

SECTION 2

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL CATECHESIS

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ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL CATECHESIS

In order to attain successful catechesis the parish needs to make a concerted effort to establish it as a high priority. This requires an understanding of catechesis as one of the central tasks of the community. Key elements to successful catechesis include the identification, formation and empowerment of leadership and personnel, as well as financial commitment to the entire catechetical endeavor. Providing these elements often requires some creative approaches.

This section will develop:

- **The Parish Commitment to Catechesis**
- **Leadership and Roles**
- **Financial Commitment**
- **Creative Possibilities**

A. The Parish Commitment to Catechesis

“The Church is bidden by God and by events...to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel.” (CT)

The parish plays a primary role in the formation and expression of our common faith. Apart from simply providing a place of worship, Catholics look to the parish for support and nourishment of their faith. Therefore, the parish has a responsibility to provide for this in a meaningful and comprehensive way to its entire people.

The parish is a catechizing community, forming people through all its activities: liturgical, social, pastoral, and financial. Every program within the parish bears catechetical value and implications as does the way each member lives and expresses his/her faith. Since the entire community and the individuals within it provide models of the Christian faith and life, it is important that they develop a catechetical consciousness, an awareness of the extent to which their activities express the Gospel.

The parish makes catechesis a priority by developing an understanding of itself as a catechizing community and by providing abundant resources for structured catechetical endeavors aimed at the formation of all its members. Effective leadership is essential to this process. Structured catechesis requires the involvement of many people and groups – adult parishioners, parents/guardians, catechists, education commissions of the parish pastoral council, catechetical leaders, pastors/administrators, diocesan personnel and the Bishop. Each of these has a special role in parish catechesis. Also adequate and varied print and audiovisual resources need to be provided.

The parish commits financial resources to provide for both material needs and the formation and support of personnel. A specific budget that encompasses all aspects of catechesis for the entire community supports this commitment. This requires the cooperation of the parish finance council.

B. Leadership and Roles

Adult Parishioners

“Every disciple of the Lord Jesus shares in this mission [to witness and share the word of life about the reign of God faithfully]. To do their part, adult Catholics must be mature in faith and well equipped to share the Gospel, promoting it in every family circle, in every church gathering, in every place of work, and in every public forum. They must be women and men of prayer whose faith is alive and vital, grounded in a deep commitment to the person and message of Jesus.”

(OHWB, Intro., p. 1)

In a general way the whole adult community within a parish is the leader in providing quality catechesis. In an effort to live as true disciples of Christ and to form youth and newcomers in the faith, it is essential that the adult community lead the way in the parish’s catechetical ministry. They may do this by:

- Availing themselves of catechetical opportunities
- Requesting a great and varied selection of catechetical opportunities
- Supporting the parish’s efforts for all age groups, financially, prayerfully and through service
- Advocating for qualified leadership in catechesis
- Participating in education boards and planning teams

The adult community, by its own life, models mature faith. It is they as a group who set the standard and expectations for a parish’s catechetical effort.

- As the adults lead, the children and youth shall follow
- As the adults model and witness, the catechumens and candidates will see
- As the adults grow in commitment and understanding, the lay and ordained ministries will develop

“To grow in discipleship throughout life, all believers need and are called to build vibrant parish and diocesan communities of faith and service.”

(OHWB, p. 2)

Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians are both catechizers and the recipients of catechesis. As catechizers they are the primary educators of their children. Their most powerful means of forming their children in the faith is through their own example of living out the gospel in their daily lives, through prayer and participation in the life of the worshipping community, and through attention to their own formation. In a more specific way, they catechize through their children by praying with them, sharing stories of our faith and Tradition, and conversing with them about issues of faith.

“By means of personal contact, meetings, courses and also adult catechesis directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their responsibility of educating their children in the faith” (GDC 227). There are many ways that the parish can give them this help. Useful information and ideas can be provided at parent meetings. In addition, some published take-home materials that provide assistance are:

- Parent/family pages from text series
- Adult information that correlates with the concepts the children are learning
- Suggestions for seasonal activities for Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter
- Suggestions for family prayers and traditions
- Ideas for service opportunities

Parents/guardians will also benefit from other types of resources for their own growth in faith and parenting such as:

- Parenting skills
- Communication skills
- Theological updates
- Prayer resources, especially intended for parents/guardians
- Video tapes for both personal and family viewing
- Audio tapes

Parishes should make every effort to communicate regularly with parents/guardians. This communication will help keep them informed of the parish program for children and youth, as well as encourage them in their role as educators of their children. Letters, take-home materials, family gatherings and telephone calls are all appropriate means of communication. Should a serious issue develop with a particular child, a telephone call and/or private meeting with the parent/guardian is most appropriate.

As primary religious educators of their children and valued members of the community, parents/guardians should be treated with a spirit of welcome and

hospitality. While many parents/guardians may not be actively involved in parish life, they bring their children to parish programs because their faith still holds value for them. This is an opportune time to reflect the love and hospitality of Jesus, to find ways to include them that are not intimidating. This may mean involving them in activities that will make them feel comfortable, and address questions and concerns that will make it easier for them to return to active participation. Pastoral sensitivity is required at all times.

Catechists

Catechesis is the ministry which seeks to make “a person’s faith become living, conscious, and active” (NCD 32) through prayer, teaching and witness. Catechists are those called to echo God’s word as they promote knowledge of the

faith, provide liturgical education, aid in moral formation and teach others to pray. They encourage and prepare those they teach to join in the communal life of the parish and to evangelize others (Cf. GDC 85). Catechists “facilitate communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community” (GDC 156). They do this in the context of and with the support of the community.

