

Policy  
For The Religious Education  
Of Catholic Children Not Attending  
Catholic Schools



March 2011

# 1 CONTEXT

“Parents, having given life to their children, are their primary and principal educators” (Congregation of Catholic Education: Circular Letter to the Presidents Of Bishops' Conferences On Religious Education In Schools #2) The Church recognises parents’ fundamental place in their child’s education in the faith and this basic understanding is reflected in the Church’s documents on catechesis and family life.

“The right and duty of parents to give education is essential ... it is original and primary ... it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and incapable of being entirely delegated or usurped by others.” (*John Paul II Familiaris Consortio, 36*)

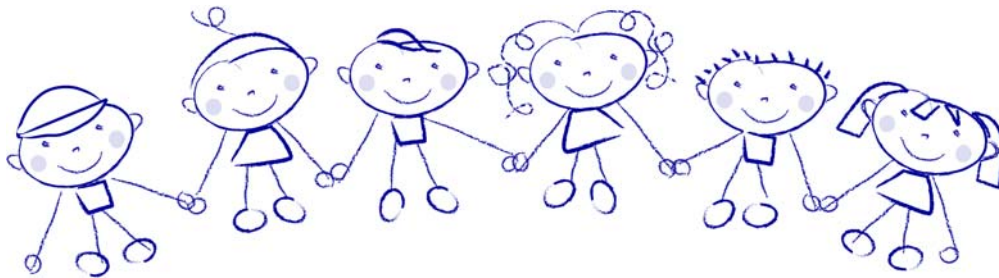
“In the absence of a Catholic school, the duty of providing for Catholic education remains primarily that of the parents with the assistance of the parish. In situations like these, parishes will endeavour, at the request of parents and with their cooperation and support, to provide appropriate religious education and preparation for the sacraments for the children who need it.” *Catholic Primary Schools - A Policy for Provision into the Future, 2.2*

“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, prayer, and all the virtues. They have the duty to provide as far as possible for the physical and spiritual needs of their children.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2252*



## **THE CURRENT SITUATION RE CATECHESIS OF CHILDREN**

At present the catechesis of children in Ireland and their faith formation is almost entirely entrusted to the Catholic School. However not all the children of Catholic families currently attend Catholic schools. There is, therefore, need for parish-based catechetical and faith formation programmes to minister to these children and their families.



### **3. STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

#### **3.i PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AND FORMATION OF CATHOLIC CHILDREN NOT ATTENDING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

- a. The General Directory for Catechesis states the six fundamental tasks of catechesis:
  - Promoting knowledge of the faith
  - Liturgical education
  - Moral formation
  - Teaching to pray
  - Education for Community Life
  - Missionary initiation

- b. Parents are the primary educators of their children and they hold primary responsibility for their formation in the faith. They are supported and guided by the parish.
- c. All catechetical programs should be faithful to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) and SHARE THE GOOD NEWS (National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland)
- d. Moral, Liturgical and Prayer Formation rest centrally with the faith community, which includes the family.
- e. The liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life and should therefore be central to catechesis.
- f. The inherent wisdom of the processes of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) should guide the praxis of all catechesis including the catechesis of children which takes place according to their age and development.

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### **3.ii PRINCIPLES FOR PARISH AND WIDER COMMUNITY**

The purpose of parish-based catechetical and sacramental programmes is to support and guide parents in their task as the prime religious educators of their children. The parish ideally will facilitate the parents of children not attending Catholic schools in enrolling their children in programmes which support parents in their task.

### **3. iii CATECHETICAL PRINCIPLES**

- a. Local circumstances will dictate the frequency, length of the sessions and the involvement by the various personnel in the delivery of the programme of Religious Education for children. However to offer the children the best support, ideally parents are involved in the preparation of the classes and accompany the children at the sessions.

The mode of delivery of the religious education of the children will be somewhat as follows:

- Small group catechesis each week, will take place in term time only.
  - Children will follow a course of Religious Education which is specifically designed for their age group.
  - The courses will facilitate the complementary roles of parish and family and will be soundly based on the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), the General Directory For Catechesis (GDC) and SHARE THE GOOD NEWS (National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland) and will take into account modern developments in pedagogy and catechetical methodology. Cf 3.1
  - Sessions will be led by catechists who have certified formation and education as Catechists.
  - Prayer will form an integral part of the programme.
- b. Materials used in parish-based catechesis will be approved by the local Ordinary with the assistance of a National Committee when such exists.
  - c. Parish based programmes will be linked to the national catechetical curriculum in terms of unity of purpose and content.
  - d. Education for community life and missionary awareness are integral to catechesis and to the promotion of the common good.
  - e. Key sources for strategic policy in relation to the faith formation of Catholic children not attending Catholic schools are the General Directory for Catechesis, SHARE THE GOOD NEWS (National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland) and other documents emanating from the Episcopal Commission for Catechesis.



