

DIOCESE OF GREENSBURG
OFFICE FOR EVANGELIZATION AND FAITH FORMATION
POLICY FOR RELIGIOUS FORMATION IN THE HOME

Preamble: In his second Pastoral Letter, *The Transmission of Faith in the Present Culture*, the Most Reverend Lawrence E. Brandt, JCD, PhD, Bishop of Greensburg announced a *Catechetical Master Plan* for the diocese. In the plan the Bishop announced a number of new initiatives under the auspices of the Office for Evangelization and Faith Formation, “for those who hold catechetical roles in our parishes, Catholic schools and other settings where catechesis takes place,” including the home. The Pastoral Letter also addressed the catechetical responsibilities of the Bishop, pastors, and parents.

In regard to the Bishop, “The proclamation and transmission of the Gospel is central to the Bishop’s ministry. Consequently, the Bishop holds the primary responsibility for catechesis in his diocese and accepts the role of chief catechist there while being responsible for the nature of its catechetical mission.” The catechetical responsibilities of the Bishop are also addressed in Canon Law, “Having observed the prescripts issued by the Apostolic See, it is for the diocesan bishop to issue norms for catechetics, to make provision that suitable instruments of catechesis are available.” (Can. 775 §1)

Pastors also have responsibilities for catechetical instruction at his parish. According to Canon Law these responsibilities are:

- “that suitable catechesis is imparted for the celebration of the sacraments;”
- “that through catechetical instruction imparted for an appropriate period of time children are prepared properly for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and the Most Holy Eucharist and for the sacrament of confirmation;”
- “that having received first communion, these children are enriched more fully and deeply through catechetical formation;”
- “that the faith of youth and adults is strengthened, enlightened, and developed through various means and endeavors.” (Can. 777 §1-3, 5)

The Bishop continued in the Pastoral Letter, “Like the bishop and priests, parents share responsibility for the formation of their children in the Catholic faith.” In fact, parents have a “primary and unique role ... in the faith formation of their children.” Canon Law exhorts, “Parents and those who take their place are bound by the obligation and possess the right of educating their offspring. Catholic parents also have the duty and right of choosing those means and institutions through which they can provide more suitably for the Catholic education of their children, according to local circumstances.” (Can. 793 §1)

It is with the catechetical responsibilities of the bishop, pastors, and parents in mind that this Policy for Religious Formation in the Home is rooted in the following from Canon Law, “The duty and right of educating belongs in a special way to the Church, to which has been divinely entrusted the mission of assisting persons so that they are able to reach the fullness of the Christian life.” (Can. 794 §1)

Texts and Resources

It has been the policy of the Diocese of Greensburg that the textbooks used in parish faith formation programs and Catholic schools must be on the *Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series* of the USCCB Subcommittee on the Catechism. The subcommittee has established *The Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997). To be in conformity with the Catechism, textbooks are judged for their authenticity and completeness.

The four criteria for a textbook to be judged authentic are:

- Minimally, the catechetical materials should contain nothing contradictory to the *Catechism*
- They should encourage and assist in the development of a common language of faith within the Church
- They should promote a healthy and vital Catholic identity in such a way that the believer is encouraged to hear the message clearly, live it with conviction and share it courageously with others
- Since the *Catechism* should not be reduced to its *in brief* sections, catechetical materials should evidence the wider context of teaching from which the *in brief* sections are drawn

The five criteria for a textbook to be judged complete are:

- The materials should reflect the four pillars of the *Catechism*: such materials should include the articles of the Creed, the sacraments, the Commandments and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer
- They should also include an appropriate presentation of the rootedness of the teaching in Sacred Scripture
- They should reflect in an appropriate manner the variety and multiplicity of the sources of the faith found in the *Catechism*, for example, the teachings from the Councils, the Eastern and Western Fathers, liturgical texts and spiritual writings
- They should show that God's love is revealed primarily in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ
- They should give proper importance to the biblical, anthropological, liturgical, moral and spiritual, as well as to the ecumenical and missionary dimensions of the *Catechism*

Therefore, the resource used as the primary text for Religious Formation in the Home also must be on the *Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series* of the USCCB Subcommittee on the Catechism. The listing is updated every four-six weeks and can be found at www.usccb.org/catechism/document/Currentlist.pdf.

