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Challenges of Inadequate Catechesis: A Hindrance to Stable Families in Soroti Catholic Diocese (Uganda)

Abstract: This study investigates how inadequate catechesis undermines the stability of Christian families in the Soroti Catholic Diocese, Uganda. Drawing on ecclesial teachings, African theological thought, and the socio-cultural context of the Teso people, this exploration examines how inadequate catechetical formation contributes to marital breakdown, moral disintegration, and declining participation in Church life. With limited trained catechists, irregular programs, and a lack of culturally rooted materials, catechesis in Soroti faces both systemic and contextual challenges. The family, as the “domestic Church” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11), requires strong catechetical support to thrive in faith and unity. This paper recommends a renewed pastoral approach centered on contextualized, lifelong, and family-based catechesis, drawing on the African communal ethos and the Church’s vision of integral evangelization.

Keywords: Catechesis, Family Stability, Domestic Church, Uganda, Soroti Diocese, African Theology, Evangelization, Faith Formation, Marriage.

1. Introduction

Catechesis is a foundational dimension of the Universal Church’s mission to evangelize and nurture the faith of her members. Rooted in the Great Commission of Christ, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Entrusted with forming mature Christian disciples grounded in Scripture, liturgy, moral life, and prayer. However, Catechesis faces mounting obstacles: pervasive underdevelopment, social fragmentation, secularization, diminishing religious certitude, technological distractions, and migration all factors that undermine effective faith formation, particularly among adults and families¹. In Catholic understanding,

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¹ Congregation for the Clergy, *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*, 16, http://www.vatican.va/content/adan/wss/roman_curia/congregation/cclergy/documents/ [accessed 22.07. 2025].

catechesis is not merely about doctrinal instruction; it is a holistic formation in faith, integrating Scripture, liturgy, moral life, and prayer².

When we turn our gaze to Africa, these challenges take on unique cultural and structural dimensions. The continent's evangelizing mission is impeded by poverty, infrastructural deficits, illiteracy, and the rapid diffusion of secular and non-Christian value systems through new media and religious movements³. The Church in Africa, aware of the need for authenticity and resonance, increasingly affirms the necessity of inculturation integrating the Gospel within local cultures through language and methods that speak to African realities⁴. Episcopal Conferences across Africa have urged the development of family-focused catechesis, contextually tailored to address cultural, social, and pastoral complexities ranging from polygamy and migration to gender ideology⁵.

Within Uganda, particularly in the Eastern Region, these continental dynamics are magnified. Socio-economic hardships, cultural traditions, and limited ecclesial infrastructure compound the challenges. The Tororo ecclesiastical province, which includes Soroti Diocese, grapples with sustaining catechetical agents amid scarce resources and rural dispersion.

Focusing on the Soroti Catholic Diocese, primarily serving the Iteso people, according to historical accounts depict persistent shortcomings in catechetical practice. Harsh initiation methods including physical punishment, led many catechumens to abandon formation; early catechists' brutality, for instance, drove some away entirely. This legacy, combined with ongoing realities poverty, displacement, and infrastructural limitations continues to thwart meaningful integration of catechesis within families and communities.

This study investigates the nature and scope of the catechetical crisis in Soroti Catholic Diocese. It argues that catechesis must be understood not merely as doctrinal instruction but as a pastoral imperative foundational to family and societal resilience. Grounded in Jesus' Great Commission, the magisterium, African theological insights, and local pastoral realities, this study aims to explore how insufficient catechesis has undermined family stability and to suggest contextually adapted recommendations that uphold the integrity of the Gospel and the cultural identity of the Iteso people.

² Ibid.

³ Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), recommendations on Family (17th Plenary), 13, <http://secam.org/recommendations-on-family-17th-plenary/> [accessed 22.07.2025].

⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 21-22, http://www.vatican.va/content/adan/wss/roman_curia/congregation/ccclergy/documents/ [accessed 06-08-2025].

⁵ Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), *Bishops' Conferences in Africa Encouraged to Develop Family Catechesis*, 5-7, <https://secam.org/bishops-conferences-in-africa-encouraged-to-develop-family-catechesis/?utm> [accessed 06.08.2025].

