ELEMENTARY CATECHESIS

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity. (On Catechesis in Our Time, 1979, no. 5) The Church has often offered guidelines of the ministry of catechesis. So too, The National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) offers direction for the catechesis of students in the elementary grades 1-8. It states the following:

School-age children should receive formal and systematic catechesis in a parish-based catechetical program, a Catholic school, or a program of home-based catechesis in which the content of the faith and the experience of Christian life is presented authentically and completely. Catechesis for school-age children “is an initial catechesis but not a fragmentary one, since it will have to reveal, although in a elementary way, all the principal mysteries of faith and their effects on the child’s moral and religious life.” (On Catechesis in Our Time, no. 37) Having introduced them to the person of Jesus Christ within the family, catechesis of school-age children presents his teachings, his ministry, and the major events of his life. Children can begin to appreciate the parables of Jesus and capture glimpses of the Kingdom of God; they can learn more formal prayers; and they can commit brief passages of Sacred Scripture to memory. Sacramental catechesis for school-age children “gives meaning to the sacraments... and it communicates to the child the joy of being a witness to Christ in ordinary life. (NCD, no. 179) Specifically, catechesis for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and of the Eucharist is ordinarily provided in these early years of schooling.” (National Directory for Catechesis, 205)

All efforts in catechesis need to incorporate the following tasks of catechesis:

1) Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith.
2) Catechesis promotes knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and sacraments.
3) Catechesis provides moral formation in Jesus Christ.
4) Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ.
5) Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.
6) Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society. (National Directory for Catechesis, pp. 60-62.

To be effective, catechesis includes both information and information in order to develop within the student knowledge of the truths of the faith along with the desire to foster a personal relationship with Jesus.

The Diocesan Religion Graded Course of Study P-12 is to be used in these grades to provide systematic and age-appropriate catechesis so that parents, teachers/catechists and the students will know what students are to know and be able to practice in regard to their Catholic Faith. There is an “Approved List” of Religion
Textbooks based on the study of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism along with a correlation of these texts from the various publishers with the Religion Graded Course of Study and the evaluative study by the consultants of the Office of Religious Education and Catechesis. If you would like information on the texts that are on the approved list contact your religious education consultant.

There are very good directives for teachers and catechists for catechesis in the elementary grades in the National Directory for Catechesis, pp. 205-206. They remind teachers/catechists that:

1) They need to understand, communicate and listen to their students with respect by being sensitive to the circumstances and current values of the students’ lives.
2) Students have a dignity not only for what they will do in the future, but who they are now.
3) Students need to be encouraged to respect the cultures, religions, races and ethnicity of others and use catechetical materials that accommodate cultural, racial and ethnic pluralism and concerns of particular groups e.g., persons with special needs.
4) Children’s comprehension develops gradually; therefore religious truths are to be presented in greater depth as the student’s capacity for understanding increases.
5) They need to provide students with experiences which show the connection between their lived faith and the message of salvation that they are being taught. Let the students use their imagination, intellect and memory.
6) They need to provide experiences that link Liturgy and catechesis and promote an appreciation for the celebration of the Eucharist.
7) They need to provide students with experiences of quiet prayer where students can respond interiorly to their relationship with the Lord.
8) They need to foster a sense of community which is essential in the Catholic faith.

Older students need:

1) To observe, interpret and evaluate their experiences, thereby ascribing a Christian meaning to their lives.
2) To acquire a desire to know their faith more deeply.
3) To realize private prayer as a means of growing in individual reflection and personal communication with God.

Diocesan assistance is given to teachers/catechists regarding methods in teaching through:

1) Weekly Religion Ideas which give teacher background, methods and resources from September to May when teaching the grade level indicators found in the Religion Graded Course of Study P-12.
2) Methods Workshops offered as needed.
3) Faith Formation Congress in certain years.