

Faith Formation in the Diocese of Buffalo

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Parish Faith Formation programs and Catholic elementary schools throughout the Diocese of Buffalo will use the Forming Disciples Standards (2022). Its intended use is for children (3-6 years) and K-8th Gr. These standards are easily adaptable for use in any of the models described, below.

Catholic Schools (K-8th Gr) *Parish Edition resource*

*“The teaching of the Catholic religion has undergone substantial changes over time. Its relationship with catechesis is one of distinction in complementarity. Where the distinction is not clear, there is the danger that both may lose their identity. Catechesis “promotes personal adherence to Christ and maturing of Christian life, (whilst) school teaching gives the students’ knowledge about Christianity’s identity and the Christian life.”³² “What confers on religious instruction in schools its proper evangelizing character is the fact that it is called to penetrate a particular area of culture and to relate with other areas of knowledge. As an original form of ministry of the Word, it makes present the Gospel in a personal process of cultural, systematic, and critical assimilation.”³³ In the present context, “religious education is often the sole opportunity available for student to encounter the message of faith.” ³⁴ **Directory for Catechesis 313***

Students will experience catechesis (5x/week). The Religion teachers will focus on adherence to the Diocese Standards (August 15, 2022), using the parish edition resource, ensuring that Catholic school students are given opportunities to experience the Faith outside the classroom. The Religion teacher must be a strong, practicing, Catholic, who exemplifies Christian virtue, possesses a firm understanding of the Faith, and who can accompany children in their appreciation, practical application, and knowledge of the Faith. Catholic schools must provide Faith- based experiences for students and their families outside the classroom, through community volunteer, opportunities to serve during the weekend Masses, participation in the liturgical celebrations, visits to parish and shrines, as well as regular diversified prayer experiences, including: Adoration, First Friday, First Saturday devotions. In this way, students and their families are presented with opportunities to experience the Faith in a deep and meaningful way, in the parish and in the home.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (3–6-year-olds)

Children entering this program will have a unique opportunity to experience a deep and relational quality with our ever present and loving God. Through the exploration of the Atrium, which surrounds the child with beauty, awe, and wonder, the children begin to understand the virtue of quiet, mindful moments. Children are guided by trained catechists who help them to explore their curiosity about God and the beauty of our Catholic Faith. Certified catechists are trained to meet the 90 hours of required formation for CGS Level 1 certification.

“If we want to help the child grow near to God, we should, with patience and courage...seek to go always closer to the vital nucleus of things. This requires study and prayer. The child himself will be our teacher if we know how to observe him.” Sofia Cavalletti

A generous grant through the FRCDB is available for 1 Catechist / FOP to cover the cost of the 3 books and the tuition for the 90 hours of GCS Level 1 Formation training.

Family Faith Formation (K-6th Grade)

*“The work of handing on the faith to the children, in a sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in this evangelization mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle.” 7 In addition to its natural service of child rearing, the family is therefore called to contribute to building up the Christian community and to bear witness to the Gospel in society. “The ministry of evangelization and catechesis of the Church of the home is rooted in and derives from the one mission of the Church and is ordained to the upbuilding of the One Body of Christ...” **Directory for Catechesis 231***

Family Faith Formation should total 36 hours of direct catechesis every year and should follow one of the three approved models:

1. **Hybrid Family Faith Formation:** Families meet 1x/ month at the parish + Children are then dropped off at parish for 2 additional classes / month. These 2 lessons are taught by a trained catechist at the parish.
2. **At Home/Online Family Faith Formation:** Families gather 1x/month at the parish + Children are taught 2 lessons / month by parents and or caregivers at home or online.
3. **In Community Family Faith Formation:** Families gather 2x/ month at the parish and complete the entire unit during the month. Children and parents engage in systematic grade level catechesis by trained catechists.

Please reference this outline sample for the Monthly Family Faith Formation Gathering .

Monthly Family Faith Formation Gathering Sample Outline:

- Families come together for a brief shared meal and social time lasting 15-30 minutes.
- The session begins with a prayer opener and a welcoming atmosphere.
- Children and parents delve into learning about the Church Liturgical year, including feasts, themes, and family activities or games to reinforce understanding (15-30 minutes).
- Children proceed to their grade-level classrooms for systematic age-appropriate catechesis, covering one chapter within a time frame of 1-1.5 hours.
- Simultaneously, parents undergo instruction on the unit (1-1.5 hours), gaining a comprehensive understanding of their child's lessons for the month. Parents are encouraged to participate in small group discussions, games, and activities to reinforce learning. They also receive take-home faith-based activities, prayers, and monthly devotions to promote faith practices at home with their children.
- After the instructional sessions, parents/caregivers and children share what they learned that day. Families are welcomed to give examples of the various ways they intend to use the planned family activities for the month.
- The session concludes with a closing prayer and any necessary announcements.
- Throughout the month, families are invited to Mass, encouraged to participate in community acts of service, celebrate the liturgical cycle within the parish, engage in faith practices at home, read the Bible in chronological order, partake in prayer and devotions, and are invited to attend and to become involved in the planning of social events for the Family of Parishes.