Catechists minister to adults, youth and children in a variety of parish settings: adult education, RCIA, sacramental preparation, school age catechesis, youth ministry, family programs, and ministerial training programs. For effective catechesis within these settings, catechists must possess certain fundamental qualities. They should be:

- Persons of faith and prayer
- Witnesses to the gospel
- Models of the faith
- Willing sharers of their faith
- Gifted ministers
- Willing participants in formation for catechetical ministry

Recruitment

The vocation of catechist is rooted in one’s baptismal commitment to participate in the “priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ” (LG 31). It is the Holy Spirit who provides the gifts for catechesis and calls one to this ministry. The parish discerns and affirms this call.

While the entire community takes responsibility for recruitment, certain individuals and groups play a more critical role in this process. They include the pastor/administrator, the parish catechetical leader, and the education commission of the parish pastoral council. The following principles should guide this process:

- Recruitment is an ongoing process.
- The call is based on one’s giftedness for catechetical ministry.
- Discernment is necessary in order to determine giftedness, ability to make a commitment, and one’s role in this ministry.

Ideally, there should be an application process that surfaces a pool of catechists. A sample application form is given in Section 5 of this handbook.

As catechesis is the responsibility of the entire parish, the calling forth of potential catechists requires a multi-faceted approach. The parish leadership needs to apprise and educate the community as to its responsibility in providing catechists. Individuals either respond to their own call to this ministry or assist in identifying others who may be gifted for it. The following are some practical suggestions for calling forth potential catechists:

- Annual parish “time, treasure and talent“ drive
- Inviting parents/guardians to consider becoming catechists when they register their children

- Have current catechists publicly share their enthusiasm for the ministry
- Personal contact
- Announcements from the pulpit
- Bulletin notices

A brief job description made available in conjunction with the above recruitment process will help to clarify the expectations of a catechist. It should include the role and responsibility of the catechist, time commitment, and training opportunities offered and required.

A process that includes a written application and personal interview with the catechetical leader and/or pastor or administrator should take place with each potential candidate to discern her/his suitability for catechetical ministry. (See Section 5 *Sample Catechist Application Form*). In addition to identifying the fundamental qualities of catechists already mentioned, the interview may clarify the following:

- Candidate's commitment to the Church and its teachings
- Importance of the Eucharist and participation in the community
- Catechetical or related experience
- Requirements for and commitment to initial and ongoing formation
- Mutual expectations
- Ability of the candidate to make the time commitment
- Roles and responsibilities of the catechist
- Policies or procedures of the specific program

Personal references should be requested, especially if the leadership does not know the candidate.

A handbook for catechists should also be made available for the candidate to review. This handbook could include the role of the catechist, expectations, policies and procedures, legal issues relative to catechesis, and opportunities for training.

It is good practice to encourage the candidate to make a commitment of at least two years to the program. It takes a full year for most inexperienced catechists to be adequately trained and develop the skills for effective catechesis. This first year can be viewed as an apprenticeship. For most catechists, it is in the succeeding years that the fruit of their training and experience is most fully realized. Also, the candidate should be informed that after the first year, an evaluation process would take place to discern the catechist's needs for further training and support and continued participation in the program.

A signed agreement stating the commitment being made by both parties finalizes the application process. On the part of the candidate, this agreement would include placement (e.g., RCIA catechist or grade level), the time commitment, and agreement to uphold the parish catechetical policies. On the part of the parish community, it would include a statement of commitment to provide appropriate resources, training, and support for the catechist.

There is no legal requirement to accept all people who volunteer (See Section 1: *Scope of Catechesis – Legal Concerns*). It is important to affirm the qualities that the candidates have and to thank them for their time whether or not they

actually commit to becoming catechists. If a candidate demonstrates potential as a catechist, but there are concerns about one's ability or comfort level, a team teaching approach may be suggested. The candidate may also be encouraged to participate in the program in another capacity.

If the application process leads to a decision that the candidate is unable to fulfill the responsibilities of a catechist, he or she may be encouraged to participate in an auxiliary or support position such as:

- Office assistant
- Hall or parking lot monitor
- Refreshment provider
- Assistant with arts and crafts, music, and other creative activities

Training and Ongoing Formation and Support

It is the expectation of the diocese that all catechists be trained and certified. The ideal is that all be certified through the Diocesan Lay Ministry Formation Program in conjunction with the Office of Religious Education. For those who cannot complete certification, they should be encouraged to participate as much as possible in segments of the Formation Program. It is particularly important that catechists participate in basic courses related to the group with which they will be working. These basic courses are:

- RCIA Catechist Training
- Adolescent Catechesis
- Teaching Religion Effectively
- Echoes of Faith Catechist Training

All of these are offered through the Diocesan Office of Religious Education. When there is sufficient interest, these courses are made available on a regional and/or parish level.

