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Lifelong Catechesis as a Response to People's Life Needs

Abstract: Although the *Slovenian Pastoral Plan* (2012) makes it clear that catechesis is for every person in every stage of life and that it should be lifelong, it overlooks many groups of people, such as parents with young children, the grieving, the widowed, the divorced, etc. Many of these and others feel unheard and unwelcomed in the Church. In this article, the authors try to answer the question: what needs to be taken into account in order to ensure that lifelong catechesis responds to the life needs of adults and that the above groups of people are not overlooked? First, the authors give some experiences of the unheard and unreceived nature of different believers. Then they show the attitudes that catechists should have in lifelong catechesis so that those who receive their catechesis will receive answers to their deepest needs in life. Finally, they show how to offer lifelong catechesis to these groups of people so that each one of them will feel that God has found him or her in his or her concrete situation through the catechist, that God accepts him or her through the catechist and wants to help him or her to seek and find the answer to his or her concrete wants, needs and questions, and that he or she will also be able to grow in faith in his or her concrete situation.

Keywords: lifelong catechesis, life needs, parents with young children, grieving, widowed, divorced

Katecheza całożyciowa jako odpowiedź na potrzeby życiowe człowieka

Streszczenie: Chociaż „Słoweński plan pastoralny” (2012) jasno stwierdza, że katecheza jest dla każdego człowieka na każdym etapie życia i że powinna trwać przez całe życie, to jednak pomija wiele grup, takich jak: rodzice z małymi dziećmi, osoby pogrążone w żałobie, wdowy, rozwiedzeni itp. Wiele z nich i innych czuje się niewysłuchanych i niemile widzianych w Kościele. W niniejszym artykule autorzy próbują odpowiedzieć na pytanie: co należy wziąć pod uwagę, aby katecheza przez całe życie odpowiadała potrzebom życiowym dorosłych i aby powyższe grupy osób nie były pomijane? Najpierw autorzy podają kilka doświadczeń związanych z niewysłuchaniem i nieprzyjęciem przez różnych wiernych. Następnie ukazują postawy, jakie powinni mieć katecheci w katechezie całożyciowej, aby ci, którzy odbierają ich

katechezę, otrzymali odpowiedzi na swoje najgłębsze potrzeby życiowe. Wreszcie pokazują, jak proponować katechezę całościową tym grupom ludzi, aby każdy z nich miał poczucie, że Bóg go odnalazł w jego konkretnej sytuacji przez katechetę, że Bóg go akceptuje przez katechetę i chce mu pomóc w szukaniu i znajdowaniu odpowiedzi na jego konkretne pragnienia, potrzeby i pytania, a także, że będzie mógł wzrastać w wierze w swojej konkretnej sytuacji.

Słowa kluczowe: katecheza całościowa, potrzeby życiowe, rodzice z małymi dziećmi, żałoba, wdowa, rozwodnik

Introduction

On the basis of the *General Catechetical Directory* (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy 1971, n. 75), the *Slovenian Catechetical Plan* stresses that catechesis should give special “attention to the different situations in which people live” (Slovenska škofovska konferenca 2018, 10). Catechesis is “a long process within which there are different catechetical paths, catechesis for all ages, personal situations and specific environments” (ibid.). This is in line with the fundamental purpose of catechesis: “To invite and accompany the catechised to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, so that they may profess their personal faith, become actively involved in the communion of the Church and responsibly live their mission in society” (ibid. 21; cf. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy 1971, n. 78-89).

