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Parish Religious Education Program

Catechist Handbook

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Please Note

Throughout this Handbook, for the sake of brevity:

- the title “Director” will be used to indicate both the Director and the Coordinator of Religious Education.
- the word “child” or “children” will be used to indicate children and youth up to 7th grade.
- the word “parent” will be used to indicate the child’s primary caretaker, whether parent or guardian

The Vocation of the Catechist

Evangelization is the mission of the Church and the purpose of Catechesis within this mission is to enable every believer to live as a true disciple with a mature faith in Jesus Christ.

(The Catechetical Leader in Third Millennium by the Bishops of New York State)

At the heart of Catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of the Father who suffered and died for us and now, risen, is living with us forever.

Catechesis aims at putting people 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.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as the urgent and definitive intervention of God in history, and defined this proclamation as “the Good News”, i.e. “the Gospel”. To this Gospel, Jesus devoted his entire earthly life. After his Resurrection, Jesus Christ, together with the Father, sent the Holy Spirit in order that He might animate His disciples to continue His mission in the whole world.

To catechize is to teach others that, in the Person of Jesus Christ, the whole of God’s eternal design is revealed. Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God is taught – everything else is taught with reference to Him.

And it is Christ alone who teaches – anyone else teaches to the extent that she/he is Christ’s spokesperson, enabling Christ to teach with her/his lips. Every catechist should be able to apply to herself or himself the words of Jesus: *My teaching is not mine, but the words of Him who sent me.* (Jn. 7:16)

(Excerpts from Catechism of Catholic Church 426 to 428 and GDC 34)

Faith Qualities Essential for the Catechist

Only men and women of faith can share faith with others, preparing the setting within which people can respond in faith to God's grace. (Sharing the Light of Faith #207)

Called by God

The Catechist receives and responds to a call that comes from the Lord and is articulated in the local Church. The response to this call includes the willingness to give time and talent not only to catechizing others but also to furthering one's own growth in faith.

Grounded in the Lord

The Catechist is committed to Jesus Christ and lives in an ever-deepening relationship with Him. It is from this relationship that the ministry of the Catechist flows. The Catechist believes in the Gospel and in its power to transform lives, and frequently reflects on and prays with the Scriptures.

Faithful to the Church

The Catechist demonstrates fidelity to the official teachings of the Catholic Church and realizes that, in the exercise of the ministry of Religious Education, it is the Church that is represented.

The Catechist tests and validates personal understanding and insights in the light of the Gospel message as presented by the teaching authority of the Church.

The Catechist is aware that, as a pilgrim people, the Church is in constant need of renewal, and strives therefore, to discern the Spirit's presence ever at work in the Church community

Committed to Community

The Catechist highly values and participates in the sacramental life of the Church and appreciates the Eucharist as the Center and deepest sign of the Catholic community. The Catechist participates in the celebration of Mass each Sunday with the parish community.

Oriented to Mission

The Catechist holds inviolate the dignity of each human person and continually works for this dignity – witnessing to the social teachings of the Church through personal attitudes and actions especially in the Religious Education Program.

Basic Requirements for Acceptance as Catechist or Catechist Assistant

For a Catechist

The ministry of Catechist is affirmed by St. Paul as being a primary ministry in the Church, one that is based upon a call from God (*1 Corinthians 12: 28*). In selecting Catechists and Catechist Assistants, the Director/Coordinator prays for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to discern in persons seeking the position, which individuals are responding to a call from the Lord.

Applicants for the role of Catechist are selected by the Director/Coordinator and must be finally approved by the Pastor by means of his written approval and signature on their Catechist application.

The applicant for the position of Catechist or Catechist Assistant must:

- be 18 years of age or older;
- have received the Sacrament of Confirmation and be a practicing Catholic who is committed to the Eucharist and faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church;
- exhibit a vital Catholic faith based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- give evidence of love for children and youth as well as the qualities of compassion, kindness, common sense, sense of humor;
- demonstrate the ability to manage children and youth and facilitate their learning;
- be in full compliance with the Archdiocesan Safe Environment requirements;
- agree to fulfill the *Catechist Ministry Responsibilities* as listed in the Catechist Handbook;
- agree to be compliant to the legitimate authority of the Pastor and the Parish Director/Coordinator of Religious Education in carrying out the ministry of Catechist;
- agree to abide by all the directives in the *Catechist Handbook*;
- agree to participate in the Archdiocesan Catechist Formation program and complete levels 1 and 2 within the Catechist's first 5 years in the ministry;
- give evidence of a sense of one's own self-worth along with security and fulfillment in one's own life.
- complete the Catechist Application and submit it to the Director of Religious Education

For a Person Under the Age of 18 Who Assists the Catechist

No one under 18 years of age may be a Catechist. Youth of 16 or 17 years of age who assist in the classroom may be in regular contact with children, only if:

- they are directly supervised in each Religious Education session by an adult who is in full compliance with the Safe Environment requirements;
- they are in full compliance with the Archdiocesan Safe Environment requirements for youth under 18 years of age. The 16 or 17 year-old assistant must complete a Background Check Form but should do so only with parental consent.

Youth, 15 years of age or younger, may only be in the catechetical session when acting as a helper to the adult Catechist. They fall under the category of those whom the Catechist must supervise.

Catechist Ministry Responsibilities

Spend several hours each week in preparing the Religious Education session guided by the Catechist's manual of the basal series selected by the parish program and by the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis* for your grade level, in order to be well-prepared for your session.

Submit a weekly lesson plan to the Director of Religious Education, using the lesson plan format provided.

Be present and on time for every religious education session you are scheduled to teach throughout the year.

Never dismiss the children/youth in your sessions before the scheduled time.

Present all the religious education lessons effectively.

Manage the children's behavior in such a way as to ensure maximum participation in the religious education lessons.

Follow all the Religious Education Program directives and procedures as given by the Religious Education Director.

Read and follow the parish *Catechist Handbook* and all other guidelines and policies of the Pastor and the Religious Education Director.

Fulfill Archdiocesan policies and directives regarding Catechists, which are usually communicated by the Regional Catechetical Director working with the Parish Director of Religious Education.

Attend all Catechist meetings organized by the Parish Director.

Interact with the parents of the children/youth in the ways determined by the parish Religious Education Director, including parent meetings scheduled for the Religious Education Program.

Participate in the Archdiocesan Catechist Formation Classes in order to achieve Catechist certification, levels 1 and 2.

Attend the annual Archdiocesan Catechetical Forum. Other opportunities for enrichment offered by the Catechetical Office (central and regional) should be attended when possible.

Requirements of the Safe Environment Office for Catechists

Each prospective Catechist must:

- complete and submit Catechist Application to the Director of Religious Education;
- complete and submit Background Check form to the Director. (Catechist cannot work with children until background check has been done and approved by Safe Environment Office.)
- sign acknowledgement that she/he has read the Archdiocesan policy relating to sexual misconduct and the appropriate Code of Conduct;
- complete the *Safer Spaces Training Program* on site or online. The training is taken after the Background Check has cleared and within the limit of 45 days of beginning their ministry in the parish. If a program is scheduled to last for less than 45 days (e.g., vacation bible schools, summer camps,), all new Catechists must complete the Safe Environment requirements before the program begins.

The on-site Safer Spaces Training Program is 40 minutes long and is facilitated by the Director of Religious Education. It consists of a presentation on DVD supported by a facilitator's guide and a master copy of the training booklet.