Minimal training should be provided to new catechists before they enter into a catechetical setting. The catechetical leader or other appropriate member of the parish staff must take responsibility to see to an initial orientation session and training. Various resources may be used. Video programs are available from the Office of Religious Education Resource Library. As a service to their customers, publishers of texts often provide consultants to give basic training for effective use of their texts at no cost. The staff at the Office of Religious Education is also available to parishes upon request. Minimal training should include:

- The concept of this ministry as a vocation
- An introduction to catechesis and its processes
- Introduction to the curriculum
- Overview of the resources being used
- Age-appropriate lesson planning skills
- Policies and guidelines
- Encouragement for more intensive training, giving information on when and where training is available

Training is to be followed by ongoing formation that may be offered in the parish, region or diocese. Ongoing formation includes all of the above topics, with increasing depth as well as theological topics. These may include:

- Faith development
- Theological subjects (Trinity, Christology, Creed, Church, Sacraments, Scripture, Morality, Mary and the Saints)
- Evangelization
- The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*
- Prayer and ways of praying with others

Support and Recognition

In addition, other opportunities for support and enrichment should be provided in the form of catechist meetings and gatherings on a regular basis. These sessions may include:

- Shared prayer and/or faith sharing
- Opportunities to share common concerns/issues
- Updates in theology or catechetical issues
- Planning for major events
- Opportunities for social interaction and/or recreation
- Inclusion in an annual evaluation process

It is important to affirm and recognize catechists both publicly and privately. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Presenting them with appropriate gifts
 - Holding special events for them, such as an appreciation party or dinner
 - Calling attention to their special efforts in the parish bulletin or newsletter
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- Sending cards on special events such as birthdays, anniversaries, or crisis times in their lives.

There are also national, regional, and diocesan opportunities for recognition. Nationally, Catechetical Sunday is celebrated annually on the third Sunday of September. This is an excellent opportunity to recognize and commission catechists for their ministry. Resources from the United States Catholic Conference for celebrating this event are made available through the Office of Religious Education. Regionally, Religious Education Week is held annually in November (sponsored by the New England Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education) to focus on the ministry of catechesis.

On the Diocesan level, St. Pius X awards celebrations are held in four regions of the diocese each year. This offers an opportunity to recognize committed and outstanding catechists from each parish. (See Section 3: *Guidelines for the St. Pius X Awards.*)

Careful attention to the recruitment, training and support of catechists is essential to effective catechesis. Catechists who receive the training and support they need are more likely to stay with a program for a longer period of time. A cohesive group of catechists who have a sense of community among themselves will provide a witness beyond words to the children and adults with whom they exercise their special ministry.

Education Commissions

According to the *Parish Pastoral Council Finance Council Guidelines* each parish is to have an Education Commission that operates under the auspices of the Parish Pastoral Council. This is one of the most evident means by which the community takes responsibility for the catechetical needs of the parish. The Education Commission's concern is for the overall educational effort of the parish. This may include, but is not limited to, adult catechesis, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, catechesis for school age children and youth, sacramental preparation, and the parish school. Each of these different ministries may be the immediate concern of another group, (e.g., religious education board, RCIA team). Thus, the Education Commission is an umbrella organization that oversees the work of all of these groups.

Purpose and Role

The Education Commission acts primarily in an advisory capacity to the pastor/administrator, the catechetical leader, and the Parish Pastoral Council in matters related to catechesis. The guidelines state that "the purpose of this commission is to coordinate the educational effort of the whole parish. The education commission carries out its mandate primarily in the coordination of the programs sponsored by the various bodies charged with some aspect of the parish educational effort. It initiates and carries out on its own only those programs not being addressed by organized parish-based educational groups" (p. 13). Those tasks that it initiates or carries out on its own may include:

- Assisting the pastor/administrator in choosing the leadership people for catechetical ministries and/or creating job descriptions

- Seeing that these ministers are properly compensated and/or recognized
- Seeing that catechetical ministers receive proper training and support
- Helping to develop budgets for catechesis
- Acting as an advocate for total parish catechesis
- Mediating any difficulties between educational endeavors and other parish organizations

The Education Commission also acts as a liaison between the parish pastoral council and the various groups charged with specific areas of catechesis. These groups may include:

- *Adult Education Teams* that promote and oversee adult formation programs for the parish and provide inspirational and educational reading materials for parishioners. This team may need to coordinate its planning with that of other commissions, especially Family Life and Spiritual Life. (See Section 1 *Adult Formation*.)
- *Religious Education Executive Boards* that advise the catechetical leader for school age children and youth in establishing policies and

budgets and providing resources for catechists. This board also assists in recruiting catechists and other volunteers and carrying out other aspects of the catechetical efforts. This board should consist of parishioners of various ages, making sure that parents and catechists are represented. This board would have its own set of by-laws specifying its mission, frequency of meetings, and the make-up and terms of its membership.

- *RCIA Teams* that oversee the implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, which includes the catechumenate adapted for children, with the RCIA coordinator. This diversified team would see to catechesis, liturgical rites, sponsors, hospitality, etc. (See the *Guidelines and Recommendations for Implementing the RCIA in the Diocese of Springfield*, 1-5.)
- *Sacramental Preparation Teams* that oversee baptismal preparation and adult Confirmation. These may work in conjunction with or be part of the RCIA team, adult education team, and the school age religious education boards.
- *Catholic School Boards* in those parishes that have Catholic schools. Connection of the school with the life of the whole parish is important.

The Education Commission and its sub-groups also need to work closely with other commissions, such as Family Life and Spiritual Life. The relationship with the Finance Council is of primary importance in order to realize adequate funding for total parish catechesis.

Membership

Membership on the Education Commission is drawn from Parish Pastoral Council members and non-members. Key people on the commission are the

catechetical leader(s) and the school principal as ex-officio members, and representatives of any groups that have responsibility for any aspect of catechesis. It is essential that all of the above groups be represented on the education commission in order to coordinate all aspects of catechesis in the parish. It is also important that membership include people from the community at large as the recipients of catechesis.

It is advisable that term limits be established for members of the Education Commission and its sub-groups. This promotes greater involvement of the entire community and prevents stagnation of any group. It also encourages people to participate, knowing that their service is limited. An example of appropriate term limits would be that one serve for three years with eligibility for one more three-year term.

