

PRAISE FOR *TEACHING THE FAITH AT HOME*

Dr. Rueter has combined his experience as an educator in the congregation and university with thorough research and insight to produce a text that explains catechetical instruction and equips the reader to realize its benefits. The history, doctrine, wisdom, and practical means of providing catechetical instruction contained in *Teaching the Faith at Home* make it a greatly needed resource for Christianity.

—Michael Eschelbach
Professor of Theology
Concordia University Irvine

The partnership of parents and church leaders is a powerful combination for both the instruction of children in the Christian faith and encouraging their vital and growing expression of that faith. *Teaching the Faith at Home* will both challenge and encourage you to make teaching the faith a priority at home and church, and give you workable ideas for how to do so in ways that honor your children's questions and foster a reasoned and owned faith. This is a wonderful resource for church leaders and parents to draw from in their work together for the sake of their children.

—Dr. Kevin E. Lawson
Editor of the *Christian Education Journal*
Director, PhD and EdD programs in Educational Studies
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

Teaching the Christian faith and forming disciples of Christ is an ongoing challenge for congregations in this postmodern, fast-paced, distraction-filled world. To this context, Dr. Rueter applies both simple encouragement and practical ideas to teaching the Christian faith at home and within the “family of faith.” This book helps parents, church leaders, and members assess their confirmation process and practice as well as give hope for the future. Many of the ideas are time tested and ensconced in congregations and families and Dr. Rueter provides a grace-filled nudge to put our faith in Christ into action. At the heart of it, Dr. Reuter reflects the body of Christ's shared care and responsibility for young people.

—Rev. Mark Kiessling
Interim Director, LCMS Youth Ministry

This is an excellent, reader friendly book, championing the cause of lifelong learning and lifespan catechesis. Rueter recognizes the responsibility of the whole church for raising disciples. He makes the case that catechesis is something church and family do together. Anyone concerned about teaching

the faith to children, youth, and adults through the entire span of life will find plenty to chew on.

Chapter 3, “What Went Wrong?,” provides an outstanding analysis of the challenge of teaching God’s universal truth in a postmodern world. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book. Rueter provides generous insights from other sources (e.g., Christian Smith in the National Study of Youth and Religion, Eugene Roehlkepartain at Search Institute, David Kinnaman, Gabe Lyons, and many more) to reinforce his points.

The second half of the book targets parents with ideas for teaching the catechism to their children. Again, great for parents but also very helpful for any instructor. Rueter’s reflections on the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism could easily be read devotionally by parents, pastors, DCEs, deaconesses, or small group leaders preparing to teach a confirmation class.

This book should find a place on the bookshelf of any person teaching the faith.

—Rev. Dr. Terry Dittmer
Senior Director, Youth Ministry Specialist
LCMS Office of National Mission

Teaching the Faith at Home will effectively equip and encourage church workers and parents alike as they work hand-in-hand to “train up a child” (Proverbs 22:6). In this excellent resource, which is both engaging and practical, author David L. Rueter provides an eye-opening approach to confirmation instruction—a philosophy of ministry that may be fundamental to building and maintaining a viable “catechesis culture” in the church and its families today!

—Deb Burma
Author of *Raising Godly Girls* (CPH, 2015)
and *Stepping Out: To a Life on the Edge* (CPH, 2013)
Youth Ministry Leader

TEACHING THE FAITH AT HOME

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HOW IS THIS DONE?



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INTRODUCTION

The Word of God was a central part of my home life for as long as I can remember. Thus, I have always had a passion for learning about God and His Word. Both of my parents were Lutheran teachers, so I not only received instruction in the home, but I also went to church just about every week. From preschool through eighth grade, I attended Good Shepherd Lutheran School in Downey, California, where my father served as principal as well as the seventh and eighth grade teacher. You might think that after all that I might want less, not more, from confirmation. Yet when it came time for confirmation, I found myself seeking out more, not less, instruction. I did not want simple answers and at times may have pushed my pastor further than he was prepared to go in order to satisfy my own curiosity.

As a church with a parochial school, Good Shepherd offered confirmation instruction both in the classroom during the week as well as on Wednesday afternoons for church members who did not attend the Day School. Although my pastor meant well, he was neither well prepared to deal with the junior high mind nor was he very enthusiastic about attempting to do so. I will admit that I may have been a bit much of a child to deal with. My desire to dig further than the average student into catechesis may have presented a challenge alongside other students who were more interested in flirting with the girls or playing baseball with wads of paper and a baseball-bat shaped pen (true story—we did play a form of homerun derby while instruction continued).

As a father of two young boys, I spend a good deal of time thinking about how I can re-create in my own children the passion I had for learning the faith. My wife, Andrea, and I started reading the Bible to both James and Wesley since well before they were able to sit through story time before bed. We have attempted to live out our conviction that the Word of God ought to be a central shaping force for our lives. We have attempted to engage in spiritual conversations, explaining what takes place when we worship at church, as well as discussing the Trinity at bath time (yes, even at age 3, James had a fairly detailed discussion on the Trinity while playing with toys in the tub).

