

ECHOING THE GOSPEL FOR CATECHISTS

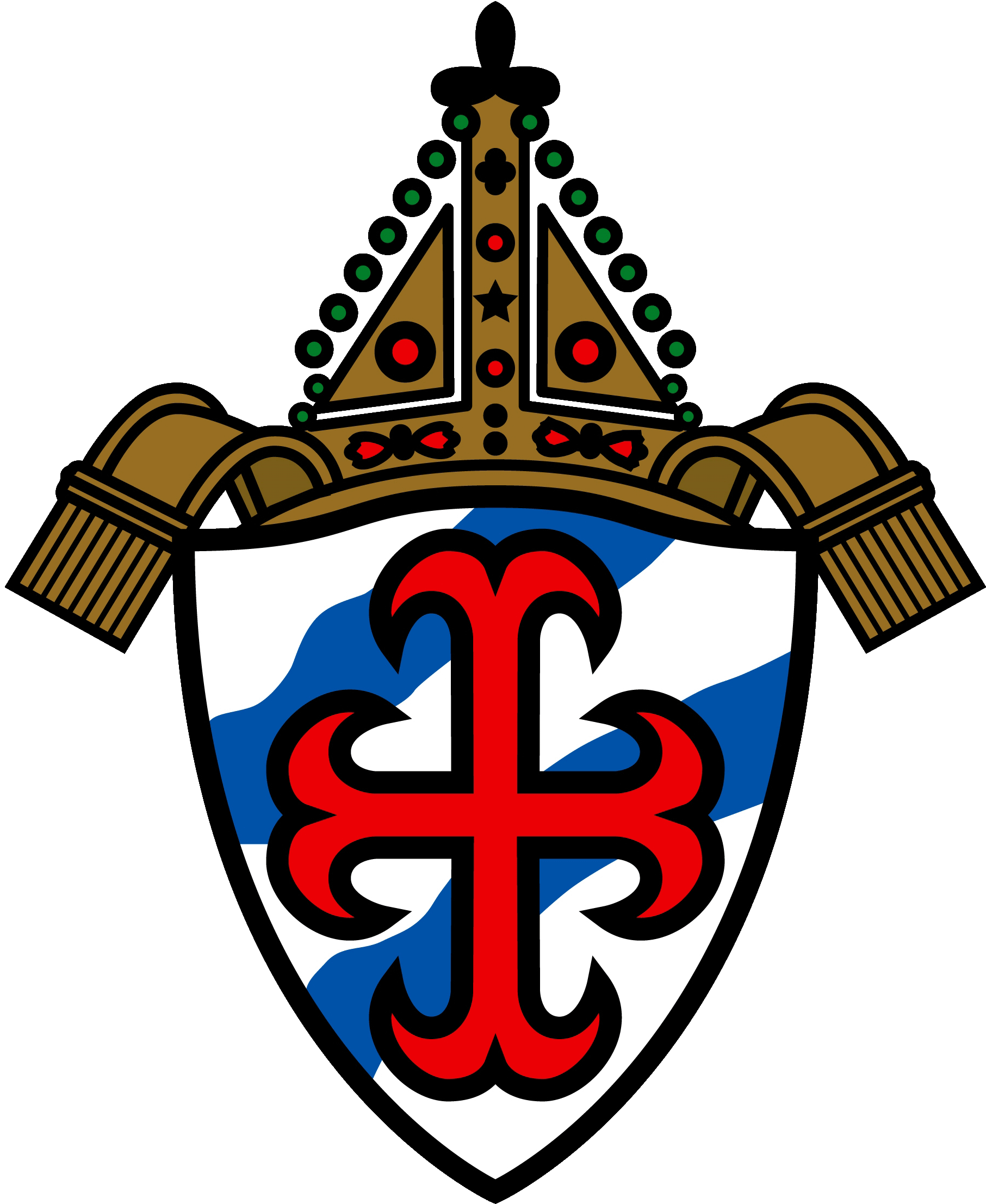
Catechetical Certification for Parish Catechists



September 1, 2016

Diocese of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids, MI

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**Echoing the Gospel for Catechists**

The Catechetical Certification program in the Diocese of Grand Rapids was developed to assist catechists who have heard God’s call to share the Gospel with others. In order to be effective in this ministry, the catechist must understand, love, live and proclaim the Christian message with enthusiasm and a sense of conviction. This proclamation of the Gospel in the parish community strives to lead students to a deepening knowledge about the faith, a greater participation in the liturgy, a prayerful connection to their God and a dedication of service to others.

