

For vibrant discipleship and outreach, the local church can benefit from an intentional process of catechesis – from the Greek *κατηχέω*, which means to teach by word of mouth. If we think about how the Faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ were transmitted by the earliest disciples and into the early Church, we can understand the importance of continuing to carry out this foundational teaching and discipleship living. This catechesis, with roots in ancient Christianity, can be adapted to the contemporary setting and specific environment of each local church.

Catechesis is not simply a teaching text. It is a fully embodied teaching of the Faith that leads to formation and transformation in community with love of God and others.ⁱ In his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K.A. Smith proposes that catechesis, or any teaching of the church, be perpetuated in a way that speaks to people as living, breathing, feeling human beings: that we learn not just through our minds, but also through our heart and physical senses.ⁱⁱ If we consider how Jesus broke bread with His disciples, and how we continue to commune with Him in this tangible way, we can better understand the need for catechetical instruction that we can live and breathe.

The Book of Acts provides an illustration of discipleship and community in the early church. A few centuries later, Augustine shows us the importance of maintaining an intentional process of catechesis. In first experiencing, then later helping to carry out and record this process, Augustine has left us with the instructions and inspiration for catechesis.ⁱⁱⁱ Catechesis is a way to guide each individual through the discipleship process, beginning with preparation for baptism and into the continuing life of the church family and service to the community.

Today we can learn from the ancient roots of church catechesis, to create an intentional and fully embodied process of discipleship teaching and living. Catechesis is vital for new

Christians, but also for lifelong believers: filling in gaps, refreshing, reminding. Where people have already come into the church from different backgrounds, and some without this solid foundation of teaching and formation, the process of church catechesis should be broad and deep enough to bring each person into this foundational understanding of Christian life. The result is a body of believers truly living in the kingdom of God.

Robin M. Jensen, in her book *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, highlights five motifs of baptism that can effectively frame any process of catechesis: cleansing; initiation into community; sanctification and living by the Spirit; death and resurrection; and God's renewal of creation.^{iv} These motifs can help to develop a comprehensive catechetical process that captures the range of Christian rebirth, and they can strengthen an existing catechesis. Jensen's motifs also provide a lens for understanding in which ways each ministry of the church teaches and embodies these baptismal foundations.

For an even more detailed framework of catechesis, J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, in their book *Grounded in the Gospel* offer a guideline for sources of catechetical content.^v In this paper, I will refer to Packer and Parrett's framework in suggesting guidelines for church catechesis. While catechesis begins at the full church level, from there it should be carried out within every ministry of the church. In these more focused settings, catechesis should emerge from and reinforce the congregational-level process. Catechesis within specific ministries helps people deepen their understanding of the Faith. In these specific settings, people can further avail their hearts to spiritual formation and transformation, in ways that speak not just to the mind, but also to the heart and physical senses. I will look specifically at the ministry of Intercessory Prayer in the local church: how it carries out and reinforces the church's process of catechesis. I will use Packer and Parrett's content guidelines as a way to elaborate this process.

The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer in Church Catechesis

The ministry of Intercessory Prayer is woven throughout the life of the church.^{vi} Every ministry is touched by Intercessory Prayer, as this ministry provides the prayer foundation and prayer covering for the entire church. The ministry of Intercessory Prayer should be continuously lifting up the other ministries in prayer. Intercessory Prayer is an avenue for teaching about prayer within church classes, small groups, and church-wide events. Every ministry should include times and means of Intercessory Prayer. The ministry of Intercessory Prayer should offer prayer also for individuals and families, and should help families cultivate a home prayer life, as well as encourage prayer in the larger community.

The ministry of Intercessory Prayer can play many important roles in the church's catechetical process. Packer and Parrett remind us that the activity of prayer is part of catechesis. One section of their framework refers to John 14:6 in providing catechesis through Truth, Life, and Way.^{vii} In this framework, Life represents formative, relational experiences between an individual and God. Prayer is part of this Life catechesis, through which growth in a person's prayer life leads to growth in the Faith and discipleship.

Prayer as Life catechesis is one of many ways the ministry of Intercessory Prayer becomes part of the church's catechetical process. Additionally, the Intercessory Prayer Ministry:

- Incorporates and reinforces foundational Faith teachings through its training, classes, activities, prayer practice, and ministry.
- Helps individuals practice prayer as they learn the foundational teachings of the Faith.
- Teaches the vital role of prayer in the life of the Church.

