



PARISH CATECHETICAL LEADER

Getting Started Information

“At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father ... who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever.’ To catechize is ‘to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God’s eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ’s actions and words and of the signs worked by him.’ Catechesis aims at putting ‘people ... in communion ... with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.’” (CCC 426)

In the Office of Lifelong Formation, we are available to accompany you on your journey of growth and conversion, as well as to help you with any aspect of children’s faith formation/religious education programming and catechist certification. We offer the following “getting started” recommendations to help you with the basic steps of planning faith formation and building a faith formation program within the context of the **mission imperatives of Renew My Church**. Renew My Church is first and foremost a journey of spiritual renewal. Jesus is asking all of us—in light of our Baptism and Confirmation—to work with the Holy Spirit in new and creative ways to: make disciples, build communities and inspire witness. We ask that you keep this mission of renewal in mind when making any decisions for your parish faith formation program.

Parish Faith Formation Program “Getting Started” First Steps

The first steps that you take as a parish catechetical leader will vary depending on the parish you’re working at and your start date. In a parish where there is an established faith formation program or your start date is late in the summer, we recommend that you make small changes to the program in your first year – in such situations, some of the items below will be easily decided.

1. Archdiocese of Chicago Policies, Offices and Resources
 - a. Become familiar with the policies, procedures and guidelines for faith formation programming in the Archdiocese (see next section)
2. Program Overview
 - a. Set goals for your catechetical ministry - *develop specific objectives and strategies*
 - i. Unit 2 of **The Leader’s Guide to the Directory for Catechesis** may be a helpful resource for reflecting on your goals for catechetical ministry
 - b. Assess the needs and gifts of the families – *with surveys, interviews and listening sessions*
 - c. Select a model for catechesis - *that fits parish resources and family needs (traditional, family, summer, etc.)*
 - d. Create a plan to implement the approach - *articulate objectives and strategies*
 - e. Implement and evaluate the plan - *don’t be afraid to make changes after evaluating each year*
3. Program Budget
 - a. Discuss with your parish business manager and pastor the procedure for creating a budget for the faith formation program.
4. Curriculum Selection
 - a. Main religion curriculum (PreK-8 grades)
 - i. **USCCB Conformity Review List** – All main curriculum used must be included on this conformity listing
 - b. Sacramental curriculum (first reconciliation, first Eucharist, confirmation)
 - i. Recommended, but not required to be on the USCCB Conformity Review List
 - c. **Child Safety curriculum**
 - d. Supplemental curriculum (e.g., Theology of the Body, Bible studies, parent formation, etc.)
 - e. **Archdiocese of Chicago Religion Curriculum Standards** – Implementation of religion curriculum standards in religious education programs is encouraged. They are more commonly used in schools, but may be helpful for catechists as well.

5. Program Calendaring
 - a. Decide day of week and number of classes per year
 - i. The number of classes and total hours of faith formation will vary depending on the program model being used
 1. Typical program hours = 45 hours per year (equivalent to 30 1.5-hour classes)
 - b. Decide additional program elements (parent engagement, service, masses, prayer events, supplemental sacramental prep dates, etc.)
6. Create Lesson Schedules and Grade-level Lesson Plans that include
 - a. Safe Environment lessons
 - b. Parish celebrations and traditions
 - c. Sacramental formation, events and retreats
 - d. Supplemental activities, crafts, plays, guided meditation
7. Parent Engagement and Formation
 - a. Consider opportunities to slowly add family elements to a program year by year (family nights, home lessons, liturgical year events, prayer gatherings)
 - b. Replace some scheduled class sessions with “Family Night” activities (such as family Advent craft-making and Lenten Stations of the Cross with family reflection and discussion)
 - c. Send a weekly newsletter that leads families through a reflection (with discussion points) on the upcoming Sunday Gospel
 - d. Share “at home” tips and suggestions for faith discussions and traditional practices
 - e. Include parents in all aspects of sacramental formation for children
8. Record of Catechesis
 - a. Create a simple Excel spreadsheet, Word document or file to record a student’s yearly attendance in your faith formation program. This is helpful for instances where a student may transfer and another catechetical leader is requesting proof of attendance.
 - b. Sacramental records are to be recorded at your parish according to the **Archdiocese Sacramental Records Policy**.
9. Catechist Certification and Ongoing Formation
 - a. Maintain catechist records by creating a file for each catechist with copies of completed VIRTUS certificates and forms, general contact information, certification records, etc.
 - b. For more information on catechist formation/certification, contact **certification@archchicago.org**.

