



# ***Introduction to*** **The Online Catechism**

This Catechism is delivered  
as a series of PowerPoint™ slides in PDF format.

*It will take about 15 minutes to read this Introduction.*

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# What is a Catechism?

A catechism is a *summary* or *overview* of core beliefs, practices, and commitments of Christian faith; its *purpose* is to teach these core elements in a format that is easily remembered.

In the Early Church (the first several centuries after Jesus' life), learning the local catechism was a requirement for baptism—and catechism classes normally lasted for three years!

Today, however, catechism may come before or after baptism. Indeed, it can be done at any stage of one's journey of faith, whether as a new believer or as a long-term believer.





The purpose of a catechism is not simply to pass along knowledge and tradition for its own sake, but rather to pass these along *in order to shape how we live*—in our daily lives and in our modern world. Therefore the later stages of the Online Catechism are designed to stimulate constructive thinking about how to live this faith today, in response to the sorts of pressures, questions, and issues that followers of Jesus face in today's world.

# How is a Catechism different from Sunday School?

- Sunday School begins in early childhood, while catechisms are usually intended for adolescents and adults.
- Sunday School curricula often focus on learning scripture, while catechisms introduce material from church tradition, church history, and denominational identity.
- Sunday School attendance can be inconsistent, since participants might not be present every Sunday, so material can be easily missed; however, this catechism is designed for participants to do at their own pace, thus ensuring that all the material is covered.




# How is this Catechism different from other Catechisms?

- Traditional catechisms convey information that is to be learned, often through a Question & Answer format; however, this approach can tend to focus on simply ‘regurgitating’ the material.
- In contrast, the Online Catechism is structured in stages to provide a process that does not simply regurgitate the material but rather forms a Christian mind (how to think ‘Christianly’ about matters today), and forms discipleship for life today.
- Participants proceed at their own pace. This allows the material to be absorbed, discussed, and processed at a pace that works for the participants.

# How to Use this Catechism

- The Online Catechism is especially useful for situations in which a traditional catechism class at church will not work, such as in 'commuter' churches.
- It can be used by individuals, families, or groups.
- In a family, parents and children can take turns reading the text aloud, and can raise questions or discuss the topic at a pace that works for them.
- Adult groups may wish to use this Catechism while meeting by Skype™ or Google Hangouts™.




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- Participating in a catechism, including the Online Catechism, does require of participants a sustained commitment of time and effort.
  - Participants are encouraged to use some writing method (such as a pen and notebook, or a tablet) to record questions for discussion, or to record thoughts and insights for future reference.
  - Periodically, you may wish to arrange discussions with your Pastor about questions that arise.



The Online Catechism proceeds in six stages, to do at your own pace as an individual, family, or group.

- Stages One and Two are recommended for *ages 13 and up*. These stages are particularly appropriate for families to do together.
- Subsequent stages are recommended for *ages 16 and up*.
- Pastors and teachers should feel free to modify this material, or add their own supplementary material, as they think necessary for their context or congregation.



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- As a mark of completing Stage One, or indeed any of the other stages, participants may wish to make a public profession of faith before their community of worship or in their Sunday School class.
  - Of those who chose to make such a public profession, for some this will be their first time doing so; for others it might not be their first time, in which case such a profession can serve as a sign of renewed faith.



# The Six Stages of this Catechism

*In order to understand how the Online Catechism proceeds, here is an overview of the six stages of the Catechism:*



# Stage One:

## Core Beliefs and Commitments

1. The Philippians Creed (Philippians 2:6-11)
2. The Two Great Commandments (Luke 10:27)
3. Loving Others (1 Corinthians 13)
4. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)
5. The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-11)
6. The Apostles' Creed
7. The Baptismal Covenant (from the Anglican Church of Canada's *Book of Alternative Services*)
8. The Gospel in Language for Today
9. A Personal Rule of Life (from the *Book of Common Prayer*)
10. The Mission Statement of Your Church

# Stage Two:

## The Biblical Story in Six Acts

For this section, participants will read 50 important chapters from the Bible (about 5% of the Bible) on the themes below, in order to gain a 'big picture' overview of the biblical story.

