

How to Understand and Use the Diocesan Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines

This curriculum has been designed to be conformity with the 2005 *National Directory for Catechesis*.

“Every theme covered by formation should feed, in the first place, the faith of the catechist. It is true that catechists catechize others by firstly catechizing themselves.”¹

This catechetical curriculum has been designed for two purposes. First, to guide the catechists to understand what must be taught at each grade level. Secondly, it has been specifically designed to help the catechist grow in the knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith, thus continuing to educate them in their ongoing faith formation.

This curriculum precedes the use of the textbook. This curriculum uses both a ‘Scope and Sequence’ method and within that method there are segments of a ‘spiral’ method.

Scope and Sequence

This method refers to the arrangement of age appropriate topics for each year. Thus each grade level has a difference goal, but one builds upon the other.

Kindergarten: God the Creator and Holy Family

Grade One: God gives His Son, Jesus

Grade Two: Preparation for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist

Grade Three: Understanding the Church

Grade Four: The Ten Commandments

Grade Five: The Seven Sacraments

Grade Six: The Old Testament

Grade Seven: Three units: three of the tasks of Catechesis:

- Christological approach to New Testament (Creed)
(following Old Testament in Grade Six)

- Morality
- Prayer

Grade Eight: Three units: the other three of the six tasks of Catechesis:

- Confirmation Preparation (Sacraments)
- Community
- Missionary Spirit and Church History

(In Grade Seven or Eight, depending upon the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation several units may need to be adjusted. However, it is important not to change the order of Christology and Morality in Grade Seven.)

It is encouraged that a textbook also be used. The text is considered to be a tool used to teach the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines. The Diocese has approved six textbook series which follow the ‘Scope and Sequence’ method. In the Kindergarten through Grade Six levels of these textbooks all six tasks are included at each grade level. For Junior High, the six tasks are presented as individual units and two texts are recommended to be used. All of these textbooks have been approved by the Ad Hoc Committee of the USCCB which oversees textbooks in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

How to Teach the Kindergarten to Grade Six Curricula Utilizing the Six Tasks at Each Grade Level

It must always be remembered that the six tasks do not exist individually in isolation. They find a unity in how Jesus formed His disciples.² This explanation is found on the cover page of the guidelines for each grade level.

Another way to view these tasks is to look at the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Task One is Pillar One: The Creed

Task Two is Pillar Two: Liturgy and Sacraments

Task Three is Pillar Three: Moral Life in Christ

Task Four is Pillar Four: Prayer

Task Five and Six: Community and Missionary Spirit flow from our Baptism. Baptism calls us to holiness of life and service to others.

We become holy through prayer and our participation in the sacramental life of the Church, the community of God's people. One important way we overcome any sinful tendencies in our lives is to grow toward the fullness of love in community. Charity or love, the greatest of the three Theological Virtues, is developed through our dispositions and choices of how we treat all with whom we come in contact.

How are the six tasks used at each grade level?

A specific example will allow us to see how to use the Kindergarten through Grade Six curricula. Consider grade four. This grade level focuses on the Ten Commandments. Thus, Task Three - Moral Life in Christ - will be the focus task of the year. However, Task One should be reviewed several times throughout the year. A teacher/catechist could be creative and teach a few components now and then during the course of a class period. The *Information for Growth* assessment over the past 10 years indicates new teachers/catechists are weak in their understanding of the Creed. This is a chance for teachers/catechists to continue their ongoing formation by learning more about the Creed. At every grade level the liturgical year is relevant. Thus, Task Two helps a teacher/catechist bring to life the various times of the Liturgical year. Students should know when Advent and Lent are happening. The Liturgical year focuses on the life of Christ through Scripture and the celebration of His life events.

Students in both parish and school catechesis should be given the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Eucharist twice a year. Prior to receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, review with the students how to examine their conscience and the actions necessary for a proper confession. In the same way, a couple times a year, prior to participating in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, review major teachings such as the Liturgy of the Word, the actions of the priest through which God becomes truly present in the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ.

Once the sacraments are taught in grade two, the content of Task Two is repeated each year up to grade six. This is known as the 'spiral' method; a repetition of highly important teachings of the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church and other important doctrines.

The Fourth Task of Prayer is taught at various times of the year depending on the wisdom of the teacher/catechist. Each class session should begin and end with prayer. This will provide ample opportunity for students to strengthen their individual prayer lives. Important teachings about prayer are contained in this task at each grade level.

