

Catechist / Youth Minister Handbook

An Annotated Checklist

Listed below are the sections of a religious education Catechist / Staff Handbook, which are recommended by the Diocese. Listed within each section are various concerns, which should be addressed, based on local needs and circumstances.

Mission & Vision Statements

Mission and vision statements - these statements should stand at the beginning of this handbook as a clear statement of your goals and directions. All that follows in the handbook should flow directly from these statements. The **mission and vision** statements should be identical to those found in the parent/student handbook. If there is a parish mission statement it would be appropriate to include it as well.

Catechist Responsibilities

- **Preparation for Class** - the catechists' responsibilities for lesson planning and other preparations should be defined.
- **Record Keeping** - any kind of record keeping that catechists are expected to do should be described in the handbook. This might include attendance records, permanent records, report cards, etc.
- **Homework** - explains when and if catechists are expected to assign homework.

Other Considerations

- **Certification requirements** - expectations regarding certification should be included.
- **Discipline** - the program's discipline policy should be clearly stated. It should contain all of the points found in the parent/student handbook. The discipline policy should also state what is expected of the catechists.
- **Legal Liabilities** - policies regarding negligence, corporal punishment, search and seizure and defamation should be included.
- **Copyright Laws** - a statement should be included that catechists are expected to be aware of and adhere to copyright laws regarding both print and media materials.
- **Field Trip Procedures** - policies and procedures for field trips should be included in the handbook. This includes the manner in which permission is to be obtained from the parents, limitations regarding places, distances or duration, requirements regarding transportation, etc. Though discouraged by the Diocese, if a parish chooses to use parent drivers, include a statement that the drivers for each field trip will be required to show a valid driver's license, current registration and proof of insurance.
- **Catechetical Staff Meetings** - states expectations concerning attendance at staff meetings.

Child Abuse

A statement should be made in the handbook that the parish will follow the policies of the diocese regarding child abuse. A copy of the Diocesan Policy on Child Abuse and Student Abuse should be available to every catechist. All catechists are to be in-serviced regarding procedures and responsibilities within the diocesan decree on child abuse.

Safety and Emergency Procedures

- **Student safety** - includes rules specific to the building and grounds being used. Emergency Weather and Fire Evacuation Procedures should be included all well as posted in each room. Attention should be given to local laws that could / should be included.
- **Accidents** - a procedure for handling accidents should be developed and described. This procedure should include the process for taking care of the student (location of medical supplies) or teacher who is ill or injured, the process for notifying the religious education leader and pastor, and the process for notifying parents or persons designated by the parents.
- **Custodial / Non-Custodial Parent Rights** - written directions for the staff should be provided regarding release of students to parents and the confidentiality of such information.
- **Blood-borne Pathogens** - a copy of the diocesan guidelines for dealing with blood-borne pathogens should be included in this handbook.

Supervision of Catechists

The manner in which the catechist is to be supervised and the frequency of the supervision should be included in the handbook. This might include classroom observation, a conference with the religious education leader, etc. The rationale for supervisory practices should be clearly described.

Personnel Policies

- Lists directions for reporting a staff absence.
- Lists procedures and amounts for remuneration or reimbursement for catechist expenses.
- Lists the time at which catechists are to arrive for class. It should be clearly states if catechists are responsible for the students prior to and after class.

The following sample is provided as a demonstration guide for writing a Catechist / Staff handbook. Please feel free to use anything you find in these pages if it is applicable - **however - not everything here will apply to every parish and the sample will need to be reviewed and revised by the parish.**

These ideas are **not** intended to suggest what the policies of a particular parish ought to be but only to demonstrate how a policy might appear in the Handbook.

Also be advised that there are references to forms to be included in the Catechist / Staff Handbook that are found elsewhere in the DRE / YM Administrative Handbook. These forms are not copied here to avoid duplication. We recommend that the forms be included in the parish version.

Sample Catechist / Youth Minister Handbook St. Idealia's Religious Education Program

The Catechist

The catechist has one of the most important jobs in the world. They have the opportunity to share their faith in Jesus Christ and the Traditions of the Church with fellow Christians. This ministry in the church participates in the ministry of the Bishop of the diocese, who is its chief teacher. The Bishop delegates this responsibility to the pastor of the parish, who in turn shares this privilege with the catechist. To share in this task of the church is a great privilege and a great responsibility.