If any Catechist fails to satisfy the Safe Environment requirements by the appropriate date, they may not come into contact with minors in any program or activity of the Archdiocese or any of its parishes or institutions until they complete the Safe Environment requirements.

The Background Check Forms consist of the following:

- *Archdiocesan Policy on Background Checks* (kept by Catechist)
- *Fact sheet on Background Checks* (kept by Catechist)
- *Summary of Rights under Fair Credit Reporting Act* (kept by Catechist)
- *Sexual Misconduct Policy, both Summary & Full Policy* (kept by Catechist)
- *Code of Conduct* (kept by Catechist)
- *Authorization & Disclosure for Background Check* (filled out by Catechist, copy sent to Safe Environment Office & original copy kept in Parish files)
- *Catechetical Office Volunteer Application* (filled out by catechist, kept in Religious Education Office files)

These forms are available both in Spanish and English in the *Safe Environment Resource Manual* and on the Safe Environment web page. (archny.org/screening-procedures)

Designated Safe Environment Reporters for the Parish Community

Archdiocesan policy requires that the Pastor, the Director of Religious Education, the Catechists and the staff of the Religious Education Program report all incidents of suspected child abuse following the procedure outlined below. Although these personnel are not “Mandated Reporters” under New York State Social Services Law section 413, by virtue of their role in the Religious Education program, they are required to report all incidents following the policy of the New York Archdiocese and the directions of the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office.

The Pastor is the legal head of the parish and thus is ultimately responsible for what happens there. Thus, he must be notified of all incidents and should be made aware of all developments.

When Archdiocesan policy requires that a report be made on an abuse incident and the Pastor does not or is unable to make the report, the Director of Religious Education will be directed by the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office to make the report, or the Safe Environment Office itself will make the report.

Because a parish commitment to protecting its children and helping its families is much broader than its Religious Education Program, its response plan should also be broader.

See Appendix for *Characteristics of the Abused Child and of the Abusive Caretaker*

**Process to be Followed in Response to Suspected Child Abuse
Internal to Religious Education Program
and Involving a Parish Employee/Volunteer**

An “internal incident” is an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor made against any person within the parish Religious Education Program (i.e. priest, deacon, sister, brother, layman, laywoman, employee, volunteer).

In response the following is done:

- The person(s) receiving the information immediately informs the Director.
- The Director immediately informs the Pastor.
- Either the Pastor or the Director immediately calls the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office (646-794-2897). (If Safe Environment Office cannot be reached, the Office of Legal Affairs is called.) The Safe Environment Office will direct the parish leadership through the situation according to Archdiocesan policy.
- If there is a real and imminent threat to the security or safety of the child, the Pastor or Director must call the police immediately. In an emergency, they should not wait to speak to the Safe Environment Office before dialing 911. The first priority is to ensure child’s safety.
- Guided by the Safe Environment Office, the Pastor informs the parents of the complaint.
- The Director of Religious Education informs the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office.
- The Pastor advises the person making the complaint (or their parent) to notify the District Attorney of the appropriate county.
- If the Pastor judges the complaint to be credible, i.e. judges that there is “reasonable cause to believe”, he places the accused person on leave at once.

(Employee continues to receive salary/benefits until there is a resolution of the complaint or an investigation shows that improper custodial conduct occurred, at which time salary/benefits may cease and employee is placed on unpaid leave pending the outcome of the investigation.)

- If the employee/volunteer admits to the alleged abuse of a minor, he/she is to be terminated. If found guilty in civil court, the employee/volunteer is to be terminated and is not to be considered for future work or service in the Archdiocese.
- To protect the reputation and good name of both the accused and the victims, anyone having information about an incident or case of child abuse is not to share that information with anyone except the appropriate authorities.

Process to be Followed in Response to Suspected Child Abuse
External to Religious Education Program
and not Involving a Parish Employee/Volunteer

An “external incident” is something that happens to a child/youth outside of the Religious Education Program and not committed by a member of the parish staff. The report is typically a self-report by a child /youth to a Catechist.

In response the following is done:

- The Catechist immediately notifies the Director.
- The Director immediately informs the Pastor.
- Either the Pastor or the Director immediately calls the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office (646-794-2807) which will direct the parish leadership through the situation according to Archdiocesan policy.
- If there is imminent danger to the child, the Director or Pastor must call the police immediately. They should not wait to speak to the Safe Environment Office before dialing 911. The first priority is to ensure the child’s safety.
- The Director of Religious Education informs the Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office.
- In all cases, if there is **reasonable suspicion**, with some specific signs, that child abuse/neglect/ is occurring, the Safe Environment Office will direct the Pastor or Director to call the **N.Y. Child Abuse Register (800-342-3720)** and report it. Then Parish leadership is to fully cooperate with the investigation of the N.Y. authorities

It is not advisable to wait to be absolutely certain that abuse/neglect is occurring. Reporting in good faith protects the complainant from any liability, even if the report proves unfounded. Reporting is the first step in bringing help to both the abused child and the abusive families.

- If the family/abuser tries to contact the parish leadership or Catechist about the report, the parish leadership or Catechist must not have any conversation about the matter. Rather they must let the appropriate authorities know about any contact or harassment.

Further specific instructions, which the Safe Environment Office will provide to the Pastor and Director, will depend on the circumstances in each case.

e.g. If a child’s parent or someone in the home is the offender, the child cannot be sent back to the abuser. Therefore, the Pastor/Director would be instructed to call the police immediately and cooperate fully with the authorities. If the abuser is a non-family member, the Pastor/Director would be instructed to notify the child’s parent unless that would create a risk for the child.

Catechist Formation

The primary responsibility of Catechesis is the preparation and formation of Catechists in the deep riches of the faith. The quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel. The textbooks and other teaching resources provided for Religious Education cannot be truly effective unless they are well used by trained Catechists. (GDC 33; 234)

Archdiocesan Catechist Formation Program

The Bishops of New York State have called upon all Catechists to actively pursue Catechist Formation and Certification. The Catechist Formation Program Levels 1 and 2, provides basic training in spirituality, theology, morality, and educational method. Catechist Formation Levels 3 and 4 (also known as the New York Catholic Bible School Program) focuses on Scripture Study and is highly encouraged but not required.

Substitute Catechists are also expected to participate in the Catechist Formation Program.

On-Site Supervision and On-going Formation of Catechists

In addition to the Catechist Formation Program, the Catechist receives regular ongoing supervision/observation from the Director that is done both formally and informally. This is followed-up with advice and directives given both in conference and in writing. The Catechist is expected to work with the Director to grow and develop in teaching skills, catechetical competencies, and group management. The ultimate goal is always to help the Catechists become increasingly effective in their ministry of evangelizing catechesis for the sake of every child and family in the parish Religious Education Program.

The Director accomplishes on-site supervision of Catechists and substitute Catechists in the following manner:

- short, regular visits to each Catechist's classroom, quietly observing the teaching/learning interaction from an unobtrusive place in the room;
- walking outside the rooms where Religious Education is taking place, to listen and learn what is taking place;
- taking notes on each Catechist's strengths, challenges, techniques, knowledge of the subject matter, abilities in working with the children/youth;
- meeting with each Catechist regularly to discuss their professional development and provide means for growth and improvement;

- handling serious needs in the Religious Education sessions immediately to prevent these from causing deterioration of the teaching/learning situation;

The Director working in the following manner with the Catechists and substitute Catechists accomplishes on-site supervision by:

- ensuring that each Catechist is using the textbook series' Catechist manual and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis* and is spending several hours each week to prepare the lesson;
- requiring a weekly lesson plan from each Catechist and using the lesson plan as a teaching tool in the Catechist's own ongoing formation process;
- organizing a meeting every 2 or 3 years during which the representative of the textbook company provides in-service on the program being used in the Religious Education Program as well as on the digital resources the company provides;
- providing in-service to Catechists in digital catechetical materials and methodology;
- creating opportunities for Catechists to observe other Catechists teaching, either in the home-parish program, or in a neighboring Parish;
- providing time in the Catechist meetings for Catechists to share problems, suggestions, and ideas to improve lesson planning and group management;
- discerning the talents of each Catechist in order to place the person at the grade level most conducive to his or her abilities.