Please consider these 3 models when planning for the Family Faith Formation programs

1). Hybrid Family Faith Formation Model:

Families meet at parish 1x/month (2-2.5 hours) + 2 lessons (1 hour/each) are held at the parish and taught by trained Catechists.

Families engaged in the Hybrid Faith Family Formation Model come together once a month for a rich learning experience, as outlined in the [Family Gathering Sample above](#). Following a shared meal, the families delve into the month's theme, feast, or liturgical activity. Then, students, guided by trained catechists, head to their age-specific classrooms for an in-depth exploration of one chapter (lasting 1-1.5 hours). Simultaneously, parents and caregivers embark on their own learning journey, delving into the first unit of their child's workbook (also 1-1.5 hours).

Students return to the parish for two additional in-person lessons, each lasting an hour, and the lessons are led by trained catechists. These 2 lessons cover two chapters. This model seamlessly blends the strengths of both family group formation and systematic, age-appropriate catechesis. It creates a warm and comprehensive environment that nurtures both family togetherness and focused learning. To enhance family learning, incorporate take-home activities and actively engage families in prayer, devotions, participation in liturgical celebrations and parish activities throughout the month.

2). At-Home / Online Family Faith Formation Model:

Families meet at parish 1x/month (2-2.5 hours) + 2 lessons (1 hour/each) are taught by a parent at home or online.

Families engaged in the At Home/ Online Family Faith Formation Model come together once a month for a rich learning experience, as outlined in the [Family Gathering Sample above](#). Following a shared meal, the families delve into the month's theme, feast, or liturgical activity. Then, students, guided by trained catechists, head to their age-specific classrooms for an in-depth exploration of one chapter (lasting 1-1.5 hours). Simultaneously, parents and caregivers embark on their own learning journey, delving into the first unit of their child's workbook (also 1-1.5 hours).

The remaining two chapters, each lasting an hour, are designed for completion at home. In this model, parents and guardians actively participate with their children, using either the textbook or an online platform. This approach fosters a collaborative and flexible catechetical environment, allowing families to engage in meaningful learning experiences from their homes while sharing the warmth of togetherness. To enhance family learning, incorporate take-home activities and actively engage families in prayer, devotions, participation in liturgical celebrations and parish activities throughout the month.

3). In-Community Family Faith Formation Model:

Families meet at parish 2x/month (2-2.5 hours each) and the entire unit is covered in each of the 2 sessions.

Families actively engaged in the In-Community Family Faith Formation Model come together twice a month at the parish for a comprehensive and engaging learning session, as detailed in the [Family Gathering Sample above](#). After a shared meal, everyone explores the month's theme, feast, or liturgical activity. Under trained catechists' guidance, students head to their age-specific classrooms to delve into half of the unit, equivalent to 1.5 chapters (lasting 1.5-2 hours). Simultaneously, parents and caregivers embark on their own learning journey, focusing on the first part of the unit from their child's workbook (1.5- 2 hours).

The entire unit is covered during the two monthly sessions at the parish. Families convene for two gatherings each month, with students exploring the unit in their grade-level classrooms and parents learning the same unit in the adult setting. This model uniquely emphasizes both communal formation and individual catechesis, creating a warm and supportive environment for shared learning experiences within the community. To enhance family learning, incorporate take-home activities and actively engage families in prayer, devotions, participation in liturgical celebrations and parish activities throughout the month.

Middle School (7th and 8th Grade)

“There are many signs that reveal pre-adolescence as a stage of life characterized by dynamic of a passage from a safe and familiar situation to something new and unexplored. Pre-adolescence is characterized by precisely the mixture of contradictory and oscillating emotions, which in reality arise from the need to measure oneself to experiment to put oneself to the test- to redefine- as a protagonist and autonomously- an identity that is striving to be reborn. In fact, in this period, accompanied by powerful development of the physical and emotional dimension, the slow and laborious process of individual personalization begins to take shape.”

Directory for Catechesis 246

“Pre-adolescent is also the time in which the image of God received in childhood is refashioned: for this reason, it is important that catechesis should accompany this delicate passage and its possible future developments with care, seeking help from the research and tools of the human sciences as well. The presentation of the faith to pre-adolescents is to take pains to sow within their hearts the seeds of a vision of God that can ripen over time: the illustration of the kerygma is to pay special attention to the Lord Jesus as a brother who loves, as a friend who helps one to be at one’s best in relationships, does not judge, is faithful, values skills and dreams, bringing one’s desires for beauty and goodness to fulfillment. Moreover, catechesis is urged to recognize the self-assertion of pre-adolescents, to create a context of meaningful group relationships, to create climate in which questions are welcomed and brought into contact with presentation of the Gospel.” **Directory for Catechesis 247**

Middle School Faith Formation (7th -8th Gr.) should total approximately 36 hours of direct catechesis every year and should consider the following recommendations:

