



**DIOCESE OF PATERSON**

**CATECHIST FORMATION AND  
CERTIFICATION POLICY**

**January 6, 2008**

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The apostolic work of the catechist springs from the Sacrament of Baptism through which all believers come to share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and the evangelizing mission of the Church. It is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. The call to the ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call, the voice of the Holy Spirit. Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training.  
(NDC #54-B.8)

The ***National Directory for Catechesis***, published in 2005, acknowledges the irreplaceable service of lay catechists and the need to provide for their preparation and ongoing formation: “Men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds are called to share in the Church’s mission. Most are volunteers. Programs of formation should be designed to help them 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 in Christ.”

(NDC, #55-A)

The ***General Directory for Catechesis*** states: “The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists. Consequently, diocesan pastoral programs must give absolute priority to the formation of lay catechists.”

(GDC, #234)

Both of the above documents outline the essential elements of catechist formation. This formation must address: the Christian discipleship and the spiritual growth of catechists, their deeper knowledge of the faith and their love for the Lord and His Church, and their understanding of the nature and purpose of catechesis in the Church’s evangelizing mission.

Formation must also help them to grow in their understanding of the socio-cultural context in which they minister, and the particular needs and characteristics of those they are catechizing. Spirituality (Being), Theology (Knowing the message), and Catechetical Methodology (Knowing the persons to whom the message is being transmitted and knowing how to transmit it effectively) are equally important to the catechetical process (cf. GDC, #234-252 and NDC # 55-56).

Catechists seek to carry out the six tasks of catechesis identified by both the *GDC* (#85-87) and the *NDC* (#20). The following tasks have one aim: to form a person as a disciple of Christ:

- 1) Promoting knowledge of the faith;
- 2) Educating people for liturgy;
- 3) Promoting moral formation;
- 4) Educating people in prayer;
- 5) Preparing people to live in a community of faith and to be active participants;
- 6) Promoting a missionary spirit that demonstrates how Christians are to live in society.

To this end, catechists need both initial and ongoing formation so that they may minister effectively.

The suggestion that anyone can be a catechist should be scrupulously avoided. The call to the ministry of catechesis should be understood within the parameters of the *NDC* #55 Sections B through E: Discernment of the Call to Catechize; the Need for Formation; and the Initial and Ongoing Formation of Catechists.

The following positive qualities should be identifiable in candidates for the ministry of catechesis:

- Faith in the Lord that manifests itself in their piety and daily life;
- Love for the Church and communion with its pastors;
- Apostolic spirit and missionary zeal;
- Love for their brothers and sisters and a willingness to give generous service;
- Sufficient education;
- The respect of the community;
- The human, moral and technical qualities necessary for the work of a catechist.

Statute 28E of the Paterson Diocesan Synod of 1971 states that the Parish Life Secretariat "... (shall) require and provide for the certification of all catechists." Based on this statute and the above criteria, the Diocese of Paterson has established the following policy for the certification and ongoing formation of catechists who minister in varied ways and at different levels, in the parishes and schools of the diocese.

## **A. Initial Formation toward Basic Certification**

***A beginning catechist must complete a total of fifty-two (52) hours over a three-year period:***

Thirty (30) hours of study in Scripture and Theology  
Sixteen (16) hours of study in Catechetics and Methodology  
Six (6) hours of Spiritual Formation

\* See section C for ways to acquire certification hours and section D for a listing of required course areas

## **B. Ongoing Formation and Validation of Basic Certification**

***A certified catechist must keep his/her certificate valid by acquiring an additional 14 hours each year:***

Six (6) hours of study in Scripture and Theology  
Six (6) hours of study in Catechetics and Methodology  
Two (2) hours of Spiritual Formation

\* See section C for ways to acquire certification hours and section D for a listing of required course areas