Curriculum

In the Pastoral Letter, *The Transmission of Faith in the Present Culture*, Bishop Brandt called for the development of Catechetical Guidelines and Curriculum for Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 8, Youth Ministry, and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). These documents are in the process of being written and are expected to become policy in the Diocese of Greensburg in 2011. It is anticipated that once these documents become policy that the expectations of the curriculum will be used to assess the progress of those being catechized no matter where the catechesis takes place – parish, Catholic school, or home. Until such time that a curriculum becomes policy; pastors, principals, catechetical leaders, and families forming the faith in the home are expected to use the Faith Development sections in the diocesan document *Taste and See* to assess the progress of those being catechized.

Parish Involvement

While the Church teaches that parents are primarily responsible for the faith formation of their children, it also teaches, “The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.” (CCC 2226) The parish “is the place where all the faithful can be gathered for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life; it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ’s saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love.” (CCC 2179)

In the Pastoral Letter the Bishop outlines active participation in the faith for all Catholics as: “weekly attendance at Sunday Eucharist, regular participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, daily prayer, ongoing formation in faith, and the use of sacramentals and the prominent display of articles of devotion in the home.” Additionally, families must involve themselves in the life of the parish by:

- participating in Liturgical roles for which they have been properly trained and educated;
- participating in the social and Christian service activities of the parish and faith formation program;
- gathering with the parish community for faith enrichment programs such as Bible Studies, retreats, and parish missions;

- participating in the spiritual, social, and service activities of the parish youth ministry program.

It is expected that this involvement in the life of the parish will take place in the home parish of the family on a regular basis.

Sacramental Preparation

Since 1994 it has been the policy, and it will continue to be the policy of the Diocese of Greensburg to prepare children of catechetical age according to the General Principles for Sacrament Preparation outlined in the diocesan document, *Journey of a Lifetime*.

- All the baptized share in the mission of the Church in the world. Thus initiation and conversion are the work of the whole parish. The involvement of the parish community in the initiation process is both primary and key.
- Immediate preparation for and the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Reconciliation takes place within the home parish of the child.
- Immediate preparation takes place in a family context at a time separate from and outside of the religion classroom.
- Immediate preparation for the sacraments properly includes conversion through the liturgy, symbol, prayer, scripture and the experience of a community of worship and service.
- The sources of sacramental catechesis are the rites and symbols for each sacrament.
- Catholic schools, parish religious education programs, and religious formation in the home support the parish in its efforts to prepare children for sacraments through prayer, encouragement, instruction, and on-going formation.
- Catholic schools, parish religious education programs, and religious formation in the home help integrate faith into daily life and continue/aid the formation process begun by families at Baptism.

In addition to diocesan Sacramental Preparation Policies, those families forming the faith in the home will be required to adhere to any parish Sacramental Preparation Policies in place.

Assessment

It is outlined in Canon Law, that it is the responsibility of the Pastor to ensure that, “children are enriched more fully and deeply through catechetical formation.” Therefore, the Pastor and those he has given responsibility for faith formation in the parish must be assured that progress of those being catechized is being made through the expectations of the curriculum no matter where the catechesis takes place – parish, Catholic school, or home. It is expected then, that those families who choose religious formation in the home will meet **twice** a year with the pastor or faith formation leader to determine the progress of those catechized at home according to the diocesan curriculum.

Training and Catechetical Certification

In accordance with the *Catechetical Master Plan* the diocese has established, “a Training and Catechetical Certification Process for those who hold catechetical roles in our parishes, Catholic schools and other settings where catechesis takes place.” All catechists, no matter where they teach, who have no formal catechetical training are expected to participate and attain diocesan certification. Those new to catechetical ministries are required to attend Orientation Sessions in their first year of being involved in catechesis. The Basic and Permanent Levels of the process will require participants to attend and complete workshops on the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other key doctrinal and catechetical elements.

Notifications, Decisions, and Appeals

It is the responsibility of the family to inform the Pastor and parish Faith Formation Leader of their intention to conduct formal formation in the home. For a parish to approve a family forming the faith in the home the family must declare their adherence to this policy and all parish requirements.

Decisions regarding both the formal approval of religious formation in the home and the proper disposition to receive the Sacrament will be made by the Pastor in consultation with the family.

Appeals to decisions made on the parish level should be made in writing to the Office for Evangelization and Faith Formation and can be addressed to:

Managing Director
Office for Evangelization and Faith Formation
723 East Pittsburgh Street
Greensburg, PA 15601