

THE ABC'S OF THE AIC

(ONE PASTOR'S MINISTRY)

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When I graduated from the seminary in 1978 my first call was to a mission church on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. I became acutely aware of the issue of evangelism. There are of course many ways to reach out to people, but our Lord commanded us to make disciples. How do we do this? In my era at the seminary the most popular way was door to door evangelism coupled with inviting people to church. As a general rule this approach is no longer as popular as it once was. Door to door calling was never very effective and most people who made these calls knew this in their hearts. And inviting people to church seemed to "beg the question". Of course, there's nothing wrong with inviting people to church, it's just not a very effective way to teach the Gospel and make disciples by baptizing and teaching. The Church Growth movement has brought another approach by using the Sunday morning service as a tool for evangelism. But some have criticized this approach for watering down the content of worship for the sake of the visitor and confusing worship and evangelism.

I do not remember much of an emphasis in my day on what is now known as "catechesis", but my mission setting soon led to that conclusion. The truth is that the Adult Information Class approach is a biblical and historical method for doing what Jesus has told us to do: make disciples. The words "teach" and "doctrine" are found frequently in the New Testament: A) **Didasklia**: Eph. 4:14; 1 Tim.1:10; 4:6,13,16; 6:1,3; 2 Tim 3:10,16; 4:3; Titus 1:9;2:1; B) **didaxh**: Rom. 6:17, 16:17; Heb. 13:9; 2 John 9.10; C) **didaskw**: Acts 28: 23-31; 1 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 4:21; Col. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; D) **paradosis**: 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6 . One of these words for teaching gives us the English word "Catechesis" and its derivatives: **katechein** (1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6). Jesus has sent his church to

make disciples of all nations by baptizing and by teaching (Matthew 28:19). The book of Acts ends with Paul teaching an “Adult Information Class” in Rome (Acts 28: 23-31). Catechesis has a long and history in the Church and this began already in the New Testament.

“Borrowed from the Greek term *catechesis* originally meant simply the oral transmission from teacher to student, instruction by dialogue. The word comes from a Greek word associated with the theater or agora; it means "to make resound, as with an echo." As with many things in Christian custom the practice of catechizing was adapted from a similar style of instruction in the Jewish synagogues and rabbinical schools. The rabbis had the dialogue method, and the Greeks had the Socratic Method, both of which informed Christian catechesis. Unlike both of these precursor influences, the Christian emphasis from the beginning was to pass on articles of faith, or definitions of belief. It is beginning with faith that Christians expected obedience to follow. Christian tradition holds that the apostles themselves established catechetical schools almost immediately. Act 18:25 mentions a Jew named Apollos who had been instructed in the way of the Lord. One of the most important of these schools is held by tradition to have been established by Mark the Evangelist, in Alexandria, Egypt. In his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius recounts the legend that Mark came to Egypt during the first or third year of the Roman Emperor Claudia. Later, he returned to preach and evangelize in Alexandria, between 61 and 68 AD. This is the school of theology where Clement of Alexandria and Origen were teachers. Some modern scholarship favors the theory that the four written Gospels of the New Testament were products of catechetical schools founded by the apostles or disciples of the apostles. The Didache (c. 70–160 CE) is possibly the first written catechism. Through schools such as this, summaries of doctrine were produced with a view to carefully and methodically hand down the teaching of the Church. This biblical pattern and foundation eventually developed into the

more formal catechumenate that is illustrated by the early Church Fathers.” (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on “Catechesis”, en.wikipedia.org.)

And Rev. Michele Dujarier writes: “It was around the year 180 that what we have come to call the "catechumenate" was born. In reality, it was less an institution than a way of doing things, a usage that spread rather rapidly and was subsequently recognized by the Church as the most suitable means to prepare converts for baptism.” (*A History of the Catechumenate: the First Six Centuries*, from the internet, resources: www.cyberfaith.com/examining/examining.)

By the time of my graduation from the seminary in 1978 catechesis (even among children) was somewhat neglected or condensed. This reflected some major shifts in educational approaches from the 1960’s that were experimental and emphasized creativity over tradition and the student over the subject matter. Memory work was discouraged and the time for catechesis was greatly shortened over previous practices.

In recent years there has been a return to catechetical instruction across denomination lines, not only for children, but for adults as well. The Roman Catholic Church has developed *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*. In the United Methodist Church Daniel Benedict emphasis the need for catechesis in his “Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples”. (see www.discipleshipresources.org.)

