

The Institute for Catechesis and Formation

Course Outline for Instructors



CAT II – Classroom Applications for Catechists

The history of Christianity – of the Catholic Church – is one of encounter with Christ, practice of the Faith, and a Tradition that has been passed on through the generations. The Gospel itself was first preached before any words were written. Now we have the richness of Scripture, Church teaching, and a deposit of Faith that nourishes us and draws us closer to God. Our Faith continues to be passed on through word and example in our families, our worship, and in through the efforts and dedication of catechists. This course will define the role of the catechist and provide him/her with the tools necessary to continue the tradition of handing on the Faith to our children. The course will address expectations and methods of communication; how to approach curriculum and the Diocesan guidelines for what is taught at each grade level; and practical experience in lesson planning, using the textbook, and presenting the material in a developmentally and age appropriate manner.

Texts: Handouts provided

Supplemental Reading/Additional Resources:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):

<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>

The Bible: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>

Catechesi tradendae, Catechesis in our time, Bl. Pope John Paul II (CT)

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html

Week 1: The Catechist's role in handing on the Faith – and getting started

The Role of the Catechist

What is *catechesis*? (CCC 4-7)

"Catechesis is an *education in the faith* of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life." CCC 5 (cf. CT 18)

Through *catechesis* we hand on the Faith, but it is more than imparting *intellectual knowledge*. Catechesis must include a *genuine love for and seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ*.

Who is a catechist?

In-Class exercise: Give the students a few minutes to consider the role of the catechist – from their personal experience, or if they are new to the program, their perceptions of what that role should be. Share with the group.

Becoming a catechist – taking on the shared responsibility of teaching children about the Faith – is a response to a call: from the pastor, who has identified you as someone with whom to entrust the spiritual care of children; and from God, who calls each one of us to be witnesses to Him and to the Faith, *by virtue of our baptism*. (CCC 1533, 2145)

Basic roles of a catechist –

- Be a committed witness to the Faith and participant in the life of the Church (Liturgy, Sacraments, acts of charity, etc.)
- Be a Christ-like example
- Teach the precepts of the Catholic Faith
- Communicate the message of the Gospel
- Be present to the children being taught and treat them with love, respecting their personal dignity, and encouraging their childlike wonder in contemplating God's love for them (cf. Mt 19:13-14)
- Engage parents and invite them into greater participation in catechizing their children. Be an example of Christ's love for them and encourage them to grow in their own faith
- Increase one's knowledge of the faith through personal study, faith formation opportunities (at the parish or courses offered by the Diocese), and recognizing the pastor as a teacher and resource

- To pray, participate in the Sacraments (especially Reconciliation and Eucharist), and do what is necessary to grow in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ

In-Class exercise: Ask the catechists to recall and share their favorite CCD/PREP story.

Faith and Prayer Development and the Catechist

In order to hand on the Faith as a catechist, it is important to not only maintain one's own spiritual life, but continue to grow in relationship with Christ. If you have a relationship with Christ that is *nourished* by prayer and the Sacraments, and developed with *intention* and *perseverance*, you will convey Christ's love and an enthusiasm for Him among your students.

- Attend Mass weekly – and more often, if possible – to be fed by God's Word and His Body and Blood
- Pray – daily. Use the acronym ACTS as a reminder: **A**doration, **C**ontrition, **T**hanksgiving, **S**upplication
- Engage in acts of charity and hospitality
- Pray for your students and their families, that God will open their hearts to Him and that they will be transformed by His love

Communication and the Catechist

In your role as catechist *communication* is very important.

- The catechist communicates the Good News of Jesus Christ to his/her students, to their families, and to everyone with whom he/she comes into contact
- The catechist communicates with the parents of his/her students, sharing what is being taught in class, discussing any difficulties or issues that must be brought to parents' attention and the child's positive learning experiences each week.
- The catechist communicates with the pastor and Director of Religious Education to learn what is expected of him/her as a catechist in that particular parish; to make known any issues that must be addressed; to relay the positive learning experiences occurring in the class; and to seek the support and resources necessary to provide solid, quality and loving religious education to the students.