The purpose of a catechist formation is to:

* Provide opportunities for the spiritual growth of the catechist
* Provide an increase in the theological knowledge of the catechist
* Provide opportunities for the catechist to expand their skills in teaching.

The ministry of catechesis as found in the National Directory for Catechesis by the USCCB, section 55 says:

* “Programs of formation should be designed to help them (catechists) acquire the knowledge and skills they need to hand on the faith to those entrusted to their care and assist them in living as disciples of Christ”
* “Like all Christians, catechists are called to continual conversion, and growth in their faith, and for this reason are called to ongoing spiritual formation.”
* “Since effective catechesis depends on virtuous and skilled catechists, their ongoing formation should enhance the human, spiritual, and apostolic qualities and catechetical skills they bring to their ministry.”

***What is Catechesis?***

“Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it, and communicates it in many ways.” (General Directory for Catechesis #105).

Jesus empowered the Church to continue His mission when he said: “Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of time (Mt. 28:18-20).”

This great commission has been handed to women and men, whom God has called, to proclaim the Good News. This ministry of teaching and forming has traditionally been referred to as catechesis.

The name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church and to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God…and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ (Catechesi Tradendae #1).

The word catechesis comes from the Greek meaning “to echo the teaching” meaning that catechesis or the teaching of the faith is an interactive process in which the Word of God resounds between and among the proclaimer, the one receiving the message, and the Holy Spirit!

Catechesis is a life-long process of initial conversion, formation, education, and on-going conversion. Through word, worship, service and community it seeks to lead all God’s people to an ever deepening relationship with God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Catechesis takes many forms and includes the initiation of adults, youth and children as well as the intentional and systematic effort to enable all to grow in faith and discipleship.

***The Art of Teaching the Faith***

What does it mean to say that the teaching of the faith is the work of the Holy Spirit? It means that the catechist cooperates in God the Fathers communication of His truth and love to His sons and daughters, most perfectly in the sending of His only-begotten Son into the world for our salvation.

How does God the Father teach His children? He accepts His children as they are, and He works to free them from sin and to draw them to Himself. God the Father works through the events of each person’s life to reveal Himself and to form a bond of faithful love with the person.

The pedagogy or art of teaching of the catechist should imitate the pedagogy of God. The catechist should help the catechized to see the hand of God at work in the events of life. Through catechesis, the catechized comes to a deeper appreciation of his or her relationship with God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ exemplifies the art of teaching of God the Father. The disciples had direct experience of Christ’s teaching through His words and deeds. They have given us a picture of His teaching in the Gospels. The following traits of his teaching are found clearly in the Gospels.

* Our Lord Jesus always received others, especially the poor and sinners, “as persons loved and sought out by God” (General Directory for Catechesis, #140);
* Our Lord Jesus always presented the truth and love of God the Father without compromise;
* He always showed forth a sensitive and strong love which helps others to overcome sin, and respects and fosters life;
* He constantly invited and urged others to “a manner of living sustained by faith in God, by hope in the Kingdom and by charity to one’s neighbor” (Ibid);
* He used all the various means of interpersonal communication, for example, “word, silence, metaphor, image, example, and many diverse signs.” (Ibid)

When our Lord invited His disciples to follow Him with all their mind and heart, He handed on to them His art of teaching as a fundamental way of sharing fully in His saving mission.

