

Elements of the Catechetical Effort

(excerpted from Diocesan Catechetical Manual, Section II. Policy, pages 16-22)

As has been reiterated by Vatican Council II, the purpose of catechesis is to insert the learner into the fullness of the Person of Christ by providing a complete exposition of the doctrinal and moral teaching of His Church. A successful catechetical effort includes:

1. A lived faith within the family setting including personal and family prayer.
2. Regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church (especially weekly Sunday Mass and monthly Reconciliation) and other aspects of parish life.
3. Faithful attendance in the catechetical instruction of the Catholic school or parish catechetical program.
4. Enthusiastic and well-informed catechists who actively live the Faith.
5. Textbooks and other resources that present the Faith.

The Purpose of the Textbook

The catechist is the most effective aspect in the parish catechetical setting. Books, resources, videos, room setups, times, places, activities, etc. are all secondary to the catechist. Holy catechists bring people to Jesus Christ and His Family, the Church not textbooks and other catechetical material.

Textbooks do play a role within the scope of any catechetical program. Effective textbooks provide catechists with abundant background, thorough explanation of Church doctrine, methodology suggestions and resources. They provide the learner with a clear, accurate and comprehensive exposition of the Catholic Faith. A good textbook serves as a tool to articulate, illustrate and reinforce the living witness and explanations of the catechist. For some, a textbook may actually open the heart through the gateway of the intellect to know, love and serve Jesus Christ. These textbooks are considered "doctrinally sound" or "faithful" or "orthodox."

In *On Catechesis In Our Time*, Pope John Paul II writes,

One major feature of the catechetical renewal today is the rewriting and multiplication of catechetical books taking place in many parts of the Church. Numerous very successful works have been produced and are a real treasure in the service of catechesis. But it must be humbly, honestly recognized that this rich flowering has brought with it articles and publications which are ambiguous and harmful to young people and the Church's life.

In certain places, the desire to find the best forms of expression or to keep up with fashions in pedagogical methods has often enough resulted in certain catechetical works which bewilder the young and even adults, either by deliberately or unconsciously omitting elements essential to the Church's faith, or by attributing excessive importance to certain themes at the expense of others, or, chiefly, by a rather horizontalist over-all view [not in] keeping with the teaching of the Church's Magisterium. Therefore, it is not enough to multiply catechetical works. In order that these works may correspond with their aim, several conditions are essential:

- a) they must be linked with the real life of the generation to which they are addressed, showing close acquaintance with its anxieties and questionings, struggles and hopes;
- b) they must try to speak a language comprehensible to the generation in question;
- c) they must make a point of giving the whole message of Christ and his Church, without neglecting or distorting anything, and in expounding it they will follow a line and structure that highlights what is essential;
- d) they must really aim to give to those who use them a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, aimed at true conversion and a life more in conformity with God's will.
(CT49)

These four conditions serve to guide the evaluation of catechetical series and textbooks.

Who Needs a Textbook? Why?

Three groups of people need a textbook series or textbooks consistent with a curriculum of their particular purpose.

1. Parish leaders (the pastor, the DOC OR DRE, the school principal, etc.) need the tools of a catechetical textbook series if their catechesis is organized into graded, separate groups or focus topics:
 - a. to provide for an orderly and systematic study of Catholicism;
 - b. to give an overview of the curriculum;
 - c. to insure steady progress from year to year;
 - d. to provide a concrete direction and focused aids to the catechists.

2. Catechists, whether experienced or inexperienced, need the tool of the manual/textbook:
 - a. to assure that Catholic doctrine and practice is consonant with Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium, most recently presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*;
 - b. to provide a sense of direction for the current lessons and a sense of continuity with previously covered materials as well as give an indication of future materials;
 - c. to give an overview of the work for the entire year;
 - d. to aid in developing lesson plans that are community oriented, liturgically and theologically sound, and oriented toward service;
 - e. to suggest a variety of methodologies and resources;
 - f. to provide specific cultural understanding and subsequent needs of the student.

3. Students need the tool of the textbook:
 - a. to have a reliable guide to the doctrines of the Catholic Church;
 - b. to work in and from;
 - c. to provide stimulus and focus;
 - d. to allow for independent use;
 - e. to refer to within the family setting.

Diocesan Textbook and Catechetical Materials Evaluation

The work of evaluation textbooks is ongoing and time consuming. We rely heavily on the input of the Bishop's Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism and the pastors and catechetical leaders of our diocese. The goal in recommending textbooks is:

1. To identify those textbooks and catechetical series which clearly and completely embody the doctrines of the Church.
2. To identify resource materials which most closely reflect our own *Curriculum Guidelines*.

The consideration of textbooks can devolve very quickly into an unproductive dialogue of "textbook wars." There is a real temptation to put too much emphasis on the choice of textbooks instead of other more important factors such as the catechist and their training. **Educational research never lists the effectiveness of the textbook above 20%.**

The approach employed in these pages is meant to encourage thoughtful decisions that can benefit the catechetical program of the parish. The following recommendations represent a work in progress. The Office for Evangelization and Catechesis welcomes the advice and experience of those who work at the parish level to help make textbook selections in the diocese.