In many parts of the Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod there seems to be an increased interest in catechesis. In 1996 A. L. Barry, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod wrote *Catechesis in the Lutheran Congregation* giving an overview of catechesis in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, the Early church, the Reformation and its application for today. President Barry concludes by asking “Where From Here?” The question remains how much is this message being effectively communicated to the local pastor and congregation in terms of actually implementing adult catechesis? And how does it fit it in with a Word and Sacrament ministry? What is its place and function in the ministry? Is it a part of the ambience of the congregation or is it something that the pastor does every

once in awhile while the rest of the congregation has little awareness or involvement? It is has been said by someone somewhere that 50% of Missouri Synod congregations confirm zero to one adult per year. That is over three thousand congregations! Imagine what could happen if this situation was addressed and improved in even half these congregations.

From my limited perspective there seems to be a lack of clarity/focus/consistency in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the place of catechesis, popularly known as the "Adult Instruction Class" or "Adult Information Class" ("AIC"). There are several aspects to this lack of clarity. I have no statistics or surveys to share, only my own observations and opinion. But it seems that many pastors and congregations are not aware of the important, even vital role, of the Adult Information Class. Or if they do know, this knowledge is somewhat vague and as a result its implementation is not as efficient or effective as it could be.

Unfortunately, the responsibility for the Adult Information Class usually falls exclusively on the pastor. The congregation is frequently not involved in any way. By this I don't mean teaching. I believe that, normally, the pastor, because of his education, should be the teacher. But the congregation is usually not invited to the class in any meaningful, engaging way or to use the class for evangelism and outreach. As a result few members attend the class and they do not invite/bring others to the class. In other words, they have no ownership of the class. The result is that the Adult Information Class is not done as well as it could be and the congregation has no focal point for making disciples. It seems that a simple "how to" approach that could easily be applied to any size of congregation would be helpful. In other words, some catechetical approaches might be too complicated or too local specific to be easily implemented in other congregations. A more simple, general approach might have broader application. This paper is an attempt to satisfy this need so that the AIC might become a part of the ambiance of the congregation.

Since my first call was to a mission church in the unchurched area of Vancouver Island I had to develop my own method and approach to making

disciples. Only later did I learn that this was a biblical and historical practice. Over time, by trial and error, a clear method evolved that resulted in an increase in worship attendance in all three congregations that I have served. (Although, I would use the same approach regardless of the results—that’s another story.) In this paper I will share the fruit of what I have learned to encourage the disciple-making method of catechesis. My goal is to present a model that could be done in just about any size parish. It should not be complicated, hard to implement, or too costly. Of course, the size of the congregation and local circumstances might dictate modifications. It is my prayer that when seminarians graduate and receive their first call they have a sense and a confidence in how to go about making disciples via an Adult Information Class. Each of the vicars who have served at my church have experienced this first hand and were given the resources to implement an Adult Information Class in their first call. Of course, the “results” will vary from congregation to congregation and even in the same congregation the results will vary from course to course, from time to time. For we must always remember that we are not in control of the results. Our Lord has given us the task to faithfully proclaim His word but the Holy Spirit creates faith when and where He wills (Augsburg Confession, V: 3).

MAKING THE AIC A PART OF THE MINISTRY

Laying the Ground Work

In too many congregations the pastor has the sole/main responsibility for the AIC. He not only teaches the class but he does most, if not all, of the recruiting for the class. One of the first things the pastor must do is establish the visibility and centrality of the AIC to the congregation. The AIC must become a part of the ambience of the congregation so that it becomes an expected and well-known norm: “This is the way we make disciples in our congregation.” This means that, not only the pastor, but also the congregation must take ownership of the AIC. Beginning with the leaders, the value and role of the AIC must be taught

and their support and involvement sought. At a minimum the members of the Church Council and the Elders must be properly taught and encouraged to attend the class so they can serve as examples and future promoters of the class. This can be done over a period of time in regularly schedule meetings. I would not mandate attendance, as that seems a bit legalistic, but artful persuasion and encouragement seems the way to go, especially as the congregation learns to love, trust, and respect their pastor. After addressing the leadership and getting their support the entire congregation can be educated in a variety of ways: Newsletter articles, Bible classes, and sermons. As with the leadership, members should be encouraged to come to the AIC in order to experience first hand the value and importance of the class. By attending the class their faith will be strengthened as the Holy Spirit works through God's word, and they will have contact with non-members in the class and thus become a part of the future assimilation of new members resulting from the class. In addition, they become enthusiastic supporters/promoters/ recruiters of the AIC. At least in the early years of this approach members who complete the AIC could be recognized on new member Sunday in a separate "Service of Renewal" (see resource section). By such a Rite (or at least listing the names of members who just finished the current AIC) other members of the congregation see their leaders and other members attending the class which brings attention to the AIC and encourages their fellow members to attend. Immediately after the "Service of Renewal" new members will, of course, be formally received by the "Rite of Membership". If it is practical, that is, if there is adequate space at the altar, the members who go through the "Service of Renewal" might stand as a group at the side of the altar to witness the confirmation/reception of the new members from the AIC, showing their identify with the new members and their support of them.