Catechetical Leaders

Successful catechesis in a parish requires much time, effort, coordination, and expertise. It would be difficult to implement the vision put forth in this handbook without trained and competent leadership which has the knowledge, skills, ongoing formation and time to devote to the catechetical needs of all the members of the parish. Therefore, **each parish needs a designated leader or leaders whose primary parish responsibility is to coordinate its catechetical endeavors.** Each designated leader should be recognized by the Office of Religious Education in accordance with its current guidelines.

Role

The catechetical leader is first and foremost a *minister*. This ministry “seeks to promote communion with Jesus Christ” (GDC 30) for individuals and the community. As catechesis touches people in their everyday lives, it requires pastoral sensitivity and ministry to their needs. The catechetical leader often comes in contact with individuals and families in very personal ways. He or she is in a unique position to hear about crises in people’s lives, as well as to be present for those unplanned conversations about faith and Church life. Therefore, the catechetical leader should be a person of pastoral sensitivity, attentive to and approachable by the diverse population of the parish. He or she must also honor the practice of confidentiality.

The catechetical leader is an *advocate for catechesis*. He or she constantly reminds the community of its responsibility to provide comprehensive and quality catechesis for life long learning. Advocacy requires familiarity with catechetical documents, understanding of catechetical theory and practice, and knowledge of diocesan and national policies for catechesis. The advocate needs to raise the question constantly of how the parish’s decisions and activities may be catechizing its members about what it means to be Catholic as well as ask how these decisions affect the catechetical ministry.

The catechetical leader serves as a *theological resource person*, particularly for catechists, as well as for individuals within the community. He or she is the one who addresses theological questions from catechists as they arise out of their teaching experience. The catechetical leader is also responsible for shaping curriculum and choosing resources that accurately and adequately reflect our Catholic Tradition. Thus, the leader must be well grounded in that Tradition.

Finally, the catechetical leader is an *administrator*, coordinating all the catechetical programs of the parish. The administrative responsibilities are comprehensive. They include recruitment, training, and support of catechists, record keeping, and budgeting for catechetical needs. A necessary aspect of this administration is communication with those directly involved in catechesis and the various segments of the parish as well as the Diocesan Office of

Religious Education. These tasks require both organizational and interpersonal skills, as well as knowledge of catechetical theory and practice.

Job Description

The ideal is that each parish (or grouping of parishes) have a professional *Director of Religious Education* who has overall responsibility for all catechetical efforts of the parish. This position requires a person who holds a Master's Degree in religious education or a related field, such as pastoral ministry, religious studies, or applied theology. The director of religious education needs an extensive understanding of theology, catechetical theory and methodology, and leadership skills that includes the ability to delegate effectively. If a group of parishes hire a DRE jointly, it may be necessary (given the logistics of the program) also to have an assistant at each site. This assistant, working in concert with the DRE, would be responsible for the proper functioning of the program.

The *Coordinator of Religious Education* normally has responsibility for one or more areas of religious education, such as adult formation or catechesis for children and youth. The coordinator often works with the director or the pastor in implementing his or her area of the catechetical program. There may be more than one coordinator in the parish to facilitate the various catechetical programs. Ideally, this person holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religious Studies and Education, or has achieved its equivalency through regional and diocesan training and continuing education on the college level. For those who have a Bachelor's Degree in another field, the catechetical leadership track of the diocesan Lay Ministry Formation Program would also prepare one to serve as a coordinator. The coordinator of religious education requires considerable competencies in theology, catechetical theory and methodology, especially relating to the area of catechesis for which he or she is responsible, as well as leadership skills.

An *Administrator of Religious Education* has limited responsibility for organizing a particular area of catechesis and works in cooperation with the pastoral staff. This role is proportionate to the skills and training of the individual. The administrator of religious education needs an introductory knowledge of theology, catechetical theory and methodology as relates to his or her area of responsibility, and some organizational skills. One can be certified as an administrator of religious education through successful completion of the catechetical leadership

track of the diocesan Lay Ministry Formation program. At the very least, this person should have some experience as a catechist and have completed catechist certification in conjunction with the Diocesan Lay Ministry Formation Program. The position of administrator of religious education should be considered a temporary measure as a person continues to work toward advanced degrees, or until a qualified director or coordinator can be obtained.

Some parishes take a *team approach* to meeting their catechetical needs. This involves two or more coordinators and/or administrators of religious education. Each has the responsibility for a particular area of catechesis (e.g., adult education, catechesis for children and/or youth, or RCIA). They work closely together with each other and the pastor to see that total parish catechesis is accomplished. For example, there may be several coordinators, one for each area of catechesis. This team approach requires regular meetings of those involved for coordination and planning. Collaboration is key to the effectiveness of this model. It is critical that each of the catechetical leaders has training and competency in his or her area of responsibility, as well as a minimal knowledge of the other areas. This model may be effective in that it makes use of the talents and skills within the parish and takes into account people's time limitations. However, parishes need to be aware of potential pitfalls of this model: lack of one designated leader who calls the team together; lack of a comprehensive and cohesive approach to parish catechesis; the absence of the expertise and direction of a well-trained professional director or coordinator of religious education.

All catechetical leaders should be:

- Persons of faith and prayer
- Witnesses to the gospel
- Models of the faith
- Willing sharers of their faith
- Gifted ministers
- Willing participants in ongoing formation for this ministry

Compensation and Support

Because of their educational background, competency, and time commitment, directors and coordinators of religious education should be adequately and appropriately remunerated for their work, as well as having access to other paid benefits such as health insurance, vacation and continuing education. Many administrators of religious education often put in a considerable amount of time and should also be paid accordingly. At the very least, the administrator is to be reimbursed for all expenses and have training and continuing education paid by the parish.

