



SILLO'AM PROJECT

FOR THE FORMATION AND TRAINING
OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEADERS
AND MASTER CATECHISTS

SILLO'AM PROJECT

“As long as I am in the world,
I am the light of the world.”

As he said this,
he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle
and anointed the man's eyes with clay,
saying to him,
“Go wash in the pool of Silo'am” (which means Sent).

So he went and washed and
came back seeing.

(John 9:5-7)



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SILLO'AM PROJECT

MISSION STATEMENT

Forming religious education leaders to serve God's Reign with wisdom and integrity

VISION STATEMENT

A formation process which is flexible, accessible and rooted in the Catholic tradition of learning as a path to holiness

SILLO'AM PROJECT

OVERVIEW

The *SILLO'AM Project* is a process for the formation and training of religious education leaders and master catechists of the Diocese of Erie. It is an educational and formational process which is standards-based. Because this process is standards-based, individuals will advance at their own pace by engaging in a curriculum designed specifically to address each standard and by demonstrating mastery of the standard.

The term “Project” is employed specifically to emphasize the fluidity of the process as it serves leaders in the Diocese. In addition to its flexibility and accessibility, *SILLO'AM* is based on a firm foundation designed by national leaders of catechetical ministry, youth ministry, music ministry and lay ministry in the United States and approved by the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Commission on Certification and Accreditation*.¹

SILLO'AM is designed to be flexible and accessible. It is designed to engage leaders and catechists at a level that is appropriate for their background and previous formation. This principle of adult learning attempts to honor training and formation that may have been received through other programs or life situations. It is also designed with learning styles in mind so that participants will, in many cases, have curriculum options in how they choose to pursue mastery of a particular standard. Also, as noted above, the process is largely self-paced so individuals will have control (with some guidance) over the pace of the program in relation to the other important activities of their lives.

1. NALM, NCCL, NFCYM, NPM, *Revised National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*, 2011.

SILLO'AM PROJECT

KEY ELEMENTS

- 1) For religious educators
- 2) Flexible and accessible
 - a. Designed with learning styles in mind
 - b. Self-paced (with guidance)
 - c. A process which respects experience
 - i. Master Catechist option
 - ii. Religious Education Leader option
 - d. Curriculum options
- 3) Entry at a level appropriate to participant's background
- 4) Standards-based [*National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*]
 - a. Standards approved by the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's Commission on Certification and Accreditation*

KEY ROLES

- 1) The Participant
- 2) The Diocesan Advisor
- 3) The Formation Director

SILLO'AM PROJECT

KEY ELEMENTS DESCRIBED

1) For religious education leaders

The *SILLO'AM Project* is designed and organized by the Diocesan Department of Religious Education primarily to support pastors through the training and formation of parish religious education leaders. It is designed to respond to the admonition and challenge of Saint John Paul II in *Catechesi Tredendae*: ...the Church “is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel.” (CT #15) This *Project* operates with attention to the truism, *one cannot give what one does not have*.

2) Flexible and accessible

To understand the flexibility and accessibility of this program, please refer to the following headings:

- a. Designed with learning styles in mind
- b. Self-paced
- c. Scaled for Success
- d. Curriculum options

SILLO'AM PROJECT

KEY ELEMENTS DESCRIBED

2a) Designed with learning styles in mind

The *SILLO'AM Project* offers a variety of learning styles and options so that each participant can find avenues to be successful. The *Project* does not guarantee that every learning process will suit the participant's particular learning style, but within the overall program there are a variety of learning styles utilized.

2b) Self-paced (with guidance)

The *SILLO'AM Project* is designed so learners can move through the various curriculum items and Standards in a fashion designed by the participant and their Formation Director. While there is a specified path through the curriculum, participants are encouraged to choose curriculum directions based on specific parish needs or personal desires.

2c) Curriculum foundation

The *SILLO'AM Project* recognizes that people will come to the process with differing backgrounds. To accurately assess an individual's ability to succeed in *SILLO'AM*, each participant is expected to enter the process by completing a specific portion of the curriculum: overview courses in Scripture, Catholic Beliefs and Theological Reflection. These competencies are drawn from several of the Standards and create for the candidate a solid foundation.

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KEY ELEMENTS DESCRIBED

2ci) Standards Scaled for Success

Participants will cover most of the USCCB approved Standards with materials designed to promote success. The *SILLO'AM* process intends to challenge its participants because the Gospel always deserves our best effort. However, for *SILLO'AM*, this means meeting the individual where they are, no matter their background, and calling them more deeply into the community of pastoral leaders. It is the responsibility of the Formation Director to continually challenge participants in this formational process.

2cii) Master Catechist level

The *SILLO'AM Project* provides parish catechists with a highly flexible process to improve their skills as a catechist beyond the current catechist formation program. Catechists who successfully complete the *SILLO'AM Project* will be awarded a Master Catechist Certificate. This designation as Master Catechist would make them a clear choice for a “grade level coordinator” role in their parish. It would also entitle them to use the Administrator of Religious Education or Coordinator of Religious Education title were they to consider becoming a religious education leader at a future time.

