

The Modern Catechumenate in the Diocese of Christchurch  
1993-2002

A research project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Ministry  
at the University of Otago, Dunedin,  
New Zealand.

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June 2007

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## 1

## THE MODERN CATECHUMENATE IN THE DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH

At its heart, the Catechumenate is about forming and energizing Gospel practitioners.

Joel Green and Mark Baker conclude their book *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, by wondering how, in this day and age, we might “articulate the saving significance of the cross.”

The shape of discipleship in the Gospels...and the theological content of the New Testament (taken together)...suggest that (1) following Jesus is focussed on transformation of faith and life...and (2) faithfulness is a process or journey of working out the significance and implications of the gospel in the face of new challenges. Doing theology, then, is not a matter of repeating the tradition or committing to memory a ten-step manual. It has to do with formation as practitioners of the gospel. To whom (then) shall we apprentice ourselves?<sup>1</sup>

Which is exactly the complex question every Christian leader and believer must find an answer to as they construct a dynamic response to the matter of becoming a follower of Jesus.

Over the last 50 years or so, a huge amount of energy and time has gone into the re-discovery and re-animation of the time-honoured practice of catechetical instruction and training as one particular attempt at an answer to the question “How are gospel practitioners to be formed”?

Early in the 1990s the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch launched the Catechumenate. There was a disturbing outcome; this attempt to implement an ancient and honourable mode of Christian instruction, formation and baptismal preparation failed to gain any traction and within a decade disappeared from view as a significant Diocesan and parish

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<sup>1</sup> Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 216.

initiative.<sup>2</sup> Today only vestiges of this experiment remain. This raises the question, “Why”?

My interest in this project was triggered by an Ellen Charry comment about the use of catechetical training for induction and formation into the Christian life;

The din of the secular world’s ways is so loud that the ancient catechetical norm of a three year preparation for baptism is not outrageous. For without lengthy socialization...the turn to God will not be experienced as a homecoming but as entrance into someone else’s house.<sup>3</sup>

The research hypothesis, submitted at the start of the project, proposed two ideas: the first was that the church lacked a common and shared understanding of what it meant to be a Christian in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and because of this it was impossible to obtain comprehensive buy-in from the leadership to support the ancient process of catechumenal preparation for baptism..

The second was that the expectations and demands of the catechumenal process may outrun the ability of the average parish to resource such a process since high levels of commitment by new believer and companion/sponsor over a significantly long period of time are expected. This frightens and discourages faith communities alongside other discipling methods that are popular, have high visibility and appear to yield quick returns.

The research confirms both hypotheses but it also unearths some other very significant issues.

To obtain the information I needed to understand what had happened, I interviewed a number of people and reviewed documents held in the Christchurch Anglican Diocese Archives. Comments of those I spoke with are included in the text and in footnotes. A lot of what they told me has been incorporated into the storyline and in particular informed the historical unfolding of the project that I have outlined in Chapter Three. Their verbatim comments are important but even more important is the picture they painted of a cause that was lost almost before it was born, and of a bewilderment that no one seemed to understand. Their words

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<sup>2</sup> The exception is an abbreviated form of catechumenate incorporating and focussing on the Rites of Passage for students from Christ’s College and St Margaret’s College at ChristChurch Cathedral.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Charry, *By The Renewing of Your Minds. The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243.

betrayed a compelling sense of sadness and confusion and I did what I do in my consulting room, allowed those feelings to generate the questions that then drove my own inquiry.

This Research Project<sup>4</sup> traces the history of the rediscovery of the ‘modern’ catechumenate in Chapter Two, reviews its introduction into the Diocese of Christchurch in Chapter Three, while Chapters Four, Five and Six propose a number of ideas as to why the project failed. Chapter Seven is a summary chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> For a fuller description of the methods and procedures I followed, see Appendix Three, 67.

## 2

### AN OLD IDEA IS REBORN

#### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY CHURCH REDISCOVERS THE CATECHUMENATE

**B**ishop David Coles made his first public reference to the programme “called the catechumenate”<sup>1</sup> in 1993. He was addressing the Synod of the Diocese of Christchurch and had drawn Synod’s attention to the “lack of an effective programme of Christian education” in parishes that would build robust believers in such a way that would give them confidence to share their faith with others. “The Anglican Church in the United States, Canada and Australia” he reported “has now adopted a very effective annual programme of Christian education called the Catechumenate.”<sup>2</sup>

The Bishop had been introduced to the ‘modern’ catechumenate by an Australian colleague, Bishop George A. Hearn of Rochester.<sup>3</sup> The two men had met in 1991 at a Bishop’s Meeting in Australia where Bishop Hearn had presented a paper on the catechumenate as an authentic way for the church to instruct, shape and initiate new Christians into the Body of Christ.

Through the General Board of Religious Education (GBRE) with which Bishop Hearn had been intimately involved, the Australians had produced “A Planning Resource for the Bishop and the Diocese” entitled *Adult Christian Initiation and Formation: Using the Catechumenal Process in Australia*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch* (Christchurch: Diocese of Christchurch, 1993), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Hearn was an enthusiastic participant and contributor to the Catechumenal Work Group of The General Board of Religious Education (GBRE) for The Anglican Church of Australia. The Director of GBRE, the Rev Trevor Smith, subsequently, also became an important resource person to the Diocese of Christchurch, visiting the Diocese on several occasions to help and support the Catechumenate Core Group.

<sup>4</sup> (Boronia: GBRE 1993)

In this document the Australians had ‘captured’ their vision for the Decade of Evangelism<sup>5</sup> while at the same time describing the catechumenate.<sup>6</sup>

A Vision for the Decade

The Catechumenal Process enables the  
congregation  
to reclaim its identity as a baptising community  
in which priority is given to the making and  
forming of new  
Christians.

The congregation engages in forming people  
in the essentials of the Christian life:  
engagement with scripture,  
prayer,  
sacramental worship and  
ministry in daily life and work.

We in GBRE believe that  
the introduction of the Catechumenal Process  
offers an  
authentic way for the Anglican Church of  
Australia  
to participate in the Decade of Evangelism.

It was in this context of “Christian Initiation” that Bishop David introduced the catechumenate to the Diocese of Christchurch in 1993 having already made reference to the Decade of Evangelism in his charge to the Synod one year earlier<sup>7</sup>.

Proponents of the modern catechumenate insist that it links faithfully with the historic, first century process of catechism and Christian formation. That it has links with this process is

<sup>5</sup> Refer to the Decade of Evangelism on page 10 of this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3 This statement and the one on the following page should be compared with the ‘pastoral’ statement from the Roman Catholic parish of St Joseph (Shreveport La.) at the bottom of page 8.

<sup>7</sup> “There is evidence in other Dioceses”, he had said “and I believe we will soon see it here, that the focus on the Decade of Evangelism has begun to bear fruit with growing numbers of people seeking church membership and confirmation”. *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1992*, 29-30.

clear; that it links faithfully with the practice of the early church is not so clear and this will be addressed in Chapter Five.

The modern catechumenate seems to defy precise definition, a fact that creates a host of problems.<sup>8</sup> As the following pages will show the modern catechumenate was born in Rome in 1963 at Vatican II and grew up during the years of the liturgical renewal movement with its emphasis on baptism as the central, locating rite that bestows identity and membership status on Christian believers. Associated with this renewal was the crafting of the ways and means by which those who were to be baptised would be brought to a fuller understanding of their faith and fashioned into the likeness of Christ. These identity shaping processes that provide “suitable pastoral information and guidance aimed at training them in the Christian life”, (see below) developed a life of their own and together with the newly recovered focus on the rites of transition emerging from the liturgical renewal movement, came to be identified as “the modern catechumenate”. This is how the Diocese of Christchurch’s Catechumenate Core Group described it. The quotes are taken from two pamphlets produced by the Core Group.

“The Catechumenate is rooted in baptismal theology and emphasises our understanding of the Church as God’s community.”<sup>9</sup>

It is an intentional process of initiation and incorporation into the local faith community. It is a process by which faith is developed and formed in response to connections made between personal and Gospel stories. Over a period of time candidates are given suitable pastoral information and guidance aimed at training them in the Christian life.

The three main goals of the Catechumenate are:

1. True initiation into the Christian faith (baptism)
2. Incorporation into the community of faith
3. To produce people who are living lives that are more explicitly Christian.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>9</sup> “*An Adult Journey in Faith. A Brief Guide to the Catechumenal Process*”.

Section 3. Undated and copyrighted to the Rev Lois Aldersley. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>10</sup> “*Introduction to the Catechumenate*” version 4. The Anglican Diocese of Christchurch (Christchurch Anglican Diocese Archives [hereafter CADA] 04 July 1999, 2.

Again, in this statement from the General Board of Religious Education for the Anglican Church of Australia, the defining four stage process of the catechumenate is described:

The Catechumenal Process is directly related to the Church's work of Christian Initiation and Christian Formation of all God's people. The...Process involves people in a journey through four stages:

1-inquiry, 2-formation, 3-candidacy, and 4- reflection.

A person begins by making inquiry, moves into a period of being formed, journeys through intense and immediate preparation for participation in the rites and sacraments, and then reflects on what participation in these 'holy mysteries' means...

The maintenance of the four stages with whatever time is necessary for participants to pass through them deliberately, is characteristic of the effective operation of the process.

As each stage is completed it is marked by a rite of transition to the next stage. The parish uses these rites to mark and express the deepening conversion of the participants and to gradually integrate the newcomer into the congregation.<sup>11</sup>

Typically this process might last over a period of up to 9 months<sup>12</sup> culminating with the Easter Vigil when the participants would be baptised and admitted to membership.

Catechists who "participate in the education of the people seeking baptism" and companions or sponsors who would "accompany and help a participant" through the process and then present them for baptism are regarded as very significant people in the process.<sup>13</sup>

It was this process of initiation that the Bishop was proposing in his charge to the 1993 Synod.

The recovery of the catechumenate – the 'modern' catechumenate – can be traced through several, though not unrelated sources.

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<sup>11</sup> "Adult Christian Initiation and Formation", 5.

<sup>12</sup> The nine month cycle proposed by the Catechumenate Core Group came to be seen by some within the Diocese as largely unmanageable. "A nine month process with only one entry point each year didn't make sense with my pastoral reality. Preparation for baptism is never tidy". Interviewee G. (Interview Date 14/09/2006)

<sup>13</sup> "Introduction to the Catechumenate" version 4, 9.

## 1 The Roman Catholic RCIA (Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults)

A substantial thread in the ‘modern’ re(dis)covery of the ancient practice of catechetical instruction leads back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council and in particular the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy promulgated by Pope Paul VI in December of 1963.

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4–5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.<sup>14</sup>

A directive to restore the liturgy, a process that was to be “undertake(n) with great care” (Para 21) followed and

the catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be put into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the period of the catechumenate, which is intended as a time of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals. (Para 64).<sup>15</sup>

This directive led eventually to the development of the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The following is an example of the way one Roman Catholic parish describes their understanding of RCIA;

RCIA is the way we are Church...to search, to belong, to mature, to be nourished, to continue growing, to love and be loved: these are fundamental stirrings of the human heart. Our lives are lived in a manner of seeking satisfaction of these very deep hungers throughout the journey of life. RCIA is the experience of discovering that one’s journey is caught up in the mystery of God’s loving plan for all people...RCIA is the prayerful manner in which the journey to Catholic Christianity unfolds. Ordinarily, the journey follows the Church’s Liturgical year and culminates in the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection at the Easter vigil.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), Para 14, 144.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Para 64, 159.

<sup>16</sup> [www.stjosephchurch.net/rcia.html](http://www.stjosephchurch.net/rcia.html) (15/10/2006)

## 2 Liturgical renewal in the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

While the Roman Catholic Church was involved in vigorous liturgical renewal on the back of the ‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy’, churches in the United Kingdom and Europe were re-writing their liturgies while in North America both the Episcopal Church in the USA and the Anglican Church in Canada<sup>17</sup> were engaged in much the same process.

Ruth Meyers<sup>18</sup> traces the development of the rites of Christian initiation within ECUSA. “A baptismal ecclesiology...that emerged out of the process of prayer book revision” led to the new *Book of Common Prayer* used from 1979. In this revision, little attention was paid to the development of catechumenal rites. This changed however after some parishes began adapting the RCIA rites from the Roman Catholic Church for their own use. Subsequently, and after a slow spread of the catechumenate, rites were published in *The Book of Occasional Services*<sup>19</sup> used from 1994. The Episcopalians now had significant, authorized liturgies that recognised the place of catechumens within the Body of Christ and their transition through the various stages of the catechetical process. The explanatory notes make it clear that; “the systematic instruction and formation of its catechumens is a solemn responsibility of the Christian community” and that the responsibility for the preparation of the catechumens “is the Bishop’s and this is shared with the presbyters, deacons, and appointed lay catechists of the diocese”. A catechumen is “defined as an unbaptised adult” and, it is noted, “these rites are appropriate for use only with such persons.”<sup>20</sup> These clear instructions appear to be offered to avoid the confusion that subsequently overtook the catechumenal process leading to a great deal of conceptual confusion over the function and use of the catechumenate. This confusion would in due course add to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of managing the catechumenate project in the Diocese.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Episcopal Church in Canada refers to the catechumenate in the following way, “(It) refers to a process, involving the whole congregation, in which new members are brought in, instructed and formed in baptismal identity for mission and ministry, and through which the life of the congregation is strengthened and renewed.” [www.anglican.ca/faith/ministry/baptized/index.html](http://www.anglican.ca/faith/ministry/baptized/index.html) (14 November 2006)

<sup>18</sup> Ruth A. Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation; Re-Visioning Baptism in the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1997), xvi.