- Offers specific prayer projects that reinforce the church's catechesis.^{viii}
- Reinforces belonging in church community through the different ways individuals can pray for each other.^{ix}
- Creates prayer lessons and activities through other types of spiritual formation classes and small group ministry.
- Contributes to prayer teaching and practice in homes, via online classes and small group materials, which also strengthens praying families.^x
- Engages symbols of prayer that appeal to the senses, serve as a reminder of prayer, and lead to asking questions about prayer.^{xi}
- Provides a foundational and intentional connection, through catechesis, to engage people who shy away from prayer.

Catechesis within the ministry of Intercessory Prayer should be intentionally in tune with the church's catechetical process. Prayer can be taught and ministered in ways that reflect and reinforce catechetical foundations. Catechesis within the ministry of Intercessory Prayer can be as detailed and deep as church resources will allow. The more intensive and extensive, the better for creating:

- A stronger church prayer covering.
- Greater understanding of the importance of prayer in the Christian life.
- More opportunities for individuals and families to grow in their prayer lives.
- Stronger bonds of prayer among the church community.
- Greater diversity of prayer activities to reach more people.

As an example of greater diversity, an individual who might not come to a designated prayer class might be drawn to participate in other ways:

- Engaging in a walk-through of prayer stations during Holy Week.
- Interacting with a question about the Lord's Prayer, sent through the church's daily news email.
- Reflecting on a prayer activity through a small group curriculum.
- Signing up for a prayer time through the 24/7 Prayer Wall.
- Praying for another family through Prayer Partners.

Each example can embody in specific and tangible ways the church's foundational catechesis.

The more ways the Intercessory Prayer ministry is developed to reflect and incorporate the church's catechetical process, the more people will engage in the Life of prayer in the church and in their homes and community.

A well-developed Intercessory Prayer ministry consists of 11 areas, each of which needs to be considered for how it informs and is informed by catechesis.^{xii} Within the space parameters of this paper, I will focus on the first area: Intercession, specifically Intercessor Training. Reflecting on Packer and Parrett's framework for catechetical content and process, I will consider why and how to incorporate church catechesis into the training for the church's teams of intercessors.

While training for active intercessors needs to accomplish certain goals, including hands-on practice, all intercessor training classes should be designed for and open to a general audience. Any individual wishing to learn more about prayer should benefit, whether or not that

individual will serve in an intercessor capacity within the church. The more intentionally the Intercessor Training is developed to include the foundations of catechesis, the more effectively the training will contribute to the church's overall discipleship process.

Catechesis through Intercessor Training

Intercessor Training should reflect the full scope of the church's catechetical process. This training is an excellent place to reinforce foundational teachings of the Faith. It is also a specific setting where individuals can participate and grow in Life catechesis through prayer.^{xiii} Those who lead the training can also be invited to teach or facilitate a one-time "encounter" in any of the church's other classes, small groups, worship services, or ministry events and activities.

Intercessor Training should be designed and made available in different formats (training course, workshops, Bible study, mentoring), not only to those who will serve as intercessors, but also to anyone in the church who would like to learn about intercessory prayer. Individual intercessors will be involved in different aspects of the ministry, depending on their calling and interests. Training should be adapted for multiple modes of participation, always keeping in mind and reinforcing overall catechesis. Remembering Smith's recommendations, the training should also incorporate teachings that appeal to the heart and physical senses.^{xiv}

It will be helpful to look at ways Intercessor Training can teach and reinforce the foundations of the Faith, as set out in Packer and Parrett's framework. Their model is easily remembered as "5-4-3-2-1," based on the number of items in each section.^{xv} They begin with five sources for the content of catechesis: Triune God, Scripture, the Story, the Gospel, and the Faith.^{xvi} Next, they consider four expressions of the Faith that help to teach this content: the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, the Decalogue, and the Sacraments.^{xvii} Then, they examine how

catechesis can be taught through three facets of the Faith: the Truth, the Life, the Way,^{xviii} while they focus the Way into two objectives: love of God and love of neighbor as oneself.^{xix} Packer and Parrett conclude the 5-4-3-2-1 model with the singular focus of all catechesis: “We proclaim Christ.”^{xx}

Sources of Catechesis

Triune God

Intercessor Training shows the specific nature of our interaction with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our prayers. A common question among church members is, “Do I pray to Father, Son, or Holy Spirit?” The correct answer is, “Any one, or all three.” Sometimes God will be addressed in prayer as any of His three Persons, depending on the circumstances and the person praying. Answering this question early in the training not only establishes a solid foundation of biblical prayer. It also reinforces the church’s overall teachings on the Triune nature of God.