In her turn, the Church has followed the art of teaching of God the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ. In a certain sense, the whole life of the Church is an education in the faith, for the Church is our Mother and Teacher. Down the Christian centuries, we find a wealth of catechetical pedagogy in the Church; the lives of the saints and of catechists, the various ways of living the Catholic faith and of communicating the faith to others, for example from the catechism, and a rich collection of catechetical practices and texts.

God the Father’s art of teaching is discovered in the action of the Holy Spirit in the catechized, leading the catechized to draw close to the Father by becoming more and more like God the Son. The finality of all catechesis is the deeper communion with God the Father which comes about by becoming more and more like Christ. The catechized becomes more like Christ to the degree that he or she responds to the promptings of the Holy Spirit dwelling within. “For this reason,” the *General Directory for Catechesis* concludes “there cannot be teachers of the faith other than those who are convinced and faithful disciples of Christ and of his Church.” (#142)

The art of teaching the faith, following the divine example, has the following characteristics:

* It helps the catechized in his or her relationship with God by which God saves us from sin and frees us to love Him and our neighbor; the art of teaching the faith stresses the free initiative of God in loving us, the dignity of man as the recipient of God’s love and the response of love which God’s initiative requires of man;
* It respects the mystery of God the Father’s communication with man: its divine origin and it adaptation in expression to situations of persons and cultures;
* It esteems the experience of the faith in the Church;
* It is rooted in interpersonal relations and makes its own the process of dialogue
* It employs signs, linking words and deeds, teaching and experience;
* It expresses the “inexhaustible divine love,” and therein finds its power.

In short, the art of catechesis favors the growth of the catechized into the likeness of Christ, with the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide. By so doing, the art of teaching the faith is the art of assisting others to return to God the Father in love and holiness of life.

Catechesis is carried out by humans who employ human means but it is a participation in the saving mission of Christ, the saving action of God the Father. Therefore, catechists must be on guard that they are **presenting the truth of the faith and not their private ideas or some ideology**. Catechists will employ a teaching art which permits them to promote the full adherence of the catechized to God and to the content of the Christian message which makes full adherence to God possible. They will also help the catechized to develop in all dimensions of the faith: knowledge, prayer and worship, and the life of the virtues. Ultimately, the catechist helps the catechized to give himself or herself to God, especially in “the vocation to which the Lord calls.” In this regard, catechesis is fundamental to the apostolate of vocations by which the Church helps young people to know their vocation in life and to embrace it with their whole being.

*The following is taken from the Heart of Catechesis: New Evangelization & a New Catechesis*

The greatest weakness of most catechetical endeavors…Elementary and High School education, Adult Education and RCIA – even those which faithfully employ the Catechism of the Catholic Church – is that they are not sufficiently Christ-centered. Although Jesus may be mentioned with some frequency, weeks may pass [or longer periods still] without spending significant class time reflecting on His words or pondering the events in His life. In our catechesis in our catechetical textbooks – even the best of them, we tend to present our material according to our own agenda and methodology. We then bring Jesus Christ as an illustration, a sort of “audiovisual aid” to illuminate the point we are trying to make.

Often we succeed in convincing people, at least for a while, that our One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church was indeed established by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. We may also effectively demonstrate the reasonableness of many of the challenging and disputed teachings of our Church; the Petrine Primacy, our Blessed Mother’s role in the economy of salvation, the dignity of human life and the sanctity of human love in marriage. But this is not enough. On “YouTube” neo-atheists are confounding and seducing our teens. We have been bleeding college age students and “twenty-somethings” for decades. And the official “attrition rate” of those we receive into the Church in our RCIA programs is 33%; 1/3rd of our “newly evangelized” and catechized Catholics fall away within 5 years. Obviously we are not winning them completely. We are failing to bring people in all of these groups – even those who are open and receptive – into a deep, lasting, and intimate holy communion with Jesus Christ!

