

We convened a committee consisting of 10 teachers and 2 principals from the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools.

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Sr. Mary Gertrude Blankenhagen, O.P.

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Therese Spoerl

Paul Bucholz

Sr. Nikki (Community of the Beatitudes)

We purposed our mission through the review of *The National Directory for Catechesis: A Vision and Direction for the Future and Summary of the National Directory of Catechesis*. We also read *Catechetical Formation for Chaste Living* in preparation for the family life objectives. The committee surveyed teachers to focus on areas of concern about the present curriculum. By enlarge the teachers liked the curriculum they did want more resources for teaching.

The remainder of our meetings was spent reviewing each learner objective at each grade level. The changes that were suggested and made focused on clarifying objectives.

We invited a representative from ENDOW to our family life review. Shari Samuels was present and appreciated the committee's approach to the topic and had no objection to the objectives.

Our final meeting was spent reviewing and recommending Religion text books. This is the one area where you can see a significant change in terms of what is recommended for use.

The final curriculum document was submitted to Most Rev. James D. Conley, Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Denver for the final review and approval. Special thanks to his advisors Dr. Sean Innerst and Mr. Ben Akers for their insightful comments. The final document reflects the suggested revisions made by the bishop's reviewers. The document was approved for use in the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools in the summer of 2012.

In **To Teach as Jesus Did** (1972, NCCB) the Bishops of the United States say:

The educational mission of the Church is an integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache) which the Church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia); service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia) (14).

Of the educational programs available to the Catholic community, Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the threefold purpose of Christian education among children and young people (101).

The **National Directory for Catechesis**, published by the USCCB in May, 2005 describes the teaching ministry of the church this way:

Catechesis is the word used to describe this essential ministry of the church through which the teachings of Christ have been passed on to believers throughout the ages. Pope John Paul II in the apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* proposes the following description of the ministry of catechesis:

Quite early on, the name catechesis was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life (NDC p. 6).

The goal of this Religion Curriculum Guideline is to provide teachers as catechists in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Denver with that "organic and systematic framework." The objectives written in this guideline are focused on students and what they should be able to demonstrate about their knowledge of God. The teacher is the delivery system, and there are almost as many good delivery systems as there are teachers. This guideline does not dictate to teachers what they should be doing. It does tell them what their students should learn.

Tasks of Catechesis

The fundamental task of catechesis is to achieve the same objective: the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus instructed his disciples; he prayed with them; he showed them how to live; and he gave them his mission

Christ's method of formation was accomplished by diverse yet interrelated tasks. His example is the most fruitful inspiration for effective catechesis today because it is integral to formation in the Christian faith. Catechesis must attend to each of these different dimensions of faith; each becomes a distinct yet complimentary task. Faith must be known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer. So catechesis comprises six fundamental tasks, each of which is related to an aspect of faith in Christ. All efforts in evangelization and catechesis should incorporate these tasks.

- ♦ Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith.
- ♦ Catechesis promotes knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments.
- ♦ Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.
- ♦ Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ
- ♦ Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.
- ♦ Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society. (NDC p. 59 ff.)

This curriculum guideline identifies student learning goals in each of these areas. It uses language that identifies goals for students that can be measured concretely.

The **National Directory for Catechesis** (NDC) describes the object of catechesis this way:

The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him, and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him. "At the heart of catechesis, we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, 'the only Son from the Father...full of grace and truth,' (1 Jn 1:3) who suffered and died for us and who now after rising, is living with us forever." (Catechesi Tradendae, no. 5) For in Christ the whole of God's eternal plan is revealed, a plan that begins with the Father's generation of his only Son and reaches its fulfillment in him. Christ is the living center of catechesis, who draws all persons to his Father through the Holy Spirit. "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, 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." (CT, no. 5) St. Paul declared, "For to me life is Christ." (Phil. 1:21) (NDC p. 55)

Teachers should be aware of the importance of their ministry as catechists and of the powerful impact they personally have in the catechetical process.

Learning Through the Witness of the Catechist

[The catechists] must orient [the students] toward life lived according to the moral teaching of Christ; and they must lead them to pray with Christ. Catechists must make the words of Christ their own: "My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me," (Jn 7:16) and they confess with St. Paul, "I handed on to you...what I received" (1 Cor 15:3). (NDC p. 101)

A Catholic school builds community (koinonia). This happens when the faculty models their care and respect for each other, for the students, and for the parents. It is done in the way the school and parish community prays and worships together. This sense of community is built in the small things that happen on a daily basis and men and women, children and adults, work together, and is demonstrated in dramatic fashion when there is a crisis or other important or unexpected event. While the sense of community in a school can be recognized and nurtured, it cannot easily be measured on an objective scale. It is expected that this community building is part of the fabric of the school and is not assigned solely to the religion curriculum, but to all the members of the school community.

