ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Working with Religion Curriculum Priority Standards in Parish Faith Formation Programs

The Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) recently updated The Archdiocese of Chicago Religion Curriculum Priority Standards for use in all archdiocesan grammar schools beginning Fall 2021. The Office of Lifelong Formation consulted on the development of these standards for Catholic schools, which align with Renew My Church principles for meaningful formation and spiritual growth, as well as with the current *Directory for Catechesis*. That said, we recognize the distinct nature of parish faith formation, particularly as Renew My Church inspires us to continually reimagine parish ministries and how we accompany children and their families in their journeys as missionary disciples.

The goals of the updated Religion Curriculum Standards include: addressing the development of discipleship, practicing of stated values and supporting evangelization efforts in the community, which all directly connect to the goals of Renew My Church. The Religion Curriculum Standards support and enhance formation that "attends to both hearts and minds and is not simply instruction."¹ Therefore, engaging with the standards will ultimately help students and catechists to experience an ongoing encounter with Christ together.

For those catechetical leaders discerning how to best integrate the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards, in letter or in spirit, into their parish based formation of children, the Office of Lifelong Formation offers the following recommendations for *Working with Religion Curriculum Priority Standards in Parish Faith Formation Programs*. While parishes are not required to utilize these standards, this guide is meant to be a useful tool to walk parish leaders and catechists through intentional and deliberate engagement with the standards. We welcome and encourage parish leaders to consider how these religion curriculum standards might be best implemented within the parish context.

This document includes an image and brief description of the relevant OCS religion curriculum documents, accompanying suggestions as you read through each document, reference to the alignment with the *Directory for Catechesis* and detailed action steps for both parish catechetical leaders and catechists.

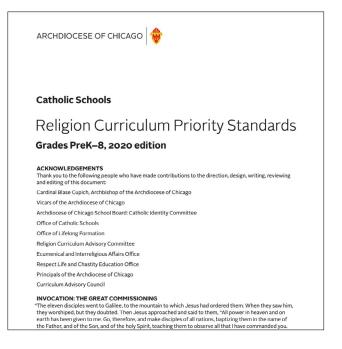
The OCS Religion Curriculum Priority Standards Introduction Document

DESCRIPTION

The OCS Religion Curriculum Priority Standards Introduction document

provides a comprehensive explanation of the history and development of the religion curriculum standards. It also provides a clear description of alignment to Magisterial and Catechetical documents as well as to evangelization and catechesis in the context of Renew My Church.

As such, the priority standards may assist parish faith formation leaders and catechists to focus their faith formation lessons with content from each of the priority standard domains to ensure that the most essential faith concepts are mastered at each grade level.



SUGGESTIONS

When reading through the introductory document, parish leaders are encouraged to pay close attention to the following sections, which each have particular relevance for understanding the value of utilizing curriculum standards in parish faith formation lessons:

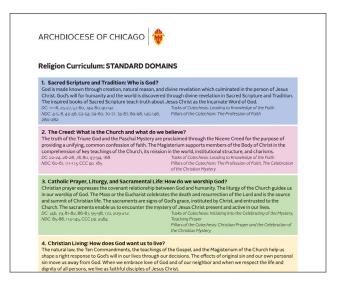
- Definition of a "priority standard" (page 2)
- Catechesis within the Contexts of Evangelization and Renew My Church (pages 2–3)
- How to Use the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards (page 4)

OCS Religion Curriculum: Standard Domains

DESCRIPTION

In the **OCS Religion Curriculum: Standard Domains document**, there are six clearly defined standard domains that are used to organize the grade level priority standards. These domains are based, in part, on the "Six Tasks of Catechesis" as outlined by the USCCB in the National Directory for Catechesis (NDC). The Religion Curriculum Standard Domains include:

- 1. Sacred Scripture and Tradition: Who is God?
- 2. The Creed: What is the Church and what do we believe?



- 3. Catholic Prayer, Liturgy and Sacramental Life: How do we worship God?
- 4. Christian Living: How does God want us to live?
- 5. Living Discipleship: How do we journey towards God in faith and service?
- 6. Religious Diversity and Christian Unity: How do we live well with others?