My sons have not always wanted to sit still while reading stories from their various children's Bibles. Like all kids, there are times when they would rather spend the time after Sunday School on the playground rather than go into church with us to worship. And if I am being honest, I will have to say that I still have Sunday mornings when I would rather sleep in than fight to get the family out of bed, fed, dressed, and on the road to church. However, the passion that moved me as a child to seek out more knowledge of my Savior and motivated me to enter ministry as a Director of Christian Education still moves me, despite my not being a morning person, to accomplish this feat.

Looking back through my years as a Director of Christian Education, and especially at all the confirmation classes I have taught, I really appreciate just how much my parents shaped my faith in Christ and desire to grow in that faith. Year in and year out, the start of confirmation instruction in the fall meant that families would begin to come out of the woodwork and sign up little Timmy and Suzie for class. As exciting as that has been over the years, I have also learned to anticipate that a good number of those students will return to the woodwork from whence they came, just as soon as instruction is completed and the Rite of Confirmation is performed. Even students who, by all appearances, were engaged and even quite inquisitive in class (as I was) never show up again after the celebratory cake is served with the requisite red punch.

Now, I do need to mention that I have seen exceptions to this trend and they bring me much joy. I have seen whole families begin to engage in the life of the congregation as a direct result of the connections formed during and through the confirmation instructional process. However, having seen so many depart just as swiftly as they arrived, I have found my heart heavy and questioning the effectiveness of what was being done under that name of confirmation.

I wanted to know more about what was happening. I wanted, and even still desire, to understand all that I can about confirmation and its impact on the youth and families in our churches. This led me to spend the last few years in doctoral study on the nature, history, and models of instruction for confirmation. Just as I was not satisfied as a student in eighth grade with the confirmation instruction that I was receiving during the school day, I was not satisfied with dismissing the question of how we might do confirmation better. As an eighth grade student, I spent

time attending an extra confirmation class after school for the public school kids. In the past few years, I have continued to explore the topic, spending time reading a wide variety of books and articles on confirmation and related topics. I make no claims to have discovered the perfect program that will keep your kids from heading out the door following confirmation. Would you really believe me if I claimed that I did have such a program? Even so, I do believe that I have locked in on a philosophy of ministry that is essential to constructing a catechesis culture within the life of your church.

Whether you are a pastor, DCE, parent, or church leader with a desire to improve your congregation's approach to confirmation, I want to begin here and now to challenge you to think beyond confirmation and to start thinking in terms of catechesis. We do not use words like that in the church much, which is a shame. Words like *catechesis* just sound too "churchy." At times, we rightly shy away from "churchy" words that only manage to confuse folks in our age of lessening biblical literacy. Yet, I want to challenge you to reclaim the term *catechesis* with me and explore in these pages how catechesis is the key to maintaining a connection to the Church and the faith through childhood and into adulthood.

Part 1 of this book focuses on laying a foundation. In order to accomplish this, I will begin by first defining just what catechesis is in chapter 1. In doing so, I will walk through the history and development of catechesis from the ancient Early Church through to the development of what we have come to know as confirmation. I know that not everyone may be interested in history, but take the time to walk through the years with me and together we will see more clearly where we have come from and establish a foundation for where we might propose to go in the years and decades ahead.

In chapter 2, I will review and explore the theology behind catechetical instruction. Following this theological exploration, chapter 3 will provide an assessment of the state of confirmation, examining what has gone wrong with the Church's approach to confirmation in recent history. The historical development, theological foundation, and critical assessment of confirmation and catechesis will provide the starting point from which this book will attempt to point ahead to a new and improved approach that will seek to better connect youth and their families with the Church, both well before and for eternity following confirmation.

To explore and develop the philosophy of ministry that I believe is essential for quality catechesis, chapter 4 will tackle the application of developmental theory to catechetical process. Chapter 5 will then discuss the concept of a thinking climate in both the Church and the home. Chapter 6 will focus on the ministry of confirmation itself. This chapter will examine how families and church leaders can best establish the proper place of confirmation in the structure of the larger ministry of the Church and life of the family. From there, chapter 7 will explore specific needs that blended and single parent families face with regard to catechizing their children.

Part 2 will be more practical. Chapter 8 will provide strategies that can be employed in the local church to help make catechesis and confirmation instruction not merely a brief class that students take to graduate, but rather an introduction to a lifetime of learning and growth in Christ. Then chapter 9 will introduce how parents are able to equip themselves for the teaching of their own children with the content of Luther's Small Catechism. Finally, chapter 10 and following will explore each of the Six Chief Parts and the Table of Duties. I will share practical ideas that parents can use as their children grow up in the faith to prepare them not only for the Rite of Confirmation but also for a lifetime of catechesis. Christian Questions with their Answers (section 4 in the Small Catechism) will be covered as an appendix. Parents are encouraged to draw on the material included in chapters 10–17 as they teach the faith at home.

The life of faith in Christ is a journey of relationship. God gathers us—created as social beings—into families and churches, where we journey together, offering support, correction, guidance, and encouragement. Please join me on the journey as I explore what might be if we were to reexamine the nature of catechesis in a Lutheran context.

