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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education in the Archdiocese of New Orleans is comprehensive and embraces early childhood through adult levels. It does not include seminaries, Catholic institutions of higher learning, or campus ministry, or the programs for continuing education of the clergy.

The ultimate responsibility for providing for the Christian formation and religious education of the people of the Archdiocese of New Orleans rests with the archbishop. (can. 386) He fulfills this responsibility through the cooperative effort of the parishes and Catholic schools and is assisted by the Office of Religious Education in an executive capacity.

1.1 OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- The archbishop entrusts the Office of Religious Education with the responsibility for religious education. The Office of Religious Education furthers the efforts of all the faithful to grow in a deeper union with the Lord by assisting in proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel, building community, celebrating prayer and worship, and motivating to service.
- The Office of Religious Education functions as an aid to the pastor in discharging his basic obligation of providing religious education for the parish. In all its endeavors, the Office of Religious Education respects and supports the role of pastor as shepherd and teacher, under the authority of the archbishop.
- The Office of Religious Education also works in conjunction with parish directors and/ or coordinators of religious education and administrators of Catholic schools in seeking quality religious education. The responsibilities and services of the Office of Religious Education include the following:
 - To spread the message of Jesus Christ with a commitment to authenticity and fidelity to the teachings of the Church, especially in educating for the proper use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*;
 - To foster family catechesis within the parish, school and family communities;
 - To promote and assist in the development of adult religious education;
 - To encourage and promote the development of ministries within the Archdiocese;
 - To promote and assist the development of evangelization efforts within the archdiocese;
 - To promote and assist in the implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* in the archdiocese;
 - To direct and assist in the formation and certification of catechists, teachers and administrators in parishes and Catholic schools, especially through the

- Archdiocesan Catechist Certification Program; to educate them in the use of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other resources;
- To act as the agency for the evaluation of the parish religious education programs and religion programs in Catholic schools;
 - To assist parishes and schools to develop diversity in catechetical programs through appropriate resources and educational methods;
 - To assist pastors and schools, through consultation and resourcing, to develop programs for the religious education of those with special needs within the archdiocese;
 - To establish norms for the qualifications for Parish and School Catechetical Leaders;
 - To provide the model job descriptions for Parish and School Catechetical Leaders;
 - To present workshops, seminars, lectures, retreats and courses which are intended for administrators, teachers, catechists, and evangelizers, and to insure that such programs and presentations are faithful to the teachings of the Church and approved by the archbishop;
 - To issue the curriculum for (parish and school) religious education from early childhood through the twelfth grades, including the Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living curriculum for these grades;
 - To assist and advise Parish and School Catechetical Leaders in evaluating religion textbooks, resources and materials for use in Religious Education programs;
 - To supervise the implementation of liturgical programs related to religious education according to the directives of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship;
 - To establish archdiocesan committees and coordinate the efforts of deanery or regional parish committees of religious education, evangelization and the catechumenate;
 - To provide guidance to parents/guardians who, under extraordinary circumstances, need to catechize a student at home

1.2 PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- Under the direction of the pastor, the religious education program of the parish is to be directed by one or more Parish Catechetical Leader whose authority and responsibilities are to be formulated in each parish by the pastor in accord with the archdiocesan guidelines for the qualifications of such positions.
- The parish exercises its responsibility for Religious Education by providing organized programs in faith formation for all ages, beginning with early childhood through adults. Catechetical programs for young people are to respect the role of parents as primary educators of the children (cans. 226 & 793). A family-centered approach in catechetical programs for children and youth is considered essential so that family life and parish life may mutually enrich and nourish each other. The parish program is to uphold the value of certification of catechists and of regular, frequent class meetings, adhering to the guidelines issued by the Office of Religious Education.