Parents are trusting that catechists will responsibly assist them in nurturing the faith formation of their children. Catechists provide an environment, which nurtures the faith life of their students and ensures their safety. In order to do this, it is crucial for all catechists to be aware of their responsibilities and have a clear understanding of their duties. This handbook provides information that will enable catechists to perform their duties and minister the Gospel of Christ effectively.

Because of the importance of the ministry and the responsibilities inherent in it, this parish will use only catechists who are 18 years of age or older and fully initiated into

the Church. Responsible youth under the age of 18 may function as classroom aides.

Catechesis

The Catholic Church has issued many documents that describe the ministry of catechesis. This program is based upon the principles and guidelines found in these documents. *The General Directory for Catechesis*, *The National Catechetical Directory*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as diocesan statements on the ministry of catechesis, provide a framework for parish programs. The following is a summary of the most important directives provided by these documents and a clarification of how they help guide the catechetical program in this parish. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes John Paul II from *Catechesi Tradendae* as he describes what is entailed in the ministry of catechesis:

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. CCC, #5

The National Catechetical Directory further clarifies what elements should be a part of a catechetical program:

Like other pastoral activities, catechetical ministry must be understood in relation to Jesus' threefold mission. It is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship, which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament. It supports the ministry of service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice.

NCD, #32

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church on the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program of this parish will include the following elements:

Message

The story of Scripture and the teachings of the Church will be communicated within the context of the faith story of each student and the signs of the times.

Community

Efforts will be made to form Christian community among the students through interaction and faith sharing.

Worship

The participants will experience many forms of prayer and worship to help them become prayerful people.

Service

Participants will be called to service and justice, which is inherent in the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church.

Religious Education Board

Mission Statement

The Religious Education Board of St. Idealia's establishes policy to ensure that all parishioners have appropriate and sustained opportunities to grow in faith.

Vision Statement

St. Idealia's religious education programs will enlighten the human and spiritual dimensions of each parishioner regardless of age or vocation.

Religious Education Program

Mission Statement

The catechetical program of St. Idealia's forms parishioners in the faith of the Catholic Tradition so that both they and the world may be transformed into the living Reign of God.

Vision Statement

So all will grow in the awareness, knowledge and practice of faith.

Program Goals

St. Idealia's Catholic Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is, in reality, a community of communities: students, faculty, farmers, townspeople, commuters, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. The unique diversity of the parish offers at once a challenge and a rich resource for learning.

The goals of St. Idealia's catechetical program are:

- To provide a program of formal religious instruction for the children and youth of the parish.
- To support parents in their role as primary educators of their children.
- To offer sacramental preparation to children and youth.
- To help youth discover the richness and challenges of Scripture and the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church.
- To build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish.
- To allow youth to experience the Church as community.
- To deepen the prayer life of children and youth.
- To motivate youth to live lives rooted in charity and justice based on the moral teachings of the church.

- To expose students to the liturgical and sacramental richness that is part of the Catholic Tradition.
- To enable students to become responsible, self-reflecting, loving and praying individuals.
- To make programs that meet diverse spiritual needs available to adults of the parish.

Role of the Catechist

A catechist is called to ...

- Be a witness of the Good News of Christ and the Catholic faith and be a model of the attitudes and actions of a disciple of Christ.
- Be willing to share his/her faith story, when appropriate, with the students.
- Be a practicing Catholic who accepts the teachings of the Church and follows its laws.
- Be a person of prayer.
- Share the love of Christ with the students through openness, listening, respect and forgiveness.
- Continue to grow in his / her own understanding of Christ's call and Church teachings.
- Continually evaluate his / her performance as a catechist and try to improve.
- Communicate the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Pray and celebrate liturgy with the students.
- Challenge the students to live lives of justice and love based on Scripture and the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Foster community among the students in the classroom.
- Follow the policies and procedures set forth in this handbook.

