

SECTION FOUR – Adolescent Catechesis

Adolescent Catechesis includes sponsoring youth toward maturity in Catholic Christian faith as a living reality through the kind of teaching and learning that emphasizes understanding, reflection, and transformation. Adolescent Catechesis done well fosters in youth a communal identity as Catholic Christians within the inter-generational community of faith and helps them to develop their own personal faith identity.

Adolescent catechesis is at the heart of comprehensive youth ministry. While everything that happens under the umbrella of parish youth ministry should include a catechetical component, intentional catechesis to, with, and for young people is also required.

4.1 The Diocese of Wilmington requires at least 30 hours of face-to-face instruction over the course of a school (program) year.

This section gives an overview of the models available to accomplish this mandate in a way that will engage young people in effective catechesis as one of many opportunities offered them by the parish community.

Effective Models of Adolescent Faith Formation for Parishes

Introduction

Recent surveys of catechetical leaders¹ across the Diocese revealed that only fourteen percent of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders not enrolled in Catholic high schools are receiving religious education. In response, the Office of Religious Education and the Office of Youth Ministry convened an ad hoc Adolescent Catechesis Advisory Committee consisting of experienced youth ministers and directors of religious education to study this problem and make recommendations.

Along with other important recommendations, the committee identified a need for a resource describing effective models of systematic adolescent catechesis within the context of comprehensive youth ministry. After gathering information about various programs from active youth ministers and recognized authorities on youth ministry and adolescent catechesis, the offices collaborated in the preparation of this document. It has three main purposes:

- To assist pastors and catechetical leaders to integrate catechesis within their other youth ministry efforts;
- To update catechetical leaders on developments in adolescent faith formation programs;
- To provide descriptions and illustrations of effective models of adolescent faith formation;

There is a benefit of participation in high quality parish youth ministry programs:

Young people who participate in youth ministry programs are interested in learning more about their faith and they want to do this as members of a group...When asked the areas in which youth ministry has most helped them to grow, youth ministry program participants cite areas of faith or moral formation rather than purely social activities...Those involved in youth programs take their Catholic identity very seriously and exhibit a deep commitment to the Catholic Church. (New Directions in Catholic Youth Ministry: A National Study of Catholic Youth Ministry Program Participants, Executive Summary, July 1996, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.)

It is our hope that this resource will inspire a renewed emphasis on the faith formation of adolescents in the context of comprehensive youth ministry.

Throughout this document the term “catechetical leadership” includes youth ministers who, by virtue of the catechetical component of comprehensive youth ministry, share in the ministry of catechetical leadership.

Adolescent Faith Formation: Foundational & Operational Principles

The principles which should guide parish leaders in providing religious education for youth have been clearly articulated in a number of official Church documents through the past fifteen years. In 1986, *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith* was published by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry in collaboration with the National Catholic Educational Association, the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education, and the Department of Education of the United States Catholic Conference. It listed the following foundational and operational principles of adolescent catechesis:

- It is integrated and developed within a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to ministry with youth.
- It fosters Catholic Christian faith in three dimensions: trusting, believing, and doing.
- It supports and encourages the role of the family and in particular the role of the parent in the faith growth of the young person and involves the parent in the formulation of an adolescent catechesis curriculum and in programs to strengthen their parenting role.
- It respects the unique cultural heritages of young people and builds upon the positive values found in these cultural heritages, while at the same time engaging young people in examining their culture in the light of faith and examining their faith in the light of culture.
- It is situated within the lifelong developmental process of faith growth.
- It responds to the developmental, social, and cultural needs of adolescents. The curriculum respects the changing developmental and social characteristics of the various stages of adolescence, providing a significantly different content and approach for younger and older adolescents.
- It respects the variability in maturation rates and learning needs of adolescence.
- It respects the expanding freedom and autonomy of adolescents.
- It uses a variety of learning formats, environments, schedules, and educational techniques.
- It best responds to the learning needs of adolescents when it is focused on particular faith themes.

These principles were reiterated in *Renewing the Vision - A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (NCCB, 1997), the U.S. bishops' blueprint for youth ministry. *Renewing the Vision* set forth some additional features of adolescent catechesis:

- It teaches the core content of the Catholic faith as presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- It integrates knowledge of the Catholic faith with the development of practical skills for living the Catholic faith in today's world.
- It utilizes the life experiences of adolescents, fostering a shared dialogue between the life of the adolescent and the wisdom of the Catholic faith.

- It involves group participation in an environment that is characterized by warmth, trust, acceptance, and care, so that young people can hear and respond to God's call.
- It provides for real-life application of learning by helping adolescents apply their learning to living more faithfully as Catholic adolescents.
- It explicitly invites young people to explore the possibility of a personal call to ministry.

Finally, the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) declares that the purpose of catechesis is to put people in communion with Jesus Christ. It also notes that all catechesis must be situated in the context of evangelization and that catechesis of children and youth should be oriented toward catechesis for adults. Accordingly, parish leaders should evaluate their current religious education efforts to determine if they not only offer information about Jesus, but also deepen young people's relationship with him.

Recognizing that adolescent catechesis is one phase of a lifelong process of continuous faith formation frees catechetical leaders from the unrealistic expectation that young people must complete all of their religious formation by the time they graduate from high school. Adolescent religious education programs which reflect the principles above will have a greater chance of fostering the spiritual growth of young Catholics and empowering them to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Keys to Effective Adolescent Faith Formation: The Faith Community & Its Youth Ministry

"...the success of such (catechetical) efforts rests very much on the quality and total fabric of parish life...When these various elements of parish life are weak or lacking, formal programs for adults typically do not flourish; when they are vibrant and strong, they create an overall climate of active participation and living faith..." (Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us - A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States, USCC, 1999, p. 41)

This statement from the U.S. bishops' recent document on adult faith formation is no less true for adolescents. The context of adolescent faith formation is at least as important as the program. That is why this section deals with the broader faith community and asks, "What are the necessary characteristics of the faith community that make for successful adolescent faith formation?"

