



Five models for catechumenal leadership

Objective: We all have different models of leadership, whether we know it or not. And every model has its strengths and weaknesses. This session is going to help you determine which model will be most effective for engaging the assembly in full, conscious, and active participation in your initiation process.

Years ago, I read [*Models of the Church*](#) by Avery Dulles. It was enormously helpful to me because the book made me realize that people live and think in very different realities. I know it seems obvious now. But if you have always thought there is only one way to see the world, finding out there are other equally valid ways to see things is mind-expanding.

In her book, *How to Form a Catechumenate Team*, Karan Powell has done a similar thing with models of catechumenal ministry. If you think there is only one way to lead the catechumenate, you are limiting the possibilities of involving a broad base of the parish community. Powell examines the following five models.

The Traditional Model

In this first model, the primary goal is to hand on the tradition. It is essentially a hierarchical model. It tends to be nonreflective and to support the status quo.

Strength

This model provides a sense of security and rootedness; it guarantees the continuation of the tradition.

Weakness

New sources of life are cut off and discouraged; creativity is not encouraged. Enablement is limited because authority and power are kept in the hands of the clergy or in the hands of the religious education coordinator or catechumenate team leader.

How would this look in a parish catechumenate?

The pastor or team leader would gather catechumens in a group or on a one-to-one basis. The pastor or team leader would ordinarily be the only minister involved. Perhaps there would be an occasional outside presenter. There may or may not be sponsors. The community of the faithful would be involved on Sunday only when and if the liturgical rites were celebrated. The candidates would be “told” the tradition and perhaps “experience” some of the traditions of the church. However, their personal faith life may or may not be touched and deepened as a part of the living, vibrant tradition of the Catholic Church.

The Charismatic or Intuitive Model

This model is named for the person with personal charisms or gifts that energize others to follow that person’s ideas. The ministry of the charismatic leader revolves around the personality of the charismatic leader who is usually creative, enthusiastic, at times prophetic, intuitive, and spontaneous.

Strength

This model has vitality, flexibility, and tremendous creativity.

Weakness

In this model, there is a tendency to rely too much upon the leader. There can develop around this leader an “in group” and those who are left out. A charismatic leader can stimulate a vision; however, this is not a good enablement model. The implementation of that vision in this model more often than not relies on the intuition and gifts of the charismatic leader.

How might this look in the parish catechumenate?

A dynamic person (pastor or team leader) would begin to implement the catechumenate perhaps by inviting others to work with him or her. There would be strong attraction to the persons involved. When the leader leaves, unless he or she has developed some leadership in those coworkers, the catechumenate suffers greatly and in some cases ceases to exist. Once the team leader, a strong, dynamic person, has moved on, the catechumenate falls apart! There isn’t room for everyone in this model.

The Classical Model

This leadership style tends to be hierarchical, highly rational, heavily dependent on the delegation of authority and fitting people into ready-made structures that have been in place for a number of years. Imagine a catechumenate that has a well-defined process, where catechists have specific jobs,

liturgists know their role, hospitality people provide the welcome, and the process has existed for three to five or more years with relative success.

Strength

In this model, the implementation of the catechumenate is efficient.

Weakness

The ministry structure shapes and limits the process. Because the emphasis is on shaping the ministries of the parish catechumenate to fit the structure rather than having a structure that supports a variety of ministries in a fluid catechumenal structure, this is not a suitable model for facilitating enablement. This model does not allow or tolerate the “messiness” that is part of being the church.

How might this look in the parish catechumenate?

As a new person joins the team, or a space on the team becomes vacant, the tendency is to choose people to fit the slot rather than to call people to come along and discern their gifts and allow their ministry to emerge. Unlike the traditional model, the classical model can be quite creative—but within an already established structure. This model can enable the vision of the catechumenate whereby all the baptized are involved, insofar as each area of service and each team member would have a committee, perhaps with subcommittees. Many people would be involved in the system.

The Human Relations Model

This model is very attractive for the catechumenate because of the heavy emphasis placed on the personal. It is essentially nondirective and concentrates on the development of a network of intimate relationships. The leader here would be a person with strong relational skills and a deep personal commitment to the initiation process.

Strength

This model develops community. Catechumenate teams built on a human relations model are very supportive, welcoming communities.

Weakness

“In-group-ness” and the need to maintain harmony, often at high cost, are primary. So much energy can be spent building and maintaining the relationships that a sense of mission can be lost.

How might this look in the parish catechumenate?

In this model where relationships are the key, the catechumenate team leader tends to invite team

members who are very much like one another. The team can become very dependent upon one another rather than be empowered to move out to others. Strong and healthy human relations are essential to the church and the initiation process; however, when the team relationships rather than the mission become the end, the group has missed the point. Participation from the community might be limited to those parishioners who are personally similar to current team members.

The Systemic Model

Here the emphasis is on interdependence and adapting leadership styles to meet changing needs. The function of the catechumenate team leader in this model is not to *do* ministry but to help others identify and carry out their ministries. The function is to help the parish to do the business of initiating new Catholic adults.

This ministry is uniquely all of ours!

The emphasis for the catechumenate team leader in this model is to help the various functions (staff, liturgy commission, musicians, sponsors, pre-catechumenate team, catechumenate team, godparents, catechists, the parish assembly, etc.) maintain sufficient connection with each other so that each function enables the others to carry out the common objective of the catechumenate.

That objective is assigned to the bishop and delegated to the parish community: "The bishop, in person or through his delegate, sets up, regulates, and promotes the program of pastoral formation for catechumens..." (RCIA #12).

Strengths

This model allows a parish community to be what it says it is within the people of God. Emphasis is placed on shared ministry. Church members (catechumens, sponsors, staff, the whole assembly) become interdependent.

Weakness

Parish life, structures, and personnel often resist this model. Parish teams, especially those that include professional ministers, feel called upon to "do" the catechumenate. This means that the ministry to which the parish is called is taken away from it. Professionalism, staffism, and clericalism block the enablement of others for ministry.

How might this look in the parish catechumenate?

This is the model Powell believes the catechumenate team leader is called to embrace. The primary concern for the team leader is not to direct but to help other women and men to minister to the catechumens and one another. The primary concern is to learn how not to do it alone.

Why are these models so important?

Leadership styles are chosen. Knowing how you minister and how you call others to ministry enables the leader to be more effective in ministry. Enablement has to do with sharing gifts, with mutual support, with accountability. If the team leader chooses such a model, then the design of the catechumenate process, and the selection of the catechumenate team and their formation, as well as the mission and ministry of the whole parish, will be influenced.

Leadership Quiz

(This quiz is available on the course website.)



Please go to <http://tinyurl.com/wpeval2> to evaluate this session.