<sup>19</sup> *The Book of Occasional Services* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1995) The Rites found on pages 117- 135 cover; Admission of Catechumens, Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism, and A Vigil on the Eve of Baptism. There are also authorized rites for use during the candidacy.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-116.

<sup>21</sup> This argument will be explored in Chapter 5.

### 3 The Decade of Evangelism

By the 1990s the work done on establishing the catechumenate within the renewed liturgical framework of the Anglican Church had caught the interest of Lambeth and the Anglican Consultative Council so that when the Lambeth Conference of 1988 proposed that the last decade of the millennium be a Decade of Evangelism,<sup>22</sup> it was suggested that the catechumenate be used as a major evangelistic method.<sup>23</sup>

When the Anglican Consultative Council met in Cape Town in January 1993 it reviewed the Decade of Evangelism to date, noting that

[the Decade] has made, and will continue to make, an impact in the life and ministry of the Church throughout the Communion; and that in those parts of the Communion where the vision is taken seriously; there is spectacular growth in the Church; (we) recommend: ...

...that the Provinces be encouraged to restore the Catechumenate, or discipling process, to help enquiries [sic - enquirers?] move to Christian faith, using the witness and support of lay people, and liturgically celebrating the stages of growth.<sup>24</sup>

And in 1999 as the Decade drew to a close, MISSIO, the Standing Commission for Mission of the Anglican Communion, reviewed the Decade of Evangelism, endorsing the idea that the

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<sup>22</sup> 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution 43 'Decade of Evangelism'  
[www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1988/1988-43](http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1988/1988-43) (27/10/2006)

<sup>23</sup> In a paper entitled "*Evangelism and Renewal: An Anglican Perspective*"  
<http://www.margaretbeaufort.cam.ac.uk/research/weston.pdf> (12/11/2006) Dr Paul Weston of Ridley Hall, Cambridge argues that the Decade of Evangelism and the revival of the catechumenate went hand in hand. He notes that one of the books recommended by the Board of Mission as reading prior to the Decade of Evangelism was William Abraham's *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989). Abraham's book promotes the catechumenate as assuming "a prominent emphasis in discussions on evangelism".

Former Archbishop of New Zealand, Brian Davis, makes an explicit reference to the catechumenate as an evangelistic opportunity. "It will encourage local churches to be more purposeful about the ministry of evangelism..." in his book *The Way Ahead. Anglican Change and Prospect in New Zealand* (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), 64.

The catechumenate as a method of evangelism is also the theme of Malcolm Grundy's monograph *Evangelization Through the Adult Catechumenate* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1991). For further reference to this book, see page 44.

<sup>24</sup> 1993 Anglican Consultative Council Resolution 44  
[www.anglicancommunion.org/acc/meetings/acc9/resolutions.cfm#s44](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acc/meetings/acc9/resolutions.cfm#s44) (27/10/2006)

Communion “revive and strengthen the catechumenal process in congregations and small groups.”<sup>25</sup>

Summary:

The link then between Bishop David’s 1993 Diocesan Synod reference to the catechumenate and his 1992 reference to the Decade of Evangelism can be traced back to the rediscovery of the modern catechumenate originating in the liturgical reforms of Vatican II embedded in the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” and similar liturgical renewal taking place within the Anglican communion. It was now being put to Synod that the catechumenal process offered an authentic way for the local Diocese to participate in the Decade of Evangelism.

The Diocese of Christchurch heard their Bishop’s enthusiasm, and when the motion asking the “Christian Education and Nurture Division of Synod to initiate training for and implementation of the catechumenate programme in the Diocese and to establish a Diocesan Leadership Team with a view to setting up a pilot project within the next year” came before Synod, they voted “Yes”.<sup>26</sup>

That was in September of 1993.

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<sup>25</sup> MISSIO. Report of the Standing Commission for Mission of the Anglican Communion 1999 [www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/commissions/missio/b\\_doc](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/commissions/missio/b_doc) 8 (27/10/2006)

<sup>26</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1993*, 39.

## 3

## THE CATECHUMENATE PROJECT IN THE DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH

## THE DIOCESE ENDORSES A SIGNIFICANT PROJECT. IN DUE COURSE IT FAILS

The Synod had endorsed the proposal of its Bishop and was now, one might have thought, committed to ensuring that the catechumenate worked.

Some of those interviewed pointed out that since the Bishop had introduced the idea of the catechumenate directly after an overhead projection presentation of declining Diocesan statistics, it seemed as though the catechumenate was being promoted as a way of reversing the statistical decline in church membership. “I am convinced that only by taking Christian Initiation and Education seriously will we be able to reverse the statistical pattern (of decline) we have seen tonight” he had said.<sup>1</sup> By linking education in and about (the) faith with “Christian Initiation” the Bishop saw, as the Australians had seen, that the introduction of the catechumenal process offered the Diocese an authentic way for it to participate in the Decade of Evangelism and at the same time potentially reverse the alarming decline in the number of people presenting for baptism. Given that the catechumenate had now become an integral ‘component’ in the renewed initiation liturgies<sup>2</sup> it isn’t difficult to see the connection the Bishop had made. However the question was now being asked and it remains; “Should the catechumenate be ‘used’ to try and put more bums on seats?” Was this ever its purpose?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1993*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> Three significant books held in the Diocesan Catechumenate Library that support the view that the catechumenate has evangelistic potential were Ruth A Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation: Re-Visioning Baptism in the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1997); Chapter 6 of A. Theodore Eastman’s, *The Baptizing Community: Christian Initiation and the Local Community* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1982) and *The Baptismal Mystery and the Catechumenate* ed. Michael W. Merriman (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1990)

<sup>3</sup> For comment on the conceptual confusion that made the catechumenate so hard to “sell”, see Chapter 5 and Appendix Two, 65-66.

As a project, the catechumenate was eventually managed on a daily basis by a lay team known as the Catechumenate Core Group. It remained the responsibility of the Christian Education and Nurture Division until that Division was dismantled by Synod in 2000 as part of a major restructuring of the Diocese when it was handed to the care of the new Ministry, Services and Programmes Committee.<sup>4</sup> Rather than actively engage the Core Group by supporting and holding it to account, the new Committee adopted a hands off policy by “encourag(ing) the various groups under our umbrella to attend meetings and update us on their work.”<sup>5</sup> As the Christian Education and Nurture Division made its last report to Synod in 2000 they put before it a motion that read “This Synod encourages Archdeaconry Councils to support the catechumenate as an effective means of discipling in ministry units”.<sup>6</sup> This motion was passed and from this point on it seems as if the heart went out of the Core Group. The Catechumenate Core Group no longer belonged and although it continued to function, in 2003 in a rather melancholy announcement “decided to hand the process (of the catechumenate) on to the Archdeaconry Councils”...(and concluded) “may the Archdeaconry Councils continue to tell the story of the faith journey, which involves Inquiry, Formation, Preparation and Reflection.”<sup>7</sup> This report of 2003 was the last the Catechumenate Group would present to Synod.

Since 2000 when the Archdeaconry Councils were established following the Davidson Report, there has been no mention of the catechumenate in any of their reports to Synod and no one with whom I spoke could ever recall the catechumenate being mentioned in Archdeaconry Councils.

So, a method of Christian formation with a long and honourable history stretching back to the beginnings of the Christian enterprise, and introduced to the Synod with enthusiasm and conviction, had all but disappeared off the radar within 10 years. But not before a great deal had happened which makes its disappearance all the more puzzling.

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<sup>4</sup> The Davidson Report, written for and presented to the Standing Committee of the Diocese in 1998, was the result of a major review of Diocesan Core Functions triggered by the need to review Diocesan investments. The Report, called “to examine the core functions of the Diocese was requested by Synod with the intention of presenting a balanced budget to Synod in the year 2000”. Preamble to the “Executive Summary of the Davidson Report”. Anglican Diocese of Christchurch. Diocesan Ministry Educator files. CADA.

<sup>5</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 2000*. Report of the Ministry, Services and Programmes Committee R5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 2000*. Diocesan Catechumenate Report 10.

In his charge to the Synod in 1994, Bishop David reported that the theme of the annual clergy school<sup>8</sup> that year had been the catechumenate and that the presentations at that conference had attempted to bring an understanding and an appreciation of the catechumenate to those present. He also reported that the very successful First National Conference on the Catechumenate had taken place in Wellington in August of that year.<sup>9</sup> Nine people - clergy and lay - had gone to Waikanae with Bishop David. The Diocesan Catechumenate Leadership Team met for the first time in June 1994<sup>10</sup> and the Bishop had called a meeting for September 13<sup>th</sup> to establish the Catechumenate Core Group.<sup>11</sup> That same year the Bishop reported to Synod that “already many parishes have expressed the desire to become ‘pilot parishes’ for this process”. “It is my hope” the Bishop continued “that within three years all the parishes within the Diocese will have begun to use the catechumenal process to encourage adults to faith...the process is essentially lay led but it requires careful training and resourcing for all concerned, including the Bishop and the clergy!”<sup>12</sup>

In November 1994 the Catechumenate Core Group reported that three parishes were practicing the catechumenate.<sup>13</sup> One year later, in October 1995 Bishop David put the Catechumenate Core Group into ‘lay-drive’. According to the wisdom of the catechumenate, the project would now essentially be in the hands of lay-people. Most significantly, in November, Glenda Prosser accepted the role of Convenor of the Core Group.

The Core Group now spelled out its vision of success and it was big. It planned to “have the catechumenate operating in every parish within the Christchurch Diocese”<sup>14</sup> though it didn’t commit to a date. The Group planned secretarial back-up, a high profile, “great

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<sup>8</sup> Facilitators at the 1994 Clergy School had been the Rev Paul Dyer (DEFT) and the Rev Tim Delany.

<sup>9</sup> The main speakers at First National Conference on the Catechumenate had been the Rev Peter Ball from the UK and the Rev Anne McElligott of the USA. McElligott’s book *The Catechumenal Process. Adult Initiation and Formation for Christian Life and Ministry. A Resource for Dioceses and Congregations* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990) became a significant resource book (“our Bible”) for those involved in the catechumenate.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Catechumenate Leadership Team meeting 16 June 1994. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Bishop David to Glenda Prosser dated 12 August 1994. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>12</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1994*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the Catechumenate Core Group meeting 29 November 1994. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records. The parishes were St Michael’s All Angels, Hinds South Canterbury, and Rangiora.

<sup>14</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1996*. Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group R37.

communication”, “membership commitment”, effective catechist training, evaluation, celebrations, and a “huge budget” and for each of these, a plan in embryo was sketched out.<sup>15</sup>

The Group prepared a handout pack for parishes enquiring about the catechumenate which turned into a big project culminating in the production of a substantial document that explained every aspect of the catechumenate.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, significant energy went into locating and, if necessary, adapting materials for use by catechumens and catechists to facilitate the important task of following the lectionary in the catechetical cycle.

By 1996 “four parishes were running the catechumenate”.<sup>17</sup> The local Core Group planned the Second National Catechumenate Conference which was hosted by the Diocese and held at Living Springs Conference Centre near Christchurch in September 1996.<sup>18</sup>

The Core Group had been training catechists since 1995 and from 1997 the Core Group planned and hosted a Diocesan Event each year. Catechist training throughout the Diocese and a regional gathering in South Canterbury were arranged. These were attended in modest numbers. In addition the Group commenced publication of a three times per year newsletter called ‘Cat Tales’ which was distributed within the Catechumenate Network.

In 1997 the Core Group submitted a budget to the Diocese that included an amount of \$10,000 for the employment of a part-time co-ordinator.<sup>19</sup> This was approved by Synod and in their report to Synod that year the Core Group noted that “a good start has been made in

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<sup>15</sup> Document dated 22.11.95 “Our Vision of a Successful Catechumenate Core Group”. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>16</sup> The document is entitled “An Introduction for Parishes interested in using the Catechumenate Process in the Diocese” v1 June 1996. By July 1999 this document was in its 4<sup>th</sup> version. Other documents were produced by the Core Group – some tract type documents all aimed at explaining the catechumenate and its stages; others like “The Catechumenate Resource Booklet for Parish Use” (v.1 April 1996) were more substantial. These documents along with books that the Core Group had identified as suitable and useful were maintained in the Diocesan Catechumenate Library.

<sup>17</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1996*. Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group R37.

<sup>18</sup> The conference was held 6-8 September 1996 and was called ‘Catching the Catechumenate’. Forty-six people attended; thirty-six were from the Christchurch Diocese.

<sup>19</sup> The 1998/99 budget was submitted to the Diocesan Registrar on 22 May 1997 by the Core Group Secretary Peter Allan. A copy of the letter with extensive documentation in support of the proposal was supplied by Glenda Prosser from her personal records. In the supporting ‘evidence’ the Secretary notes that as a result of a visioning workshop in 1995 the Core Group had set their vision statement; “To see the catechumenate operating in every parish in the Christchurch Diocese’ but that after working on the Diocesan Strategic Plan in July 1996 their objective had been to “introduce the catechumenal process into 35 parishes within five years of the beginning of 1996”.

spreading the catechumenate throughout the Diocese but a much greater commitment of time and resources than can reasonably be expected from volunteers is now required.”<sup>20</sup> A document specifying the person and job description for the role of Diocesan Catechumenate Co-ordinator was drafted in November<sup>21</sup> and early in 1998 Glenda Prosser, a Licensed Lay Minister within the Diocese and an active participant in her local parish of Rangiora, up until now the Core Group Convenor, became the Co-ordinator in a part-time salaried position.

1998 appears to have been a busy year with the activity reported in the Core Group’s report to Synod.<sup>22</sup> The third and, it seems, last National Catechumenate Conference was held in Rotorua and four members of the Core Group attended.<sup>23</sup> The report of the Core Group to the Synod of 1999<sup>24</sup> suggests yet another busy year including this comment from the co-ordinator, “More and more people throughout the Diocese are responding to the challenge of the catechumenate. There are now 15 parishes implementing the Process in the Diocese of Christchurch plus one Methodist parish.” A diocesan conference took place and catechist training for seven people continued.