## **C. Ways to Acquire Hours for Initial and/or Ongoing Certification**

1. Catechists who have degrees or are working toward degrees, or who have taken non-degree courses at an accredited college or university, whether graduate or undergraduate, may count course hours as long as they fulfill the following requirements:
  - a. The courses are in the required areas of study with a reasonable balance among the theological/catechetical areas.
  - b. The courses were taken within ten (10) years prior to the date of application for Basic Catechist Certification.
  - c. The applicant has training in catechetical methodology.
2. Catechists applying for Basic Certification or Ongoing Formation credit may count any Diocesan or parish sponsored institute, workshop, or program toward certification as long as it meets the following criteria:
  - a. The institute, workshop, or program dealt with one or more of the required areas of study.
  - b. The applicant attended the institute, workshop, or program within five years prior to the date of application for Basic Catechist Certification.

3. Catechists unable to attend courses or programs may choose to do self-study as long as it fulfills the following requirements:
  - a. CD's, Video's, DVDs, online resources, books or other printed materials in the required areas must be approved by the Diocesan office.
  - b. Reflection sheets should be completed and presented to the DRE in order to have hours credited toward certification or validation of a current certificate.
  - c. Lists of approved resources and the reflection sheets can be found on the Diocesan website.
4. Catechists may be credited with a maximum of six (6) hours for actual classroom experience if they have taught and have been observed by the DRE or his/her representative during the period of applying for basic certification. In addition, certified catechists may receive two (2) credit hours for actual classroom experience in Catechetical Methodology (out of the required 6).
5. If the pastor or his representative believes a candidate is active in the Spiritual Formation areas listed in Section D1 below, then the catechist shall be credited with the appropriate number of hours in the area of spirituality towards their initial certification (maximum of 6 credit hours) and/or towards their ongoing formation and validation of their basic certification (maximum of 2 hours).

#### **D. Required Areas of Catechetical Formation**

##### **1. Spiritual Formation**

“Preach the Gospel in everything that you do; if necessary, use words.”  
-- St. Francis of Assisi

Like all disciples of Jesus the Christ, catechists are called to holiness. Catechists should be exemplary followers of Jesus with unquestioned personal integrity and moral character, and a life that is in conformity to the teaching of the Church.

The catechist should continue his/her own spiritual formation through:

- a. Frequent reception of the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation;
- b. Participation in retreat days, days of renewal, prayer, faith-sharing groups and/or other devotional activities of the local and/or diocesan church;
- c. A deeper practice of prayer (e.g. the recitation of Morning and Evening Prayer in union with the Church), daily meditation, spiritual reading, and, where possible, regular spiritual direction.

## 2. Biblical-Theological Formation

The following is a brief overview of the required areas of content based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* and the *NDC #23-25*.

### a. Sacred Scripture

“Sacred Scripture, the Word of God written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has as the preeminent position in the life of the Catholic Church and especially in the ministry of evangelization and catechesis” (NDC #24.B).

Catechists should become familiar with the basic elements of Salvation History and the major themes of the Old Testament in order to better understand the mystery and person of Jesus. They should understand the basic structure, meaning, and purpose of the four Gospel accounts and the rest of the New Testament writings as the basic source of our Christian faith and moral life.

### b. Doctrine

“The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the doctrinal point of reference for education in the basic tasks of catechesis” (NDC #24.C).

The plan of this catechism follows the tradition that builds catechesis on the following four pillars:

#### 1) *The Profession of Faith (the Creed)*

The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life and is therefore the most fundamental and essential of all teaching. While all the truths of the faith form an organic or harmonious unity, other truths are organized around these fundamental truths: the Trinity, the Incarnation, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ. Catechists should take care to teach the mysteries of the faith, e.g., the Trinity, using the proper theological language of the Church.

#### 2) *The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (the Sacraments of Faith – Liturgical Life)*

Faith and worship are closely related: faith gathers the community for worship, and worship renews the faith of the community. In the Liturgy, the official public worship of the Church celebrates what

she professes and lives: above all, the Paschal Mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation. The liturgical life of the Church revolves around the seven sacraments, with central emphasis on the Eucharist.