A *Ministry Analysis Work Sheet* is included in Section 5 as a guide in determining the salary for a catechetical leader based on education, experience and job responsibilities. Also included are job descriptions for each of these forms of catechetical leadership. It is strongly recommended that the parish develop its own job description relative to its situation and to the experience, training, and responsibilities of the particular catechetical leader.

It is important that the parish make a commitment to the well-being of the catechetical leader. This means that the job description and expectations must

be realistic and that adequate support in terms of resources and auxiliary personnel be provided. It is recommended that duplicate parish responsibilities be avoided, such as combining the positions of director of religious education and choir director. It is nearly impossible for one person to fulfill two positions without one of them receiving inadequate attention or without causing excess stress to the individual. The director or coordinator of religious education should also have access to resources, such as a comfortable working space, secretarial help, and janitorial help, so that he or she can concentrate on providing comprehensive quality catechesis in the parish. Certain times of the year are more demanding on the catechetical leader, requiring a greater expenditure of time and energy than at others. It is reasonable and fair that, in recognition of this, there be flexibility in the work schedule.

The catechetical leader also needs to take responsibility for his or her own well-being. The person should avoid taking on extra tasks within the parish that are not directly related to the job description or that someone else could do. It is important to take time off in terms of vacation or retreat, for example. Attention to one's physical, spiritual and mental well-being are assets to the catechetical ministry.

Hiring

When seeking a director/coordinator/administrator of religious education, parishes are encouraged to communicate and work with the Diocesan Office of Religious Education. The office can assist the parish in identifying individuals for this ministry, in developing appropriate job descriptions and compensation, and in seeing to the proper formation of catechetical leaders. **The Bishop of Springfield would like all parishes (or groups of parishes) in the diocese to have an appropriately qualified and compensated catechetical leader, as outlined in this document, to oversee this very important ecclesial ministry.**

Oftentimes, the parish has individuals who have the fundamental qualities for potential catechetical leadership, but lack the training and expertise required for this ministry. The parish is urged to identify such individuals and encourage them to develop their potential. This can be a process that requires time and a willingness to invest resources into the formation of that person. One may begin as an administrator of religious education and advance to coordinator. The Office of Religious Education can provide valuable assistance in this process.

Smaller parishes that do not have the financial resources to hire a qualified catechetical leader may team up with one or more parishes to hire someone. This requires a carefully agreed upon plan and commitment for mutual cooperation and support. Yoked parishes also find it advantageous to share a catechetical leader. It is recommended that parishes work with the Office of Religious Education to facilitate this process.

Professional Interaction and Development

Once a person has been identified and/or hired for catechetical leadership, it is important that the individual meet with the diocesan religious education staff. The purpose of this is to familiarize him/her with diocesan services and policies and opportunities for formation and support, and to develop a working relationship with diocesan personnel.

The catechetical leader interacts with many groups within the parish. As a member of the parish staff, the director/coordinator of religious education attends regular staff meetings. The staff normally includes professional personnel such as priests, deacons, pastoral associates and pastoral ministers. He or she also is an ex officio member of the Parish Pastoral Council and its Education Commission. Catechetical leaders are responsible for convening boards for their area of expertise e.g., the religious education executive board or the RCIA team (See the previous section on "Education Commissions"). They also must communicate and interact with other groups such as the school, youth ministry, and Spiritual and Family Life Commissions.

Networking with other catechetical leaders provides support and a context for the sharing of ideas and resources. This can best be accomplished through membership in professional organizations, such as our diocesan Parish Religious Educators (PRE). This association links catechetical leaders with each other, with diocesan offices and the various parishes in the diocese. Its purpose is to provide a supportive community that seeks to update and inform its membership through its regularly scheduled gatherings and programs. Also, regional gatherings of coordinators provides a valuable form of networking.

It is critical that all catechetical leaders participate in ongoing professional development and formation. Programs are offered through the diocese, Catholic colleges, regional and national catechetical organizations. Periodic involvement in regional and national conferences (e.g., East Coast Conference, Institutes with the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, and the biennial New England DRE Convocation) are invaluable experiences for the catechetical leader. These programs provide professional, educational, and spiritual development. Catechetical leaders are urged to participate in such events. The parish should financially support their participation.

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

Director of Religious Education

1. Initiate, organize and implement programs designed to meet the religious education needs of the total parish, e.g.:
 - a. develop educational programs for adults and children
 - b. develop sacramental programs
 - c. coordinate (or work with the Parish RCIA Team toward) the implementation of RCIA
 - d. recruit and train or provide for the training of volunteers to implement all catechetical programs
 - e. provide programs for support and spiritual growth for those involved in parish religious education
 - f. prepare schedules and communicate these schedules to appropriate individuals and groups
 - g. maintain appropriate records of programs and their participants
 - h. select appropriate educational resources
2. Maintain familiarity with educational resources such as:
 - a. programs and/or texts
 - b. audio visual materials
 - c. supplementary materials needed for effective implementation of catechesis
3. Maintain familiarity with official catechetical documents of the Church.
4. Prepare the budget for religious education.
5. Communicate and cooperate with the pastor and parish organizations which include:
 - a. meeting on a regular basis with the pastor and parish staff
 - b. attending all meetings of the religious Education Commission and/or Board
 - c. attending all meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council
 - d. convening the Religious Education Executive Board and
 - e. communicating with the parish community
6. Organize and maintain an efficient office which is accessible and responsive to the needs of parishioners.
7. Evaluate existing programs and make recommendations for revision or expansion of programs.
8. Prepare an annual report for the Parish Religious Education Board and/or Parish Pastoral Council or Education Commission.
9. Participate in ongoing professional development through reading and participation in workshops, seminars, and catechetical institutes.
10. Understand diocesan policies in order to develop parish polices which are consistent with diocesan policies.