2d) Curriculum options

The *SILLO'AM Project* recognizes that individuals have different learning styles. To accommodate people’s learning preferences, every effort has been made to provide access to differing formats of material, i.e., on-line options or reading options. All participants will be expected to spend time with a Formation Director who will assist the participant in integrating the information and skills they are learning.

SILLO'AM PROJECT

KEY ELEMENTS DESCRIBED

3) Program Entry

Silo'am Project participants will be interviewed by a Diocesan Advisor prior to enrolling. During this interview each participant will have the opportunity to discuss their previous educational and work experience. It should be noted that this discussion will not determine whether a particular Standard within a level has been met, since that is the responsibility of the Formation Director, but only to discern interest and initiate the foundation curriculum.

4) Standards-based

“Certification standards describe a profession’s focus and activities, the values to which it is committed and the responsibilities for which it is accountable.”² A curriculum designed to certification standards is attempting to educationally respond to a wide variety of issues related to knowledge, skills, and values. Success in a standards-based curriculum is determined by one’s ability to demonstrate an appropriate level of competency in each standard area. Revised *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* is divided into five Standards:

1) Human; 2) Spiritual; 3) Intellectual; 4) Pastoral; 5) Specialized.

This style of curriculum allows individuals to demonstrate competency in a particular Standard which they have learned or developed from other areas of life, making the curriculum flexible and yet still rigorous.

2. NALM, NCCL, NFCYM, NPM, *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*, 2006, p. ix.

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KEY ELEMENTS DESCRIBED

4 a) Standards approved by the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's Commission on Certification and Accreditation*

The standards that guide the formation process of the *SILLO'AM Project* have been developed by the *National Conference for Catechetical Leadership*, the *National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry*, the *National Association of Pastoral Musicians* and the *National Association for Lay Ministry*. These groups have submitted these Standards to the *USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation* and they have been approved. The *Commission on Certification and Accreditation* requires renewal of these National Standards every seven years.

SILLO'AM PROJECT

KEY ROLES DESCRIBED

1) The Participant

The participant's role is the most essential role in the *SILLO'AM Project*. This *Project* exists because there are dedicated and inspired men and women who wish to hand on the Good News of Jesus Christ. The *SILLO'AM Project* seeks to assist and form these men and women as leaders who can make Christ known and loved in the modern world with both competence and confidence.

2) Diocesan Advisor

This Advisor's role is filled by a member of the Department of Religious Education. The Advisor's role is to help participants navigate through the *SILLO'AM Project*. The Advisor will meet with each participant as they enroll in the Project and periodically throughout the process to assist participants. They will assist the participant with record keeping and any issues concerning the program. The Diocesan Advisor will also walk with the participant through the Foundation Curriculum assessing the completion of the competencies in this phase of the program.

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KEY ROLES DESCRIBED

3) Formation Director

The *SILLO'AM Project* promotes the pastoral and spiritual formation of participants as well as their educational progress. Upon successful completion of the Foundation Curriculum, each participant will be paired with a Formation Director who is easily accessible to them geographically when this is possible.

The role of the Formation Director is to meet with the participant on a schedule that is guided by the pace of the individual participant. This meeting will determine if the learning elements of the program are resulting in the successful completion of specific certification standards. The Formation Director will also determine where prior experience indicates that a particular standard has already been successfully achieved. The Formation Director, through discussion and dialogue, will help the participant integrate what they are learning with the process of pastoral practice. In the event that a particular learning activity has not led to the successful completion of a particular Certification Standard, the Formation Director may suggest other materials the participant may use to more completely develop a concept/issue for successful completion of the Standard.

The Formation Director's role is not that of a teacher. Curriculum content is provided either through reading material or on-line courses; the Formation Director is the person who guides the participant to recognize and integrate what is being learned with appropriate pastoral practice as articulated by the Certification Standards.

SILLO'AM PROJECT

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment in the *SILLO'AM Project* is accomplished by contacting a staff member in the Department of Religious Education to set up an appointment. (www.erieeled.org and click on “Staff”) or 814-824-1210

At the initial meeting the following will be covered:

1. Brief review of certification standards
2. A general overview of the curriculum
 - a. Assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes
 - b. Curriculum items required of all participants
 - c. Curriculum options where available
 - d. Writing expectations
3. Role of the Diocesan Advisor
 - a. Foundation Curriculum
4. Role of the Formation Director
 - a. Choosing a Formation Director
 - b. Pacing the program

SILLO'AM PROJECT

PROCESS

The following information is offered so that the participant's learning and formation process leads to improved pastoral practice as well as personal spiritual growth.

1) Consistent effort

Once having begun the *SILLO'AM* process, it is suggested that the participant exert a consistent effort to move through the various Standards. For example, if the reading option is chosen to complete a particular Standard, it is recommended that one plans to complete all the assignments within a time-frame similar to those who choose the on-line option (5 weeks for a single course or 10 weeks if two are required). This recommendation seeks to help participants avoid a situation where one feels that they will “never finish.”

