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CATECHISM

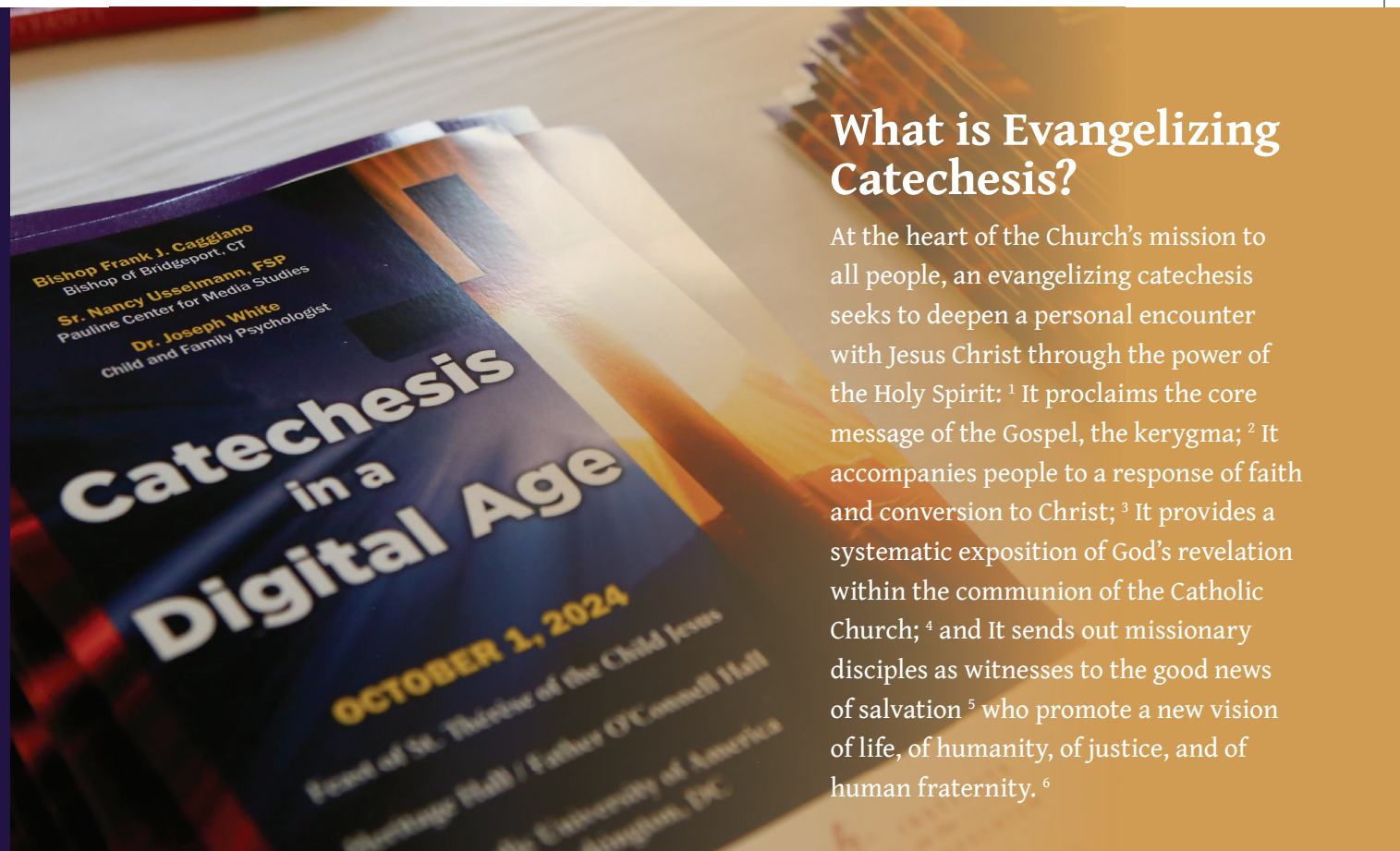
Catechesis in a Digital Age

OCTOBER 1, 2024

Fr. O'Connell Hall, The Catholic
University of America

WASHINGTON, DC

*An event jointly hosted by the Institute
on the Catechism and the School of
Theology and Religious Studies of the
Catholic University of America*



What is Evangelizing Catechesis?