In May 1998 the Core Group had submitted a budget request to Synod for the next two years of \$21,500.<sup>25</sup> But in October they were advised that the budget for salaries for 1999 would be cut to \$6,000.00.<sup>26</sup> In August of 1999 the Diocesan registrar advised the Committee that funding for salaries for 2000 would be cut to \$2,400. “The Co-ordinator’s funding level is based on the position being the lowest priority set by Standing Committee in its application for funding from St John’s College...the Standing Committee requests that the Catechumenate Core Group be asked to review how the Catechumenate work can be carried out in the future.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1997*. Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group R41.

<sup>21</sup> Document entitled “Diocesan Catechumenate Co-ordinator” dated November 1997. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>22</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1998*. Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group R39.

<sup>23</sup> The conference, held in Rotorua 12-14 June 1998 was entitled “Spirituality and Justice in the Contemporary Catechumenate”. The keynote speaker was Michael Merriman, Ministry Formation Office, Diocese of North Queensland and editor of *The Baptismal Mystery and the Catechumenate*.

<sup>24</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1999*. Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group R33.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of the Catechumenate Core Group meeting 4 May 1998. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of the Catechumenate Core Group meeting 21 October 1998. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from the Diocesan Registrar to the Catechumenate Core Group 5 August 1999. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

This reduction in funding for the Catechumenate Project appears to be the direct outcome of the Davidson Report.<sup>28</sup> In his Draft Interim Report, Commissioner Davidson had proposed that it was “difficult to argue that bodies such as the catechumenate...should continue to receive ongoing funding by the Diocese much longer. The Diocese having established and contributed to the funding of [this] body needs to look to [it] now to continue [its] activities through [its] own resources.”<sup>29</sup> Recommendation 8.4 of the same report read “That the Diocese’s current indirect and direct financial commitment to the work of the Catechumenate Core Group be reviewed with a view to phasing out its financial commitment while retaining Diocesan interest in and support of its work.”<sup>30</sup>

In October 1999 Glenda Prosser advised the Core Group that she wouldn’t “be available for reappointment as Diocesan Catechumenate Co-ordinator when (my) contract expires at the end of January 2000.”<sup>31</sup>

With the cut in funding and Prosser’s announcement a significant moment had arrived. The co-ordinator’s position was replaced in 2001 by the new role of Diocesan Catechumenate Educator, which was to be a six-month, unpaid voluntary position. Margrett Sherwood who filled this position reported to the Standing Committee in September of 2000 and recommended inter alia that the role of the Catechumenate Educator be acknowledged as valuable since there was a need for someone to continue talking about the catechumenate with parishes who were interested, that it could reasonably be a volunteer position, and that some parishes would never be interested in the catechumenate because it “did not fit their style of worship or learning.”<sup>32</sup>

The Core Group continued to function throughout the period 2000 - 2002 but things were not going smoothly. In 2001 only one person enrolled for the annual Diocesan Catechumenate Conference which was cancelled and catechist training was put on hold because there had

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<sup>28</sup> See Footnote 4, 13.

<sup>29</sup> “Review of the Core Function of the Diocese” Draft Interim Report 15 July 1999. 20. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from G. Prosser to Members of the Core Group. 6 October 1999. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>32</sup> Catechumenate Educator’s Report to Standing Committee 30 September 2000. Diocesan Ministry Educator files. CADA.

been no interest from within the Diocese.<sup>33</sup> While the Group was able to report several “exciting” ventures<sup>34</sup> it is clear that the life had gone out of the project. And with the handover to the Archdeaconry Councils in 2002 some time after Synod that year, the catechumenate virtually disappeared from view.

Bishop David wrote to Margrett Sherwood sometime early in 2003. He thanked her and others for their

hard work on the catechumenate over many years. It has been a very important chapter in our journey as a diocese. Ironically although interest has waned, the Diocesan Planning Event at the end of February, identified the need for more ‘formation’ of Anglicans, linked with confirmation preparation! This is not the end, but maybe just a short pause!<sup>35</sup>

This brief survey of the short life of the catechumenate project within the Diocese of Christchurch does not really do justice to the hard and determined work put in by a number of people. From 1995 onwards the project had been headed by lay people; two who gave everything they had were Glenda Prosser and Peter Allan the secretary of the Group. A scan of Glenda Prosser’s personal records shows the huge amount of energy and toil both these people gifted to the project.

And still it failed and the question remains “Why”?

\* \* \* \* \*

Before reviewing some of the critical issues that led to the demise of the catechumenate several matters are worth mentioning.

Between 1995 and 2000, the Diocese asked parishes to supply information about the numbers “of candidates undertaking the Catechumenate”. This information is found in Appendix One.<sup>36</sup> It shows that out of the 77 parishes and ministry units in the Diocese, 32 at one stage

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<sup>33</sup> Catechumenate Core Group minutes. 06/09/2000. Diocesan Ministry Educator files. CADA.

<sup>34</sup> A “faith learning experience” for the students at St Margaret’s College and Christ’s College was held again at the Cathedral, and a “successful promotion” and information stall was held at a Diocesan “Alive and Loving it” event.

<sup>35</sup> Undated letter supplied by G. Prosser from her personal records.

<sup>36</sup> Appendix One, 64.

or another during this six year period could identify people “undertaking the Catechumenate”. Only two parishes, St Michael’s All Angels [40 in total] and Rangiora [26 in total], reported people “undertaking the catechumenate” in each of these six years; while one parish (Hinds Co-operating) had people in four consecutive years, until the vicar left the parish; and the rest, with the exception of the more recent programme running at Christ’s College, St Margaret’s College at ChristChurch Cathedral, had low and fluctuating numbers over the six years the records were kept. The records show that in total 418 people participated. With the student programme numbers taken out, 323 people in 32 parishes participated over those six years. It is impossible to tell how many of these people were new converts to the Christian faith.

It is clear that the dream, first voiced by the Bishop and echoed by the Catechumenate Core Group, of every parish within the Diocese participating in the catechumenate as a lively and attractive process of Christian formation was never achieved. And the fact that, in 2006, few can speak about the project with animation or enthusiasm suggests that it has not left a deep imprint within the Diocese.

A second issue of note is that for almost as long as the project had a life it was subject to challenge from competing programmes that in the end won the heads and hearts of Diocesan members.

The year after the Bishop proposed the catechumenate, the Diocese endorsed the Bishop’s proposal to bring Cursillo to the Diocese.<sup>37</sup> The Bishop described Cursillo as “aimed at moving church members from passive membership to an active and committed leadership in the church”. While there are hints here that this process shares something in common with the catechumenate, it is true that there are major differences. One major point in common with the catechumenate however is that Cursillo too is a lay led movement and both draw on the same talent pool for leadership. Ten years later, Cursillo remains and appears to be in good heart.

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<sup>37</sup>*Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1994, 30.*

In 1999 Synod approved yet another formation programme, SEED and “endorsed it as an approved spiritual direction programme within the Diocese.”<sup>38</sup>

It should be asked “What does this apparent endorsement of competing programmes one on top of the other do to the Synod’s resolve to birth, nurture and grow to maturity it’s first born, the catechumenate”? Do we really need a smorgasbord of options to choose from? Is this a sign of the consumer culture in the ‘post-modern’ church? And of course, when programmes compete for talent, funding, attention and energy, some are bound to suffer.

And then there was Alpha. Alpha was launched in New Zealand in 1995, the same year the Catechumenate Core group of the Diocese started work and spelled out its big vision. In an interesting, personal statement Dr Ray Muller, the Anglican priest who spearheaded Alpha at the beginning, writes about the way Alpha commended itself to him.<sup>39</sup> Alpha has won wide acceptance throughout the church and with its new and enriched programmes looks as if it has a secure future. The issue Alpha posed for the catechumenate was acute; how does evangelism fit with discipling?

The Catechumenate Core Group spent a great deal of time attempting to position itself in relation to Alpha. A letter from Lois Aldersley, then priest in charge of Hinds Co-operating Parish, raised the issue in March 1997.<sup>40</sup> She reports on a conference she had attended in the Diocese of Wellington which was called to figure out how “Alpha (might be) incorporated into the Inquiry stage of the catechumenal process”.

She mentions her two concerns:

- 1...should a parish implement the two side by side (programme and process) without due regard to the spirituality that undergirds the catechumenal process, the integrity of both could be lost... and
- 2...because Alpha is attractively presented and marketed...it could seperceed [sic] the Catechumenate which as yet is only in its promotional stages. Sadly, unless energy is put into integrating both, I fear the shorter programme may side-line a longer faith journey and encourage the spirit of Modernism.<sup>41</sup> The Core Group

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<sup>38</sup> *Year Book of the Diocese of Christchurch, 1999*. Report of the Christian Education and Nurture Division 56. SEED is an acronym for “Spiritual Energy, Encounter, Direction”.

<sup>39</sup> “I gave up on Evangelism and became committed to making disciples...” in Alpha New Zealand Update 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue. June 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from the Rev Lois Aldersley to the Catechumenal Core Group 13 March 1997. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

made use of documents produced by the Diocese of Wellington<sup>42</sup> which was trying to resolve the same issue but the matter appears to have remained essentially unresolved.<sup>43</sup>

Similar difficulties were faced by the Core Group as it tried to figure out where it stood in relation to “Emmaus”, an ecumenical study resource that emerged within the United Methodist Church “with similar goals to the Catechumenal Process i.e., evangelising, initiating and incorporating people into the community of faith and equipping them for participation in its life and mission.”<sup>44</sup>

And in 1999, the Core Group had significant problems with Cursillo which resulted in them preparing a “succinct statement” and “half page explanation” which was to be sent to Cursillo to correct some serious misunderstandings that Cursillo held about the catechumenate. The short document was to describe the catechumenal process and emphasize that “true understanding can only come from experiencing the process.”<sup>45</sup>

The Catechumenate Core Group appeared to struggle to interpret itself to these groups with winsome clarity. This was the same problem they appeared to be having within the Diocese.

Lest it be thought that it was only the Diocese of Christchurch that was having trouble marketing the catechumenate, it seems that similar difficulties were being experienced in Australia.

In an email to Bishop George Hearn in August 2001, Bishop David Coles asks, on behalf of the Core Group, what the Australian experience had been since “we have been operating the

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<sup>42</sup> “Alpha and the Catechumenal Process. A discussion paper for the Anglican Diocese of Wellington” 1998. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

<sup>43</sup> It was interesting to find exactly the same issues being addressed internationally. An essay by Andrew Harter entitled “Alpha and Catechumenate Compared” is posted by the North American Association for the Catechumenate at <http://www.catechumenate.org/docs/alphaarticle.pdf>. (25/10/2006) This article originally appeared in 1996 at about the same time the Christchurch team were dealing with the same issue.

<sup>44</sup> “The Catechumenal Process and ‘Emmaus’. A discussion paper for the Anglican Diocese of Wellington” 1998. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records. “The Walk to Emmaus is a spiritual renewal program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders...Emmaus leaders encourage participants to meet regularly in small groups. The members of the small groups challenge and support one another in faithful living. Participants seek to Christianize their environments of family, job, and community through the ministry of their congregations”. <http://www.upperroom.org/emmaus/whatis/> (23/11/2006)

<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the Catechumenate Core Group 10 March 1999. Held by G. Prosser in her personal records.

catechumenate process for several years [in Christchurch] but recently interest has waned somewhat. This may be due in part to the impact of Alpha”.<sup>46</sup>

In a lengthy and candid reply Bishop Hearn says “You would be labouring under a misapprehension to believe that the Catechumenate was or had been universally robust within the Australian Church...(it) has not found the acceptance or growth to the extent that I had initially hoped ten years ago”.<sup>47</sup> In an interesting and telling footnote, Bishop Hearn concludes “Unfortunately, many of our Australian Anglican clergy are uncomfortable with a reflective theology.”

Is this then a significant issue, discomfort with a theology that is reflective and less dogmatic?

It may be. But there are other issues that spelled failure for this project.

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<sup>46</sup> Email dated 16 August 2001. Bishop D Coles’ personal files.

<sup>47</sup> Email dated 10 September 2001. Bishop D Coles’ personal files.

# 4

## EVEN GREAT IDEAS NEED TO BE NURTURED<sup>1</sup>

### HOW THE CATECHUMENATE FAILED BECAUSE IT WASN'T WELL MANAGED

It seems unlikely that Synod ever thought of the job of ‘getting the catechumenate up and running’ as a project or as an opportunity in project management. Certainly, the nature and magnitude of the task the Synod had set itself, which it then moved to the Core Group, required project management expertise.

In retrospect, the tragedy of the catechumenate project is that it failed, amongst other things, because basic project management principles were ignored throughout its short life. Born into a culture marked by good intention it eventually lacked corporate support, unflinching leadership, and firm direction when it was most needed. It was not conceived or managed adequately as a project.

This chapter examines these issues while the following chapters review the conceptual confusions that existed within the way the “new” catechumenate was defined as it was introduced into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century church.

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<sup>1</sup> A vigorous debate sprung up with two of those who read and reviewed this paper for me, about the necessity and wisdom of this chapter. One asked “Is this a theology paper, or a programme analysis document for an MBA”? before saying “But I think the point you make is correct”. Another thought it should come after Chapter Five because, he maintained, the theological reasons for the failure of the catechumenate are much more important than the mismanagement of the project. After giving these criticisms consideration I decided to leave the chapter where it is with this comment in its “defence”. As a Master of Ministry research project, I take the view that (1) the management of acts of ministry (here the ‘act of ministry’ is merely bound up with corporate structures and culture) deserve to be implemented with as much intelligence and understanding about process as we can muster. (2) Inherent in the commitment to good management is the commitment to nurturing and caring. This I take to be praxis in theology. It is also our reaching out after excellence in acts of ministry. (3) That read carefully, the section “Problem and Project Definition” (p28ff) is punctuated with theological wisdom. (4) I too take the view that the inherent confusions and contradictions within the modern catechumenate were the major contributors to its failure. I mention this in para 2, 32.