Duties of the Catechist

When a person accepts the role of catechist in the parish religious education program, it is assumed that the person is willing to complete the following tasks and accept the following responsibilities. Catechists who have questions about any of the following duties should discuss them with the religious education leader.

Each catechist will...

- Attend meetings and training sessions scheduled by the religious education leader.
- Be present for each catechetical session at least 15 minutes in advance of the scheduled starting time and remain at least 15 minutes after the session is finished.
- Spend an appropriate amount of time planning before each class.
- Follow the format provided in the textbook for each session.
- Supervise the students in the class he / she is teaching, making sure to provide a safe catechetical environment.
- Use the time during class to form and inform the faith of the students in his/her care.
- Maintain discipline in the classroom following the policies outlined in this handbook.
- Provide prayer experiences for the students in the class.
- Follow diocesan and parish policies regarding catechesis.
- Seek diocesan certification as a catechist in a timely manner.

Benefits Provided to the Catechist by the Parish

- Baby-sitting for catechist's children as necessary.
- Reimbursement for approved expenses.
- Fees for approved workshops and in-services.
- Orientation and training.
- No fee charges for catechist's children in the religious education program (if applicable).

Catechist Ethics

- Catechists will model a Christian life-style in and out of the classroom.
- Catechists will follow the teachings and laws of the Church.
- Catechists will display a positive attitude toward the students and their families.

Catechist Screening

Everyone who works with children in the parish catechetical program will be expected to complete Safe Conduct Protocol Training and have a Criminal Background Check. This is expected before someone can assume responsibilities with children or youth.

Child Abuse Reporting

All residents in the State of Indiana are required to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. The pastor and DRE have those contacts available. All parish staff and volunteers must participate in an in-service training on child abuse identification and reporting procedures. The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has written a policy on child abuse, which is available through the DRE.

The Catechetical Process

Catechesis involves instruction on and apprenticeship in the teachings and traditions of the Church, and therefore catechesis is much more than merely a transfer of information. The ultimate goal of catechesis is an increase of personal faith and the resultant transformation of the person being catechized, as well as the Christian community and the world at large. In order for this to happen, it is necessary for the catechist to use a process that promotes growth in faith and life-changing behavior at the same time. Each catechist must understand that in order to fulfill their role; they will have to pay as much attention to the *way* they teach as to *what* they teach. The following process or something similar is generally used in the modern catechetical materials. Catechists should use it as a framework for planning lessons

STEP ONE: LIFE EXPERIENCE The process begins with an attempt to get in touch with the life experience or “story” of those to be catechized. As believers get in touch with their story, they become aware of God’s presence in the world and God’s action in their lives. Sharing their story and hearing the stories of others reinforces this awareness and sets the stage for the proclamation of the Gospel.

STEP TWO: REFLECTION Through questions and discussion, the life experience of the believer is deepened. As believers examine their experiences together, awareness of the deeper meaning of the experience grows. Life experiences become faith stories in which God and the believer become co-authors.

STEP THREE: MESSAGE At this point the Catholic Christian Tradition, which includes Scripture, is examined as the larger “story” which gives the individual story both context and meaning. The student discovers who they are in relation to the community of faith. The stories of Scripture and the language and formulas that

communicate the beliefs the Catholic Church teaches are handed on as the way Catholics have understood the Christian message through the ages.

STEP FOUR: DISCOVERY Now the group makes the connection between their own faith story or life experience and the Christian story. Each sheds light on the other. This step is basically a dialogue between believers and the Tradition.

STEP FIVE: RESPONSE Finally, the believer is challenged with the question, “So what?” The message of Christ is not meant to be merely the topic for discussion among Christians, but a challenge to be put into action. At this time the catechist can suggest ways for the group to respond and believers can challenge one another in their efforts to live the faith.

Catechist Certification

In order to carry out this important ministry, training and resources are essential. In his first encyclical letter, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II states:

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and by events...to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy...in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel. This is no mere human calculation; it is an attitude of faith. And an attitude of faith always has reference to the faithfulness of God, who never fails to respond.

