Introduction to the Seasonal Material

The intention of this seasonal resource is to assist the catechist in leading the students, not only in a celebration of liturgical prayer resplendent with the use of full and robust symbols associated with the seasons, but also in facilitating the goal of liturgy, which is to invite transformation in the lives of those who celebrate it. The Church teaches that the seasons of the year highlight the mission of Christ specific to each season. The liturgies of the liturgical seasons invite reflection on the mystery of Christ within the prism of the themes inherent in each season.

The liturgy instructs us in the faith, but it also forms us and invites complete transformation. Theologians refer to the liturgy as “primary theology.” All the truths of our faith are celebrated in the liturgy in the course of the liturgical year.

…Liturgy has educative and formative value; liturgy is not subservient to catechesis. Catechesis promotes conscious active participation in the liturgy by: explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, thanksgiving, repentance, praying with confidence, community spirit, understanding correctly the creeds. (NCD, 35, 36)

How does the liturgy form us in the faith?
The liturgy forms through liturgical texts and scriptural readings. We are formed through the proclamation of the word and our reflection on it. The Scriptures invite us to listen and appropriate the message of the biblical texts. The language of our ritual prayers are filled with metaphors and meanings taken from the Scriptures. They invite our reflection and speak to us of doctrine as well as the meaning of the seasons. One need only read the preface for Christmas season to glean the most eloquent theology of the Incarnation of Christ.

Liturgy forms us through the symbols and symbolic actions of the celebration. Symbols and symbolic actions are non-verbal forms of communication that have to be experienced rather than explained. Symbols and symbolic actions invite us to plumb the depth of their mysteries and in so doing invite transformation. When we gather and process (community), make the sign of the cross (cross), proclaim the word (Scriptures), lay on hands (hands), anoint (oil), immerse (water), and share Eucharistic bread and wine (bread and wine) we not only celebrate our faith, but we celebrate our identity as Christians. We are people who are born again through the life giving waters of baptism and committing to its renewal in our lives every year at Easter.
We are people who participate in the paschal mystery of Christ by embracing the cross each day of our lives and by joining our lives to the sacrifice of Christ and in so doing, participate in his ongoing work of redemption in the world. (What good news that is—and so few of us are aware of the implication and power that holds in our lives! To think that we have been given the opportunity and privilege to join Christ in his ongoing salvific mission means that the suffering of our daily lives is redemptive. When young people come to us with their stories of broken lives and wounded spirits they not only find redemption for themselves, but within their suffering lay inherent potential for good.) We are also people who bring light to a darkened world. We are people who have been anointed and upon whose hands have been laid in order that Christ is permanently configured to our lives. Thus we are strengthened to live the Christian mission. Ultimately, we are people who have feasted on the Bread of Life and supped on the Blood of the Covenant so that we might in turn go out and be that bread, and shed our blood in the world.

Sacramental symbols not only give us our identity, they provide us with what we need to effectively live the Christian life. They are the means by which we encounter the living Christ midst his absence. The full and robust use of symbols (community, light, word, cross, water, oil, garment, bread, and wine) and subsequent reflection on their meaning and power in our lives is an important exercise for our spiritual growth. Words and actions of liturgy deepen the awareness of who we are and who we are to become. Words, symbols and actions of the liturgy capture the imagination and reveal the depths of human identity.

Formal catechesis assumes that conversion has taken place in the lives of persons being catechized. At least that is what is hoped. Both the General Directory for Catechesis and the National Directory for Catechesis are so insistent that conversion is at the heart of catechesis that it now situates all catechesis within the model of the baptismal catechumenate—the RCIA. Catechesis of the RCIA is conversion centered. Doctrines of the Church are indeed authentically passed on, but they are handed down in such a way as to foster faith and conversion.

What is it about the catechumenate that has captured the imagination of the GDC and the NCD? There are six elements: 1) The goal is conversion. 2) Initiation takes place within the community of believers—the community’s faith and lived practice of the faith. 3) Liturgical prayer is integral formation. The liturgy instructs:

“Every liturgical celebration has educative and formative value” (NCD, 36).
“Even in the case of children, the liturgy itself always exerts its own inherent power to instruct” (DMC, 12).
“The liturgy has the power to form children and all believers in the paschal mystery” (LMC, 21)
Catechumens are invited to unpack the truths inherent in the liturgy celebrated in the context of the liturgical year and make appropriate decisions for change and transformation.

4) Content flows from the liturgy celebrated in the context of the liturgical year. All the truths of our faith are celebrated in the liturgy within the course of one complete liturgical cycle.

5) A variety of ministries are involved—priests, deacons, catechists, readers, musicians, assembly. 6) Candidates engage in mystagogical reflection (reflection on the mysteries). Integral to initiation, ministry is a reflection on the liturgies, celebrated and appropriation of meaning for the purpose of lasting conversion of heart. Candidates reflect the readings, the stories, symbols, ritual actions, prayers of initiation rites, and then appropriate meaning for their own lives. Mystagogy interprets life in the light of the mystery celebrated.