2. The Theological Role of Catechesis in the Church's Mission

Catechesis holds a central place in the mission of the Church. It is not simply the transmission of doctrines but a comprehensive formation process that leads to an intimate union with Jesus Christ. According to the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), "Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted... in an organic and systematic way"⁶. Its purpose is to deepen understanding of the faith, nurture a life of discipleship, and equip believers to live and witness to the Gospel in every aspect of life, including within the family, which is the primary cell of the Church and society.

2.1. Catechesis as Integral to Evangelization

Evangelization and catechesis are deeply interconnected, with evangelization introducing individuals to Christ's saving message and catechesis nurturing that encounter into a mature, lived faith. Pope Paul VI emphasizes in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that evangelization is incomplete without catechesis, which must engage "the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social"⁷. Catechesis thus grounds faith in everyday realities such as marriage, parenting, and community life. Scripture reinforces this formative role: Proverbs 22:6 highlights the lasting impact of early instruction, while Colossians 3:20 affirms the role of catechesis in shaping family character and obedience. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, calls for a renewed catechesis that is "kerygmatic", contextual, and mission-oriented, fostering personal relationship with Christ and adapting to diverse cultural settings⁸. In Africa, with its rich cultural diversity, such adaptability is essential for catechesis to be both relevant and transformative.

2.2. Catechesis and the Family as a Catechetical Community

The Second Vatican Council's recognition of the family as the "domestic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11) places parents at the center of catechetical formation, a role deeply affirmed by Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 urges parents to teach God's commandments diligently in everyday life, while Psalm 127:3 celebrates children as a divine heritage, rooting faith formation within the rhythms of family living. Pope St. John Paul II reinforces this in *Familiaris Consortio*, emphasizing that married couples bear the primary responsibility for educating their children in faith⁹. However, as Laurenti Magesa cautions, catechesis must move

⁶ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 67, http://www.vatican.va/content/adan/wss/roman_curia/congregation/ccclergy/documents/ [accessed 22.07.2025]; cf. A. Zel-Ima, *Role of Religion Didactics in the Religious Education of Children and Adolescents*, „Studia Elckie” 22(2020), no. 3, p. 369-378.

⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Rome, December 8, 1975, 29.

⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome, November 24, 2013, 163-168.

⁹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Rome, November 22, 1981.

beyond abstract theory and engage with the lived moral traditions of African families to be truly effective and transformative¹⁰.

2.3. Catechesis as a Communal and Lifelong Process

Catechesis is a lifelong and communal journey that evolves with the faithful from childhood through adulthood, as affirmed by the General Directory for Catechesis¹¹. This intergenerational transmission of faith is exemplified in 2 Timothy 1:5, where Paul acknowledges the sincere faith passed down from Lois to Eunice and then to Timothy. In the African Church, Small Christian Communities (SCCs) serve as vital platforms for ongoing catechesis, enabling families to engage with Scripture and share their experiences in culturally meaningful ways. Promoted by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), SCCs function as grassroots structures that support both family evangelization and catechetical formation.

2.4. The African Contribution to Catechetical Theology

African theologians have brought inculturation to the forefront of catechetical theology. Bénédet Bujo emphasizes that catechesis in Africa must resonate with communal values, storytelling, proverbs, and music, asserting that “the Word must become a word that the African heart can comprehend”. Similarly, John Mary Waliggo highlights contextual catechesis that engages issues such as HIV/AIDS, polygamy, land conflict, and intergenerational tensions.

Deuteronomy 6:7, already above, again resonates here: teaching must happen “when you sit... and when you rise” that is, in daily life, within cultural rhythms and relational contexts. This reinforces the call for culturally-rooted catechesis, not as an option but as an imperative.

3. Socio-Cultural Context of Family Life in Teso (Soroti Diocese)

Understanding the socio-cultural context of the Teso sub-region, where Soroti Catholic Diocese is located, is essential for grasping the challenges of catechesis and family stability. The Teso people, predominantly Iteso by ethnicity, inhabit Eastern Uganda and parts of Western Kenya. Their worldview, traditional values, and evolving social conditions have significant implications for how catechesis is understood, received, and lived out within families.

3.1. Traditional Understanding of Family and Marriage among the Iteso

The Iteso people traditionally view family as extended and communal, with multiple generations and relatives contributing to the upbringing of children, and marriage seen as a union between families and clans, marked by bride wealth (*esirikit*) as a symbol of commitment and legitimacy. While this structure fosters

¹⁰ L. Magesa, *African Religion and the Christian Faith*, Nairobi 2004, p. 131.