Supervisory Responsibility of the Director for the Teaching/Learning Experience

The person ultimately responsible for the supervision of all the children throughout the entire duration of the weekly Religious Education Program is the Director of Religious Education. This supervisory responsibility includes the supervision of the Catechists and staff in their interaction with the children. The Catechist is expected to cooperate fully with the Director with regard to professional development in evangelizing Catechesis and in skills for group management.

The Director selects a single textbook series, grades 1 through 5, in accordance with the Archdiocesan *Guidelines for Catechesis, Pre-Kindergarten through Grade Six*, the needs of the children of the parish, and the capabilities of the Catechists. The Director also selects materials/program for effective sixth and seventh grade catechesis in accordance with the Archdiocesan *Guidelines for Catechesis, Grade 7 & Grade 8*. These textbooks and teaching materials must be in conformity with the *United States Catholic Conference of Bishops* (USCCB) list of approved textbooks. Because our program is 7 years, not 8 years, there is mandatory at-home work required between grades 6 and 7, to ensure all topics in the Archdiocesan Guidelines are covered.

All additional materials and resources used in the Religious Education sessions, whether printed materials or resources available through technology (e.g. cell phone apps, DVD's, Websites, Youtube) and all visiting presenters to the Religious Education sessions must be approved before the day of the session by the Director of Religious Education.

The Director of Religious Education must approve any field trip or special enrichment experience one week before the day of the session.

After consultation with the Catechist, the Director makes the final decision regarding which grade-level the Catechist will teach and which group of children will be entrusted to her/him. If changes in placement of children or Catechist must be made during the year, this too is the responsibility of the Director.

Removal of Child from the Group

The Director has the right to remove a child from the group session:

- if it is believed that the child would benefit significantly from an individual or smaller group situation;
- if the child's behavior is seriously inhibiting the learning of others in the group;
- if temporary removal is used as a disciplinary measure for serious and/or persistent disruptive behavior.

Such action should be preceded by a consultation involving the child, the family, the Catechist, the Director and the Pastor. If, in an extreme case, the Director finds it necessary to remove a child from

the program entirely, the Pastor must approve the final decision. Director and parent would then arrange Private Religious instruction for the child.

Meeting the Catechetical Needs of Children with Disabilities

In the Archdiocese of New York, Special Religious Education is an essential part of the Parish Religious Education Program. It is guided by the Catechetical Office book: *Recognizing the Gift: a Parish Resource Guide for Welcoming Children with Disabilities*.

Catechists of special religious education are recruited and selected by the Director of Religious Education. To be successful in special religious education a background in special education is helpful but not necessary. Above all, the Catechist should have an abiding sense of God's presence in all persons, a desire to work with children with special needs, patience, a sense of humor and enthusiasm.

Catechists of special religious education are required to participate in the Archdiocesan Catechist Formation Program and to receive Archdiocesan Catechist Certification. As part of this formation program, they take the course in special religious education.

Copyrighted Materials

Any printed materials that are copyrighted may not be duplicated without permission from the holder of the copyright. The following exceptions may be made:

- A Catechist may duplicate a single copy to use in preparing or in teaching the class.
- A Catechist may duplicate a short printed item for each of the children but the distribution must be limited to that particular session, and the copies must include the notice of copyright.

Music for use in class or program liturgies may not be reproduced without securing the permission of the holder of the copyright. Multi-media materials that are protected by copyright laws may not be copied for use in the Religious Education session without permission.

The Catechist must ask the Director's permission to use any of these additional materials in the Religious Education session.

Supervisory Responsibility of the Catechist

No child is left unsupervised during the Religious Education Program, during any activities sponsored by the program, or while going to and from locations of sessions, Parish Church, lavatories, and other destinations on the parish premises while the program is in session. The parish program should provide hall and bathroom monitors for all sessions to augment the supervisory responsibilities of the Catechists.

Supervision is a mental as well as a physical act. Therefore, the Catechist/supervisor must be attentive to those in her/his care as well as being physically present with them.

Supervision is necessary upon the children's arrival at and departure from the place of the religious education sessions from 15 minutes before the scheduled start time until all children are picked up at the end of the session.

Even if a Catechist has an emergency (e.g. an accident or sudden illness), the Catechist must never leave a group unsupervised. If there is no other adult in the area to replace the Catechist, the Catechist must bring the children to the session of another Catechist or to the Director.

All supervision must create a safe environment for the children and be practiced in the context of the policies and practices of the *Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office*. These policies and practices are presented and explained on the *Safe Environment Office* web page (archny.org/safe-environment-program) See especially *Child Protection Policies: Codes of Conduct*. They are also found in the *Safe Environment Office Resource Manual*.

Attendance Register

The Catechist takes attendance at the beginning of the Religious Education session. Before the start of class (i.e. before leaving the Gym on Wednesday afternoons) the catechist must ensure that the Director has the attendance lists. These are collected and checked in order to immediately contact the parent in case of an unreported absence.

The Catechist maintains an attendance register for each session. It must always be legible, updated, and recorded in ink. It must include each child's record of both absences and tardiness.

If a child's name is in the attendance register, the Catechist is accountable for that child.

The attendance register is never taken from the parish premises. At the end of the year, the information is transferred to the permanent record card of each child.

The register may become a legally significant document and therefore must be kept in the Religious Education files for a minimum of 7 years.

Dismissal Procedure

Unscheduled early dismissals should never occur.

At the end of the Religious Education session, children are dismissed to the care of the parent or parent substitute according to the following routine:

- For Wednesday afternoon sessions: The parent meets the child in the Gym at the assigned table and notifies the catechist that the child is leaving.
- For Wednesday evening sessions: The Catechist escorts the children to the main lobby of the school and leaves them with a supervising staff member. The parent picks up the child at the Westchester Avenue entrance to Annunciation School. Either the parent or the child notifies the supervising staff member when he/she leaves.
- For Tuesday and Thursday sessions: The Catechist escorts the children to the parent waiting area and ensures that their parents receive them.

- The Catechist should know the parent or parent-substitute for each child as specified on the registration form. If someone other than the parent or parent-substitute is to pick up the child on a given day, this change must be given in writing to the Director prior to the session in question. The Director will notify the Catechist of the change. The Catechist must not dismiss a child to an unauthorized person even if it is the non-custodial parent.

- A child should not be released to anyone under age 18.

- A child should not be released to someone who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

- Staff of the Religious Education Program may not drive children home.

- The Catechist brings to the Director any child whose parent/parent substitute has not arrived within the agreed upon time for pick up.

If an individual child needs to be dismissed early, the child is always brought to the Director who will handle the dismissal.

Management of Children

The Catechist's attitudes and actions should imitate the respect and loving care that the Lord Jesus has for the child.

