Quest: A Fresh Approach to the Heidelberg Catechism
Proposal for the Mission Renewal Grant of Classis Iakota

Summary

Bridge of Hope is conducting a fresh approach to the catechism called Quest. Beyond a creative repacking of the Heidelberg Catechism, the curriculum is designed to be conversational, digitally interactive, and flexible. By recording responses from learners and facilitating teacher response, Quest promotes personal exploration of themes while holding onto standardization. Quest was successfully prototyped at Bridge of Hope in fall 2022. Now the remaining three units require design. Other churches have already expressed interest in using the resource, so the intention is to produce a new catechism experience that can be accessed by Classis Iakota churches by fall 2023.

Background

In 2022 Tina Folkerts, a member of Council at Bridge of Hope, and Nathan Hitchcock, the church's Vision Consultant, began talking about the need for a fresh approach to the catechism. It was acknowledged that there had been a hole where catechism used to be. While youth were getting good learning experiences along the way, they were not getting consistent, intentional training in reformed Christian discipleship.

Folkerts and Hitchcock looked at published resources for walking through the Heidelberg Catechism. Most interesting to them was Bob De Moor's *Quest of Faith*, which had gone through several editions with Faith Alive. *Quest of Faith* emphasized the conversational approach and appeared to lend itself to a certain gamification. Folkerts and Hitchcock agreed that it would be worth translating De Moor's resource into a digital version on a learning management system (LMS) platform, collecting students' answers. The desire was for students to respond in their own words, not necessarily verbatim catechism answers. Teachers could then respond to answers, seeing if learners were discovering and integrating valid biblical-theological concepts. The Youth Discipleship Team and Council approved a prototype of the new catechism, which would be called, like De Moor's book, Quest of Faith. Hitchcock reached out to Faith Alive and Bob De Moor, letting them know about the experiment. They were supportive of it, thinking it could either extend the reach of De Moor's product or pave the way for a new product.

In the design phase, Hitchcock started with the structures of De Moor's *Quest of Faith* redirected several times. Instead of a combination of reformed confessions, Hitchcock focused on the Heidelberg Catechism. Rather than use De Moor's questions, Heidelberg questions were grouped together under key questions and worked through linearly. Ultimately, Hitchcock decided to follow the order of the Heidelberg Catechism directly, and use De Moor's "Some Possible Answers" section under each question to serve as the functional rubric for accepted answers.

The prototype was launched in September 2022, taught by Ross Douma and Deon Wynia, two members of Bridge of Hope. Nathan Hitchcock supervised. Fifteen high schoolers participated in the first cohort. They met after the Sunday service for ten weeks. Not every learner was there each week, but they had access to the LMS and therefore to the content even when they were gone.

Feedback from students was gathered unscientifically. General comments were positive. Learners liked the conversational approach, meaning they could work through answers in their own language, not have to repeat the "exact right answer." They found the process clear and, after the first week, found the technology easy to use. Their willingness to talk in real time was a mixed bag. They did especially well when criticizing culture or repeating "Sunday school answers," but less participatory when it came time to express feelings, doubts, or general questions. Juniors and seniors were noticeably more interactive than freshmen and sophomores. However, all the learners typed in answers to respond to the weekly quest(ion). This interactive measure was highly successful in terms of responsiveness.

Other churches have expressed interest in trying out the fresh catechism. Lebanon CRC, led by Rev. Bob Drenton, would like to try it in the near future. Rev. Bob De Moor has also asked for permission to use it with a group of senior citizens in the Edmonton area as a kind of parallel experiment. It may be that other churches, particularly in Classis Iakota, will be interested in trying out the format of Quest. The LMS platform allows individual churches to modify the curriculum as they see fit.

Features

Quest is similar to other catechisms being used in the CRC and RCA in that it follows the content and basic structure of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is different in some key regards.
  ❖ Most of the instruction is built around dialog, discussing key theological questions.

