

## KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

### ASSUMPTIONS



Before listing the components of a comprehensive religious education program, please note the following key assumptions.

1. PARISHES COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, EACH WITH A UNIQUE SET OF ASSETS AND LIMITATIONS; THEREFORE EACH PARISH CATECHETICAL PROGRAM HAS A UNIQUE QUALITY.
2. A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM MUST BE TAILORED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PARISH IT SERVES.
3. PROGRAMS TAKE FIVE YEARS TO SHAPE.
4. DO NOTHING THE FIRST YEAR BUT LISTEN.
5. CATECHETICAL PROGRAMS MUST RESPOND TO THE COMPONENTS NOTED BELOW (PAGES 6-8).



## KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

### EIGHT COMPONENTS

#### 1. THE PROGRAM HAS A WELL-ARTICULATED MISSION AND VISION

A well-developed mission statement is the foundation of a quality religious education program. Equipped with this foundation, programming tasks will become more or less instinctive as they attempt to bring the mission/vision to life. This vision must find its roots in the Church's catechetical documents.

#### 2. THE PROGRAM HAS A WELL-DESIGNED CURRICULUM

The key to this component is a broad understanding of the term curriculum. Current Church teaching directs that our catechetical mission must take us beyond imparting information to include the development of conscience, values, and a Gospel-driven lifestyle. The curriculum, which gives the mission/vision shape and substance then, needs to be more than a "scope and sequence" that lists the information to be taught and when it will be taught. The curriculum also needs to identify the values and behaviors to be acquired. A good curriculum, therefore, is at the heart of program development. It seeks to translate the overarching goal of catechesis into sets of specific, measurable goals to be achieved at a particular age. The Diocese of Erie has mandated a curriculum for Kindergarten through Senior High School. It is included in this handbook.

#### 3. THE PROGRAM IS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE AND USES APPROPRIATE METHODS

The program's structure and, in particular, its curriculum need to match the capacities, learning styles, and readiness of the age group being catechized. This applies both to content as well as methods. Knowledge of developmental theory is especially important when selecting textbooks and other resources. It is particularly important in the selection of textbooks to remember that a publisher incorporates material as a part of a series. All the information in a particular series is related to all the other information in that grade level as well as to the grades that both precede and follow. It is poor practice and therefore not recommended, to allow catechists to select grade level books from different publishers based solely on personal preference.

## KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

### EIGHT COMPONENTS, CONT'D

#### 4. THE PROGRAM IS BASED ON NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Needs assessment takes place before implementing changes in programs or instituting new programs. It is a periodic process which seeks to discern various attitudes of the parish and its members. It involves tangible elements such as demographics and the socio-economic makeup of the parish. Much of the information necessary is readily available simply by attentive observation, interviews, reviewing parish records and consulting with other members of the parish team. It does not always require some sophisticated instrument or process. How one gathers information is not as critical as how it is used. In using the needs assessment to help shape the program, remember to stay within the parameters of catechetical ministry. Catechetical ministry cannot address all the needs or solve all the problems a parish might experience. Some needs must be addressed by other ministries and organizations in the parish. However, the structure of a program must never become an end in itself.

#### 5. THE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS ONGOING EVALUATION

Evaluation seeks continuous improvement of existing programs. Evaluation seeks to determine how well the goals established through the process of curriculum development have been achieved. The results of the evaluation will indicate if change is necessary. Unlike needs assessment, which is periodic, evaluation should be ongoing. If it is discerned early in the year that something is amiss, for example, a high degree of absenteeism in the youth program, one should not wait until the end of the year to address it. If through observation the leader realizes a particular catechist is not suited for a particular age group, some immediate attention may be necessary. Early detection of problems is the primary benefit of ongoing evaluation. Comprehensive yearly evaluation is also essential. Soliciting responses from the students, parents and catechists at the end of the year will provide a great deal of feedback to guide program development.

#### 6. THE PROGRAM RESPECTS THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY

Most parishes encompass a wide variety of family structures, each at a particular stage in the family life-cycle. A parish program must attempt to meet the needs of the majority of the members in any particular group of children, youth or adults. It must at the same time be aware of those with special needs and seek to respond with sensitivity and a sense of inclusiveness.

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### EIGHT COMPONENTS, CONT'D

#### 7. THE PROGRAM INCORPORATES PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS

A well-planned catechetical program includes a schedule for ongoing communication with parish leadership, parents, catechists and the parish at large as an integral part of the overall program. This attention to communication includes public relations: effective communication (brochures, letters, handbooks, etc.), effective oral communication (formal and impromptu speaking), and working with the media, all coordinated into a total plan of timely sharing of information. As Jesus taught, a candle is not lit and then put under a basket. A good public relations plan is the lampstand on which one places the catechetical program.

#### 8. THE PROGRAM UTILIZES ALL AVAILABLE CURRENT TECHNOLOGY

Today's children and youth are often described as the media generation. Effective program development today therefore, needs to take this into account. A good program will seek to incorporate the use of appropriate technology in its instructional material. The use of any technology such as videos, DVDs or the internet should always serve the purpose of the lesson and never be an end in itself.



*Adapted from Developing Parish Programs*