SUGGESTIONS

When reviewing the Standard Domains, we encourage a deep reading of the domain title, brief description and all of the support references listed with each domain. Parish leaders are encouraged to take special note of the Magisterial and Catechetical documents that are referenced for clear alignment to Catholic teaching and doctrine, particularly:

- The Directory for Catechesis
- The Tasks of Catechesis (with updated titles in the Directory for Catechesis)
- The Pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

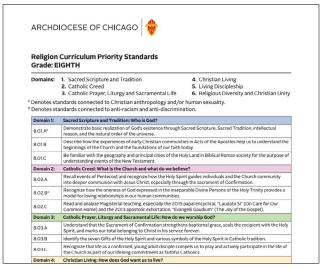
Grade-level Religion Curriculum Priority Standards (Pre K–8)

DESCRIPTION

Three **grade-level priority standards** have been identified for each of the six standard domains for PreK through grade 8. The priority standards for each domain are representative of knowledge and/or skills that are central to the understanding and practice of the Catholic faith. The identified priority standards also serve as building blocks to prepare students for subsequent study and religious formation at the next grade level.

SUGGESTIONS

When reviewing both the standard domains and the religion curriculum priority standards



for each grade level, it is critically important that both catechetical leaders and catechists understand that each priority standard has been written to:

- Provide a brief overview of teaching priorities as a way to help catechists (and parents) understand some foundational aspects of religious instruction.
- Provide clear priorities that should be mastered at each grade level to ensure that students are learning essential elements of the Catholic faith as they progress through faith formation programs.
- Correlate with any standard religion textbook series that is on the **USCCB Conformity Review List.**

 Correlation documents are currently available for: Finding God (Loyola Press), Christ our Life (Loyola Press), Blest Are We (RCL Benziger), Christ in Us & We Live Our Faith (Sadlier), Spirit of Truth (Sophia Institute).

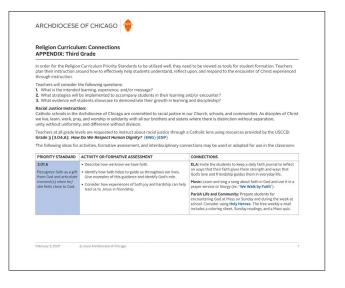
These are examples of how standard religion textbook series correlate with the priority standards. Use of these specific religion curriculum textbooks is not required in the archdiocese. The priority standards will correlate with any religion curriculum that is on the USCCB Conformity Review List.

Important note: The priority standards for each grade level are not inclusive of all material that is presented in faith formation sessions.

Grade-level Religion Curriculum: Connections and Appendices (Pre K–8)

DESCRIPTION

While the priority standards provide a starting point for catechesis and evangelization, the religion curriculum appendix documents for PreK-grade 8 (hyperlinked on page 8) provide ideas and suggestions about how to incorporate the religion standards through interdisciplinary connections at each grade level. The appendices will help catechists to plan their lessons in a way that helps students encounter Christ through a variety of teaching methods. Catechists may also refer to the grade-level appendices for ideas about formative assessments.



SUGGESTIONS

Each of the grade level appendix documents have been written to offer more detailed recommendations and tips for:

- Helping students to understand, reflect upon and respond to instruction that encourages spiritual growth and uses all moments as teachable moments for an encounter with Christ.
- Using priority standards to create engaging lessons for student formation through supplemental ideas for activities, formative assessment and interdisciplinary connections which may be adapted for parish faith formation sessions.
- Engaging students with varied learning styles through suggestions for interdisciplinary connections. While these connections are more applicable for connections with typical school subjects (e.g., math and science), these suggestions will also enhance parish faith formation sessions.

Important note: Religion textbook series that are on the **USCCB Conformity Review List** also include supplemental activity and assessment suggestions. Catechists may not need to look beyond a parish's current catechetical materials for meeting the priority standards in their faith formation classrooms.