- Students meet at the parish 2-3 x/ month to learn and share the Faith with trained Catechists.
- Mentor groups are encouraged.
- Ideally, the same catechists/ mentors should work with the same group of students when in small group discussions throughout the year, promoting trust and accountability among peer groups.
- Each year, middle school students (7th /8th Grade combination) may participate in a 3 -5 hour optional retreat. Parents, deacons, priests, catechists, mentors, and highly engaged middle/ high school students should be involved in taking leadership roles in the retreat.
- Throughout the month, pre-adolescents and their families are invited to attend weekend Mass, encouraged to participate in community acts of service, celebrate the liturgical cycle within the parish, engage in faith practices at home, participate in retreats, read the Bible, and begin to use Scripture as a form of prayer, different forms of prayer are introduced and encouraged, daily prayer is incorporated into the life of pre-adolescent, partaking and leading prayer and devotions in the home and in the parish community, monthly opportunities for confession are offered and participation is encouraged, pre-teens are invited to attend and to become involved in the planning of social events and liturgical celebrations for the Family of Parishes. Pre-adolescents are encouraged to take lead roles within the parish: Greeters, Lectors, Ushers, Music ministry, and volunteer their unique gifts and talents within the FOP community.

High School (9th-12th Grade)

*“Adolescence is a season of life that goes from around the age of 14-21, and at times continues well beyond. It is characterized by the drive for independence and at the same time by the fear of beginning to separate from the family context; thus creates a continual to and from between burst of enthusiasm and setbacks. In their journey of faith, adolescents need to have convincing and compelling witnesses by their side. It is to be the concern of the community to identify for the service of catechesis those persons who are best able to relate to their world, illuminating it with light and joy of faith. It is important that catechesis be carried out as part of pastoral care for young people and with a strongly educational and vocational connotation, in the context of the Christian community and of the other adolescent life environments”. **Directory for Catechesis 248-249***

The Buffalo Diocese follows the USCCB: [Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework, for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of the High School Age.](#)

High school students (9th-12th grade) have 36 hours of catechetical instruction each year. If students are preparing for Confirmation, then the requirements will be adjusted, so that the hours for direct Confirmation prep and the hours for catechesis do not exceed 36 hours.

Key details:

- Students gather at the parish 2-3 times a month to engage in learning and sharing their faith with trained Catechists.
- Mentor groups are strongly encouraged.
- It is recommended that the same Catechists/Mentors work consistently with a small group of high schoolers to foster trust and accountability within peer groups.
- Each year, High school students participate in 3 -5 hour retreat. Parents, deacons, priests, mentors, catechists, and engaged high school students should be involved in taking leadership roles in the retreat.
- Throughout the month, adolescents and their families are invited to attend weekend Mass, encouraged to participate in community acts of service, celebrate the liturgical cycle within the parish, engage and lead in faith practices at home and in the parish, participate in retreats, read the Bible, use Scripture as a form of prayer, familiar with different forms of prayer which is practiced and encouraged, daily, partaking and leading prayer and devotions in the home and in the parish community, monthly opportunities for confession are offered and participation encouraged, teens are invited to attend and to become involved in the planning of social events and liturgical celebrations for the Family of Parishes. Adolescents are encouraged to take leadership roles within the parish: Greeters, Lectors, Ushers, Altar server training, and assume prominent ministerial roles within the parish ie) Sacristans, invited to attend Leadership workshops, Mission Immersions trips, Parish Council, etc..teens are encouraged to volunteer their unique gifts and talents within the FOP community.
- The recommended resource for high school students in Faith Formation is the Sophia Institute's *Spirit of Truth*.

Adaptive (Special Needs) Family Catechesis (K-12th Grade)

“The Church’s solicitude for persons with disabilities springs from God’s way of acting. Following the principle of the incarnation of the Son of God, who makes himself present in every human situation, the Church recognizes in persons with disabilities the call to faith and to a life that is good and full of meaning. The theme of disability is of great importance for evangelization and Christian formation. Communities are called not only take care of the most fragile, but to recognize the presence of Jesus who in a special way manifests himself in them. This “calls for twofold attention: an awareness of the possibility to educate in the faith the people with even grave or very grave disabilities; and a willingness to consider them as active subjects in the community in which they live.”³² At the cultural level, unfortunately, there is a widespread conception of life, often narcissistic and utilitarian, that does not grasp the manifold human and spiritual richness in persons with disabilities, forgetting that vulnerability belongs to the essence of humanity and does not prevent happiness and self- realization.” ³³

Directory for Catechesis 269

Families meet a parish 1-2 x/month and learn 1-2 chapters/ month.

The Adaptive Family Catechesis Model encourages families with special learning needs to come together for a monthly gathering at the parish. This model caters to the unique needs of the families.

Families collectively delve into one thematic lesson from the unit during these gatherings.

To enhance learning, families incorporate take-home activities and actively engage in prayer, devotions, liturgical celebrations, and various community parish activities throughout the month. This model adapts to the diverse learning needs within families, seamlessly blending structured catechesis with a flexible, family-driven exploration of the Faith. It also encourages active involvement in the parish community, fostering a warm and inclusive atmosphere for families to grow in their faith journey together.