

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### Historical Background

On May 25, 1994, Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza promulgated *Diocesan Catechesis for Children and Adolescents*. In so doing he stated, “These guidelines provide the parish or school with established goals and objectives that are to be followed in all religious education programs.” Since that time this document has served as the standard reference for the content of catechetical ministry in the Diocese (now Archdiocese) of Galveston-Houston.

Those guidelines reflected several distinct styles and approaches. The children’s section was purchased from the Archdiocese of New York. In it the Early Childhood (Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten) section consisted of a single page. Grades 1-6 were organized by: Core Content, Christian Living, Sacred Scripture, Prayer and Worship, Vocabulary, Liturgical Symbols, and Prayers. Human sexuality was added as an addendum in 1997 based on the 1991 USCC document *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. By contrast, the adolescent section, developed locally by the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, was based on learning objectives organized around faith themes taken from *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis* prepared by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. It was divided into two sections, older and younger adolescents, with sexuality catechesis integrated as one of several themes.

A number of significant developments after 1994 suggested that a review of the guidelines was needed. These developments included: the creation of a new universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (first available in English in the summer of 1994), the publication of *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1997, in that same year the promulgation by the Congregation for the Clergy of a new *General Directory for Catechesis*, the 1999 publication by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*, and finally the new *National Directory for Catechesis* approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2005. In addition to these foundational documents, many other national and universal documents touch on areas of catechesis.

These documents themselves suggest that catechetical activities need to be coordinated among parish faith formation programs, parish youth ministry programs, and Catholic schools. As a consequence, in the fall of 2007, the archdiocesan offices of Catholic Schools, Continuing Christian Education [now known as Office of Evangelization and Catechesis], and Youth Ministry [now known as Office of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization] jointly began a process seeking to create a new Catechetical Framework for the archdiocese. What follows is the result of that collaborative effort.

### Guiding Vision

A joint committee, drawing on the expertise of the three sponsoring offices, in studying these foundational catechetical documents, determined that the following nine points are to be viewed as foundational and guiding principles for catechesis.

1. At the center of all catechetical activity is the person of Jesus Christ (*GDC* 41, 80; *NDC* 1, 19B; *OHWB* 2; *RV* 10).
2. Catechesis exists as an essential moment in the broader process of evangelization (*GDC* 46, 63; *NDC* 15, 19D; *RV* 36).

3. The primary vocation of all baptized Christians is to grow in holiness of life, seeking to live in ever deepening ways their relationships with God and their common communion as members of the Body of Christ (*GDC* 27, 56, 70; *NDC* 35D, 40, 49).
4. Catechetical methodology is based on God's own methodology in Revelation; which is realized gradually through actions and words, respecting people's circumstances and capacity to accept and interpret it (*GDC* 139, 145; *NDC* 28, 28B).
5. The baptismal catechumenate is the inspiration and model for all catechesis (*GDC* 29, 59; *NDC* 19D, *OHWB* 81).
6. Catechesis includes the traditional category of religious education, but is broader and includes a multiplicity of tasks (*GDC* 67, 85-86; *NDC* 20; *OHWB* 89, 91-96; *RV* 29).
7. Catechesis needs to be lifelong and systematic (*GDC* 68, 187; *NDC* 19E; *OHWB* 29, 44; *RV* 29).
8. Catechesis of adults is the primary form of catechesis and all other forms are derived from and oriented to it (*GDC* 59, 275; *OHWB* 41).
9. Catechesis is essentially ecclesial and needs to engage the domestic church as it builds vital local Christian communities (*GDC* 254, 255, 257; *NDC* 19C; *OHWB* 103, 117, 121; *RV* 11, 21).

Based on these principles, and having reviewed existing curricula from several (arch)dioceses around the country, it was determined that as a result of this process, the basic structure of this document would have the following characteristics:

1. It would be lifelong, beginning with birth, continuing through early childhood, childhood, early adolescence, later adolescence, culminating in adulthood, in which it was evident that each stage of development sought to build on what had preceded it and moved toward the final goal of a mature, faith-filled, adult Catholic. A fuller, more delineated treatment of the young, middle, and older adult components of adulthood would be addressed in the subsequent curriculum guide. This guiding document for systematic catechesis would complement existing guidelines for sacramental catechesis.
2. The organizing structure would be the six tasks/dimensions of catechesis articulated in the *GDC* and repeated and developed in *OHWB* and the *NDC*.
3. The approach by which it calls forth conversion of life as Christian disciples with a living, explicit, and fruitful faith would be characterized by comprehensiveness and integrity of formation, its gradual character expressed in definitive stages, and its constant references to the Christian community.
4. Guidance would be taken from the USCCB's *Guidelines for the Preparation and Review of Pre-School Materials*, *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. These documents would be used to ensure doctrinal completeness but would not be seen as constraining the scope of the work.
5. Catechesis in human sexuality would be thoroughly and intentionally integrated.
6. Age appropriate and systematic catechesis would reflect the USCCB's *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

## **Creating a Catechetical Framework**

The joint committee from the three sponsoring offices convened a much larger study group consisting of archdiocesan staff, pastors, parish catechetical leaders, youth ministers, and Catholic school personnel. Originally the intention was to produce a single curriculum guide, complete with learning outcomes and unit topics. One of the findings that emerged from this study group, however, was the realization that, while there needed to be consistency across the archdiocese in catechetical endeavors, the day-to-day needs of different contexts (e.g. Catholic schools, parish based faith formation, comprehensive youth ministry, homeschooling) preclude a single *curriculum resource*. As a result, the determination was made to produce instead a *Catechetical Framework*. A *Catechetical Framework* would serve as the first step through the development of an organized plan of learning outcomes that identify the content to be learned in terms of clear, definable standards of what the learner is to know and be able to do. This *Catechetical Framework* would serve as a basis for unity out of which *curriculum resources* could later be developed for the various different contexts. This approach was seen to provide both the necessary flexibility and still secure coherency in catechesis across the archdiocese. The development of subsequent *curriculum resources* as determined by various constituencies would identify the various learning approaches needed to achieve the content outcomes in the *Catechetical Framework*.

### **Process Employed**

The study group met for several months under the direction of the original members of the joint committee. They together produced an initial draft. Copies of that draft were shared with the publishing community and all major catechetical publishers were invited to collaborate in evaluating the quality of the initial draft. Representatives of publishers who responded to this invitation met with the joint committee in the fall of 2008. The joint committee used their feedback and subjected the initial draft to an exhaustive review for consistency and completeness. A second draft was prepared and in July 2009 was sent out for review by four national catechetical consultants, every member of the original study group, and additional catechetical practitioners of the archdiocese; a group of greater than seventy persons. Their comments and suggestions were considered and appropriate modifications to the second draft were made by the joint committee. This third draft was provided to the directors of the three sponsoring offices who reviewed it and, after making their own modifications, it was sent to Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston. After his final review and approval he now promulgates it under his own name as the official *Catechetical Framework for Lifelong Faith Formation* that is to be the foundation for all catechetical activity in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*