The Slovenian Bishops' Conference, which issued the *Slovenian Pastoral Plan Come and See* in 2012, stressed the need to make the transition from the catechesis of children and young people to the catechesis of adults, because this “is one of the basic itineraries wherever local churches embark on the path of the new evangelization” (Slovenska škofovska konferenca 2012, n. 119). The *Slovenian Catechesis Plan* takes this into account and makes it clear that catechesis is lifelong and embraces all stages of life, personal situations and specific environments. Every Christian is called to be a catechist. This is not only the vocation of priests, ordained persons and trained catechists (Slovenska škofovska konferenca 2018, 13-31)

In this article we will try to answer the question: What is particularly important to consider in order for lifelong catechesis to respond to the life needs of adults and to ensure that the groups of people listed above are not overlooked? First of all, we will give some experiences of unhearing and non-acceptance of different believers. Then we will show the attitudes that catechists should have in lifelong catechesis so that those who receive their catechesis will receive answers to their deepest needs in life. Finally, we will show how to offer lifelong catechesis to these groups of people, so that each one of them will feel that God has found him or her in his or her concrete situation through the catechist, that God accepts him or her through the catechist and wants to help him or her to seek and find the answer to his or her concrete wants, needs and questions, and that he or she will also be able to grow in faith in his or her concrete situation.

1. Some adults' experiences of not being heard and accepted

The *Slovenian Pastoral Plan* (2012, n. 118-121) makes it clear that catechesis is for every person, in every age: children, young people, adults. Since the family is the basic unit of the Church, the addressee of the catechesis is therefore also the family in particular (Stegu 2015). Unfortunately, nowhere in the plan is it mentioned that it would be right not to overlook as special addressees of the catechesis groups of people, such as: parents with young children, the bereaved, the widowed, the divorced, etc. Nor is there any specific mention that men and women, whether married or not, should be given special attention, because this is often neglected. It is these groups of people who often feel very unheard in the Church and thus unwelcomed.

When we meet people who have lost loved ones, many of them complain that there were a lot of people at the funeral, but a few weeks after the funeral they are left alone with their grief. They are grateful for the Holy Mass, especially when it is the seventh or thirtieth day. The priest celebrates the Mass really well and they are really grateful to him. But he does not take the time to listen to them so that they can share their feelings, their sadness, their distress with him. He asks them politely how you are, but he is already rushing on, or he starts telling them that time will heal the wounds, that the deceased are now with God, that they are happy there, that God will give them consolation. This does not really help them, because it leaves them alone and helpless to discover how God is really present in all that they have experienced and are experiencing, and where the light of hope for a new life is. Even the believers they meet at Mass tend to avoid them or to address them with general phrases that hurt rather than help.

Many divorced people feel excluded from communion and the possibility of participating in the parish. This feeling of exclusion is even greater when, years later, they meet a new partner and want to live with him or her, but cannot get their marriage annulled. Many see no other solution than to leave their home parish and go regularly or at least occasionally to another parish where they are not known.

Many men, married or unmarried, fathers or not, often say that they cannot find their place in the Church. They do not feel heard in their deepest questions and searches. Similarly, women.

Many believers who are practical Christians and are at Mass every Sunday cannot forgive their father or mother, their daughter or son, their husband or wife, the Church or the State, and not even themselves. They do not know how to come to peace, to inner freedom. They do not feel heard in their immense need.

A parish priest told how a widower from a neighbouring parish came to him. He complained that he found it hard to understand how it was possible that in parishes there were many groups for all kinds of people, from the young to the old, but he could not find a group where the widowed could be together. He was unable to comprehend how it is

possible that the widowed are overlooked and that no one wants to be aware of this and to reach out to them so that they can feel heard and accepted in the Church.

Many parents with pre-school children experience the greatest stress every Sunday when they go to Mass, and they are already afraid of what they will experience from the parish priest or the parishioners if their little children are not completely at peace.

When we hear these and other stories, everyone probably asks themselves, why is this happening? Why do these people feel unheard and unwanted? What makes them unable to believe that God has not abandoned them and that, despite their hardships, He still loves them, is with them, hears them, accepts them? What can we do to ensure that fewer people will experience this?

2. The fundamental attitudes of the catechist: listening, closeness, acceptance and witness

There are still many people of faith in Slovenia, and not a few who attend Sunday Mass, even though attendance at Mass has dropped considerably during the pandemic of Covid-19 (Slovenska škofovska konferenca 2021). We wonder how many of them have ever experienced what those who lived when Jesus walked in Palestine experienced.

