coll., on pedagogical staff.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Česká biskupská konference, *Dokument o směřování katecheze*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Data were based on questionnaires from all dioceses in the Czech Republic, cyclically processed by the Department of Data Analysis and Processing of the Czech Bishops' Conference (we present data from 2021). See also CBC, Catholic Church in the Czech Republic (2024), Frýdek-Místek, KLEINWÄCHTER holding s.r.o, sec. 27.

<sup>58</sup> See: Catechetical and Pedagogical Centre of the Ostrava-Opava Diocese, Course of Religious Teaching and Christian Education, [online] [Cit. 8. 1. 2025], available from: [<https://kpc.doo.cz/podpora-katechetu/trilety-vzdelavaci-program-3/>].

- **Education to Christianity** It is a study programme for graduates with a secondary education with a high school diploma. Study to acquire the competence to teach the Roman Catholic religion outside the school premises and to do pastoral and catechetical work for all age groups in the parish.

**Supervision.** This is an offer of supervision for all teachers of religion, priests and lay people.

- **Open supervision group for the catechists.** Open supervision groups meet in the following areas: The capacity of the supervision group is about 5–10 persons. A continuation will be arranged at the given locations according to the interest of the participants. The catechist can bring in his/her own topic or listen and be guided by the supervisor. It is possible to attend only one supervision session, and it is not necessary to attend repeatedly.
- **Individual supervision** is an option for catechists for whom group supervision is not acceptable/safe or who come with a specific problem.

**Mentoring.** It is an offer for catechists whose practice is not going as expected, or who are stagnating and looking for a way to continue teaching or catechesis. It is personal accompaniment in the development of the catechetical ministry. It takes the form of a conversation between two people, tailored to the needs of the religion teacher. It always occurs in a safe space. The content of the conversation remains between the mentor and mentee. It lasts one hour, and several follow-up conversations may be conducted (the usual time between conversations is one month). Mentoring is an offer of the KPC, for teachers of religion and catechists not to be left alone in their ministry<sup>59</sup>.

An offer of individual support for beginning teachers of religion and catechists.<sup>60</sup> Objectives of support for beginning teachers of religion and catechists:

- To guide the beginning religion teacher in working with methodological materials with an emphasis on the grade or group of grades he/she teaches in a given school year.

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<sup>59</sup> See: Catechetical and Pedagogical Centre of the Ostrava-Opava Diocese, Course of Religious Teaching and Christian Education, [online] [Cit. 8. 1. 2025], available from: [https://kpc.doo.cz/podpora-katechetu/mentoring/].

<sup>60</sup> See: Catechetical and Pedagogical Centre of the Ostrava-Opava Diocese, Course of Religious Teaching and Christian Education, [online] [Cit. 8. 1. 2025], available from: [https://kpc.doo.cz/podpora-katechetu/pro-zacinajici-ucitele/].



- Provide support to the teacher based on an analysis of his/her needs.
- To familiarise him/her with the support offered by the KPC and to link him/her to its system.

#### Offer of formation programmes of the CBK for catechists and teachers of religion

Inter-diocesan cooperation in the field of catechesis and religious education in the Czech Republic is organised and ensured by the Catechetical Section of the CBC. Its tasks include monitoring, initiating, and creating conditions for this cooperation. The Catechetical Section of the CBK also performs tasks assigned by the CBK that go beyond the possibilities of individual dioceses. Since 1996, it has been organising National Catechetical Congresses. These congresses are held periodically at least once every 2 years.

The first national congress was held on 25–28 October 1996 in Ústí nad Orlicí. Up to 450 participants were registered. The congress was attended by domestic and foreign experts in the field of catechetics, pedagogy and related fields, such as the Director of the National Catechetical Centre of the CBC, Dr. Helena Šťastná, P. Bohumil Kolář, Doc. Ludmila Muchová, Doc. Rudolf Smahel, guests from Slovakia and the main guest was P. Walter Ruspi, Head of the Catechetical Section of the Italian Bishops' Conference<sup>61</sup>. The second national catechetical congress was held again in the same place in 1998. The Third National Catechetical Congress in 2001 was held in Hradec Králové. All three congresses although they did not have a main topic, were certainly a great enrichment for all those who worked in the catechetical ministry.

Since the IV. The programme of the National Catechetical Congress has a clear focus, according to which the speakers are chosen. In addition to theoretical lectures, there are practical, thematic, according to the addressees of catechesis, workshops. The number of participants has stabilised at 200 catechists (priests, religious and laity).

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<sup>61</sup> See: Archive of the Catechetical Section of the Czech Episcopal Conference; National Meeting of Catechists, News from the Diocese, in: Monthly of the Litoměřice Diocese 1 (1996) 13, p. 12.

An overview of other thematic congresses is given<sup>62</sup>:

- IV. The National Catechetical Congress in Hradec Králové (2003), theme: Catechism of the Catholic Church and its challenges for the third millennium.
- V. The National Catechetical Congress in Hradec Kralove (2005), theme: I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
- VI. National Catechetical Congress in Kroměříž (2007), theme: I believe in the resurrection of the body and eternal life.
- VII. National Catechetical Congress in Kroměříž (2009), theme: Faith.
- VIII. National Catechetical Congress in Velehrad (2011), theme: Christian Initiation.
- IX. The National Catechetical Congress in Velehrad (2013), theme: Living Faith and the Cyril and Methodius Tradition.
- X. The National Catechetical Congress in Třešť (2016), theme: Family and its role in religious education.
- XI. The National Catechetical Congress in Třešť (2018), theme: Missionary Dimension of the Church.
- XII. National Catechetical Congress in Kroměříž (2023), theme: The Art of Communication.