### Birth of an idea:

At the beginning, the idea of bringing the catechumenate to the Diocese was simply that – an idea. Ideas must then be translated into plans and resources that will give life to the idea and, if managed well, eventually bring about an outcome that will serve the needs of the enterprise. This sequence of processes – which can be lengthy - is embodied in standard project management theory and practice. A project is simply defined as an undertaking that has a start and end point and requires someone to manage time, resources, costs and quality, while a project plan precisely identifies the steps required to take an idea from its initial expression through its development into the stages that will take an organisation towards the planned outcome.

As a project manager myself I have conceptualised the process in this way. Each of the steps will:

- be carefully expressed in action language making clear what has to be done and who will do it or be responsible for it;
- identify how each step and task is linked
- have a start and an end date;
- identify the people and financial resources required for each step and make it clear how we would know when each step is completed so the next one may proceed.

Each plan, which is a series of related and linked, sequential tasks, will have a designated person (normally known as a project manager) who is commissioned to make sure the plan is carried out. This person is accountable to the group of people within the enterprise that carry ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of the enterprise. This was one of the difficulties with the catechumenate, it was hard to identify where ultimate responsibility for the success or otherwise of the catechumenate project lay. A project advocate will work closely with the manager.

A recent web article<sup>2</sup> makes the point that software packages can be wonderful assets in managing complicated projects. Given the Core Group's dream of having every parish and ministry unit using the catechumenate within three years, this project would certainly have qualified as one such 'complicated project' and a programme such as Microsoft Project would

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<sup>2</sup>Mike Glenn, *Microsoft Office; Microsoft Project*  
<http://pubs.logicalexpressions.com/Pub0009/LPMArticle.asp?ID=141> (08/04/2007)

have allowed time-line management, required the identification of resources required to launch the project and bring it to completion, made clear any potential problems and allow for “what if’s” so a project manager could have seen the effect of these before finalising plans and committing them to action. It would also have allowed progress to be tracked.<sup>3</sup>

None of the people interviewed for this research project could recall any such analysis being done in preparation to establish whether the Synod could have supported a project like this. One of the interviewee’s remarked in what sounded like a throw away comment, that the “catechumenate was set up to fail.”<sup>4</sup> In the lack of comprehensive assessment and careful forward planning at the beginning it is possible to see - even at that stage - the demise of the programme in sight.

There are three discrete issues worth noting in respect of the catechumenate as a project; leadership, funding, and problem and project definition.

### Leadership:

To be a project manager or leader can be a thankless task though it doesn’t have to be.<sup>5</sup> At least not if the project is managed well. In addition to a project leader, a project sponsor and a project champion or advocate (within the community of the faithful we might choose to call

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<sup>3</sup> Microsoft Office Project 2007 is Microsoft’s latest version of the popular project management programme. Its features include built in reports, export to PowerPoint for presentations, to Word for reports and to Access for manipulation of project information. Financial costings can be exported to Excel, though it is doubtful that this would have been required with the catechumenate project.

*A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)– 2000 Edition* published by the Project Management Institute (USA) is the basic reference and the world’s de facto standard for the project management profession. In 2001 it was designated an American National Standard by the American National Standards Institute.

The amount of literature on project management is impressive. Books that include project management theory and practice that I have found useful include: Nicholas Imparato and Oren Harari, *Jumping the Curve. Innovation and Strategic Choice in an Age of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994); Kevin Freiberg and Jackie Freiberg, *NUTS. Southwest Airlines’ Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success* (Texas: Bard Press, 1996); and Jim Collins, *Good to Great. Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001)

<sup>4</sup> Interviewee A (Interview date 21/08/2006)

<sup>5</sup> The list of books on leadership is massive. Four of the most useful books that I have used are J.P.Cotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996); J Herrington, Mike Bonem and James H Furr, *Leading Congregational Change. A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000); Ronald A Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Ronald A Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line. Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

this person, the “project animator”) are there to support the project and its leader. Support should be understood as an active, robust and resolute commitment to ensuring that the project leader has all the backup and resources he or she needs to ensure the project succeeds. The catechumenate had a sponsor in the Bishop who took a keen interest in it throughout its life, but it doesn’t appear to have had an identifiable advocate or protector.<sup>6</sup> This flaw in the design of the project team made life at the top difficult since project leaders at times have to cut a deep furrow and maintain a direction that may trigger immense resistance. Leadership at these moments is a little bit like an arm wrestle and the leader must keep the pressure on if the project is to track in the right direction and according to the time line that has already been agreed. At moments like this sponsors and advocates are invaluable allies in keeping the project alive and healthy.

Proponents of the catechumenate made the point that part of its appeal was that it was lay led. There was a problem in this however. One of the interviewees said it was hard to tell who “the leader” was and one of these people went further when he said “We were constantly losing our leadership...it felt as if the leadership wasn’t nurturing the project.”<sup>7</sup> And according to at least two others there was another factor at work. In itself it can be fatal though I’m not convinced that this was the fatal flaw in the catechumenate project. It was put most clearly by one of them who said “It (the Core Group) turned out to be a closed group – a sort of a club.”<sup>8</sup> It is possible that this was the perception of others as well and may account for some of the ‘disinterest’ in the project across what seemed to be a wide spectrum of Diocesan members, priests and Ministry Unit leaders. Clubs exist to serve the needs of those who belong and in general clubs, and ‘closed groups’ don’t emerge as movers and shakers of ideas or processes.

Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*<sup>9</sup> makes the point that the leaders of ‘great’ organisations and ‘great’ processes embody a “paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will”. Their ambition is “first and foremost for the organisation” and they are resolved to do “whatever it takes to make their enterprise great, no matter how big or hard the

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<sup>6</sup>Interviewee A said “It felt as if the leadership wasn’t nurturing the project” and later went further when he said “Leadership was the critical issue. I felt abandoned by the Bishop” (Interview date 21/08/2006).

<sup>7</sup> Interviewee A.

<sup>8</sup> Interviewee E (Interview date 13/09/2006).

<sup>9</sup> Refer footnote 3, 25.

decisions.”<sup>10</sup> Leaders who are accountable for the stewardship of the processes they have been entrusted to implement need a steely resolve to make sure the project succeeds. For this they need the ongoing critical assessment and support of the project advocate and sponsor. Without it there is a strong likelihood that the project simply ends up serving their own needs to be busy – even if this is “being busy in the Lord’s work”!

### Funding:

There would have been moments of elation and some very good reasons for thanksgiving during the life of this project and it is possible to detect some of these in the reports that the Core Group submitted to Synod. However there were also moments of despair

One such moment of disbelief followed the report of Commissioner Davidson in 1999 when he recommended the phasing out of the Synod’s financial commitment to the catechumenate. There can be no doubt that the report reflected ‘public opinion’ about the catechumenate and that the Commissioner was reporting what he had heard people saying about it. So when he reported that the Diocese should “retain interest in and support...its work” but reduce its funding, it seems as if he is signalling an end, not to the catechumenate since he invites the Core Group to consider ways in which the project could become self-funding, but to the security the Diocesan funding provided for the catechumenate. I suspect however that to those who were close to the catechumenate it would have sounded as if Mr Davidson was actually suggesting that Synod could now forget about the catechumenate. Because by the early 2000s that’s essentially what had happened.

In 1999 funding for the project was effectively withdrawn. Funding for the part-time coordinator eventually reduced to \$2400.00 and was given the lowest priority set by the Standing Committee in its application for funding from St John’s College. The new role of Diocesan Catechumenate Educator that replaced the role of Catechumenate Core Group Coordinator in 2001 was an unpaid, voluntary position.

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<sup>10</sup> Collins, *Good to Great*, 39.

I could find no correspondence or evidence that this suggestion to reduce funding, eventually endorsed by the Standing Committee of the Diocese, was challenged with any energy or sense of outrage. A project advocate would have managed a vigorous challenge to this proposal and might have insisted that Synod or Standing Committee review its original intention in establishing the catechumenate. It was argued, by implication, in the Commissioner's report that there were few if any indications that the catechumenate was 'adding value' to Synod's life or mission. But his proposal that effectively killed off the project – though there were two further acts that brought its life to an indecent end<sup>11</sup> – would not have been the proposal of choice had the catechumenate been managed as a project and structured properly at the beginning. It is true that projects take any number of unexpected turns during their life. However, with regard to funding, the action of choice would have been a vigorous conversation with the Core Group about the dilemma that the Synod faced and a robust review of the project with a view to enhancing its management and searching for better outcomes than the ones the commissioner was seeing. An advocate charged with advocating for the project and doing everything possible to protect this 'child' of the Synod born in 1993 would have mounted a strong defence for the project. Had this happened it is possible that there might have been a different outcome.

### Problem and Project Definition

Most things that go wrong at the beginning go badly wrong from there onwards. This project was no exception.

What exactly was the problem that the project, known as catechumenate, was being promoted to solve? Looked at in the context in which it had been first proposed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Bishop's suggestion to Synod to implement "a catechumenate programme" in the Diocese was related to his concerns about the declining number of people presenting for baptism and his interest in how the Diocese might involve itself with Lambeth's Decade of Evangelism.

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<sup>11</sup> The first of these was passing the catechumenate into the 'care' of the Ministry, Services and Programme Committee in 2000, and the second was handing the catechumenate into the 'care' of the Archdeaconry Councils in 2003. Both of these have been referred to in the preceding chapter.

In endorsing their Bishop's proposal the Synod agreed to define the project as a solution to these two particular concerns. Without realising it, Synod fell into the trap of what is known as "jumping to solutions."<sup>12</sup> This is similar to the process we know as "jumping to conclusions" where chunks of data and streams of logic are omitted from the process of getting to a trustworthy endpoint. In this instance Synod "jumped to solutions" leaving large chunks of difficult, preparatory work undone in their haste to do something. But, it must be asked, were the concerns expressed by the Bishop the true need or "basic problem" facing the Diocese at that time? And if they were, was his catechumenate proposal subsequently endorsed by Synod, an appropriate and adequate solution? By ignoring the hard work required to understand the true need facing the church Synod short circuited the process of adequate problem definition and the subsequent equally demanding task of appropriate project formulation. It failed to ask whether this particular way of defining a solution to a proposed problem was adequate. It subsequently faced an uphill battle to get significant buy-in to the project.

Gary Heerken's goes on to say that "identifying the true need can be tricky...(but) effective project managers always delve for the true needs because (once identified) they may find alternative ways of meeting the need that are faster, cheaper and more efficient than the original (proposed) solution."<sup>13</sup> The 'true need' is generally regarded amongst project managers as "the most basic problem"<sup>14</sup> and unless this is understood, any proposals put up as solutions will almost certainly fail to address the real issue. The parallels with the catechumenate project are clear.

So how might the "basic problem" or the "true need" be understood?

"By hard work and a lengthy conversation that navigates around and amongst conflicting opinions". This was the first response of one of New Zealand's most gifted and elegant project managers I interviewed for this project.<sup>15</sup> Interviewee M is the CEO of one of New Zealand's leading unlisted companies and he and his staff are constantly involved in project

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<sup>12</sup> Gary R Heerkens, *Project Management; 24 Lessons to Help You Master any Project. The Employee Handbook for Enhancing Corporate Performance* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>15</sup> Interviewee M (Interview date 01/11/2006).

creation, project management and project assessment. Good project management from start to finish is the lifeblood of this successful enterprise.

It may take months of talking amongst his leadership team and stakeholders before they arrive at a satisfactory definition of the basic problem. The talking is intentional and focussed and on the way “we may change direction five or six times...we may also get well and truly stuck which isn't a bad thing”. He explained that the longer a project team stays stuck in the early stages of understanding the nature of any given project the harder and deeper they must think, and the longer they must look. “There must however be some one person charged with ensuring that the conversation goes forward and doesn't get bogged down”. Project management is a process – at least in the early stages of a project life-cycle – of recycling and reforming ideas until one emerges as being truthful. That's the one a good project team will recognise as the one they can pretty much all buy into.

Interviewee M explained how he and his teams work away at this conversation for weeks and weeks before generating any suggestions about what they might do about it – if anything. As they recycle the conversation in their search for truthfulness, they identify facts and assumptions, define the problem with greater clarity and understanding and set objectives according to strict criteria. This recycling will lead inevitably and eventually to a shared understanding of the “basic problem”. He explained that this would happen because everyone was deeply committed to the health of the enterprise and that they trusted each others input into this process. These conversations earth the issue in the real world in which his company trades and prevents them all from ‘shadow boxing’ or setting up straw men.

Only once “the basic problem” is agreed will the team generate as many proposals as possible, brainstorming suggestions while avoiding any judgement about the usefulness of any one particular suggestion. All ideas are then evaluated, and “the conversation may start all over again...the feedback loops are working well now”. Eventually they will decide what to do and start planning to implement the particular solution they have agreed on. Evaluation and follow-up including an eye to new issues that have arisen – “since none of this has happened in a vacuum...our world has been moving on while we've been debating” conclude the first full cycle. And of course, as he explained by now they have significant buy-in.

It's this process of involving as many people as possible in an intentional conversation that generates buy-in and enthusiasm. It also gives a much better look at what resources will be needed and what resources the enterprise has amongst its own people. "If you understand all the options the more enthusiasm you get for one you eventually choose" he said.