In my congregation this happens twice a year. In this way (and in others that can be thought of) the AIC is constantly kept in front of the congregation so that over a period of time it simply becomes a part of the "life-blood" of the congregation, part of the "ambiance". In others words, it will simply become a natural part of "how we do things in this congregation".

ADVERTISING AND RECRUITING

In every Sunday Bulletin there should be a set announcement (weekly) advertising the beginning of the next AIC, even if the exact date is not known E.G., “Next AIC begins in September”. About four weeks before the class actually begins prayers for the AIC should be offered in the Prayers of the Church asking for God’s blessing. Again, this makes the AIC a natural part of the ministry, continuing to raise the awareness level of the class and, of course, God hears the prayers! (How many congregations don’t have public prayers before the beginning of an AIC?) Conversations in the congregation should be “peppered” with references to the AIC: “Are you going to the next class?”, “Who are you going to invite?” Sermons and Bible Classes can also refer to the AIC and its central role in making disciples.

Letters of invitation can be sent to all who have had contact with the congregation as visitors, from baptisms, weddings, funerals, and if there is one, the school (including the school newsletter). The evangelism committee for a response can follow up these letters with telephone calls (see resource section). Such phone calls can determine more accurately how many people might attend the class and can also serve as encouragement for people who have not yet enrolled.

Brochures (resource section) can be used as bulletin inserts to make it easy for members to register for the class. The same brochure has a section for the member to request a letter of invitation to be sent to someone or the member may give it to the non-member as a witnessing tool and AIC invitation. The brochure can answer many questions for the prospective class member and a picture of the instructor (pastor) can “put a face” on the class. The brochure leaves something in the hands of the non-members as visual reminder of the class. A lot of thought must go into the design of the brochure. I believe that a picture of the instructor is important as well as an outline of the class by subject. For a community class like this the instructor’s education is also important to

illustrate his educational qualifications to teach the class. A brief message from the instructor can also add that personal touch to the invitation. In addition, there should be motivational questions indicating the value of attending the class. The brochure should also indicate how to register for the class and it should be as easy as possible with different options the might include phoning the church office or going to the church's website and registering on line, www.messiahseattle.org. The website also is a form of advertising and recruitment for the AIC as well. A few days before class begins A 3 by 5 reminder card is sent to all who have registered up to that point. And finally, there should be information on the brochure about who you are: 1) your congregation and 2) The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Members bringing non-members is an excellent way to recruit for the class. In this way the pastor is not the only one advertising and recruiting for the class; the whole congregation is involved. The non-member is more likely to feel comfortable in the first few weeks since someone they know has brought them. This method "feeds" on itself as new members to the congregation will most likely have a larger "pool" of non-church friends to invite to the class than would long standing church members. So the "cycle" of invitations tends to be self-perpetuating.

Obviously the more people that can be invited to the class the better. An excellent way to do this is through a community mass mailing (see resource section on Direct Mail). Such mailings have a low percentage of response, but is based on volume. So, the percentage of people who will actually respond to the mailing will be low, but the number of people who actually attend the class will increase! The more the volume, the more the response will be. This mailing goes to a selected number of houses in a zip code(s). The timing of the mailing must be carefully thought out as well. It must not be sent too soon because people will not feel an "urgency" to register; but not too late because their weekly schedule might already be set. I usually plan to have the brochure delivered at the house no sooner than four weeks before the class begins but no later than three weeks.

Since I teach the AIC twice a year, the mailing goes to the community twice a year. Experience and common sense indicate that it might take two, three, four or more mailings for someone to respond. (I am convinced, based on anecdotal information, that our mailings have an impact on our community well beyond the actual attendance at the class.) You never know for any given class the number of people who did not register for the current AIC, but will register for a future class. Again, persistence is the key. Don't give up. Year after year keep getting the word out.

How do you fund such a mailing? Ideally, the congregation should fund it as a line item in the budget. However, before that point is reached it may be necessary to rely on congregational members who are committed to this ministry. After the mailing has proven its usefulness the hope would be that the congregation would take on this responsibility and not rely on just individual donations. Experience shows that new members brought in by the AIC offset some of the cost for this mailing by the added offering they give as members of the congregation.