## **4. OVERVIEW OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN CATECHESIS**

Religious Education is one form of the Church's mission of evangelisation. It invites the believer to live a conscious and active faith. This mission is carried out by various people on different levels. The responsibility of each person will vary, but all are important to the fulfilment of the Church's mission to proclaim the Good News.

The Bishop is the chief catechist in the diocese and establishes diocesan policy in all matters relating to catechesis. Parish Priests in accordance with diocesan policy will consult with the parish pastoral council, any available catechist and the local diocesan advisor in selecting suitable programs and determining suitable personnel to deliver such programs. The Parish priest will also arrange for adequate supervision for the practice of parish catechesis. The competence for the religious education of a child lies with the parish of domicile i.e. with the parish in which the child and the child's parents live. (However local agreements may be made)

**Can. 777** In a special way the parish priest is to ensure, in accordance with the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop that:

- 2° Children are properly prepared for first confession and First Holy Communion, and for the sacrament of Confirmation, by means of catechetical formation over an appropriate period of time;

**Can. 780** Local Ordinaries are to ensure that catechists are duly trained to carry out their office properly, namely, that continuing formation is available to them, that they have an appropriate knowledge of the teaching of the Church, and that they learn both the theory and the practice of the principles of pedagogy.

## 5. CATECHISTS

“Catechists, many of whom are volunteers, may be engaged in catechizing adults, young people, children, and those with special needs. Theirs is a particular way of carrying out the promise the Church makes at every Baptism: to support, pray for, and instruct the baptized and foster their growth in faith. The fundamental tasks of catechists are to proclaim Christ’s message, to participate in efforts to develop community, to lead people to worship and prayer, and to motivate them to serve others” (*Sharing the Light of Faith*, 213).

The aim of the catechist is to bring about understanding so to help others to think, judge, act and hope like Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ. Only Christ can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us be members of His Mystical Body, His Family, the Church, the Holy Trinity. To do this, the catechist must put on the mind of Christ and see others as He sees them (*Catechesi Tradendae*,5).

Catechists must be practising Catholics, baptised and confirmed, taking part in the worship and apostolate of the Church. They must realise that their vocations as Catholics call them to worship God in the liturgy and their personal prayer and to serve God through service of God’s people. The example of their prayer and service is a powerful teaching tool. Catechists should be versed in the hierarchy of truths<sup>11</sup> as outlined the GDC. (They are required to have a general knowledge of the Creed, the Commandments, the Mass and Sacraments, the Liturgical Year, the prayer life of a Christian, and the life of Christ and the Church’s Social Teaching.)

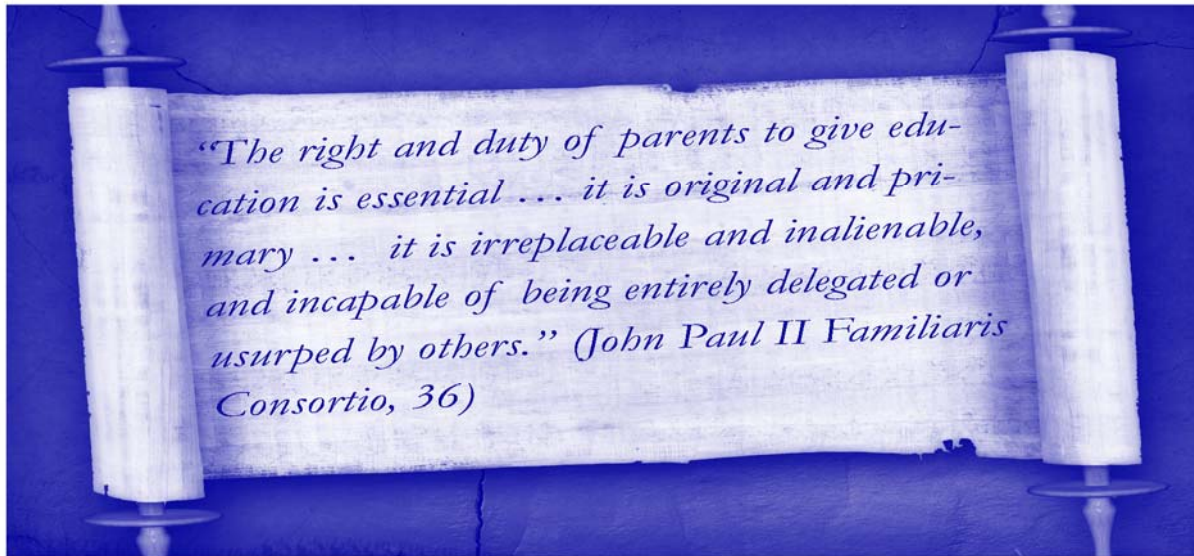
They should have a sound knowledge of the human person to facilitate communication, and have a working knowledge of teaching methodology. Therefore, catechists are strongly encouraged to complete the courses in doctrine and methods offered through recognised Colleges of Education. They may also participate in any workshops and training sessions provided by the Diocese. Catechists are required to be suitably approved and vetted by the local competent authority.