The Community and Missionary Tasks are *daily lived experiences* in the classroom, at home, at play. They flow from our Baptismal call to holiness and a missionary spirit. We come to a growth in holiness by allowing God's life of

grace to continually grow in us. However, holiness is lived out in community, family, classroom, playground, etc. In the classroom, each child has dignity before God. No child should ever experience any type of alienation. The current problem of bullying must never be tolerated. These types of issues must be corrected so that each child feels loved and accepted. The catechist thus becomes an extension of Christ's love for each child. The community task is thus lived each day through interpersonal interaction.

The Missionary Task is also lived throughout the year. Having a missionary project once or twice a year and praying for missionaries in foreign lands are ways of living the Missionary Task. Young people must learn to give of themselves in various ways. This will assist them in overcoming tendencies to selfishness and realize they are called to help the many forms of poverty, both material and spiritual. Service to and for others always helps student to think beyond themselves, thus helping students move toward spiritual maturity.

Following the presented plan of action, the tasks work together to be unified in Christ's wisdom, how He formed His disciples. The teacher/catechist should never omit one of the six tasks for a lack of time. All six tasks should be interwoven during the year to fully form each child in the faith.

Using the References

One way in which the Office of Catechesis has attempted to assist all teachers/catechists in teaching the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines is through the references and suggested activities. Each statement in the content of the curriculum has been correlated to the appropriate paragraph in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Compendium to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and/or Sacred Scripture. The *Catechism* and *Compendium* are primarily intended for your own personal formation as a teacher/catechist as most of the material in these resources is too complicated for young students to understand. The Sacred Scripture citations are intended to be used for your formation but also occasionally to be read in class when appropriate. Sacred Scripture is the very Word of God and children should be exposed to it frequently. There are many stories in the Sacred Scriptures that are appropriate for even very young children, for example: the creation story, Noah's ark, and Christ's birth, His public life, and His sufferings death and resurrection.

On the far right side of the curriculum we have included activities under the heading "Living the Christian Faith." These activities, reflections and discussions have been included to give you, the teacher/catechist, a starting point for teaching the material presented in the curriculum. It is essential that students be to apply what they have learned in order for the material to become more than mere facts. Educational theory has shown that activities, reflections and discussion are excellent ways to help students begin to apply what they have encountered in the classroom. Please use these activities as they are written or alter them slightly to meet the needs of your students. Textbooks

and teachers manuals also provide additional activities. The ultimate goal is to engage both the mind and the heart of the learner.

In God's Image

Each grade level of the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines contains a section entitled, “In God’s Image.” Each person is created in the very image of God Himself. This gives each person dignity beyond compare. In an era when the dignity of the human person is often in question it is very important to stress to students the importance of recognizing the dignity of each and every human person. This lesson will not only enhance their spirituality and bring them into closer union with Christ but it will also teach them valuable lessons about interacting with those around them.

Understanding the Catholic Church

As Catholics, we are blessed to have a Church that is both a human and divine institution. There are many aspects of our Church that are very important to understand. This section aims to teach the students about the structure of the Catholic Church. Each grade level discusses a different aspect of the structure of the Catholic Church.

Inculturation

The section entitled “Inculturation” is very important to students’ growing awareness of themselves as members of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Faith is lived in a universal Church which is able to maintain the foundational Truths of the Faith while at the same time adapting and respecting various expressions of culture and time periods. There are many ways in which the Catholic Faith adapts to the religious tradition of its peoples; without losing Catholic identity the Church respects cultural diversity. In this section four ways are discussed: Saints from various cultures and time periods, Traditions and Devotions, Prayers, and Signs and Symbols. These examples of inculturation are presented so as to draw the students deeper into their faith by appealing to them from their own culture and time.

Using the Vocabulary

In the *National Directory for Catechesis* the Bishops of the United States explain that one of the important, “criterion for the presentation of the Christian message is that it should foster a common language of the faith so that it may be proclaimed, celebrated, lived, and prayed in words familiar to all.”³ To that end, the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines place an emphasis on vocabulary. At each grade level the vocabulary words are bolded the

first time they appear in the content of the curriculum to aid you, the teacher/catechist, in finding these words. At the end of the Kindergarten and Grade One curricula there is a chart which lists all the words that should be taught during those grades. At the end of the Grade Two through Grade Six curricula there are two charts. The first chart lists the vocabulary words which are new to the grade level. The second chart is a list of words that should be actively reviewed with the students each year. Many if not all the review words can be found in the content of the curriculum.