Coordinators of Religious Education

1. Organize and implement part or all of the catechetical programs of the parish (as determined by agreement with the coordinator and the pastor or staff), e.g.:

- a. recruit and provide for the training of volunteers who assist in the program
 - b. provide regular meetings for catechists for support and formation
 - c. recommend to the parish director of religious education (or pastor) texts, programs, audio-visual materials and appropriate supplies to be used in the program
 - d. prepare schedules and communicate them to appropriate individuals and groups
 - e. maintain records of programs and participants
 - f. prepare (or collaborate in the preparation of) the catechetical budget
2. Communicate and cooperate with the pastor, the parish director of religious education and parish organizations to include:
 - a. meeting with the pastor (and director) and staff on a regular basis
 - b. participating in all meetings of Parish Religious Education Commission
 - c. convening the religious education board
 - d. participating in all Parish Pastoral Council meetings
 - e. communicating with the parish community
 3. Maintain an efficient office that is accessible and responsive to the needs of parishioners.
 4. Evaluate all programs relevant to the specific area of responsibility assumed and make recommendations for revision and/or expansion of programs.
 5. Prepare and present an annual report to the Parish Board of Religious Education and/or Parish Pastoral Council or Education Commission.
 6. Maintain familiarity with diocesan policies relevant to the specific area of responsibility assumed.
 7. Participate in ongoing formation through reading and attendance at catechetical workshops, seminars and institutes.

Administrator of Religious Education

1. Organize a particular segment of the religious education program in cooperation with the pastor (and/or the coordinator or director of religious education) to include:
 - a. scheduling catechetical sessions and communicating that schedule to appropriate individuals and groups
 - b. recruiting volunteers and seeing to their training and formation
 - c. maintaining a supply of resources for catechists
 - d. seeing that appropriate records are maintained
2. Cooperate and communicate with the pastor and appropriate groups to include:
 - a. meeting regularly with the pastor
 - b. participating in Parish Religious Education Board and/or Commission meetings
3. Participate in training and formation for catechetical ministry.

**DIRECTORS/COORDINATORS/ADMINISTRATORS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Qualifications - Skills/ Competencies - Responsibilities**

	Director (DRE)	Coordinator (CRE)	Administrator (ARE)
Education/Experience	MA Degree in Religious Education or related field*	BA Degree in Religious Studies and Education <u>or</u> BA Degree plus LMF	LMF Catechetical Leadership certification
	1 year as a Coordinator	Catechetical Leadership	1 year as a parish
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		certification 3 years as a parish catechist	catechist
Skills/Competencies	Management/ Leadership Organization Goal setting Delegation, evaluation, communication Public relations Theological reflection Teaching	Leadership Organization Goal setting Delegation, evaluation, communication Theological reflection Teaching	Leadership Organization Spiritual reflection Teaching
Responsibilities:			
Ministerial	Sharing faith and knowledge with individuals & groups Listening & responding pastorally	Sharing faith and knowledge with individuals & groups Listening & responding pastorally	Sharing faith with individuals & groups Listening in time of need
Advocacy	For effective total parish catechesis	For effective total parish catechesis	For specific programs**
Theological	Serve as resource for catechists and individuals/groups Evaluate & choose resources Train catechists	Serve as a resource for catechists Evaluate and choose resources Oversee training of catechists	Work with pastor to choose resources Advise catechists of training opportunities
Administrative	Develop all catechetical programs & calendars Oversee keeping of records Recruit catechists Budget all programs	Develop some or all catechetical programs & calendars Keep records for these programs Recruit catechists Budget programs	Organize specific programs.** See to keeping records for and scheduling of specific programs Recruit catechists

* "related field" denotes religious studies, theology, or pastoral ministry

** "specific programs" denotes those for which the catechetical leader is responsible

SAMPLE CATECHIST APPLICATION FORM

Name _____

—

Address _____

—

Phone:

(Day) _____ (Evening) _____

Other activities in which you are currently involved (work/volunteer)

Previous catechetical experience (grade/age level and parish)

Catechetical training or workshops attended

Special interests/skills

Availability:	Days	Morning	Afternoon	Evening

Pastors/Administrators

“Experience bears out that the quality of catechesis in a community depends very largely on the presence and activity of the priest.” (GDC 225). It is the pastor who bears the responsibility for seeing that comprehensive catechesis is carried

out for adults, youth and children. Successful catechesis in a parish requires much time, effort, coordination and expertise. Therefore, the pastor shares this responsibility with others: catechetical leaders, catechists, and education commissions and boards.

“The function proper to the presbyterate in the catechetical task arises from the sacrament of Holy Orders. ... The ministry of the priest is a service which forms the Christian community and coordinates and strengthens other charisms and services. They work to see that the faithful are properly formed and reach true Christian maturity. Priests foster the vocation and work of catechists and assist them in carrying out a function which springs from Baptism and is exercised in virtue of a mission entrusted to them by the Church.” (GDC 224)

The active involvement of priests benefits themselves as well as the community. It helps them to establish relationships with the persons involved. These relationships contribute to building community. They enable priests to better identify their parish’s catechetical needs, as well as their parishioners’ gifts and talents. This interactive contact with the priest helps foster vocations to Christian ministry.