In-Class exercise: Ask the catechists to think about their communication strengths and how they can be applied to the situations mentioned above. Next, ask them to think about which circumstances would pose a challenge for them. Have the catechists share with each other, and then work as a group to find helpful communication solutions.

Instructor's Note: This section on the importance of communication is a good time to discuss with the catechists the expectations – and challenges – they may face in their specific situations. This is a delicate matter, since DRE's, and ultimately pastors, are responsible for assuring that the religious education of children is carried out in the parish. Discussion should be focused on positive means of communicating with pastors and DRE's, and tools to help catechists foster a spirit of cooperation with those responsible for managing parish religious education programs.

Communicating with parents – obstacles and opportunities

Instructor's Note: This is an important opportunity to share, through group discussion – the kinds of obstacles catechists face when speaking to parents – as well as the opportunities that can be created for better understanding and cooperation.

Some of the obstacles that catechists face may be internal to them: fear of confrontation, lack of confidence, lack of a clear understanding of their role

Some obstacles may be a result of the attitude or approach of the parents – lack of involvement in the life of the parish (including attending weekly Mass); a poor understanding of the purpose of religious instruction in the parish; lack of understanding of their role as primary religious educators in the home

When engaging parents, the catechist should –

- Be respectful
- Be positive
- Be encouraging
- Be proactive
- Be cooperative
- Develop a plan for effective and positive communication

Helpful resources: <http://catholicblogger1.blogspot.com/2011/09/parent-teacher-communication.html>

<http://www.catholicteacher.com/blog/archives/23-Parents-as-Partners-Effective-Strategies-for-Catholic-Teachers.html>

http://www.catholicteacher.com/archive/articles_view.php?article_id=2687

In-Class exercise: Discuss some positive ways to communicate with parents. Brainstorm ideas in small groups, and then come together in the larger group to share. These ideas can become part of a Catechist's Resource developed during this course.

Encouraging parental involvement

Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators.

Declaration on Christian Education, Pope Paul VI

Some suggestions for inviting parents' participation in religious education -

- Write a letter of introduction to parents at the beginning of the year. Introduce yourself, giving a brief overview of what the children will learn, and invite their participation in the program. Let them know that you are available to answer questions and to be a resource for them.
- Send weekly notes home with each child explaining what was taught, and an action item for them to implement together in the coming week
- Share positive experiences their child has had in class. Example, "John was the first one to go to the prayer corner, fold his hands and be ready for Opening Prayer."
- Encourage the students to share what they have learned in class with their family – parents, brothers and sisters, etc.

Faith Development

An introduction to the Religious Education Guidelines

In 2009 the Diocese of Allentown introduced Religious Education Guidelines for elementary schools and parish religious education programs. These Guidelines were designed to help religious education instructors in developing lessons appropriate to the age and developmental capabilities of each grade level. The Guidelines are a valuable resource to be used in conjunction with the particular text used in the parish.

Looking at the Guidelines – Grade levels 1-8

Priority topics

Standards – Creed, Sacraments, Morality, and prayer

Catechism and Scripture references

- *Suggestions for Faith Development and Faith Journey at each grade level are found in the Appendix*

Applying the Guidelines

Definitions

Cognitive – objectives related to the act or process of knowing, perceiving, and remembering.

Example: know the two forms of Liturgical prayer – the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours

Affective – objectives related to moods, feelings, and attitudes. *Example: grow in appreciation for prayer as an essential way of developing our relationship with God.*

Behavioral – objectives related to the manner in which one behaves or what a student can do at the end of a lesson. *Example: recite from memory the prayers for this grade level.*

- *For an example of development in **Prayer** through the grade levels (standards and the cognitive, affective and behavioral applications) see the Appendix*

Homework –

Ask the catechists to bring a copy of the teacher’s edition of the textbook used in each of their parishes to the next class. Catechists should also bring a practical classroom idea to share with the group (ex. a prayer activity, game, music activity, etc.) as well as a sample lesson plan. These ideas will become a resource created by the catechists to share with each other.