The next Congress will be held in 2026. The Catechetical Subcommittee of the CBC for Catholic Education will have another working meeting on this topic in the first half of 2025.

In addition to the aforementioned congresses, the CBC Catechetical Section organises scientific conferences for the staff of diocesan catechetical centres or occasional study days for bishops in the framework of the CBC's Plenary Sessions.

The last study day for bishops on the Christian Initiation of Adults occurred on 22 January 2024 at the Archbishopric of Prague. An analysis of the current pastoral and catechetical practice in this area in each diocese is presented. Theoretical anchoring of the topic, presentation of the results of the sociological survey in the dioceses, examples from pastoral and catechetical practice, all were intended to serve the bishops to respond adequately to the pastoral challenges of today.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See: Archive of the Catechetical Section of the Czech Episcopal Conference; National Meeting of Catechists, p12.

<sup>63</sup> See: Czech Bishops' Conference, The 138th Plenary Session of the CBK ended, in: *Církev. cz* | News: [https://www.cirkev.cz/skoncilo-138-plenarni-zasedani-cbk\\_32315](https://www.cirkev.cz/skoncilo-138-plenarni-zasedani-cbk_32315) (9.01.2025).

## Some important challenges related to teaching religion and catechesis

The current status quo of religious education in schools. The Czech Republic is a country with a strong degree of secularisation. Therefore, due to the low interest in religion in state schools, religious education there fulfils mainly a cultural function. Nowadays, especially in secondary schools, instead of classical religious education, religious studies are offered, sometimes in the framework of civic education, which is a useful tool for learning about and understanding other cultures and other world religions or worldviews.

Support religious education. In most cases, churches introduce compulsory religious education within their established schools. Schools established by the Roman Catholic Church follow diocesan instructions; the specific form of instruction is part of the school's curriculum. The Report on the Activities of the Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic for 2022 states that the Roman Catholic Church operates 120 schools and educational institutions. Methodological support for catechists and religion teachers is provided by the diocesan catechetical or school centre.

The new identity of the subject *Teaching Religion*. The term "religion" in schools seems to be associated with several prejudices. The name itself often has negative connotations and gives the impression that it is a subject that is exclusively for children from families who attend religious services regularly.<sup>64</sup> In the future, therefore, a new alternative for this subject is being sought. The name alone is telling. The name Foundations of Christianity or Foundations of Christian Faith and Culture is a suitable alternative.

Offer new programmes for the continuing education of teaching professionals. Given the poor awareness of Christianity in the pedagogical environment of public schools, an important challenge for the Czech Bishops' Conference is the preparation of accredited programmes for the continuing education of teaching staff. These programmes can focus on introducing the basics of the Bible and theology to teachers of social studies subjects, especially history and the Czech language.

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<sup>64</sup> L. Muchová, *Výuka náboženství v českých zemích: pro Evropu ještě realita nebo již dějiny?*, "Studia Theologica" 5 (2003) no. 4, pp. 82–83. Online z: <https://studiatheologica.eu/pdfs/sth/2003/04/07.pdf>

Preparation of new curricula. Another current challenge is the preparation of alternative curricula for religion, or the basics of Christianity (Basics of Christian Faith and Culture), the content of which is not catechesis, but an introduction to the basic content of Revelation and its reflection in the history and culture of the Czech (also Moravian and Silesian) country.

## Conclusions

The presented topic of the preparation and lifelong (permanent) education of the catechists and teachers of religion of the Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic responds to the needs of the local church and also responds to the challenges of today's time associated with the work of the Church in a secular society. A brief historical excursus helps to understand the transformation of religious education and catechesis from the fall of communism to this day.

Fluid times pose new challenges, and the Church is looking for new ways to better reach today's people. On the other hand, the established legislative framework sets specific requirements for the qualification of teachers of religion. Hence, the urgency of their professional and personal formation.

Today's catechetical ministry requires a comprehensive approach that combines professional training with spiritual formation and with the art of communicating with modern man.

The system of training for catechists and teachers of religion has a good foundation; however, the Church sees the need for change, especially in the area of practical preparation for teaching. Adapting religious education to the current needs of a young generation living in a highly secularised environment remains a current challenge.

These challenges show that teaching religion and catechesis in the Czech environment requires methodological and conceptual changes. The Church should also think about new ways of communicating with the public. On the one hand, the secular character of public education must be respected, but the cultural and historical significance of Christianity should be more emphasised.

As a necessary prerequisite for all the Church's evangelising and catechetical activities, systematic and systemic work to overcome the prejudices associated with the teaching of religion is essential. It is necessary to search for new forms

that are comprehensible both for the believer and for a secularised society. The introduction of alternative curricula and new subject names could thus contribute to a better acceptance of the Christian message. Also, offering accredited programmes for the continuing education of teaching staff may help deepen the understanding of the Christian heritage on which Czech society is also based.

If in the future the Church is able to respond adequately to today's needs and challenges, religious education and catechesis can play an important role in communicating Christianity and its cultural, historical and spiritual heritage. The Church can therefore enrich the education system and contribute to a better understanding of the Christian values and traditions that are the foundation of European civilisation.

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