Effective programs of adolescent faith formation typically happen in faith communities with:

- Youth-friendly leaders, liturgies, programs, and ministries;
- Active and meaningful youth participation in the mission and ministries of the faith community;
- Parish leaders who understand and are committed to the U.S. bishops' vision of comprehensive youth ministry;
- A program of faith formation that is just one of a variety of vibrant youth ministry components;
- Trained and effective adult youth ministry leaders and catechists;
- Healthy cooperation/collaboration between youth ministry and catechetical leadership.

Youth-Friendly Leaders, Liturgies, Programs, and Ministries: *Youth-friendly* means that the faith community is intentional about welcoming young people into its life and activities. *Youth-friendly* leaders, including pastor, staff and parish council, strive to understand and be responsive to the unique needs and culture of youth. *Youth-friendly* liturgies have songs, music and homilies that are inclusive of the entire faith community, especially young people. *Youth-friendly* parish programs intentionally welcome and include young people. *Youth-friendly* ministries utilize the abilities of young people at the service of the faith community and the broader community.

Active and Meaningful Youth Participation: In youth-friendly parishes, young people are visible everywhere. They serve in liturgical ministries at Sunday Mass. They are active and visible participants in parish renewal programs. They sing in the choir and play instruments in music ministry. Not only are they involved in helping to plan and lead youth ministry activities, they are warmly welcomed and mentored into appropriate parish leadership roles and may serve on a parish's pastoral council, worship team, etc. They are included in parish service and social activities. Their presence is felt not only in youth ministry activities, but in every aspect of parish life.

Parish Leaders Committed to Comprehensive Youth Ministry: In developing youth-friendly faith communities, leadership is vital: as the leaders go, so goes the faith community. If parish leaders, including pastor, staff and council, understand and are working towards the vision of youth ministry described in *Renewing the Vision - A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (NCCB, 1997), their commitment and efforts will bear fruit in terms of enhanced youth participation across the board. This vision "provides a way for integrating ministry with adolescents and their families into the total life and mission of the Church, recognizing that the whole community is responsible for this ministry. The comprehensive approach uses *all* of our resources as a faith community – people, ministries, programs – in a common effort to promote the three goals² of the Church's ministry with adolescents." (*Renewing the Vision*, pp. 19, 20).

A Variety of Vibrant Youth Ministry Components: A systematic program of adolescent faith formation makes no sense if it takes place in a vacuum – if there are no, or few, other significant involvements of the young person in living a life of faith. Catechesis is one of the eight components of comprehensive youth ministry described by the U.S. bishops in *Renewing the Vision* – the other components round out the experience of adolescents in the faith community, and provides the living framework in which catechesis becomes comprehensible and lived instead of dry and theoretical. These components include:

- Community Life: As the bishops say in *Renewing the Vision*, "The content of our message will be heard only when it is lived in our relationships and community life." (p.34) Community life is not just among young people; it is also between young people and the rest of the faith community. Young people need meaningful connections with the broader faith community, its mission and ministries, in order to truly understand its message.

The three goals of comprehensive youth ministry are as follows: (1) to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today; (2) to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community; (3) to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person. (*Renewing the Vision*, pp. 9-18)

- Evangelization: “Evangelization is the energizing core of all ministries with adolescents. All of the relationships, ministry components, and programs of comprehensive youth ministry with adolescents must proclaim the Good News. They must invite young people into a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus and empower them to live as his disciples.” (Renewing the Vision, p. 36)
- Justice and Service: “The ministry of justice and service nurtures in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; empowers young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering; and infuses the concepts of justice, peace, and human dignity into all ministry efforts.” (Renewing the Vision, p. 38). Not only are young people engaged in various kinds of service in the faith community, they must be meaningfully involved in the social mission of the faith community. As such, they are learning about Catholic social teaching as they are engaged in the work of making it a lived reality – in the same ways that all members of the faith community are so engaged. Young people are serving at soup kitchens, rehabbing low income housing, collecting canned goods, working for Habitat for Humanity – and learning along the way about systemic injustice and the preferential option for the poor.
- Advocacy: “The ministry of advocacy engages the Church to examine its priorities and practices to determine how well young people are integrated into the life, mission, and work of the faith community. It places adolescents and families first by analyzing every policy and program – domestic, parish-based, diocesan and international – for its impact on adolescents and families.” (Renewing the Vision, p. 27)
- Leadership Development: “The ministry of leadership development calls forth, affirms, and empowers diverse gifts, talents and abilities of adults and young people in our faith communities for comprehensive youth ministry with adolescents...This approach involves a wide diversity of adult and youth leaders in a variety of roles.” (Renewing the Vision, p. 40)
- Pastoral Care: “The ministry of pastoral care involves promoting positive adolescent and family development through a variety of positive (preventive) strategies; caring for adolescents and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; providing guidance as young people face life decisions and make moral choices; and challenging systems that are obstacles to positive development (advocacy).” (Renewing the Vision, p. 42) Further, in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, the healing power of Christ is made available to youth.
- Prayer and Worship: “The ministry of prayer and worship celebrates and deepens young people’s relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it awakens their awareness of the

Spirit at work in their lives; it incorporates young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially Eucharist; it nurtures the personal prayer life of young people; and it fosters family rituals and prayer." (*Renewing the Vision*, p. 44)

Trained and Effective Adult Youth Ministry Leaders and Catechists: Adults responsible for the faith formation of youth must receive the training and preparation that is necessary for them to serve as effective mentors, guides and teachers of the faith. The following minimum competencies are fundamental to any adult leader serving in youth/catechetical ministries:

- basic theological competence in scripture, morality, church doctrine, sacraments, ecclesiology, Christology – in accord with the Second Vatican Council;
- understanding of adolescent development and its implications for ministry and catechesis;
- ability to reflect on and share one's personal faith;
- ability to effectively lead prayer and worship;
- understanding of effective catechetical process, and capability to implement it;
- the ability to relate well with young people: to be a listening, supportive, challenging, helpful and healing presence in their lives;
- the ability to identify and get help for young people who are in some way at risk (e.g., young people suffering from abuse or neglect, who are desperate or suicidal, etc.).