Connecting OCS Religion Curriculum Standards with Parish Faith Formation Programs

IMPORTANCE OF ALIGNMENT TO THE DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS

The OCS Religion Curriculum Standard Domains are written in such a way that is aligned to, and supportive of, the goals and tasks of catechesis as outlined in the Directory for Catechesis:

"In order to achieve its goals, catechesis pursues several inter-connected tasks that are inspired by the way in which Jesus formed his disciples: he got them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, taught them to *pray*, proposed to them *gospel values*, initiated them into the life of *communion* with him and among themselves, and into *mission*." (Directory, 79)

"In order to form believers for an integral Christian life, catechesis therefore pursues the following tasks: leading to knowledge of the faith; initiating into the celebration of the mystery; forming for life in Christ; teaching to pray; and introducing to community life." (Directory, 79)

Additionally, the appendices to the religion curriculum standards provide alignment with the Directory for Catechesis by offering supplemental activities and connections that are directly related to:

- **1.** *The sources of catechesis*: Sacred Scripture and Tradition, the Magisterium, the Liturgy, the Testimony of the Saints and Martyrs, Theology, Christian Culture and Beauty.
- 2. The methodology in catechesis which "must refer to the word of God and at the same time attend to the authentic demands of human experience." (Directory, 194)

Through these areas of alignment to the Directory for Catechesis, as well as the alignment to the Magisterium and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the religion curriculum standards can greatly benefit parish catechetical programs. By utilizing the religion curriculum standards in parish faith formation programming for children and youth, catechetical leaders and catechists can ensure that the tasks of catechesis are being pursued during faith formation sessions which will, in turn, support the ultimate goal of catechesis which is "**to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ**." (Directory, 75)

As witnesses of the faith, catechists share from their personal encounter with the person of Jesus, and through the testimony of their lives, catechists lead others into the mystery of faith. Catechists are called to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as they accompany others in the Christian life. Therefore, prior to working through the following action steps, catechetical leaders and catechists are encouraged to pray for guidance and inspiration from the Holy Spirit as they explore how the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards can help them "**put people in communion with Jesus Christ**."

ACTION STEPS FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERS

- Carefully review all of the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards documents, including: Introduction and Acknowledgements, Standard Domains and Grade Level Standards & Appendices.
 - **a.** Spend some time reflecting on evangelization and catechesis in the context of Renew My Church, pages 2-3 of the Introduction and Acknowledgements document. Consider the

ways in which you are forming your catechists in the relational, instructional, and process aspects of evangelization and catechesis.

- **b.** Highlight specific standards, topics, and/or resources for each grade-level that are particularly relevant for your parish community, and plan to share those priorities with your program catechists.
- c. To envision how the curriculum standards align with your program's religion textbook series, look at the textbook correlation samples Finding God (Loyola Press), Christ our Life (Loyola Press), Blest Are We (RCL Benziger), Christ in Us & We Live Our Faith (Sadlier), Spirit of Truth (Sophia Institute) or cross-reference the curriculum standards with your current religion textbook series Scope and Sequence chart(s).
- **2.** Meet with the parish's school principal and a few school teachers (where a parish school is present) to seek recommendations and best practices to share with catechists to support them in using the standards in their lessons.
- **3.** Meet with faith formation program catechists to introduce them to the religion curriculum standards.
 - **a.** Provide an overview of each of the documents and have hard copies available of the standard domains and priority standards for each grade level.
 - i. Highlight the importance of evangelization and catechesis in the context of Renew My Church, pages 2-3 of the Introduction and Acknowledgements document.
 - **ii.** Engage in a discussion around the importance of evangelization and catechesis and the mission imperatives of Renew My Church to make disciples, build community and inspire witness.
 - **b.** Spend time reading through and discussing the standard domains as a group.
 - i. The **Religion Curriculum Standards Review and Reflection Worksheet** provides prompts for discussion and charts for taking notes.
 - **ii.** Make sure catechists have a clear understanding of each curriculum standard and that they are given the opportunity to personally engage with and reflect on how they integrate the faith concepts of the standards in their daily lives.
 - **iii.** Remind catechists that the standards are not necessarily meant to be presented in a specific chronological order, and that they are often taught and re-visited throughout the entirety of any catechetical textbook series.
 - **c.** Spend time in small groups (i.e., PreK-1, 2-4, 5-6, 7-8) to review and discuss grade-level priority standards and appendices.
 - i. The **Religion Curriculum Standards Review and Reflection Worksheet** provides prompts for discussion and charts for taking notes.
 - ii. Discuss how to align curriculum standards to lesson plans. The **Utilizing Priority Standards Template** is a tool to plan instruction for each grade-level priority standard.
 - **iii.** If you don't have many catechists in your program, consider collaborating with one or more neighboring parishes to provide the opportunity for catechists to discuss priority standards in grade-specific cohorts.
- **4.** Inform parents during a parent meeting of any specific areas of implementation or new faith formation program emphases that are related to the religion curriculum standards.

