



para el mundo - pour le monde - for the World - para o mundo - per il mondo

On 10 May 2021, Pope Francis established a new ministry in the Church: that of Catechist.

The formation of Catechists takes many forms depending on the countries and experiences. Here, we limit ourselves to that which the Brothers of the Holy Family have in the CFCs (Centres of Formation of Catechists) also called "Catechist Schools" in Burkina Faso, which is similar to that of other West African countries and which has developed during the 20th century and up to nowadays.

The Brothers of the Holy Family collaborate in the formation and direction of two Schools of Catechists: Imasgo (Diocese of Koudougou), which currently has 60 couples and 180 children, and Gyalghin (Archdiocese of Koupéla), which has a total of 67 married couples and 167 children. Ten (10) unmarried young people also live there for their formation.

The activities of the School of Namoungou (Diocese of Fada N'Gourma) are suspended for the moment because of the danger of terrorist groups in the area.

The Brothers were also at the School in Donsê (Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, which was previously in Pabré and Guilongou. In the latter place, the first Burkinabe Brothers were formed as Catechists. There was also for many years, under the direction of the Brothers, a School in Bam (Diocese of Ouahigouya) in the Centre-North of the country.

The purpose of these Schools is to form Catechists who will then take charge of Christian communities in rural areas with a whole series of activities aimed at evangelisation: preparation for the sacraments and catechesis, presiding at celebrations of the Word of God in the absence of the priest, funerals, the charitable and economic organisation of the community, etc.

All this requires a good formation which is carried out over 4 years and in which the husband and wife take part, in the case of married couples, which is the case in most cases; the children have schooling courses adapted to their age.



SCHOOLS FOR CATECHISTS IN BURKINA FASO



A DAY IN IMASGO

The Payao couple are at the Normal School for Catechists in Imasgo (Koudougou) in the 4th year: the last year of training. This year they will be sent on mission by the bishop.

The Catechist family, aware of the mission that awaits them as direct witnesses of the basic Christian communities, try to conform their life to that of the Holy Family of Nazareth, where they prayed, worked and loved. In fact, the couple lead a well-harmonised life of prayer and work. In addition to the timetable set by the School, the family also has a daily programme of prayer and work. They get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to perform their Marian devotion: the rosary. After the rosary they wash up and go to the chapel at 5.30 am for meditation until 6 am, the time for mass, to entrust their day to God and to recharge their batteries by participating in the Eucharistic celebration. After mass they have breakfast together and do some small jobs (the woman in the kitchen and the head of the family arranges the chairs for the sale) before going to class at 7.30 am. In addition to the exercises of piety that they do together at the School, the Catechist family entrusts the night to God through Mary, involving their children in prayer.



The Catechist couple, like the family of Nazareth, live by the sweat of their brow. The head of the family manages to make wooden chairs. It is very hard work that requires sacrifice: they have to look for wood in the bush and, considering the School timetable, it is a bit complicated. But the head of the family who is passionate about his work, uses his free time to look for wood and sacrifices his sleep for production. On his days off, especially on Thursdays, he can make three chairs in one day. With the proceeds of this activity he is able to pay some of the family's expenses (cooking, health and schooling for the children). The head of the family also works as a bricklayer because at the School each pupil has to learn a trade. The catechist's wife, for her part, is learning to weave Faso-Danfani (burkinabè cloth), and she too is passionate about her trade and has her own machine to keep herself busy after finishing school. She has also taken up hairdressing, which she does quite well.

of the School and the liturgy (sacristy, singing...), to manual work and to their own education.

In short, the Catechist's family is an exemplary and very dynamic one that seeks to incorporate the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth in order to be a witness of the Gospel in the future in the mission of the catechists, not only with their teachings but also with their lives. We could give other examples, the catechists live their daily lives in this way.

Testimony of Brother Jérôme Sawadogo

THE FORMATION

Joining a Catechist School implies a strong human and Christian commitment. It is not only a matter of acquiring a solid formation for a few years, but of committing oneself to a path that will last practically all one's life.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that it is a commitment made as a couple in most cases and not only individually. This family dimension gives a new dimension to the years of formation and to the very meaning of the mission.



Often, it is the good witness of the catechists in their communities that gives rise to new vocations.

In any case, the ideal of the catechist is to help bring the good news of the Gospel to others and thus contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of God in the place where he/she carries out his/her mission.

The essential contents of the formation plan of a School for Catechists are the study of Christian doctrine, knowledge of the Word of God in the Bible and the practice of liturgical animation.

Alongside these more important contents, there are other contents such as pedagogy, catechetical methods and the use of the media, etc.

Great importance is given to the knowledge of the local languages (in rural areas the people speak these languages commonly and the Catechist should know them well). Catechesis and liturgy are usually conducted in the local language. Knowledge of the French language is also necessary.

Another aspect to which great importance is attached and which takes up a lot of time is manual work. The schools have fields for agricultural activities and, with some outside help, they have to be self-sufficient. They also do some handicraft work.

The team of formators is composed of the Director (usually a priest), the Brothers' community and some Monitors (sometimes chosen from former students). These Monitors are an important component in the organisation of community life and work.



SENDING OUT ON MISSION



The sending on mission is of the utmost importance. It normally takes place during a celebration presided over by the diocesan Bishop.

During this celebration, the Bishop gives the missionary mandate to each of the families that completed the cycle of formation and assigns them the Christian community (one or more villages) in which they will carry out their mission.

Afterwards, each family sent is given the means of subsistence to settle in their place of destination.

They are also given books and work tools to earn a living while carrying out their duties. Some Associations, such as the CAM of Villa Brea, collaborate to provide these means.

In spite of this collaboration and the efforts of the Dioceses, the economic problem and the lack of material means persist, as well as the need for continuous formation is recurrent among the catechists.

On the other hand, the attractiveness of the city with its many possibilities of integration, including from a Christian and ecclesial point of view, makes some families look for other types of commitments and activities.

There is also the growing influence of sects and other religious groups which try to attract the simple people in rural areas and in the face of which the catechist sometimes feels disarmed.

The relationship with the parish priest and the clergy in general is also sometimes complicated because the ministry of the catechist, although well defined in theory, is not always harmoniously integrated into the activities and responsibilities of the parish.

In spite of these and other difficulties, the Brothers of the Holy Family see in the Catechist Schools an excellent means of living their mission and sharing the joy of the Gospel in the same spirit as that great Catechist, Brother Gabriel Taborin (Cf Catechists with Brother Gabriel).



"Called to walk together in a participatory style"