He then ventured an opinion from a project management point of view on the issue facing the Synod. "How would anyone know what really needed to be done since there's no indication that it (Synod) was agreed on an understanding of "the main problem". The project plan would have been very different for instance, if in response to an agreed problem of fewer and fewer people coming for baptism, there had been agreement that Synod believed this was because the church was no longer seen as relevant. Or there would have been a different plan if the Synod had agreed that this was because of the way the church was structured and that it was no longer mobile or responsive enough. Or it might have been agreed that this wasn't a 'universal' issue and some parishes were actually doing OK....but that others weren't."

All these comments point in one direction - that before a project plan is drafted, lots of talking must take place – talking to clarify the issues; talking to gain understanding; talking to build an agreed response; talking to build trust; and talking to win affection and buy-in. Only when that is done can any enterprise have confidence that its dreams can be rooted in planning that is likely to work.

In summary:

In spite of extremely hard work by a few the catechumenate failed, in part, because it lacked significant project management expertise. "This project needed the heart of the Diocese beating within it and it didn't have it" said one of the interviewees.<sup>16</sup> It is the beating heart that drives the hard questions and insists on clarity but there were few if any signs that Synod had engaged in the sort of robust and elongated process described by interviewee M. I could find none. To launch a major re-formation and re-socialisation programme of the sort the Synod was about to, without the hard work required to get agreement on what the problem was and what would be done about it was courting trouble.

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<sup>16</sup> Interviewee A.

But there were other more basic issues that bred disappointment and then indifference. It is to these we now turn.

# 5

## TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ENTHUSIASM ?

I argued in the previous chapter that the Catechumenate failed as a project because basic project design and management considerations were ignored.

I think it is possible to argue that even poorly managed projects can survive. It is quite another question as to how well a poorly managed project delivers expected outcomes. In the next three chapters I will argue that even more importantly than the management considerations, confusions and contradictions existed at the very heart of the catechumenate. These theological confusions would have brought the project down even had it been managed well.

As I interviewed people I was confronted by one increasingly perplexing question, ‘why did this project fail to capture the imagination and enthusiasm of the leaders within the Diocese’? I interviewed ten people who were close to the heart of the catechumenate from the beginning and spoke less formally with another eight or nine: four of these people remain advocates of a process like the catechumenate; but the rest have walked away from the attempt to launch “the catechumenate” and seem discouraged and bewildered about what exactly it was that had happened. Several appeared cynical about the whole thing in retrospect, and there was a distinct sense of sadness about what had happened amongst others. No one had been able to understand or interpret the failure of the catechumenate.

A few of them could articulate in modest ways what they believed had caused the project to fail.

One of them<sup>1</sup> proposed that the catechumenate had failed for the following reasons:

1. as a result of Diocesan politics.
2. because the clergy are powerful gatekeepers and won't let anything or anyone through to influence their parish programmes if it doesn't fit with their plans.
3. lay people are too timid and don't rate themselves as sponsors/companions or catechists.
4. the Core Group could not 'sell' a nine months programme. The reciprocal of this was that they came to believe that people were reluctant to commit to a programme that ran over that length of time.

Another<sup>2</sup> said the catechumenate failed because "the Diocese never got on board, it was introduced top-down, and because of the lack of clergy support."

But on the whole the responses of those I spoke with left me wondering where the enthusiasm and energy had gone; had there ever been any? Why was there so little apparent excitement? Why had this project failed to fire the imagination? In the early years of the Christian movement robust pre-baptismal instruction and testing that eventually morphed into a more structured catechumenate had been an essential and critical process in the formation and socialization of new believers. Surely to tap into this ancient discipline believed to be so necessary for the health and well-being of the early church would be an exciting and energizing prospect!

But apparently it wasn't. The dream of the Bishop and the Catechumenate Core Group to see the catechumenate operating in all parishes and ministry units throughout the Diocese never eventuated. What had happened?

In brief, built into the way the catechumenate was conceptualised and talked about in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century were some major internal confusions that the Diocese didn't recognise, address or resolve. The 'rediscovery of the catechumenate' was marred by the failure of the church to grasp the massive consequences of the changes that followed Constantine's 'conversion' in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the radical changes in Western philosophy and theology resulting "from the collapse of the Enlightenment project."<sup>3</sup> By the 1990's the church was no longer

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewee C (Interview date 04/09/2006)

<sup>2</sup> Interviewee F (Interview date 12/09/2006)

<sup>3</sup> See Alister E McGrath, *A Scientific Theology Vol. 2 Reality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2002), xi.

the gathering place of all humanity in the sense of Christendom where the boundaries of church and state coincided. This collapse of Christendom into which many expressions of the catechumenate were born meant that those ways of conceiving catechumenate no longer made sense. Because of the failure to recognise and take this seriously the ‘modern’ catechumenate carried its own internal confusions that went unrecognised. As a result the catechumenate was introduced for the wrong reasons and promoted for the wrong purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Roman Emperor Constantine’s ‘conversion’ in 312 and his subsequent edicts that led to a totally new relationship between Empire and Church, there has been continuing confusion about the nature and function of the catechumenate. I will argue that the introduction of the catechumenate into the Diocese as a way “reversing statistical patterns (of decline) in church membership” and in particular the number of people presenting for baptism, was inappropriate. In spite of the interest that promoters of the ‘new’ catechumenate had in proposing the catechumenate as an evangelistic method it was never intended to be used in this way. It was understood by the early church as a way of testing faith and resolve and as a way of forming and socializing those who had already decided they wanted to live within that community of faith shaped by the Holy Spirit and comprised of those who owed allegiance to Jesus the Christ.

When commencing this project I suggested the following research hypothesis:

1. The church lacked a common and shared understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and that it was impossible to obtain comprehensive buy-in amongst the leadership to support this tried and ancient process. And
2. The expectations and demands of the catechumenal process may outrun the ability of the average faith community to resource such a process since high levels of commitment by new believer and companion/sponsor over a significantly long period of time are expected. This frightens and discourages faith communities alongside other discipling methods that are popular, have high visibility and appear to yield quick returns.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interviewee E was clear that the catechumenate had been “sold as our contribution to the Decade of Evangelism”.

<sup>5</sup> Interviewee B spoke for several, when he said, “Yep...it’s all too hard [expecting us to do it the way they were suggesting]. He was referring to the nine month long programme which was the original time frame proposed for parishes “running the catechumenate” (23/08/2006). Interviewee H, actually acknowledged that the catechumenate “is too demanding and requires intense involvement – is it sustainable?” he asked. (Interview date 27/09/2006).

The comments reported on the previous page support the second proposal. It turns out however that the situation is far more complex than either of these early proposals suggested. In order to appreciate this and understand the conceptual confusion<sup>6</sup> that bedevils the modern catechumenal process it is necessary to review briefly, the historical development of the catechumenate.

### A brief historical review of the Catechumenate:

References to the catechumenate can be found in many dictionaries and encyclopaedias.<sup>7</sup> On the whole these articles are descriptive and not analytical. Two useful publications that push beyond description and provide a developmental overview as well as being pastorally helpful are Paul Turner's *The Hallelujah Highway. A History of the Catechumenate*<sup>8</sup> and Alan Kreider's *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom. Christian Mission and Modern Culture*.<sup>9</sup>

#### 1 Paul Turner's *The Hallelujah Highway. A History of the Catechumenate*

Paul Turner traces the evolution of the catechumenate from the early church to the developments that occurred following Vatican II in chapters relating to selected moments in the life of the Christian church. These 'moments' include, for example, Peter, Paul, the Didache, Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and the Apostolic Tradition which "came to be regarded as the single most influential document in the history of the catechumenate".<sup>10</sup> Following Constantine, he refers among others to Ambrose and Augustine,

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<sup>6</sup> The confusion that I am referring to is apparent when one reviews what was said about the catechumenate. Appendix 2 contains references to the catechumenate culled from Diocesan Year Books over the period 1998-2003. A careful review of these statements makes it clear that those writing about and promoting the catechumenate couldn't make up their minds if it was about "putting more bums on seats", forming and socializing new members, recovering the lapsed (and backsliders), attracting newcomers, instructing the pew sitters or a bit of all the above.

<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopedia of Christianity* Vol.1 ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Brill, 1999), 360-367. *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* ed. Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 298-300. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Second Edition* Ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 223-225.

Catholic Encyclopedia "Catechumen" [www.newadvent.org/cathen/03430b.html](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03430b.html) (27/01/07)

Wikipedia "Catechumen" [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catechumente](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catechumente) (27/01/07)

<sup>8</sup> Paul Turner (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000)

<sup>9</sup> Alan Kreider (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999)

<sup>10</sup> Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 6.

John Chrysostom, Caesarius of Arles, the Gelasian Sacramentary, Toribio Motolinia, one of the first group of Franciscan Friars to evangelize “New Spain”<sup>11</sup> in 1524, Charles Lavigerie who ‘replanted the catechumenate in Africa’<sup>12</sup> in the 1800s, and finishing with mention of Balthasar Fischer under whose “patience and learned direction the full catechumenate was reborn”<sup>13</sup> following Vatican II. In each instance, Turner describes the place and understanding of catechesis in preparation for baptism and the requirements and processes surrounding baptism as the rite of admission into the Christian community.

A review of Turner’s material demonstrates an evolution of the catechumenate over two millennia. The simplicity of the way in which the early Christian church prepared for and practised baptism gave way during the third century to “initiation rites [that are] much more elaborate”, and by the time of the Gelasian Sacramentary about 750 it is interesting to note that the earlier simplicity of “conversion being expressed by repentance...instruction centering on Jesus...(and) baptism followed by a brief period of formation” has gone.<sup>14</sup> “Although” as Turner notes, “the catechumenate and its rites had been developed and reduced, (and) their existence was still prized by the community and celebrated in the midst of the faithful”<sup>15</sup> there is now no reference to an interest in Jesus Christ nor the turning point formerly recognised as “conversion”. Great interest and attention is shown however in the details and intricacies of the initiation rites.

It appears as if admission to membership in the Christian church now proceeds on the basis of a complex and hierarchically managed system of procedures (the rites) that assume priority over the earlier, valued and necessary personal acts of repentance, conversion, and preparation for baptism followed by a lifetime of transformation and socialization as one of Jesus’ people.

Turner makes an interesting observation in his chapter on the Spanish Franciscan friar, Toribio Motolinia.<sup>16</sup> He notes that considerable concerns about the adequacy of baptismal preparation for adults prior to the Council of Trent (1545-1563) were expressed by the Mexican bishops. Their concerns about what should be ‘known’ by those presenting for

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<sup>11</sup> “New Spain” refers to the Spanish colonization of the Americas commenced by Columbus in 1492.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 118-123.

baptism were subsequently “organised into the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* published in 1566” but that while these missionaries had recommended a time of preparation (before baptism) they did not...call it a catechumenate. The ecumenical Council of Trent issued no canons on a catechumenate, nor were any of the missionary bishops in attendance.”<sup>17</sup> It wasn’t until 1963 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council that the catechumenate would be re-discovered and mandated back into the life of the church.

Turner’s description of the evolution of the catechumenate offers few, if any, hints as to why the catechumenate unfolded as it did. His work is largely descriptive. So in omitting any reference to the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312, he eliminates any possible appreciation about the confusion that has bedevilled the modern catechumenate.

To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and King of an alternative world order had been costly for the first Christians and warranted an admission process based on decision which was then tested by searching judgement of the already existent community of faith. But when Constantine established his new world order and the church was recognised by the Empire, at that moment the Christian church was depowered as an alternative community. In one stroke, the emperor shifted the balance of the forces arrayed against the Christian community and removed the major reasons that had necessitated a robust catechetical process that tested individuals who had confessed Christ as Lord and were opting to live by the values of the Kingdom of God while at the same time living in Caesar’s world. Now the nature of admission into this community known as ‘Christian’ started to change and it was no longer necessary to test and check the genuineness of faith with the same firmness that characterised the original catechumenate. Christendom was born and the catechumenate began to lose its firm edge.

## 2 Alan Kreider’s *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*.

Alan Kreider’s focus is on the changing nature and understanding of conversion over two millennia. He sets out to “distil the essence of conversion”<sup>18</sup> noting that in the early Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>18</sup> Kreider *Change of Conversion* , 109.

community it undoubtedly “reshaped an entire way of living and system of values.”<sup>19</sup> Conversion, he proposes, should be understood as a radical change in what people believe coupled with a concern for ethics and an investment in solidarity with those who share a similar commitment to this new view of the world, or in short a change “of belief, behaviour, and belonging, accompanied by a strong religious experience.”<sup>20</sup>

Tracing the way in which Christians gained increasing influence following Constantine’s edicts of the early 4<sup>th</sup> century and their “capacity to induce and compel adherence”,<sup>21</sup> Kreider tracks this changing nature of conversion and the implications for admission into the community of faith. By the time of Caesarius of Arles in the mid-sixth century for instance, the church is describing a very different conversion and form of admission than that of Peter, or Paul or even Justin in mid-second century Rome.