This year, for the first time, we have made professional DVDs of the 15 week class taught at Messiah. We were able to do this because we have a professional videographer who volunteered his time to this project. We hope to use these DVDs in a variety of ways: 1) As handouts for missed classes 2) or as a "Correspondence" course for those who cannot attend the actual class. 3) Perhaps we can make the course "downloadable" from our church's website as another avenue for a "correspondence" course. 4) We hope to use the DVDs on the local cable television. 5) Future technology might open up other uses as well (iPOD downloads?) Not every congregation will have a professional videographer but the course might be video taped with less exacting standards or at least audio cassettes could be made.

IMPLEMENTING THE CLASS

The pastor must choose materials that adequately communicate the basic teachings of the Christian faith and also suit his style of teaching. I prefer the "That I May Know Him" format (See Resource Section) because each chapter is based on a "skeleton" outline of Bible passages which allows me to teach the meaning of each passage, use my own illustrations and also supplement the text with handouts. In this way I am not restricted by someone else's script I am thus free to use my teaching style. The other reason that I have chosen "That I May Know Him" is its length: 14 lessons (I add an additional week for review and summary, thus making a total of 15 sessions). It seems wise not to make the course too short (less than 10 weeks?) so that the necessary topics can be adequately covered. And yet, if the course is too long (over 20 weeks?) it may discourage people from coming.

Another decision that has to be made is which day of the week the AIC should be taught. The selection of the day might be determined by the geographic location in the country, the size of the community as well as any local customs. However, if there is only one pastor it should not be taught on Sunday morning as this will take the pastor away from teaching a Sunday morning Bible class that builds on the foundation of the AIC. The Sunday morning Bible class needs pastoral involvement as "follow up" teachings to the AIC. I would think that Fridays and Saturdays, generally, would not be good nights. Wednesdays are not good if there are mid-week services for Advent and Lent. So what nights are left? Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sunday. But what night(s) are meetings held in the church? At my church it is Tuesdays, so Tuesday is eliminated. Monday is not good for me, as it is my day off. So now I'm down to Thursday or Sunday. Either night would work for me, but I have chosen Thursday nights and have not had a problem (although I have done Sundays too). At any rate, some thought needs to be given to the best time(s) to offer the class—best time for both the pastor and those who attend.

The pastor will also have to decide how long each session will be. Certainly at least one hour should be given and probably more. How much more? Anything over two hours seems too long. But should it be one and a half-hours

or two hours? I have had no problems with people committing themselves to two hours per session with the following schedule:

7:00 – 7:30pm: Opening prayer and review of previous weeks lesson (Session one uses this time for an orientation to the class—see resources).

7:30- 9:00pm: The lesson for the evening is taught, concluding with an assignment given and closing prayer.

On the first three nights of the class a registration table should be set up (using nice card tables or something else appropriate— everything must look “nice” and “inviting”) staffed by one or two people (evangelism/assimilation members?). Why three nights? Because some people might not be able to make the first few sessions. My experience is that you will usually get “walk-ins” that never formally registered but decide to attend. The registration area should clearly be labeled "Adult Information Class" registration (white board in Tripod, etc.) Since this is a “community class”, it should have the appearance of registration at a community college or its equivalent. This gives the impression of value and importance and also serves a useful function of checking people in (including "walk-ins" who did not pre-register), confirming addresses and phone numbers, and handing out materials, pencils/pens and name tags. This also frees the pastor to greet people as they enter the class. The people at the registration table will have the official registration list. But the pastor will have a copy of the same list at his podium to help learn names and keep track of attendance. He can always compare his roster with the one at the registration table. Once the registration table is removed at the fourth lesson, you will still need a card table (or other suitable table) at the entrance of the room where the class is taught.

On this table I place a basket of highlighters and a basket of new, freshly sharpened #2 pencils. Also on this table are any handouts I have for the lesson that night as well as for the previous lesson for those who missed that lesson. I also ask a member of the congregation who is attending the class to staff the table until each lesson for the night starts. This person can meet and greet people, get to know their names, make sure they get their hands outs and help

the pastor in keeping accurate attendance records. (If someone wants to join the congregation at the conclusion of the class, it is important for the pastor to know how many lessons were missed, if any, and what those lessons were about).