All the Evangelists tell us about His approach to the people. The Evangelist John, in particular, shows Jesus approaching each person and meeting him or her in his or her concrete condition, what he or she is experiencing at the time, what he or she needs, what he or she is looking for, etc. He shows us this in a very vivid way, especially in the stories of Nicodemus (Jn 3: 1-21), the woman of Samaria (Jn 4: 1-41), the man who was sick for thirty-eight years (Jn 5: 1-18), the man who was born blind (Jn 9: 1-41), etc.

Jesus approaches these people respectfully or allows them to approach him, He is with them, listens to them, welcomes them, develops a dialogue with them, explains to them the Word of God and how they can see their life and the way forward in the light of it. In Jesus' relationship with people, therefore, listening, closeness, acceptance are always present. When He is with them, He listens respectfully and with love, and makes them feel that they are accepted as such. He then gradually reveals to them the presence of God in their situation and invites them to take a step forward into a new life with Him and His Father. In doing so, He leaves them with complete freedom to accept His invitation or not. That is why He always used parables, metaphors and stories. He did not speak directly about the Father and His Kingdom, but always indirectly, so that each one could freely decide whether or not to accept the invitation to believe in Him and in His Father and to become His disciple. Whoever has ears, should hear (Mt 11:15; 13:9). He who looks, let him see (Mt 13:16). He gives total freedom and encourages the acceptance of personal responsibility towards the message communicated, the truth of life.

How can today's Christians experience this? Jesus founded the Church, a community of His disciples who re-present His mysterious presence in the midst of the world through His death and resurrection (Acts 2). Through baptism, He gives rebirth to every person who accepts faith in Him and desires to become a living member of the Church, His mystical body. He clothes him with Himself (Gal 3: 27) and gives him, together with the Father, the Holy Spirit, so that he may live and work in His Spirit and re-present Him in the midst of the world (Rom 12) (Prijatelj 2018). If, therefore, we want others to be able to taste, know and love Jesus Christ, then all Christians are called to learn from Jesus His way of catechesis.

In the history of the Church we have some great examples of this approach. Among them is St Ignatius of Loyola. In his approach to people and in his offering of spiritual help, he took two guidelines in particular into account:

1) *God seeks each individual personally, reveals Himself to him, and leads him to Himself* (*Spiritual Exercises* n. 15). Ignatius believed that God communicates directly with each person through various aspects of his experience, including his conversations with others, his daily experiences and impulses of the heart, his feelings and insights gained through prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and spiritual or other writings. The task of the one who wants to help another on the path of his spiritual growth is to discover where the one who comes to him is on this path, what he wants to achieve, and how God is already seeking him or is already present in his life (*ibid.* n. 2). Human desires¹ and needs are very important. If a person has no desire in him or herself, then it is impossible for anyone to help him or her in his or her spiritual growth (*ibid.* n. 16).

2) *God is actively present everywhere. We are called to seek Him and find Him or let ourselves be found by Him* (*ibid.* n. 230-237; Platovnjak 2021a, 88-89). The task of the one who wishes to help another on the journey of faith is to help that person to discover the presence of God, how he or she can hear, see and taste Him, so that he or she may accept this presence, respond to what He gives, and become, together with Him, a gift to others, a interlocutor and collaborator in the building up of the kingdom of God.

In our time, Pope Francis in particular encourages us to adopt this attitude, often giving priority to listening, closeness and acceptance. This principle of his approach to people and to every theme related to the life of faith is very visibly present in all the synods he has convened and which have taken place in his presence. Listening, listening and listening again (Francis 2022). We cannot speak of respect and love for people if we do not first listen. For listening is one of the fundamental attitudes of respect and love for others. If this is not there, then the two are only apparent. Nor can there be true closeness and acceptance.

