



*The Faith That Marks God's People*

# **Guidelines for Catechesis**

Pre-Kindergarten

Archdiocese of New York  
Revised - 2016

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May 15, 2016  
Feast of Pentecost  
Year of Mercy

Dear friends in the Lord:

With prayer and confidence in your dedication to the mission of catechesis – to bring everyone closer to Jesus Christ – I promulgate these *Guidelines for Catechesis, Pre-Kindergarten Through Grade Six* in the Catholic school and catechetical programs of the Archdiocese of New York.

This is the third edition of the *Guidelines*. Since they were first promulgated in 1987, the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office and the Office of the Superintendent of Schools found it necessary to revise and update them, particularly in light of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1995. This update incorporates added scriptural references, protocols on catechesis issued by the bishops of the United States, and the new translation of the *Roman Missal*.

Allow me to thank the leaders of the Guidelines Revision Committee for their efforts: Sr. Joan Curtin, CND, director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office and chairperson; Ms. Nancy Doran; Ms. Linda Fitzsimons; Ms. Margaret Hoblin; Sr. Teresita Morse, RJM; Mr. Philip Gorrasi; Ms. Lisette Robustelli; and Ms. Paige Sanchez.

Just a few months after his election, Pope Francis spoke to catechists attending the International Congress on Catechesis in Rome, and thanked them for their commitment. He said:

*Catechesis is a pillar of faith education and we need good catechists! Thank you for your service to the Church and in the Church. Even if at times it may be difficult and require a great deal of work, and although the results are not always what we hope for, teaching the faith is something beautiful! It is perhaps the best legacy we can pass on: the faith! To educate in the faith, to make it grow. To help children, young people and adults to know and love the Lord more and more is one of the most exciting aspects of education. It builds up the Church!*

Permit me to add my own heartfelt thanks. I count on you, your knowledge of and faithfulness to Church teaching, and your pedagogical skills to assist me in sharing the faith that we were given at baptism and enriched by years of living and learning. Hopefully, you know that I could not carry out this sacred duty without you.

With prayerful best wishes, I am,

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tim. Carol. Dolan." with a cross symbol to the left.

Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan  
Archbishop of New York



## ***The Faith That Marks God's People***

**The Faith That Marks God's People** is developed according to the following format in grades one through six:

1. Each grade level is introduced by a statement of the year's doctrinal theme.
2. The pedagogical objective of the year follows the theme statement.
3. The **Guidelines** are to be read across the page, following the delineated bands.

The basic teachings of the faith are contained in the first two columns: "Core Content" and "Christian Living."

The "Core Content" column presents the faith concepts; the "Christian Living" column explains how these concepts are to be lived out by Catholics. The issues of morality, including respect for life and concern for justice and peace, form the substance of this column.

The "Sacred Scripture" column includes several passages in the Old or New Testament where the core content is imaged or taught.

The "Prayer and Worship" column suggests prayer and liturgical experiences for the child.

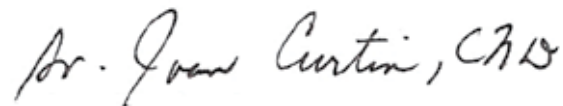
4. Throughout the Guidelines, from grades one through six, there is a developmental presentation of the major concepts.
5. On the final page of each grade level, there is a listing of vocabulary, prayers, and liturgical symbols and liturgical gestures to be taught. This page also includes the portion of the Creed that is to be taught or reviewed, and prayers to be encouraged.
6. After each entry in the **Guidelines**, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1997*, is cited in support of the concept expressed. These citations are intended to deepen the catechist/teacher's understanding, on an adult level, of the content being taught.

The **Guidelines** are addressed to the catechist/teacher, not to the students. Nonetheless, throughout the **Guidelines**, the language has been kept as simple and straightforward as possible without sacrificing theological and doctrinal accuracy. It is hoped that the language used to present each concept will help the catechist/teacher to teach the concept according to the capacity of the student.

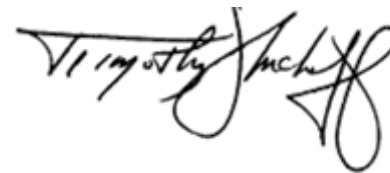
These **Guidelines** are not to be considered a substitute for the textbook. It is recommended that each parish select a single textbook series found to be in conformity with the US. Bishop's Protocol, for use in grades one through six for the school and parish programs, and that these **Guidelines** be used in conjunction with that textbook series. The **Guidelines** have been designed to assist the catechist/teacher in the use of the textbook by providing the essential content to be taught at each grade level.