### 3) *Life in Christ (the Commandments – Morality)*

All Christian moral life is rooted in the dignity derived from God's creation of us in his image and likeness. In Christ God reveals how human beings are to live.

The Church has the responsibility to form its members in light of the Gospel and to teach them how to apply Christian moral principles to contemporary problems in specific and practical ways. The Ten Commandments (Decalogue) and the Beatitudes are the primary reference points for the application of Christian moral principles.

Followers of Christ have the responsibility to apply Christian values to social systems, structures and institutions in an effort to root out injustice.

Secularism, materialism, and ethical relativism erode moral reference points and thereby diminish people's ability to make moral decisions.

### 4) *Prayer of the Believer (the "Our Father")*

Prayer nurtures our vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. Personal prayer is God's initiative, and the response to that gift is prompted by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the "Our Father" we find the model of prayer taught to us by Jesus himself and the sum total of all the good things we hope for and that our heavenly Father wants to give us. The Church's rich tradition includes many forms and expressions of prayer.

## 3. Formation in Catechetical Methodology

Formation should also include training in catechetical methodology. This formation should help catechists grow in their capacity as genuine teachers of the truth, keenly aware of both the authentic Gospel message and the circumstances of those for whom the message is intended (*NDC #55-E*). Catechists are to identify and create "suitable conditions which are necessary for the Christian message to be sought, accepted, and more profoundly investigated" for each of the various groups they serve. It is clear that in order to present the Catholic faith in its fullness and in a way that is attractive to each group, those who catechize need preparation

and ongoing formation specific to the conditions of those to whom they proclaim the Gospel message” (NDC, #54-B.8).

The following areas should be understood by catechists.

- a. The Nature and Goal of Catechesis in the Church
  - 1) Historical development of catechesis in the Church
  - 2) Catechesis in the Church’s mission of evangelization
  - 3) Forming disciples as the goal of all catechesis
  - 4) The elements of the catechetical process (cf. GDC, #60-76; NDC, #19-20)
  
- b. The Socio-Cultural Context for Catechesis
  - 1) General characteristics of our American culture
  - 2) Diversity in U.S. culture
  - 3) Profile of American Catholics
  - 4) Challenges to catechetical ministry in the U.S. (cf. NDC, #4-A, B, C)
  
- c. Catechetical Methodology
  - 1) The nature of learning and of the learner
  - 2) Forming disciples: information, formation, transformation
  - 3) Effective communication and use of resources
  - 4) Methods of catechesis for various age levels (cf. GDC, #137-162; NDC, #55)

## **E. Required Record-Keeping of Catechetical Formation at the Parish**

We suggest each catechist keep his/her own record of accumulated hours toward certification/validation and that the parish appoint a local certification moderator who will be responsible for keeping records of certification hours of their catechists. Forms may be downloaded from the Diocesan website ([www.patersondiocese.org](http://www.patersondiocese.org)).

The following information should be maintained in the parish office of religious education/faith formation:

- a. Catechist’s name;
- b. Catechist’s address and phone;
- c. Year Catechetical Ministry began;
- d. Date of basic certification;
- e. Year of validated basic certification;
- f. Record of courses attended and hours acquired:
  - i. Title of course or program
  - ii. Location of program
  - iii. Date attended
  - iv. Hours acquired



v. Validation of course completion

On an annual basis, the parish office should send a master list to the Diocesan office indicating the names of catechists and the hours accumulated toward certification/validation. Also, parishes should forward to the Diocese the names of certified catechists who have completed their 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and subsequent 5 year milestones of catechetical ministry.

The on-going adult journey in the life of faith as disciples of Jesus Christ is the backdrop against which these formation and certification experiences have their truest expressions. Parishes must commit themselves to forming and cultivating a catechetical community where the love of Christ and His Church and the zeal and joy for teaching and evangelizing are prevalent and nourished.