Pope Francis (2018) reiterated this point at the end of the Synod on Youth at the closing liturgy and after the midday prayer on 28 October 2018, when he illustrated the three steps of

¹ Skralovnik (2022, 180) points out the verb form of the root *wh*, desire, longing, which in *Hebrew Bible* denotes the existential force allowing people to enter a dialogue with objects (with the motif of ingestion), with fellow men (reproduction) and – in prophetic corpora – also with God (with the motif of searching for ontological existential answers, His presence, and a restored earthly order).

accompanying young people on their journey to faith. In explaining Jesus' encounter with the blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46-52), he emphasised that Jesus listened to his cry and allowed him to speak. Jesus is in no hurry. He takes time to listen. He is with him. For *listening is the first step* that helps others on the journey of faith. It is necessary to embrace the apostolate of listening. Only listening can be followed by speaking. Therefore, on behalf of the whole Church, the Pope apologizes to the young people: "I would like to say to the young people, in the name of all of us adults: forgive us if often we have not listened to you, if, instead of opening our hearts, we have filled your ears. As Christ's Church, we want to listen to you with love, certain of two things: that your lives are precious in God's eyes, because God is young and loves young people, and that your lives are precious in our eyes too, and indeed necessary for moving forward." (ibid.)

Listening is followed by the *second step* of accompaniment on the journey of faith, which is *to become a neighbor*, as Jesus became to Bartimaeus. *The third step* of accompaniment on the journey of faith is *witnessing*, as Pope Francis says: "It is not Christian to expect that our brothers and sisters who are seekers should have to knock on our doors; we ought to go out to them, bringing not ourselves but Jesus." (ibid.) Faith happens in the encounter, not in the transmission of theory.

It is very important to follow these three steps in lifelong catechesis, so that it becomes a real encounter with the living God and leads to a personal faith that responds to this encounter with Him in our listening, in becoming close to man, in respectful acceptance and in a witnessing attitude of living in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

This attitude of listening is also emphasized by the Czech priest and professor Tomáš Halik in his book *Close to the Distant*. In it, he quotes a saying of philosopher Erio Voedelin, who says that "the greatest problem of today's Christians is not that they do not know the right answers, but that they have forgotten the questions that have been asked and to which these answers refer" (Halik 2012, 24). Answers without questions asked by concrete people in concrete time and space are very abstract. They are similar to trees without roots. Many presentations of Christian truths can appear as such to searching and unbelieving people. The living truth, the living trees - with roots - of which Jesus speaks in the metaphor of the Kingdom of God as a tree in whose crown the birds of the air nest (Lk 13: 19), can only be arrived at in a living "dialogue" between questions and answers. When Jesus described Himself as the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6), He forever linked the truth with the way and the life. Truth, like the way and life, is therefore in constant process, in movement. "Answers are tempted", Halik (2012, 24) explains, "to end the process of our search, as if the subject of the conversation were a problem - and it has already been solved. But with a new question, the bottomless depth of the mystery opens up again." Questions of faith are not about problems, but about mystery. That is why we must not step off the path of searching and questioning, the path of discipleship.

Where there is no possibility of questioning, there is the danger of total certainty in faith and of religious order and control. Christians thus close ourselves up in our own camp,

where everything is clear to us. Both confident believers and confident atheists can fall into this danger. Neither can understand those who are in the opposite camp. And each of them is in danger of falling into fundamentalism and dangerous fanaticism. Halik makes this point very well when he says: “Faith without critical questions would turn into a boring and lifeless ideology, infantile bigotry, or into fundamentalism and dangerous fanaticism. But rationality itself, without the spiritual and ethical impulses that arise from the world of faith, would be similarly one-sided and dangerous, and could degenerate into cynical pragmatism or bitter scepticism” (86).

Just as the apostle Paul became all things to all (1Cor 9:22), so Christians are called to become all things to all in this way, to become seekers with the seekers and questioners with the questioners. In this way they will be able to enable others who are in one way or another distant from God to discover most fully His closeness, which is at the same time also distance, since He is immanent and transcendent at the same time.