¹¹ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 105, http://www.vatican.va/content/adan/wss/roman_curia/congregation/ccclergy/documents/ [accessed 22.07.2025].

strong social networks, it also presents tensions with Christian teachings particularly regarding sacramental marriage, as polygamy and ancestral spiritual practices remain prevalent in some areas. These cultural elements can conflict with Catholic doctrines on monotheism and the sacraments. As anthropologist Grace Akello observes, “the Iteso construct their identities around kinship, ancestral land, and spiritual mediation, making any religious instruction that fails to consider these factors alien and ineffective”¹². Thus, catechesis that overlooks these cultural foundations risks being dismissed or resisted.

3.2. Changes Affecting Family Stability: Migration, Modernity, and Poverty

Family stability in the Teso region has been significantly affected by socio-economic changes such as urbanization, poverty, and conflict. As youth migrate to urban centers, they adopt individualistic and secular values, often cohabiting without Church recognition and prioritizing economic survival over sacramental marriage. Widespread poverty and unemployment further destabilize families, making catechesis appear burdensome due to time and financial constraints. The legacy of conflict, particularly the Lord’s Resistance Army incursions, has left deep emotional scars, necessitating healing-centered catechesis focused on reconciliation. These challenges underscore the urgency of catechetical renewal that addresses real-life struggles. As Pope Francis affirms, “families need to be helped and supported to realize their role as the primary place of human and Christian formation”¹³, making it essential for catechesis in Soroti to be both contextually relevant and pastorally responsive.

3.3. Cultural Practices That Challenge Catechetical Effectiveness

Certain cultural practices in the Soroti Diocese continue to challenge the effectiveness of catechesis and Christian family life. Polygamy remains socially acceptable in some communities, complicating the Church’s teaching on monogamous sacramental marriage. Informal unions, often formed without traditional or Church ceremonies, lack both stability and sacramental grace, while spiritual syncretism such as consulting traditional healers or engaging in rituals incompatible with Christian belief undermines doctrinal integrity. These realities reveal a disconnect between catechetical content and cultural integration. As Bénézet Bujo emphasizes, “an authentic inculturation of the Gospel message must dialogue with African religiosity without compromising the integrity of the Christian faith”¹⁴, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive yet theologically sound catechesis.

¹² G. Akello, *An Anthropologists*, Nairobi 2011.

¹³ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Rome, March 19, 2016, 200.

¹⁴ B. Bujo, *Christian Spirituality in Africa. African theologian on inculturation*, Nairobi 1992, p. 85.

3.4. Opportunities within Teso Culture for Catechetical Renewal

Teso culture offers valuable opportunities for catechetical renewal by providing culturally resonant avenues for faith formation. The Iteso's rich oral tradition marked by storytelling and proverbs can be effectively used to communicate biblical truths and moral teachings through familiar parables and analogies. Their strong sense of clan-based solidarity naturally supports the development of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), where mutual catechesis and spiritual support flourish. Additionally, the deep respect for elders presents a chance to empower well-trained elder catechists to guide families in matters of faith and morality, reinforcing traditional values within a Christian framework.

Moreover, the Iteso's love for music, dance, and communal celebration creates a joyful and participatory environment ideal for engaging catechetical methods. When the Church embraces these cultural strengths, it enhances both its credibility and effectiveness in evangelization. As the AMECEA bishops affirm, "The faith must be African in expression and Christian in content" (AMECEA, 2008)¹⁵. Therefore, the future of family catechesis in Soroti hinges on a dialogical and contextualized approach one that respects and integrates the richness of African cultural identity with the depth of Catholic tradition.

4. Inadequate Catechesis and Its Impact on Family Life

In the context of Soroti Catholic Diocese, inadequate catechesis does not merely represent a pedagogical weakness; it is a foundational crisis affecting the moral, spiritual, and social fabric of family life. The family, as the domestic Church, requires formation in doctrine, prayer, and Christian living. When such formation is insufficient, the very vocation of the family is undermined, leading to a wide array of destabilizing consequences.

4.1. Poor Understanding of Christian Marriage

A sacramental comprehension of Christian marriage as taught in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 1601) is often poorly communicated or absent in many parts of Soroti. Christian marriage is defined by the Church as "a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life... ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring" (CCC, no. 1601). Yet:

Many couples in Uganda including in Teso / Soroti sub-region enter into civil or customary ceremonies without full awareness of the sacramental demands: permanence, fidelity, openness to life, mutual sanctification.