For Justin, *belief* led to discerning of areas of demonic power in society that enslaved people; but the freedom that Christ brought liberated people from addiction and compulsion, and led to distinctive forms of *behaviour*. It also led to a unique sense of *belonging*.<sup>22</sup>

In a world where Christians were “scandalously inclusive”, frequently maligned by their detractors, and where “every Christian was a candidate for death”<sup>23</sup> and might suffer “exemplary execution”, Kreider wonders about “the intriguing attraction of early Christianity”.<sup>24</sup> What was it that rocketed the Church to a 40% per decade growth rate over the first three centuries? How could this be, since as Kreider notes, no doubt with a chuckle and his tongue firmly in his cheek, “they had no Decades of Evangelism...nor was their worship particularly seeker-sensitive.”<sup>25</sup>

Kreider concludes that it was the Christians’ distinctive beliefs, a sense that there was “divine power among the Christians”, their behaviour which changed the new converts into better people, and an overwhelming sense that they were a group of people “with a big vision living an unusual lifestyle...embodying attractive, new possibilities” that captured the imagination of

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, xv.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

the pagan communities the Christians inhabited. And here is the important point; this was the product of

careful, prebaptismal catechizing by church leaders who attempted to apply the teaching of Christ to the lives of their flock. Furthermore, the Christians' lifestyle was the product of their self-identity: as 'resident aliens' they were members of a church whose social reality spanned and transcended the Roman Empire.<sup>26</sup>

New believers, converts to the new communities known as Christian, were now scrutinised, tested and enrolled in a process of re-socialisation. They were superintended on their journey from conversion through the transformation of their belief, induction into their community of belonging, and re-patterning of their ways of behaving. Following evangelisation, conversion and catechesis - in which the believers lived their way into a new kind of thinking centered on "the good news", and "enlightenment" (a period in which exorcisms and other spiritual preparations culminated in baptism) the process of admission into the Christian community took place. Old "addictions and compulsions" were replaced by a new love for Jesus and the people who were called by His name. There were huge risks to life and limb in belonging to this community, eliciting for example Paul's concerns that new believers clearly understood the metaphor of dying and rising and appreciated the possible high risk consequences of being a Christian.

Throughout its first three centuries the Christian church had been subject to a hostile and increasingly systematic persecution. But in 313, this danger ended when "Emperor Constantine legalised Christianity...giving it a position of privileged equality with other religions."<sup>27</sup> Constantine and his successors now "proffered powerful incentives for conversion to Christianity... patterns of inducement and compulsion"<sup>28</sup> which made it easier and very desirable to become a Christian; indeed in some instances it was necessary to be a Christian to be employed.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 33., This was conveyed in the Edict of Milan which followed Constantine's victory over his rival in battle, Maxentius, the year before in 312. Kreider raises the issue of Constantine's 'conversion' pointing out that it wasn't until close to his death in 337 (36) that Constantine actually became "a catechumen". As to whether his behaviour changed, no one seems to know for sure!

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 38-39. Kreider points out that the phrase "patterns of inducement and compulsion" is attributed to Sir Herbert Butterfield.

Now the nature of conversion started to change and so did the catechumenate. There were more catechumens, a “vastly larger...less disciplined and less catechised group than they had been a century earlier. For many...it was less of a journey than an extended period of aimless milling about – attending church if they found it convenient, listening if they chose, (and) behaving as they wished.”<sup>29</sup> By the second half of the fourth century Christianity had become a “religion by royal appointment. Christendom...was dawning.”<sup>30</sup>

In Christendom the members of civil society and members of the Christian church coincide precisely...In Christendom everyone is a Christian...People are Christians, not because of what they believe (which may wander wildly), nor because of how they behave, but rather because they belong.<sup>31</sup>

and the catechumenate was on its way to becoming part of a tamed rite of admission into one of Christendom’s many eventual expressions. The differences that previously existed between the early Christians’ belief, behaviour and their distinctive communities of belonging and the surrounding non-Christian world has now disappeared. At times the catechumenate would disappear altogether. Eventually recruitment into the church would be by way of christening of all infants and “baptismal services, which for the pre-Christendom Christians had been significant liminal<sup>32</sup> events, became routinised; [and] because they were unavoidable, they became ritually perfunctory.”<sup>33</sup>

In the last chapter “Christendom - Product of Conversion - and some clues about the future of Christianity”,<sup>34</sup> Kreider concludes that Christendom is now in a “state of decrepitude if not decomposition”. However, we might rejoice since “weighty impedimenta have [now] been lifted” from our shoulders and by looking back to the early church we may find “a source of relevant clues” for Christian living in post-Christendom.<sup>35</sup> One of these “relevant” clues is what he calls “the formative power of the catechetical process”. He notes with appreciation the “rediscovery of the importance of significant pre-baptismal formation” and concludes:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 42.

The differences that existed between the early Christians belief, behaviour and their distinctive communities of belonging and the surrounding non-Christian world has now disappeared.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>32</sup> “Liminal” - a word used in the psychology of perception refers to significant “threshold” events.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 86-107.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 100. Kreider’s first two ‘clues’ relate to “missiological awareness” and “the ingredients of conversion”.

To be a creative minority [the Christian community in a post-Christendom era] whose members...know how to make peace and to engage with the other addictions of post-modern society – this requires catechetical formation that has moral substance as well as the experience of God’s grace, love and power in appropriate ritual.<sup>36</sup>

Sadly, however, Kreider doesn’t acknowledge that the “re-discovered catechumenate” didn’t survive.

At least not in the Diocese of Christchurch. Nor, according to Bishop George Hearn, did it do well in Australia. And it struggles in North America too. In the Fall of 2006, Bev Piro, a Board Member of the North American Association for the Catechumenate, wrote in their Newsletter;

Where does the catechumenate fit?...we must find a way to broaden the appeal of the catechumenate in ways that will capture the interest of other aspects of church organisation...Perhaps roundtable discussions with leaders of multiple program areas would help weave the catechumenal thread throughout the fabric of our churches...it may then fall upon previously ‘stopped up’ ears that would be opened to hear this Gospel word.<sup>37</sup>

With all the tentativeness that those words convey and the obvious uncertainty of a leadership casting about to see if they might persuade the church-at-large to embrace the catechumenate, it still struggles to be taken seriously in North America as recently as late last year.

One is forced to the conclusion that something has gone badly wrong within the modern catechumenate.

#### So who is the catechumenate for and where does it fit?

Separately, several of those I interviewed for this project spontaneously offered similar comments; the catechumenate was just another of those ideas someone had dreamed up.<sup>38</sup> When asked about this they said that within the church, new plans, ideas and projects are

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>37</sup> [www.catechumenate.org/NAACFall2006.pdf](http://www.catechumenate.org/NAACFall2006.pdf) website of the North American Association for the Catechumenate (14 February 2007)

<sup>38</sup> This sort of comment conveniently overlooks the fact that Bishop David’s proposal received the approval of Synod. Everyone who voted “Yes” joined in the endorsement.

constantly being proposed. Apparently little if any effort is made to get their ideas about what the “problem” is, let alone buy-in as stakeholders to the latest proposal. Nor, in relationship to the catechumenate, could they recall any debate about the confusions that are buried within the way the modern catechumenate is conceived. Apparently nothing was ever challenged by Synod. Nor by anyone else. As a result, their energy ebbed quickly and it seems most simply ignored the catechumenate. “It made no sense” one of them said “No one seemed to be sure exactly who the catechumenate was for. But Alpha appeared not long afterwards and while it’s probably not perfect, it made perfect sense. I could see immediately what it was all about.”<sup>39</sup>

Once the initial euphoria that followed the introduction of the catechumenate had died away the Core Group appears to have struggled with the difficulties that this loss of conceptual clarity catapulted them into and the subsequent confusion about the nature and purpose of the catechumenate.<sup>40</sup>

In 1996 for example the Core Group said:

The Catechumenate is a process where participants are incorporated into the local Anglican Church by recognisable and recognised stages of spiritual growth. Candidates may be unbaptised newcomers, lapsed Anglicans or regular worshippers who wish to engage in a time of intentional growth.<sup>41</sup>

This sort of statement would not have made any sense to the early church for it is not an accurate description of the catechetical process. The catechumenate has nothing to do with the “local Anglican Church”. And categories such as “lapsed (Anglicans) or regular worshippers who wish to engage in a time of intentional growth” would have been unrecognisable to the early church. The church of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that spoke like this had failed to recognise that in large part it was still clinging to outmoded categories that only had relevance in Constantine’s failed era of Christendom.

And again: “The Catechumenate caters for unbaptised newcomers, baptised but unchurched people, and regular churchgoers who wish to deepen their faith walk”<sup>42</sup> In the early church the

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<sup>39</sup> Interviewee B.

<sup>40</sup> This can be seen in Synod documents and Appendix Two offers examples of this confusion.

<sup>41</sup> Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group to the Diocese of Christchurch, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group to the Diocese of Christchurch, 1997.

catechumenate was most certainly for unbaptised newcomers but not for “baptised, but unchurched people, and regular churchgoers who wish to deepen their faith walk”. Once again people in these or like categories would have been unknown to the early church and the catechumenal process.

One of the interviewees proposed that “things have changed”<sup>43</sup> since the early church insisted on a searching and robust admissions procedure. This is unarguable. But the question must be “Yes....but what is it that has changed”? Well, the changes that affect a robust admissions process into the faith community ride on the heels of Constantine’s edicts. And until the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century deals with its own identity uncertainty and discomfort about where it belongs in a world that finds it increasingly irrelevant, it is unlikely that it will recover an understanding of discipleship or catechumenate that will serve it well.

One further example of the confusion surrounding the intention of the modern catechumenate will suffice. It reflects the difficulties that beset the church when it sets out to use a process for a purpose for which it was never intended.

In 1991, early in the Decade of Evangelism, Grove Books published a small booklet entitled *“Evangelization through the Adult Catechumenate.”*<sup>44</sup> It is a tract promoting the value of the catechumenate as an evangelistic opportunity. “The Adult Catechumenate is a very important means of evangelism...people come and stay in our congregations. In an open atmosphere they learn to meet their Lord with and through other Christians.”<sup>45</sup> It is also a ‘mini-handbook’ on setting up catechumenate groups and may be useful for that purpose. But Grundy seems to miss the point completely when, in talking about the ‘rediscovery of the adult catechumenate’ he says,

It is remarkable that these practices developed by these early Christians have come to fruition in these modern clothes where so much sophistication and theory has been put into understanding how adults learn. It is equally remarkable that for so many centuries these fundamental methods of preparing new believers were

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<sup>43</sup> Interviewee H.

<sup>44</sup> Malcolm Grundy (Grove Books Ltd: Nottingham, 1991)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4.

not used. Had they been, then perhaps we would have avoided the almost ‘casual’ way people come to church for baptism and confirmation today.<sup>46</sup>

People may come to church today casually for baptism and confirmation. But that shouldn’t surprise anyone who understands that, for almost two millennia following Constantine church and empire have been wedded in a way that was set up to dissolve and eliminate the boundary between church and empire, subvert raw faith, discourage robust admission to an alternative community of faith, and dissuade converts about the need to be transformed within that community of believers.

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I have been arguing in this chapter that the nature and purpose of the catechumenate changed irreversibly following Constantine’s ‘conversion’ in 312. Once the emperor had changed the rules about what it meant to be a Christian and collapsed the boundary between church and state, there was no longer a need for a robust process of admission that tested a believer’s resolve to participate in a particular community where lifestyle choices were shaped by the metaphor of dying and rising, and to behave in ways that honoured Jesus. The catechumenate was at its best when the pressure was on, the boundaries were clear and the consequences of belief were obvious. Looked at like this it was, to put it simply, relatively uncomplicated.

On this basis, one of the problems with the re-description of the modern catechumenate is that it tries to do far too much and in so doing loses credibility and focus.

For instance in Piro’s editorial on the NAAC website she writes:

Instead of asking the question “Where does the catechumenate fit?” a more pertinent question is “How does the catechumenate strengthen education, evangelism, justice, vocation, mission, stewardship, and worship in congregational life, and, by extension, in the life of the whole church?”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5. It is doubtful, in my opinion, that the modern catechumenate was ever characterized by “much sophistication [or] theory [about] how adults learn”. The modern catechumenate emerged out of liturgical renewal not learning theory.

<sup>47</sup> Website of the North American Association for the Catechumenate. (14/02/2007)

There is no shape in this sort of approach. No one can be sure where the catechumenate starts and ends. Advocates argue that that this is exactly what the catechumenate is – an all embracing notion that shapes every aspect of church life and Christian living. But in doing this they lose any hope of gaining the ear of those who need to be sure exactly what they are buying into. This is one of the reasons why the project failed in Christchurch. Could anyone ever have been sure exactly what it was they were being invited to put in place?

In summary:

One thoughtful interviewee close to the heart of the project said “it [the catechumenate] can’t be just another programme, and if you’re looking for the revival of the catechumenate you must look deep within the tradition of the church.”<sup>48</sup> And then the question becomes, “You’re right. But which part of the tradition should I look at?”

Kreider’s proposal is that we look backwards in order to go forwards which is often a risky proposition. He suggests we look at the early centuries before Constantine before the birth of what eventually was to become Christendom.

It may also be risky to suggest that here in the first two centuries we find a purity and a simplicity that ceases to exist after Constantine. But here at least, some things are clear;

- There was an admissions process to membership in the Christian community that was rigorous and testing. After all, went the argument, if you might die for believing, you need to know and appreciate exactly what it is you stand for.
- this admissions process followed an active, prior decision to say “Yes” to life through dying and rising with Christ, and actively saying “No” to the “addictions and compulsions” that lead only to death. Active decision making preceded admission.
- And there was serious intent on the part of the new community of belief to replicate in every believer ways of living that honoured Jesus.

On the other hand, the modern catechumenate, rediscovered in the decades following Vatican II hasn’t recovered from the damage inflicted upon it by Christendom. In its present

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<sup>48</sup> Interviewee H.

reconstruction it promises more than it can deliver and because of this has failed to gain a toe-hold in a church that by and large lost interest in it and walked away from it.

One other thing becomes clear: in the early church the catechumenate was not promoted as evangelistic method. Hence its introduction into the life of the Diocese in the early 1990s as an “authentic way to participate in the Decade of Evangelism” and to provide a hoped for reversal in the downward trend of those presenting for baptism, was I believe unhelpful and probably did it an injustice. When Alpha was introduced in 1995 many vicars were drawn to it for its apparent clarity and lack of pretension.<sup>49</sup> It was marketed in a lively and attractive way and the cost seldom became an issue because, as one of the interviewees said to me, “I could see straight away what we were buying.”<sup>50</sup> Whatever the advocates of the catechumenate said about the superiority of a “process rather than a programme”, when it comes to real life lived in the raw, the programme won out. In spite of the danger of reducing the complexities of life and faith, Alpha captured the imagination of church leaders as an ‘evangelistic programme’ in a way the catechumenate never did nor could. It was never conceived for that purpose.

