

SECTION 200 – CATECHETICAL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Policy 201 – Comprehensive Systematic Catechetical Programs

I. Overview

Catechesis of children and youth should be of sufficient length to allow for a close relationship with the person of Christ to develop through age appropriate instruction in the knowledge of the faith, developing the spirituality and prayer life of those who follow him and realizing and participating in the lived mission of a disciple of Christ. Since faith formation is life-long, children are to be in some form of faith formation every year and not just those years in which they are preparing to receive a sacrament.

- A. Parishes will provide formal, systematic, continuous lifelong faith formation. A comprehensive program involves direct formation of the children as well as formation of their parents who are the primary catechists of their children (Canon Law Society of America 1998, cc 774 and 776). When meeting with parents, the importance of families celebrating Sunday liturgy together should be reinforced. By observing their parents during the Mass, children “experience the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer” (USCCB 2005, no. 36.A.3a).
- B. Programs will employ the baptismal catechumenate as the inspiration for all faith formation (USCCB 2005, no. 35.D).
- C. All faith formation programs will promote the six fundamental tasks of catechesis:
 - Knowledge of the faith
 - Knowledge of and active participation in liturgy and sacraments
 - Moral formation which imitates the life of Christ
 - Praying with Christ
 - Living in community and participating actively in the life and mission of the Church
 - Having a missionary spirit that helps disciples of Christ to bear witness to their faith in words and deeds (USCCB 2005, no. 20)
- D. The parish assesses the needs of its community and determines the model(s) and mode or manner of formation that best suits its particular circumstances. As an example, some formation might need to be available in a specific language or in multiple languages (e.g., English, Spanish, or Vietnamese).
- E. It is recommended that a parish contact the Director of Catechetical Services prior to implementing any program other than those specified in this manual.
- F. Regardless of the model(s) used, Diocesan Safe Environment policies must be followed. At least at the start of each program, parishes should provide parents with guidelines on all relevant policies, including how children are to be brought to class and picked up from class (e.g., guidelines regarding “drop-offs”).

- G. Although weekly hours and yearly sessions may vary, depending upon the model(s) used, all programs should have no fewer than twenty-six contact hours with students each year.
- H. Any catechetical textbook used by the parish or parents electing to use home-based catechesis must be on the USCCB's Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series.⁵

II. Traditional School Model

- A. In this model, children are typically grouped in classes according to their grade level.
- B. Two cleared adults over the age of twenty-one are assigned to each classroom. This may be two catechists or a catechist and an assistant. In addition to the two cleared adults, teens and young adults⁶ may assist in the classroom after they have completed the Safe Environment Training.
- C. This model allows for the exploration of faith between peers under the guidance of the adult catechist.
- D. Variations on this model may include special sacrament classes, family-centered activities, cultural or liturgical experiences or special experiential activities outside the normal classroom setting.
- E. Parishes may coordinate faith formation programs such that parents attend sessions in a separate room at the same time as the children are meeting. In this manner, all members of the family participate in age-appropriate faith formation at the same time.

III. Family Clusters Model

- A. In this model, small, caring, and supporting faith communities composed of several families, including parents/guardians and children of various ages, come together in designated family homes to create a faith formation community. The PCL or faith formation leader should provide all material, including lesson plans and objectives, to parents.
- B. Parents who have completed their Sacraments of Initiation may rotate as instructors for the children of these faith formation communities. All parents are considered catechists and must be cleared per the Safe Environment guidelines.⁷ There must be at least two cleared adults in each room of the home where children are present during a Family Clusters session.
- C. Ideally, parents would follow catechist formation as specified in the Continuing Catechetical Formation Plan (CCF Plan).⁸ Realizing the challenges associated with this level of catechesis, each parish should develop and host appropriate formation for parents that addresses both adult faith formation and methods in catechesis.

⁵ <http://www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/subcommittee-on-catechism/upload/Current-Conformity-List.pdf>

⁶ Teens and young adults are those who have been confirmed and are between fourteen and twenty-one years of age

⁷ https://www.cathdal.org/Safe_Environment_Program.pdf

⁸ [https://www.cathdal.org/Continuing_Catechetical_Formation_-_Guide_for_the_Catechist_\(2\)\[1\].pdf](https://www.cathdal.org/Continuing_Catechetical_Formation_-_Guide_for_the_Catechist_(2)[1].pdf)

Sometimes, families are drawn to the energetic faith communities on college campuses. These communities may or may not offer faith formation for the children of students or families attending Mass. Activities offered at these communities are considered supplemental to a parish-based sacramental program and should not be deemed a substitute for what is offered through the parish.