Evidence from the study Factors associated with repeat childbirth among Adolescent Mothers in Soroti District, Teso sub-region, Uganda shows that 26.1% of adolescent mothers have a repeat childbirth, significantly higher than

¹⁵ Paul VI, *Address to the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar 1976*.

the global estimate (18.5%) suggesting gaps in moral formation and in formation in responsibility and openness to life¹⁶.

The fluidity and hybridity of customary marriage traditions in Uganda, discussed in “Fluidity and Hybridity of Customary Marriage Traditions in Contemporary Uganda,” shows that customary marriages are evolving and being re-interpreted, often blending traditional, civil, and religious norms in ways that may weaken sacramental understanding¹⁷.

Consequences stemming from poor marital preparation include:

- Elevated rates of separation, desertion, or cohabitation outside ecclesial recognition,
- Extramarital relations or polygamy, especially where cultural norms still permit polygamous behavior, or where the religious teaching has not fully taken hold.

These problems are exacerbated by the lack of post-marriage pastoral follow-up. Few structured catechetical programs support couples through challenges such as infertility, financial hardship, conflict with in-laws, communication failures. This results in spiritual fatigue and relational drift.

4.2. Breakdown in Moral and Spiritual Values

When catechesis fails to shape conscience and virtues, families fall back on cultural norms or secular influences. Some studies in Uganda illustrate precisely these failures and their effects:

The Child Protection Practices and Attitudes of Faith Leaders Across Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala finds that although faith leaders in Uganda are relatively strong in listening to child abuse cases and engaging in child protection, a majority still favor physical punishment as discipline. This indicates that Christian teachings about self-control, forgiveness, and non-violence are not fully internalized by many who should be moral formators¹⁸.

In Soroti District, a qualitative study Perceptions of adolescent mothers towards adolescent repeat childbirth indicates that many adolescent pregnancies are repeated due to lack of moral guidance and sexual education¹⁹.

Manifestations of moral breakdown include:

- Domestic violence rooted in unresolved anger, alcoholism, and weak conflict-resolution capacities,

¹⁶ P. Mulalu, B. Wanume, D. Soita, D. Amongin, G.J. Wandawa, *Factors associated with repeat childbirth among Adolescent Mothers in Soroti District, Teso sub-region, Uganda: A cross-sectional study*, <http://www.medrxiv.org/content> [accessed 08.09.2025].

¹⁷ A.P. Isiko, J.M. Isabirye, *Fluidity and Hybridity of Customary Marriage Traditions in Contemporary Uganda*, “Noyam Journals” 4(2023), no. 3.

¹⁸ K. Jailobaeva, K. Diaconu, A. Ager, C. Eyber, *Child Protection Practices and Attitudes of Faith Leaders Across Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala*, “The Review of Faith & International Affairs” 19(2021), no. 1.

¹⁹ P. Mulalu, B. Wanume, D. Soita, D. Amongin, G.J. Wandawa, *Perceptions of adolescent mothers towards adolescent repeat childbirth in Soroti District, Teso sub-region, Uganda: A phenomenological study*, <http://www.medrxiv.org/content> [accessed 08.09.2025].

- Teen pregnancies and early marriages, especially in adolescent girls who are not supported by strong moral catechesis,
- Child neglect or abuse where human dignity is not deeply taught or lived.

According to Charles Ogwara, one of the roles of catechesis is to empower families to become “schools of virtue and sanctity”²⁰. In Soroti, however, the weakening of this role has led to the opposite: families that perpetuate vice, conflict, and instability.

4.3. Weak Domestic Church Identity

The idea that the family is the “domestic Church” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11) is largely underdeveloped in catechetical practice across many parishes in Soroti Diocese. According to William Okweny, he notes that this ecclesial identity implies that the home should be a place of prayer, catechesis, forgiveness, and Christian witness²¹. However, where catechesis is deficient, parents are not equipped to live or transmit the faith to their children.

Indicators of this weak domestic Church identity include:

- Absence of family prayer or Scripture reading at home,
- Minimal participation in the sacraments, especially among men,
- Reluctance or inability to address moral issues with children,
- Religious formation delegated entirely to schools or parishes.

As Pope Francis reminds us in *Amoris Laetitia*:

“The family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom... and where we begin to learn faith”²².