Certainly the quintessential and crucial insight of the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** is asserted in #426-427:

**At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the Person of Jesus Christ 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.”**

**In catechesis “Christ the Incarnate Word and Son of God…is taught – everything else is taught with reference to Him – and it is Christ alone who teaches…every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: “My teaching is not mine, but His who sent Me” (ccc #426-7 and CT #5-6)**

If we seek to catechize effectively, Jesus Christ must be clearly present ***at the heart of every catechetical session.***

Most Catholics, even those consistently practicing their Faith, have never spent a significant period of time reading and studying the Scriptures. We are often quite content merely to listen to the bits and pieces of the story of Jesus proclaimed during Mass on Sundays. Attempting to grasp and understand the story of Christ’s life from our weekly experience at Mass is like trying to comprehend the Sistine Chapel ceiling while suspended 18 inches from the surface of the fresco.

Aside from the fact that He lived about 2000 years ago, for most Christians the chronology and the scope of Christ’s life are only vaguely understood – even for those who have taken the initiative to further their studies. The formal consideration of the Life and Person of Jesus Christ is often presented within studies of the Synoptic Gospels, the Joannine Writings, or courses in Christology – an historical overview Who and What Jesus is. Following these methodologies students are not usually brought into an intimate encounter with the Person they seek.

The vast majority of Catholics who casually plow through the latest five-hundred page bestsellers have never taken the three or four hours necessary to read straight through the sixteen short chapters of Mark’s Gospel [about thirty pages of the **Bible**, the “all-time bestseller]. Legions of J.K. Rowling fans and Star Wars aficionados who can expound at length about the origins, motivations, and even the “spiritual significance” of Harry Potter and Anakin Skywalker, know few details of the Life of Christ; born in a stable, performed some miracles, told a few parables; died on a cross. Those seeking to know and understand Jesus more intimately need to be more effectively engaged by the drama of His life as it actually unfolded – to understand and appreciate the narrative sequence… the **“narration”** of His story.

When the Son of God set out during His Public Life to teach and to proclaim the coming of His Kingdom, He knew well His time was limited. He had about 3 years to manifest the Gospel with His Words and Deeds. As His mission unfolded, Jesus Christ revealed the deepest Mysteries of Eternity in a very carefully conceived manner, following a definite strategy, in particular places and situations.

For example, when He initiated His catechesis on Baptism, Christ did not make a series of presentations on the Seven Sacraments over the course of a three-day retreat, then conduct seminars on Christian Anthropology and the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel during the ensuing two weeks. Instead, He sent John to prepare the way. When the moment arrived for Jesus to reveal the call to new life in the Holy Spirit, He orchestrated [and participated in] the marvelous theophany of His Own Baptism. Several months later He took Nicodemus to task for his lack of understanding and explained the necessity of being begotten of water and Spirit, describing certain dynamics of the sacrament and the economy of salvation in great detail. Not long after this we see the disciples themselves baptizing others. Christ manifested His teaching on Baptism [and other Mysteries and doctrines] gradually and in concert with His Mission. **The chronologically unfolding story of Jesus’ life was His Methodology – the “Syllabus” for the “course” he was teaching.**

Employing the Four Gospels, an overview of the history, a good map of Palestine in biblical times, and a bit of common sense, we can alter the methodology of our catechesis by focusing on and pondering the **Life of Christ**. Following Jesus’ own “syllabus” – His Ministry and story as it unfolds – we too can proclaim and explain the crucial content of the **CCC** and other significant sources in the same sequence and context in which Our Lord revealed the Mysteries of our Faith. The primary focus of every session – our catechetical **expression** – should remain where it needs to be – on Jesus Christ; His life, His words, and His Deeds.