Policy 203 – Special Needs Catechesis

All members of a parish community should have access to faith formation appropriate to their situation. “Persons with disabilities...are integral members of the parish community... and should be integrated into ordinary catechetical programs as much as possible” (USCCB 2005, no. 49). The term “persons with disabilities” involves a variety of conditions, including intellectual, developmental and sensory disabilities.

Parish staff should make an attempt to identify those individuals who live in their parish boundaries and have some form of disability; with this identification, the parish can make a specific pastoral outreach to determine the needs of those with a disability and to warmly welcome them to the parish’s ministries (USCCB 1995, no. 4). Where possible, “parishes should encourage those with disabilities to participate in all levels of pastoral ministry (e.g., care ministers, catechists, etc.)” (USCCB 1995, no. 5).

Parish faith formation staff and parents of children with disabilities should meet and coordinate on the best form of catechesis for their children.

The form of catechesis that is selected could be from a wide range of models, including mainstreaming in a Traditional School Model or creating a program specific to an individual child. Within the mainstream option, variations exist, including special assistance, supplemental instruction, and special guidance to help students comprehend the material. In addition, there could be situations where the best option is to split time between a Traditional School Model and individual instruction in another room or in the student’s home. Refer to the Diocesan Office of Pastoral Services and the National Catholic Partnership on Disability²⁰ for resources that assist in determining the best catechetical options for children with disabilities.

²⁰ <http://www.ncpd.org/>

SECTION 300 – ADULT FAITH FORMATION

I. Background of Adult Faith Formation

It was through Jesus that the disciples were able to know God’s heart and their lives were transformed because of it. Following his Resurrection, he appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures for them. After their eyes were opened, they realized that their hearts were burning while he spoke with them.

In the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus gave His disciples the command to: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20).

The disciples followed his command and “very soon the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ” (John Paul II 1979, no. 1). Through this catechesis, referred to in this policy section as adult faith formation, the US Bishops want “to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith” (USCCB Catechism 2000, no. 1229). Parishes can help adults develop their faith by providing a variety of faith formation activities and resources in a welcoming parish climate (USCCB OHWB 2000, no. 17).

For adults to develop a full understanding of their faith and live a faith-filled life, they need parishes that are vitally alive in faith and provide a variety of faith formation activities and resources. The US bishops emphasize the importance of parishes making a commitment to adult faith formation and placing it at the heart of the parish catechetical vision and practice, without weakening commitment to other essential educational ministries (USCCB OHWB 2000, no. 6).

II. Participants in Programs

Every adult (those who have completed the eighteenth year of age) should have, through evangelization and catechesis, the opportunity to continued formation. Parishes in the Diocese of Dallas shall offer programs whose purpose is to fulfill this commitment to adult faith formation. “Most adults are capable of a free and informed response of faith to God’s initiative of love. They ‘have a right and a duty to bring to maturity the seed of faith sown in them by God.’ They have experienced the joys and challenges of life and have the capacity to question the truth and meaning of life. ‘The catechesis of adults...is the principal form of catechesis because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form’ ” (USCCB 2005, no. 48.A). When preparing for these programs, parishes are to keep in mind the different stages of adulthood (e.g., young adults, the middle aged, and the elderly), the family systems (e.g., single parent), and diversity of their parishioners.

III.Length of Formation

Faith formation has no end date; it is a lifelong, continuous process. It is “that particular form of ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit, and fruitful confession of faith” (USCCB 1997, no. 82).

SECTION 600 – EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONNEL

Each parish will employ or appoint adequately trained ministers (staff and/or volunteer) to ensure that parish catechetical needs are met. “The single most critical factor in an effective parish [faith formation] program is the leadership of a professionally trained catechetical leader. Depending on the size and scope of the parish catechetical program, parishes should allocate their resources so that they are able to acquire the services of a competent and qualified catechetical leader (or someone in the process of becoming qualified and competent) or to share those services with another parish” (USCCB 2005, no. 54.B.5).