10. Some Catechetical Resources

a. **Catechesi Tradendae** (Pope John Paul II)

- i. This Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II articulates the importance of catechesis in our time, and describes the important and unique roles the Church, the laity and the family play in ensuring that all Catholics not only understand the Faith but are prepared to live it fully.

b. **Directory for Catechesis**

- i. As the Catholic Church embarks on the mission of teaching the Christian faith, the new *Directory for Catechesis* lays out guidelines for catechesis and presents universal norms to guide pastors and catechists in the work of evangelization.

c. **The NEW Directory for Catechesis - Highlights and Summaries for Catechists and Pastoral Leaders**

- i. Deacon Matthew Halbach presents a user-friendly overview of the Catholic Church's new *Directory for Catechesis* with this easy-to-read guide that makes the directory accessible, relevant and meaningful to those involved in catechetical ministry.

d. **Catechist's Guide to the Directory for Catechesis (OSV)**

- i. The *Catechist's Guide to the Directory for Catechesis* introduces catechists to the structure and content of this important document. Written in accessible language for anyone who teaches the Catholic Faith to others, this brief, magazine-style guide provides an overview of the organization of the directory, key quotes from the document and discussion of the major themes.

e. **An Evangelizing Catechesis: Teaching from Your Encounter with Christ (OSV)**

- i. *An Evangelizing Catechesis: Teaching from Your Encounter with Christ* shows you how every form of catechesis must be evangelistic in nature, fully centered on Christ and designed to draw students into a life of missionary discipleship.

f. **Our Family Faith: Resource Guide for Family Catechesis (RCL Benziger)**

- i. This resource guide provides catechetical leaders with ready-to-use tools needed to engage families, including: critical questions and evaluation strategies to be used when assessing current catechetical program, tips for determining the best model and methods for ministering to families, five detailed plans for gathering the whole family to grow in faith and customizable forms to assist in resourcing families with materials that can be used at home.

g. **A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting (McGrath Institute at Notre Dame)**

- i. This free report examines the crucial role of parents in shaping the religious commitment of their children, and explores the different ways that parents are passing on their religious heritage. This in-depth report is a must-read for parish staff who are concerned about passing Catholicism to the next generation.

Archdiocese of Chicago Policies, Offices and Resources

These Archdiocese of Chicago policies and guidelines include essential resources and information to help parish leaders connect to and work in compliance with the mission and vision of the Catholic Church in Chicago.

1. **Archdiocese of Chicago Policies and Procedures** - broad and comprehensive norms and directives which affect the entire archdiocese. The policies flow from and are consistent with the mission of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Internal operating procedures, practices, rules and guidelines of individual schools, parishes and agencies shall not contradict archdiocesan policy.
 - a. Book One – General Norms, Accountability and Ecclesiastical Processes
 - b. Book Two – The People of God (Personnel Policies)
 - c. **Book Three – The Teaching Office of the Church (Catholic Schools, Catechesis and Communications)**
 - d. Book Four – The Sanctifying Office of the Church (Sacramental and Liturgical Life)
 - e. Book Five – The Temporal Goods of the Church (Administrative, Financial and Legal)
2. As outlined in both the Archdiocese of Chicago Policies and Procedures and the **Directory for Catechesis** (115-116), “The parish priest/pastor is the first catechist in the parish community.” Therefore, all aspects of faith formation programming are to be made in consultation with the parish priest/pastor.
3. **Safe Environment Office Website** and **Office for the Protection of Children and Youth** (OPCY)
 - a. *Protecting God's Children for Adults* is a training conducted by certified facilitators on the prevention of child sexual abuse. All archdiocese employees and volunteers who work with children must create and maintain an online account with VIRTUS when they register online to take the training. Those under the age of 18 are unable to meet compliance requirements; therefore, they may not be in a supervisor position or in charge of minors.
 - b. *Student training*: Every student in every grade in religious education programs are to be offered training on how to protect themselves from sexual abuse. The approved child/youth training programs for use in the Archdiocese can be found here.
 - c. **Virtual Safe Environment Guidelines** – (updated 2020)
4. **Archdiocese Confirmation Policy**
 - a. **Confirmation Guidelines (PDF)**
 - b. **Confirmation Policies and Procedures Fact Sheet (PDF)**
 - c. **Confirmation Resources and Activities (PDF)**
 - d. **Confirmation Retreat Resource (PDF)**

5. **Office of Lifelong Formation (OLF)**

- a. The Office of Lifelong Formation team members are available to assist and consult you in areas such as child and family ministry, youth ministry, catechist formation, and adult sacramental preparation. Their contact information is available [here](#).
- b. Vicariate lifelong formation coordinators are available to advise, connect and assist parish catechetical leadership. Their contact information is available [here](#).
- c. **For direct assistance with any aspect of children's faith formation/religious education programming, contact [Deborah Breakey](#), Senior Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry, or [MaryEllen Casselman](#) (Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry).**
- d. Lifelong Formation Newsletter – Monthly updates and resources for Religious Education Programs are shared through our monthly newsletter. [Subscribe here](#).

6. Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Human Resources

- a. If you have not received employment information, such as the Handbook for Archdiocese Employees, call the Office of Human Resources at 312.534.8200.

7. **Archdiocese Email Accounts and Resources - YouTube**

- a. Request an Arch email account (if you haven't received one already) – contact the Archdiocese IT team at 312.534.5227, ITservicecenter@archchicago.org, for help

"The accompaniment of a person on a journey of growth and conversion is necessarily marked by gradualness, in that the act of believing implies a progressive discovery of the mystery of God and an openness and entrustment to him that grows over time." (DC 179)

Please contact us anytime to let us know how we can help:

For help with any aspect of faith formation programming, contact [Deborah Breakey](#), Senior Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry, or [MaryEllen Casselman](#), Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry.

For help with catechist formation/certification, contact [Kenneth Velasquez](#), Senior Coordinator for Certification