While pastors exercise their role as educators in the faith most explicitly through the homily, they are to see that the Christian faithful are given catechetical formation. They are also to move beyond the circle of active parishioners, making every effort with the help of the Christian faithful to bring the gospel message to those who no longer practice their faith or who do not profess the faith (See Can. 528.1).

The role of the pastor in the catechetical endeavor then, is primarily that of ensuring that the catechetical needs of the entire Christian community are met, including the evangelization of those who are seeking entrance into the community. He does this by calling forth the gifts and talents of those in the community, identifying catechists and leaders, and empowering them to carry out the catechetical plans and programs of the parish with him. The immensity of the task of catechesis is such that the pastor cannot do it alone.

It is essential to effective catechesis that the pastor hire a qualified and competent catechetical leader to help him in his role as educator in the faith. (See the previous section on “Catechetical Leaders”.) It is important that he

meet regularly with the catechetical leader for planning, coordinating and addressing any issues or questions that arise. This leader also participates in staff meetings along with other professional members of the pastoral staff.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (225) identifies the catechetical tasks of the parish priest as follows:

- To establish a sense of *common responsibility* for catechesis in the Christian community and a recognition of and appreciation for catechists and their mission;

- To care for the *basic orientation of catechesis* and its planning by giving emphasis to active participation of catechists and by insisting that catechesis be well structured and oriented;
- To promote and to discern *vocations* to the service of catechesis and to give great attention to the formation of catechists;
- To integrate catechetical activity into the program of *community evangelization*, and foster the link between catechesis, sacraments and the liturgy;
- To ensure that the catechesis of the community is in concert with the *diocesan pastoral program* of religious education.

The Office of Religious Education is available to assist pastors in carrying out their catechetical responsibilities.

Diocese

“In the Diocese catechesis is a unique service performed jointly by priests, deacons, religious and laity, in communion with the Bishop”.
(GDC 219)

“The diocesan catechetical office is the means which the Bishop as head of the community and teacher of doctrine utilizes to direct and moderate all the catechetical activities of the diocese”.
(GDC 265)

The Bishop

It is the Bishop who bears primary responsibility for catechesis within the diocese. He carries out this responsibility through his preaching, by putting forth a vision of catechesis, and by setting catechetical standards. It is he who provides the “overall direction of catechesis in the particular Church” (GDC 223). He delegates the day-to-day practical concern of catechesis to the Office of Religious Education. The policies, programs, and services of that office are carried out under the auspices of the Bishop. At both the diocesan and the parish level, all those who serve in catechetical ministry do so in collaboration with the Bishop.

The Office of Religious Education

The Office of Religious Education of the Diocese of Springfield (ORE) is missioned for advocacy, service and formation for quality catechesis for all ages.

As an *advocate*, it acts as the Bishop’s delegate in making catechesis a priority and putting forth a diocesan vision of catechesis that is reflected in its policies and guidelines. It acts as an advocate for pastors and parish leaders in their roles of implementing catechesis in the parish. The ORE advocates that quality catechesis is made available to adults, youth, and children of the parish, as well as those in the wider communities who are seeking a renewed or new relationship with God and the Church. The ORE is a place where all involved can bring their catechetical concerns.

In its role of *service*, the ORE provides consultation for parish leadership and other agencies in planning and implementing catechetical programs for adults, youth and children. Two resource libraries are available, one in Springfield and one in Pittsfield. For catechetical leaders and catechists these libraries have samples of catechetical resources, reference materials, and audiovisual materials for rental. General reading materials about our Catholic faith and spirituality are available for borrowing by interested persons.

A major component of the service of the ORE is *formation* for catechetical ministries. Training and enrichment programs are provided for catechists and

catechetical leaders in all areas of catechesis: adult education and RCIA, and catechesis for children and youth. A certification program for catechists and catechetical leaders is provided in conjunction with the Diocesan Lay Ministry Formation Program.

A brochure that further describes these services and formation programs is provided with this handbook and is available from the Office of Religious Education.

The Office of Religious Education relates to other agencies and groups. It works collaboratively with other diocesan offices, such as the Offices of Pastoral Ministry, Youth Ministry, Worship, and Catholic Schools. The staff attends to its own continuing education and enrichment, as well as its relationship to the wider Church. This relationship to the wider Church is attained through involvement in regional and national organizations e.g., the New England Conference of Diocesan

Directors of Religious Education, the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders, and the North American Forum on the Catechumenate.

Parish catechesis is carried out under the auspices of the Bishop and the ORE, providing catechesis according to the diocesan vision, policies and guidelines. The parish benefits by taking advantage of the catechetical services provided by the diocese. Catechetical leadership in the parish works closely with the ORE in planning and implementing its catechetical programs.

C. Financial Commitment

The pursuit of excellence in catechesis is reflected in a financial commitment that recognizes the parish catechetical endeavor as a priority. The parish makes a serious effort to identify the broad spectrum of catechetical needs and develops an adequate budget to meet those needs. While some parishes have more resources available to them than others, all parishes have a responsibility to assure that specific funds are made available for catechesis, even as they assure funding for other necessary or required expenses.

Importance of Financial Commitment to Total Catechesis

The Parish Finance Council plays an important role in seeing that appropriate funding is developed and provided. “The purpose of the Finance Council is to aid the Pastor in the administration of parish goods in order to carry out the mission of the parish“ (*Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Council Guidelines*, p. 18). The primacy of catechesis in the mission of the Church is reflected in Christ’s command to “go into the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15; also, see Mt. 28:19). Therefore, the Finance Council gives high priority to catechesis in its overall planning.