Some specific duties of catechists are:

- to be conscientious in the preparation of class work;
- to utilise class time effectively;
- to maintain classroom order in an atmosphere of Christian discipline.
- to provide an attractive learning environment;
- to keep records and make reports of student progress;
- to carry out Diocesan and parish policies;
- and to refer any serious moral, educational and disciplinary problems to the Director or Parish Priest.







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### **The necessity of Catechist Formation**

Priority must be given to training and ongoing formation of catechists who are the soul of every method. It is vitally important that Catechists are continually updated regarding developments in school-based catechesis (GDC 137, 156, 216, 219, 234).

Pope John Paul II affirms:

“During my apostolic journeys I have been able to observe personally what the catechists offer, especially in mission territories, an outstanding and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and the Church.” (*Address to Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, April 1992, cit. 3*)

“So many times it has fallen to you to strengthen and build up the Christian community ... even to found new ones through the first proclamation of the gospel. Give thanks to the Lord for the gift of your vocation, through which Christ has called you from among other men and women to be instruments of his salvation.

Respond with generosity to your vocation and your names will be written in heaven (cf. Lk 10:20).” (*Address to catechists of Angola*)

For this reason, there has been an emphasis by the Church on the need for catechist training.

Again, Pope John Paul II states:

“To set high standards (for catechist training) means both to provide a thorough basic training and to keep it constantly updated. This is a fundamental duty, in order to ensure qualified personnel for the Church’s mission, with good training programs and adequate structures, providing for all aspects of formation - human, spiritual, doctrinal, apostolic and professional.” (*Address to Plenary Assembly of the the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, April 1992*)



## **DIOCESAN INVESTMENT**

The Bishop is the chief catechist in the diocese. To assist the bishop in this task the diocese may need to fund the training of catechists and employ Directors/Coordinators of Catechetics and Faith Formation.

## **RESOURCES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE**

### **RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST:**

*ALIVE-O* adapted for use in the home and parish (Veritas)

Sr. Celine Ryan PBVM

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Children's Activity Book** ISBN-85390-726-X

**Parents' Book** ISBN-85390-721-9

**Video** ISBN-85390-7-324

**Called to the Lord's Supper**

**Jeannine Timko Leichner** (Our Sunday Visitor)

**Children's Activity Book** ISBN 978-1-59276-299-6

**Called to His Supper**

**Jeannine Timko Leichner** (Our Sunday Visitor)

**Catechist/ Parent Guide** ISBN 0-87973-140-0

**Making Things Right**

**Jeannine Timko Leichner** (Our Sunday Visitor) ISBN 978-1-592-76157-9

### **CONFIRMATION**

**Preparing to be Confirmed** by Diana Klein (Mc Crimmons) ISBN 085597643-8

**My Preparation for Confirmation and First Communion Sacraments of Initiation**  
Salford Diocese

**ALIVE-O** adapted for use in the home and parish: Confirmation

Anita Ryan (in pilot form only)

**Confirming Our Children** (Veritas) ISBN 1-85390-756-1

**Confirming Our Children 2** (Veritas) ISBN 1-85390-860-6

**The Spirit Sets Us Free** (Sadlier) **Parents/ Pupils**

**The Spirit Sets Us Free** (Sadlier) **Catechist**