- The parish exercises its responsibility in the parish school by providing formal religious education classes as part of the daily curriculum. Provision is to be made for a certified School Catechetical Leader who attends to the implementation of the religion program in the school.
- The parish exercises its responsibility by establishing a catechumenate for the formation of those wishing to be baptized or come into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

1.3 NON-PAROCHIAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Under the authority of the Archbishop as principle teacher of the faithful, the immediate responsibility for the total religious program in non-parochial Catholic schools rests with the principal who is to be assisted by a qualified, certified School Catechetical Leader.

The school is to provide certified catechists and regular, frequent class meetings adhering to the curriculum mandated by the archbishop and officially issued by the Office of Religious Education.

1.4 ADMINISTRATION OF CATECHETICAL PROGRAMS

- Parents are obliged and enjoy the right to educate their children according to the documents of Vatican Council II and other approved catechetical writings, i.e., *The General Directory of Catechesis and The National Directory of Catechesis*.
- The pastor is responsible for choosing the catechetical materials used in the parish and for their conformity to the teaching of the Magisterium (can. 773). An updated list of acceptable textbooks is provided quarterly by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on their website (with a link on the Office of Religious Education's website to the conformity list).
- The pastor is responsible for the selection of catechists and, in the discharge of this duty, he must respect the regulations made by the archbishop concerning such selection.
- In each parish the responsibility for each of the levels of the total religious education program (early childhood through adult) is to be assigned by the pastor. Ideally, each level should have its own certified coordinator.
- In each parish it is recommended to have a group to advise and support the pastor and the Parish Catechetical Leader. It should consist of the pastor, the parochial vicar(s), the Parish Catechetical Leader, together with representatives of parents and other parishioners.
- Religious education in the parish should include family and parent education, RCIA, evangelization, and continuing education to meet the needs of all adults in the parish.

Those responsible for these programs must take care that programs are conducted by certified personnel. Pastors must take care that such programs are adequately supported spiritually and financially by the parish.

- Sacramental Catechesis in each parish is to include programs that are designed to prepare parents and sponsors to celebrate the baptism of their children (unless they have recently received such instruction) and to prepare parents to share in the responsibility for preparing their children for the initial celebrations of Reconciliation and Eucharist, as well as the celebration of Confirmation.
- No less than thirty (30) classes or sessions are held per year for the parish elementary and secondary catechetical programs.*
- It is appropriate that parents be expected to pay an equitable amount to assist the parish in financing religious education in the parish catechetical programs. However, no student is to be refused religious education or sacramental preparation due to an inability to pay.
- Parishes and schools are to provide adequate funding whenever possible for the acquisition of catechetical resources, including teaching aids and audiovisual materials for both the parish school and the parish school of religion.
- It is recommended that the Catechetical Leader and catechumenate directors be active members in organizations where they can meet with other religious education leaders to discuss mutual concerns. These groups include NCEA (National Catholic Education Association), NPCD (National Association for Parish Catechetical Directors), or NCCL (National Conference for Catechetical Leaders).
- Parishes working together in a deanery or the archdiocese should develop a process for seeking out and assessing the needs of persons with disabilities within the parishes and provide special religious education programs for them. When possible, special needs students should be integrated into existing programs.
- Mindful that the faithful have the right to their own form of spiritual life consonant with the teaching of the Church, parishes are to provide, guide and allow for various expressions of faith in religious education out of respect for spiritual and cultural diversity (can. 214).

1.5 CURRICULUM AND SACRAMENTS

- The pastor is ultimately responsible for the selection of the catechists and, in the discharge of this duty, he must respect the regulations made by the archbishop concerning such selection (Canon 776).
- A curriculum designed for each age level --based on the current documents of the Holy See, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the policy and guidelines of the

*See PSR (CCD) 30 Sessions vs. 30 Hours Rationale on the ORE website by clicking [here](#).

Office of Religious Education and *The Curriculum for Religious Education in The Archdiocese of New Orleans* -developed by the Office of Religious Education -- should be implemented in each parish and school program. The goal of the program should be communicated effectively to the parents and parishioners.

