

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

# CATECHIST HANDBOOK

Kindergarten, Grades 1-8,  
RCIC, First Communion Preparation,  
Confirmation Candidates Grades 8-12



SAINT  
MARY

*of the*  
IMMACULATE  
CONCEPTION  
*Roman Catholic Church*

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## **CATECHIST'S PRAYER**

**Lord God, you are the source of all love,  
truth, and goodness.**

**You are the source of my being  
And your Word is the  
true path for my journey.**

**Grant to me the courage  
to live according to your Word.**

**Instill in me,  
through the gift of your Holy Spirit,  
the desire and the wisdom to share  
Your love, your truth, your goodness  
with my students.**

**Help me to use my time  
to better prepare myself  
for this sacred responsibility.**

**For I so need to offer myself  
in your service  
with all of the patience,  
perseverance and love  
that you have first shown to me.**

**I ask no more than this, Lord,  
In the name of your Son  
and my Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

**Jack McBride**

## **WHO IS A CATECHIST?**

Catechist is not a new term. It has its very roots in the Church. It comes from a Greek word meaning, “To teach” or to “inform.” In the times of St. Augustine, the word took on the meaning to resound, to echo, to sing out.

“Next to home and family, the witness of the catechist may be pivotal in every phase of the catechetical process. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, catechists powerfully influence those being catechized by their faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the transparent example of their Christian lives. For catechesis to be effective, the catechist must be fully committed to Jesus Christ. They must firmly believe in his Gospel and its power to transform lives.” *National Directory for Catechesis*, page 101

Catechesis is the process of helping people acquire and deepen Christian faith and identity. This happens thorough initiation rites, prayer, instruction, and formation of conscience. Catechesis includes the message presented and the way in which the message is presented. It has been chosen as the word that best describes the process that includes instruction, but also goes beyond that to commitment, action and involvement. It is a word used almost exclusively by the Catholic community. The four tasks of catechesis are: proclaiming Christ’s message, participating in efforts to build community, leading people to worship and prayer and motivating them to serve others.

Parents, teachers, principals in Catholic schools, directors of religious education and youth ministry, deacons, priests and bishops are all catechists. All of these catechists have their own role and unique responsibilities in helping people acquire and deepen their Christian faith.

Effective catechesis takes place when that catechesis is “permeated by a climate of prayer.” #85) Prayer is a keystone habit in the life of a Catholic. When we establish a climate of prayer in our catechetical settings, we establish a habit that helps other habits to flourish: reverence, respect, compassion, selflessness, and so on.

### **The New Evangelization**

“The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. The focus of the New Evangelization calls all Catholics to be evangelized and then go forth to evangelize. In a special way, the New Evangelization is focused on 're-proposing' the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith. Pope Benedict XVI called for the re-proposing of the Gospel "to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization." The New Evangelization invites each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.” <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/index.cfm>

### **A catechist should have the following personal qualities:**

- Believe deeply in Jesus, the teachings of the Catholic Church and a desire to share that belief with others.
- Be authentic, positive, culturally aware, and alive with the joy that comes from living the Gospel message.
- Give active witness to their faith commitment.

- Have a love for and be sensitive toward the age group they desire to catechize.
- Be open to growth by participating in activities that provide personal and spiritual growth, especially Sunday Mass.
- Special devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist, source of spiritual nourishment for Catholics. Also have a special devotion to Mary, the model for all catechists and the first disciple of Jesus.

### **Prerequisites for Catechesis**

Besides the necessary personal qualities, a catechist should seek to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities needed to proclaim the gospel message effectively. A catechist should have a solid grasp of Catholic Teachngs, culture, doctrine, worship and Scripture. They should also have communication skills, be able to use various methodologies and understand how people grow, mature and learn.

In this era of re-evangelization we are asked to focus on the call to the New Evangelization. We are asked to invite and witness to those who have not yet come to know God, as well as those who have allowed their relation with God to grow cold or seemingly die.

### **Jesus the Teacher**

Jesus' most common title was teacher. In the four gospels, Jesus is addressed or referred to as "teacher" almost fifty times. Jesus communicated the Good News by teaching in the synagogues and by sharing his message wherever groups gathered around him.

How does Jesus teach? Jesus teaches in a relational way or Divine Pedagogy. He comes down to our human level. He tells stories or parables. He uses examples from the experiences of the people He is with and teaches them by the way he lives. As a Catechist, you are following in the footsteps of Jesus, the master teacher.