When interacting with any child, the Catechist uses behavior management (or "discipline") appropriate to an educational environment as a necessary means for the Religious Education Program to accomplish its goals. The purpose of behavior management is to help the children develop self-control, self-respect, respect for others, and reverence for the Word of God which is being explained to them in these sessions.

Physical contact with a child is highly discouraged. However, in the event that touch is necessary for the child's well-being, the Catechist should follow keep the contact public, appropriate and nonsexual.

Humiliation or abusive language must never be used as a form of discipline.

Dress and Appearance of Child

Children are expected to wear modest clothing that reflects the dignity of the Religious Education Program in which they are participating. With the approval of the Pastor, the Director has the final authority to determine the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the clothing worn. If a child violates the policy, the Catechist immediately sends the child out of the session to the Director. The Director will call the parents. The parents must bring alternative clothes for the child to change into so that he/she may return to the Religious Education session. The guidelines appear in the Parish Handbook and are consistent with those of the Yonkers Public Schools.

Individual Meeting of Child with Catechist

No child should be kept after class unless the meeting is pre-arranged with the parent and the Director of Religious Education.

A child may receive scheduled individual instruction or counseling from a Catechist or other staff member for reasons such as additional instruction, misbehavior, excessive absence or lateness but this can only take place with the written permission of the parent and it must be organized by the Director.

A Catechist should never meet alone with a child in an area that cannot be supervised. If the meeting is behind a closed door, the door must have a glass window such that the Catechist and the child can be clearly seen from outside the room.

A Catechist must not become so emotionally involved with a child that objectivity and fairness are compromised. If a relationship with one child keeps a Catechist from responding to the needs of other children on a regular basis, the appropriateness of this relationship should be examined.

Corrective Actions and Processes used by Catechist and Director

Several infractions of rules of conduct by an individual child should be reported to the Director. This will result in a call by the Director to the child's parent. The Director will describe the situation and work out a solution with the parent. If the infractions continue, the Director will organize a conference with the parent, the Catechist, the Director and the Pastor.

All meetings between parent and Catechist regarding the faith formation or behavior of a child are approved and organized by the Director of Religious Education.

The Religious Education Program reserves to the Director, under the authority of the Pastor, the right to remove a child from the group session, either temporarily or permanently. Some salient reasons for this removal are

- if the child's behavior is seriously inhibiting the learning of others in the group;
- if the child's behavior is seriously inhibiting the safety or well-being of others in the group;
- if temporary removal is used as a disciplinary measure for serious and/or persistent disruptive behavior.
- if the Director discerns that the removal will be beneficial to the child's own growth and development.

Such action should be preceded by a consultation involving the child, the family, the Catechist, the Director and the Pastor.

If, in an extreme case, the Director finds it necessary to remove a child from the program entirely, the Pastor must approve the final decision. Director and parent would then arrange private religious instruction for the child.

Unacceptable Behavior

The following types of behavior are not allowed during the Religious Education Program.

Infractions which call for discipline by the Catechist include:

- ÿ acting in a disrespectful manner toward the Catechist, other adults or children in the program,
- ÿ speaking and interacting with other children inappropriately during the session,
- ÿ leaving the classroom or class group without permission,
- ÿ using a cell phone during the session when not authorized by the Catechist,
- ÿ doing something other than the work of the session,
- ÿ violating the dress code,
- ÿ eating during the Religious Education session.

Persistence in any of these behaviors after several corrective measures have been taken will place this behavior in the category below.

Infractions which call for immediate action by the Director and Pastor include:

- ÿ possession of and /or sale of alcohol or other drugs,
- ÿ leaving the Religious Education premises when child is supposed to be attending the session,
- ÿ willful defiance of authority,
- ÿ possession of weapons, such as knives, guns, or look-alikes,
- ÿ physical assault/fighting, threatening bodily harm
- ÿ harassment and intimidation of other children,
- ÿ theft, extortion
- ÿ cheating,
- ÿ abusive or vulgar language,
- ÿ defacing or damaging of parish property, vandalism, arson
- ÿ bullying/cyber-bullying.

Persistence in any of these behaviors after corrective measures have been taken can result in the removal of the child from the Religious Education group sessions, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the recommendation of the Director and the decision of the Pastor.

Food in Religious Education Program

No food is allowed during the Religious Education Program classroom sessions. Any food provided to the class should take place in the gym with the approval of the Director.

Snacks before the session begins must be eaten in the Gym. Food or drink containing nuts is NEVER allowed before, during or after Religious Education either in the gym or in the classroom.

The Catechist's Responsibilities for Handing on the Faith with Excellence

The Six Fundamental Tasks of Catechesis

The six Fundamental Tasks of Catechesis entrusted to the Catechist by the Church are:

- to promote the knowledge of the faith
- to give moral formation,
- to provide liturgical education,
- to teach to pray,
- to educate for community life,
- to initiate into the missionary dimension. (*GDC 85 – 86*)

It is hoped that the child experiences Catholic life in the home and in the parish, learning from the experiences of these two environments how to live as a faithful Catholic person.

The role of the Catechist is to provide intellectual enlightenment about the Catholic life, which the child is already living, and to foster the child's faith development by accomplishing the "Fundamental Tasks" in an age-appropriate way.

The Catechist helps the child to understand, ever-more-deeply, the meaning of the Sunday Mass which the child's family regularly attends.

Schedule of Sessions

The Religious Education Program in which the Catechist has committed to teach has 30 sessions per academic year, each session running for 90 minutes. The 30 sessions are scheduled between Sept. 1 and June 30. (Classes for children with special needs are shorter.) In addition, the Program offers a minimum of 5 hours of family catechesis given according to the models and methods approved by the Catechetical Office.

Homework

Homework reinforces learning and provides opportunities for independent study and creative thinking. It is an effective way for the child to internalize the religious education he/she has received so that it becomes "faith formation". Parents are expected to help their children by arranging a quiet, comfortable place for them to complete the homework and by encouraging and helping the child as needed.

Parents are strongly urged to participate in the online parent dimension of the child's religious formation, which is provided by the textbook company and follows the child's lessons.

Prayer in Each Religious Education Session

The 6 Fundamental Tasks of Catechesis entrusted to the Catechist by the Church include two on prayer: to teach to pray and to provide liturgical education.

It is essential that each Catechist become an effective leader of prayer for the children, comfortable in using a variety of prayer styles and, above all, able to teach each child to pray in ways that are conducive to the child's personal communication with the Lord Jesus.

Catechists must ensure that they include a prayer experience as a dominant part in each religious education session.

Bibles are available in every classroom. The Catechist imparts a reverence for the Word of God while at the same time giving the children a familiarity and ease in using the Bible that is age-appropriate. The Catechist must be well acquainted with the Scripture passage being presented in order to prepare the children to receive its message. The Word of God should be read from the Bible itself rather than from a secondary source.

The Director and Catechists organize liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance for all the children at least once a year, either as a total program liturgy or as smaller group liturgies.

Assessment

Assessment of the effectiveness of religious education in each child is done in order to facilitate further growth. However, It is important to be aware that the child's faith, love for the Lord, moral living and commitment to the Church are not being assessed. What is being assessed is the child's grasp of the knowledge that has been taught in the Religious Education Program.

Each child is expected to master the contents of the textbook and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis* at the grade level in which he/she is enrolled. The Catechist will give the children regular assessments based on the textbook lessons and on the content contained in the *Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines*. These assessments may be written or oral, formal or informal, at the catechist's discretion. The results of any formal assessments should be given to the parent.