The catechumenate makes most sense when applied to the early stages of Christian formation. For the early church it was a time of careful pre-baptismal formation; a robust and searching test of genuine belief and a way of starting to re-socialize those who had already chosen for the life that Jesus offered. It is this careful and searching, supportive scrutiny that precedes baptism that is important to recover and rejuvenate.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Of course Alpha wasn’t, nor is it, exempt from criticism. Interviewee A said, with some feeling, “The catechumenate offers the opportunity for people to review and measure their life experiences of the Gospel. Alpha doesn’t [offer that]”. (Interview date 21/08/2006)

<sup>50</sup> Interviewee B.

<sup>51</sup> It was interesting to discover, after having written this, that this view is shared closer to home. In 1993 a Task Group reporting to the Assembly Standing Committee of the Uniting Church of Australia urged the renewal of the sacrament of baptism and then wrote, “The establishment of a practical catechumenate or time for preparation of baptism may well be considered...”

[www//nat.uca.org.au/TD/doctrine/pdf/becoming\\_disciples.pdf](http://www.nat.uca.org.au/TD/doctrine/pdf/becoming_disciples.pdf) (15/02/07)

Interviewee H, an early supporter of the Catechumenate, made a thoughtful comment when he said “If a parish isn’t doing the catechumenate it must be able to answer the question, “What is your new member preparation process for induction, formation and integration”?”

# 6

## THE HEART OF DANGER

### LOOKING FOR A RING OF TRUTH

In the previous chapter I proposed that the catechumenate carried within itself the seeds of failure. In addition, dogged as it was with internal conceptual confusions, it could not be marketed with winsome clarity or sustaining exuberance. For the same reason it wasn't warmly welcomed or eagerly embraced. Confusion breeds bewilderment and eventual indifference.

But the question about where any enthusiasm had gone wasn't fully answered yet. As I talked with those who had come to reject the catechumenate I discovered they were tired, weary and disinterested with yet another attempt to bring hope back into the church. I also started to understand why they had become tired and lethargic.

The clue was small and intriguing and it was buried in the words of a busy suburban parish priest who had just not been able to get excited about the catechumenate. "I didn't ever see the catechumenate as something that would attract Joe Average to the faith" he had said.<sup>1</sup> Why would this have been, I wondered. It turned out that the catechumenate appeared to be more interested in the well-being of the church and place too much emphasis on "making people Anglicans"<sup>2</sup> and this wasn't high on his agenda. By implication of course he was

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewee G.

<sup>2</sup> Lest it be thought that it is unfair to draw the conclusion that the catechumenate placed a lot of emphasis on people "becoming Anglicans" it should be noted again that the statements of the Core Group (Appendix 2) do point towards this.

An unattributed sermon simply entitled "Timaru June 1996" makes the point even more clearly. Towards the end of the sermon, the speaker draws attention to "3 important things the catechumenate does for our church".

1. It provides a way to welcome new converts that validates their previous experience. In effect, we as the church are saying to them "Your experience up until now is valid. God has been at work in your life. Let us help you discover what he wants of you now". NOT JUDGEMENTAL (emphasis original)
2. It restores the role of primary evangeliser to the congregation. It is the congregation (the body of Christ in this place) who teaches the convert how things are done here: This is where we sit, this is how we

alluding to the critical question of mission and what it is that the church is in the world (marketplace) for.

The modern catechumenate failed because it didn't have an adequate theology of conversion. It didn't make clear the distinction between being Christian and being not-Christian. And because of this it could never be unequivocal about its primary function which is to form and socialise those who are already Christian. Because of this it failed to win the hearts and minds of parish leaders; those who need to become first curious, then interested, then intrigued, and then excited over their role in making disciples and building the community of resident aliens.

### Into The Heart of Danger

In their book *Leadership on the Line. Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Heifetz and Linsky<sup>3</sup> establish a line of logic that goes directly to the heart of leadership in the community of faith, that community of “resident aliens...whose social reality spans and transcends the...Empire.”<sup>4</sup>

Leadership, they say, would be a safe undertaking if the organisations with which we associate only faced problems for which “they already know the solutions”. But of course we don't and they don't. Heifetz and Linsky call problems for which we already “have the know-how” as technical problems. Technical problems throw up technical challenges and as they point out, every community of people, the church included, need competent ‘technicians’ to ensure healthy maintenance of the enterprise. In contrast however, the “whole host of

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address the Vicar. This is the page we are now on. Very practical but intentional ways of making people feel welcome and included.

3. The catechumenate challenges our understanding of ministry. It is centered in the laypeople forming others for the ministry of the church. The spiritual life is taught by the faith community itself. The vicar does have a role to play”. (Held by G. Prosser in her personal records)

The points made under ‘1’ can all be challenged particularly the words in capitals at the end. The fact is that the gospel requires God's people, at times, to be messengers of judgement. But the items under ‘2’ make the issue quite clear. Even if it is true that a congregation is “the primary evangeliser” – and this could be vigorously debated – to then suggest that issues such as where we sit or how we address the vicar are related to ‘evangelism’ is ludicrous. This is the stuff of plain courtesy and friendship, not evangelism. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit in any of this. One suspects that Holy Spirit has been reduced to the spirit of the believing community. For a thoughtful and interesting consideration of evangelism refer to Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Evangelism. Living in a Three-Storeyed Universe* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> Ronald A Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 19.

problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures...[ones] that cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high” are called adaptive challenges because they require “experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments at numerous places within the...community”. These challenges require us to learn new ways and make “adaptive leap(s) necessary to survive in new environments. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself”.

When people look to authorities for easy answers to adaptive challenges, they end up with dysfunction. They expect the person in charge to know what to do, and under that weight of responsibility, those in authority frequently end up faking it or disappointing people, or they get spit out of the system in the belief that a new “leader” will solve the problem. [This is a] great danger to those who lead who often try to avoid the danger, either consciously or subconsciously, by treating an adaptive challenge as if it were a technical one. This is why we see so much more routine management than leadership in our society...the single most common source of leadership failure we’ve been able to identify...is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges (as if they were) technical ones.<sup>5</sup>

Grasping the differences between technical and adaptive approaches is important for the church and the work of transformation.

But it seems as if this is what the Diocese didn’t grasp. The immediate challenge was what to make of and then what to do about the disturbing decline in the number of people putting themselves forward for baptism – the issue the Bishop identified in his charge to the 1993 Synod. This was an adaptive challenge and in treating it as if it was a technical one, the Diocese made a fundamental mistake and came up with an inadequate proposal that was eventually regarded by most as unlikely to succeed. With a few exceptions it failed to generate any significant curiosity, interest, wonderment, excitement or enthusiasm. Something was very wrong. The catechumenate had become, what Heifetz calls, a ‘distraction’. In introducing the catechumenate as a [technical] solution the Diocese was now distracted from the much more important task of facing the adaptive challenge, “What are we to make of and then what are we to do about these declining numbers.”?

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald A Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 14.

In an earlier book he had authored on his own, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*,<sup>6</sup> Heifetz makes some additional pertinent points. Exercising leadership from a position of authority in adaptive situations means “going against the grain” and rather than fulfilling the people’s expectations for answers, one provides questions;

rather than protecting people from outside threat, one lets people feel threat in order to stimulate adaptation; instead of orienting people to their current roles, one disorients people so that new role relationships develop; rather than quelling conflict, one generates it; instead of maintaining norms, one challenges them.

He then identifies the processes that leaders bring to creating disequilibrium in order to face adaptive challenges. They are:

1. Identify the adaptive challenge.
2. Keep the levels of distress within the organization within tolerable ranges for doing adaptive work.
3. Focus attention on ripening issues and not on stress-reducing distractions.
4. Give the work back to the people at a rate they can manage, and
5. Protect the voices of leadership without authority by giving cover to those who raise the hard questions and generate distress.

Rick Barger calls on these ideas in his book *A New and Right Spirit. Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Culture*<sup>7</sup> and makes a telling point which I think marks the critical turning point in answering the question “where did the enthusiasm for this project go?” The short answer is that it evaporated through exhaustion.

Much of the church’s frustration and confusion today, Barger suggests, is that the church is

stuck in technical approaches at a time that demands adaptive leadership...*[Pastors and priest]) are exhausted from one technical approach after another. They know deep down inside that something is inherently wrong...perhaps they sense that their technical capital is exhausted [and that] there is no technical solution to the confusion the church faces over its identity and calling and the pain and tension that (particular) confusion causes.*<sup>8</sup>

We have reached an extremely important point in our understanding about the failure of the catechumenate in the Diocese. The tragedy of technical solutions is that they simply perpetuate ‘more of the same’ inadequate responses. It was disconcerting to hear numerous

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<sup>6</sup> 126-128.

<sup>7</sup> (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33. (Emphasis added)

comments as I spoke informally with people about the catechumenate that this was yet “another go at doing something to appear as if we are really trying to do something useful”. A busy priest here, and no doubt another busy one there, had no interest in committing themselves to yet another technical proposal. They were tired and worn out trying to make inadequate proposals work. They needed someone or some process that would lift them out of the mundane. They were looking for something that had a ring of truth about it.

A ring of truth - reframing everything in the light of the sacred story:

So where does the church find a ring of truth? Where does its health lie? And how does the church move forward expectantly on tip toes with a sense of excitement and some hopefulness?

According to Barger the answer to these questions lies in paying attention to the very rich soil of the church, recovering it, and bringing it to life. “The church is simply the church – a community...immersed in the ancient and authentic story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Being immersed in the story, by nature it enjoys an ethos that heals, restores, and gives life.”<sup>9</sup>

For the church then, literally everything in life is to be reframed in the light of the sacred story. “The sacred story will be the organising principle that informs, gives shape to, and holds together a lifestyle.”<sup>10</sup> This is nothing short “of a complete reorientation of life.”<sup>11</sup> It is transformative conversion we are talking about here. And conversions are the result of seismic shifts of an order way beyond technical solutions. They are beyond adaptive solutions though this is the soil out which they are born. In reviewing the way the Diocese approached the catechumenate there are no hints that this was a project that sought to transform in this way.

This is an important observation since the catechumenate is an attempt to form and socialise believers, a process shaped by the transforming ‘in-this-world-yet-not-of-this-world’

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 47.

metaphor of ‘dying and rising with Christ’, a process that cannot be understood in any other way but as life lived in a new order shaped, formed and energised by Jesus own death and resurrection. For the resident aliens, otherwise known as Christians, live in two kingdoms one of which is not of this world and which is defined by Resurrection.<sup>12</sup>

### Second Order Change:

Technical solutions are no solution when the challenge requires adaptive responses. However even adaptive responses can’t redeem systems.

This problem about how change is to be instituted in tired, worn out and dysfunctional systems is seen daily by therapists and constantly exercises the minds of change proponents where the question is “Why is it that when we want things to be different we always seem to end up making the same old mistakes and ending up with the same old unsatisfactory situations”? Or to put it more technically, what is the relationship between change and [the] persistence of dysfunctional behaviours”? At some stage the Diocese must have wondered; “We made these changes and put the catechumenate in place and hoped, but nothing changed. What went wrong”?

Whenever systems theorists, Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, and Richard Fisch,<sup>13</sup> observed a dysfunctional system, which by definition was one exhibiting limiting behaviours in a repetitive and persistent way “despite desire and effort to alter the situation”, they found themselves asking two questions; “How does this undesirable situation exist?” and “What is required to change it?”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Sermon on the Mount for instance can never be understood simply as the description of a good life lived well. It makes sense only if it is understood as the shape of life lived out of dying and rising with Christ; life lived by witnesses to the resurrection as a witness to the resurrection. The Gospel which records it is after all a post-resurrection witness to Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J., Fisch, R. *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1974)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Using the Theory of Groups<sup>15</sup>, and more importantly the Theory of Logical Types<sup>16</sup> to provide a way of thinking about those types of change which “transcend a given system or frame of reference”<sup>17</sup> they observed the difference *in type*<sup>17</sup> between two sorts of change; on the one hand for example, changes in the engine speed of a machine, and on the other hand, changes in the way it functions that occur as a result of a change, a transformation in the way it is designed. “The distinction is fundamental and must on no account be slighted,” says W. R. Ashby.<sup>18</sup> Ashby in his book *Design for a Brain* is describing two different types of *change* “one that occurs within a given system which itself remains unchanged, known as 1<sup>st</sup> order change, and by contrast the discontinuous or transformational change that “provides a way out of a system”; change “whose occurrence changes the system itself - known as 2<sup>nd</sup> order change.”<sup>19</sup>

Discontinuity is the key to transformation. Christian resurrection offers truly profound second order change possibilities, as it provides a way out of a system while at the same time changing and transforming the system itself. Resurrection is the ultimate discontinuous change that deconstructs life as we know it, life lived within the confines of the Empire and in the same moment reconstructs new life lived beyond and transcending the constraints of the Empire.

It is astonishing then to realize that the catechumenate originally sprang out of this deep and potent soil-mix in the need of the day to test and then re-form and re-socialise lives as believers commenced their Christian living grounded in and shaped by the resurrection of Jesus. This is life formation-by-resurrection.<sup>20</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from prison where his witness was not confined by bars, hinted at exactly the same thing when he wrote,

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<sup>15</sup> The Theory of Groups began life in early 19<sup>th</sup> century mathematics. It has developed into successively more intricate formulations used in quantum and relativity theory. In its simplest form in the social sciences it states that try as one might, there are circumstances where a member of a group can act without effecting any change at all within the group. Things will persist as they always did. The Theory of Groups accounts for stasis or the persistence of things ‘the way they are’.