Policy 601 – Create Catechetical Plan and Determine Staffing Needs

Recognizing the importance of well-designed faith formation programs and in light of their responsibility to “take care of the catechesis of the Christian people so that the living faith of the faithful becomes manifest and active through doctrinal instruction and the experience of Christian life, (Canon Law Society of America 1998, c. 773), pastors will coordinate with appropriate church leaders to develop a parish catechetical plan.

The US bishops are explicit in stating that “every parish needs to develop a coherent catechetical plan that integrates the various components of the overall program and provides opportunities for all parishioners to hear the Gospel message, celebrate it in prayer and Liturgy, and live it in their daily lives. That plan should reflect the priority of adult catechesis [and] take into account the needs of everyone in the parish ...It should develop goals and objectives specific to the parish community and include the regular assessment of progress toward the achievement of those goals and objectives” (USCCB 2005, no. 60.A).

To develop its plan, the parish can begin by conducting an assessment of faith formation that is currently in place and the demographic groups targeted by each activity. While doing the assessment, it is important to consider all six of the fundamental tasks of catechesis which are referenced in Policy 201. Once the assessment is complete, the effort continues by identifying which groups and/or tasks of catechesis are under-represented and how best the parish could work with them. From there, priorities are established and a strategy is determined on how to implement a revised plan that meets the parish’s needs. The plan should be refreshed and updated as appropriate to meet the ever-changing needs of the parish community.

As the catechetical plan is being developed, attention is placed on the resources required to implement the plan. “The parish catechetical plan should be adequately financed and staffed by professionally trained catechetical leaders so that the teachings of the Church are readily accessible to all the Christian faithful in the parish” (USCCB 2005, no. 60.A). According to the size and diversity of its community, a parish should hire or appoint an appropriate number of faith formation leaders with the right level of experience and qualifications.

As staffing resources are determined and a new position is created or an existing position becomes vacant, the parish should consult the Director of Catechetical Services, who can work with the parish by providing tips on recruiting, advertising, and salary guidelines, and by advising the parish of qualified individuals who have voiced an interest in such a position.

SECTION 700 – SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The diocese has a Safe Environment Program²⁵ that implements training, screening, background checks and other procedures designed to reduce the risk of abuse of children and vulnerable adults. Every parish must have the program and each is responsible for program implementation and ongoing maintenance.

Policy 701 – Safe Environment Training, Screening, and Reporting

Each parish will appoint a Safety Director to oversee the parish safe environment program, which will adhere to all Diocesan requirements regarding training, screening, and reporting.

Policy 702 – Volunteer Requirements

All volunteers must comply with Safe Environment training policies and procedures, as specified by the Diocesan program.

Policy 703 – Child Safe Environment Training

The Virtus Program and other anti-victimization training is part of the Charter for the Protection of Youth and Young People issued by the USCCB. Twice annually, catechists in each parish are required to teach this anti-victimization program to the children in the faith formation programs. One of these sessions should be during the first part of October. Please refer to the Safe Environment Office for training and to the Virtus website for more information.²⁶

Policy 704 – Visiting Priest and Speaker Requirements

All parishes will adhere to the Diocesan policy on visiting priests and speakers,²⁷ which includes the requirement to provide a celebret or affidavit of good standing issued within the previous six-weeks.

²⁵ https://www.cathdal.org/Safe_Environment_Program.pdf

²⁶ <http://www.virtusonline.com/virtus/>

²⁷ https://www.cathdal.org/Visiting_Speaker_Requirements.pdf

SECTION 800 – RISK MANAGEMENT

To prevent or minimize either accidental loss of property or harm to any person on the parish grounds or at a parish event, the Diocese of Dallas’ Risk Management office develops and issues policies and guidelines. Contact the Office of Risk Management with any concerns or questions.

Policy 801 – Considerations Related to Physical Safety in Group Settings

Lit candles should be prohibited in all areas of the parish or school, with some specific exceptions such as in the Sanctuary during Mass.

Emergency drills

Contagious Diseases

Policy 802 – Copyright Compliance

“It is illegal and immoral to reproduce copyrighted texts and music by any means without written permission of the copyright owner. The fact that these duplicated materials are not for sale but for private use does not alter the legal or moral situation of copying without permission” (USCCB 1982, no. 78). As well, it is illegal to show copyrighted movies or videos without first gaining permission.