If parents are untrained, uninvolved, or spiritually passive, the faith transmission is interrupted, creating spiritual orphan hood in children.

African theologian Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike cautions that:

“When families fail to embody the Christian message, the Church’s witness in society is gravely diminished. Strong families are the hope of a strong Church”²³.

4.4. Decline in Church Participation and Engagement

Inadequate catechesis is also linked to decreased involvement in ecclesial life. Numerous believers, especially men and youth, detach themselves from the sacramental and communal aspects of the Church due to a lack of comprehension regarding its significance. Liturgical participation becomes merely habitual or infrequent, while involvement in lay apostolates, choirs, or formation groups declines.

Symptoms include:

- Low Sunday Mass attendance, especially outside major feasts,

²⁰ C. Ogwara, *Director Pastoral Catechetical Centre*, phone conversation with the author, [19.08.2025].

²¹ W. Okweny, phone conversation with the author, [24.08.2025].

²² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 274.

²³ W. Nasimiyu, *AFER*, Kampala 2003, p. 52.

- Minimal confession and Eucharist reception,
- Lack of commitment to tithing, Church upkeep, or apostolic service,
- Weak leadership within Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

According to Fr. Samuel Ebietu, over 60% of adults who receive sacraments (especially Confirmation and Matrimony) rarely continue active involvement in Church programs unless specifically followed up²⁴.

This lack of catechetical continuity results in sacramental minimalism where sacraments are treated as rites of passage rather than transformative encounters with Christ and the Church. This further weakens the faith environment of families and contributes to generational cycles of lukewarm Catholicism²⁵.

5. Theological and Ecclesial Implications of Weak Catechesis on Family Stability

The weakening of catechesis within Soroti Catholic Diocese does not merely pose practical pastoral challenges; it raises deep theological and ecclesiological concerns. The Church teaches that the family is a “domestic Church,” a primary space where faith is nurtured, lived, and passed on (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11). Therefore, the erosion of catechetical formation within families directly compromises the Church’s mission of evangelization, communion, and sanctification. A theological reflection on this problem reveals how inadequate catechesis impairs the very identity and vitality of the Church in the local context.

5.1. Undermining the Vocation of the Family as Domestic Church

The Second Vatican Council introduced the concept of the family as the *Ecclesia domestica* the domestic Church where parents are the “first heralds of the faith” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1656). In this view, the home is the foundational cell of the Church and society, where discipleship, prayer, moral formation, and communion are cultivated.

When catechesis is lacking or sporadic:

- Parents do not assume their role as primary evangelizers of their children,
- The spiritual atmosphere in the home becomes secular, syncretic, or indifferent,
- The sacraments become isolated events rather than part of a lived Christian journey,
- Family crises are addressed through cultural practices or psychology without reference to Scripture or Church teaching.

Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* stressed that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family”²⁶. If families are unformed in faith, the future of the Church and society is placed at risk. The disintegration of Christian

²⁴ S. Ebietu, *Pastoral Coordinator Soroti Catholic Diocese*, phone conversation with the author, [12.08.2025].

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 86.

marriage and the breakdown of parenting responsibilities rooted in Gospel values thus signal not only a social problem but a theological failure.

5.2. Weakening the Church's Evangelizing Mission

Catechesis is integral to the Church's mission of evangelization²⁷. Inadequate catechesis at the family level hampers the Church's ability to form mature, missionary disciples who can witness to the Gospel in society. Without sound doctrinal and moral formation:

- Catholics cannot articulate or defend their faith, especially in the face of secular ideologies,
- Families are not empowered to evangelize other families, neighbors, and co-workers,
- The Church becomes inward-looking, clericalized, or dependent on external aid rather than animated by lay witness.

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) emphasizes that catechesis should be comprehensive, continuous, and community-centered²⁸. Its absence weakens the structures of faith transmission and results in what Pope Benedict XVI called "religious illiteracy" a state in which many baptized Catholics are unable to explain or live their faith meaningfully.

According to Charles Ogwara, there's often minimal engagement with the Bible among the community, leading to widespread misinterpretations of moral teachings particularly those concerning marriage and sexuality and increasing susceptibility to religious sects or traditional beliefs that conflict with Catholic doctrine²⁹.