The familiarity with Our Lord that this intellectual and spiritual endeavor is intended to foster will hopefully, by God’s Grace, bring greater intimacy with Jesus. If, as St. Jerome observed, **“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,”** then knowledge and understanding of Scriptures provides an occasion more profoundly to know and to love Christ. As the one seeking to know Christ is formed in this process of prayer and pondering, he may be led to share with others “the gift he himself has received.” Then, as teacher and catechist, he might very effectively choose to follow Jesus’ “syllabus” following Christ through the Gospels, integrating his catechesis within the exegesis. Following his “*modus operandi*”has an added benefit; an effective catechist would also be “marrying” theological disciplines – Scripture Study, Evangelization, and Catechesis…a truly “Biblical Catechesis.” A “Bible Study” of this sort would have a broader appeal for the average parishioner than just another RCIA cycle or catechetical class.

Such an approach is more consistent with the pedagogy suggested by the Catechism itself in #426-427. This insight is echoed eloquently by Fr. Rainero Cantalamessa:

**If Christianity, as so often and so rightly has been said, is not primarily a doctrine but a person – Jesus Christ – it follows that the proclamation of this Person and of one’s relationship with Him is the most important thing, the beginning of all true evangelization and the very condition for making such a thing possible. To reverse this order and put the doctrines and obligations of the Gospel before the discovery of Jesus would be like putting the carriages in front of the railway engine that is supposed to pull them.”** (Rainero Cantalamessa, Jesus Christ the Holy One of God p. 90)

Pope Francis recently observed in a speech to the Pontifical Biblical Commission that, **the center of our Faith is not only a book, but a history of salvation and especially a Person, Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh.”** A pedagogy utilizing the content and substance of Sacred Scripture and the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, but following a more Christocentric presentation of its inspired content will more effectively inform and form heralds of the New Evangelization to win the minds and heart of our brothers and sisters. With the help of God the Holy Spirit, may we ever more effectively proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the Word of the Lord **and** the Heart of Catechesis.

**Catechetical Certification for Parish Catechists**

Within the Diocese of Grand Rapids, there are three required dimensions of growth in which parish catechists must show continual competence in order to maintain certification: Spirituality, Theology, and Evangelization.

**Area A – Human/Spiritual – one’s own personal, spiritual and faith development**

Catechetical ministry builds upon the mission to which all the baptized are called to, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel” (Mark 15:15). This proclamation of the Good News requires a witness not only in words but also in actions. It is through the authentic witness of the Catholic Christian in their manner of life and fidelity to the Church’s teachings and traditions that the Gospel is best preached. All those called to the catechetical ministry must show themselves to be well-formed and healthy human beings who are living good and moral lives according to the Church’s teaching. Catechists not living a life in keeping with the Church’s clear teaching in these matters is to create contradiction in our work and to sow scandal within the community.

Catechists ought to demonstrate the qualities of human maturity needed for fruitful ministry with children, youth and adult. This development entails the two-fold dynamic of strengthening positive traits that foster teaching effectiveness and lessening negative traits that hinder it. Accordingly, they ought to strive to deepen their knowledge of self and other, grow from experiences of suffering and challenge, maintain a balanced and positive relationships appreciate and value diversity and demonstrate basic human virtues. Cultivating such traits and skills within a Christ-centered community contributes to the development of a healthy and well-balanced personality, for the sake of both personal and spiritual growth.

“Spiritual formation aims to arouse and animate true hunger for holiness, desire for union with the Father through Christ in the Spirit, daily growing love of God and neighbor in life and ministry, and the practices of prayer and spirituality that foster these attitudes and dispositions. It promotes and strengthens that fundamental conversion that places God and not oneself, at the center of one’s life. Openness to ongoing conversion is a prerequisite for fruitful spiritual formation.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

**AREA B –THEOLOGY – The study of Church teachings, scripture and Church documents**

Having encountered the person and message of Jesus Christ, the hunger of the Catechist for union with the Triune God is constant. The result of this hunger is the call to holiness, built on the Word of God, experienced in the liturgy and sacraments, formed through suffering, nurtured in joy, and sustained in community with all the baptized through the Church as Mystical Body. The Catechist gives witness to a well-formed spirituality through a rich and diversified prayer, theological reflection, and action rooted in Catholic Social Teaching.