PART 1

UNDERSTANDING CATECHESIS
AND CONFIRMATION

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS CATECHESIS ANYWAY?

“Catechesis? Is it contagious?”

I love Hugh Laurie. His portrayal of Gregory House on the television show *House* was “Must See TV” for me for years. Each week, Dr. House and his team were presented with some rare condition to diagnose that no other group of doctors was able to figure out. In round table form they would run through a barrage of diagnostic possibilities with technical language that left me a bit confused (really, why was sarcoidosis mentioned in just about every episode?) and often caused me to watch the show with medical dictionary in hand.

Catechesis is one of those “churchy” kinds of words that we tend to stray away from to avoid unnecessary confusion not only for new believers but also for longtime members who may have never heard nor understood what it means. Making use of this term in a book such as this may seem to be similar to my armchair medical practice of watching *House*. Yet, I would argue that when we lose terms like *catechesis*, we run the risk of losing the essential core of the Church practice that the term defines. So what is catechesis anyway, and why is such a term worth explaining in a culture uninterested in tradition and traditional-sounding terms?

The Greek word *katacheo*, from which our term *catechesis* is derived, means “to sound again.” Thus, the educational process of catechesis is the sounding again of the historic truths of the Christian faith from one generation to the next.¹ An elder generation presents the content of our

¹ John Bombaro, “A Catechetical Imitation of Christ,” *Modern Reformation* (March–April 2009): 32.

common faith, and the younger generation echoes back what they have learned. Catechesis, then, in its simplest form is a sort of call and response of the truths of the Christian faith. Luther's Small Catechism exemplifies this in its structure and form. Although there already were catechisms available prior to Luther's work, his innovation in structuring the book in a question and answer format was new to the genre.

In the Preface of his Large Catechism, Luther states substantive reasons why the Christian faithful should continually use the catechism. Both the weighty reasons and the urgency remain today. Luther was concerned with the lack of teaching of the faith that he saw in the churches of his day. I believe that we face a similar crisis today. Churches are full of activity, but may often fail to ensure quality teaching, especially for the young. The Church continues to struggle against the prevailing winds of the culture that seek to instill in emerging generations what Christian Smith calls "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."² While the culture pushes toward a conception of faith lacking in distinctions, faithful Lutheran pastors, DCEs, teachers, and, most importantly, parents seek with much prayer to impart the unique claims of the Christian faith into the hearts and minds of young people. As Paul teaches in Romans 6, while we are still dead in our sins and wholly incapable of reaching out to God, Christ reaches out to us, removes from us our sins, and restores us to life and a right relationship with the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Catechesis is an educational practice of the Church that provides a portion of the pushing back against the tide of our culture. Through the sounding again of the truths of Scripture, one generation bequeaths to the next the essential core of Christianity. The presentation of the essential core truths of the Christian faith has developed over time, but the foundational structures have been with us for many centuries. What we have in the Small Catechism includes what are known as the Six Chief Parts. They are the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession, and finally Holy Communion. These, along with the Daily Prayers, Table of Duties, and Christian Questions with Their Answers, form the substance of Luther's Small Catechism.

² Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118–71.

Much of the foundational teachings of the Church summarized and taught through Luther's Small Catechism were already essential to the catechetical teaching of the Church in the centuries prior to Luther. The earliest written document related to the Church's catechetical efforts is the *Didache* (first century AD). With the bulk of converts of the time coming from the Gentile community, the *Didache* was written to pass on what it means to live as people of The Way.³ Whereas Lutheran catechesis focuses more on right understanding, the focus of the *Didache* was more on right living than on right learning.

The Church Fathers used this early work to develop the practices of and structures for catechesis. In the third century AD, *On the Apostolic Tradition* presented a practice that included a rigorous examination on the merits of one's claim of faith and an examination of the changes evident in one's life. The teaching provided in this early document focused on what we today might call "Christian living," and instruction in it could last upwards of three years. The catechumen (formal student of the Christian faith) was then instructed on the teachings of the Gospel in preparation for Baptism and finally instructed on the sacrament of Holy Communion.⁴

This early practice of the Church seems to be very different from the "Pastor's Class" concept of modern Lutheranism. Yet, it makes sense when you stop to consider the precarious situation the Early Church was in at that time. Prior to Constantine, the Church lived through periods of violent persecution. The Early Church leadership had to be certain that those claiming to be new converts were not in fact spies sent to identify the leadership of this new religious movement. Judaism was legal while Christianity was not. Initially, Roman officials seemed to allow that Christianity was merely a sect within Judaism, but with time, the Christian faith was seen as more distinct from Judaism than legally allowable. The Roman practice had been to allow conquered people to maintain their pre-existing religious beliefs and practices (within certain parameters). However, the development of new religious beliefs and practices

³ The Way was another name used during the first century AD to describe the Christian movement. It referred to people who followed "the way" of living as taught by Jesus.