A specific budget for catechesis makes a strong statement to the entire parish community about the value of catechesis. It is a concrete expression of the parish’s commitment to form adults and children in the faith. It is a tool for planning that assists parish leadership in implementing comprehensive catechesis for each year. A catechetical budget gives leaders and catechists clear parameters for the available financial resources and encourages them to plan and prioritize spending.

Preparing a catechetical budget is a process that involves collaboration of several individuals and groups: the pastor, the catechetical leader(s), the Education Commission and its subgroups, and the Parish Finance Council. The process involves identifying catechetical needs, establishing priorities, identifying sources of income, and clarifying the place of catechesis in the overall parish budget.

Sample Budget

Items to be considered in a parish catechetical budget include but are not limited to:

- Catechist training
- Adult education programs
- RCIA catechesis
- Teaching materials such as texts and their supplements
- Audio-visual materials
- Speakers

- Library acquisitions and/or pamphlet rack materials
- Subscriptions to professional journals

- Catechist appreciation and support
- Supplementary programs such as retreats, Vacation Bible School, etc.
- Hospitality (refreshments, etc.)
- Supplemental catechetical supplies
- Office supplies, postage, etc.

A major component of a catechetical budget is salaries and benefits for the catechetical leader(s) and staff. (See “Catechetical Leaders” in Section 2 and the “Ministry Analysis Worksheet” in Section 5.) These are being listed separately since most parishes put salaries into a separate category. Benefits would include:

- Health insurance
- Pension
- Continuing education and formational experiences for the catechetical leader(s)
- Conference expenses for the catechetical leader(s)
- Mileage expense for meetings and conferences
- Dues for professional memberships

Each parish is unique. There is no one budget that fits all. It is important that the catechetical leaders and Finance Council work closely in designing a budget that fits into the budget structure of the entire parish.

D. Creative Possibilities

It is often advantageous for parishes to combine resources in order to provide a better catechetical program. This can be accomplished through implementing specific aspects of catechesis on a regional basis or by parish clustering that includes most or all of the catechetical programs. Some factors to determine the suitability of such combined programs would include:

- Geographical proximity and a positive relationship
- Small parishes that have limited resources
- Similar ethnic demographics

The primary consideration is to provide the most effective catechesis that maintains the basic elements of word, worship, service and community. Larger is not necessarily better. Class size, especially for children and youth, should include no more than 12 participants. It is important that those involved in combined programs do not lose a sense of community and parish identity. While financial considerations are an important factor, they are not the highest measure of whether such combinations will be successful. It is also important that all involved parishes make a clear commitment in terms of sharing resources and planning.

Whether catechesis is combined through regional programming or parish clustering, certain principles apply:

- Every effort must be made to maintain parish identity and a sense of community.
- The best setting for liturgical celebrations is the home parish.
- All involved parishes contribute their resources: personnel, finances and facilities.
- Planning needs to take place collaboratively. It may be helpful to develop a combined religious education board.
- All the principles outlined in this handbook for effective catechesis for adults, youth and children are to be followed.

Parish Clustering

In this model, two or more parishes combine their resources to hire a qualified director of religious education who oversees some or all of the combined programs listed above. All parishes involved benefit from the experience and expertise of a professional director that the individual parishes may not otherwise be able to afford. Well organized and quality catechesis is made possible. The model requires both collaboration and commitment on the part of all involved parishes. Parish resources of personnel, finances and facilities are shared.

This model has many variations. Consideration needs to be given to the needs of the region and the goals of the diocese. Planning for parish clustering takes place in consultation with the staffs of the involved parishes and the Diocesan Diocese of Springfield, 2000

Office of Religious Education. Most, but not necessarily all, programs are combined. There may be coordinators or administrators of religious education who work with the director to take care of on-site details or to implement a specific area of catechesis, such as adult education or RCIA catechesis.

The section of the handbook on Catechetical Leaders further explains the function of directors, coordinators and administrators of religious education.

Regional Programs

Regional programs are those in which one or more catechetical programs are shared by one or more parishes. Some possible combinations are:

- **Adult education programming.** - This can be a very beneficial inter-parochial activity, whether through lecture series, small group experiences or parish missions. It is especially helpful when one parish does not have the financial resources to pay speakers or the facilities to host programs.
- **Adult sacramental preparation.** - Collaborating with local parishes to prepare adults for Confirmation is especially beneficial when there are small numbers in each parish.
- **RCIA catechesis.** - While some RCIA formation may take place in a combined setting, *it is essential that all rites, including the weekly dismissal rite and breaking open the Word, be done in the parish in which the catechumen or candidate will be initiated.* (See the *Guidelines and Recommendations for Implementing the RCIA in the Diocese of Springfield*, 92-96 for further suggestions.)
- **Ecumenical and interfaith programs for adults.** - Programs focused on topics such as social justice, mutual understanding and dialogue, and local issues are most appropriate. It is essential that these take place under sound leadership with ecumenical sensitivity.
- **Catechist training and updating.** - These especially lend themselves to regional gatherings. They provide opportunities for catechists to interact with each other and share ideas.
- **School age catechesis.** - Either some or all aspects are combined. For sacramental preparation, the catechesis and parent involvement may happen jointly, but the liturgical celebrations should take place in the child's home parish.
- **Supplementary programs such as retreats and Vacation Bible School.**