CT, #15

In order to carry out this call for trained catechists, the diocese has developed Fan-the-Flame, Inspiration Through Religious Enrichment (FIRE) Program. It is the responsibility for each catechist to commit him / herself to this program. A schedule of local courses can be obtained from the DRE or the diocesan Pastoral Office for Catechesis.

Catechist Evaluation

The DRE is responsible for the supervision of each catechist. During the year each catechist will be observed by the religious education leader and given feedback on their progress in an interview session. The Catechist Appraisal Form will be used to report the results of the evaluation to the catechist. The purpose of these evaluation sessions is to continually improve the parish program by supporting those who teach in it.

Suspension

The parish reserves the right to suspend and / or not renew the volunteer ministry position of any catechist who is not successfully performing their duties or who is not fulfilling the responsibilities in this handbook. Any catechist who is accused of a serious crime or who is discovered to have committed a serious crime will be put on

immediate leave until the matter has been investigated and it is determined by the pastor that there is no danger to the children or youth of the parish. Conduct inside or outside of the program that is detrimental to the reputation of the program/parish or the safety of others may be grounds for suspension or expulsion at the discretion of the pastor.

Resolution

- The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has a Policy for Conflict Resolution at the parish level.
- The goal of the policy is to provide a means for the resolution of problems and complaints of individuals which may arise from the application or interpretation of personnel policies, practices, or procedures.
- Contact the Human Resources Department for a copy of the policy.

Curriculum

The catechetical curriculum must communicate clearly and completely, according to the age level of the person being catechized, the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church. The source for these teachings and traditions is Scripture and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These resources have been made accessible and age appropriate by the development of a *Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana Religious Education Curriculum*.

Textbooks and other materials used in the classroom are in conformity with the teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They have been chosen because they offer catechists the resources necessary to conduct classes, which include all the elements of the ministry of catechesis.

Presently the textbooks used are:

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| • Pre-School Program | <i>God the Father</i> | ABC Publisher |
| • Elementary program | God the Son | ABC Publisher |
| • Grades 7-10 | God the Holy Spirit | ABC Publisher |
| • Confirmation Prep | <i>Confirmed in Life</i> | ABC Publisher |

The text material has been evaluated and found acceptable by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Each catechist will be given a copy of the *Bible*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the appropriate pages from the *Diocesan Curriculum* for their use in lesson planning. The textbooks must be used by the catechist as the primary resource for planning and teaching. Catechists are not to substitute other materials or disregard the text as a resource unless permission has been given by the DRE.

Copyright Laws

Catechists are expected to be aware of and adhere to copyright laws regarding both print (word or music) and media materials (music, video, digital images, etc.). These laws regulate the copying and distribution of information created by someone other than the catechist. As a general rule of thumb, catechists are permitted to make one copy of print material for their personal use. While there are some print materials, which are considered public domain and may be copied freely, these materials are few and rare. Therefore, it is the expectation that any material that is copied for distribution within the religious education program be explicitly marked with the required permission to copy information. This permission is obtained by calling or writing the publisher of the material and asking for permission to copy. This regulation expressly forbids copying any textbook / workbook / activity book pages for distribution to a class unless there is an explicit statement in the text stating permission is granted.

Planning

Because of the importance of planning and organization in order to teach effectively, each catechist is expected to spend sufficient time prior to class planning his / her lesson. A lesson plan is to be written for each class. The religious education leader will periodically check lesson plans.

Planning is important not only for the individual class session, but also for the entire year. A calendar for planning the catechetical year is provided in the back of this book. This calendar is to be submitted to the religious education leader by the beginning of classes.

Substitute Catechists

Catechists who have to miss a class session are to call the religious education leader as far in advance as possible so that a substitute may be contacted. It is the responsibility of the catechist to have a lesson plan available for the substitute to use. If less than 48 hours notice can be given prior to the cancellation of the class, the catechist is asked to call the students and tell them that the class is cancelled and indicate to the religious education leader that all the students have been notified of the cancellation.

Prayer/Liturgy

Catechists are expected to provide the young people in their class with opportunities to experience a variety of prayer forms and learn the traditional prayers of the Catholic Church. In this process catechists can rely on the child's experience of prayer within their family. The list of prayers to be taught can be found in the *Diocesan Curriculum* by grade. These prayers are to be learned with the cooperation and help of the family, especially in the elementary years. Catechists should provide parents with a list of these prayers and inform them of their responsibility to pray with their children as the children learn the prayers in class.