Baptismal catechesis implies that the feasts, liturgies and seasons of the liturgical year are the framework. The goal of such catechesis is to deepen the life of faith. It involves initiation into a community of believers and formation into a tradition. Liturgical, conversion-centered catechesis is a formation and celebration of who we are and who we are invited to become.

What, you might ask, does this have to do with what we are trying to accomplish in the seasonal section of this resource? If we are to accomplish what the Directories set forth, then we must ask if in our work with youth we provide ample opportunity for this conversion centered catechesis to take place. This resource sets out to assist in this goal.

Liturgical Season
Each session is set within the context of a specific liturgical season. Basic information regarding the season is provided. The primary focus of the Advent and Lenten liturgies is gradual conversion through the season. Studies have shown that conversion is a gradual process. Thus, the sessions for Advent and Lent are crafted in such a way to invite more in-depth conversion through the weeks. Thus, an individual liturgy is provided for each of the weeks. Each session includes two different options of readings taken from the three-year corpus of Advent cycle readings. Each week the reflection question intended to facilitate gradual conversion changes as well.

Two liturgies will be provided for Ordinary Time. The focus of one liturgy will be Marian devotion and the other will be the importance of Sunday. The latter will include multiple reflection questions for use in the liturgical prayer, that will facilitate their ongoing conversion-centered reflection throughout the weeks of Ordinary Time. One session will be provided for Easter and Christmas utilizing the same methodology.
Liturgy
If liturgy forms and instructs, then the liturgy is the locus (primary place) for beginning the catechesis of which we speak. Each lesson is crafted as a liturgy of the word. Each liturgy includes a symbol, ritual prayers, ritual action, and Scriptures that speak to the specific season. When crafting your environment, attention to detail is important. Symbols should be large enough that they express meaning on their own merit—they do not have to be explained away.

Each liturgy will include reflection questions that will flow from the readings provided. Such questions will provide the environment in which students explore and appropriate meaning for their lives, flowing from the liturgical celebration. Music is chosen that best reflects the themes of the seasons. Each liturgy will end with the song, “Go Make a Difference,” as that is the goal of every liturgy. We are transformed for mission in the world.

At the end of each liturgical prayer a question for their private reflection is provided. Allow one or two minutes for their personal reflection and invite them to keep thinking about the question throughout the week. A story is included in order to give direction to their thoughts.

Seasonal Presentation
After the liturgy, read the weekly focus material and any mystagogical/reflection questions that might be included throughout the seasons.

The following book is a wonderful resource that will assist catechists in the important role of mentoring the faith journey of adolescents. A must read!

Journal Questions

Possible plan for use of journal
The journal should be a loose-leaf binder with removable pages. Divide the notebook/journal in half. Entitle the first half, “Journal Questions,” and entitle the second half, “Personal Reflection.” Expectations regarding the journal: the teacher/catechist will read pages in the section entitled, “Journal Questions.” The “Personal Reflection” section will be private. The students will use the “Personal Reflection” section for personal dialogue with God or themselves over spiritual matters in their lives (such as dealing with relationships at home or at school).

School setting: Once a week stop class five minutes early. Invite the students to take five minutes (or more as time allows) to respond to one of the posed questions in the “Journal Questions” section of their journal. Ask the students to take their journal home and continue writing for at least ten more minutes. Then ask them to hand in the loose-leaf pages with their responses (the next day) so the teacher/catechist can read the responses and give them back to the students. That way they can return the pages to their binders by the end of the week.

Parish setting: Stop class five minutes early every week and invite the students to respond to the “Journal Questions.” Invite them to take the journal home and continue the exercise for another ten minutes. Have them hand in their responses at the beginning of next week’s class. The catechist reads the responses throughout the week and returns the page[s] to the students the following week, so that they may be reinserted in their journal.

School and Parish: Tell the students to be creative. If, for example, they have never suffered for doing what is right, invite them to imagine a situation that might come up (out of their own life experience) in which the student would be challenged to decide whether “to do” or “not do” the right thing. Invite them to consider God’s role in this choice.

The journal question could be either a continuation of the question that was discussed during the liturgical prayer (conversion catechesis question) or the questions designated as journal questions below.

By reading the responses, the teacher/catechist will glean a sense of how the youth are responding to the ongoing conversion questions and will serve as discernment as to what needs to be emphasized in class.

Each day continue to encourage them to write in their “Personal Reflection” section each night before bed—even if only for five minutes. Assure them that this is private—between them and God. Assure them that you will not be reading that material—that is why you are using a loose-leaf binder with returnable pages for the journal. Periodically check with them to see if they are using their private journal—remind them that it is a discipline to be developed and could help them create a wonderful way to have a conversation with God.