⁴ John H. Westerhoff III and O. C. Edwards Jr., *A Faithful Church* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co, 1981), 52.

was severely restricted. Thus, what seems like extreme measures to our modern ears were in fact reasonable precautions given the culture in which the Church first took root.

Following the conversion of Constantine, things radically changed. Rather than having to protect the Church from spies, the church leaders had to protect the integrity of the Church teachings from the massive influx of converts to the now trendy faith of the emperor. In order to handle the massive influx of converts, catechesis could no longer take place in smaller, more private settings. The more intimate discipling of converts conducted by the Early Church had to give way to larger scale presentations. Thus, the catechetical sermon, presented to larger audiences, ascended to the forefront of the Church's catechetical preparations.⁵ Great figures in the history of the catechetical sermon included Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Augustine of Hippo. Cyril firmly established the pattern of catechesis as a threefold framework with the Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord's Prayer. John Chrysostom was known for the practical nature of his catechetical sermons. In his *Baptismal Instruction*,⁶ he skillfully connected teaching the faith with cultural commentary, providing a context for comprehension of doctrinal exposition. Augustine explored a number of pedagogical techniques including the use of questions as well as the honing of rhetorical skills. This, in fact, made Augustine a rather popular catechist.

As the golden age of the catechetical sermon waned, the form remained beyond its true fruitfulness. Catechetical sermons were still preached, but no longer were converts moving through the catechetical process toward Baptism. As the Medieval Church developed, major changes in theology and practice reshaped catechesis. One of these changes was the development of a longer time period between Baptism and first Communion. Early Church conversions tended to focus on adult populations. As Christianity spread and new people groups were added, this trend continued. It was only once the majority of the people groups of Europe were Christianized that the trend changed and larger numbers of children were baptized. While there had been, and in fact

⁵ Josef A. Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith: A Manual of Catechesis* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 3.

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), 36–40.

continues to be, a tradition of infant Communion in the Eastern or Orthodox Church, the Western or Roman Church did not follow suit. Thus, catechesis moved from a form of instruction provided prior to Baptism to a practice of educating those baptized as infants once they were able to reason well enough to comprehend the faith for themselves. In response to this development, the Church developed two tools that have become foundational for modern catechetical efforts: the catechism and confirmation.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATECHISM AND CONFIRMATION

Although the basic structure of the catechism was fairly well solidified by the thirteenth century AD,⁷ the term *catechism* was not used in English until 1357, in reference to John Thoresby's *The Lay Folks' Catechism*. The development of *The Lay Folks' Catechism* was approached with a dual purpose in mind. The simultaneous issuing of the work in both Latin and the vernacular meant that both the laity and the priests were able to improve their understanding of the Christian faith. The catechism taught on six items: the fourteen points of the Creed, the Ten Commandments, seven sacraments, seven works of mercy, seven virtues, and seven deadly sins.⁸ This set the standard by which catechisms would be developed and evolve in the coming years.

Another example of the further development of early catechisms can be seen in *Life of Soul*.⁹ What is interesting to note when reviewing *Life of Soul* is the large number of scriptural references included. This contribution to the development of the catechism would become far more common in future catechisms, like those of Luther and the other reformers.

Of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments, confirmation remained one of the worst defined within the practice of the faith in Medieval Catholicism.¹⁰ In some sense, it can be argued that its development was more of a reaction to shifting practices in Baptism, since more infants

⁷ Berard L. Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 9.

⁸ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 13.

⁹ P. F. Schaffner, trans., "Life of Soul," in *Culture of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 211.

than adults were baptized in the Middle Ages in Europe, as opposed to the larger numbers of adult Baptisms that marked the Early Church period. The catechism—Luther’s and others (see *The Lay Folks’ Catechism* and *Life of Soul* for precursors to Luther’s)—became the instruction manual for catechesis within the structure of confirmation. Confirmation thus took shape as a way for the Church to instruct youth in the faith of their Baptism as they transitioned toward adulthood.¹¹ As this method of instruction was taking shape, the Roman Catholic Church was solidifying its teaching on the sacramental nature of confirmation itself.

When the reformers set out to reform the Church, they did not neglect the educational aspects of church life, and thus brought their own theological understanding to bear on the practice of catechesis and the development of catechisms. The connection between catechesis and the catechism is that of instructional method and instructional tool. Just as the catechetical sermon once performed the task as a guide through the Scriptures and foundational doctrines, the catechism developed as a manual for instruction of the unlearned. As the form of some indicates, instructors and parents quizzed students with questions directly out of the catechism. The emphasis was on memorization, as it was assumed that all students had already accepted the teachings of the Church. Thus both the reformers and Rome used these documents to distinguish students’ understanding of the Ten Commandments, the Sacraments, and the rest of the core elements found in their pages.

FORMING LUTHER’S THEOLOGY OF CATECHESIS

Confirmation nearly did not survive Luther’s reforms. More than merely rejecting the sacramental aspects of confirmation, he initially considered leaving the practice entirely behind. However, despite his concerns, Luther concluded that if a form of confirmation could be instituted that did not supplant Baptism, he could support it as an educational effort.¹²

¹¹ Keep in mind that adolescence was not a stage of development in the Middle Ages. The transition to adulthood was more closely tied to physiological changes at the onset of puberty. Thus, our “traditional” junior high confirmation once marked a truer transition into adulthood than it does today.