Today there are more and more Christians who believe and claim to have all the important answers, and who offer definitive, often very cheap answers. For Joseph Ratzinger, “in the history of faith it is important to maintain the original sense. For the believer, it is essential that the identity of authentic, original teaching is kept through the centuries. But in the essential historicity of man, this identity can only be kept if it is not a mere identity of a formula passed on externally. The teaching, in order that it maintains its identity, has to be continuously assimilated together with all historical changes of man. Here, decisive is that the believer through the word is led in the relationship with the reality of God, that is, he meets God and not the sum of gained knowledge. The revelation cannot be identified with a certain amount of sentences, because words have an intermediary character in the encounter from which they come and to which they should lead. That’s why the revelation requires constant assimilation and explanation” (Zyzak 2013, 153).

Some Christians, like Halik, consciously choose to become doubters with doubters and seekers with seekers. God Himself then makes sure that their many religious certainties are undermined, but at the same time He endows them with precious gifts, as Halik (2012,25) also testifies: “It was in that ‘globe’, in that moment of undermined and eroding certainties, it was through that ‘hole in the roof’, it was in that movement of ever-new questions and doubts, that He revealed His face to me as never before. I have come to understand that ‘encountering God’, conversion, believing in the way God reveals Himself and the way the Church presents that revelation, is not the end of the road. Faith is a ‘following’, it has the nature of a journey that never ends in this life.”

This is the Gospel way, the way of Jesus Christ, who became a real man in order to show us the way of seeking and finding the Father and life in Him, in His Spirit. Becoming seekers with seekers, questioners with questioners. To listen. To be close. To accept. To witness. As the Apostle Peter encourages, “Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you. But answer with meekness and reverence, out of good conscience” (1Pt 3: 15-16).

This is not the easy way. It is often incomprehensible to many people, especially to the orthodox and convinced believers who are afraid to face the truth that in their faith there is always “unbelief” and in their certainty there is also “uncertainty” (Horvat et al 2022). It is difficult to accept the truth that this is not something bad, but that this is the true way of faith, which is to walk in darkness and light at the same time, to walk on a straight and winding path, with dead ends and abysses at the same time. They cannot accept the fact that too much certainty in their faith prevents them from being true disciples of Jesus, able to pass the faith on and accompany others on the journey of faith.

This fact of the necessity of uncertainty in faith to pass on the faith is also confirmed by the extensive psychological research by H. Sundén on the success of different types of believing parents in passing on the faith to their own children, cited by Halik (2012, 30). In fact, the research showed that parents who are very convinced Christians are very bad religious educators of their children. They discourage their children from religion by their great authoritarianism. Similarly, “too insecure” parents do not allow their children to accept the faith because their faith is too ambiguous and unconvincing. The best results are achieved by parents who are “a little unsure” or “not too sure”, because they are able to allow their children to ask critical questions and educate them mainly by personal example.

3. Some options for lifelong catechesis in response to people's life needs

Every Christian is reborn in the Holy Spirit through Baptism and Confirmation and is equipped through the regular celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confession, involvement in the concrete communion of the Church, personal and communal prayer, meditation on God's Word, catechesis and personal formation in the faith to be able to be a catechist together with Jesus Christ and in the power of his Spirit: to be an apostle of listening, closeness, acceptance, and witnessing. Of course, the training to be a catechist is an ongoing task for every Christian. In so far as he allows himself to receive catechesis again and again, to be catechised himself, so much more can he be a catechist to others.

Every catechist is called to be especially close to those people or groups of people who feel particularly unheard and unreceived. We will try to list some of these groups and the ways in which the catechist can help them on their journey to experience the Gospel message as a joyful gift of God, as God's answer to their personal life questions, and as a light and a guide in the midst of their daily lives (Slovenska škofovska konferenca 2018, 22).

