

GUIDELINES FOR MINISTERING TO ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN

PHILOSOPHY

The GDC states that “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ” (#80). We must provide people with experiences of the sacred and help them to identify the sacred in their own lives. Catechesis is accomplished by varied, interconnected tasks that are inspired by Jesus’ example in forming his disciples. The six tasks of catechesis as outlined in the NDC are:

Catechesis...

1. promotes knowledge of the faith
2. promotes knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments
3. promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ
4. teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ
5. prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the church
6. promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society (pg. 60-62)

These tasks are imparted through individual relationships, the community of faith, liturgy, instruction, experiential learning, ritual, prayer, and outreach to the global community. “Continuing education in the faith is a question which concerns the whole community; catechesis, therefore is an educational activity which arises from the particular responsibilities of every member of the community, in a rich context of relationships” (GDC #220). Nothing can replace the experience of faith taught and practiced in the household. “Parents are catechists precisely because they are parents” (NDC pg, 203). Therefore central to elementary catechesis is the faith development of the entire household.

GOALS

- Through forming a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, children build a strong foundation for lifelong discipleship.
- It is essential that elementary programs create a nurturing community for households to grow in faith providing opportunities for conversion and formation not only for the child but for the entire household.
- Through catechesis, all should be encouraged to know and respect other cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. Catechetical materials should accommodate cultural, racial, and ethnic pluralism, the concerns of particular groups, and persons with special needs.
- “Persons with disabilities should be integrated into ordinary catechetical programs as much as possible” (NDC 207)

- As children mature, ongoing catechesis is needed to help them observe, explore, interpret and judge their experiences, ascribe Christian meaning to their lives, and act according to the norms of faith and love.
- The truths of our faith should be presented at every age to allow for an ever deepening understanding and growth in lived faith.
- A correct understanding of experiential learning includes recognition that the entire faith community is an important part of the experience of the child: households, catechists and faith community all have essential roles in the catechesis of the young.

PROGRAM

Models

Preparation is a necessary part of any catechetical model. Models for catechesis should flow directly from the specific catechetical needs of the parish community and aim to achieve the six stated tasks of catechesis. Catechetical preparation should include:

- Examining the social, cultural, ethnic and religious situation of the parish, as these change over time.
- Building awareness that liturgy is the source and summit of parish life
- "...[Methodology seeks] to bring about a conversion to Christ that leads to a profession of faith in a Triune God and a genuine personal surrender to him. It helps believers to become disciples and discern the vocation in which God is calling them" (NDC pg. 94)
- A focus on the formation of the entire household

In designing a program based on the catechetical needs of a parish and the joint leadership and vision of the pastor and catechetical team, some possibilities include:

Weekly formation sessions	Community service opportunities
Lectionary based catechesis	Ritual celebrations of liturgical seasons
Retreats	Prayer services
Home based catechesis	Special Mass celebrations
Intergenerational assemblies	Reconciliation services
Faith sharing	Vacation Bible school
Parent meetings	Bible study
Sacramental preparation	Small Christian communities
Family nights	Enrichment for catechists

Catechetical Materials

Catechetical materials are adapted to the stages of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical development. Properly sequenced programs present the Christian message, and the

history of the Church's response to it, in a manner appropriate to each age level. Using appropriate media and methodology, these programs should give satisfactory emphasis to:

1. doctrine
2. moral content
3. efforts to develop community
4. worship
5. service of the faith community and society at large.

The Vatican and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approve textbooks for appropriate use of the catechism. The Los Angeles Archdiocesan Elementary Commission reviews textbooks based on four categories: content, process/activities, catechist formation/resources, and layout/look of the book. For more information visit the [Helpful Hints When Choosing a Textbook Series](#) and [Recommended Text List](#).

Learning Environment

“Organization for catechesis is person centered” (NDC pg. 246). It is critical that learning environments are provided to help children think, question and explore new ways of understanding their faith and building a relationship with God. This requires us to be aware of the many different way in which our children learn. As human beings we are continuously growing and developing. Some of these ways include “how we build knowledge and construct meaning, how we grow psychologically and in our ability to relate to others, and how we grow in our ability to think and act morally... Understanding the cognitive ability of our learners will help us to respond to their developmental needs in appropriate ways that can nourish their growth in faith” ([Echoes of Faith: Introduction to the Learner](#)). A well planned and executed lesson includes a clear objective, knowledge of your learners and their age appropriate abilities, a variety of activities that meet the needs of different learning styles, well timed activities, and new ways of approaching and relating faith concepts to your learners lived realities. The use of audio and visual aids such as art, music, movement, storytelling and spontaneous prayer are encouraged.

Formation of Catechists

The formation of catechists is the responsibility of the parish catechetical leadership and the whole community. Catechist formation should develop the human, spiritual and apostolic qualities of the catechist. “Parish-centered programs for catechists remind them as catechists that their calling as catechists come from the Church, that they are sent by the Church, and that they hand on the faith of the Church” (NDC pg. 241-242). Catechists are encouraged to complete Basic Certification to become a Certified Catechist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and maintain their certification through ongoing formation. Basic Certification includes *Theological Phase* – participation in a ministry formation center; *Applications Phase* – Specialization in Elementary; *Practicum Phase* – observations, evaluations and a final interview. To renew certification catechists must continue to attend formation opportunities. See Formation guidelines for more information.

Sacramental Preparation for Reconciliation and Eucharist

Sacramental preparation for baptized children assumes that the child has begun a journey of discipleship: coming to know, believe and become the person of Jesus in the world. This relationship is strengthened by celebrating God's mercy, forgiveness and the gift of Jesus in the form of bread and wine.