¹² Arthur Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 16.

Luther came to this conclusion when he realized how much the German people of his day needed solid biblical instruction and that proper training and tools were lacking for local parish priests. He rightly maintained the distinction that confirmation was not to be viewed as a sacrament, but rather as a critically essential educational ministry of the Church. In this way, Luther sought to disconnect the catechetical nature of confirmation from the sacramental theology that grew up around it as developed by the Roman Catholic Church. Catechesis was once again adapted to respond to the shifting needs and theological reforms of the Church.

Just as it took Luther time to discover the value that catechesis and catechism might have for his reform movement, it also took time for him to develop his own work. His theology evolved as the answers to certain questions caused him to move on to other emerging questions. As he worked, he made use of a series of charts from which he would later develop both his Large and Small Catechisms. Through these charts, Luther developed what became known as the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism.¹³

Luther, though an educated man, possessed the ability to write to the uneducated. The success of the Small Catechism can be seen in the clarity with which it presents biblical material.¹⁴ The logical flow that Luther developed aided in the use of the Small Catechism for study. This made his theology accessible to the growing number of Lutherans in Germany and across Europe. Luther's Small Catechism should be considered a text for the life of the Church, not merely used for a brief period of instruction, as is more common today.

Luther's work on the Small Catechism affected more than the churches that bear his name today. In many ways, Luther was really introducing catechesis in a modern sense. He sought to disconnect the catechetical nature of confirmation from the sacramental emphasis placed upon it by the Roman Catholic Church.

¹³ Harold Grimm, "Luther's Catechism as Textbook," in *Teaching the Faith* (River Forest, IL: Lutheran Education Association, 1967), 34.

¹⁴ Grimm, "Luther's Catechism as Textbook," 38.

LUTHER'S CATECHISM COMES TO AMERICA

When Lutherans came to America, they brought with them an assortment of catechisms from the various regional Lutheran churches to which they had belonged in Europe. Each regional exposition of the catechism lent its own interpretation of Luther to the theological discussion. As theological trends in Europe shaped these interpretations, the various groups of Lutherans who gathered together in America struggled to form a united voice. This resulted in the development of two main streams of Lutheranism: American Lutheranism and Confessional Lutheranism.

Lacking a central publishing house, dozens of variant catechisms were found within a single Lutheran congregation.¹⁵ Compounding this confusion, the first edition of Luther's Small Catechism produced in America was published not by a Lutheran, but by a Moravian. As one might expect, this edition, published in 1744, was not well accepted or widely used. It was not until 1785 that a single unified catechism was officially recognized and printed for the Pennsylvania Ministerium. Thus, American Lutheranism took shape in an ambiguous approach to confessional standards and the influence of German Rationalism.

By way of contrast, the development of early Confessional Lutheranism offered a counter to the movement of American Lutheranism. Immigration played a key factor in the resurgence of confessionalism in America around the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶ As these more conservative immigrants arrived, they brought with them a desire to maintain the confessional standards that they held dear. Many, in fact, fled the Old World to avoid the Prussian Union that sought to merge Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany.

This renewed confessionalism is evident from the inclusion of the Augsburg Confession in many editions of the catechism printed after 1840.¹⁷ Clearly, this new wave of Lutheran immigrants approached their faith in a different way than their American Lutheran predecessors. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there had not been confessional Lutherans in America prior to this wave.

¹⁵ Arthur Repp, *Luther's Catechism Comes to America* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), 47.

¹⁶ Repp, *Luther's Catechism Comes to America*, 178.

¹⁷ Repp, *Luther's Catechism Comes to America*, 179.

In 1613, the more orthodox Johann Conrad Dietrich published a catechism that drew from the exposition of Luther's Small Catechism in a series of catechetical lectures.¹⁸ It was this version that was selected to be the first official catechism of the newly forming confessional Lutheran Church body, the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, known since 1947 as the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The early founders of the LCMS saw in Dietrich a fellow brother who was as concerned as they were about the teaching of the pure doctrines of the Church.¹⁹ Purity of doctrine and a strict adherence to the confessions marked and defined his catechism for Confessional Lutheranism.

Catechisms were used in the Christian home as well as in the local church. Luther taught that the teaching of the faith to the young was a duty of local government, the church, and the family.²⁰ Parents would spend time quizzing their children, perhaps at the dinner table, to assist them in memorization. Instruction focused around these quizzing interactions in a memorization/recitation model. Lutheran parish pastors made use of the Small and Large Catechisms in both their own learning and as instructional guides while teaching the children in their parish.

Luther's pedagogical model involved three basic stages:

1. Learn and remember the basics.²¹
2. Understand the basics.²²
3. Make applying the fundamentals a lifelong practice.²³

In stage 1, the catechist (the teacher or instructor) would present the material in the catechism, then the catechumen would recite what was just taught. In this manner, the students put the basics to memory.²⁴ Luther's

¹⁸ S. Carter, "Catechisms in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: An Historical Survey" in *Teaching the Faith* (River Forest, IL: Lutheran Education Association, 1967), 59.