To implement these **Guidelines** effectively, the catechist/teacher must be committed to give time and talent not only to catechizing others, but also to growing personally in faith and understanding. For this reason, an extensive Archdiocesan **Catechist Formation Program** in all counties of the Archdiocese is offered both online and on site to ensure ongoing theological, spiritual and pedagogical formation of all catechists/teachers.

Through this endeavor, it is hoped that the whole Church of New York will continue to grow in the faith that marks God's people.



Sr. Joan Curtin, C.N.D.  
Director, Catechetical Office



Dr. Timothy J. McNiff, Ed. D  
Superintendent of Schools

# Catechesis Prior to Grade One (3 to 6 year-olds)

## Introduction

The home is the first school of prayer and the seedbed of faith. (2685) Parish support for the family as the “domestic church” (2204) includes the work of religious educators who help parents to fulfill their role of “first heralds of the faith” (1656) to their children.

Specialists in early childhood development observe not only that young children can know and experience God, but that their experience bears a particular character, and is marked by great joy. Children from three to six years of age possess a profound capacity for contemplating the greatest truths of faith, and of experiencing a relationship with God that is loving, joyful, grateful and trusting.

By as early as the age of three, most children are ready to take part in a pre-school catechetical program. In such a program the role of the catechist is different from, yet complements, the unique role of parents.

Guided by a realistic assessment of the resources of the parish, the training of the catechists, and the merits of programs and methods that are in conformity with the ‘United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Protocol* for teaching materials, the Director/Coordinator of Religious Education, or the School Principal as appropriate, must choose that method of program which will best serve the needs in each particular parish situation.

Sofia Cavalletti is the pioneer of the early childhood religious education method known as *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. Her work is inspired by the insights and educational method of Maria Montessori. She calls early childhood “a privileged age for accepting the Kerygma” and demonstrates that a suitable early introduction to the good news of God’s loving initiative will ground all later developments in a child’s religious and moral life.

In the New York Archdiocese, *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is the preferred Catechetical program for this age group. It is based on deep insight into the needs and capacities of the young child and is effective with children from all cultures, learning abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. The parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18) is central to this catechesis because young children are in the sensitive period for protection and the protective love of the Good Shepherd is a subject of inexhaustible interest to them.

The effective use of *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* depends upon the hands-on training developed by the National Association of the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, and available through the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office. No parish Religious Education program may use this method unless its catechists have received the required training and certification.

Readers should keep in mind that effective use of this method depends upon hands-on training, which will be provided by the Archdiocese in cooperation with the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

# The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

## Underlying Principles

God and the child have a relationship that the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* seeks to serve with reverence and respect.

The catechist is a servant of a message that is not her or his own, and together with the child must humbly listen to God's word.

The catechist must observe the child carefully, as the inner dynamism of the child's need, will direct the catechesis.

The child is capable of perceiving the greatest realities of faith, and must never be talked down to.

The child must be given the opportunity to discover and appropriate the truth for her or himself.

Prayer, contemplation, and silence are natural components of the child's religious life, and must be honored.

The content of the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is inseparable from the method of the Catechesis. The effective use of both method and content relies upon the preparation and training of the catechist.

## Christ as the Starting Point

Jesus, the Christ, is always the starting point and the center of *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. Jesus, seen through the stories and parables of the New Testament, provides the closest link between the child and the whole mystery of God and salvation. "At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth..." (426) Although starting with Christ follows neither the chronological order of the salvation history approach nor the order of logical progression which dictates that one must know God before one can recognize God's Son, it does correspond to the needs, spirituality and experience of the child.

It is a valid theological starting point as well, since the Christian gains a privileged access to the Old Testament through the person of Christ, and not apart from him.

## Wonder and Prayer

The child has a natural capacity for wonder and contemplation. Wonder is an essential element in our falling in love with God. It forms the foundation for our spiritual life. The human capacity for wonder is without limits but for the young child it goes beyond "capacity" to "need". It is important that this need be nurtured. A particular characteristic of the 3 to 6 year old child is a great capacity for wonder. The young child learning about the world wants to take a closer look, "to linger". This close observation leads to a wonder and a contemplation which brings the child in touch with the sacred. In *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, the child is given sufficient time to stop and dwell on the mysteries presented so that wonder will become a fundamental attitude of spirit.



