

Stages of Faith Development

To understand the growth of faith, one needs to see faith as a way of relating to the world, of perceiving ultimate reality. Faith is a way of behaving that is based on a relationship with God.

Faith develops in stages. (Note: The ages given below are approximate. Also, not all people go through all stages, and not all people of comparable age are necessarily at the same stage. Each person is a unique individual and his or her relationship with God develops with God's grace.)

- *Faith from parents—birth to age 6.* A child takes on what parents or significant adults believe and projects this as his or her own. The child accepts parental faith without much question.
- *Faith from stories—ages 6-12.* A child can follow a story line and can begin to make personal the faith attitudes of adults. For example, at this stage, the child can say: "I believe that the bread at Mass is really Jesus."
- *Faith from the group—age 12 to late adolescence.* A child becomes capable of abstract thought and can handle doctrinal formulas. This is the stage of conformity to a group's ideas and social norms. It is also a time of uncritical faith.
- *Making faith one's own—late adolescence to adult.* The individual becomes a critical thinker with questions that need to be addressed. Differences, values, and alternatives are examined, and choices are made. This is an either/or stage which does not recognize a middle ground.
- *Mature, open faith—adult.* As a person matures, he or she becomes more comfortable with mystery and paradox. The individual does not need to resolve polarities by eliminating one side.
- *Deep, consistent faith—late adult.* This is a stage of great holiness. The individual has resolved paradoxes and is in constant contact with God. All actions and attitudes flow from this contact.

What personal examples can you give that shows faith as a way of behaving based on a relationship to a personal God?

Where do you perceive yourself to be in your own faith development? What signs or indications do you see in yourself that causes you to assign yourself to a particular stage?

How can knowing the various stages of faith development help you to be a better catechist?

What specific techniques might you use to take faith development into account when teaching? What kinds of activities would stimulate growth in faith?