September 2017

Dear Brother Priests and Catechists,

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), Pope Saint John Paul II noted that the whole Church is responsible for the work of handing on the faith (cf., n. 16). He also noted that pastors have special responsibilities for catechesis: “Because of their charge, pastors have, at differing levels, the chief responsibility for fostering, guiding and coordinating catechesis” (n. 16). Thus, bishops and pastors along with their parochial vicars have the special task of ensuring that the fullness of our faith, with its language and expression, is transmitted to the faithful in order to foster the unity of faith and uphold the communion of the Church.

In the last twenty years, there have been major changes for the good in the catechetical formation of our young people. The materials that are now available are carefully examined and approved by the bishops so that those materials are in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The importance of a personal relationship with Christ has been highlighted in our faith formation as well as the call to service and mission. We are grateful for the dedicated work of our catechists. Their ministry is invaluable in forming our youth to be faithful disciples of Jesus (cf. CIC, c. 785.1).

As bishop, I have the serious obligation before God to ensure that we are doing all we can in passing on the faith to our young people. All priests are pastors of souls who share this responsibility with the bishop (cf. CIC, c. 519). The bishops and priests also share this duty and privilege with our catechists (cf., CIC, c. 774.1). As bishop, I want every young Catholic in our diocese to know and to internalize the basics of our faith in such a way that they are able to express in the common language of faith what the Church believes.

As many in the ministry of catechesis note, the elimination of memorization from our catechetical programs has seriously diminished our young people’s ability to articulate the faith. They may know the faith, but do not have a ready language to express it. However, when our young people do possess a way to express the faith of the Church, they are better equipped to answer the questions that they face in living out that faith.
To this end, I am hereby asking all those involved in the religious formation of candidates for Confirmation to have each candidate for this sacrament know, understand and memorize a few simple questions and answers that are attached to this letter (cf., CIC, c. 386.1). These questions elicit answers that are the most fundamental expressions of our faith. They are taken and adapted from the Baltimore Catechism No. 1, a catechetical tool geared for children preparing for First Holy Communion. Thus, the ability to master these questions and answers is well within the competence of our Confirmation candidates.

Before any candidate is to be presented for the Sacrament of Confirmation, they are to demonstrate their ability to answer the questions that I am sending you (cf., CIC, cc. 775.1; 779; 780). I am asking each pastor in collaboration with his parochial vicar to interview the Confirmation candidates and provide the assurance that they know the questions and answers (cf., CIC, cc. 528.1; 773; 776; 777, 1, 2, 5). Memorizing these questions and answers is a supplement to a much wider formation of our candidates. Nonetheless, I consider the ability to articulate the faith clearly and accurately in our post-Christian society essential.

I thank you in advance for your needed co-operation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Arthur J. Serratelli

Bishop of Paterson