

## Eastern Catholic Catechesis in the United States

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### Abstract

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In the first of three presentations on Eastern Catholic Catechesis, Fr. John Kachuba provides a brief history of the development of catechetical structures and resources for Eastern Catholics in North America. Beginning with the early 1970's, Eastern Catholics of both the Byzantine and Syriac traditions began working together towards an "Eastern Christian Formation and Development Program." As the years progressed, specific elementary school-level programs were developed, corresponding to the respective traditions of the Churches from the East. In an effort to coordinate resources more effectively, eparchial directors formed the *Eastern Catholic Conference of Diocesan Directors (ECDD)*, which later became a committee of the *Eastern Catholic Associates*, at the level of the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The *ECDD* continues to produce materials, which serve not only to educate Eastern Catholics in their own faith and traditions, but also teach Roman Catholics about the existence and gifts of the Eastern Churches.



I would like to present to you a brief history of catechesis in the Eastern Catholic Churches in the United States and some of our accomplishments and our goals.

As you know, catechesis continues the teaching mission of Jesus Christ. In the Gospels, Jesus is seen many times teaching the crowds, his followers and his apostles. After Pentecost the Apostles proclaimed to the world what they had heard, seen and believed.

Catechesis of the people of God continues to this very day. The methods, the materials, and emphasis of transmitting the teachings of Christ have, however, changed through the years. In particular, the Eastern Churches have through the centuries utilized methods and ways of transmitting the teachings of Christ which are different from those of our sister Churches of the West.

For our Latin brethren, from the Reformation until modern times, the view of religious instruction remained pretty much the same. It was an instruction with emphasis on the individual's relationship with God. The person's relationship with the community was oftentimes neglected. This was contrary to how instruction was done in the early Church and contrary to the spirit of the East.

After the unions with Rome of some of the Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East, schools were established along Western lines to provide a better education for the clergy and the faithful. This was done especially in the United States among the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The Second Vatican Council, however, called us to return to the style of Christian living of the early Church. Since then, the Bishops have stressed the central role of adult catechesis in the teaching ministry of the Church, as well as the parents' obligation to take responsibility for the Christian upbringing of their children. At the same time, the Eastern Catholic Churches began a process of "de-latinization" and a return to their Eastern roots.

Catechetical renewal in the Byzantine Eastern Catholic Churches in the United States began in 1971 with the development of the "Total Eastern Christian Formation and Development Program." The Maronite Catholic Church of the Syriac tradition, officially began its renewal in 1984 with the publishing of their elementary-level series, *Faith of the Mountain*. Saint Maron's Publications is the main publisher of Maronite materials. You'll hear more about this later in Fr. Anthony Salim's talk.

The "Total Eastern Christian Formation and Development Program" actually began with the meeting of several priests of the Ruthenian jurisdiction. Almost immediately the Melkite

Church joined the effort. Although an adult program was needed and was planned, the Bishops thought it better to begin with a specifically Eastern Catholic Grade 1 – 8 series, in order to address the formational needs of growing generations. The various Roman Catholic texts were simply not adaptable to the needs of the Eastern Churches, nor would the Catholic publishers in the United States develop materials just for us, considering the limited distribution potential. Work began on Grade One of the *God With Us* series in 1971. As each new grade level was published, more and more jurisdictions began to use the text.<sup>1</sup> Not only the Ruthenian and Melkite Churches, but also the Ukrainian Church and some of the Orthodox Churches began to use the series. In 1979, the Ukrainian Church in the United States and Canada began to attend the editorial meetings, contributing to the writing of the texts and participating in other work of the Development Program.

In October of 1979 a proposal was made to officially establish a board of diocesan directors for the Eastern Churches. The organisation was to include eparchial directors and their staff. At that time the proposed name was *Byzantine Catholic Diocesan Directors of Religious Education*. However, through the occasional participation of the Maronite Church and with a view looking to the future, the name was changed to *The Eastern Catholic Conference of Diocesan Directors (ECDD)*. This title more accurately reflects the membership of all Eastern Catholic Churches.

Soon after the Eastern Catholic Bishops in the United States were organised into a Conference known as the *Eastern Catholic Associates* (February, 1988), the directors of religious education became a committee of the Eastern Catholic Bishops. Because of this structural change the Canadian representatives, unfortunately, ceased attending our meetings, but continued to use the text and continued to keep in contact. The ECDD has since become the publishing arm of the Eastern Catholic Bishops in the United States for catechetical materials. It also represents the catechetical concerns of the bishops.

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<sup>1</sup> The first volume was published in 1972, with a new grade published each following year. The entire program is presently in process of revision.