4.2 Adults who serve as catechists within specific Adolescent Catechesis programs (i.e., an eighth grade catechist, a Bible Study leader, etc.) must be actively involved in the Diocesan Catechetical Formation Process.

Diocesan programs of training and certification are indispensable resources for those who bear the responsibility for coordinating programs of youth ministry and/or catechesis. (For more information on these opportunities, contact Catholic Youth Ministry or Religious Education).

Healthy Cooperation & Collaboration between Religious Education and Youth Ministry Leaders: Since catechesis is one of the eight components of youth ministry as defined by the U.S. bishops in *Renewing the Vision*, youth ministers must serve as catechetical leaders. In this regard they orchestrate the adolescent faith formation efforts of the parish, sometimes alone but often together with the other catechetical leader(s) of the faith community (typically a DRE or CRE). Ideally, this relationship will be marked by healthy cooperation and collaboration – and mutual respect.

4.3 The job description of the Coordinator for Youth Ministry and/or DRE/CRE must delineate who is responsible for adolescent catechesis programs and Confirmation preparation.

Regardless of who is primarily accountable for adolescent catechesis and Confirmation preparation, both the Coordinator of Youth Ministry and/or DRE/CRE share responsibility for aspects of adolescent faith formation. The pastor, exercising his role both as chief catechist and manager of the pastoral staff, must help establish a healthy and productive relationship between all who serve as catechetical leaders. Ideally, healthy collaboration will have the following characteristics:

- clear lines of authority and delegation in regard to various aspects of the adolescent faith formation program and sacramental preparation;
- collaborative planning and evaluation, where all catechetical leaders, including youth ministry volunteers not responsible for catechetical programs, bring their respective gifts and insights to the process;

Effective Models of Adolescent Catechesis within Youth Ministry

The following models of adolescent catechesis will be discussed in this section, followed by brief descriptions of some supplemental approaches:

- Mini-Courses
- Small Faith Communities
- Retreats
- Discipleship in Action
- Super Sundays
- Religious Education Classes
- Supplemental Approaches:
 - Family-friendly, Intergenerational, Resources, Programs & Activities
 - Rites of Passage
 - Pilgrimages, Encuentros, Conferences, Rallies
 - Programs of Leadership Development and
 - Religious Recognition Programs for Boy and Girl Scouts

4.4 Youth Ministry Leaders must follow all guidelines outlined in *For the Sake of God's Children*, including utilizing the checklists in Appendix Four (Safe Environments) when choosing a model of adolescent catechesis.

Important Considerations

Whole Church Faith Formation: The life, worship, community and service of a faith community provide the rich subject matter for catechesis throughout the year – if leaders have a vision of “whole church faith formation,” in which the faith community itself becomes the primary curriculum and living context of catechesis. The models described below, if they are to be effective, should be integrated into the fabric of the life of the faith community, and responsive to the liturgical seasons, feasts, celebrations and major events that punctuate a year in the life of a Catholic parish. See Section 5 on page 21 for a description of “whole church faith formation.”

Matching Models to Catechetical Objectives: It is important to note that no one model is necessarily better than the others. Ideally, several models will be used in combination, determined by goals, needs, interests, available resources and time considerations. Moreover, certain models are better at accomplishing particular cognitive, affective or behavioral objectives than are others. See Section 6 on page 23 for assistance in selecting the right model(s) for your situation.

Cultural and Ethnic Diversity: Our catechetical efforts should include attention to the reality of the culturally diverse society in which we live. Catechesis and all ministry efforts are “multi-cultural when [they focus] on a specialized ministry to youth of particular racial and ethnic cultures and [promote] multi-cultural awareness among all youth.” (Renewing The Vision, p. 22) By affirming and utilizing the values and traditions of ethnic cultures, young people come to a greater appreciation of their heritage and identity, and feel empowered, valued and welcomed by a universal Church which celebrates unity within diversity. It is incumbent upon all catechetical leaders “to incorporate ethnic traditions, values, and rituals into ministerial programming; teach about the variety of ethnic cultures in the Catholic Church; provide opportunities for cross-cultural experiences; and foster acceptance and respect for cultural diversity.” (Renewing the Vision, p. 23)

Models

Mini-Courses

This approach involves short catechetical courses (e.g., 4-8 weeks, one evening per week, 1½ - 2½ hour sessions) dealing with targeted themes. For instance, a parish may choose to offer a 6-week mini-course on Wednesday evenings focusing on morality, take a month break, and then offer a 4-week mini-course on sexuality and dating.

Periodic assessments and surveys help to discern which faith themes are most likely to capture the attention of youth while addressing their developmental, spiritual and catechetical needs. Attention to the Diocesan recommendations regarding faith themes appropriate for younger and older adolescents can assist catechetical leaders in this discernment.

The mini-course model is usually part of a larger overall program of comprehensive youth ministry. Typically, community-building activities, parish activities and functions, service projects and spiritual programs are planned for the periods between one mini-course and the next.

Like the small faith community model, mini-courses can offer young people an opportunity to gather in small groups on a regular basis to share fellowship, support one another and grow in faith. Unlike that model, however, participation depends upon who signs up, thus young people could well find themselves in a whole new group with a new adult facilitator every four to eight weeks.

Advantages of the Mini-Course Model:

- It allows for a greater integration of youth ministry and catechesis, since other youth ministry activities can be scheduled in the weeks between courses.
- It can create greater investment and ownership on the part of both youth and their parents, since their needs and values are given serious attention through the whole process of surveying and discussion that precedes the construction of the curriculum.
- Mini-courses typically include a thought-out scope and sequence.
- Since courses are time-limited, participants are less likely to become disinterested and bored. It's also easier to make commitment to a mini-course than to an ongoing one.
- Young people enjoy the exercise of free choice as they select the mini-courses of most interest to them.
- This model is ideally suited to the parish context where attendance is voluntary and access to young people is not a foregone conclusion.

