

Curriculum Guidelines for Adolescent Catechesis

Diocese of Buffalo

Adolescent catechesis supports *one stage* of a lifelong process of embracing the Catholic way of life. This catechesis must form young disciples by empowering them to know and follow Christ in their daily lives. Young people grow in their Catholic faith by falling in love with the person and message of Jesus Christ. They mature in faith when that love forms and transforms them within a community of disciples, the Church.

In order to meet the diverse needs of young people and the diverse settings across the Diocese of Buffalo, several different models may be used by parishes to implement comprehensive and systematic faith formation for adolescents. It is important to keep in mind that adequate time is needed for quality education and formation. Whether programs meet weekly, monthly, or seasonally, attention to contact hours must be given. Celebration of the Eucharist, service projects, large group gatherings, and small group settings each contribute to one's on-going faith formation and should be an integral part of the catechetical experience. To this end, parish faith formation programs for young people of high school age should seek a range of **thirty (30) to thirty-four (34) hours** of meaningful contact as a minimum requirement for each age level according to the policy of the Diocese of Buffalo. (This excludes the Sunday Eucharist).

The Department of Lifelong Faith Formation can assist parish catechetical leaders in developing a strategy to effectively implement the diocesan curriculum and maximize the opportunity for engaging young people in their faith. Each parish should be involved in a process of continual assessment and improvement of their catechetical initiatives.

How to Use This Curriculum

The Curriculum Guidelines for Adolescent Catechesis of the Diocese of Buffalo is thematic, not grade specific. It is aligned with the *Doctrinal Elements of a Curricular Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (USCCB, 2008) and its companion *Adaptation for Use in Parish and Youth Ministry Programs* (USCCB, 2010). Each topic can be used to develop a stand-alone course using textbooks (see USCCB's *Conformity Listing* www.usccb.org/catechism/document/) and other properly approved resources or blended with elements of other themes to accommodate parish / high school settings. To assist catechetical leaders in the design of their program for

adolescent catechesis, each topic contains the content outline; suggested activities; and ideas for critical reflection.

Developing the parish plan for adolescent catechesis can be challenging because, in many parishes, young people do not attend religious education/faith formation programs past their Confirmation (usually in 10th or 11th grade). Therefore, parish catechetical leaders must strategically select the topics and methods which will optimize the learning and formation of their young people in a way that will cultivate post-Confirmation commitment to the faith. With this in mind, parishes with a comprehensive vision for youth ministry will continue to reach out and catechize young people at every stage of development. Faith formation is a lifelong process which is nourished at the local level.

Parishes must have a comprehensive plan for adolescent catechesis and should contain several complementary elements: comprehensive and systematic catechesis that addresses specific doctrinal themes; development in prayer and liturgical formation; and opportunities for service and reflection. This plan must be designed to reach beyond Confirmation.

(NB: the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (USCCB, 2002) mandates that all parishes and Catholic schools provide sexual abuse awareness training on an annual basis to all young people enrolled. This mandate is integrated, where appropriate, into the curriculum, however, every Catholic school and parish must provide this training annually even if it is not explicitly identified in the topic chosen. Consult our website, www.officeoflifelongfaithformation.org for updates.)

Suggested Program Models

Given the variety of learning needs and parish communities, catechetical leaders should take great care in developing a program for adolescents that will fully engage them in their faith and deepen their commitment to discipleship. Below are several suggested models. Often parishes use a combination of these models (please contact the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation for assistance):

1.) **Weekly/Bi-weekly Classes** - the curriculum is implemented through carefully planned sessions lasting 60-75 minutes. Generally, the calendar runs September through May. The benefits of this model are that it allows for regular contact with the young person which can promote a relationship with their catechist and parish. The limitations include schedule conflicts as teens become more committed to employment and other extra-curricular activities.

2.) **Mini-Courses** – this model breaks each topic of the curriculum into smaller sections. Gatherings could last 2-3 hours, thus having fewer meetings. This is especially helpful in areas where there is much competition for time with schools, athletics and jobs. In addition, the participants can select courses that meet their interests or schedule.

3.) **Retreats** – Retreats offer participants an entirely different way to learn about the sacred and apply it to their lives. Diverse prayer experiences, open dialogue, personal witness, and storytelling in a new setting appeal to many people. Parishes can create an exciting program for adolescent catechesis using retreats and can explore various curricular topics. Retreat planners should involve an outside facilitator who is gifted in presenting to teens.

4.) **Non-Gathered Learning** – With the growth of technology and independent learning, adolescent catechesis can grow when young people, families, and the parish utilize technology to grow in faith. Courses, online conversations, prayer, research, and even games are some ways parishes can connect with teens without gathering them. This model can be used in conjunction with all the others to reinforce the learning and allow for personal growth.

5.) **Extended Service** – Young people have a natural desire to help others. This makes for an ideal time to engage teens in worthwhile service activities that allow them to use their individual gifts and talents with others. Service experiences combined with authentic theological reflection can easily meet the learning standards of the diocesan curriculum. Planned service experiences during academic breaks integrated with discussion and prayer can root one's understanding of discipleship in lived experience.

6.) **Whole Community Catechesis** – Parishes committed to the on-going faith formation of all members of their community set an important example to the young that our journey toward discipleship lasts our entire life. A combination of intergenerational learning programs, age-specific gatherings, and non-gathered outreach which adequately align the curriculum of the Church within the entire parish community promotes sharing and a deepening of faith.

7.) **Family Catechesis** – integrating several strategies to assist families be more active in their faith will help every parish catechetical effort. Viewing parents as partners rather than roadblocks is vital. Parents often need to be re-engaged in their faith or evangelized for the first time. We can no longer assume that parents attend mass regularly or have been actively growing in their faith. Therefore, there more involved families are in a parish entire faith formation program, the better for the entire parish. The *Strong Catholic Families – Strong*

Catholic Youth Initiative is a diocesan process assisting parishes and schools in motivating parents to assume more leadership in the household of faith. For more information, please contact the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation.

The Department of Lifelong Faith Formation of the Diocese of Buffalo is prepared to assist parish catechetical leaders so that this vision can become a lived reality in each parish faith community.