- **a.** Reinforce that every level of formation is important for children and youth, by outlining the progression of content that occurs from one grade level to the next.
- **b.** Provide a supplemental information sheet for parents that has a brief summary of the religion curriculum standard domains and ideas of things that they can do at home to reinforce the standards.
- **c.** For family faith formation programs, discern whether or not engaging parents with the curriculum standards (as you might do with catechists) would be beneficial.

ACTION STEPS FOR CATECHISTS

- **1.** Consider the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards a tool to use that may enhance the faith formation of children and youth.
 - **a.** The priority standards can help you to grow in your own faith and to plan faith formation lessons that will effectively help children and youth to understand, reflect upon and respond to the encounter of Christ experienced through faith formation sessions.
 - **b.** Reflect on the following questions as you work with the standards in your faith formation lesson planning:
 - i. What is the intended learning, experience and/or message?
 - **ii.** What strategies will be implemented to accompany participants in their learning and/or encounter?
 - **iii.** What evidence will participants showcase to demonstrate their growth in learning and discipleship?
- Carefully review all of the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards documents, including: Introduction and Acknowledgements, Standard Domains and the specific Grade Level Standards & Appendices that are relevant for the children/youth that you catechize.
 - **a.** Spend some time reflecting on evangelization and catechesis in the context of Renew My Church, pages 2-3 of the Introduction and Acknowledgements document. Consider the ways in which you can incorporate the relational, instructional and process aspects of evangelization and catechesis in your formation sessions.
 - **b.** Make sure that you read and understand what each standard domain and each priority standard means. If any of the standards are not clear to you, talk to your catechetical leader about that.
 - **c.** Consider each priority standard in terms of your personal faith life and practice. Engage with the standards by thinking deeply and praying about the faith concepts in each of them. Take note of how your personal reflection and faith experiences might inspire the way that you teach about each of the standards.
- **3.** Compare the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards and the Scope & Sequence chart of the religion curriculum textbook for a specific grade level. Take time to note which chapter of the religion curriculum textbook covers particular priority standards.
 - a. Look at the correlation samples if needed Finding God (Loyola Press), Christ our Life (Loyola Press), Blest Are We (RCL Benziger), Christ in Us & We Live Our Faith (Sadlier), Spirit of Truth (Sophia Institute).

- **b.** Remember, these are not the only religion textbook series that can be used for faith formation in the archdiocese. These are simply examples of how standard religion textbook series correlate with the priority standards. If your program happens to use one of these textbook series, you may use the correlation samples to help you connect the standards to your faith formation lessons.
- **4.** Take time to unpack and better understand the priority standards, and consider ways that you can align the curriculum standards to your faith formation lesson plans:
 - **a.** Identify what children and youth need to know (content/knowledge to acquire) and what they need to do (skills to acquire).
 - **b.** Envision what mastery of a specific standard might look like, then align your lesson plans and accompanying resources to that vision.
 - **c.** After reflecting on how the standards relate to your own faith life, think about ways to help children and youth make connections and attach relevance to the faith topics you are sharing. Write some open-ended questions for each priority standard to help stimulate interest and discussion.
 - **d.** If, in addition to the religion textbook, more ideas are needed for supplemental activities or formative assessments, look through the grade level religion curriculum appendix for additional resources:
 - i. PreK, Kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade
 - e. The Religion Curriculum Standards Review and Reflection Worksheet, Standard Domains Chart and the Utilizing Priority Standards Template are tools to help you unpack the priority standards and plan instruction.