

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIOCESE



The primary organizational structure in the Catholic Church is the diocese headed by the bishop. One of the key pastoral roles of the bishop is that of teacher (*Decree on the Bishop ~ Pastoral Office in the Church*, # 12). The bishop is responsible for seeing that Vatican and national guidelines for catechesis are properly interpreted and pastorally responded to at the local level. He delegates this responsibility to the pastor who in turn delegates it to his religious education leader. It is this act of delegation which establishes the unique role of the parish religious education leader as an agent of the Church.

Various international (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]* and the *General Directory for Catechesis [GDC]*) and national (*National Directory for Catechesis [NDC]*) catechetical documents contain the Church's vision for catechesis. The diocesan Department of Religious Education as an agent of the Bishop is responsible to

- a) analyze the catechetical needs of the diocese,
- b) develop an action plan to respond to the needs,
- c) promote the formation of catechists,
- d) indicate for parishes the necessary instruments for catechesis,
- e) foster institutions of a specifically catechetical nature,
- f) improve personnel and material resources,
- g) and collaborate with the Diocesan Liturgical Office (*GDC#266*). The diocesan Department of Religious Education and parish religious education leaders share in the common task of making the Gospel known and drawing all to the person of Jesus Christ through the Church.

The parish religious education leader is asked to "promote and implement diocesan policies and guidelines regarding religious education and respond to requests for reports, surveys and program evaluation" (USCC approved National Certification Standards, CL 5). This cooperative relationship between the Diocese and the parish enables the best catechetical effort for the people of God.

Different parishes have different needs and it is the responsibility of the pastor and the religious education leader to interpret diocesan policy to achieve the most good at the local level. There are also valid differences in approach, philosophy, and even personalities, but it is important to remember that Diocesan and parish goals and mission are the same.

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS, CONT'D

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN VICARIATES/DEANERY

Everyone benefits from collaboration. The social pressures on religious education in the midst of the modern world require a combined effort which shares the available talent across the Diocese. The parish is indeed an expression of the local church, but in fact the local church (the Diocese) only exists when people work together to build up the Reign of God. Within each Vicariate (a geographic subdivision of the Diocese), there are monthly meetings of religious education leaders. These meetings serve not only as a prayerful support network, but also as an opportunity for growth and learning. These meetings also serve as a way for the Diocesan staff to interact with parish leaders. Participation in these local groups is a way to not only learn new approaches but to share ministerial experience and offer support to those who are newer in this ministry.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE PARISH

The pastor is the leader of the parish and the person ultimately responsible for providing religious education. Pastors are called to see to it that faith "becomes living, explicit and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living" (*Code of Canon Law*, Canon #773). Moreover, the pastor is directly accountable to the bishop for providing effective religious education in the parish. The pastor as chief catechist of the parish works collaboratively with the religious education leader in directing the formation of the parish community. The pastor delegates the day to day operation of the program to the religious education leader, but retains the responsibility for formation of the parish community.

It is a responsibility of the religious education leader to maintain a positive relationship with the pastor and work collaboratively with the parish staff. This may involve providing information, resources and in-service to the staff. It may also involve seeking the input of staff on religious education planning. The more knowledgeable the staff is about each other's ministries and the more input there is, the more likely it is that there will be a cohesiveness in carrying out the parish vision and mission.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH A PARISH / REGIONAL SCHOOL

If a parish / regional school exists, the religious education leader needs to be ready to assist the principal in carrying out the goals for religious education. In making the vision of total Catholic education a reality, the religious education leader needs to help foster a faith community among parish catechists and staff and also the school faculty as requested. As administrators, both the religious education leader and the principal have similar responsibilities in planning, staff development, curriculum design, public relations, and working with parents and other parishioners.

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They should work collaboratively on issues of religious education curriculum, religion textbook selection, sacramental preparation, and required parent meetings. The religious education leader also needs to communicate with the principal when planning the religious education calendar for the year in order to avoid conflicts.

The religious education leader must also work in relation to other diverse ministries within the parish, paying particular attention to the education committee, the finance council, and the pastoral council where these bodies exist. The religious education leader is also responsible to “provide orientation and in-servicing of catechetical committee members and formation teams in their areas of responsibility.” (USCC approved *National Certification Standards*, CL 6)

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL OFFICIALS AND OTHERS

It is important for the religious education leader to develop a working relationship with local public school officials. It is often beneficial to see the child in the total context of their lives and the public school is a big part of children's lives. Contacting local schools for schedules of activities can also help avoid conflicts and forcing families to choose between valuable activities. The development of this relationship is also important when you choose to use the provisions of [Act 175](#).

Ecumenical relationships are also an important resource. Work with the pastor and the local ministerium to develop relationships with colleagues in other denominations. When planning community service events, summer bible schools, or youth nights for the church community, check with other churches to see if the children/families in their programs would also be interested in working with the parish.

Advertising events and activities in the local newspaper and through public service announcements can serve as an important evangelical effort. Perhaps there are Catholics and other non-churched people who are waiting for an invitation to join the parish or religious education program. An advertisement inviting them could prove to be a simple yet effective tool.