In order to provide students with a well-formed catechetical experience, they are offered an opportunity to participate as a group in three Eucharistic liturgies during

the course of the year. Catechists may be asked to assist in the process of planning the liturgy. Students will be involved in the planning as well. Along with three Eucharistic liturgies, the students will participate in five seasonal prayer services throughout the course of the year.

It is essential for all catechists to take the opportunity to deepen the young peoples' experience of liturgy. Discussing the Sunday readings, the seasons of the Church year, holy days and saints' feast days, rituals, liturgical practices and symbols can help youth understand and celebrate their Catholic heritage.

Attendance

Each catechist must record attendance at the beginning of each class using the role list received. The catechist is then asked to complete the attendance form each week for the office files. The religious education leader or an office volunteer will come around to each room and collect this form. A copy of the form can be found in the back of this book. Forms may be picked up weekly in the catechist mailboxes in the religious education office.

Non-Custodial Parent Rights

Catechists will be advised by the religious education leader of the non-custodial parental rights of each child from a divorced family when this information is available. It is the catechist's responsibility to have duplicates of any parental correspondence sent to the non-custodial parent as well as the custodial parent if this has been requested. Catechists must recognize that occasionally children will miss religious education because of custody issues. It is never in the best interest of the child to force competition between time with a parent and time in a religious education program. Compassionate understanding is needed even when these situations cause absences.

Homework

Catechists are asked to assign homework. This will enable the parent(s) to keep informed about the material being covered, and involve them in their child's formal religious education. Parent(s) are asked to assist their children with all home assignments.

Progress Reports

In order to give the students formal feedback on their behavior in class and their participation and cooperation in the catechetical process, each catechist is to send the student and parent(s) a progress report two times a year, in late November and early April. A copy of the progress report is in the back of this book. These reports will be mailed home. The catechist is responsible for writing out the report and addressing the envelope provided for each student. The religious education office will stamp and mail them.

The comments the catechist writes on the progress report must be specific, behavior-oriented and verifiable. In other words, they must describe student

behavior the catechist has witnessed. These progress reports should avoid judgmental comments. To say “Johnny has a difficult time sitting still” is very different than saying, “Johnny is a wiggle-worm.” (The first describes behavior while the second belittles Johnny’s person.)

Supervision

Catechists are responsible for the supervision and safety of the children in their care. Catechists must be present at all times when class is in session. A catechist may leave his / her classroom only in a case of emergency. Because of the difficulty in maintaining supervision, children are allowed to go to the bathroom only when accompanied by a classroom aide.

Catechists must take care to keep all equipment in working order and notify the religious education leader when something is in need of repair or replacing, keep the classroom free of hazards, and monitor all student activities.

Catechists who see students wandering the halls or left unattended are to report this to the religious education leader immediately. Catechists who discover an unrecognized adult in the building are to escort the person to the religious education leader’s office immediately.

When supervising the dismissal of the children, never let a child go with any adult that does not have explicit permission to pick the child up from the program.

Respect For Privacy

Catechists must respect the students’ right to privacy and refrain from casually sharing personal evaluative information about the students. Special care must be taken not to inform other catechists about student behavior problems unless it is important for the growth of the child, and the effectiveness of the catechist. Any information shared should be objective in nature, constructive and relevant to the program. No information about students should be shared with anyone outside the program except for those who are responsible for the student’s care.

Discipline

Catechists are responsible for the safety and welfare of the children in their class. Also, they are responsible for creating an environment in the room that is positive, Christian and conducive to learning. In order for that to happen, the catechist must establish him or herself as a leader in the classroom and set behavioral expectations for the children. Being on time and prepared with immediate activities for the students are critical to success in this regard. The following policies will provide guidelines in this area.