- Adult facilitators/catechists typically vary from mini-course to mini-course; in this way they can teach courses for which they already have the necessary education, training, skill or interest.
- Shorter courses allow for more time to do planning for creative programming.
- Mini-courses reinforce the notion that catechesis and religious education are life-long processes. Since mini-courses mirror the most frequent model of adult faith formation programming, young people will be formed by the process itself along with the content.
- High quality resources and texts are available (e.g., St. Mary's Press *Horizons Program*) that are based on and support this approach.
- Expert guest presenters can be enlisted from outside the parish to conduct particular mini-courses.

Some Concerns about the Mini-Course Model:

- It requires skillful marketing on an ongoing basis. Registration can be an ongoing challenge, since participants are constantly signing up for new classes.
- The format limits the amount of time available to cover any topic in depth.
- It calls for a variety of trained adult facilitators who have expertise in a broad range of theme areas.
- Participants may end up with major gaps in their religious knowledge if the mini-courses fail to cover a broad range of faith themes, or if attendance is sporadic.
- Lacking informed supervision and planning, mini-courses may target "fad" topics, thereby leaving very significant gaps in participants' faith formation.
- With significant turnover in catechists and participants, young people may not experience the benefits of long-term, in-depth association with peers and adult facilitators;
- Other parish-wide activities and programs which complement the mini-course model must be offered and promoted, lest youth come to expect that their only involvement in parish life consists of class attendance.

Small Faith Communities

Small faith communities foster faith in the context of a more intimate, caring community. In this model, the young people of a parish or school are typically invited to join smaller groups numbering eight to ten members. Depending upon the program and its participants, small faith communities tend to meet bi-weekly for 1½ or 2 hours. Less frequent meetings make it difficult for the group to gel into a community. Periodically, small groups may be brought together to share in a large group setting, or to engage in some kind of social or worship activity. This furthers the experience of faith through the larger Church.

Groups are typically led by a cleared adult facilitator, or perhaps a pair of cleared adults, or even a married couple. Sometimes an adult and a youth will team up to provide leadership. Less frequently, small groups are conducted by trained peer leaders (note: see caution regarding youth leaders in the list of concerns below).

Groups may be arranged at random, or by grade, interest, location, or some other unifying feature. Adult facilitators are often expected to remain with their group throughout the entire four years of high school for the sake of continuity. Small faith communities frequently meet in a home, usually that of the adult facilitator, which fosters a sense of comfort and safety. Genuine shared experiences of faith can take place because trust has been carefully and intentionally nurtured. Participants enjoy a depth of interpersonal interaction and affection, and are willing to share their experiences of faith in God honestly and straightforwardly with each other.

A typical small faith community meeting might include: a general sharing of each teen's thoughts and feelings since the last time they met; shared prayer; discussion of a particular faith theme; a presentation or discussion that connects life experience with the Church's story; a resolution or some kind of response by individuals or the entire group to grow in discipleship. Catechetical programs or textbook series are frequently used as a starting point. However, when youth are invited to offer suggestions for topics in addition to those already planned for the year, they come to know that their opinions and life experiences are valued. Through connections made with the Church's story, they discover and find friendship with God in and through their experiences of love and faith fostered in the group.

4.5 Parishes that choose to build small faith communities that meet in private homes must utilize the appropriate check list in Appendix Four of this manual).

Advantages of the Small Faith Community Model

- This model offers a scheduling alternative to the "once-a-week-for-an-hour" structure of the Traditional Model. Because the small faith groups typically meet longer, increased flexibility of structuring generates momentum and longer activities can be attempted. For instance, prayer and socializing can

- more readily be built into the session.
- Small faith groups build great depth of trusting relationships between teens and their leaders over an extended period of time.
 - Thematic content is balanced by appropriate relational ministry.
 - This format provides credible adult and teen role models of faith for youth.
 - Each young person can be known personally. Faith is more readily passed on when the Good News can be addressed to the unique individual situation of the hearer.
 - Teens in leadership learn some vital discipleship skills: articulation of their faith experience, group facilitation, listening, peer ministry and collaboration.

Some Concerns about the Small Faith Community Model

- Parishes may have difficulty recruiting a sufficient number of cleared adults willing to make the commitment of time and energy necessary to make this model work.
- Small group leaders need training and ongoing support in order to be effective. Because of the strong emphasis on establishing long-term relationships, there is an increased need for professional supervision and accountability on the part of the catechetical leader or coordinating youth minister. Special care must be taken to ensure that group leaders are acting appropriately within the scope of their role as catechists and mentors.
- Special care should also be taken with teen facilitators, both in terms of preparation and ongoing support and accountability. If the content of group sharing and discussion has the potential to become deeply personal or emotional, an adult facilitator should, without exception, be present in the group.
- Cleared adult facilitators may overemphasize devotions or interpersonal sharing to the exclusion of catechetical content.
- There will always be teens whose jobs or activities will prevent them from being regular, committed participants in the small group – resulting either in teens being excluded, or in intermittent, unpredictable participation on the part of some.
- Care must be taken to ensure that the small faith groups remain connected with the larger Church. Other parish-wide activities, outreaches and programs must be made available and attractive to teens in small groups lest they (and the faith community) mistakenly expect the small group to be able to respond to all their faith needs.

Retreats

Retreats are perhaps the most effective programs a parish can offer its youth. Retreats create short-term small faith communities where faith questions can be explored in an in-depth way over an extended period of time, usually a weekend. Because retreats are often evangelizing events, they intentionally draw together adolescents' lived experiences and relationships and place them in the context of the divine mystery.

Just as there are many different catechetical approaches there are many different kinds of retreats. Some retreats have been known to draw several dozens of teens into one shared experience. Others are intentional about keeping numbers small. Much depends upon the theme, the psychological and spiritual development of the participants and the goals of the retreat. Whatever the circumstances, retreats often provide intense and profound experiences of God's loving presence in the lives of young people.