3.1 Parents with small children

Many parents with small children are in great need of a way to communicate the faith to their children, to stand by them in their search, to support them in their growth in faith. A survey of young families showed that many parents feel very helpless and want above all to be heard in their distress and search, to feel the closeness of priests, catechists and co-believers, to be simply accepted in their situation and to be helped, also through various groups and meetings. Their greatest pain is precisely that many people judge them for not knowing how to educate their children properly. For this reason, many no longer want to go to Mass regularly with their small children, even though they feel that it is very precious for them to be able to go to Mass together as a family and thus be accepted and strengthened in the Eucharistic sacrifice of thanksgiving (Platovnjak 2022, 358-363).

We are called to reflect together as a parish community on how we as a communion can offer these families with children a sense and awareness that God is close to them, that He hears them and accepts them for who they are (Krajnc 2018, 800-809). Isn't this what God wants to reveal to them, not only through the liturgy of the Word of God and the liturgy of the offering, but through the attitude of all who are present at Mass? Everyone who is present at Mass is called to reveal to these parents and children in a visible, "sacramental" way how much God loves and respects them by their presence and attitude at Mass. God has therefore given him the opportunity to be present at Mass, so that through him, his body, he can show these parents and children how close He is to them, listening to them, accepting them and confirming them in their journey of faith, hope and love. Whoever does not respond to this call makes it impossible for God Himself to be truly present in fullness in the lives of these parents and children. It is right that we should develop this awareness that this is one of the greatest catechetical roles that every Christian has, but which is unfortunately often neglected and unacknowledged.

Of course, various forms of catechesis can be of great help to these parents, such as family catechesis (Purger 2022), the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (Markovič 2022), catechesis for children during the celebration of Mass for families, various meetings for families with small children and parishioners, etc.

3.2 Divorced person

Many Christian marriages break down and the divorced are often left alone in their distress, failure, defeat, woundedness, with many feelings of guilt. Many are left alone and helpless to raise children who are not yet adults. Divorce is one of the most difficult trials in the life of an adult Christian. They often no longer find a place in their parishes. The results of a survey of divorced people showed that what divorced people want most is respectful understanding and acceptance from priests and the church community. It also showed that many divorcees have experienced the reality of spiritual growth through their "defeat" in marriage (Platovnjak 2015, 476-482).

One of the priorities of lifelong catechesis is to be close to these people, to listen to them, to welcome them and to help them to discover the way forward, the way of growth in faith, personal and spiritual growth, also through the conscious and subconscious discovery of the true image of God and the decision to live according to it (Grzywacz 2022). The defeat has only brought to an end something that no longer has a future. After defeat, man can turn his gaze in a new direction, in the direction of true freedom and greater fullness of life. The whole church communion should be educated in the gaze that the infinitely merciful Father and Jesus Christ, who concretely reiterates the Father as revealed in the Gospels, have on them (Platovnjak 2015, 482-485). Every Christian is called to become a catechist of these people by presenting Jesus Christ and approaching them in the Spirit of Christ, who surprises again and again.

Groups in which they can come together and grow together, such as the Groups Heart (*About the Community HEART* 2022), can be of great help to the divorced. But even more can be done by becoming close to these people, by listening to them respectfully and welcoming them as God himself.

3.3 Grieving persons

Death is a constant in the life of all humanity. Most often, many of the distant believers come to the parish, to get closer to the parish, to the Church, precisely at the death of a relative after a long time. These people especially want to be heard and accepted in their immense distress. In this state they are very sensitive and every ambiguous word or question can cause a new wound in their painful heart. Those who experience a beautiful and sensitive welcome in the parish in the run-up to the funeral and at the time of the funeral, often find that they are no longer heard in their pain.

Pope Francis makes the importance of the attitude towards the bereaved very clear with his warning: "To turn our backs on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy mean the loss of a pastoral opportunity, and close the door to other efforts at evangelization" (Francis 2016, n. 253) He therefore invites especially pastors to take the time to do this: "In general, mourning for the deceased takes considerable time, and if the pastor wishes to accompany this process, he must adapt himself to the needs of each stage of the mourning process." (RL 255)

Not only priests, but every Christian should ask himself again and again how much time he takes for the grieving, stopping with them, really listening to them and giving them a safe space to express their sorrow, pain, doubts, various feelings of guilt, etc. Grieving people need this very thing at the news of death, in preparation for the funeral and at the funeral. But they need it not only at the time of the funeral, but even more so after the funeral, because many bereaved people are then left all alone and helpless in the face of their loved one's death (Platovnjak 2021b, 685-688).