5.3. Ecclesial Alienation and Sacramental Disengagement

The sacraments are meant to sustain Christian life from birth to death. But inadequate catechesis leads to sacramental disengagement, especially after initiation rites such as baptism, confirmation, or matrimony. As a result:

- Many Catholics treat the sacraments as cultural milestones rather than ongoing encounters with grace,
- There is little or no preparation for confession and Eucharist after First Communion,
- Participation in the Sunday Eucharist diminishes, especially among youth and men,
- Couples live in irregular unions or polygamous relationships, unable or unwilling to regularize their status in the Church.

This sacramental gap has serious ecclesiological consequences. It results in a Church that is numerically large but spiritually superficial. The community

²⁷ Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 44.

²⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 70-71, http://www.vatican.va/content/adam/wss/roman_curia/congregation/ccclergy/documents/ [accessed 22.07.2025].

²⁹ C. Ogwara, phone conversation with the author, [19.08.2025].

lacks depth, cohesion, and missionary zeal. The vision of the Church as a communion of believers centered on the Eucharist becomes blurred.

African theologian Laurenti Magesa warns that:

“A sacramentally disconnected community cannot sustain itself... The rites must connect with life and must be explained in the language and culture of the people”³⁰.

5.4. Hindering Inculturation and African Ecclesiology

The African Church has consistently emphasized the need for inculturation integrating the Christian message with African cultural values without compromising the Gospel³¹. Inadequate catechesis frustrates this effort in two major ways:

- Failure to Understand Culture Theologically: Catechists who lack proper training cannot critically engage with cultural practices like polygamy, ancestral rites, or bridewealth from a theological perspective. They either reject them entirely or accommodate them uncritically,
- Alienation of the Local Faithful: When catechesis is delivered in foreign frameworks or languages without contextualization, it is perceived as a colonial or clerical imposition rather than an invitation to conversion. This leads to disengagement or parallel practices being Catholic in public but traditional in private.

The AMECEA Pastoral Department notes that:

“Catechesis in Africa must become truly African in expression, content, and methodology. Otherwise, it remains a borrowed garment, worn only on Sundays”³².

To restore theological vitality and cultural relevance, catechesis must return to its roots: shaping the whole person in faith, reason, and culture.

6. Recommendations and Pastoral Strategies for Catechetical Renewal in Soroti Catholic Diocese

Addressing the challenges of inadequate catechesis requires a holistic, context-sensitive pastoral approach that respects the local culture while faithfully transmitting the Catholic faith. Drawing from Church documents, African theology, and best pastoral practices, the following recommendations aim to revitalize catechesis as a foundational element for stable families and a vibrant Church in Soroti Diocese.

³⁰ Cf. L. Magesa, *African Religion and the Christian Faith*, p. 139.

³¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Nairobi 1995, 59.

³² AMECEA Pastoral Department, *Small Christian communities as a model of the Church in Africa*, Nairobi 2008, p. 22.

6.1. Strengthen Catechist Formation and Support

The quality of catechesis depends significantly on the formation and motivation of catechists. Many catechists in Soroti currently lack formal training, theological depth, and pedagogical skills.

- Establish a diocesan Catechetical Training Centre offering regular, accredited programs in theology, pastoral care, and inculturation.
- Provide ongoing formation workshops to update catechists on Church teachings, effective methodologies, and cultural sensitivity.
- Equip catechists with teaching resources such as catechisms, audiovisual aids, and contextualized catechetical materials in Ateso and other local languages.
- Encourage peer support networks and recognition of catechists to boost morale and commitment.

As the *General Directory for Catechesis* emphasizes, catechists are “the backbone of evangelization” and must be “adequately trained and supported”³³.

6.2. Promote Family-Centered and Community-Based Catechesis

Since the family is the “domestic Church”, catechesis must actively involve parents and extended family members.

- Develop parish programs that offer regular catechetical sessions for couples and parents, focusing on marriage, parenting, and faith transmission.
- Encourage the formation of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that include family units and provide peer support, prayer, and reflection on Gospel values.
- Implement post-marriage catechesis and enrichment programs to support couples through early challenges and foster spiritual growth.
- Integrate children’s catechesis with family involvement, ensuring that faith formation happens in the home and parish collaboratively.
- Such initiatives align with *Familiaris Consortio*’s call for the family to be “supported and helped by the Church” in its evangelizing mission³⁴.

6.3. Use Local Language, Culture, and Contextual Tools

Catechesis is effective when it speaks the cultural language of the people.