¹⁹ Carter, "Catechisms in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," 59–60.

²⁰ Charles Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 92.

²¹ Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 97.

²² Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 100.

²³ Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 109.

²⁴ Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 98.

question and answer method was used in stage 2, when the catechist moved from memorization to understanding as the famous Lutheran phrase “What does this mean?” was asked and Luther’s explanations came into play. In stage 3, Luther stressed the need for ongoing study of the catechism, since it covers the very foundations of the faith.²⁵ The time of formal catechesis and the use of the catechism was only a beginning. Following confirmation, students were to continue to make use of the catechism as a form of daily meditation and guide to God’s Word.

LUTHERAN CATECHESIS TODAY

Today we find the inheritance of both Confessional and American Lutheranism across Lutheran denominations. In general, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) tends toward American Lutheranism, while the LCMS and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) are marked by Confessional Lutheranism. However, the streams of both approaches to confirmation have crossed to such an extent that one can find the influence of both within each of these three church bodies.

A diversity of forms and models mark the current practice of confirmation in Lutheran churches in America. What was once uniform and directed primarily through denominational publishing houses is now a multifaceted and creative mix of denominational, independent, and local church developed curriculums.

Each of the three largest Lutheran church bodies in America (ELCA, LCMS, and WELS) publishes its own confirmation materials with its own focus. The ELCA is currently promoting its *Here We Stand*²⁶ curriculum. With online content and customizable lessons, the focus is on flexible, contextual usage. The LCMS, through Concordia Publishing House (CPH), offers a subscription service called *Confirmation Builder*²⁷ that enables pastors and other instructors to customize lessons drawing from a number of sources in the CPH catalog. The Faith Foundations²⁸ curriculum of the WELS similarly remains strictly faithful to the Small Cate-

²⁵ Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 110.

²⁶ See www.augsburgfortress.org/herewestand/.

²⁷ See www.confirmationbuilder.com.

²⁸ See online.nph.net/p-7713-faith-foundations-catechism-student-lessons-yr1.aspx.

chism for fifth and sixth graders. Their Luther's Catechism Lessons for seventh and eighth graders walk students through the original questions in the Small Catechism and provides additional instructional aides to better connect the content to students' lives.

The Concordia Catechetical Academy²⁹ is at the forefront of a movement within the LCMS to return to a more traditional model of catechesis in the style of the Small Catechism itself. To accomplish this, they have published the Lutheran Catechesis Series, as well as other publications, and have held conferences on catechesis. Moving beyond the practice of seventh and eighth grade confirmation instruction, the Academy's catechesis model begins far earlier. Students learn and memorize the Six Chief Parts in third grade and the Table of Duties in fourth grade. They then go on to learn the Old Testament in fourth grade and the New Testament in fifth grade, followed by instruction on the Large Catechism in sixth and seventh grade. In eighth grade, they study the Table of Duties at a greater depth, along with the Parables and Miracles of Jesus, the Smalcald Articles, and the Augsburg Confession.

In the new confessionalism of the Lutheran Catechesis Series, the question and answer structure of Luther's Small Catechism is reprised and expanded into the other teachings of the Church. The Lutheran Catechesis Series model seeks to incorporate additional material to respond to weaknesses seen in students' biblical literacy. The key difference, however, is its instructional approach. Whereas other curriculums have moved away from rote memorization, the Lutheran Catechesis Series stresses its usage as fundamental.

Supplementing the congregational instruction, the Lutheran Catechesis Series makes use of what it calls the Congregation at Prayer. Using a structured order of worship for the home, the Congregation at Prayer provides hymns, prayers, Bible readings, and elements from the Small Catechism for home study and reflection.

In addition to the resurgence of confessional approaches to confirmation, a number of innovative new models are being explored. These emerging models seek to strengthen the weaknesses that have crept into confirmation ministry since its inception in the Lutheran Church. Many seek to avoid the "graduation effect," in which students consider their

²⁹ An auxiliary organization of Peace Lutheran Church, Sussex, WI.

confirmation to be a graduation from church life. Others merely hope to improve the educational methodology used to convey traditional content. Some new models augment the content of Lutheran confirmation instruction to compensate for changes in culture, resulting in a larger focus on overall biblical understanding and literacy.

Rev. Dr. Kevin Wyssmann developed one such innovative approach when he served at Christ's Greenfield Lutheran Church in Gilbert, Arizona. In his "Systemic Catechesis,"³⁰ students are not required to begin or complete their studies at a single predetermined date. Instead, he allows for learning beginning in fifth grade with no set required completion date. In this manner, students can work at their own pace; they are not left to drop through the cracks, because they have the support of the ministry staff and elders.