Advantages of the Retreat Model

- Retreats can be designed specifically to meet the age/development/spirituality of the participants.
- Since most retreats occur off-site, getting away for a few days enhances the experience of "doing something unique and different."
- Like summer camp, retreats often mix different types of activities together in order that different learning styles are engaged.
- When youth are voluntarily present, they usually are committed to active participation and invest themselves in the success of the program.

Some Concerns about the Retreat Model

- Retreats can be costly. The rental of the facility, transportation and feeding a group of growing teens over an entire weekend can strain personal and parish budgets.
- Some adults are more comfortable with teaching than they are with witnessing or openly sharing their own faith story. Presenting one's own witness talk can be much more threatening than transmitting doctrine. Other retreat dynamics like prayer experiences, small group discussions, community building activities and the like may call upon adult and youth leaders to take on tasks for which they are unprepared. Therefore, special training for both adult and youth leaders is necessary.
- Young people may be distracted by the novel environment, and the overnight stay can lead to special discipline challenges.
- It is unrealistic to expect young people (and adult leaders, too) to attend several retreats during the year so that they might be exposed to several faith themes. Therefore, the retreat model works best when it supports other catechetical models. It is generally not recommended that retreats become the primary mode of catechesis.

Discipleship in Action

“Faith in action” is the guiding premise for service learning. Involving young people in service to others is to engage them in discipleship. Learning to serve and serving to learn are mutually inclusive opportunities for young people to discover biblical principles regarding the call to justice and the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching while acting as God's agent of justice, peace and forgiveness in service to others.

The “Pastoral Circle” (*based on the work of Peter Henriot and Joseph Holland and adapted by Thomas Bright and John Roberto*) describes the process of service learning.

This four-step catechetical model provides opportunities for involvement, exploration, reflection and action that lead to growth in awareness of social injustice and the ability/skills to positively impact areas of social injustice:

- Involvement asks participants to get in touch with their own experiences of social injustice. Involvement asks the question, “What is going on here?”
- Exploration widens the reflections on their own experiences to examine the relationships between the values, structures, ideologies, etc. that cause injustice. Exploration asks the question, “Why does this happen?”
- Reflection examines experiences through the lenses of Scripture and Catholic social teaching, and allows participants to discern how our faith lifestyle motivates us to respond. Reflection asks the question, “As a Catholic Christian, what did I learn? How did I grow?”
- Action is the crucial fourth step and the culminating purpose of reflection and exploration. While complex social issues rarely result in simple solutions, it is possible to make some kind of positive and effective response. This step helps people to identify the particular role they can play in weakening or eliminating injustice. Action asks the question, “What are we, as a Catholic Christian faith community, going to do about it?”

The response of action inevitably leads to more *involvements* that call for more *exploration, reflection* and *action*, each time building upon previous insights and experiences, hence the “Pastoral Circle.”

Service learning formats vary from program to program. A popular format is a variation of the summer camp model. For a week or two during the summer, young people are gathered daily (or every other weekday) to participate in the Pastoral Circle process. Usually, service projects and sites have been prearranged. Part of the day is spent exploring issues, and then participants go to the prearranged site to serve. They gather back at the end of the day for debriefing and reflection on what they experienced and observed at the service site.

More typically, service learning that takes place as one-time events sprinkled throughout the calendar year. Opportunities to serve at a soup kitchen, food pantry, nursing home, etc., accompanied by reflection before and debriefing afterward, can be meaningful.

Advantages of Discipleship in Action

- Young people learn to “walk the walk while talking the talk.”
- Youth have personal experiences of empowerment and the ability to participate in the transformation of society into the Reign of God.
- The Pastoral Circle allows for intentional catechesis about biblical principles and our rich church tradition of Catholic social teaching.
- Young people and adults are generally already predisposed to “doing something” to make the world a better place. They want to be asked to serve but they want assurances that their service is meaningful. Service learning supplies the means for purposeful service.
- Teens and adults learn vital skills of discipleship: looking at the world with God's eyes and being moved to compassionate action for the benefit of God's children.

Some Concerns about Discipleship in Action

- Like summer camp, not all youth will be available to participate in a weeklong program. Other service opportunities must be made available to them.
- Like the retreat model, larger service opportunities such as mission trips, can be cost restrictive.
- Service learning is one of many catechetical efforts. It cannot stand alone as the sole means of catechesis for adolescents in a faith community.

Variations of Discipleship in Action

Service learning can take place in powerfully effective ways through mission trips and work camps. These have become normal fixtures in many parish summer youth ministry calendars across the Diocese, and can be powerful, life-changing moments in the lives of young people.

Mission trips can be either domestic or international. They are frequently arranged in conjunction with a sponsoring organization, often a religious community like the Comboni Missionaries, the Franciscans, Glenmary or Maryknoll. They can last as little as a weekend, or as long as a month, although the typical length is one or two weeks. There are as many different kinds of experiences as there are different kinds of missionary activity. Participants may find themselves restoring housing in Appalachia, teaching in a vacation bible school on an Indian reservation, or serving food in the inner city.

Work camps are relatively new experiences for young people. Typically scheduled during the summer months when young people are more available, work camps are

weeklong, structured programs of service, prayer, fellowship, religious education and reflection. In short, a work camp provides a complete and well-organized program of service and formation for youth. Rather than having to plan all of the complex logistics of a mission trip, adult leaders can opt into a work camp package that makes all of the arrangements for you. In preparation for a work camp, adult leaders typically need to attend to fund-raising to meet the substantial per person fee, transportation, and collecting tools and supplies. Service sites and the entire program during the week away are planned and coordinated by the work camp staff. An example is *Young Neighbors in Action*, a work camp conducted by the Center for Ministry Development. Information about opportunities such as these is available from the Diocesan Office for Catholic Youth Ministry.