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person’s right to be treated not only with dignity and respect but also with love. In order to provide for a safe and well ordered program, in which students and catechists can learn to follow Jesus’ call to love, some rules for behavior are

necessary. Students are expected by their behavior to make the classes safe and positive experiences for themselves and their classmates. The program exists for student growth and in turn they are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

1. Respect is to be shown for all students and catechists as well as other adults in leadership roles.
2. Students are expected to display Christian values in the way they dress, speak and behave.
3. Students are expected to be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time.
4. Students are expected to act in a safe manner in and around the building and alley.
5. Students are expected to use voice and display actions in a manner that is appropriate for a classroom and respectful of the study time of others.
6. Use or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco of any kind is strictly prohibited. These items will be seized and parents notified immediately. Students will be immediately removed from the environment.

Good discipline is aimed toward growth. We recognize that children may make mistakes and the role of the catechist at times will be one of guiding and correcting those mistakes. Catechists will handle discipline problems in a positive manner. Catechists are encouraged to handle minor discipline problems in their classroom.

Students whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom should be sent out of class to the religious education leader. Anytime a student is sent from class for disciplinary reasons, their parent(s) will be contacted either by phone, in person, or in writing.

If the student's behavior continues to be a problem, the student will be removed from class and the parent(s) will be contacted again. In order to return to the classroom, the student and parent(s) will meet with the catechist and religious education leader to resolve the issues. At this time the parent(s) may be asked to sit in on the class for a few weeks to observe their child and his / her interaction with the catechist and other students. If the situation cannot be resolved, the child will be placed in another class if one is available or the parent(s) will be asked to complete the year at home.

Any form of abusive treatment (either verbal or physical) or corporal punishment of a student by catechists is strictly forbidden. Catechists must never abuse a child verbally or touch a child in a way that could be construed as punitive. If a catechist strikes or injures a child or if there is a serious altercation between a catechist and a student or between students, it must be reported immediately to the religious education leader. The parish will support the catechist in the event of legal action arising from such an incident only if the catechist was acting in self-defense and was in imminent danger from the student.

Weapons Policy

In order to ensure a safe and Christian environment, it is forbidden for anyone to possess a weapon or any object/material/substance that could be used as a weapon or confused with a real weapon by any reasonable person (toy guns, etc.) in the buildings, or within the geographic boundaries of (parish name), or in any location used by the parish to conduct any catechetical activity, or in any conveyance providing transportation to or from any activity related to the religious education program.

Weapons or potential weapons will be confiscated by the religious education leader when this action does not place the religious education leader in danger. If the student has used a weapon against another person or will not surrender the weapon or offending object/material/substance immediately and willingly, the local police will be called first, followed by notification of the parent(s). This is a zero tolerance policy.

Any student who violates this policy will be subject to immediate parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by injured parties. The student will be removed from the religious education class and an alternative method of religious education will be negotiated with the parent(s) for the remainder of the year. Judgments about re-admittance to the program for the following year will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

If the incident involves an exchange of bodily fluids (for example, as in a wound which breaks the skin), the student(s) will be asked to submit to medical tests for transmittable diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B as recommended by a doctor. These tests will be at the parent(s) expense. In the name of being a community of Christians motivated by care and respect, this policy asks that the results of these tests, which are governed by guidelines of strict confidentiality, be openly shared with the respective parties on a need to know basis.

Threats of Violent Behavior

As a community of believers who value patience over aggression, and love above all else, it is inconsistent with our basic values to tolerate an environment of threat or fear. Threats of harm made against another individual or group of individuals are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

This policy recognizes that in any community of people there will always be some conflict. Students will always be encouraged to manage their conflict in a positive, non-aggressive manner. Behavior such as cursing, pushing or fighting will not be tolerated.

In cases which are deemed by the catechist or religious education leader to be “minor” (meaning: no reason to believe the situation would lead to physical harm) the

students will be separated and encouraged to work out their differences after a “cool-down” period.

If the catechist regards the altercation as “serious” (meaning: reasonable expectation that the conflict will lead to physical harm) the students will be immediately separated, the religious education leader will be notified, and the parent(s) of the students will be called. The religious education leader must determine that the situation is resolved before the students will be readmitted to the program.