The answer to this is a more personal funeral pastoral, as well as groups for the grieving, or a programme where they can find a safe place to express their grief, to be heard, to seek answers to their too many questions, to find help on the path of finding a new image of God, a new way of believing and living by faith (688-693). But not only groups are not enough for this, a lifelong catechesis for all believers is also needed, so that they can truly be the ones through whom these people feel that God listens to them, is with them, accepts them and reveals to them the way of a new life.

3.4 Widowed people

There are many widowed people who remain alone in their widowhood. Every catechist is called to understand the anguish of one who has lost a spouse with whom he or she has lived for so many years and shared so many things. But it can quickly happen that we overlook them in their great distress. If it is a few months or a year after the death, we already think that we should have moved on and started a new life. Many times they are encouraged to just pray more, to help their families and with the various works in the parish. They are also overlooked in Church documents, except for Pope Francis. He invites all parish collaborators and all Christians to dare to enter into this distress, to understand it and to be close to the widowed: “Losing one’s spouse is particularly difficult... From the moment of enduring a loss, some display an ability to concentrate their energies in a greater dedication to their children and grandchildren, finding in this experience of love a renewed sense of mission in raising their children.... Those who do not have relatives to spend time with and to receive affection from, should be aided by the Christian community with particular attention and availability, especially if they are poor” (Francis 2016, n. 254).

The answer to their plight can certainly be found in groups for the widowed. In them they can find support on the way to finding new ways to live their lives more fully and to live their faith in a new way. But even more, it is necessary for each catechist to feel God himself calling him, to present His closeness, His listening, His acceptance, to be with them in their search for answers to their questions. He should help them to discover a hope that does not deceive and a way that is not an escape from the reality they are experiencing, but which enables them to find a new meaning in life (Platovnjak 2021b, 691-693).

Conclusion

Vocation is man’s mission to “responsibly cooperate with God’s creative plan, [...] to be formed by Christ, to strive for holiness, for true communion with God, and to continue Christ’s mission in this world” (Slovenska škofovska konferenca 2018, 16). In the lifelong process of catechesis, “man is trained to hear, discern, and respond to God’s call for his life in freedom and love” (ibid.).

Many people do not discover this vocation because they do not find a person, a Christian, who can help them to discover, by his attitudes towards them, the God who is close to them, who listens to them and welcomes them in their concrete situation. In this article we have seen that it is therefore necessary to help all catechists working in lifelong catechesis of adults to develop the attitudes of listening, presence, acceptance and witness. These attitudes most fully reiterate Jesus Christ, whom every Christian is called to represent in his own time and place, and also respond most fully to the fundamental anthropological and spiritual needs of every human being, especially those who are experiencing life's particular hardships and trials. Of course, it is not only catechists who need to develop this attitude, but also all Christians.

In the last section we pointed to some of the most fundamental groups that are the most tested and often the most overlooked in our parish communities and in the whole Church: families with small children and the faithful, the divorced, the grieving and the widowed. It is these groups that need lifelong catechesis in various groups for them, and even more so that those who are around them may be a true re-presentation of Jesus Christ, so that through them they may feel that they are also heard and accepted by Him.

There are certainly many more groups of people to whom we should give special attention, but there is no room for that. Thus, more should be said about groups for the sick, addicts, wives and husbands suffering from abortion, the elderly, prisoners, men, women, different professions, singles, people trapped in unforgiveness, believers seeking to deepen their religious knowledge, politicians and business people, etc.

The needs of different groups of people are an incentive for the whole Church to become even more aware of the importance of including in the formation of priests, persons of consecrated life, catechists and all Christian lay people who wish to be formed more consciously, even in their studies, a conscious education for the apostolate of listening, closeness and witness.

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