With a strong belief in lifelong faith formation, a minimum of two consecutive years of catechetical formation is required for the reception of the sacraments. Readiness, not chronological age or school grade will determine a child's preparedness to encounter Christ in a sacramental celebration. This decision of readiness rests with the parents and the child in dialogue with the catechist, the parish priest and the catechetical leadership of the parish. This process affirms the fact that the child celebrating the sacraments is involved communally as well as individually.

Parents/guardians have a right and duty to be intimately involved in the preparation of their children for the sacraments. It is the role of the parish to help parents/guardians to grow in their understanding and appreciation of the sacraments in order to be able to participate readily in catechizing their children. We must affirm the role of parents as primary religious educators and include the whole parish community in the initiation of members into the fullness of the Catholic tradition. We must meet people where they are providing opportunities for conversation and conversion where they can make connections between life and faith. All sacraments are parish centered celebrations of God's presence among us.

Preparation Specific to the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Christ's healing and reconciling ministry is carried on in the church. God's unconditional love and mercy is offered through the sacrament of reconciliation. By the sacrament of reconciliation we express the desire to be at peace with God and with our brothers and sisters. "Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation" (NCD no. 126). Catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation should help children to:

- acknowledge God's unconditional love and mercy for us
- That they can turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation at any time on their faith journey
- Through conscious formation, recognize the presence of good and evil in the world, their personal capacity for both, and develop skill for the discernment of good moral choices.
- Recognize that their sins create a disconnect in their relationship with God and others.
- The sacrament strengthens them to face the consequences of their sin.
- Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and other close to them, but from God
- Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation
- Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation

“Parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness and conversion” (NDC page 135).

“...Parents should be invited in the preparation of their children for this sacrament for they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continued growth in the understanding of God’s mercy and love. (NDC 135)”

“Conversion is a life-long process, catechesis for the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year (NDC pg. 136).”

Preparation Specific to the Sacrament of Eucharist

“Since the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, catechesis for the Eucharist recognizes it as the heart of Christian life for the whole church (NDC pg. 124)”.

Catechesis in preparation for the first reception of the Eucharist should:

- Teach that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.
- Teach not only the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on...they can as full members of Christ’s Body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord’s table and the community of their brothers and sisters.
- Ensure that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity for the Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion.
- Develops in children an understanding of the Father’s love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- That the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and the priest’s words of consecration, spoken first by Jesus during the last supper.
- Teaches that the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ and that what appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body.
- Teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread
- Teaches the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine
- Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass
- Helps children to receive Christ’s Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner

As with Reconciliation, parents and parish catechetical leader together with the pastor are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. “Parents have the right and duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion. The catechesis offered should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.” (NDC pg. 127)

Children need to be prepared for First Eucharist with an understanding that they will eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. Pastors are encouraged to take seriously the directives of the Bishops of the United States as well as our own Cardinal and offer the cup regularly on Sundays. Thus, all reception of communion under both species will be normative for all.

The Cardinal states in his document on liturgy, *Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass* (Sept. 1997) that "...receiving both the Body and the Blood of Christ is to be the practice of every parish at every Sunday liturgy. Homilists should occasionally make reference to the fullness of the symbol that is extended to every communicant. The words of Jesus are spoken in every Eucharistic Prayer: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it."

Resources

Recommended Text List

The following texts are approved (imprimatur) and recommended (evaluated) for use as curriculum material within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Please keep in mind that recommendation of one text published by a company does not imply recommendation of all their materials. When a new publication appears, Archdiocesan consultation and evaluation should be obtained before adopting a program for use.

The following publisher's series have been evaluated and are acceptable for adoptions as programs for **Parish Religion Programs and Parochial Schools**:

Publisher	Series Title	Grade	Pub. Date	Evaluated
Benziger	<u>Come Follow Me</u>	Grades K-8	1998	1997
	<u>Christ Jesus, the Way</u>	Grades K-6	2003	2002
Loyola University Press	<u>Christ our Life</u>	Grades 1-8	1999	1999
	<u>Finding God</u>	Grades 1-6	2005	2005
Silver Burdett Ginn	<u>Blest Are We</u>	Grades K-6	2002	2001
RCL	<u>Faith First</u>	Grades K-6	2000	1999
	<u>Faith First:</u>	Grades K-8	2006	2006
	<u>Legacy Edition</u>			
Wm. H. Sadlier	<u>Coming to Faith:</u>	Grades K-8	1999	1998
	<u>Keystone Edition</u>			
Harcourt Religion Publishers	<u>We Believe</u>	Grades K-6	2004	2005
	<u>Walking by Faith</u>	Grades 1-6	1999	1998
	<u>Call to Faith</u>	Grades K-6	2005	2005

Since the Catechism of the Catholic Church was published in 1992, many publishers are submitting their materials for review by the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism within the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

If submitted for review, their materials published since 1995 will contain a statement such as the following: *“The Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found this catechetical text to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”*

If you have any further questions regarding Elementary materials please contact the Office of Religious Education (213) 637-7410.

Publishing Company Websites:

Sadlier – www.webelieveweb.com

Harcourt - www.harcourtreligion.com

RCLBenziger/Catechist Magazine - www.rclbenziger.com

Loyola Press - www.loyolapress.org

Group Publishing - www.grouppublishing.com

St. Anthony Messenger Press - <http://catalog.americancatholic.org>

Pflaum - www.plaum.com

Celebrating the Lectionary - www.resourcepublications.com

Group Publishing’s Children’s Ministry Magazine - www.childrensministry.com

Twenty Third Publications - www.twentythirdpublications.com

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops - www.usccb.org

Religion Teacher’s Journal – www.religionteachersjournal.com

Documents

General Directory for Catechesis Congregation for the Clergy, 1997

National Directory for Catechesis United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005