- Parish religious education programs are to be available for children ages 3-5. Such a program is to be considered as part of the total parish program. It is recommended that an ongoing program of guidance and education be provided for the parents whose children are enrolled in the early childhood program.
- In addition to the specific course objectives in the curriculum prepared by the Office of Religious Education for children in grades kindergarten through twelve, preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation, as well as the RCIA, form an integral part of the children's catechesis.
 - Preparation for and the initial celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede the celebration of First Eucharist.
 - Proximate preparation for the celebration of First Eucharist ordinarily takes place when the child is in the second grade (age 7 or 8).
 - When the celebration(s) of First Communion takes place, the celebration(s) should welcome candidates from Catholic school and the Parish School of Religion to participate.
 - Confirmation is celebrated upon completion of the appropriate preparation, according to archdiocesan policy.
 - Parishes are to cooperate fully with the sacramental preparation programs in accord with the curriculum published by the Office of Religious Education. Sacramental preparation and first celebration of sacraments are done within the parish community.
 - In regard to preparing disabled persons for the celebration of the sacraments, parents, pastors and catechists are to be mindful that, even though some disabled persons cannot express verbally either their desire or readiness to receive the sacraments, the desire and readiness can be expressed in their eyes, their gestures, or their quality of silence. Consult *Archdiocesan Sacramental Guidelines for Persons with Disabilities*, 1994, available through ORE (based on the USCCB Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities).
 - Unbaptized children who have reached the use of reason (usually 7 years of age) are to participate in the RCIA as adapted for children and are to be baptized, confirmed and receive first Eucharist at the Easter Vigil with the adult catechumens.
- Provision is to be made for the celebration of Eucharist, Reconciliation and other liturgies within religious education programs.
- Communications with the parents are to be made regularly regarding the progress of those participating in the religious education programs in the parish and the Catholic

schools.

- The recruitment of catechists for the Parish School of Religion is the primary responsibility of the pastor.
- The Office of Religious Education offers guidance and a program for achieving certification for persons desiring to serve as catechetical leaders in the archdiocese.
- Expenses for the certification and continuing formation of volunteer religion teachers are to be borne by the parish.
- Catechist and teacher training and continuing formation are the primary responsibility of the parish and the principals of non--parochial Catholic schools, according to the certification guidelines of the archdiocese.
- Certification for coordinators of Evangelization or Catechumenate must be sought by those exercising such ministries.

2. RELIGION AS A MAJOR SUBJECT IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

All Catholic elementary and secondary schools are to maintain the study of the Catholic religion on an equal basis with other academic subjects, i.e., in the amount, frequency and priority of class time, and in the quality of courses and instruction, and should have equal priority in the budget. Religion shall be taught to every student for a full class period every day.

3. CATECHETICAL FORMATION IN CHASTE LIVING

Catholic youth are encouraged to cherish their dignity as a human being made in God's image and likeness and to cherish others in that same dignity of personhood. These guiding principles and curriculum guidelines are meant to help the youth of our Archdiocese deepen their relationship with Christ and the Church through joyfully embracing the call to love and live chaste lives either as a married follower of Christ or as a celibate person. Our purpose is to focus on the moral religious foundations of the teachings of the Catholic Church. We are guided by the Holy Spirit and the relational love witnessed through the Holy Trinity and thus as followers of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, we are called to live and share in this same love of the Triune God.

Faithful to Jesus' teaching and call we urge those charged with the catechesis of our young people namely Parents/ Guardians and Catechists, to embrace the catechetical call of Chaste Living by witnessing and teaching the importance of the sacramental life of the church, the cultivation of the Cardinal and Theological Virtues, The Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes.