If the individual child needs additional help in learning and better understanding the concepts assessed, the Catechist will alert the Director who will then consult with the parents and the Catechist before deciding how this should be provided.

Progress Reports

Progress reports reflect the child's performance in the religious education setting, that is:

- attendance at sessions,
- participation in the sessions,
- behavior and attitude during the sessions,
- quality of at-home assignments,
- memorization,
- grasp of the content taught.

Catechists prepare a progress report for each child twice yearly, in January and in May.

These reports are distributed directly to the parents in early February and mailed home in June.

Repetition of Grade Level

Repetition of Grade Level means that the child must repeat the grade level or the year's curriculum. Great care should be taken in the home as well as in the program to help the child realize that repetition of the year's curriculum is not a punishment but rather a means to help the child be as successful as possible.

The reasons for repetition of grade level are as follows:

1. Excessive absence: 5 or more absences are grounds for repetition.
2. Poor performance: children who do poorly when assessed on the content of the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis*, may be required to do remedial work as organized by

the Director. If the remedial work is not sufficient in enabling the child to grasp the content, repetition may be the best solution.

3. Excessive lateness: 6 or more late arrivals are grounds for repetition.

In making the decision regarding a child's repetition of a grade level, the Director consults with the parent and the Catechist. The Pastor in consultation with the Director always makes the final decision.

Catechists' Weekly Preparation

The same day as the previous religious education session has been conducted:

Read the lesson in the Catechist manual for the following week. Also read the section of the Archdiocesan Guidelines that you will be teaching. This gives you time to mull over the contents yourself and also to seek help and clarification as needed. It gives time for ideas on presentation to germinate.

Always keep as your central focus the ultimate goal for all your work with the children -- forming disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Look up and read prayerfully the Scripture passages suggested in the Archdiocesan Guidelines and in the manual. Deepen and broaden your understanding of these passages with the help of scripture resources. Allow them to soak into your own heart before you attempt to present them to the children.

At least 3 days prior to the session:

Study the lesson in the manual.

Decide what 2 or 3 concepts are the learning objectives for the session. Such as "The 10 Commandments are a way to live as God wants us to" or "Advent is a time to think about doing better before Christmas comes."

Decide if and where you need to change the manual's approach in order to better meet the needs of your students. Be very clear as to the reason for this change.

Prepare your written lesson plan, writing down exactly what you will do.

Have the lesson content and plan so well in your mind that you will not be riveted to the manual, but rather able to follow it while at the same time being attentive to the needs of the students and the action of the Holy Spirit.

Plan so that every minute of time in the session is well used in some way.

Plan to have a variety of learning activities to meet the various learning styles of the children/youth.

Plan to keep the children's attention and interest.

Immediately Before the Religious Education Session:

Arrive at least 15 minutes before the session begins in order to prepare the learning space and to be in control of it when the children arrive.

Get all materials – books, media, art supplies, etc. – ready to be used so that no time is lost during the session.

Be sure you have a way of remembering each child's name (e.g. seating chart).

After the Religious Education Session:

Stay at least 15 minutes in order to see any child or parent who wishes to see you, always with the approval of the Director.

Sample Lesson Plan for Religious Education Session

(Use Reference Pages in Planning)

Name of Catechist: _____

Date of Session: _____

Grade Level Taught _____

Section/Session: _____

Review from last week : _____

Two or three learning objectives for the Religious Education Session:

Catechist Manual: chapter and pages: _____

Archdiocesan Guidelines Concept(s):

Page Number(s):

Scripture References

New Vocabulary

Prayer Experience: _____

Teaching Methods: _____

Teaching Materials:

Homework: _____

Reference Pages to be Used in Planning the Religious Education Session

Life Experience

- Which of the children's life experiences will I draw upon to evoke their enthusiasm and explain the content of this session?
- Should I use the life experience given in the textbook?

Catechesis (Faith Development)

- What is the Basic Teaching in the Archdiocesan Guidelines for this lesson?
- What is the Catechesis (Faith Development) in the Catechist's Manual?
- In my own words, describe the catechesis (i.e. church doctrine, Scripture, tradition, church law, etc.) that I will teach.

Sacred Scripture

- What are the Scripture references in the Archdiocesan Guidelines for this session?
- What are the Scripture references from the Catechist's Manual for this session?
- Do I wish to use any other Bible references? Why?

Prayer and Worship

- What is the suggestion for Prayer and Worship in the Archdiocesan Guidelines for this session?
- What is the Catechist's Manual suggestion for Prayer and Worship?
- What prayer experience will I share with the children/youth in my session?
- What special intentions should we remember to pray for?
- Should I include reference to any Holyday or Church season?
- What specific prayer do I want to review or teach?

Faith Response (Christian Living):

- What is Christian Living Response in Archdiocesan Guidelines for this session?
- What is the Faith Response encouraged in Catechist's Manual for this session?
- What Faith Response do I expect from the children and how will I encourage it?

Teaching Methods:

Which teaching methods will I use and how will I use these methods?

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|
| ___ Bible reading and reflection | ___ demonstration | ___ memorization | ___ project |
| ___ examining a basic conception | ___ activity | ___ drama | ___ game |
| ___ reading of the textbook | ___ story telling | ___ art | ___ music |
| ___ illustrations on board | ___ lecture | ___ discussion | |
| ___ use of internet: how? | _____ | | |
| ___ other: | _____ | | |
| ___ presentations by children: how? | _____ | | |

Teaching Materials

Which teaching materials will I use?

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| _____ textbook | _____ DVD/Video/YouTube |
| _____ Bible | _____ CD |
| _____ activity book | _____ PowerPoint |
| _____ smart board | _____ pictures/posters |
| _____ worksheets | _____ cell phone |
| _____ chalkboard | _____ outside presenter |
| _____ other: _____ | |

How will I use them: _____

Homework

- What homework assignment will help my students better understand and live Christ's message:
- Something to think about: _____

- Something to write about: _____

- Something to do: _____

- Something to review: _____

- Is there something in the assignment that will draw in and involve the student's parents in some way? _____

Catechist's Personal Evaluation (to be done after teaching the session):

- *How did the children/youth respond to this session?*
- *What should I review from the session for next week?*
- *How do I feel about this session?*
- *Would I do anything different next time?*
- *List at least two good things you or the children experienced from this session.*

Confidentiality

Communication with Parent

The contact information given by the parent to the Director of Religious Education is privileged information. It is solely for the purpose of communicating with the parent regarding their child's religious education. It may not be shared with any other group within or without the parish unless the parent as well as the Pastor gives permission.

All individual written communications to parents will come from the Director in the following manner: e-mail or flocknote. Occasionally, US Mail will be used. Text messaging will be used only via flocknote.

All communication between parent and Catechist regarding the faith formation or behavior of a child should be approved and arranged by the Director. Catechists should not phone or text the parents without the express permission of the Director. Likewise, parents should not phone or text the Catechist.

Communications with the parents should be written, emailed or mailed unless a staff member can hand them directly with the parent. A child will never be used as a courier or messenger.

Confidentiality between Catechist and Child

Being a role model and trustworthy adult for children and youth is an important dimension of the Catechist's responsibility. This may result in a young person's seeking advice and counsel from the Catechist. Before any confidences are received, the Catechist should advise the young person that he/she will respect the person's confidence except when there is a danger to life, health, or safety. The Catechist has an obligation to reveal to proper authorities any knowledge received which would result in harm to someone, even if a promise of confidentiality has been given.