Adults must take care not to stifle the capacity of the child for wonder, either by overstimulating or understimulating the child. Too many images, offered too rapidly, can cause the child to withdraw as a protection from such a wearying display. Understimulation can also deprive the child of wonder.

Prayer is the response of the child to the encounter with the Word, and arises naturally. Prayer is the means by which the child integrates the experience of the Word into the child's personal life. Memorized prayers are no substitute for the child's spontaneous prayer in response to God's presence and activity.

The child's prayer at this stage of life has a particular character: it is almost exclusively praise and thanksgiving, rarely, if ever, petition. This preference should be respected.

### **The Environment**

*The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* takes place in a designated space called an "atrium". The atrium should be a place of safety and openness arranged to foster the child's independence in learning and encourage the activities appropriate to the child's stage of development. The objects and furniture in the atrium should be adapted in size and weight to the child's abilities.

In the atrium, the Bible is displayed in a place of honor. A special area is also set aside for the Good Shepherd parable. The area for prayer is taken care of by the children themselves and they prepare it according to the seasons of the liturgical year.

Other possible areas might be devoted to Baptism, Eucharist, the parables of the kingdom, the life of Christ, and the geography of Israel. In each area, the appropriate materials should be easily available so that the children can work with them independently.

### **The Use of Scripture**

The scriptures proclaimed to the children are always taken from adult versions of the Bible, and are read slowly and with respect.

Added solemnity is given to the reading of the sacred text by the presence of a lighted candle during the reading.

The catechist may begin by telling the story of the scripture passage in his/her own words, but then it is important to proclaim and listen to the word from the text of Sacred Scripture itself.

Certain New Testament stories and parables are particularly appropriate for young children and are read in their entirety while Old Testament texts are used more sparingly. Memorization of scripture verses is avoided, because breaking the scripture into these smaller units tends to diminish one's grasp of the whole parable or story.

Booklets with the scripture readings are made available to the children who can read, so that they can revisit the texts, either individually or in groups, as they work with the materials relating to them.

## The Use of Materials

Simple, good quality materials, such as figures of the Good Shepherd, the sheep, and the sheepfold, are an essential aid to the child in meditating upon the scripture. They are designed with the needs of the children in mind, not those of the adult. Once the children have been shown how to use the materials, they are given the time and opportunity to work with them independently and at their own pace.

## Content

The *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is rich in content. The content is directed by the choices of the children, but there are some texts and themes that are always explored. Among them are the following, which would be presented in accordance with the liturgical year over a three-year period:

### The Good Shepherd:

- The parable of the Good Shepherd
- The parable of the found sheep
- The psalm of the Good Shepherd
- The eucharistic presence of the Good Shepherd

### The Land of Jesus:

- The world and the land of Jesus
- Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem
- Places and features of the land of Israel
- Places within Jerusalem

### The parables of the Kingdom:

- The mustard seed
- The pearl of great price
- The hidden treasure
- The yeast/heaven

### Baptism:

- Light
- Word
- Water
- Oil
- White garment

### Advent prophecies:

- The "Light" and the "Child" (Isaiah)
- The "Virgin" and "Bethlehem"
- The "Star"

### The Eucharist ("sacrament of the gift"):

- Preparation of cruets
- Mingling of water and wine
- The lavabo
- The gesture of the invocation of the Spirit
- The gesture of the offering
- The gesture of the sign of peace

### Events in the life of Jesus:

- The Annunciation
- The Visitation
- The birth of Jesus and adoration of the shepherds
- The birth of Jesus and adoration of the Magi
- The Last Supper
- The Resurrection

Acknowledgments:

References obtained through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Website ([uscbb.org](http://uscbb.org))

The Scripture passages are from the New American Bible, rev. ed. © 2010 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

The Act of Contrition is taken from the “Rite of Penance”, © 1974 by the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc.

The Apostles’ Creed is taken from the Roman Missal 2010 (International Commission on English in the Liturgy)

The Glory Be is taken from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Website ([uscbb.org](http://uscbb.org))

The Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church was used to guide the revision process.