Students are expected to report to their catechist or religious education leader any threat made by a student that mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the police for investigation. The student making such threats will be suspended from the program until such time as the police investigation is completed and the appropriate authorities are satisfied that there is no real threat of harm. In such cases, judgments about re-admittance to the program will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

Keeping Student Confidences

Occasionally students will share their personal problems with catechists. This can be very beneficial and healing for the child or youth. Catechists must make the students aware; however, that there is a point at which the catechist must share information with the student’s parent(s) or someone else who is responsible. A brief statement such as, “I will keep your confidence unless the life, health or safety of yourself or others is involved,” can help students understand that catechists are legally responsible to pass on such information.

If, in the course of class-work, or a retreat program, a catechist requires the students to write journals, and hand them in, the catechist is responsible to read them. And again, if there is any information that involves the life, health or safety of one of the students, the catechist must report that information to the religious education leader, the pastor, or to the parent(s), whichever can be reached in the most timely manner.

Relationships with Students

Often, as catechists work with students, they form caring relationships with them. Good relationships with the students can help foster faith growth. However, caution must be exercised in relationships that develop between catechists and students. Some guidelines for these relationships are:

- The catechist is the one responsible for making sure relationships with students are appropriate.
- Catechists should avoid situations that would appear to be inappropriate.
- Catechists should avoid being alone with students in an area hidden from view.
- Classes in homes are never permitted by the diocese.

- Caution must be used when touching a child. Any touch that could be interpreted as sexual must be avoided. Hugs should be appropriate and initiated by the child.
- Catechists should never transport students when they would be alone with a student in the car. Call the parent and wait with the child.
- If a relationship with one child keeps the catechist from meeting the needs of the other students on a regular basis, the relationship should be examined.
- In the unusual circumstance where a catechist may meet a student outside of the parish setting (i.e. a public school setting or sporting event), the catechist should be mindful of protocols and stay in a public setting.
- When catechists communicate electronically with students outside of the classroom, they should adhere to the *Social Media and Networking Directives*.
- Catechists who find themselves sharing their personal problems with students are well beyond what is appropriate and should end the relationship.

Harassment

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and therefore of St. Idealia's parish. Each person is entitled to work in an environment free from discriminatory practices such as any form of harassment based on race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability including sexual harassment. Parish leadership wishes to be vigilant regarding harassment whether between or among catechists and/or parish leaders, among students or between catechists/parish leaders and students. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if persistent harassment is proven, the offender will be dismissed when this is appropriate. Harassment of all forms is illegal as well as immoral and individuals will be encouraged to seek legal protection.

The term "harassment" refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive and that fails to treat others with dignity and respect. It includes treating someone unfavorably because of his or her race, sex, creed, color, age or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment on the basis of sex might include unwelcome sexual advances, requests or demand for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, including, but not limited to:

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, intimations or comments.
- Visual contact such as derogatory and / or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures.
- Physical contact such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, study or play because of sex.
- Retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment.

The term "sexual harassment" refers to harassment based on the gender of the offended individual when the people involved are of different "levels" within the parish. It involves threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of employment, grades or other benefits or to avoid some other loss and offers of

benefits in return for sexual favors. It also means creating a hostile environment for the student or employee such that it is an unfit environment for learning or work. Examples include, but are not limited to repeated unwelcome sexual advances, repeated sexually explicit jokes or comments, or the displaying of sexually inappropriate materials.

Allegations and complaints of any type of harassment must be reported as soon as possible. Parent(s) who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the religious education leader.

Weather and Emergency Situations

Cancellation of Classes

Classes may be canceled from time to time because of inclement weather. The following direction is offered:

IF THE LOCAL SCHOOLS ARE CANCELED OR DISMISSED EARLY, THERE WILL BE NO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES.

To find out if classes are canceled, listen for reports on (name local radio and television stations) or check your e-mail.

Safety Procedures

There are safety procedures posted in each room for fire and tornado emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week of class, and review instructions periodically through the course of the year.

In case of **fire** the catechist's main responsibility is the evacuation and safety of the children, not extinguishing the fire. In case of fire, the following steps are to be followed:

- If a fire is discovered, catechists should set off the fire alarm in the building.
- Each class is to follow their designated evacuation route and gather at their designated gathering point outside the building
- Catechists are to lead their class in a calm and orderly manner
- Catechists are to take role when they arrive at their gathering point.
- Students must remain at the gathering point until dismissed by the catechist either to return to the class or to their parent(s).