Catechists should never phone or text a child.

The Process of Journaling in the Context of Religious Education

The assignment of keeping a journal carries with it serious risks. Therefore, that assignment should never be given in the Religious Education Program.

Use of Social Networking Sites by Religious Education Program

Regarding the use of social networking sites and all other electronic communication, the parish Religious Education Program follows the directives published by the *Archdiocesan Safe-Environment Office* (nyfaithformation.org – *Safe Environment Resources – Facebook and Child Protection*). These include the following:

- There may be no private direct communication with a minor. All communications must be through parents.
- There may be no photographs or videos of minors posted without the written permission of the parent.
- There may be no photographs or videos of religious education personnel posted without the individual's written permission. With regard to a group photo or video, written permission must be given for every person in the photo/video.
- There may be no contact information, or other personal information, of a minor or of religious education personnel posted without the written permission of the parent or Catechist/Director.

The written permission for all the above must be given directly to the Religious Education Director.

Cell Phones

The use of cell phones and other electronic devices by the child is not permitted during the Religious Education session unless the Catechist as part of the educational process directs this. Cell phones brought into the place of the Religious Education session should be turned off and placed in the child's backpack. Catechists should never collect or confiscate a child's cell phone. Children in need of contacting a parent must ask the Catechist's permission to go to the Religious Education Office to place the call.

Pictures or videos should be not allowed during Religious Education sessions—either by students or catechists unless prior approval is given by the Director and parents.

Accidents and Illness

Medical Condition of Child

Registration information regarding a medical conditions along with appropriate Medical Forms are kept on file in the Parish Religious Education Office for every child. Every catechist has a list of medical conditions that may flare up or impact a child's ability to participate in the classroom. This list is always kept in the red binder that the Catechist brings to class every week. This information is strictly confidential and is to be used with the utmost discretion.

Administration of Medications including Epi-Pen

No medications of any kind, whether prescription or over-the-counter, should be administered to, or taken by, the child during the Religious Education Program.

Other than administering emergency medication or medical treatment, no Director/Coordinator of Religious Education or Catechist is permitted to administer or provide medication or medical treatment to a child. The administration of medication or use of a special medical device will only occur when there is an imminent threat to a child's life or well-being (e.g. severe allergic reactions, serious chronic medical condition).

Without exception, when emergency medical treatment has been provided, the Director will call 911. The Director will also call the child's parent or parent substitute as designated on the allergy sheet that is part of the registration packet.

In the event that a child has a condition for which emergency medication may be necessary, the parent must provide a written request and directives to the Religious Education Director.

Any emergency medication/medical device to be administered during the program according to the above directives must be brought by the parent to the Religious Education Office and ideally is administered there. Someone accepted as competent and approved by both parent and Director must administer the medication/medical device.

In cases of children with potentially severe allergic reactions, the medication (e.g. epi-pen) may need to be administered immediately wherever the child is located. How this is to be done must be put in writing at the beginning of the academic year on the registration form and the *Agreement to be Used in Case of Child with Severe Medical Condition*.

- In cases where a child may carry and/or self-administer the epi-pen, the child should keep the device (ideally two) with him/her at all times. It is the responsibility of the parent to replace the medication (e.g. epi-pen) when it expires.

- For any child who cannot administer the epi-pen to him/herself, the parent, or adult designated by the parent, must stay in the area of the session each week throughout the child's entire time in the program.
- No Director or Catechist is to accept responsibility for administering the epi-pen.

In light of these directives, the Director will decide on an appropriate course of action and put this in writing using the form *Agreement to be Used in Case of Child with Severe Medical Condition*. It should be signed by both Director and parent. The decision must be approved by the Pastor.

Accidents or Illness

In the case of any medical emergency, 911 will immediately be called without exception.

In the case of an accident or illness that occurs to a child while attending the Religious Education Program, the following steps are taken:

- The Catechist reports the accident or illness immediately to the Director.
- If bleeding is involved, the blood-borne pathogen procedures are followed. The red binder contains emergency medical supplies, including rubber gloves.
- The Director notifies the designated parent.

In case of a serious accident or illness:

- 911 or the local police/emergency rescue squad is called immediately. Phone numbers are in the red binders.
- The Catechist reports the accident or illness immediately to the Director.
- The Director notifies the Pastor.
- The Director notifies the designated parent.

Blood-borne Pathogens

When a Catechist or volunteer needs to intervene and implement “universal precautions,” the person does so from an informed, voluntary response under the “Good Samaritan Act” and uses prudent public health protective procedures.

Instructions for the Catechist:

All supplies to treat emergency bleeding are in the red binder.

Treat all blood and body fluids as if they were potentially infectious.

If an accident involving a blood spill occurs, encourage the individual to tend to his/her own injury. Direct or help the individual involved with a blood/body fluid incident to care for him/herself having minimal contact with you, e.g. If a child has a bloody nose, hand the child the tissues and instruct him to pinch his nose. If the child has a cut, hand the child clean paper towels and direct him to hold the towel firmly over the cut.

When you need to intervene and provide assistance that requires contact, always place a barrier between yourself and the individual. (e.g. vinyl gloves)

When providing assistance:

- wear disposable vinyl gloves;
- use disposable towels/tissues for each injury;
- place any blood-stained materials in a sealable plastic bag;
- remove gloves following the proper procedures;
- wash hands thoroughly with anti-bacterial soap using proper hand washing procedures;
- keep other children away from area of body fluid spill. Cover it with paper towels.

As soon as possible, notify the Director who will call a custodial person for immediate clean-up. If no one comes to clean up, the 10% bleach solution in the Catechist Biohazard kit can be used as a temporary disinfectant.

Contents of Catechist Biohazard Kits (found in the red binder given to every catechist)

- disposable vinyl gloves
- band-aids of various sizes and types
- paper towels
- alcohol towelettes
- plastic bags with ties
- 10% bleach solution
- gauze pads
- *the Blood-borne Pathogens Instruction Sheet for Catechist*

Program Safety

Emergency Cancellations of Program

Emergency cancellations due to forecasted weather or building accessibility issues will be announced using Flocknote e-mail or text. E-mail notifications may also be used.

The Religious Education program follows the weather guidance from Yonkers Public Schools. Therefore, if Yonkers public schools are closed, the Religious Education program is cancelled. Also, if Yonkers public schools cancels after-school activities, the Religious Education program is also cancelled for that day.

If catechists have questions about whether Religious Education is cancelled or not, they should e-mail mary.rose@annunciation-fatima.com.

Visitors

Exterior doors to the building are kept locked while the Religious Education Program is in session. No unauthorized persons are allowed in the area where the Religious Education sessions are taking place. Parents and other visitors go directly to the Religious Education office or the gym. The Director appoints an adult whose responsibility it is to monitor all visitors and to insure that they remain only in the designated places. If an unexpected visitor comes to the place where the Catechist is teaching, the Catechist immediately asks the hall monitor to escort the visitor to the office and calls the Director to alert her/him of the unauthorized presence. The Catechist does not leave the children.

Use of Lighted Candles Prohibited

No lighted candles may be used in the Religious Education sessions even for prayer, such as the lighting of the Advent wreath. It is against the regulations of the Fire Department. Battery-operated “candles” may be substituted.

Drills for Fire, Lock-Down, Shelter-in-Place

At least once a semester, in early fall and in the spring, Fire Drills, Lock-Down Drills and Shelter-in-Place Drills are held for each session of the Religious Education Program. The drills should make use, insofar as possible, of the procedures known to the children from their public school drills.