### **Volunteer Background Check, VIRTUS Seminar and Profession of Faith**

As mandated by the Diocese, paperwork for the volunteer background check must be completed by all volunteers working with children. You will not be able to volunteer unless all paperwork is completed, submitted and approved.

You must also attend a VIRTUS Seminar within 45 days of submitting the paperwork. Please go to [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org) to view dates, locations and to register on line.

You must also make a Profession of Faith on Catechist Sunday. A signed copy of your Profession will be kept on file.

New Catechists are required to attend an orientation session.

### **The Attitude of the Catechist toward the Class**

- Be confident, yet have a humble sense of your mission to Evangelize.
- Be realistic about your abilities, your responsibilities and your limitations as a catechist.
- Be enthusiastic, interested, cheerful and unafraid to show a sense of humor.
- Be open to learn and to grow in your faith from experiences in the classroom and from your students.
- Use pleasant speech and conversational tone.

### **The Attitude of the Catechist toward the Student**

- Be sympathetic and understanding of each student. Treat each student as Jesus would. Incorporate the cultures of the students into catechesis.
- Learn to listen to what each student says, verbally and non-verbally..
- Be fair and treat each student fairly. Do not “pick favorites.”
- Try to understand each student.
- Keep the class moving. Be prepared and have alternate activities ready if you finish early.

### **CATECHIST CERTIFICATION**

#### **Levels of Certification**

The catechist, with assistance from parish and diocesan personnel, achieves a Basic certification (50 hours), then either an Advanced certification (100 hours= Basic Certification + 50 hours) or a renewal of their certification (10 hours). The diocese also provides a Master Catechist program.

Local and diocesan courses, workshops, conferences and online classes are offered to assist catechists in attaining certification. St. Mary's Religious Education Office offers courses each school year in order to help catechists get certified. Catechists should strive to attain certification in a timely manner in order to grow in their faith and to best serve in their ministry.

#### **Applying for Certification**

St. Mary's Religious Education Office will keep track of training hours that are offered through our office. If catechists attend other workshops, classes, etc., please let us know date, time, place, topic, etc. and we will add them to your hours of training. When catechists complete their first 50 hours, the Religious Education Office apply for Basic Certification from the diocese. A certificate is issued by the Diocese of Arlington.

For more information read :

<http://arlingtondiocese.org/religious/documents/FinalGoThereforedatedApril42011.pdf>

Online courses are also available. Visit [www.catholiceducationcenter.com](http://www.catholiceducationcenter.com) <http://www.cdu.edu/>

### **IMPORTANT EVENTS**

Catechists Meeting and VIRTUS Renewal in August or September

Catechetical Sunday and Profession of Faith in September

Parish Volunteers Appreciation Dinner in October

Parish Educators Reception in January

Three Catechists Certification Classes Annually in October, January and February. Dinner is provided before each session.

**See annual calendar for dates.**

## **CATECHIST WEEKLY PROCEDURES**

### **Preparation**

- Pray regularly for guidance from the Holy Spirit for you and your students.
- Read the Teachers' Guide to become familiar with the Week's lesson and objective.
- Spend at least an hour preparing for class.
- Be present for class each week. The students need contact with their catechist to build trust and to appreciate the importance of Religious Education and the joy of being a Catholic.

### **LESSON PLANNING**

On your Schedule of Lessons for the year, lessons are scheduled so we ask that you try to stay on schedule. Our texts present the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church in a variety of teaching methods and are in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. When you skip or omit lessons, the children are deprived. If you do not feel qualified to teach about a particular aspect of the faith, or have difficulty understanding what the lesson plan is trying to communicate, do not skip over the lesson. Instead, please contact the Religious Education office for support.

Your lesson plan binders are yours for the year and are to be returned when classes are over.

We plan and schedule the following activities during class time:

- Opening and Closing prayers
- Confessions during Advent and Lent.
- Formation in Christian Chastity lesson in September.
- Safety Drills
- You may add other activities to the schedule, but complete lesson plans first. Check with DRE before planning other activities.

### **Arrival**

- Please arrive at least fifteen minutes before class begins.
- Pick up your folder in the Parish Life Center office and **immediately read the Catechist Memo**. It contains important information that may affect your class.

