



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.

¹ renewmychurch.org/parish-renewal/parish-spiritual-renewal

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?


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Catholic Schools

Religion Curriculum Priority Standards
Grades PreK–8, 2020 edition

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Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Office
Respect Life and Chastity Education Office
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Curriculum Advisory Council

INVOCATION: THE GREAT COMMISSIONING
“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

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Religion Curriculum: STANDARD DOMAINS

1. Sacred Scripture and Tradition: Who is God?
God is made known through creation, natural reason, and divine revelation which culminated in the person of Jesus Christ. God’s will for humanity and the world is discovered through divine revelation in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. The inspired books of Sacred Scripture teach truth about Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God.
DC: 11-16, 23-27, 37-60, 108-150, 167-182
NDC: 4-5, 8, 42-45, 53-54, 59-60, 70-71, 74-87, 89-98, 145-146, 280-282
Tasks of Catechesis: Leading to Knowledge of the Faith
Pillars of the Catechism: The Profession of Faith

2. The Creed: What is the Church and what do we believe?
The truth of the Triune God and the Paschal Mystery are proclaimed through the Nicene Creed for the purpose of providing a unifying, common confession of faith. The Magisterium supports members of the Body of Christ in the comprehension of key teachings of the Church, its mission in the world, institutional structure, and charisms.
DC: 22-24, 26-28, 78, 80, 93-94, 168
NDC: 60-61, 111-113, CCC pp. 185
Tasks of Catechesis: Leading to Knowledge of the Faith
Pillars of the Catechism: The Profession of Faith, The Celebration of the Christian Mystery

3. Catholic Prayer, Liturgy, and Sacramental Life: How do we worship God?
Christian prayer expresses the covenant relationship between God and humanity. The liturgy of the Church guides us in our worship of God. The Mass or the Eucharist celebrates the death and resurrection of the Lord and is the source and summit of Christian life. The sacraments are signs of God’s grace, instituted by Christ, and entrusted to the Church. The sacraments enable us to encounter the mystery of Jesus Christ present and active in our lives.
DC: 70b, 79, 81-82, 86-87, 95-98, 170, 209-212
NDC: 89-98, 113-145, CCC pp. 294a
Tasks of Catechesis: Initiating into the Celebration of the Mystery
Teaching Prayer
Pillars of the Catechism: Christian Prayer and the Celebration of the Christian Mystery

4. Christian Living: How does God want us to live?
The natural law, the Ten Commandments, the teachings of the Gospel, and the Magisterium of the Church help us shape a right response to God’s will in our lives through our decisions. The effects of original sin and our own personal sin move us away from God. When we embrace love of God and of our neighbor and when we respect the life and dignity of all persons, we live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

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**.

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Religion Curriculum Priority Standards	
Grade: EIGHTH	
Domains:	1. Sacred Scripture and Tradition 2. Catholic Creed 3. Catholic Prayer, Liturgy and Sacramental Life 4. Christian Living 5. Living Discipleship 6. Religious Diversity and Christian Unity
* Denotes standards connected to Christian anthropology and/or human sexuality. * Denotes standards connected to anti-racism and anti-discrimination.	
Domain 1: Sacred Scripture and Tradition: Who is God?	
8.01.A*	Demonstrate basic realization of God's existence through Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, intellectual reason, and the natural order of the universe.
8.01.B	Describe how the experiences of early Christian communities in Acts of the Apostles help us to understand the beginnings of the Church and the foundations of our faith today.
8.01.C	Be familiar with the geography and principal cities of the Holy Land in Biblical Roman society for the purpose of understanding events of the New Testament.
Domain 2: Catholic Creed: What is the Church and what do we believe?	
8.02.A	Recall events of Pentecost and recognize how the Holy Spirit guides individuals and the Church community into deeper communion with Jesus Christ, especially through the sacrament of Confirmation.
8.02.B*	Recognize how the oneness of God expressed in the inseparable Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity provides a model for loving relationships in our human communities.
8.02.C	Read and analyze Magisterial teaching, especially the 2015 papal encyclical, "Laudato Si'" (On Care for Our Common Home) and the 2013 apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium" (The Joy of the Gospel).
Domain 3: Catholic Prayer, Liturgy and Sacramental Life: How do we worship God?	
8.03.A	Understand that the Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens baptismal grace, seals the recipient with the Holy Spirit, and marks our total belonging to Christ in his service forever.
8.03.B	Identify the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit and various symbols of the Holy Spirit in Catholic tradition.
8.03.C	Recognize that life as a confirmed, young adult disciple compels us to pray and actively participate in the life of the Church as part of our lifelong commitment as faithful Catholics.
Domain 4: Christian Living: How does God want us to live?	

- 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.

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Religion Curriculum: Connections APPENDIX: Third Grade		
In order for the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards to be utilized well, they need to be viewed as tools for student formation. Teachers plan their instruction around how to effectively help students understand, reflect upon, and respond to the encounter of Christ experienced through instruction.		
Teachers will consider the following questions: 1. What is the intended learning, experience, and/or message? 2. What strategies will be implemented to accompany students in their learning and/or encounter? 3. What evidence will students showcase to demonstrate their growth in learning and discipleship?		
Racial Justice Instruction: Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago are committed to racial justice in our Church, schools, and communities. As disciples of Christ we live, learn, work, pray, and worship in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters where there is distinction without separation, unity without uniformity, and difference without division.		
Teachers at all grade levels are requested to instruct about racial justice through a Catholic lens using resources provided by the USCCB: Grade 3 (3.04.A): How Do We Respect Human Dignity? (ENG) (ESP)		
The following ideas for activities, formative assessment, and interdisciplinary connections may be used or adapted for use in the classroom:		
PRIORITY STANDARD	ACTIVITY OR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	CONNECTIONS
3.04.A Recognize faith as a gift from God and articulate moment(s) when he/she feels close to God.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how we know we have faith. Identify how faith helps to guide us throughout our lives. Give examples of this guidance and identify God's role. Consider how experiences of both joy and hardship can help lead us to Jesus in friendship. 	<p>ELA: Invite the students to keep a daily faith journal to reflect on ways that their faith gives them strength and ways that God's love and friendship guides them in everyday life.</p> <p>Music: Learn and sing a song about faith in God and use it in a prayer service or liturgy (e.g., "We Walk by Faith").</p> <p>Parish Life and Community: Prepare students for encountering God at Mass on Sunday and during the week at school. Consider using <i>Help Heroes</i>. The free weekly e-mail includes a coloring sheet, Sunday readings, and a Mass quiz.</p>
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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

1. 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

- 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?
2. 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).