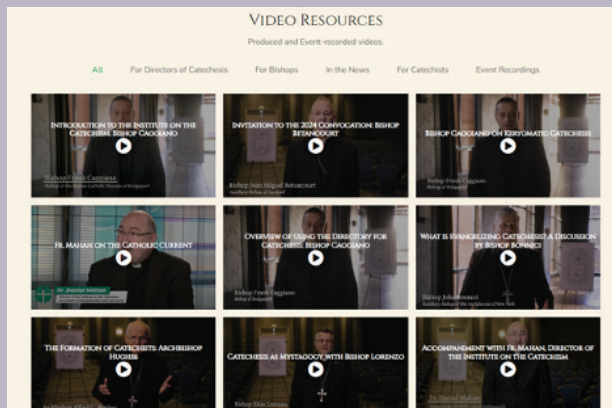
At the heart of the Church's mission to all people, an evangelizing catechesis seeks to deepen a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit: ¹ It proclaims the core message of the Gospel, the kerygma; ² It accompanies people to a response of faith and conversion to Christ; ³ It provides a systematic exposition of God's revelation within the communion of the Catholic Church; ⁴ and It sends out missionary disciples as witnesses to the good news of salvation ⁵ who promote a new vision of life, of humanity, of justice, and of human fraternity. ⁶

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, April 27, 2021 ¹ The Directory for Catechesis (DC) offers a more expanded description in paragraphs 55 and 56. ² Cf. DC, 2: The kerygma "manifests the action of the Holy Spirit, who communicates God's saving love in Jesus Christ and continues to give himself so that every human being may have the fullness of life." ³ Cf. DC, 3: The process of accompaniment leads to an internalizing of the Gospel which "involves the whole person in his unique experience of life." ⁴ Cf. DC, 4: "The act of faith is born from the love that desires an ever- increasing knowledge of the Lord Jesus, living in the Church." ⁵ Cf. DC, 4: "All believers are active participants in the catechetical initiative...and because of this are called to become authentic missionary disciples." ⁶ Cf. DC, 60: "Since 'the kerygma has a clear social content'...the efficacy of catechesis is visible not only through the direct proclamation of the Lord's Paschal mystery, but also through its revelation of a new vision of life, of humanity, of justice, of social existence, of the whole cosmos which emerges from the faith and which makes its signs concretely present."

How Do I Learn More About Evangelizing Catechesis?

Evangelizing Catechesis is a relatively new phrase in the Catholic lexicon. The phrase has arisen in an age in which the dominant culture is no longer religious, let alone Christian. The religion of our day is anything but the worship of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In such an age the call to evangelize is both compelling and urgent. That the seeds of faith might germinate, take root, grow, and bear fruit, it is important that catechesis take place within the context of evangelization. Saint Pope John Paul II makes this emphasis, teaching us that catechesis is a remarkable moment within the whole process of evangelization (cf. *Catechesi Tradendae* 18).

The website of the Institute on the Catechism (evangelizingcatechesis.com)



provides a helpful resources page for anyone who want to learn more about evangelizing catechesis. Printed materials include the recently published *Handbook on the Catechetical Accompaniment Pro-*

cess, available free of charge in digital form. Video resources include short videos of the bishops of the Subcommittee on the Catechism teaching about various aspects of evangelizing catechesis. The resource page also includes videos of longer presentations given at the 2024 Institute Convocation and recent webinars.

The Resource page is ever expanding with newly curated materials aimed at sharing the vision of Evangelizing Catechesis. All are welcome to peruse these materials and share them with others.

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The Catechetical Institute is an outreach of Franciscan University of Steubenville, which seeks to form those who form others – priests, deacons, parents, parish and school leaders, teachers, catechists, and teams. We offer formation in evangelization, catechesis, mentorship, spiritual guidance, and team building, delivered via customizable offerings: online workshops and live events. Visit FranciscanAtHome.com



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EVENT ATTENDEES

Attending
in person

42

Participating
Remotely

46

Total
Participants

88

Theme

Evangelizing Catechesis:
From Information to
Transformation

Plenary Presenters

Most Reverend Frank J.
Caggiano, Bishop of
Bridgeport

Sister Nancy Usselmann,
FSP, Director of the
Pauline Center for
Media Studies

Doctor Joseph White,
Associate Director
of Curriculum
Development, Our
Sunday Visitor

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Mr. Thomas Nee
Dr. Christopher Ragusa
Professor Alissa Thorell

This event was a collaboration of the Institute on the Catechism and the School of Theology and Religious Studies of The Catholic University of America, the university chartered by the bishops of the United States. Many in attendance are studying theology and catechetics at the university, so we hope that this program helped them to have a better idea of the vision of an evangelizing catechesis in an age that is seeing an ever-increasing presence of digital media.