3.1 Guiding Principles

- Human beings are created in God's own image and created for love.
- Individually human beings reflect creation in the image and likeness of God by having an intellect, free will, and the capacity of performing truly human and moral acts.
- Being created in God's image enables human beings to share in Trinitarian love, express love in marriage through generating new life, and through selfless giving.
- Grace and friendship with God were lost through a free act of disobedience called Original Sin.
- The effects of Original Sin are:
 - Loss of Grace
 - Damage to the harmony of body, intellect and will
 - Reduced ability to love unselfishly
 - Experience of shame
 - Confusion about the nature and purpose of the human body
 - Being subject to temptation to sin
 - Death
- God didn't abandon human beings.
- God sent Jesus to accomplish our redemption.
- Jesus knows us and loves us.
- Jesus taught us how to live and gave us the gift of new life through the Holy Spirit.
- Christian morality consists in following Jesus, being transformed by His grace and renewed in His mercy.
- Moral formation involves a journey of interior transformation and conversion to Christ.
- We do not lead the moral life on our own. God helps and transforms us by the power of grace.
- A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do what is right and good.
- The cardinal virtues are acquired by effort as a result of education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in repeated morally good acts. All human virtues are related to the cardinal virtues.
- The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity. They aid humans to

grow in a generous and self-giving love that is foundational for a chaste life.

- The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit complete and perfect the virtues.
- Christ's gift of salvation offers humans the grace to maintain moral balance and persevere in the pursuit of the virtues.
- The glory of salvation is experienced through the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- The Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Four Precepts of the Church instruct us in how humans are to live and act in union with God.
- Chastity is a virtue that allows us to do right, good and loving acts in the area of relationship and sexuality.
- Chastity promotes the full integration of sexuality in accord with a person's state of life. Chastity promotes abstention from immoral sexual activity.
- Chastity includes training in human freedom and the result of hard personal and interior work.
- Chastity flows from the moral virtue of temperance that helps direct our sexuality and sexual desires toward authentic love. It is not a repression of sexual feelings but is the successful integration of the gift of sexuality.
- Christ's disciples need to be aware of and resist temptation to engage in activities which are violations of chastity. These violations are sinful.
- For any who fail to live chaste lives, forgiveness is given through Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We need God's grace to help us live a chaste life.
- Conjugal love between a husband and wife is part of God's plan for humanity. It is a mutual gift of self. Married people are called to love in conjugal chastity; un-married people are called to live in a chastity of continence.
- Pornography defames the intimacy of the marital act and injures the dignity of God's people.
- The unity of the spouses and the gift of life go together through the marital act. Any sexual activity outside the marriage defames the sanctity of marriage. (i.e. premarital sex, extramarital sex and cohabitation)
- The unity of a couple shown through the marital act is manifested in creating new life. Therefore no means should be used to discourage procreation such as artificial birth control. If a couple is not able to conceive a child no artificial means of conception are

allowed since it is the conjugal act of love that results in the gift of new life.

- The existence of homosexual tendencies is not sinful; however acting upon these tendencies in homosexual acts is contrary to chastity, natural law and is closed to the gift of life. In this same manner same sex "marriages" do not contain the elements essential to God's plan for marriage and therefore lack the benefit of a sacramental covenant and the ability to generate new life.
- The Blessed Mother, through prayer and devotion, will assist people in living a chaste life.

4. GUIDELINES FOR HOME-BASED CATECHESIS

While we recognize that parents are the primary educators of their children and that some parents may "choose to provide catechesis for their children in their home, their catechesis must be both complete and authentic." (*National Directory for Catechesis*, #3, *Home-Based Catechesis*) "Complete" catechesis includes on-going catechesis of children from Grade 1 through Grade 12, with a minimum of thirty (30) instructional hours per year for all students not enrolled in a Catholic school.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that "the bishop of the diocese, the pastor of the parish, the parents, and the children all have God-given responsibilities that must be respected in considering home-based catechesis." (*NDC*, 3)

"Parents who would like to provide catechesis at home should make themselves known to the local pastor and consult with him or his delegate to ensure that the catechesis provided in the home is the catechesis of the Church. Dialogue between the pastor and the parents is essential to the complete and authentic catechesis of children in their home." (*NDC*, 3)

With this guidance from the United States bishops in the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the Office of Religious Education for the Archdiocese of New Orleans provides the following guidelines for those parents wishing to catechize their children in the home:

- "Parents who choose to be not only the primary educators of their children but also their catechists must adhere to all guidelines for catechists outlined by the diocesan bishop." (*NDC*, 3) Because the Archdiocese of New Orleans requires all catechists to be certified as such through participation in the *Archdiocesan Catechist Certification Program*, all parents who wish to catechize their children in a home-based program must also be taking courses toward certification through the *ACCP*. (See the Office of Religious Education website, orearchdio-no.com, for *Certification Policy* and dates, times and locations of classes.)
- Catechesis may be permitted in the home for a **SERIOUS** reason, such as serious illness or in the case of a student unable to take instruction in a regular classroom setting, such as a severe developmental or cognitive delay or disability, or physical disability. This

allowance does NOT cover scheduling conflicts, such as sports or other extracurricular activities. Also permitted to catechize in the home are those parents who home school their children in all other subjects.

- Families who wish to catechize their children in the home according to the above description must follow Archdiocesan Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines for the age level of their child(ren). These may be obtained from the parish catechetical leader.
- In the Archdiocese of New Orleans, parents who would like to provide catechesis at home must **FIRST** contact the pastor of their parish to determine if this is possible. There must be sufficient catechetical staff to supervise the catechesis to be done in the home. The pastor will make the final decision regarding home-based catechesis.
- Textbooks to be used in home-based catechesis must be the same as those used in the local parish. These may be purchased through the parish religious education program. Other supplemental materials may also be used for home-based catechesis. However, these additional materials must be approved by the Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education and must be in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Students who are catechized in a home-based program are required to take quarterly exams to ensure that progress is being made in accordance with the Archdiocesan curriculum for that grade level. Exams may be, but are not limited to, written questions specifically on material from the text. In addition, there may be oral exams on prayers and practices/traditions of the Catholic faith as listed in the Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines. This accountability is necessary to ensure that the child(ren) are receiving religious instruction in accordance with the standards of the Parish School of Religion and Catholic schools in the Archdiocese.

5. SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION AND HOME-BASED CATECHESIS

"Immediate preparation" for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation is to be done in the parish. Any family who is engaged in home-based catechesis must present their child(ren) for the immediate preparation for the above-named sacraments, in communion with students in the parish school of religion and/or the Catholic school. Because the parish is the basis of the spiritual and sacramental life of all members of the parish community, this preparation, as well as the reception of the sacraments, is done within and supported by the members of the parish community.

"Since the celebration of the sacraments continually integrates the children into the Body of Christ, preparing children for reception of the sacraments should always be undertaken in collaboration with the local pastor and catechetical leader. These children should be encouraged to participate in non-instructional, preparatory activities of the parish peer group preparing for the sacrament." (*NDC*, 3)

6. PARTICIPATION OF FAMILIES IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

"All parents have an obligation to involve their children in the life and mission of the Church. Since their children are being initiated into the life of the Church, which is fundamentally realized in the local parish, parents who provide catechesis for their children in their homes should participate fully in the life of the local parish. They should celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in the local parish, involve themselves in its charitable works, and attend appropriate training and formation sessions the parish or diocese provides." (*NDC*, 3)
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7. RELIGION PROGRAMS IN PRIVATE NON-SECTARIAN SCHOOLS

The Archdiocese of New Orleans does not give official approval nor monitor religion classes for Catholics taught in private non-sectarian schools. Such classes are neither approved nor allowed to replace catechetical instruction or sacramental preparation offered for young people in the church parish.

8. COLLECTION OF OTHER RESOURCES

The Office of Religious Education has developed collections of other resources which affect religious education in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. These collections are:

- *Archdiocesan Sacramental Preparation and Guidelines for Children -First Reconciliation and First Eucharist*
- *The Curriculum for Religious Education and Chaste Living in the Archdiocese of New Orleans*
- *Archdiocesan Sacramental Guidelines for Persons with Disabilities*
- *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living (USCCB)*

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