- ❖ Learning is oriented more toward holistic understanding than mere recitation.
- ❖ Interaction is conducted by having students enter responses into the Pathwright LMS; the teacher provides feedback through the LMS and grants "credit" where an answer is sufficient.
- ❖ While attendance is strongly encouraged, quests can be done independently for disciples who miss a session.

The structure of each week can be seen in the overview of a sample session:

That is, after the initial question, learners walk through three signposts (or inputs): scripture passages, the relevant Q&As from the Heidelberg Catechism, and a fun component such as a game, meme, cultural artifact, or activity. The three signposts may be listed in different order depending on the week. The Exploration step contains three discussion questions to unpack the main question further. The initial Quest(ion) step invites students to give an initial (unevaluated) answer, and the Discovery step asks them to answer the question in their own words.

Discovery

After the signposts and exploration, try answering the question again. Write three to five sentences.

What is at the center of Christian belief?

> *Write something...*

The entire session is designed to be completed in around 45 minutes. The first segment, Gospel, may be viewed by clicking here.

Sequence

Quest is a four segment sequence. It does not have to be taught in the following sequence, though it is recommended that one do so. Likewise, the content can be covered independently, but it is highly recommended that each person go through with a group of co-journeyers.

Season	Segment	HEIDELBERG TOPICS	Q&A
Fall, Year A (10 weeks)	Gospel	Prelude: My Only Comfort Prelude: Misery Prelude: Deliverance	1-22
Spring, Year A (10 weeks)	Creed	Creed God the Father God the Son God the Holy Spirit	23-64
Summer	Church	[Belong]	65-85

or ad hoc with adults (2-4 weeks)		The Holy Sacraments Holy Baptism The Holy Supper	(Not incl.)
Fall, Year B (10 weeks)	Ethics	Prelude: Gratitude The Ten Commandments	86-115
Spring, Year B (10 weeks)	Spirituality	The Lord's Prayer	116-129

In the future, given enough students or enough church cooperation, it may be possible to run Years A and B concurrently.

For Bridge of Hope, content on church life (and with it Heidelberg Q&A 65-85) are covered through its membership course. Other churches may elect to do their own membership course there or walk through the catechism questions more traditionally.

The Need

Nathan Hitchcock was the chief designer for the first of four segments. Bridge of Hope hired him to design the overall structure of Quest and build the first segment. The three remaining segments (Creed, Ethics, Spirituality) have yet to be designed. Hitchcock is finishing his work with Bridge of Hope in other areas and, while able to help build the teacher training component, will not necessarily be available to help complete the project. Thus the primary need is to secure design assistance for the remainder of Quest. This person would need to be qualified theologically, pedagogically, and technologically.

Secondary needs include the purchase of a subscription to the LMS. In order to facilitate several cohorts of Quest at a time and support enough administrator accounts, an Essentials Plan from Pathwright LMS is recommended. Since Bob De Moor's *Quest of Faith* is being used as a rubric, each teacher would receive a copy of the book. Training for teachers should be provided, which may include the development of a manual and/or dedicated training sessions with someone who has run the program before.

Deliverables

The following deliverables would be achieved by persons commissioned and/or hired by Bridge of Hope. Bridge of Hope would take responsibility for these deliverables.

Complete design of Creed segment	Mar 2023
Cohort finishes Creed segment	May 2023
Complete design of Ethics segment	June 2023
Update Gospel segment	June 2023
Provide access to other Classis Iakota churches to start cohorts of Gospel, Creed, or Ethics	July 2023
Complete trainings and recorded training materials for new teachers	Aug 2023
Complete design of Spirituality segment	Dec 2023

Proposed Budget

An amount of $7500 is requested to complete the above deliverables.

Design of Creed (~25 hours)	1000
Design of Ethics (~25 hours)	1000
Design of Spirituality (~25 hours)	1000
Design, record, deploy Quest Teacher Training	950
Licensing and image fees	250
Pathwright Essentials Subscription (one year)	2550
Copies of *Quest of Faith* for new teachers	150
Training supplies for all-classis training session	150
Total	*7050*

Respectfully submitted,

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