TEACHING THE CLASS

As with all teaching, the AIC must be taught well. This is especially important since the majority of the class (hopefully!) will be non-members. First impressions are important and people will not return to class if it is poorly taught or poorly presented and your own members will also lose the incentive to invite people to the class. Preparation for each session is important (even if the pastor has been teaching the class for years). Preparation keeps the pastor from becoming lazy or sloppy and keeps the presentation fresh. The pastor's general approach to on-going study will be reflected in his teaching in general, and in his AIC teaching specifically. Thus, the pastor will be a life-long student of the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, systematic theology, church history and culture. No, the pastor can't know everything. But he should be as educated and prepared as possible. After all, people look to him for certain answers. And within reason, he should be able to give answers or be able to find the answers. And when the pastor simply doesn't know the answer that too should be communicated with candor. Pastors, of course, must make the distinction between answers we don't have but might be available, versus answers that we don't have because they are not available because the Scriptures are silent.

Every pastor has his own personality, but he should teach with conviction and passion. Why should anyone want to believe what we believe if they sense a lack of conviction or passion? So Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:11: *"Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men"* (NIV). Because many people in the class will know little or nothing about Christianity, clarity should be a goal as well. This does not mean that the teaching has to be "dumbed down". Quite the opposite, good scriptural and Christian terms and concepts can and should be used (Christianity has its own culture with its own

vocabulary and even calendar), but the pastor must be sure to explain them. Any potential confusion of terms and concepts can be further clarified by encouraging questions by the class members. Illustrations and examples can also clarify difficult terms and concepts as well as a generous use of the black board/white board and other visuals such as overheads or power point presentations. Such aids will vary from congregation to congregation.

RECEIVING NEW MEMBERS

At the conclusion of lesson 14 I hand out a request for membership form (see resource section) that is to be returned the following week, lesson 15. Members from the AIC will probably be received in three basic ways: 1) The rite of confirmation for those who have never been confirmed in the Lutheran Church. 2) By re-affirmation of faith or affirmation of faith for those who have been confirmed at some time in the Lutheran Church but don't have a congregation from which to transfer. 3) By transfer from another congregation in fellowship with us.

If some have not attended the AIC but have transferred their membership they would be included in the new member Sunday at the conclusion of the AIC. On new member Sunday two groups could be distinguished. After the "Service of Renewal" for members completing the class, the first group of new members would be those joining by transfer, and re-affirmation of faith or affirmation of faith. The next group to be invited forward would be those who are joining by the "Rite of Confirmation". These new members would receive a blessing (as found in the rite) and a Bible passage chosen for them along with their confirmation certificate. In other words, they would be received in the same manner as Junior Confirmands.

Pictures should be taken of all the new members and posted in a prominent place in the congregation for all to see for name and face association. These pictures should be left up until the conclusion of the next class or the next reception of new members. A new member packet should be prepared (see

resource section). After the service all the new members are invited to follow the pastor to the fellowship hall where a receiving line is formed for the dismissed congregation to welcome and greet the new members. Of course, this would be a time for the traditional cake with an appropriate saying on it welcoming the new members along with the necessary coffee, tea, and juice.

At sometime during that week the pastor should write a formal letter of welcome and prayer for God's blessings on them in their new church home. (See resources.)

In addition to the formal reception some kind of new member orientation could follow in the weeks to come. The orientation should be as inclusive as possible since the new members might range from being a brand new Lutheran/Christian to a life-long Lutheran who has transferred his membership. Items such as basic congregation structure (council, committees, elders, auxiliaries, etc.), the mission of the congregation (including the centrality of the AIC!), explanation of liturgical/worship practices and whatever else would be helpful to new members such as some information about the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. An Assimilation Committee could have follow up responsibilities to help the new members assimilate into the congregation.

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HANDOUTS AND RESOURCES

In order to supplement the classroom teaching handouts for reference in class or to be taken home to read are recommended. Rev. Alvin Barry's brochures "What if...." cover a variety of important subjects that can be used for additional reading and are available in formats for unlimited copies. References to pertinent books can be useful. For example, I refer to several books when I teach the session on creation versus evolution. (See resource section—Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, Adler & Adler, 1985; Michael J. Behe, "

“Darwin’s Black Box”, The Free Press, 1996; Philip Johnson, *“Darwin on Trial”*, InterVarsity Press, 1993; William Dembski, ed., *“Uncommon Dissent”*, ISI Books, 1994; William Dembski, *“Intelligent Design”*, InterVarsity Press, 1999.) These books bring a certain expertise and credibility that is beyond my own education in the field of science. This allows me then to concentrate on my expertise on the biblical account of creation. Newspaper and magazine articles can also be referenced for a variety of subjects such as archaeology, science, history, Christian denominations, etc. (footnote on Ann Landers!). The writing materials made available (highlighters and pencils) encourage people to take notes or emphasize points that I’ve made. I have provided a list of the handouts I use for each lesson as well as resources.