Younger readers may prefer to read an illustrated version.

Act 1. Creation

Act 2. The Fall

Act 3: Israel

Act 4: Jesus

Act 5: The Church

Act 6: The New Creation

These are followed by ten psalms.



## Stages Three to Six


Some comment is needed before we proceed to the next stages. Stages One and Two sought to familiarize participants with some foundational material for Christian faith—to provide a basic understanding of faith, discipleship, and the biblical story. Stages Three to Six now shift the learning process to involve deeper understanding, and also involve individual research (such as using the internet) to engage with the material.

## Stage Three:

# A Deeper Understanding of Core Beliefs

Stage Three enables a deeper understanding of the core ideas of Christian faith. To do this, we will use the *Catechism* of the Presbyterian Church of Canada. Now you may think, “What? We will use a catechism within a catechism? That seems odd!” The Presbyterian catechism, however, is structured quite differently from the Online Catechism—it provides a structure which gives opportunity for deeper insight into, and discussion of, a range of themes (or ‘doctrines’) of Christian faith. In particular, these are:



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1. God
  2. God as Creator and Ruler
  3. God in Christ
  4. God the Holy Spirit
  5. The Bible
  6. Faith
  7. The Church (including ministry, baptism, and communion)
  8. Our Life in Christ
  9. The Church Reaches Out
  10. Our Hope in God

# Stage Four: Church History

Our current beliefs and practices do not come to us purely from scripture, but are mediated through history. So in this section we learn from, and are inspired by, the history of the Church over the past 2000 years.

## Section A: Themes

- The Spread of Christianity I: Asia and Africa
- The Spread of Christianity II: Europe and the Americas
- The Protestant Reformation
- The Challenge of Modernity
- The Modern Missions Movement
- The Church and Social Care
- The Church Under Persecution



# Stage Four (continued)

## Section B: Personal Research

In this section you will gain familiarity with five significant figures from Christian history. Choose at least one figure from each of the following categories, and choose five figures in total: for each, write a half-page point-form summary of their life and their significance for Christian history, using the internet, books, videos, or resources from your Pastor.

- Significant Figures in Mission History
- Important Thinkers in Christian History
- Inspiring Figures in Christian History

For this section, you may already know figures you would like to investigate. If not, suggestions are provided on the website for this Stage. Your Pastor will also be able to provide suggestions.

# Stage Five: Denominational History and Distinctives

The process of working through a catechesis always takes place within the context of a Christian community and tradition, with the lenses on Christian faith that come with that denominational context. This stage introduces participants to the history, thought, and practices of their home denomination or tradition. Individual pastors will either use denominational resources already available or develop their own resources for this stage.



## Stage Six:

# Thinking and Living the Faith Today

- On the next slide are a number of topics. Participants will choose *five* of these topics, and for each topic will invest at least four hours of learning about that topic. This may be done by reading a book, reading magazine or journal articles, researching on the internet, and/or watching videos. Your Pastor can help you find relevant resources.
- Although participants may be inclined to focus on less than five topics, the reason for exploring five topics is that such breadth of exposure is intended to develop patterns of Christianly thinking across a range of issues about how to live daily life, and how to engage with issues in our modern and post-modern world.

# Stage Six: Possible Topics

- Art and/or the Arts
- The Environment
- Family and/or Parenting
- Mission
- Money and/or Economics
- Politics
- Science and/or Evolution
- Sex and Sexuality
- Suffering
- Work (in general) or Your Profession (in particular)
- Or other topics in consultation with your Pastor



# Finally...

- Completing all six stages is a significant personal achievement, demonstrating substantial commitment, perseverance, and personal growth. It would be appropriate for Pastors and congregations to find a significant way to mark this accomplishment when a church-member completes all six stages.
- Now you are ready for Stage One!