BISHOP FRANK CAGGIANO: “THE VISION OF EVANGELIZING CATECHESIS”



Bishop Caggiano opened our conference with a spectacular talk discussing the revolutionary lens of the digital continent in which we find ourselves, raising the important questions concerning digital catechesis. “We cannot embrace technology in the work of catechesis without fundamentally and deeply reflecting upon what we are doing,” Bp. Caggiano reflected.

Bp. Caggiano provided “guardrails” for the vision of evangelizing catechesis in our modern culture. The first is to remember the kerygma being proclaimed—that we are not passing on a *something*, but introducing a someone: Jesus Christ.

The second guardrail is the need to address

the whole individual, heart, will, and body. When we consider how technology is a tool for evangelization, we need to consider the *kind* of encounter being fostered. Does it lead to both inward conversion and outward mission, living a life of wonder, awe and gratitude, embracing all of the human person? That is the proper disposition before the gift of the Holy Eucharist, and it is necessary for us to continue to grow in conformity to Christ.

The third guardrail is community in the catechetical enterprise. We have both natural and ecclesial families, and our parish communities must accompany our formation in the Faith. We need to consider what digital and virtual communities are and can be. Often, they are “self-determined,” which can do harm to evangelization because the message of salvation is limited to this group rather than shared with everyone.

A final observation Bp. Caggiano offered was that as we turn to evangelize our secular culture, we must also remember that this effort of evangelizing catechesis should be focused on adults. While not diminishing the importance of forming children, adults have been neglected, and it is they who will help to build a culture of evangelization for their children.

SR. NANCY MICHAEL USSELMANN, FSP: “MEDIA MINDFULNESS AS A CATECHETICAL MODEL”

Sr. Nancy Usselmann, FSP, bringing her expertise in “media mindfulness,” continued the conference with practical applications for an evangelizing catechesis in a digital, and secular, landscape. She asked, “How can our evangelization and catechetical efforts touch those on the fringes of Faith, and strengthen those without a personal response to that Faith?” The answer must be one that responds to the whole person, in accord with an evangelizing catechesis. Catechesis must not only hand on the content of Faith, but also form others in the *imago Christi*. To do this, catechists must be willing to reach out into the digital experiences of everyday people.

Listing various social changes brought by the digital age (shifts in attentiveness and discourse, to name a few), Sr. Nancy highlighted storytelling. Stories demand the creativity of the human spirit and display our inmost longing for transcendence. Navigating

these stories through “media mindfulness” is then the model for evangelizing catechesis in popular media culture. She defined media mindfulness as “critical engagement through questioning and interpreting media messages through the lens of human and gospel values.” Media is an environment where we can ponder the ultimate questions, find grace (sometimes through its opposite), and encounter Christ.

Sr. Nancy then identified *The Bear*, a TV series from FX about an ambitious chef coping from his brother’s suicide, as a particularly strong example of where this transformation can take place. The protagonist’s aspirations and grief ultimately keep him in a state of restlessness, which Sr. Nancy noted is a “starting point for catechesis.” While shows like *The Bear* may make audiences identify their own restlessness, Sr. Nancy encouraged listeners to use that as an invitation into the life of Faith.



DR. JOSEPH WHITE: “CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN A DIGITAL AGE”

Dr. Joseph White, sharing his expertise in clinical psychology and neurodevelopment, presented on the dangers and proper use of digital technology in catechesis.

While assuring attendees he is no luddite, Dr. White carefully cited research on the largely negative effects of screentime on children and teens: lower literacy and communication skills, lower empathy, lower impulse control, and executive function deficits. He summarized that the medium itself, not simply the content contained therein, has these negative neurobiological effects. Catechesis presented entirely in a digital mode, without proper engagement of the person, is bound to exacerbate these problems and act contrary to the life-giving content of the faith.

Dr. White finished with some practical applications, recommending several guidelines for digital technology and catechesis. He advised against activity on screens if that activity can otherwise be done offscreen. Human persons learn best through multisensory modes, and he pointed out that Catholic symbols (think the aromas of incense and light beaming through stained glass), respond to this aspect of human nature. These symbols engage the human person in a holistic and therefore more effective way—a way no screen



can replicate, in accord with Bp. Caggiano’s words. Digital technology should be reserved for goals that could not be readily attained otherwise, (e.g., online tours of the Holy Land), but it cannot replace personal interaction.