

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

### ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEADER

In its most specific sense, ministry is a service designated by the Church, given in the name of the Church and done to help the Church fulfill its mission. One of the primary duties of a Bishop is his responsibility to proclaim the Good News and to



oversee catechetical formation (Canon 775). So significant is this responsibility that the universal Church offers this counsel, “Catechesis is so basic to the life of every particular Church, that ‘no diocese can be without its own catechetical office.’”

*(General Directory for Catechesis, #267)*

The responsibility for catechetical ministry is delegated by the Bishop to pastors of local parishes. Again, leadership in parish religious education ministry is noted as a primary responsibility of the pastor (Canon 776), and of the parish consultative bodies such as the Pastoral Council Education Commission/Board. Frequently this leadership role is shared with those designated in the Diocese of Erie as religious education leaders.

Religious education leaders then, proclaim and teach the Word of God as understood by the Church, and are appointed to give direction to this ministry as a delegate of the pastor. Religious education that is recognized as qualitatively excellent demands suitable leadership to provide both vision and guidance.

The Catholic Church’s commitment to education throughout history has been a vital force informing both citizens and disciples - persons whose faith shapes the economics, politics and family life of society. In 1965 this commitment continued in parish life as directors of religious education (DREs) became integral members of pastoral staffs. During the thirty three years since this significant development, DREs have become well-recognized figures on the landscape of the Catholic Church in the United States.

*(DRE: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, p. 3)*

The growing demands for educational and formational ministry by diverse groups in the parish require that religious education leaders be qualified to provide effective leadership. Excellence in religious education is most likely to happen when religious education leaders have the necessary competencies to provide knowledgeable and motivational leadership in all the areas that make up a complete religious education program.

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### ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEADER, CONT'D

These competencies are completely outlined in the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers: Parish Catechetical Leaders* written by the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership (NCCL) and approved by the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) Commission on Certification and Accreditation. These competency standards for parish leaders exist so that

**The fundamental task of catechesis...the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus instructed his disciples; he prayed with them; he showed them how to live; and he gave them his mission.**

*(National Directory for Catechesis, First Printing, USCCB, page 59)*

While it is evident that size has a tremendous impact on how ministry functions in a parish, it ought have no bearing on the foundational need for capable leadership in religious education. Regardless of its size, the parish should seek one or more qualified persons to oversee the ministry of religious education. On the one hand, when a smaller parish cannot afford such leadership on its own, sharing a religious education leader with another parish is a reasonable solution. Conversely, when a parish's catechetical programs grow larger in size and number, more than one leader with specific gifts may be needed.

Religious education leaders, regardless of the scope of their responsibilities or the size of the parish, must strive to approach this ministry of the Word in a professional and caring way. Donald G. Emler, in his book *Revisioning the DRE*, states:



To be a professional is to raise the practice of religious education above uninformed hunches. A professional educator will not chase a new fad technique or program because it is popular. To be a professional means that one can refer to theoretical principles and to relevant empirical research so as to adequately evaluate situations and ideas and be able to choose alternatives rather than blindly repeat previous actions.

(p.81)

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### DUTIES AND TASKS OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEADER

Ministry for and with the Word of God deserves professionally competent religious education leaders to carry out its specific responsibilities. *The primary task of the religious education leader is to faithfully proclaim Jesus who is the Christ and to pursue the mission of the church.* Those serving in the ministry and profession of religious education leader share in a wide variety of duties to achieve this primary task. The following is a small but representative list:

- ◆ Engage in programs or practices of continuing ministerial formation and lifelong personal growth. (1.3)
- ◆ Demonstrate an ability to discern the “signs of the times” and address current realities in the Church and the world in light of the Gospel. (2.6)
- ◆ Know and integrate into ministerial practice theologies of liturgy, worship and sacraments. (3.4)
- ◆ Exercise sound practices of compassionate pastoral care. (4.1)
- ◆ Develop and nurture the prayer life of the community in which one serves. (4.8)
- ◆ Insure the centrality of catechesis in the development of the parish as an evangelizing and catechizing community. (CL 4)
- ◆ Exercise effective supervision of catechetical employees and volunteers while fostering leadership abilities. (CL 7)

*(Competencies from the National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers)*