Formation for the catechist is a journey beyond catechesis into theological study. A Catechists faith and teaching is formed by the study of the Catholic theological tradition. A Catechist growing in theological competence can articulate and interpret this Catholic teaching and tradition with disciples from diverse communities. Catechists should have a growing knowledge of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Basic study of the faith unearths treasures in the Tradition of the Catholic Church and sheds light on the Church’s teaching by making connections for the sake of a broadened and deepened faith and a better-grounded and informed teaching ministry.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**AREA C –METHODOLOGY – leading the spiritual and faith development of others**

The Catechist in his/her role as an evangelizer and catechist, operates in a parish setting which has various dimensions – faith formation, worship, cultural diversity, community life, social justice and apostolic service. Catechists must be effective listeners who foster respect and offer compassionate care within varied settings. In the spirit of the Gospel, they serve others as companions on the journey of faith. They work collaboratively with others in the parish.

Methodology means bringing the Good News to others. It has both an inward and an outward direction. Inwardly it calls for continued receiving of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and allowing it to touch and enter the students we teach by on-going conversion. Outwardly it calls for us to live what we have learned and teach our students to live the Gospel and move out to others. How do we form our students into disciples?

Methodology also prepares the Catechist for being able to teach and model the faith to children, youth or adults. Methodology requires that catechists understand how to teach and the models that work best in their setting.

**Basic Level Catechist Certification**

**Basic Level 1 Certification**

**❑** Total of 9 clock hours of effective formation

**❑** These 9 hours include a minimum of 3 clock hours in SPIRITUALITY; 3 clock hours in THEOLOGY; and 3 clock hours in METHODOLOGY.

**❑** Basic Level 1 certification is good for two years and may be renewed only once.

**Basic Level 2 Certification**

**❑** A total of 15 additional clock hours of effective formation.

**❑** These clock hours include a minimum of 5 clock hours in SPIRITUALITY, 5 in THEOLOGY of the Catholic faith and 5 hours in METHODOLOGY.

**❑** Basic level 2 certification is good for three years and may be renewed.

**Basic Level 3 Certification**

**❑** A total of 16 additional hours of formation

**❑** These clock hours include a minimum of 5 clock hours in SPIRITUALITY, 5 hours in THEOLOGY and 5 hours in METHODOLOGY with one additional hour in any dimension.

**❑** Basic level 3 certification is good for three years and may be renewed.

Once a catechist has reached a total of 40 formation hours they may apply for a **Diocesan Catechetical Certification.** Diocesan Certification requires 50 formation hours. At that time they move into the Professional certification requirements.

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**Renewal of Basic Level Certification for Catechists**

**Renewal of Basic Level 1 Certification**

**❑** Total of 9 clock hours of effective formation

**❑** These 9 hours include a minimum of 3 clock hours in each of the three dimensions of formation.

**❑** Renewal mustbe completed within 2 years of achieving this level of certification. Renewal extends certification status for two additional years.

**Renewal of Basic level 2 Certification**

**❑** Total of 15 clock hours of effective formation

**❑** These 15 hours include a minimum of 5 clock hours in each of the three dimensions of formation.

**❑** Must be completed within 3 years of achieving this level of certification. Renewal extends certification status for three additional years.

**Renewal of Basic Level 3 Certification**

**❑** Total of 15 clock hours of effective formation

**❑** These 15 hours include a minimum of 5 clock hours in each of the three dimensions of formation,

**❑** Must be completed within 3 years of achieving this level of certification. Renewal extends certification status for 3 additional years. If the catechist has reached 40 hours they are now eligible to earn 10 additional hours for **Diocesan Certification.**

NOTE:

**❑** **If certification lapses without renewal** or without an indication of reason for lack of renewal, the person is no longer certified as a catechist in the Diocese of Grand Rapids and to be re-certified must have an additional formation hour for every three months, after the first three months, the certification has lapsed along with the number required for the standard renewal, for example: if a person was certified in 2010 and needed a renewal by 2013, but failed to renew on time an additional hour will be added for every three months, after the first three months, beyond the amount needed for the renewal.

