



Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Church

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YEAR OF MERCY
2016

AMAZING
CATECHISTS

CHILDREN AND ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH EXPECT OF THE CATECHIST?

This handout is an addition to the parish's published Adult and Children's Religious Education (R.E.) and Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) Guidelines and Handbooks.

Without reaching an open flower, pollen would become mere dust, never fulfilling its intended purpose as a creation of God. This vivid image, borrowed from the French Philosopher Gabriel Marcel, may also be utilized to speak of the Word of God in our world today. It is present, but it must be proclaimed and shared with those who desire to receive it. People who have come to the R.E. program and RCIA process, already have an eagerness, readiness, and receptivity, but the Word must reach them. Hence the role of the parish catechist.

Catechists: Who are they?

Catechists are ordinary people, like you and I, who are willing to generously steward their time and talents to lead and journey in faith instruction with another person, in order to present and explore some aspect(s) of the Word of God, and to show how it illuminates the path we are all asked to journey as believers and disciples of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

People who accept God's challenge and the community's acceptance and commission to instruct those desiring to learn about or enter into the Roman Catholic Church—thereby joining the Body of Christ—will be given professionally prepared instructional books and/or lesson plans for the faith education classes, which outline goals and objectives to guide their instruction, and ample resource materials to support them.

Catechists are asked to read, pray, listen, and share; entrusting all the while that the Holy Spirit will guide them, as well as open the minds and hearts of their R.E. students or RCIA inquirers, candidates, and catechumens.

Are there desired characteristics or qualities for a Catechist?

Yes. As a component of the catechetical mission of the Catholic Church, catechists (men and women) are *called* by God to the ministry by passing on the Christian faith (General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), #55A). A person *called* to the ministry of catechist does not have to “know *everything*” about the Catholic faith, however, they do need to demonstrate a good and articulable knowledge of their faith, the sacraments and practices of the Catholic Church, etc. By God's abundance love and grace for us, many times the learning process is not solely by the class participant(s), but by the catechist as well!

“The Church entrusts the ministry of catechist to exemplary followers of Christ with unquestioned personal integrity and moral character ... Positive qualities [in the catechist] should be:

- Faith that manifest 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 [religious] education;
- Respect of the community; and
- Good relations with others” (GDC, #55B).

“Like all Christians, catechists are called to continual conversion and grown in their faith and, for this reason, are called to ongoing spiritual formation. The catechists should continue his or her [own human, spiritual, and intellectual] formation through frequent reception of the sacraments, especially the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, [as a minimum]” (GDC, #55C).

When tasked to facilitate a R.E. class or a RCIA formation meeting or “break-out session” with RCIA participants (following the Mass’ proclamation of the Gospel and the homily), the catechist(s) need to please remember:

1. Read, study, meditate, and pray over that day’s prescribed lesson material and scriptural readings in advance.
2. Become familiar with what the Church’s catechetical books, lesson plans, etc., say about the messages and information contained within the class chapter or scriptural readings, so that:
 - a. We teach and promote the official teachings of the Catholic Church;
 - b. We don’t import our own personal thoughts and interpretations into the class or group discussions)—which might confuse the listener or present material that may be incorrect/contrary to the teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church; and
 - c. The catechetical instruction session doesn’t get “off-track” with personal stories.
3. Limit non-pertinent or elongated “personal stories” whenever possible. A general rule to embrace is: a “personal testimony” story of how God revealed Himself in the catechist’s life *may* be appropriately integrated into the day’s scripture and lesson plan objectives. Too many “personal stories” however, tend to move the focus of attention by the listener(s) from God’s Word and our learning of matters of the faith to “us”.
4. A Word on RCIA Rule of Confidentiality: Often, RCIA process participants reveal very personal and private details about themselves, their family, etc., during such meetings. This is to be respected and maintained in confidence. Open discussion by a catechist of such confidential information may necessitate their dismissal from the ministry by the Pastor.

Note: The only exceptions to the Confidentiality Rule is when someone in the group expresses that they are a threat to themselves or others (e.g., suicidal or homicidal ideations) or discloses any mental, physical, and sexual abuse (of minors, the elderly, and at-risk persons) which is governed under the mandatory reporting requirements by the State of Colorado Revised Statutes and our diocesan and parish policies and procedures.

The Art of Catechesis

The Church’s *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) offers very helpful insight about the different levels of catechesis. When we engage in the formal study and instruction of the Catholic faith – otherwise known as *catechesis* – we can general group people into three (3) broad categories:

1. *First*, there are those who know little or nothing about Jesus and the Catholic faith.

2. *Second*, those who recognize Jesus as the source of true peace and joy, but they do not know much more than “the basics” of their Christian Catholic faith; and
3. *Third*, those who have received a basic level of catechesis in the faith and have been fully initiated into Christian life.

While these are not hard-and-fast guidelines, we can say that there are three (3) levels of associated catechesis (GDC, Chapter 2) and that people move successively from one level to the next:

- a. ***Initial proclamation*** (hearing the Word of God and wanting to know more);
- b. ***Initiatory catechesis*** (the action of the person to move beyond the initial proclamation level, by seeking to participate in instructional formation process(es) to learn more about God, the faith, the practices of the Catholic Church, etc.); and
- c. ***Ongoing catechesis*** (the life-long catechetical journey to learn more and more about God, the faith, and the Church), after reception of the Sacraments of Initiation).

Sadly and unfortunately, within the Catholic Church today, some members of the faithful possess an incorrect and/or uninformed belief that there is no further need of their personal participation or investment in “learning” about their faith and the Church, after they have received all of their sacraments of Initiation (e.g., Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation). This is far from the truth and hence our collective need for outreach and adult continuing religious education within the universal Church.

I pray that you find this informational handout helpful in understanding the vital importance of your ministry role in the catechetical mission of the Roman Catholic Church and our parish, and helpful refocus our understanding and continuing need to be well-formed parish catechists.

As we begin the 2016-2017 Religious Education/Catechetical Year, the Our Lady of the Visitation Parish will be hosting a myriad of adult faith formation opportunities throughout the year (e.g., Bible study classes; etc.). I request that, as part of your own spiritual and faith formation during this next year, you please consider attending some of these on-going faith formation events.

In closing, please accept my wholehearted appreciation and **THANK YOU** for your dedicated work in the catechetical faith formation of your parish’s children, youth, adults, and RCIA participants.

May God reward you abundantly for your good works! Wishing you a blessed and peace-filled remainder of the Year of Faith and God’s graces during this upcoming Year of Mercy.

Respectfully
Yours in Christ,

Fr. Bob Newbury
Pastor