Advantages of Mission Trips & Work Camps

- Since both mission trips and work camps typically involve an extended immersion in a very different socio-economic, cultural or ethnic world, participants find many of their fundamental assumptions about life challenged. Such experiences are ripe moments for conversion into a deeper appreciation of the prophetic dimensions of the Gospel.
- Groups that share such experiences tend to bond deeply. Fast friends in faith for life often emerge from these kinds of experiences.
- It is not unusual for young people to come to a clearer sense of a personal call or vocation to ministry or service by virtue of such experiences.
- Both mission trips and work camps typically involve service to the poor – thus, not only are the poor served, but participants deepen the kind of solidarity with the poor that is at the heart of much of Catholic social teaching.

Some Concerns about Mission Trips & Work Camps

- A great deal of preparation, advance planning and fund-raising usually precedes these events. Typically adult leaders need to arrange for transportation, lodging, food, and secure building supplies, lumber, tools, etc. as well.
- Since such programs are so time-and resource-intensive, they can have a detrimental effect on other dimensions of the comprehensive youth ministry effort in a parish or school.
- Safety is always a very important consideration in traveling with young people. This concern is amplified exponentially if the destination is a third-world country, or a location with little or no access to health care, or a place subject to political unrest or exotic health threats. Great care must be exercised by adult leaders in selecting destinations, in working with reputable sponsoring organizations, and broadly, in ensuring that all participants will return safe and sound.
- Both Protestant and Catholic organizations sponsor mission trips and work camps. If a parish is contemplating a Protestant-sponsored trip, leaders need to thoroughly check out the theological assumptions and doctrinal content that their young people may encounter as part of the

experience. As a general rule, Catholic-sponsored programs will adhere to the principles of Catholic social teaching – one less thing for adult leaders to be concerned about.

- The cost of mission trips and work camps can be prohibitive for groups or individuals.

Super Sundays

This model evolved in the late 1970's as a way to make religious education more appealing to youth, and to reverse the decline in attendance many parishes were experiencing.

In a typical Super Sunday, an aspect of the gospel message is proclaimed to young people through interactive, exciting, high-energy programming. The format usually consists of a block of time on a Sunday afternoon and/or evening on a once a month basis through the school year (e.g., 3-7 p.m.). A late morning through early afternoon schedule is also sometimes used (e.g., 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Activities may include: icebreakers and community building activities, fun skits, witness talks, slide shows, small group sharing and discussions, a major presentation (speaker or video), Eucharist (or prayer service) and dinner/refreshments. Monthly sessions typically revolve around one topic or theme, e.g. drugs/alcohol, sex and dating, parent/family communication, decision-making, or an article of the faith. These once-a-month sessions are supplemented with other activities and programs offered throughout the week for those youth who wish to explore their faith in more depth.

Advantages of the Super Sunday Model:

- Large gatherings of young people are attractive to adolescents. Often, youth will come to an event solely because their friends are going.
- Highly interactive community-building activities, a key element in this model, respond well to the adolescent need for peer interaction.
- The evangelizing nature of this model assists in leading young people to conversion experiences that, in turn, challenge them to move toward more in-depth catechesis.
- Teenagers see the Super Sunday as something different, novel and exciting. The program lends itself to being publicized as an “event,” rather than just another religious education class.

Some concerns about the Super Sunday Model:

- Since Super Sundays typically take place once a month, a youth who misses one or two sessions may go without some form of religious education for months at a time.
- Super Sundays typically have no scope or sequence, that is, no coherent progression from one topic to the next. A program on “dating” could well be followed by a session on the Stations of the Cross. There is a tendency to choose a lot of topics which will grab attention rather than focus on a very few topics which are explored in depth.

- Weekly or bi-weekly in-depth catechetical sessions must supplement this program for young people to grow in faith and discipleship.
- At the end of four years, youth have received a smattering of teaching on many unrelated subjects. It is questionable whether a young person would have a solid grasp of basic catechetical themes if only exposed to Super Sundays.

Religious Education Classes

Religious education classes are offered by many of the parishes of the Diocese. The typical format of this approach is a one-hour class held weekly throughout the school year. Students gather at the parish in groups according to grade level with an adult catechist. Textbooks typically provide structure and content to classes.

Advantages of Religious Education Classes

- The schooling approach is familiar to both adults and youth.
- In areas of the Diocese where there is a long tradition and strong parental support for this approach, attendance may be quite high (typically in rural areas with little local access to Catholic secondary schools).
- Textbooks and teachers' manuals provide approved content and clear structure. Most catechists can use the teachers' manuals with a minimum of formal training.
- Management is simple because classes occur on a regular basis on a specified day of the week.
- Other events (e.g. service, prayer, etc.) may be added to provide variety and breadth to the program.

Some Concerns about the Religious Education Classes

- Except in areas of the Diocese where there is a strong tradition of this approach – reinforced by potent parental support – attendance can be extremely low. Numbers of participants typically drop off dramatically each year as young people move from junior high through senior high school. Many parishes have completely discontinued this approach during the high school years due to poor attendance. Similarly, Confirmation programs that utilize this approach may enjoy strong participation leading up to the sacrament, but little or no participation afterwards.
- This format tends to focus narrowly on the cognitive dimensions of education. While some individual catechists can supplement the material to take into account the faith needs of their students, untrained and/or unseasoned catechists will likely not have the skills or resources to do so.
- Prescribed course curricula often do not engage the real faith needs of adolescents. Without skilled and seasoned catechists who can translate lesson plans into effective learning/growth experiences, textbooks can be more of a hindrance than a help.
- The one-hour time slot is typically inadequate to the development and

presentation of the material, and leaves little or no time for community-building, prayer, experiential learning activities, and the like. Catechists often find themselves frustrated by too little class time, and much too much material that they feel obliged to cover.

- This approach can be insensitive to the fact that during the school year young people spend the better part of their waking hours in classrooms, and may have little or no inclination to spend more time in a classroom. Although they may be very interested in growing in their faith, the prospect of one more weekly class can be abhorrent to many youth.
- Even in areas where this approach generates high attendance, it is worth raising the question as to whether this approach supports or detracts from comprehensive youth ministry. If a parish's youth ministry efforts are limited to religion classes, it will likely be marginally effective in passing on the faith.