This systemic model also throws into the mix a youth-oriented worship service to teach students the richness of weekly worship. It involves the students in parish service hours, through which they experience how the gifts God gives them can translate into service in the church. "Systemic Catechesis" offers a balanced approach that attempts to provide students of different learning styles time to consider their learning in a way more conducive to their needs.³¹

Wyssmann stresses that the church needs to be flexible as it works with individual students. He notes that all students bring with them their own unique prior knowledge of the Christian faith.³² In some cases, our students need to unlearn false understandings of the faith before they are able to learn and build upon right understandings. One can see how, with a task such as this, flexibility in the time of instruction is essential.

Under the guidance of Dr. William Knippa, the confirmation program at Bethany Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas, delays instruction until students are in ninth and tenth grade. Basing this model on his Ph.D. work in psychology, Dr. Knippa seeks to work with students at a more advanced stage of concept abstraction. Students are expected to know the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed,

³⁰ Kevin L. Wyssmann, "Systemic Catechesis" (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2002).

³¹ Wyssmann, "Systemic Catechesis," 5.

³² Wyssmann, "Systemic Catechesis," 51.

and the books of the Bible prior to the beginning of instruction. In this way, instruction time can focus on life application and a student's beliefs or questions regarding the doctrines of the Church.³³

In 1993, Rev. Rich Melheim, a pastor in the ELCA, developed Faith Inkubators, which has reinvigorated confirmation across several denominations. Melheim's model of confirmation involves both a large group time and small group discussions. The multi-media curriculum provides students with game-show style activities designed to engage the learner. The small group time encourages a more personal application of the large group learning.

Faith Inkubators has many features designed to keep students' attention, but it has been criticized for lacking depth of content. In addition to the traditional Six Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism, the curriculum includes sections on Martin Luther, an overview of both the Old and New Testaments, and the life of Jesus. Another section covers what they call "Hot Topics," such as Sex and Love; Drugs: Your Body is a Temple; Fast Cars and Other Risky Business; War and Peace; Suicide; and others.³⁴ With these additional topics as well as the overall structure of the program, church leaders are able to supplement where they find the need to add depth to the curriculum.

Faith Inkubators has added Living Faith Journals as a tool to take home the learning done in confirmation class. Just like in small group time, during which highs and lows (what went well and not so well in the past week), along with prayer requests, are discussed before reiterating the main teaching, the journals replicate small group time daily in the home. The overarching goal of the journals, as well as Faith Inkubators as a whole, is to resurrect confirmation from the previously mentioned "graduation effect."

CATECHESIS: MORE THAN JUST CONFIRMATION

In *What Does This Mean?: Catechesis in the Lutheran Congregation*, former LCMS president A. L. Barry defines catechesis as having everything to do with leading to faith in Christ and living the life of

³³ I experienced this practice firsthand when on my internship at Bethany.

³⁴ "Faith Inkubators: Head to the Heart," www.faithink.com/Inkubators/h2h_90_themes.asp (accessed October 27, 2008).

faith.³⁵ This implies that multiple strands of Christian education are at play in catechesis, including discipleship and spiritual formation.

Catechesis is a term that the Church does not use as often as it should. Catechesis is far larger than confirmation. While confirmation can be seen as either the Rite of Confirmation or a sequence of study leading to that rite, catechesis is the larger formation of core doctrinal understanding that begins far sooner and lasts far longer than even the most extensive confirmation program.

Christian education is broader than catechesis. Whereas catechesis focuses on core doctrines, Christian education seeks to teach the full content of the Bible. Looking at the relationship between catechesis and Christian education this way, we see that all of catechesis is Christian education, but not all of Christian education is catechesis.

The relationship between Christian education and discipleship is similar. Christian education is necessary, catechesis included, but it is not sufficient for discipleship to take place. Discipleship is the following of Christ in one's life. As Lutherans, we tend not to emphasize what it means to live out our Christian faith as much as our Evangelical brothers, which may, to a certain extent, be wise on our part. Our strength lies in teaching the doctrines of the Christian faith with clarity. The hope is that a clear understanding of the doctrines of the Christian faith will naturally result in individuals living out that faith in a Christlike manner. Nevertheless, I would suggest that, at times, our neglect to draw the connection between our rich doctrinal emphasis and our life in Christ hinders the spiritual maturity of our congregations—especially as it relates to teaching the faith to the young people in our church. This sets up a false distinction between the head and the heart as they relate to our faith.

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stresses that God is the one who has laid the foundation of our discipleship in the Christian life.³⁶ As thankful recipients of God's grace, we are less likely to fall into cheap grace.³⁷ Out of a sense of thanksgiving, we rejoice in the blessings

³⁵ A. L. Barry, *What Does This Mean?: Catechesis and the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), 9.

³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1954), 28.

³⁷ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

of forgiveness and seek to respond in joyful service of our Lord and King. As a community of faith, we gather for mutual support and growth, and each week we seek to grow in faith and in joy-filled service.