Policy 803 – Social Media Policy

All diocesan and parish employees, as well as volunteers, must comply with the diocesan social media policy.²⁸

Policy 804 – Travelling Off-Site

Before taking any child off-site, the faith formation leader must have the appropriate signed consent form from the child’s parent or legal guardian.

Before allowing any child to be driven to a parish-sponsored off-site event by a volunteer driver, the driver must be cleared per the diocesan Safe Environment guidelines²⁹ and must meet the criteria on both pages of the Volunteer Driver form.³⁰

²⁸ https://www.cathdal.org/Social_Media_Policy.pdf

²⁹ https://www.cathdal.org/Safe_Environment_Program.pdf

³⁰ https://www.cathdal.org/Vehicle_Safety_Policy.pdf

APPENDIX – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Apprenticeship – a period where a beginner or learner actively seeks how to do a certain role or occupation; in the context of Confirmation, confirmandi are called to learn how to live as followers of Jesus

Candidate – an individual who has been baptized either as Roman Catholic or as a member of another Christian community, who has neither been catechized nor received the Sacraments of Confirmation and/or Eucharist, and is seeking full communion in the Roman Catholic Church

Catechumen – an individual who has not been baptized as a member of a Christian community and who seeks to become a member of the Roman Catholic Church

Catechuminate – the second period in the RCIA process; during this period, an individual who has celebrated the Rite of Acceptance will study the doctrines of the Catholic faith and are introduced to the prayer life and apostolic works of the community (McBrien 1995, 237)

CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) – an official association for the catechetical instruction of the laity that was first proposed in the late 16th century and eventually became somewhat synonymous with religious education (McBrien 1995, 351); since the CCD office was closed in 1974, the more appropriate term is either religious education or faith formation

CLW (Children’s Liturgy of the Word) – catechists lead a separate Liturgy of the Word with children, apart from the main assembly, where the readings are adapted to the knowledge and capabilities of young children (Regan 2005, no. 1)

Companion – a person who accompanies another on a journey or who assists another through a certain process; in this manual’s material, a companion is someone who accompanies an individual preparing to receive a sacrament (e.g., a sponsor could be considered a companion for a confirmand)

Discipleship – the practice of following Jesus by women and men of faith

Godparent – an individual who meets certain criteria (see Policy 302) and assists a catechumen or the parents of a child who is being baptized. The godparent’s responsibilities include showing the catechumens how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, bearing witness, and guiding the catechumens’ progress in the baptismal life (International Commission on English in the Liturgy 1988, no. 11).

Lectio divina – a meditative reading of Sacred Scripture that leads to prayer

Mystagogia/Mystagogy – the RCIA period directly after the Easter Vigil where those who were initiated into the Church are instructed on how to live as a Christian; this period typically concludes at Pentecost

Neophyte – the newly baptized

PCL (Parish Catechetical Leader) – a person who organizes and directs the program of lifelong faith formation for all parishioners under the direction of the pastor and in collaboration with the parish staff

Proximal year – the year closest to an event; when preparing to receive a sacrament, the year of catechesis closest to the celebration of the sacrament may be referred to as the proximal year

Proxy – a person authorized to act for another

Quinceaños – a traditional celebration of life and gratitude to God on the occasion of the fifteenth birthday of a young Hispanic man/woman

RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Rite – a repetitive ceremonial activity with fixed rules or a particular ritual ceremony like the Rite of Baptism (McBrien 1995, 1118)

Rite for the Call to Continuing Conversion – a rite in the RCIA process celebrated at the beginning of Lent for candidates to declare their intention to complete their Christian initiation

Rite of Acceptance – first rite in the RCIA process where individuals declare their intention to join the Catholic Church

Rite of Election – a rite in the RCIA process celebrated at the beginning of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment; this rite is celebrated by catechumens

Rite of Welcoming – a rite that welcomes those who are preparing to complete their Initiation into the Catholic Church through the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist

Sponsor – a person who acts as a witness for an individual who receives the Sacrament of Confirmation

USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) – the episcopal conference of the United States and the US Virgin Islands whose purpose is to address pastoral issues in these geographic areas (McBrien 1995, 473)

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