### **When Class Begins**

- After the Opening Prayers take attendance and record it on the white attendance sheet in your folder using the following notations:
  - + Denotes Present
  - 0 Denotes Absent
  - ① Denotes Late
- Office volunteers will call the homes of those who are absent so take attendance with accuracy and integrity. Allow fifteen minutes for late arrivals.
- All late arrivals must report to the office to get a late slip. Do not allow late students in the classroom unless they have a late slip.

## **Opening and Closing Prayers**

- Quiet students and ask them to place themselves in the presence of God.
- The Opening and Closings prayers are led over the PA system. Children should participate reverently.
- You may include other prayers, scripture and special intentions.

## **Lesson for the Day**

- Briefly review last week's lessons and concepts.
- Follow the lesson plan for the week.
- Discuss any holy days or saint's feast days for the week.
- Discuss the Mass readings for the upcoming Sunday.

## **Homework**

Homework is optional. You can assign prayers to memorize, a page in their text to complete, on-line exercises or one of the family activities in the text. Be creative and ask them to do a good deed, be nice to a brother or sister, help their parents without being asked, etc.

## **Dismissal**

- Classes end with the Closing Prayer.
- Follow the policy for the dismissal of students.
- Fill out the Catechist Weekly Report.
- Straighten room, pick up trash and turn off lights and fan.
- Return the catechist folder with all the papers removed Except completed Catechist Weekly Report.

## **CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES IN THE CLASSROOM**

The policy is to discipline with love and understanding. **Deal with behavior problems immediately.** Speak to the students about their behavior and, if necessary, inform the DRE or call the parents after class. The DRE can allow you to make this call.

## **SUBSTITUTE CATECHIST PROCEDURE**

Inform the Religious Education office if you need a substitute as soon as possible. The catechist is responsible to submit their lesson plan for the class. If your assistant can substitute for you, ask them, otherwise, we will find a substitute for you. Only the DRE can cancel a class.

## **PROGRESS REPORTS**

Direcives from the Diocese call for specific teachings, doctrine and prayers at each grade level and are available in the Religious Education Office. We adhere to these guidelines and issue Progress Reports in January and May so that parents can determine how their child is doing. If a child has been a problem in class, do not use the Progress Report to inform the parent. Inform parents of behavior issues as they occur. Use the Progress Report to tell parents of improved behavior. Please visit [http://arlingtondiocese.org/religiouised/religious\\_ed.php](http://arlingtondiocese.org/religiouised/religious_ed.php)

## **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

### **Student Illness or Injury**

If a student becomes sick or injured during class, bring her/him to the office or send a note to the office and someone will come to get the child and the parents will be notified. Do not under any circumstances dispense medication to the child even if you know the child and the parent.

The office will not dispense medication for the parents. If a student requires medication during class time; the parent must come to the office to administer the medication.

### **Safety Drill Procedure**

A plan for an emergency exit is posted in your classroom. Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself and your class with the specifics. When a fire drill will be conducted you will be given advance notice.

- Stay calm— students will follow your cue.
- Count students before you leave and take the class list kept in your folder.
- Quietly take the students through the designated exit.
- If you are the last one out, close the door.
- Once outside, line up the students.
- Count the students again.
- The students should be quiet at all times so they can hear instructions.
- Return to the classroom after the all clear signal has been given.
- Count the students once you are back in the classroom.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

Supplies should be requested one week prior to the time you need them.

We stock a variety of colored paper, crayons, markers, scissors and other craft items.

Copy Machine—we can make copies for you if you request them on the back of your Catechist Weekly Report or if you call us at least a day before your class. You may also use the copy machine during the week or before Religious Education class starts.

Bulletin Boards—there are bulletin boards available in the classrooms, do not hang anything on the walls.

### **CATECHIST RESOURCES**

1. Books and videos are available in the Religious Education Resource Room. You may check them out at any time. There is a video list in the back of the Plan Book with descriptions and appropriate grade levels and a list of Catholic web sites.
2. Your Teachers' manual provides substantial information on your grade level. Grades K-8 and have Black-line Masters in your binder. There are also other resources available online at the <http://www.loyolapress.com/christ-our-life-2016.htm> .

St. Mary's Library, which is located in the Parish Office Building on the first floor.

**PLEASE READ THE PARENT HANDBOOK and Visit [www.stmaryfred.org](http://www.stmaryfred.org)**