Students in a Catholic school must learn the culture of apostolic service to others. Their participation in school-sponsored service activities can be assessed; their internalizing of that attitude cannot be so easily measured.

The role of the catechist is of strategic importance.

The evangelization of the culture through the communication of the complete and authentic Gospel message, and the enculturation of that message through profound dialogue between it and the language, customs, and practices of a people, constitute what Pope Paul VI termed the "drama of our time" (NDC p. 66).

Criteria for the Authentic Presentation of the Christian Message

The presentation of the Christian message

- ♦ Centers on Jesus Christ
- ♦ Introduces the Trinitarian dimension of the Gospel message
- ♦ Proclaims the Good News of salvation and liberation
- ♦ Comes from and leads to the Church
- ♦ Has a historical character

- ♦ Seeks enculturation and preserves the integrity and purity of the message
- ♦ Offers the comprehensive message of the Gospel and respects its inherent hierarchy of truths
- ♦ Communicates the profound dignity of the human person
- ♦ Fosters a common language of faith (NDC p. 75)

The methods employed by catechesis aim to harmonize the personal adherence of the believer to God, on the one hand, and to the content of the Christian message, on the other. Catechesis attends to the development of all the dimensions of faith: as it is known, as it is celebrated, as it is lived, as it is prayed. It seeks to bring about a conversion to Christ that leads to a profession of faith in the Triune God and to a genuine personal surrender to him. It helps believers to become disciples and to discern the vocation to which God is calling them.

God's own methodology inspires a plurality of methods in contemporary catechesis. The method or methods chosen, however, must ultimately be determined by a law that is fundamental for the whole of the Church's life. Catechetical methodology must exhibit a twofold fidelity. On the one hand it must be faithful to God and to his Revelation; on the other it must respect the liberty and promote the active participation of those being catechized. From the beginning of time, God has adapted his message to earthly conditions so that we might be able to receive it. (Emphasis added.) "This implies for catechesis the never ending task of finding a language capable of communicating the word of God and the creed of the Church, which is its development, in the various circumstances of those who hear it" (GDC, no. 146). In this light, genuine catechesis employs methodology that

- ♦ Emphasizes God's loving initiative and the person's free response
- ♦ Accepts the progressive nature of Revelation, the transcendence and mysterious nature of the word of God, and the word's adaptation to different persons and cultures
- ♦ Recognizes the centrality of Jesus Christ
- ♦ Values the community experience of faith
- ♦ Is rooted in interpersonal relations and makes its own the process of dialogue
- ♦ Utilizes signs, which link words and deeds, teaching and experience
- ♦ Draws its power of truth, and its task to bear witness to the truth, from the Holy Spirit (Cf. GDC, no. 143)

As the believer progresses on the journey toward the Father...the believer's understanding of the mystery of Christ...[and] a strengthening of faith in turn leads to a change of heart (conversion)... Catechesis should promote a synthesis of the faith by which we have been taught to believe and the faith which we enact in our everyday lives. It develops all dimensions of faith: knowledge, liturgical celebration, Christian living, and prayer (p. 94 ff).

Sacred Time: The Liturgical Year

The Latin Church lives and celebrates the mystery of Christ in the span of a calendar year that represents the mystery of the incarnation and redemption beginning with the First Sunday of Advent and concluding on the Solemnity of Christ the King. The Eastern Catholic Churches begin and end the liturgical year in accord with their particular traditions and follow the pattern of the Church year by means of their own particular lectionaries.

The economy or history of salvation unfolds throughout the liturgical year. Each day of the liturgical year is sanctified primarily by Christ's presence in it, but also by the prayer and the liturgical celebrations of the People of God, especially by the Mass and the Divine Office. The liturgical year exerts "a special sacramental power and influence which strengthens Christian life."

From the time of the apostles, beginning with the actual day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church has celebrated the Paschal Mystery every first day, Sunday, the Lord's Day. "The intimate bond between Sunday and the Resurrection of the Lord is strongly emphasized by all the Churches of the

East and West.” Sunday is the weekly Easter. The day of Christ’s Resurrection is both the first day of the week in the new creation and the “eighth day” of the week, the image of eternity, which anticipates the glorious return of Christ and the fulfillment of God’s reign. In the Byzantine Liturgy, Sunday is called “the day that knows no evening.”

“The weekdays extend and develop the Sunday celebration.” (NCD, no. 144) As the Church celebrates the mystery of Christ throughout the liturgical year, she honors especially Mary, the Mother of God, and Mother of the Church, who is “inseparably linked with her son’s saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be.” The Church also commemorates the lives of the apostles, martyrs, and other saints, for they have been glorified with Christ. They are heroic examples of Christian life and intercede for the faithful on earth. (NDC p. 146)

Further pertinent quotations from the **National Directory for Catechesis** have been inserted with the student objectives. It is recommended that all teachers have access to this important document as a resource for their teaching and an inspiration for the ministry as Catechist to which each is called.