Scripture

Effective Intercessor Training covers the full range of scripture. Too often, we limit the impact of biblical prayer by teaching only the scripture verses that specifically mention prayer. But the entire Bible is a basis for prayer. Scripture also must be the foundation for any area covered by Intercessor Training – for example, watchmen on the wall; biblical examples and understanding of dreams and visions; declaring and decreeing scripture.

One of the best ways to learn intercession is to start praying scripture. This is not limited to familiar verses. Intercessors will encounter a much richer depth of prayer by learning to pray the full range of scripture, in the appropriate context of each passage. What does it mean, for example, to pray a particular Psalm? To pray the words of Jesus? To pray from the Epistles?

Intercessor training that delves into scripture, and dovetails with overall church teaching on how to read and understand scripture, opens a dynamic dialogue with God.

Intercessors not only learn to pray scripture. They also learn to recognize scripture when God reveals it to them in prayer. As they hear from God, they need to check that what they are hearing lines up with God's Word and His nature.

The Story

Scripture cannot be taken out of context from God's biblical narrative. When intercessors understand the big picture of God's redemption and restoration plan – and our sinful nature in the presence of a holy God that requires this plan – they can pray powerfully for what God is doing, in the face of the enemy's lies and our sinful nature. A solid understanding of God's story also helps intercessors learn to pray appropriately for other people – not to violate free will, not to miss the healing and restoring work God is doing, and not to neglect the importance of prayers for forgiveness, repentance, and generational healing.

The Gospel

God's story comes into sharp relief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is a vital part of Intercessor Training and also provides great standalone training in the Life of prayer. Through our deeper understanding and connection with Jesus, we learn why we pray, how to pray, the importance of quiet time in prayer and presence, how to discern what God is doing in a given situation, lessons on prayer from Jesus' parables, and other discoveries. A dynamic training on intercessory prayer will bring the Gospel to life and help individuals engage the Gospel directly in their prayer life.

The Faith

The Faith is, very broadly, what we believe, how we live, and our source and power for living as disciples^{xxi} As a guideline for catechesis, the Faith is shaped and expressed by, and infuses the other frameworks examined here. But in teaching the ministry of intercessory prayer, it helps to keep the Faith in mind as its own designation.

In intercessory prayer, what we believe undergirds our prayers. It is always helpful for intercessors to have a reference for what they believe. The habit of regularly examining their prayers, in light of what they believe, leads to prayers that stay in line with God's will. It also strengthens them against the lies that come with backlash from the enemy.

By growing in the Faith, intercessors also have the confidence, through Jesus, to enter the throne room of God; and to declare and decree what they know to be true. A solid grounding in the Faith, which is an expression of scripture and the story of God, leads to prayers spoken in boldness, truth, and the love of Christ. Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit, by which we live as disciples in the Faith, keeps intercessors from trying to pray in their own strength and will.

The Faith also reminds us we are not alone. Corporate intercession, honoring free will, learning from the Faith tradition in the history of the Church, praying in and for unity in the body of Christ, and being introduced to biblical role models of intercession, such as Anna, Abraham, Hannah, Paul, and Jesus, helps intercessors to grow as praying disciples within the community of Faith.

Four Expressions of the Faith

At this point in Packer and Parrett's model, we reach four traditional expressions of the Faith, that help us learn and profess what we believe about our Triune God, scripture, God's

story, and the Gospel. These four expressions are the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, the Decalogue, and the Sacraments. I will discuss the first expression, the Creeds, in detail. The others can be developed in similar ways.

Whether we look at the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, or another variation that lines up with scripture and the Faith, the Creeds of the Church are a great way for Intercessor Training to reiterate the church's catechesis. The Creeds are also an effective means of practicing prayer. Using the Creeds as a model for prayer, intercessors not only learn God's Word, but they also learn how our expressions of the Faith line up with scripture.

