The General Directory for Catechesis calls for a faith that "involves a change of life, a 'metanoia,' that is a profound transformation of mind and heart...By meeting Jesus Christ and by adhering to him the human being sees all of his deepest aspirations completely fulfilled. He finds what he had always been seeking and he finds it superabundantly" (GDC 55). Catechetical methodology must be Christocentric, creative and constantly evaluated by how effectively it invites the learner to lifelong conversion.

Because of the importance it places on the proclamation of the Gospel message and the needs and the capacities of the individual learner, we have found the ecclesial method to be a very effective method for our students.

Step 1: Preparation

Rather than personal experience as our starting point, we begin with a temporary "calculated disengagement" that helps the learner transition from the busyness of the day to a place of openness, docility to the Holy Spirit and receptivity to the truth of God’s Word.

"The catechist must help create the conditions for the possibility of a deepening of God’s Word in the hearts of those being served" (TMWP, p. 138)

Key "Environmental" Factors:

- Physical Environment of the catechetical space – Ensuring the space is as comfortable as possible and conducive to fruitful catechesis. What does the space communicate about what will take place?

- Disposition of the catechist – What do I communicate to those I’m teaching? Am I happy to see them? Have I welcomed them with warmth and enthusiasm? As am ambassador of Christ, do they meet him in me?

- Building an atmosphere of trust and respect amongst your learners – without this, it will be very difficult for learners to be open to God. With it, the capacity for genuine community is present, and they will be more likely to be attentive to the catechist.
Catechesis beginning “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit…”

- The catechist mentors his/her learners in the life of prayer. Prayer is always a crucial part of the “preparation” step. We are teaching them to pray.

- We want them to be comfortable praying with Scripture, with the liturgy, with music, with silence, with formal prayers, with spontaneous prayer, with Christian prayers from various cultures, with the prayers of the saints, and with prayer that arises in their own hearts. Gradually, incrementally, the catechist guides each learner to be comfortable with the immense diversity of the life of prayer.

- The ecclesial method always begins in prayer, inviting the learner to have an open heart before God and his Word.

Step 2: Proclamation

- Central step of the method.

- This is the joyful announcement, the convicted proclamation of the Good News. In one to three sentences, how can the heart of the doctrine be expressed in a way that the learner will understand it and situate everything else they learn around this central statement?

- A good proclamation is
  
  - Short, concise, easy to remember – it will be the one thing “ringing in their ears” as they leave the catechetical setting
  
  - Internalized and understood so well by the catechist, that it is not read but proclaimed from the heart with confidence and joy
  
  - Age appropriate and group appropriate
  
  - Visually present before the students (on board, on handouts, etc.)
  
  - Constantly reinforced throughout the catechesis

- Crafting an effective proclamation presupposes on the part of the catechist a thorough grasp of the doctrine and its implications in the Christian life

- Some examples of proclamations include:

  - “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16)

  - God the Father said to Peter, James and John on Mount Tabor as he says to all of us, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5)
The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life – it is through the Eucharist that we are all united in Christ.

Christ is risen from the dead. Dying he conquered death, to the dead, He has given life!

Prayer unites us to the one who loves us perfectly and unconditionally – it is the lifting up of our hearts and minds to God.

Step 3: Explanation

"In the third step, in a certain sense, the catechist’s personal creativity is now more challenged and evoked so that they may help participants come to a deeper personal understanding and assimilation of the message of faith. The explanation that will be made will, of course, be always in the light of the Church’s understanding of the Word, but the catechist is challenged to find appropriate ways to ‘inculturate’ this message so that it can be adapted to diverse groups to whom it is addressed. This will be done by utilizing appropriate pedagogical and andragogical teaching/learning techniques and by tapping into cultural points of reference that can help with the understanding of the message” (TMWP, p. 143).

Characteristics of this step:

- Most likely the longest step in the method. Time and creativity need to be put into this step so that the learners truly can understand the meaning of what has been proclaimed.

- Active, participative on part of learner is particularly important. This step requires “the active engagement of the participants, so that the relevance of the Word to their life story and to contemporary issues can be brought to light” (TMWP, p. 143).

- Both inductive and deductive learning processes involved – Apologetics and fruitful use of memorization should be used along with storytelling, question and answer, dialog between catechist and learners, roleplaying, art, music, literature, appropriate connections to human experience.

- Learning styles and variety of multiple intelligences of learners engaged so as to elicit a full response of faith

Step 4: Application

"Firm and well-thought-out convictions lead to courageous and upright action” (John Paul II, Catechesi Tradendae 22)

The Deposit of Faith is not meant to be merely intellectualized – its delivery is meant to lead to a full response of faith, to the transformation of the individual and society.
Christian conversion of heart and mind does not happen without asking the question “what are we to do?” (Acts 2:37).

Key Characteristics of this step:

- **Involves call to deepened commitment** to following Christ and his will in our lives.

- **Catechist acts as mediator of this call to conversion**, facilitating “communication between the people and the mystery of God” (GDC 156). It is crucial to create the opportunities for Christian conversion in the catechetical setting and encourage opportunities for this conversion to continue in the life of the family.

- **Many are the ways this step may be done**: carefully led small group discussion, time of silence/meditation, journaling, prayer with others, opportunities for specific resolutions for growth in holiness, etc.

- In end, what is hoped for is (1) a life of increasing personal Christian holiness and witness and (2) life orientation of deeper service to others.

**Step 5: Celebration**

“If the catechetical process begins in prayerful attentiveness and openness to the Word of God, I believe that it must also end in prayerful gratitude and praise to God. This attitude of thanksgiving and praise is paradigmatic for all of Christian life. We look at the ‘wonderful things’ God has done in the Creation and Redemption and are spontaneously impelled to prayer and praise. This must be a major part and the climax of a catechetical process and methodology that is deeply rooted in the Church’s own faith and self-understanding” (TMWP, p. 146-147).

This final step:

- **Cultivates a spirit of praise and gratitude** in the presence of God’s Word.

- **Ends in a place of thanksgiving** and not criticism, skepticism, confusion. The aim is for the learner to leave the catechetical setting in place of peace and joy and preparedness for life’s challenges.

- To accomplish this, the catechist may choose at times explicitly to bring learners to a place of thanksgiving (for example, “the Eucharist, body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ is such a gift to us – let’s turn to the Lord in prayer and thank him now for this immense grace in our lives…”).

- The catechist may choose to creatively incorporate the *session proclamation* into prayer, bringing focus of catechesis back to the heart of the doctrine focused on.

- **Ideas to incorporate into prayer during celebration step:**
  - Liturgy of Word, liturgy of hours, a focus on liturgical year
  - Music – listening or singing
- Creative use of symbols – cross, candle, image of Blessed Virgin
- Movement/gesture – perhaps moving into the Church to pray or inviting learners to come up individually to receive prayers of group

*The Little Children Being Brought to Jesus*
Rembrandt van Rijn