**❑** The only college credits accepted are those in Theology or a related ministry.

**❑** Use the excel sheet on the diocesan website to keep all hours. Continue to add to that sheet for renewal and movement to a higher level of certification.

**Descriptions and Examples of the Three Dimensions for Certification**

**AREA A – SPIRITUALITY/HUMAN – one’s own spiritual/psychological/faith development**

* Participation in retreats for spiritual development
* Participation in Parish Missions
* Learning and experiencing various prayer styles
* Talks on Spirituality, Vocation, Living out our Christian lives
* Opportunities for reflection on one’s faith life and personal spirituality
* Personal Catholic bible study and reflection
* Spiritual Direction
* Pro-life ministry
* Stages of human and faith development
* Development of conscience
* Personal Bible study and reflection

**AREA B –THEOLOGY – the study of Church teachings and documents and Scripture**

* Exploring various church documents
* Study of Scripture – various books of the Bible, Hebrew Scriptures, Christian Scriptures
* Morality
* Liturgy
* Church Doctrine
* The Creed: Trinitarian and Christocentric
* Prayers of the Church
* Sacraments – Initiation, Healing and Service
* Ecclesiology
* Jesus Christ
* Catholic Social Teaching
* Mary and the Saints
* Paschal Mystery
* Liturgical Year
* Familiarity with ecumenical and interreligious practice
* Familiarity with the theological issues that emerge

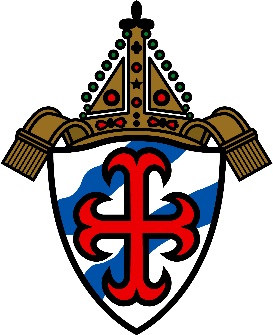
**AREA C –METHODOLOGY – leading the spiritual and faith development of others**

* Faith development of children
* Methods for teaching the faith
* Process of adult, young adult, adolescent and child learning
* Physical, psychological, moral and spiritual development
* The catechesis of special needs children/youth
* Understanding the New Evangelization and how to practice it
* Understanding the evangelization process of students
* The development of conscience
* Shaping a social environment in which faith can be nurtured
* Creating a good and safe physical environment
* Creative activities in learning
* Teaching students to pray together
* Developing successful lesson plans
* Teaching in an un-Christian culture
* Understanding the reality of persecution of those practicing the Christian faith
* Listening & communication skills
* Conflict Management
* Time Management
* Group process and dynamics

Examples of experiences that may **NOT** be accepted for catechetical certification include but are not limited to:

* Volunteer experiences, i.e., Eucharistic Minister, TECH retreat counselor; social justice volunteers, Youth rallies (unless there is a definite workshop given with an identifiable topic and speaker for the adults).
* Taking part in sacramental retreats with students
* Reading of magazines or books when there is no indication of how the material was discussed or how it impacted the way a person taught.

For initial and on-going certification, the Catechist completes the Basic Level certification application form, submitting it to the Parish Catechetical Leader for signature. The signed form is then forwarded to the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation. Letters of Certification will be sent to local Catechetical Leaders for distribution to their catechists. The catechists are thus affirmed for their continued growth and competency as they further the mission for the Church in the Diocese of Grand Rapids.

 **Certification for Parish Catechists**

**Information Guide**

**Levels of Certification**

**Basic Level Catechist Certification**

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**❑** These clock hours include a minimum of 5 clock hours in SPIRITUALITY, 5 in THEOLOGY of the Catholic faith and 5 hours in METHODOLOGY.

**❑** Basic level 2 certification is good for three years and may be renewed.

**Basic Level 3 Certification**

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**❑** Basic level 3 certification is good for three years and may be renewed.

**Renewal of Basic Level Certification for Catechists**

**Renewal of Basic Level 1 Certification**

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1. USCCB, Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, 2005, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. USCCB, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, Washington DC, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. USCCB, Co-Workers in the Vineyard, 2005, p.43. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)