

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CATECHIST HANDBOOK

Kindergarten, Grades 1-8,
RCIC, Sacramental Prep,
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 through initiation rites, 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.

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

A catechist should have the following personal qualities:

- Believe deeply in Jesus and the teachings of the Catholic Church and desire to share that belief with others.
- Be a positive person, alive with the joy that comes from living the Gospel message.
- Be committed to the teaching mission of the Church.
- 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 Eucharist.
- Special devotion to Mary, the model for all catechists and the first disciples of Jesus. Special devotion also to the Most Holy Eucharist, source of spiritual nourishment for Catholics.

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 did Jesus teach? He told stories or parables. He used examples from the experiences of the people he was with and taught them by the way he lived. Jesus used these teaching methods in his day to communicate his message.

As a Catechist, you are following in the footsteps of Jesus, the master teacher. Use his methods to teach your students.

A Catechist Should Be:

- A practicing model Catholic.
- Willing to live and share their faith, not just teach information.
- Prepared for class every week and follow the curriculum.
- Dress appropriately and arrive at least 15 minutes before class begins.
- Respectful of the students and expect the same from them.

Volunteer Background Check and VIRTUS Seminar

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 six months of the start of classes. Please go to www.virtus.org to view dates, locations and to register on line.

Preparation for Catechesis

Besides the necessary personal qualities, a catechist should seek to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities needed to communicate the gospel message effectively. You should have a solid grasp of Catholic culture, doctrine and worship, familiarity with Scripture, communication skills and the ability to use various methodologies and understand how people grow, mature and learn.

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).

Local and diocesan courses, workshops, conferences and online classes are offered to assist catechists in attaining certification. St. Mary's Religious Education Office will offer courses each school year in order to help you 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 hours that are offered through our office. If you attend other workshops, classes, etc., please let us know date, time, place, topic, etc. When you have completed 50 hours, we will fill out a Catechist Certification Application Form and send it to the diocese. A certificate will be issued by the Diocese of Arlington and we will get it to you.

Online courses are also available. Discuss these with the Religious Education Office and visit www.catholiceducationcenter.com.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Catechist Meeting and Commissioning in September (All are required to attend)

Catechetical Sunday in September

Catechist and Holy Cross Academy Faculty Appreciation Celebration in January

Three Catechist Certification Classes Annually Dinner is provided before the sessions begin.

See annual calendar for dates.

CATECHIST WEEKLY PROCEDURES

Preparation for the Catechist

- In order for the catechist to communicate to their class, they must know their material well.
- Pray regularly for guidance from the Holy Spirit for you and your students.
- Be present for class each week. The students need contact with the catechist to build up their trust and to appreciate the importance of religion class.

The Attitude of the Catechist toward the Class

- Be confident, yet have a humble sense of your mission to speak the Good News.
- 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. Make each one feel important and a part of the group.
- Learn to listen to what each student says, verbally and non-verbally, before, during and after class.
- Be fair and treat each student alike during class. Do not "pick favorites."
- Try to discover each individual's need and work from there.
- Keeps the class moving. Be prepared and have alternate activities ready if you finish early.

LESSON PLANNING

On your calendar, lessons are scheduled for the year and we ask that you try to stay on schedule. Our texts are in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and if you skip

or omit lessons, the children miss the faith and doctrine that is to be taught in each grade level. Remember, everything in our faith is important. 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 DRE 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:

- Confessions during Advent and Lent.
- Formation in Christian Chastity lesson.
- Fire Drill
- 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

- Take attendance and record it on the white attendance sheet in your folder using the following notations:
 - + Denotes Present
 - 0 Denotes Absent
 - L 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 and then hang the attendance sheet on the hook outside the door.
- 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 Prayer

- Quiet students and ask them to place themselves in the presence of God.
- Start with the Sign of the Cross and pray the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary."
- 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 coming week.

Homework

Homework is an option. You can assign prayers to memorize, a page in their text to complete 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

- End your class with the prayer "Act of Contrition."
- 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

It is our policy to discipline with love and understanding. Do not allow a behavior problem to continue, immediately speak to the student about their behavior and, if necessary, inform the DRE who will call the parent. The DRE can allow you to make this call.

SUBSTITUTE CATECHIST PROCEDURE

The catechist should inform the RE Office if they need a substitute as soon as they realize they can not be in class. 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

Directives 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.

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.

Fire 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 to 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 clear signal has been given.
- Recount 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 before class starts. You may also use the copy machine during the week or before R.E. class starts.

Bulletin Boards—there are bulletin boards available in some of the classrooms in the Parish Life Center and the JP II House for you to use. Do not hang anything on the wall or in classrooms.

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 black binder with descriptions and appropriate grade levels and a list of Catholic web sites.
2. Your Teachers' manual provides you with substantial information for your grade level. Grades K-8 have a Black-line Master binder with quizzes, tests and additional activities.
3. St. Mary's Library, which is located in the Parish Office Building on the first floor, is open Sunday from 9:30 AM—12:00 Noon.

(For additional information) PLEASE READ THE PARENT HANDBOOK. Also visit www.stmaryfred.org