Supplemental Approaches

The following are not broad enough to be considered models of adolescent catechesis; however, they may be effectively utilized in tandem with the models described above to reinforce and further develop catechetical themes.

Family-friendly, Intergenerational, Resources, Programs & Activities

It's a common complaint among catechists and youth ministers that their efforts seem too often to go unsupported by parents and families. Moreover, catechetical leaders readily acknowledge the powerful influence that parents and families have on the faith development of their youth, for good or ill. Yet they often feel helpless in this regard.

Resources are available to assist catechetical leaders in having an impact on the faith of parents and families – and thus on young people in those families. Perhaps the most significant resource in this regard is *Family Works*, published by the Center for Ministry Development. This 3-inch binder is packed with everything from intergenerational learning sessions to family prayer and service activities.

Catechists and youth ministers can use resources such as these to augment their sessions with young people. With sufficient forethought and planning, parents and families can be invited into exploring the same faith themes as their teenagers. Topics pass from catechetical sessions to the dinner table, and learning at church is shared and reinforced at home. In this way, the faith formation of a teenager becomes a shared project of parents, families, catechists and youth ministers – as it should be.

Rites of Passage

Rites of Passages which include catechesis can uniquely address the needs and culture of youth and may assist them in successfully moving

from childhood towards whole, healthy, responsible Catholic Christian adulthood.

Pilgrimages, Encuentros, Conferences, & Rallies

Even with solid catechetical programming in place, parishes recognize the value of augmenting their efforts by participating in diocesan, regional and national faith-enriching activities and programs:

- Parishes looking to expose their youth to the universal Church will send them on World Youth Day pilgrimages or sponsor trips to the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).
- A model that is new to the English-speaking world is that of the Encuentro, a special gathering that is like yet unlike a conference: with greater emphasis on community involvement and celebration, Encuentro will likely be a familiar model for Hispanic youth.
- On the Diocesan level, look for rallies for high school age youth and junior high school age youth that offer opportunities for young people from all over the Diocese to come together for faith sharing.
- Retreat or retreat-like experiences can help youth articulate and develop their own spiritualities and empower them to leadership in prayer and worship.

Parishes that take advantage of these opportunities and incorporate the learning in follow-up sessions, find these supplemental resources and programs very helpful in supporting their catechetical efforts. Parishes who use these programs as their sole means of catechesis or faith development will discover that their youth will *not* (a) develop a connection to the local parish, (b) be exposed to (and, therefore, treasure) the richness and diversity of the Catholic tradition, (c) be challenged to grow from searching to owned faith.

Programs of Leadership Development and Ministry Formation

Young people who are moving into positions of service and leadership in their faith communities are often provided specialized training. Whether liturgical, a peer ministry or general leadership skill, this sort of training provides an invaluable opportunity to deepen the faith and spirituality of young people. If those conducting the training understand their role as catechetical, they will include components in their training that go well beyond simply conveying the “how to’s” of ministry and service – they will include prayer, reflection, faith sharing, and sharing our faith tradition.

Youth leadership programs such as YouthLeader, conducted by the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry) offer extended, in-depth opportunities to develop not only ministry skills, but also a deepened understanding of our faith in the context of our baptismal call to ministry.

Religious Recognition Programs

Many of our young people are involved in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or American Heritage Girls. These programs offer wonderful faith-building opportunities in their religious recognition programs. Each year, hundreds of young women and men in the Diocese receive the Marian Medal, the Ad Altare Dei, Parvuli Dei and others. These programs taken alone do not comprise a comprehensive catechetical model; however, they can serve as effective supplements. Further information and complete program instructions and manuals are available through the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry. (See Section Six, "Scouting as Youth Ministry")

How to Select the Right Model

This is perhaps the most vexing question that catechetical leaders face: of the many models and resources that are available, which shall I choose? Or better: Which models, singly or in combination, have the best chance of effectively evangelizing and catechizing our young people? The following series of questions and answers may help in this discernment:

Is my parish “youth friendly?”

As discussed earlier in this document, the overall climate of the parish faith community is vitally important to an effective program of adolescent catechesis. In “youth friendly” parishes with comprehensive youth ministry, systematic adolescent faith formation is simply part of the fabric of the general hospitality accorded to youth. Contact CYM for assistance in this regard.

Does my parish have comprehensive youth ministry?

If not, this is the place to start. Since systematic adolescent catechesis best takes place in the context of comprehensive youth ministry, this is your best starting point. Contact CYM for assistance in developing your youth ministry.

Does my parish operate out of the Whole Community Catechesis perspective?

It has been said that the faith community is the primary curriculum of religious education. How the parish serves, celebrates, prays, worships – how the parish lives as a faith community – is at least as important as its intentional, systematic catechesis in terms of conveying the good news. In Whole Community Catechesis, intentional catechesis is intimately intertwined with the liturgy, service, teaching and community of the parish. Contact the Office of Religious Education for assistance in learning more about and developing this approach.

How do I select the most appropriate model(s) of adolescent catechesis for my faith community?

This is a complex question, since it requires answering several other interlocking questions: (a) What needs do we hope to address? (b) What do we want to accomplish? (c) What resources (personnel, time, and money) are available? Each parish community needs to assess its needs, establish its goals, and determine the resources it plans to devote to the effort. Once these steps are accomplished, the chart on the next page may assist in matching needs, goals and resources to the appropriate model.

The chart illustrates that some of the models are better at what the General Directory for Catechesis calls “primary proclamation,” directed at nonbelievers and those living in “religious indifference.” (GDC, #61) Some are better at “continuing education in faith” (GDC, # 69) and some are better suited to “journeying towards perfection” (GDC, #56), that is, into deeper conversion and discipleship.