The Office of Catechesis has created a glossary of Catechetical Curriculum Guideline vocabulary words to aid teachers/catechists. These definitions are meant primarily for the teacher/catechist to gain a deeper understanding of each term. However, if the teacher/catechist would like to have the students memorize the definitions of certain words these definitions may be used. If necessary, the definitions may be either simplified or expanded to meet the needs of the grade level and reading level of the students. Unless a child understands the vocabulary they will not understand the truth of the Faith.

Thus, vocabulary is essential to the understanding of the Faith. Teachers/Catechists should not be intimidated by vocabulary since many words become meaningful as lessons are taught. Creative approaches can be used to simplify the learning of more difficult words. Some catechists have a section in the classroom where difficult words are placed to be view and reviewed. Others have a box which contains individual papers with difficult words. Students can be involved by periodically drawing words and quizzing one another or acting out the meaning of the word.

How to Teach the Grade Seven and Eight Curricula Utilizing the Six Tasks at Each Grade Level

How are the six tasks used in Junior High?

Unlike the Kindergarten through Grade Six curricula, the Junior High Curriculum approaches the tasks differently. This has been done in recognition of the amount of material that needs to be presented at these levels. Together Grade Seven and Grade Eight cover all six tasks. Each task is designed to be presented as an individual unit.

Recognizing that students in parishes and schools in the Diocese of Fort Wayne ~ South Bend receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in either Grade Seven or Grade Eight, there are two different ways the units can be arranged so that the Sacrament of Confirmation will be taught prior to its celebration in the parish.

Model 1: When Confirmation is received in Grade Seven

Grade Seven

- Unit 1: Task One – The Person of Christ
- Unit 2: Task Two – Confirmation
- Unit 3: Task Three – Morality

Grade Eight

- Unit 4: Task Four – Prayer
- Unit 5: Task Five – Community Life
- Unit 6: Task Six – Missionary Spirit

Model 2: When Confirmation is received in Grade Eight

Grade Seven

- Unit 1: Task One – The Person of Christ
- Unit 2: Task Three – Morality
- Unit 3: Task Five – Prayer

Grade Eight

- Unit 4: Task Four – Community Life
- Unit 5: Task Two – Confirmation
- Unit 6: Task Six – Missionary Spirit

The First Task, which focuses upon knowledge of the faith, presents an in depth study of the person of Christ. This unit most naturally should be taught as the first unit in Grade Seven as it continues the story of Salvation History from the Grade Six study of the Old Testament. In Appendix I developed lessons can be found for this unit. The method employed in Christology is the deductive method in which the doctrine is derived from experiences presented in the Christology curriculum.

The Second Task, which promotes a deepening understanding of the liturgy and the sacraments, focuses upon the Sacrament of Confirmation. This unit is crafted so that it can be taught in the year that the students are to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. The unit on Confirmation reviews all seven sacraments focusing particularly on the Sacraments of Initiation. It also includes a morality review.

The Third Task, which focuses on moral formation in Christ, examines the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes as a foundation for the moral life. This unit should be taught in Grade Seven sometime after the unit on the Person of

Christ. A model lesson plan for this unit can be found on the diocesan website. This would use the inductive method in which the doctrine is taught and then applied to life.

The Fourth Task, which focuses on praying with Christ, introduces students to a personal prayer life and teaches many different ways to pray. This unit has also been crafted so that it can be taught in Grade Seven or Grade Eight. Catechesis in prayer is specifically taught during this unit but should also be included in year round. Each classroom session should begin and end with prayer.

The Fifth Task, which focuses on the community of faith, develops a rich understanding of the Communion of Saints. This Task looks at the community of faith on earth by looking at the vocation of each person as a call from Christ, and reviews the doctrines of heaven, hell and purgatory. The Community Life unit should be covered in Grade Eight but a sense of community should be fostered year round.

The Sixth Task, which focuses on the missionary spirit, is presented in the backdrop of Church History. In this unit, at the end of Grade Eight, students are encouraged to gain a sense of Church History. However, memorizing dates and events is not necessary. Rather, the historical aspect has been presented to put the saints and their missionary spirit in context relative to their historical time. A great example of this integration of Church History can be found in the movie “Brother Sun and Sister Moon” which portrays St. Francis of Assisi interacting within his historical situation of the Crusades. St. Francis never became a knight but his conversion to Christ and help of the poor certainly helped to win souls.

Following the presented plan of action, the tasks work together to be unified in Christ’s wisdom, how He formed His disciples. The teacher/catechist should never omit one of the six tasks for a lack of time. All six tasks should be interwoven during Grade Seven and Eight to create a complete picture of the faith.

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¹ *General Directory of Catechesis*, #239

² *National Directory for Catechesis*, #20

³ *National Directory for Catechesis*, #25I

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