- Develop catechetical materials in Ateso and other local languages, including storybooks, songs, and proverbs that convey Christian teachings.
- Utilize inculturated liturgies and rituals that respect Teso customs while highlighting Gospel values.
- Train catechists in inculturation theology, enabling them to address cultural challenges such as polygamy, bridewealth, and traditional rites pastorally and theologically.
- Employ digital media, drama, and storytelling as dynamic catechetical tools, particularly to engage youth and young adults.

³³ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 77, http://www.vatican.va/content/adan/wss/roman_curia/congregation/cclergy/documents/ [accessed 22.07.2025].

³⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42.

- African theologian John Mbiti insists that “the Gospel must be rooted in the African world-view to bear fruit”³⁵. Effective inculturation deepens faith and family cohesion.

6.4. Engage and Empower Youth in Catechesis

Young people face increasing secular and cultural pressures that challenge their faith and family values.

- Establish youth-friendly catechetical programs incorporating music, drama, sports, and social media.
- Encourage peer-led initiatives where trained youth catechists evangelize and mentor their peers.
- Promote vocations awareness and spiritual retreats to deepen youth understanding of Christian marriage and family life.
- Address contemporary issues such as gender roles, relationships, and responsible sexuality with openness and fidelity to Church teaching.
- By engaging youth creatively, the Church fosters a generation that values stable families rooted in faith.

6.5. Foster Parish-Based Marriage Enrichment and Support

Marriage formation must extend beyond initial preparation.

- Introduce post-wedding follow-up programs that provide spiritual counseling, communication skills training, and conflict resolution.
- Facilitate support groups for couples facing challenges such as infertility, financial hardship, or family conflicts.
- Collaborate with civil authorities and traditional leaders to promote Christian marriage as a public and private good.

Encourage priests and pastoral agents to be proactive in family ministry, recognizing the diverse realities families face.

Such pastoral care aligns with Pope Francis’ call in *Amoris Laetitia* to “accompany families with mercy and hope”³⁶.

These recommendations offer a road map to restore catechetical vigor in Soroti Diocese, emphasizing the integral connection between sound formation, cultural sensitivity, and pastoral outreach. By empowering catechists, engaging families and youth, and fostering a lived domestic Church, the diocese can strengthen family stability and renew its evangelizing mission.

Conclusion

In Soroti Catholic Diocese the moment has come to move beyond diagnosis and recommendations toward bold, coordinated action. The diocesan leadership—bishop, diocesan curia, parish priests, catechists, and lay leaders—should immediately form a Catechetical Renewal Task Force. Within the next three to

³⁵ J.S. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, Nairobi 1991, p. 109.

³⁶ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 312.

six months, this group must draft a multi-year catechetical plan that establishes clear goals, resources, roles, monitoring, and evaluation. Key among priorities is setting up or strengthening a diocesan training centre for catechists, offering accredited formation in theology, pedagogy, inculturation, and pastoral care, together with regular workshops to deepen both knowledge and practice.

Parishes must shift toward family-centred catechesis. Parents, couples, and extended family members should be involved in ongoing programs on Christian marriage, parenting, and faith transmission so the role of the domestic Church is not theoretical but lived daily. Materials in local languages like Ateso, Kumam must be developed: storybooks, songs, dramas, and proverbs drawn from local culture to help integrate faith in culturally resonant ways. Alongside this, youth need dedicated catechetical opportunities: peer-led initiatives, retreats, social media, music and drama that address their real life questions, so that they become active witnesses rather than passive recipients.

Sacramental life requires renewed attention. Sacraments must be understood not as isolated rites or cultural milestones, but as gateways into sustained Christian living. Preparation for baptism, confirmation, marriage, Eucharist, and confession must connect to ongoing catechesis; there must also be deliberate follow-up to prevent sacramental disengagement. Pastoral care should reach out to those in irregular unions or traditional arrangements, offering accompaniment, mercy, and a path toward regularization.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation must be built into every initiative from the start. The diocese should define measurable indicators such as attendance at sacraments, family participation in programs, youth involvement, and Sunday Mass attendance and collect regular feedback from catechists, families, and youth. Pilots should be launched in sample parishes within the first year, with full-scale roll-out over the next two to three years. By committing now to these steps, Soroti Diocese can renew catechesis in a way that strengthens families, revitalizes sacramental life, roots faith in culture, and reawakens its evangelizing mission.

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