Week 2: Planning lessons, engaging students and communicating the Faith

The second half of this course is a “working session” to give catechists practical experience working with the Diocesan Guidelines, learning how to approach the textbook, and developing lesson plans.

Designing instruction

Planning and preparation –

- Catechist knows the subject he/she is teaching
- Catechist knows the typical patterns of student learning
- Catechist sets appropriate learning expectations
- Catechist knows where to find resources and how to utilize them
- Catechist plans lessons that are organized
- Catechist engages in fair and meaningful evaluation of students

Lesson Planning

1. Determine the Objectives
 - Objectives should be clear and concise. *Example – The students will be able to...*
 - Aim of the lesson – at the end of the lesson, what do I want my students to know and be able to do?
2. Consider the parts of the lesson
 - Introduction – motivation, focus, human experience
 - Through – message, discovery, learning activities
 - Closure – response, beyond/review/summary
3. Self-evaluation
 - After the lesson is over, write your own comments about how it went
 - What went well?
 - What needs to be changed
 - Did the students accomplish what I “aimed” for them to learn?
 - Make adjustments for the next class

Constructing a Lesson Plan

Instructor’s Note: A sufficient amount of time should be devoted to practicing lesson plan design. Break students into working groups – as much as possible by grade level taught – and ask them to work on developing a lesson based on a specific chapter of their text. Students should utilize the Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines in developing their plans.

Classroom Management

For the first step toward Wisdom is an earnest desire for discipline. Ws 6:17

For the catechist –

- Establish your expectations for conduct in the classroom – your students’ and your own
- Be consistent and clear; follow through
- Model the behavior you would like to see in your students
- Treat students with respect and love
- Avoid angry responses. Watch your language!
- Focus on *behavior*, not persons
- Never use ridicule
- Be understanding, yet firm
- If a classroom situation is getting out of hand, find help from another teacher or from the DRE/CRE

For the students –

- Create a list of classroom rules at the beginning of the year. Make the list simple and concise, and ask the students for their input as well. Creating the list together can be a learning opportunity for the students, and allows them to become “invested” in establishing the rules and living by them
- Give a clear explanation of what each of your classroom rules entails, giving examples, and asking students for their own
- Reinforce good behavior

Helpful resources: http://www.catholicteacher.com/archive/articles_view.php?article_id=2282

In-Class exercise: Discuss some positive ways to manage classroom behavior, especially when discipline problems arise. Brainstorm ideas in small groups, and then come together in the larger group to share for the Catechist’s Resource developed during this course.

➤ ***Instructor’s note: below are some additional suggestions to share/discuss:***

Six Ways to Manage your Classroom –

1. Understand student behavior and develop a system for managing students
2. Clearly define and teach your classroom rules and transitional procedures
3. Model and practice the desired behavior
4. Develop intervention strategies

5. Develop a climate of mutual respect
6. Establish effective consequences

Managing Student Behavior –

- Stop what you're doing and address the student. Quietly demand the student give their undivided attention
- Very explicitly, inform the student that his/her behavior is inappropriate. Focus on the behavior and its effects, not on the child's personhood
- Explain the consequences of continued misbehavior
- Have the student report back (in his/her own words) what you've said and the consequences if the behavior continues

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations... Mt 28:19

Final thoughts –

- Read and prepare each lesson prior to the next class meeting
- Make an effort to learn each student's name as quickly as possible. Greet each one by name when they arrive for class
- Maintain eye contact
- Show patience as students struggle to put ideas into words
- Think about each student and attempt to make connections with his/her life
- Before the students arrive, take a moment for personal prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your lesson and supply the words He wishes you to speak