Fire Drills (or Fires)

The routes (both primary and secondary) to be used by each session in evacuating the children from the building is posted in the room where the session is regularly held. The route includes the location of the place of destination.

Each Catechist must know the both the primary and the secondary route and the site to which the children are to be evacuated in case of fire or other emergency.

Instructions for Catechists in evacuating children:

- insure that all children are out of the room and then lead them to the assigned place of safety;
- have the last person out of the room close the door;
- bring the red binder and use it to verify that all those in your charge are safely out of the building.

A staff member is appointed whose responsibility is to check the bathrooms and evacuate any children in those rooms. For each disabled child in the program, a staff member is appointed to assist that student. This is always an adult other than the Catechist.

Lock Down Drills (or Lock Downs)

A Lock-Down is implemented in the event there is an internal physical threat to the building and its occupants. i.e. an intruder or an external physical threat to the building and its occupants or a dangerous person near the building, police activity near the building).

The Director will give the message over the public address system: **There is a Lock Down.**

If this is a true lock down, the Director calls 911 immediately. Director calls Pastor.

Catechist focuses on keeping all the children in his/her session safe by following the established emergency procedures that are:

- Catechist takes the magnetic strip off the door which locks the classroom door.
- Catechist closes blinds on windows and doors to prevent anyone seeing into room.
- Children are placed so as not to be visible or a target from outside the room.
- Each Catechist verifies attendance and insures that each child is accounted for. If a child is missing, the Catechist notifies the Director immediately by cell phone or a similar device. The Director locates the child and insures his/her safety.
- The Police will conduct a building sweep to locate the intruder. All wait for the Director to give further instructions. These instructions will be relayed to the Director by the police and communicated to Catechists by means of text message or announcement via the PA system.

Shelter-in-Place Drills (or Situations)

A Shelter-in-Place procedure should be implemented in an event such as chemical spill, gas leak outside the building, or severe weather emergency.

Director calls 911 immediately. Director calls Pastor.

The Director will give the message over the public address system: This is a Shelter-in-Place.

Director, Catechists and staff get everyone inside Religious Education building and move all children to the lobby of the school, away from windows and doors.

Director, staff and volunteers close and lock all doors and windows. Custodian turns off HVAC system.

Each Catechist verifies attendance for her/his session and insures that every child is accounted for. If a child is missing, the Catechist notifies the Director immediately by means of a cell phone or similar device. The Director locates the child and insures his/her safety.

Catechist remains in place with the children throughout the entire situation, waits for instructions from the Director, and proceeds accordingly.

Performance of Catechetical Personnel

The primacy of catechesis in the mission of the Church calls for a renewed commitment to the recruitment, formation and ministry of the Catechist as a top priority in our parishes.

(The Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium by Catholic Bishops of New York State)

Acceptable and Non-acceptable Behavior and Performance of Catechists

Whether working on a volunteer or on a compensated basis, Catechists and other staff members by their appearance and all of their actions should reflect their role as religious educators entrusted with the sacred task of handing on the faith.

The Catechist is expected to arrive at least 15 minutes before the session and stay at least 10 minutes after the session to ensure adequate preparation and care of the learning environment. Lateness for the Religious Education Sessions is not acceptable.

More than 5 absences during the year from the weekly religious education sessions could result in dismissal.

Attendance at Catechist meetings is required. Failure to attend required meetings could result in dismissal. These meetings are listed on the Catechists' Calendar.

Dress and Appearance

Catechists, Classroom Assistants and Catechist Aides are expected to wear modest, professional clothing appropriate for the Religious Education Program sessions. Appearance and dress during the Religious Education Program are an unspoken means of conveying the dignity of the role of handing on the faith.

Catechists must monitor the children's dress code and certainly cannot violate it in their own attire. It is the Director of Religious Education who has the final authority in determining inappropriateness of a Catechist's clothing and appearance.

Process Followed for Unsatisfactory Behavior or Performance of Catechist

The Director/Coordinator advises a Catechist or staff member of any behavior that is inappropriate or unacceptable.

The Catechist is also advised if the evaluations of the Catechist's performance indicate an unsatisfactory teaching/learning situation. The Director gives suggestions for improvement.

If the unsatisfactory behavior or performance persists, the Director advises the Pastor of the situation.

In either of these cases (unsatisfactory behavior or performance), a written account of the notification is made (including dates, times, circumstances and other pertinent information) and put in the Catechist's file. This account should be specific, behaviorally oriented and verifiable. It should not contain a character judgment.

The Director specifies in writing the behavioral changes that are necessary. When possible, this includes a time line. This is given to the Catechist and a copy put in the Catechist's file.

If there is no improvement, the Catechist is warned that failure to change the behavior will result in a change of area of service or even dismissal as the situation warrants.

The Director specifies in writing the possible consequences to the Catechist and keeps a copy of this in the Catechist's file.

If the Catechist's performance continues to be unsatisfactory, the Director might change the Catechist's assigned teaching level or ministry responsibilities to another more in keeping with the Catechist's abilities, or might have to dismiss the Catechist.

If the Catechist's behavior continues to be unsatisfactory, the Director may have to dismiss the Catechist.

Dismissal of Catechist

Volunteers can be dismissed as well as paid employees. The procedure is the same for both categories. Some reasons for considering the dismissal of a Catechist are:

- consistent demonstrated failure to maintain control of the group in the Religious Education session,
- inability to adequately teach children or youth,
- consistent failure to follow the Archdiocesan Guidelines or the designated curriculum,
- consistent resistance to the leadership, directives and guidance of the Director/Coordinator,
- excessive absence from the program (the *Catechist Handbook* more specifically defines “excessive”),
- behavior that fosters divisiveness and a spirit of negativity among the other Catechists and staff,
- physical or mental incompetency in carrying out the supervisory and educational responsibilities of the Catechist.

The Director recommends the dismissal to the Pastor, who must make the final decision.

In terminating the services of any employee/volunteer, the employer is not obliged to give reasons, and in some cases it may be preferable not to do so. If reasons are given, they should be behaviorally specific and not judgmental. They should be based on observations and evaluations that have been documented in writing and shared with the employee/volunteer throughout the year.

Regrettably the Catechist may be hurt or angered by the dismissal, but the Director must remember that the formation in faith of the children and youth is more important than the feelings of an individual Catechist.

If the Director finds it necessary to dismiss the Catechist, it is pastorally important, when possible, to help the Catechist find aspects of the wider parish life where his/her gifts and talents can be more effectively used.

Allegations of child abuse or molestation must result in immediate suspension. Any allegation of child abuse or molestation must be immediately reported to the Director who will follow the procedure delineated in the Handbook Chapter *Administration for a Safe Environment*.

Contents of Catechist File

The Director has a file for each Catechist in which are kept:

- completed Catechist Application Form along with the record of all personal references (A written record of the date the reference was checked, by whom, and a careful summary of what was said should be kept with the application.),
- Authorization & Disclosure for Background Check (unless parish entrusts these to someone other than Director),
- Catechist's emergency medical information, if any, in a sealed envelope,
- Catechist Formation records, including sessions attended and the completed observation form,
- all supervision reports,
- written evaluations signed by both Director/Coordinator and Catechist,
- objective documentation of positive contributions and problem behavior.

When a Catechist leaves the Parish Religious Education Program, the file is placed in an inactive file and kept for at least 7 years (or longer if it is reasonably possible that the person might return to active ministry as a Catechist).