<sup>16</sup> The Theory of Logical Types rests on the distinction between classes and members of classes and postulates that change can occur only when we keep the two orders separate. Change always involves moving from one logical level (type) to another. This entails a “shift, a jump, a discontinuity or transformation, a change of the greatest theoretical and practical importance for it provides a way out of a system.” (*Change*, 9-10)

<sup>17</sup> *Change*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Watzlawick, *Change*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> This phrase “formation-by-resurrection” is the theme of Eugene H Peterson’s book *Living the Resurrection. The Risen Christ in Everyday Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006)

Socrates mastered the art of dying; Christ overcame death as "the last enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26). There is a real difference between the two things; the one is within human capacity, the other implies resurrection. We need not *ars moriendi* the art of dying, but the resurrection of Christ to invigorate and cleanse the world today. Here is the answer to...give me where to stand and I will move the earth. What a tremendous difference it would make if a few people really believed and acted upon that. To live in the light of the resurrection—that is the meaning of Easter.<sup>21</sup>

The catechumenate in the Diocese sadly never rose above the mundane. It was birthed in the land of technical solutions to challenges that begged for adaptive solutions, and formation-by-resurrection beyond that.

Barger then makes a crucial comment. "Discipleship is simply how one witnesses to being grasped by the gospel in one's church and daily life. *It is an adaptive journey...*[and] is an outcome of the gospel, not a prelude to it."<sup>22</sup> So this is where the logic has taken us. Discipleship - an adaptive journey that is the outcome of the gospel.

I have suggested that in spite of the fact that in 1993 the Synod had endorsed the introduction of the catechumenate, structurally and politically this was not a representation of what many were privately thinking. I have proposed that, at a time when it most needed courageous adaptive solutions to highly significant issues that were pressing in on the Synod, Synod unfortunately settled for a technical solution. Barger suggests that this sort of decision induces lethargy and eventually, disinterest. Energy and enthusiasm that might have been available simply seeped away. Sadly, hope had not been born after all.

I then proposed that as church we know about something that is even more profound than adaptation, true transformative second order change. This is the order of change that "provides a way out of a system" while at the same time, changing the original system. This is Resurrection. It requires continuity with the past but introduces profound discontinuity. Discipleship, which follows gospel and resurrection transformation is a continual re-enactment of the metaphor powered by Jesus' own resurrection. Had these elements been infused into the debate about the catechumenate there may have been a different outcome. At

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<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: Fontana Books, 1953)

<sup>22</sup> Barger, *A New and Right Spirit*, 128. (Emphasis added)

the least the task of discipleship formation might have been seen as an exciting and exhilarating prospect.

## 7

## CATECHETICAL TRAINING TO VALIDATE THE HOMECOMING

## A CONCLUSION

**I**t was Ellen Charry's use of the word "homecoming" that first aroused my interest about the way in which we mark and celebrate a return to the Father's house.

The din of the secular world's ways is so loud that the ancient catechetical norm of a three year preparation for baptism is not outrageous. For without lengthy socialization...the turn to God will not be experienced as a homecoming but as entrance into someone else's house.<sup>1</sup>

I also started to wonder what happens if we don't do this well and get it wrong? What happens to the returnee's? Is it possible that some of them might actually go in through another door and enter "into someone else's house"?

I was talking with friends about the psychological and emotional dimensions of homecoming and about the Roman Catholic Rites of Christian Initiation, and almost as an aside, one of them said, "Oh I think the Anglicans did something like that years ago. They started the catechumenate. But I've no idea what happened."

Which is when my search really began. Someone had "done something about this". What had they done? And what had happened? I wanted to know since my interest is in the management of the homecoming. As a psychologist I have listened to many clients talk about the ambiguous and fraught experience of "returning home" as adults and attempting to find their place in a family they had once known but where they were no longer recognised. And where they no longer recognised things as they had once known them. How could it be that this family where they once belonged didn't seem to have a place for them any longer? Perhaps they really had made a mistake and entered someone else's house.

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<sup>1</sup> Charry, *Renewing of Your Minds*, 243.

This research project is the outcome of my search for some information about “what the Anglicans did”. It turns out that they did a lot and have little to show for it.

I have proposed some answers to the question “Why did this project fail”? I suggested that the modern catechumenate is conceptually flawed and that it was introduced to the Diocese for the wrong reasons and used for the wrong purposes. In the previous chapter I suggested that when the Diocese most needed courageously adaptive solutions it settled for a technical solution to a ‘problem’ that wasn’t very clear or well understood. The elusive ring of truth was never present and any enthusiasm had drained away. And in Chapter Three I proposed that the project foundered because it wasn’t managed well. It is not hard to see the major flaws in its construction as a project and its management.

#### Who are we here for as church?

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Synod endorsed the catechumenate because they believed they needed to be doing something significant to reverse the decline in the numbers of people presenting for baptism, and to be seen to be doing something distinctive for the Decade of Evangelism. It is also hard to avoid the conclusion that, on these grounds, the Synod was simply looking after its own life and its own well-being.

But that is not Gospel lived out of or according to the second order change motif of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Charry’s direction provides a way out of this dilemma. Her suggestion is intriguing. The purpose of a lengthy preparation for baptism is so that an individual’s turn to God “will be experienced as homecoming”. To recognise and honour the need of the individual is paramount. It is equally as important for the Father to know that the returnees have knocked on the right door and been admitted to the right house and been warmly welcomed into the family. Charry’s proposal that re-socialisation and re-formation within the Christian community be lengthy is married to her insistence that the function of theology is always pastoral. The purpose of doing theology which equates to her “basic catechetical training” – she doesn’t refer to ‘the catechumenate’ - is to “promote love of God and nourish

a godly life.”<sup>2</sup> And validate the homecoming for the returning child. That’s all. The focus is all on the believer. And not on the church.

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One interviewee said, “Catechumenate? - it’s a funny word to use to try and attract people into the church. Would anyone really know what it means anyway?”<sup>3</sup>

Now I think that the use of the term ‘catechumenate’ is counter-productive. Even though the word has a rich history and even if we can explain it with some flair it would be better to use a word that is less archaic and functionally makes our purpose apparent. I think that is Charry’s point.

As far as I can make out there is no significant debate over the meaning of the term as it was understood by the early Christians. To catechize was to embark on a process that built and buttressed belief and led to distinctive behaviour and a unique sense of belonging.<sup>4</sup> It was what we broadly conceive of today as the process of discipling that follows conversion. It is “the journey that works out the significance and implications of the gospel in the face of new challenges...it has to do with formation as gospel practitioners.”<sup>5</sup>

Now Eugene Peterson’s suggestion is useful. “The resurrection of Jesus,” he says, “is the event that sets and keeps in motion the entire gospel enterprise [and is] ... the focus for our spiritual formation.”<sup>6</sup> Since “resurrection gives spiritual formation its energy and character [and] is the action at the core of all Christian spiritual formation my concern is to re-establish this arena of action at the centre of our imagination”<sup>7</sup> for the Christian derives his or her primary identity solely through the process of formation-by-resurrection.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewee D (Interview date 06/09/2006)

<sup>4</sup> Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Green and Baker, *Scandal of the Cross*, 216.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson, *Living the Resurrection*, 102.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 94.

Could Peterson's "imagination" be the same "imagination" that Walter Brueggemann refers to as he describes the prophetic community in *The Prophetic Imagination*?<sup>8</sup> I think it is. If so, the tasks of formation-by-resurrection start to look very different compared with the ones commonly described in many of today's discipling programmes. They become the answers to the questions, "What does it mean to live in this particular community that 'embraces the imagination of God' and refuses life in the kingdom of this world?" What does it mean to live in this community of faith where we appreciate, honour, and treasure "the front-line, elemental realities of human, bodily historical existence."<sup>9</sup>

The tasks of Christian formation and discipleship training within the community of the resurrected faithful who have embraced the "very imagination of God"<sup>10</sup> becomes training in the art of seeing and living out the alternatives – training in the art of alternative imagination.<sup>11</sup> And whilst formation-by-resurrection is the power that shapes this alternative vision it is linked indissolubly with identifying marks that ground the life of this Christian community in history; a long and available memory that sinks us deep into an identifiable past that is available in song and story, an awareness of pain and suffering that links us with suffering of the past and those suffering in the present but is unbearable for the long term, an active practice of hope and life in a community that knows about promises yet to be kept, and promises that stand in judgement on the present.<sup>12</sup>

But, and this is Peterson's point, unless we install formation-by-resurrection at the centre of this community that bears witness to the alternative Kingdom of God and at the centre of that community's ability to imagine, a strong sense of identity and mission essential to worthy catechesis will disappear from our grasp. And if that should happen we won't be able to validate the homecoming, promote love of God, or nourish godly lives.

Which is, after all, what God has called his church into being to do and bear witness to.

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<sup>8</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that Peter L. Steinke concludes his book *Healthy Congregations. A Systems Approach* (Herndon Va., Alban Institute Publication, 1996) by saying that healthy congregations are ones that have cultivated the art of imagining alternative worlds. As a by-product and a big bonus, imaginative people just happen to be both more resilient and flexible. 108.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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## APPENDIX ONE: Number of candidates “undertaking the Catechumenate”

<u>Parish/ Ministry Unit</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Amberley		3					3
Aranui-Wainoni			2				2
Avonside	1						1
Barrington Street	6						6
Bishopdale					2		2
Cathedral			11		11		22
Ellesmere	8	12		7			27
Geraldine					3	3	6
Glenmark/Waikari		12					12
Heathcote/Mt Pleasant	1					3	4
Highfield			4	1			5
Hinds Co-operating	10	24	10	8			52
Hoon Hay	4						4
Kaiapoi			8	6			14
Kensington-Otipua			2				2
Linwood	5					5	10
Marchwiell			2				2
New Brighton						4	4
North New Brighton		4	2	2			8
Opawa		5			3		8
Rakaia	1						1
Rangiora	6	9	3	6	1	1	26
St Albans	14	9	9				32
St Michael's All Angels	7	12	4	7	5	5	40
Te Ngawai				1			1
Timaru-St Mary's		3	2	4			9
Upper Riccarton	20	9		2			31
Waimate			4				4
Woolston		3			4		7
St Margaret's College			18		17	29	64
Christ's College						9	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>59</b>	
in Parishes or Ministry Units	12	13	14	10	8	8	
Ministry Units in Diocese	77	77	77	78	78	80	

Source: Diocese of Christchurch  
*Year Books* 1996-2001

## APPENDIX TWO

### VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS OF THE CATECHUMENATE PRESENTED TO THE DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH BETWEEN 1993 - 2003

“as to how the Catechumenate can help the nurture of new adherents to the faith”

Report of the Christian Education and Nurture Division. Diocese of Christchurch, 1993.

“the Catechumenate...a process which is designed to equip and nurture adults on the faith journey towards baptism and or confirmation”

Address of the Bishop. Diocese of Christchurch, 1994.

“The catechumenate is a process where participants are incorporated into the local Anglican Church by recognisable and recognised stages of spiritual growth. Candidates may be unbaptised newcomers, lapsed Anglicans or regular worshippers who wish to engage in a time of intentional growth. Movement from stage to stage is celebrated liturgically within the regular church service”

Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group. Diocese of Christchurch, 1996.

“The Catechumenate is a process of education which is responsive to the needs of those enquiring into the Christian faith or the local faith community. Participants in the Process are incorporated into the Christian faith and the church by means of liturgical celebrations involving the whole faith community. The Catechumenate caters for unbaptised newcomers, baptised but unchurched people, and regular churchgoers who wish to deepen their faith walk”

Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group. Diocese of Christchurch, 1997.

“The catechumenate is a process of faith development which either prepares adults for baptism or for re-affirmation of their faith”

Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group. Diocese of Christchurch, 1998.

The catechumenate is a process by which faith is developed and formed in response to connections made between personal story, the Gospel story, and the story of the faith community. It is an intentional process of initiation and incorporation. Suitable for both newcomers and regular worshippers, the catechumenate is an exciting, inspiring process that needs to be experienced to be thoroughly understood and appreciated”

Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group. Diocese of Christchurch, 1999.

“...the catechumenal process of faith development, initiation and integration within the faith community”

Report of the Diocesan Catechumenate Core Group. Diocese of Christchurch, 2000.

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### APPENDIX THREE

Method used in this research project:

After obtaining the necessary endorsements and sign-offs from the University, I completed the following tasks:

- 1 Agreed the terms of the relationship with my project supervisor.
- 2 Mapped out a schedule and time-line for the project.
- 3 I then identified 14 people who I approached to see if they were willing to be interviewed. This approach was supported by a letter from my supervisor.
  - 7 of these people (5 vicars) had been heavily involved with the catechumenate from the beginning; 3 of them (vicars) had responded to the opportunity to be involved with promoting the catechumenate within their parishes; 3 (2 vicars) had been disinterested in the project from the beginning; and one person, an industry leader (also an Anglican from outside the Diocese) had a strong commitment to project management. I interviewed these people between August and November of 2006.
- 4 At the same time I was reviewing documentation held at a number of locations:
  - The Diocese of Christchurch archives where I reviewed Year Books from 1990 - 2007, and documents about the Catechumenate. Archivist Jane Teal was a great help.
  - The extensive document collection about the catechumenate held by Glenda Prosser who allowed me to review her full collection including and in particular minutes of the meetings of the Catechumenate Core Group.
  - Documents held by, and kindly supplied by Bishop David Coles.
- 5 I was researching the literature on the catechumenate during this time also. Judith Curtis, the librarian at Theology House, was most helpful and supportive.
- 6 I also researched relevant websites for material on the Decade of Evangelism, and the emergence of the modern catechumenate.
- 7 The completed research project draws on the interviews, document searches, and the literature review.

