



## FAQ: Lay Catechists

### 1. What Do You Mean by the Term *Catechist*?

The term is employed in many expanding churches in Africa. A Lay Catechist (or Lay Pastor) is a confirmed Anglican layperson charged with the task of leading a congregation and/or starting a new congregation under the direct supervision of an ordained minister. Often a Catechist will have a job outside of the Church. The primary gifts needed by a Catechist are leadership, loyalty and the desire to gather and see that people are disciplined (fully catechized) through the formation and growth of new works.

### 2. What Does a Catechist Do?

Essentially, a Catechist is the point-person for a congregation or missional community. He or she oversees the vision, mission, and direction of the ministry, and ensures that the day-to-day functions of a congregation or missional community are completed. The primary ministry gifts of Catechists vary according to various ministry contexts. The Catechist is charged with raising up lay people into ministry according to their gifting.

### 3. Why are Catechists Needed?

Catechists are needed for the spontaneous expansion of God's Church. Releasing Catechists enables gifted leaders to raise up congregations or missional communities from within their own cultural situation. Catechists can start congregations or missional communities to enable more rapid, organic Church growth—and more flexibility in the amount and types of congregations or missional communities possible.

### 4. Who Provides Oversight for Catechists?

Regional leaders and ordained parish clergy meet regularly (often monthly) to provide training, oversight and support for Catechists. This oversight could take two different forms:

- A home or “mother” parish sends out Catechists to plant a new congregation or missional community (as part of the mother parish). These Catechists receive oversight from their rectors (or other clergy in the congregation). The hope is to create a network of individual congregations or missional communities based in different areas or cultures in a region, all of whom are in relationship with each other through the mother/hub congregation.
- Another option is for regional clergy and parishes to raise up, equip, send, and oversee Catechists to start new works.

### 5. How Does Holy Communion Work in a Catechist-led Congregation?

Catechists are not ordained and cannot celebrate the sacraments. Three different options are available in Catechist-led congregations:

- The first is to have priests that preside over the service and administer the sacraments.
- Another option is to have a Catechist-run service. The Catechist presides over a liturgy without communion, based primarily on the Morning or Evening Prayer service. In addition, the hope is to have a communion service with a priest about once a month.
- A third option is for the Catechist to distribute consecrated elements. This is at the discretion of the Bishop, and it is recommended within a network of Churches, in which the mother Church consecrates elements for the Catechist-led congregation on the same days as the Catechist's service. The communion comes directly from the parish that has oversight of the Catechist and her/his congregation. The Catechist functions as a Lay Eucharistic Minister.

#### 6. Is the Position of Lay Catechist a Stepping-Stone to Ordination?

No and yes. Being a Lay Catechist is not a stepping-stone to ordination in that this ministry should not be limited to those who want to be ordained. One can be an effective Catechist throughout life without seeking ordination. Instilling this notion will open the door for many people who are called to start congregations and minister, yet feel called to remain in lay ministry. However, many deacons and priests may emerge from the pool of Catechists and Lay Evangelists. Churches in parts of Africa often ask their aspirants for Holy Orders to serve as Catechists for at least five years. Ordination becomes the fruit of *proven* ministry as the people of God bear witness to the fruit of the Catechist.

#### 7. How Does One Become a Catechist?

Clergy help identify potential Catechists from their congregations by taking notice of men and women who are growing into maturity, who effectively gather people, who are able to communicate clearly the truths of Scripture, and who have a vision of seeing the Church expand into new groups of people.

#### 8. What Training Does a Catechist Need?

Training for a Catechist is informal, contextualized, individualized, “on-the-job” and mentor-based. The Catechist works personally with a mentor to develop an individualized set of learning goals that encompass head (knowledge), heart (character and devotion), and hands (skills). The set of learning goals for each Catechist will consider the skills needed to lead a culturally-specific congregation. For example, a Lay Catechist leading a congregation reaching people in recovery will need to know a great deal about the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions. A Lay Catechist leading a congregation of Spanish-speaking immigrants will need to speak Spanish and understand the special needs of people living in a new culture. A Lay Catechist seeking to plant a congregation among sophisticated skeptics will need to know how to handle reasoned objections to the Christian faith. In all these cases, the role of the mentor is to assist the Catechist in identifying both learning needs and resources.