Here are several ways we can include the Apostle's Creed in Intercessor Training – these also extend into other teaching areas of the intercessory prayer ministry (e.g., helping people grow in their prayer lives), and they reinforce the overall church process of catechesis:

- An annotated copy of the Creed, which teaches intercessors how to turn each line into a prayer. Not only for intercessors, this can also be used in other church classes, small groups, and even offered in the church blog or newsletter.
- A class that teaches how to pray from the Creed into different situations. This can be a crossover class that is part of the church's adult spiritual formation curriculum.
- A devotional guide that connects each line from the Creed with relevant scripture verses to pray. As with the annotated copy, this can also be taught, utilized, and distributed through multiple channels, including for families and small groups to use at home.
- A reflection question and one-sentence prayer, based on the Creed, included in the church's Sunday bulletin, weekly newsletter, or daily news email. This could correlate with a sermon series or adult spiritual formation class series on the Creeds.

- A prayer vigil, in conjunction with the children's/youth confirmation class, by which intercessors commit to praying the Creed on behalf of the class, as the children are learning about the Creed.

Truth, Life, and Way

Three facets of the Faith are shared by Packer and Parrett as a guide for developing an effective catechetical process.^{xxii} These three areas are taken from John 14:6: the Truth, the Life, the Way. In the context of overall church catechesis, intercessory prayer is one way people participate in the Life aspect of the Faith, as discussed above. But Intercessor Training also creates avenues for teaching and experiencing all three aspects of the Faith:

Truth

As mentioned in the discussion of scripture, the most effective Intercessor Training will cover the Bible in depth. Intercessors will often be praying for situations where people believe lies, and where truth needs to be prayed. Intercessors need a strong foundation in the truth of God's Word. Intercessors also need to be able to hear and speak truth. They need to live above reproach and allow effective accountability in their daily lives. They need to be willing to give their hearts to God for examination, correction, and healing. Effective Intercessor Training teaches them how to walk in repentance and forgiveness, including forgiveness of self.

Life

Intercessor Training should include the full scope of Life catechesis – not only practicing contemplative prayer but also spending daily time in worship. Worship is not only a way of life for intercessors, but it is also the way to enter God's throne room for prayer. Worship is also one of the biggest strategic keys in spiritual warfare. Intercessors need to live a sanctified lifestyle,

which includes inner healing and fasting. All of these are part of the Life catechesis in the Packer and Parrett model.

Way

Corporate relationship and community outreach is also part of an intercessor's life. Effective Intercessor Training should include an emphasis on the importance of prayer in community life (both within the church family and within the larger community). Intercessors need to pray for unity and should be living in unity as they pray. They need to learn that the first action in any social justice activity is prayer. Community events, local missions, and mission trips require an undergirding of prayer, including community prayer, prayer vigils, and prayer walking.

It is effective to take a social justice issue, like poverty, and include this in Intercessor Training. Look at poverty in the local and global community: What are the major issues? How can we bring effective prayer to those issues? What are some historic and biblical examples of prayer in the service of social justice? This type of teaching can be a topical or book study with prayer activities. It can serve well not only as part of Intercessor Training, but can also be a standalone class for the congregation.

The Greatest Commandment

Packer and Parrett take us further into the Way by looking at Matthew 22:36-40. As we walk in the Way, we are to love God, to love others, and to love ourselves. Often that last is the hardest. This greatest commandment by Jesus should be at the forefront of all our Intercessor Training. Not only do the intercessors need to live by this commandment, but they also need to be praying this as a foundational commandment for church life. Here, we see an example of the

ways overall church catechesis reinforces the catechetical process within Intercessor Training, and vice versa.

Matthew 22:36-40 is a scripture that should be often repeated within the framework of Intercessor Training. It is a verse that can be applied during hands-on training. When we give a training scenario, for example, asking intercessors how they would pray in a certain situation, we can additionally ask, “How does Matthew 22:36-40 apply?” This scripture is good for review throughout the training process. A crossover class, within the spiritual formation ministry of the church, can be taught on how to pray this scripture for discipleship living. The passage can be memorized, prayed often, and reinforced through every stage of the Intercessor Training process.

Focus on Christ

Although the proclamation of Christ comes last in the Packer and Parrett model, Christ is the primary measurement by which all Intercessor Training needs to be assessed. Why do intercessors pray? Because of what Jesus is doing. How do intercessors pray? By Jesus, who has made a way for us to enter the throne room of God. What do intercessors pray? As Jesus leads. Where do intercessors pray? At the feet of Jesus. That barely scratches the surface of how every aspect of Intercessor Training needs to point to and invite the presence of Christ.