It is in this context that catechesis is rightly placed. There is no catechesis apart from the community of faith. Within the community of the Church, that is, the Body of Christ, fellow sinners gather to receive forgiveness from and restoration with God along with their fellow members of humanity. For people to be led into the Christian faith and life, there must be someone doing the leading. Once they have been led into the faith, they also need someone to lead the growth and development of their faith. The Church is, by God's design, a place devoted to the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, prayers, and breaking bread together (Acts 2:42).³⁸

Again, we see the strands of catechesis, Christian education, and discipleship come together. Thus, as a working definition of catechesis, I would suggest that we proceed with the following: Catechesis is the element of Christian education focused on understanding the essential doctrines of the Bible that form the foundation of the Christian faith and the adoption of those claims as central tenants of one's own faith and life leading toward richer discipleship.

In worship, the liturgy of the Church teaches believers, new and old, the language of our relationship with God and one another. Through our worship, we come to learn the story of the relationship between God and His creation, the fall and subsequent redemption through Christ. In worship, Christ comes to us through Word and Sacrament. God's grace restores us, bringing us into a right relationship with Him and one another.

Having heard from God's Word and responding in praise to Him, we naturally seek to grow in our knowledge of Him and all that He has and continues to do for us. Our instruction in the Christian faith, essentially what catechesis is all about, provides additional content to the faith we express and confess in worship. Steven P. Mueller notes that despite ongoing struggles to understand Christ's claims of divinity, His role as

³⁸ "The breaking of bread" may be a reference to Holy Communion. I tend to lean that direction, but others suggest that this was merely another aspect of fellowship through the practice of communal meals.

teacher was recognized.³⁹ The Great Commission charged Christ's disciples, and by extension their disciples, with continuing His teaching ministry. However, Jesus was no mere instructor, since we know Him to be God incarnate. Thus, the central content of the faith taught is Christ Himself. This is the core of our catechetical efforts.

Having been instructed in the faith, we are, in theory, equipped for service in the name of Christ. As Christians, we each take part in the ministry⁴⁰ of the Church, though through a wide variety of ways.⁴¹ In our catechesis and spiritual growth, we learn about how we might seek to serve others within the Church and those outside the Body of Christ in need of the Gospel's saving message. Matthew 25:35–36 provides a view of how faithful Christians might serve their fellow man. In this way, we minister to the physical needs of those in our communities in need and through that service minister to Christ.

Thus, we see that catechesis ought to be a foundational element of our Christian education efforts in the local church. However, we also see that this is not done in isolation. It could be argued that catechesis is the foundational element of one's personal discipleship. Whether one becomes a part of the Body of Christ through Baptism as a child or is called into a relationship with Him later in life, a life of discipleship begins as God makes us His own. Infants who are not able to respond to the faith given them at their Baptism must rely for years upon the instruction and support of their parents, sponsors, and others in the family of faith.

Just over a month after he was born, our son James was baptized at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Rancho Cucamonga, California. We have an absolutely classic photo of a rare occurrence. James was perfectly still! It's not just that he did not cry or cause some other typical

³⁹ Steven P. Mueller, "The Doctrine of God," in *Learning at the Foot of the Cross* (Austin, TX: Concordia University Press, 2011), 27.

⁴⁰ Ministry here is used in the broad sense—not ministry in the narrow sense as defined by the pastoral office. Steven P. Mueller clarifies the distinction in *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess* (Wipf & Stock, 2005): "Ministry—from a Latin word meaning, 'service,' ministry is sometimes used as a synonym for any service done by a Christian. More narrowly, ministry refers to the work of specific Christians who are called to specific offices in the church. In its most proper sense, ministry refers to the ministry of word and sacrament, namely the pastoral office." It is the first sense, not the last, that is implied here.

⁴¹ See Matthew 25:35–36 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.

fuss, it was that he was, in fact, fast asleep. James did exactly what he had to in order to be baptized—he fell asleep. There in the pastor’s arms, James was adopted into the family of God, purely as an action of God. He did not even need to be awake for the experience. While we ought not to sleep throughout our life of faith, we are, in fact, in more than a state of spiritual sleep prior to Baptism—we are dead. We offer nothing. Catechesis, then, is a time in which we dig more deeply into the faith of our Baptism and come to terms with the specifics and implications of those beliefs. We are still led by the Holy Spirit, but we are actively growing and learning for ourselves.

In their book, *Grounded in the Gospel*, Packer and Parrett present catechesis as a part of building believers.⁴² They emphasize quality in the workmanship in our approach to catechesis as well as the whole of discipleship.⁴³ They are speaking of the quality of the workmanship that we employ as we pour into the lives of young people and those young in the faith. In order to achieve this quality, I believe that we need to understand catechesis as a unified part of Christian education and our discipleship. The Early Church’s emphasis on orthopraxis (right action) as well as orthodoxy (right belief) speaks to the historicity of this combined emphasis. Our efforts for catechesis very much should be an intentional part of our spiritual-formation efforts as a part of an overall discipleship plan. In the coming chapters we will discuss more about the theological approach to catechesis itself. Then we will get into the practical questions: How do we put catechesis into practice as the element of Christian education focused on understanding the essential doctrines of the Bible that form the foundation of the Christian faith? How do we adopt those claims as central tenants of our own faith and life leading toward richer discipleship?

⁴² J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 16.

⁴³ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 16.