However, if the Catechist is dismissed for extremely poor teaching or for inappropriate behavior, the file should be kept "in perpetuity".

Catechists are allowed access to their official files.

Appendix

Routes to be followed for each session location in evacuating the building

Annunciation School:

From every hallway, there are two means of exit—at either end of the hallway. The primary route of exit is the exit closest to the classroom. If that exit is blocked or seems compromised, catechists should direct the children to the other exit.

Once outside the building, catechists should lead the children away from the building, either up Westchester Avenue or through the playground towards Manhattan Avenue, depending on the exit taken.

If due to a true emergency situation the school cannot be reentered, Catechists should bring the children to Annunciation Church to gather. If Annunciation Church is not available, Catechists will be directed to the ball field behind Annunciation Church as the secondary site. Parents will be notified where the children are and asked to come pick them up.

Pope Francis Mercy Center:

If possible, all children should be taken from their classroom, through the bridge room and into Our Lady of Fatima Church.

If it is necessary to leave the building due to a true emergency situation, there are 2 exits: the kitchen and the front door. Catechists should take the children through the nearest exit. If that exit is blocked, they should proceed to the other exit.

If due to a true emergency situation the center cannot be reentered, parents will be instructed to take their children home immediately.

Characteristics of the Abused/Neglected Child

Child abuse and child neglect are complex problems that are not confined to any one family, racial, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic or religious group. They represent a serious breakdown in the family structure, and both the Gospel Message and the legal system of this country call upon the assistance of the wider community in addressing the problem. (GDC 139)

Learning the signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect may help the Director and Catechists to recognize when a child, youth and family begin to show the risk factors for abuse or neglect.

There are 4 main categories of abuse:

- physical abuse,
- emotional abuse,
- neglect,
- sexual abuse.

Physical abuse is any non-accidental physical injury to a child caused by a parent or caretaker which results in, or threatens, serious injury to the child. This may include excessive corporal punishment.

Verbal harassment, threats, and the systematic destruction of the child's self-esteem are all part of the mental and emotional harm inflicted by emotional abuse.

Neglect means depriving a child of conditions necessary for normal development including food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education and supervision.

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult, a youth or another child in a position of power uses a child for sexual gratification or allows another to do so.

Studies indicate that children rarely make false allegations of abuse. If a child speaks of abuse, it should be taken very seriously.

Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Unexplained bruises or welts: may be in various stages of healing, in clusters of unusual patterns, or on several different areas of the body
- Unexplained burns: may be in shape of cigarette, rope, iron, or caused by immersion which may appear sock-or glove-like
- Unexplained lacerations to mouth, lips, arms, legs or torso
- Unexplained skeletal injuries, stiff swollen joints, or multiple fractures
- Missing or loosened teeth
- Human bite marks
- Unexplained abrasions or bald spots
- Appearance of injuries after an absence from school (weekend, or vacation)

Behavioral Indicators

- Easily frightened or fearful of adults/parents, of physical contact, or when other children cry
- Destructive to self and/or others
- Extremes of behavior: aggressive, withdrawn
- Poor social relations
- Learning problems; poor academic performance, short attention span, language delayed
- Runaway or delinquent behavior
- Complaints of soreness or awkward movements
- Accident prone
- Wears clothing that clearly is meant to cover body when not appropriate
- Seems afraid to go home

Indicators of Abusive Caretaker

- Describes the child in a consistently negative manner
- Is a harsh disciplinarian
- Conceals or misleads a provider about a child's injuries

Emotional Maltreatment

Physical Indicators

- Failure to thrive
- Developmental lags
- Wetting of bed/pants
- Thumb sucking
- Appears sad
- Speech disorders, such as stammering or stuttering
- Health problems: ulcers, asthma, skin disorders, severe allergies, obesity, extreme weight loss
- Poor appearance
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Behavioral Indicators

- Habit disorders: sucking, biting, rocking, etc.
- Destructive to self and/or others
- Extremes in behavior: aggressive, withdrawn
- Phobias, sleep disorders,
- Developmental lags: mental, emotional
- Learning problems
- Inhibition of play
- Cruelty, vandalism, stealing, cheating, fire setting, etc.
- Sadomasochistic behavior toward animals and other children
- Head banging
- Overly adaptive behavior: inappropriately adult or infantile
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts

Indicators of Emotionally Abusive Caretaker

- Rejects, ignores, terrorizes, or isolates the child

Neglect

Physical Indicators

- Poor growth pattern
- Constant hunger
- Malnutrition
- Dark circles under eyes
- Poor hygiene: body odor, lice
- Inappropriate clothing
- Constant fatigue
- Listlessness
- Falls asleep in school
- Consistent lack of supervision especially for long periods or in dangerous activities
- Unexplained bruises or injuries as a result of poor supervision
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs such as: lack of proper immunization, gross dental problems, need for glasses/hearing aids

Behavioral Indicators

- Developmental lags
- Beggars or steals food, forages through garbage
- Always hungry
- Destructive to self and/or others
- Extremes in behavior: aggressive, withdrawn
- Hyperactive
- Assumes adult responsibilities or acts in pseudo-mature fashion
- Exhibits infantile behavior
- Delinquent behavior
- Depressed/apathetic; states "no one cares"
- Frequent school absences or chronic tardiness
- Excessively Seeks attention and/or affection
- Hypochondria

Indicators of Neglect from Caretaker

- May be substance abuser
- Has chaotic lifestyle which might include loss of job, income, housing

Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Genital/anal itching, pain, swelling, or burning
- Genital/anal bruises or bleeding
- Frequent urinary tract or yeast infections
- Pain on urination
- Vaginal/penile discharge
- Poor sphincter control
- Venereal disease
- Pregnancy
- Chronic unexplained sore throats
- Frequent psychosomatic illnesses
- Loss of appetite

Behavioral Indicators

- Sudden radical behavior change
- Extremes in behavior: aggressive, withdrawn
- Regressive behavior
- Runaway or delinquent behavior
- Depressed, apathetic or suicidal
- Destructive to self and/or others
- Poor social relations
- Refuses to change for gym
- Does artwork depicting sexual themes
- Behaves seductively and has sexual knowledge beyond age
- Compulsive use of language referring to genitals
- Sexually acts out or attempts to force or coerce other children to be sexual
- Complains of soreness or moves or sits awkwardly
- Wears clothing that covers body when not appropriate
- Compulsive bathing
- Has nightmares

Indicators of Abusive Caretaker

- Is extremely protective of family privacy
- Does not allow the child to be involved in extracurricular or developmentally appropriate activities such as being with friends or dating

Warning Signs of a Sexual Abuse Offender

Sexual abuse can occur in any environment including homes, churches, schools and religious education programs. In 8 out of 10 reported cases of child sexual abuse, the victim knew the offender. Offenders go to incredible lengths to ensure that they are not strangers to the child. They can spend months and often years grooming entire communities to accept them as trustworthy and upright. We need to be aware of the warning signs that a sexual predator may be lurking about.

Some signs are more obvious than others:

- Uses bad language around children;
- Tells children dirty jokes;
- Shows pornography to children.

Other signs are a little more subtle:

- Always wants to wrestle or tickle;
- Always wants to be alone with children;
- Prefers to be with children instead of adults;
- Discourages involvement from other adults.

Some signs can be hidden entirely:

- Gives gifts to children without permission;
- Allows children to do things they are not normally allowed to do (e.g. drink alcohol);
- Encourages the children to keep secrets.