Throughout the process of teaching on prayer, it is beneficial to orient and reorient every individual to Jesus, through every lesson. The prayer lessons and activities, in turn, should help people grow in their relationship with Christ. If any teaching or activity on prayer reinforces a person’s daily life and relationship with Jesus, the catechesis and the Intercessory Prayer ministry will have served its primary purpose.

A comprehensive Intercessor Training and Intercessory Prayer ministry helps to effectively build the prayer foundation of any church. The teachings and practices of the

Intercessory Prayer ministry have the potential to shape the prayer life of each person and family in the church. Much crossover potential is available through teaching and interaction with other ministries. The prayer covering and intercession, the prayer life of the congregation, and the crossover with other ministries is made even more effective when Intercessory Prayer reflects, shapes, and reinforces the church's process of catechesis.

APPENDIX:

Outline of a Well-Developed Church Ministry of Intercessory Prayer^{xxiii}

A well-developed ministry of intercessory prayer should include the following:

- Coordinated networks of trained intercessors.
- Prayer covering for leadership.
- Consecration of land.
- Ministries covered/walking in prayer.
- Prayer for/in worship services.
- Individuals growing in their prayer lives.
- Families praying together.
- Children and youth learning to hear from God.
- Prayers for healing.
- 24/7 prayer for the church.
- Strategic prayer for the community.

The brief outline above is derived from each of the following core areas of the Intercessory Prayer ministry:

1. Intercession – intercessor leadership and teams; intercessor training; different types of intercession.
2. Property – land consecration; cleansing buildings.

3. Leadership – life of presence; repentance; praying for each other; learning about prayer; being covered in prayer.
4. Ministries – praying for each other; being covered in prayer; ministry prayer chaplains; prayer in all activities and events; teaching about prayer (ministries, classes, small groups).
5. Worship – prayer preparation; corporate prayer (volunteers); prayer during worship; presence; altar ministry; weekday sanctuary prayer; prayer services.
6. Individuals – learning about prayer; life of prayer and presence; repentance; prayers by name; prayer box; prayer list; prayer classes (listening, talking, journaling, being); prayer retreats; prayer calendar; prayer blog; prayer through daily/weekly church news.
7. Families – praying together; Prayer Partners; assigned intercessors.
8. Youth/Children – prayer training/activation in classes/retreats; prayer partners; prayer activities/lessons; prayer in children’s church; youth prayer teams.
9. Healing – Healing Rooms ministry/teaching; intercession for Inner Healing (sanctification) ministry/teaching; prayer cloths/cards; healing services.
10. Prayer Wall – 24/7 prayer covering; participation; daily needs; listening; prayer vigils; prayer materials; foundations for effective church prayer.
11. Community – prayers by name/street/neighborhood; community sectors/issues; praying the news; prayer walking; community prayer; National Day of Prayer; prayer events.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁱ See J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 42.
- ⁱⁱ See James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 26.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 131-2.
- ^{iv} See Robin M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 4.
- ^v Packer and Parrett, 77.
- ^{vi} See Appendix for an outline of a well-developed church ministry of Intercessory Prayer.
- ^{vii} Packer and Parrett, 77.
- ^{viii} Praying for pastors, signing up for the 24/7 Prayer Wall, etc.
- ^{ix} Jensen, 53; the Intercessory Prayer ministry offers many ways for individuals to engage in community through prayer – praying for others via prayer requests, 24/7 Prayer Wall, prayer teams, prayer walks, prayer vigils, prayers for ministry areas, Prayer Partners, etc.
- ^x See Packer and Parrett, 66-68, re. Richard Baxter’s ministry impact on families and neighborhoods during the mid-17th century.
- ^{xi} Prayer stations, prayer candles, prayer cloths, healing art, decorated prayer journals, etc.
- ^{xii} See Appendix for the core areas of an effective Intercessory Prayer ministry.
- ^{xiii} Packer and Parrett, 77.
- ^{xiv} See Smith, 26.
- ^{xv} Packer and Parrett, 77.
- ^{xvi} Packer and Parrett, 78.
- ^{xvii} Packer and Parrett, 85.
- ^{xviii} Packer and Parrett, 88.
- ^{xix} Packer and Parrett, 90.
- ^{xx} Packer and Parrett, 92.
- ^{xxi} Packer and Parrett, 83.
- ^{xxii} Excerpt from Janet Lynn Eriksson, *Building Blocks of a Praying Church*, n.p.

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