Materials which have not been reviewed are not listed. Unlisted catechetical materials that you would like to use in your programs should be submitted for review along with a letter describing how the material reaches the above stated two-fold goal. Submissions should be sent to:
Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, 5201 Bishops Boulevard, Fargo, ND 58104.

Textbook and Catechetical Materials Evaluation Terminology

The textbook series listed on the following pages have been evaluated and received one of the following ratings:

1. RECOMMENDED
2. WITH SUPPLEMENTATION
3. NOT RECOMMENDED

RECOMMENDED materials are most near our diocesan curriculum guidelines.

Catholic Schools

The materials which are designated as RECOMMENDED are to be the primary materials used in the diocese for Catholic schools.

Parish Programs

In addition to the materials designated as RECOMMENDED, certain situations such as class size, finances, catechetical models, etc. in parish settings might warrant using materials with the rating WITH SUPPLEMENTATION. Materials in both categories could be means to good catechesis.

Materials designated as NOT RECOMMENDED are not to be used for catechesis. Additional information on these NOT RECOMMENDED materials may be obtained by contacting the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.

Materials which have not been reviewed are not listed. Unlisted catechetical materials that you would like to use in your programs should be submitted for review along with a letter describing how the material reaches the needs of your catechetical program. Submissions should be sent to: Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, 5201 Bishops Boulevard, Fargo, ND 58104.

As series and catechetical materials are created or altered, new recommendations will be issued.

Most catechetical materials are published with an "imprimatur." An "imprimatur" signifies that the material is free of doctrinal error. It does not designate, however, that the material is doctrinally complete, systematically presented or pedagogically appropriate.

Additionally, an official declaration that texts are in doctrinal conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) by the USCCB's Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism does not address methodological or pedagogical matters. In other words, a positive finding by the Ad Hoc Committee does not necessarily constitute a recommendation of the material.

Process for Selecting Textbooks

It is recognized that first the Bishop for the diocese and then the pastor for the parish have the canonical responsibility for catechetical instruction. The pastor should participate in a substantive way in the selection of catechetical resources, including the reviewing and approval of the catechetical books and materials to be used in their respective school and/or parish programs. A process which includes diocesan recommendations, the pastor's own research and the involvement of parents is ideal.

General Evaluation Overview

The process for evaluating textbooks and supplementary materials is conducted at two levels: diocesan and parish.

Diocesan Level

The Office for Catholic Education and Formation and theologians approved by the Bishop, evaluate catechetical series and textbooks for the Diocese. Reviewed materials are rated as RECOMMENDED, WITH SUPPLEMENTATION AND NOT RECOMMENDED. Should a local parish or school program wish to consider textbooks not recommended and/or not evaluated, they must submit the material in question for evaluation to the Office for Catholic Education and Formation, along with a written statement of why the material fits their particular situation. The resources are **not** to be used until the evaluation has been completed. Due regard to the length of time needed for such an evaluation must be taken into account by those submitting the texts.

Parish Level

The choice of a particular text is the task of the pastor, who is the prime catechist of his parish. **The pastor may not simply delegate this task to others.** If necessary, the pastor may create a committee to assist him in choosing a textbook. The pastor, with the committee's assistance, then proceeds to decide upon a series or textbook that will be used in the program. Choices are limited to the materials already recommended by the Office for Catholic Education and Formation.

When a parish and Catholic school program are in the same parish, each is expected to use similar materials.

Particular Parish Evaluation

The following process is recommended to local parishes and schools considering a new religion textbook series or other materials:

1. Notify the Office for Catholic Education and Formation for parish programs and for school programs that you are considering a change in your present series or textbooks. We will provide the most current list of approved textbooks and catechetical series. We may also be able to provide review copies.
2. The pastor may review the materials himself or create a committee including the DOC or DRE, principal, curriculum coordinator and/or catechists from each level. Parents and other interested, knowledgeable people could also participate in the committee.
3. The pastor and the committee should read the *Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines* pertaining to the age level and the section entitled *Purpose of Textbooks* provided in this manual.
4. Discuss the positive and negative qualities in the current series in light of #3.
5. Consult the list of diocesan recommended texts, paying particular attention to whether they are in the parish or Catholic school edition. The primary material used in Catholic schools is limited to those materials listed as *recommended*. Parishes might also use the materials listed as *with supplementation*.
6. Be sure to look at all the components which comprise the series---the student text, the catechist's guide, and the other support materials to be used with the textbook.
7. Secure samples from the publishers or the Office for Catholic Education and Formation of all the religion materials the committee wishes to examine. These samples should be given to all committee members for comparison and study. Each committee member should be particularly sensitive to how the series fulfills the criteria they have already identified. Sometimes publishers will provide workshops free of charge to introduce a catechist to their materials, if a parish or school purchases the series. Find out what services are available from publishers directly.
8. Arrive at a consensus recommendation about the series or textbook a catechist hopes to adopt. The pastor makes the final selection of materials. If there is a committee, this decision is made in light of the recommendations of those who have reviewed the materials.
9. When a change in the local catechetical curriculum involves a significant change in teaching style and materials, catechists should participate in appropriate in-services prior to implementation. Make arrangements for a catechist in-service on the new materials before beginning the school year or parish program.