It stands to reason that models that are better at “primary proclamation” are likely to be most helpful early on in the progression of a systematic program of faith formation. Those that provide “continuing education in the faith” should follow, and those that lead young people into deeper conversion and discipleship should follow thereafter. Of course, this sequence is not set in stone – the genius of effective catechetical leadership is to meld models and approaches together within the context of the broader faith community in a way that makes formation seamless and ongoing.

The chart also identifies those models that are heavily labor, time and money-intensive. In general, these qualifiers should serve as general guides to the investment of resources demanded by each model.

	<i>Effective at Primary Proclamation</i>	<i>Effective at Continuing Education in the Faith</i>	<i>Effective at Deeper Conversion & Discipleship</i>	<i>Labor Intensive</i>	<i>Time Intensive</i>	<i>Money Intensive</i>
Mini-Courses		✓				
Small Faith Communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Retreats	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Service-Learning			✓	✓	✓	
Mission Trips, Work Camps, Conferences (NCYC)	✓	✓	✓	✓+	✓+	✓+
Super Sundays	✓					
Summer Camp	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Religious Ed Classes		✓		✓	✓	

Note: the checks above should be understood as general guides, not indicators of particular programs.

Works Cited in this Section:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994.

Fashion Me A People, Maria Harris, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1989.

General Directory for Catechesis, Congregation for the Clergy, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997.

Growing Together: Adolescent Religious Education, Office of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1989.

New Directions in Catholic Youth Ministry: A National Study of Catholic Youth Ministry Program Participants, Executive Summary, July 1996, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

Renewing the Vision - A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997.

The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith, the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), 1986.

Confirmation Guidelines

4.6 Parishes are to follow the Diocesan Guidelines for Confirmation when preparing young people for reception of the sacrament.

4.6.1 Preparation for reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation may not begin before eighth grade.

4.6.2 Catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation is a distinct program, separate from but integrated with other components of youth catechesis/youth ministry.

4.6.3 Confirmation Preparation does not include required service hours.

1. The Confirmation preparation program should never be equated with comprehensive youth ministry or adolescent catechesis. Parishes that extend Confirmation preparation over the course of an entire school year (or more) run the risk of Confirmation preparation becoming the only ministry to and with youth. Confirmation prep is about engaging young people in the steps necessary to understand and prepare for the sacrament in which they choose to partake. Confirmation Preparation is not, and should never become, a “last ditch” effort to teach young people all the leaders believe they should know prior to “graduating” from religious education. If youth ministry is comprehensive, then Confirmation prep is one of many opportunities for continuing faith formation in a parish.
2. Catechesis for Confirmation should recognize the importance of the entire community as catechizing agents. Every effort should be made to incorporate the community in the preparation process.
3. A program for Confirmation catechesis must involve the parents in significant ways. Minimally, the parents should be given an orientation to the program; an overview of current theological development of the sacrament; opportunities to reflect on the life of the Spirit in their own lives and suggestions for family support and participation in discussion around attributes or character of the sacrament.
4. The immediate preparation for Confirmation should follow the format of the diocesan planning process for parish youth catechesis, i.e., each theme should be planned to include the cognitive element (believing); the affective (trusting); and acting (doing).
5. The content of the catechesis includes a review of the following themes:

- a. Baptism: including the meaning of dying and rising, salvation, freedom and sin
- b. On-going conversion including the life-long Journey of Faith and the need for reconciliation, especially through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- c. Jesus Christ: including the meaning of his life, death and resurrection for our salvation and his meaning for individuals and the Church today.
- d. The mission of the Church: including responsibilities of membership; witness to the faith; the call to ministry; action on behalf of justice; preferential option for the poor.
- e. The community of Faith: including the communal dimension to faith; the charisms and gifts of the Spirit; and the body of Christ, as well as the institutional dimensions of the Church.
- f. The Presence of the Spirit: including reflection on the life and presence of the Spirit in the Church and in the life of the believer; discernment of the presence of the Spirit.
- g. Confirmation: including a presentation and explanation of the Rite itself and the signs and symbols of the sacrament.
- h. The Eucharist: including its place in the life of the individual and the community.

(The catechesis assumes that these and other themes have been taught in the major catechetical programs that have been offered by the school and the parish. Catechesis at this time should be a deepening of the understanding and a reflection on the themes suggested above.)

- 6. Scripture should be at the heart of each and every theme. Every effort should be made to encourage the candidates to read and be nourished by God's Word.
- 7. Prayer that engages and active participation in worship should also be encouraged during this time.
- 8. Sponsors: Each candidate selects his/her own sponsor. Ideally, the sponsors should be involved in the preparation of the candidates. They should be adequately prepared to carry out their role. Parishes may have a practice of assigning or allowing the candidate to select a member of the local community to accompany him/her on the journey to Confirmation and participate in the immediate preparation process. This person may or may not be the same as the sponsor.
- 9. Retreats:
 - a. Retreats can be effective elements in a catechetical or Confirmation program.
 - b. If there is a retreat in the preparation process, the Confirmation planning team should be clear to its purpose in the overall program.

- c. The extended time afforded by a full-day, an overnight or weekend experience can provide an opportunity to build community, for prayer and reflection, and/or for a time for teaching.
 - d. Diocesan events are not substitutes for a parish Confirmation retreat.
- 10. Since service to the Church and community is a natural overflowing from the liturgy and the presence of the Spirit, Confirmation Preparation does not include required service hours. The parish should provide many and varied ways for all members to participate in faithful service and should encourage theological reflection before and after service experiences.
- 11. It is appropriate that prior to final preparation for the sacrament, the candidate should:
 - a. express verbally or in writing his/her desire to proceed to Confirmation.
 - b. meet individually with the pastor or his delegate
- 12. The candidate, catechist, parish priest (or delegate) and parents/guardians discern the readiness of the candidate to proceed to Confirmation.
- 13. Postponement: If for any reason, a decision is made to delay Confirmation, the parish should make every effort to keep the individual involved in the life of the community. Future invitations should be offered encouraging the individual to renew his/her preparation for the sacrament.