In the case of impending **severe weather**, the religious education leader will advise the classes if there is a need to take cover. Catechists will direct the class to go to the area designated for shelter during storms and take cover or, if that is not possible, to take cover away from windows, under the desks or tables. If possible, catechists will draw drapes or blinds on all windows.

Injury

If one of the students is injured, the catechist is to inform the religious education leader immediately and apply first aid as appropriate. First aid kits are available in the religious

education leader's office. Gloves are provided in each classroom so the catechist can avoid contact with blood and other body fluids. The religious education leader will send a first aid provider to help, if one is available, and inform the student's parent. If the injury is serious, the religious education leader will contact the appropriate emergency services.

AIDS and other infectious diseases

Confidentiality for students who are HIV positive or have other infectious diseases is protected by law. These students are not required to inform the catechists or religious education leader if they have these diseases. In case of injury or sickness, care should be taken to avoid contact with bodily fluids or blood. Rubber gloves are available in all the classrooms and disinfectant is provided in the first aid kits. All catechists are to be informed of and understand the Blood-borne Pathogens Policy of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana. This policy can be found in the back of this handbook.

Accidents and injuries involving bodily fluids or blood must be reported to the religious education leader using the Incident Report Form. Catechists are to read the health forms of the students in their care to anticipate any health problems that may arise.

Field Trips

Catechists who wish to take their class on a field trip or any other activity out of the ordinary routine are to request permission for the activity at least two weeks in advance in writing. If permission is granted by the pastor or the religious education leader, the activity may be arranged under the following conditions.

- The activity or field trip must have a catechetical purpose.
- The event must involve reasonable activities and distance.
- The catechist is responsible for informing parent(s) and getting permission slips from all students IN ADVANCE, IN WRITING.
- A Medical Release Form must be obtained for each student attending the event.
- The field trip or special event must be limited to the pre-arranged plan and should not be altered.
- At least one Safe Conduct Trained adult chaperone for every 10 children above fourth grade, and one adult for every 5 children, fourth grade or younger must accompany the group.
- A bus should be used for transportation whenever possible.
- If cars are used, drivers must be over 25 years of age. A copy of the driver's license and registration must be obtained and certified to be current. They must show proof of current insurance, and they must be informed that their insurance is the primary insurance in the event of an accident. They must be informed of the route to be taken, and follow that route.

No field trips or special events are considered sponsored by the parish unless the permission of the religious education leader or pastor is granted in advance.

Student Progress Reports

The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana recommends that a progress report be sent home two times per year for each child enrolled in the program. It would also be appropriate for the catechist to write a progress report in the form of a letter to the student and parent(s).

The report form should include an important introductory note to parents about the progress report itself. The note should contain a disclaimer that indicates that what is being discussed is not the student's faith but rather their participation in the program. This disclaimer should be included in any version of a progress report that is sent home.

If you use the diocesan progress report or one similar in style, it is suggested that a cover letter be sent with the report. The cover letter for the progress report could include:

1. The purpose of the bi-yearly progress report.
2. A thank you to the parents for their support of the program
3. Invitation to parents for a conference about the report and/or program.

If you choose to send a letter as a progress report, it should be on parish or program letterhead. Using letterhead reflects the importance of this communication. A copy of the letter should be given to the religious education leader.

A progress report in the form of a letter should include the following:

1. The cover letter information noted above.
2. General opening comments about the material that has been covered in the period.
3. An opening affirmation of the student in some area.
4. A brief statement about how the child is doing with the material (seems to understand the material; needs help with required prayers, etc.)
5. A brief statement about attitude (cooperation, effort, etc.)
6. A brief statement about behavior in class (participation, homework, etc.)
7. A statement of any concerns about work done, attitude or behavior.
8. The letter should include any concerns about attendance issues.
9. A closing affirmation statement about the student.
10. Parental signature to demonstrate that the parent has seen the letter.
11. Required date for return with parental signature.