2) Formation Director

The Formation Director is the essential key to successfully completing training and formation in the *Silo'am Project*. Meeting faithfully with the Formation Director and keeping the Formation Director apprised of progress is indispensable.

Sessions with the Formation Director will essentially be guided discussions. The Formation Director plays the vital role of tracking progress through the various Standards and, in the end, is the person who determines when a Standard has indeed been successfully completed. Each Standard has specific criteria which determine successful completion. In these directed and focused discussions, the Formation Director will be listening to discern that the appropriate content has not only been learned but also integrated into the participant's understanding, attitudes and behavior.

SILLO'AM PROJECT

PROCESS

2) Formation Director, cont'd

The Formation Director's role is not that of a teacher nor should it be confused with that of a mentor. The Formation Director is a compassionate yet discerning guide helping the participant to successfully meet the expectations of the Standards established for lay ministers in the Church. (see #4 concerning successful completion)

3) Admission Requirements:

Master Catechist process - one must be a certified catechist as recognized by the Diocese of Erie prior to admission to *Silo'am*.

Religious Education Leader – one must be hired in a parish as a religious education leader. It is recommended that diocesan catechist certification be completed prior to beginning the *Silo'am Project*.

4) Program Completion

The curriculum portions of the *Silo'am* process are accomplished by personal reading and writing, group reflection sessions and on-line courses with their accompanying writing requirements. The various curriculum tasks are tied to particular Standards so participants are assured that they will be exposed to a sufficient level of material to make Standard completion a reasonable assumption.

THIS CANNOT BE STRESSED HIGHLY ENOUGH: IN A STANDARDS-BASED PROCESS, THE COMPLETION OF A CURRICULUM OBJECTIVE (for example: taking a class) IS NOT AN AUTOMATIC COMPLETION OF THE STANDARD TO WHICH IT IS ASSOCIATED.

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PROCESS

4) Program Completion, cont'd

This distinction is important for two reasons:

- a) Always refer to the Standard(s) being referenced when pursuing a particular curriculum task. The book being read or the course being taken are not, in themselves, what is important. How this book or course helps one better understand the Standard is the key question.
- b) Success in the *Silo'am Project* is dependent on completion of the Standards, NOT the curriculum objectives. The Formation Director may ask a participant to complete other/or additional curriculum tasks to feel assured that the criteria of a particular Standard has been met.
- c) A final certificate of completion will be presented when all five standards have been successfully completed. Given that participants enter the *Silo'am Project* at different places (see section 2cii), the final certificate received will reflect the level at which the participant was reasonably challenged and still educationally successful. This decision will be made by the Director of Religious Education in consultation with the *Silo'am* Coordinator and the participant's Formation Director. This certificate will identify that the participant has successfully completed the *Silo'am Project* at the level which would allow them to use the Diocesan title of Coordinator of Religious Education or it will acknowledge completion at a level which will allow the participant to use the title of Administrator of Religious Education

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PROCESS

5) On-Line Learning

Listed below are some general thoughts for those who might be new to on-line learning (though specifics for an individual course may be different). The on-line learning programs used in the *Silo'am Project* are typically five or six weeks in length. Usually the first week is a setup week to ensure that all computer settings are working properly. The school will assist with this and is accustomed to working with people new to their courses. There is always a particular person responsible for the administration of the course which means there will always be someone with whom to communicate if questions arise.

Attention to the scheduling of these classes will impact choices about how to move through the various Standards.

The courses will typically consist of three elements. There will be reading, which may be presented on-line and printed if desired or it may have to be obtained locally or from an on-line bookstore. Written responses to questions will usually be required, although the length and details will depend on the course. Lastly, many courses ask that students participate in a “chat session.” These are hosted by the course facilitator/teacher through a service provided by the school. An on-line chat simply means that students participate in a conversation by typing questions or replies and it requires presence on-line at a specified time.

6) Reading Option

For those who are interested in participating in the *Silo'am Project* but who do not have access to the internet, there is the opportunity to complete the process using printed resources. These resources will be identified in the curriculum objectives for each Standard. Those choosing to use the reading option will be expected to submit written responses using a pre-determined format which is available on-line once the participant completes the Formation Curriculum.

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PROCESS

7) Reflection Group Participation

Participants will be expected to participate in an occasional *Reflection Group*. *Silo'am* participants will be provided with access to information about other participants so that groups of three or four can be formed by the participants and at the participant's and Diocesan Advisor's convenience.

8) Costs associated with the *Silo'am Project*

It is difficult to be specific about the actual costs because of the variety of options that are available within the *Silo'am Project*. Hopefully, the following breakdown will provide a general idea.

- a. **Participants** will be asked to purchase books for the various courses. This will allow the participant to develop a personal library of resources.
- b. **Parishes** are asked to pay for the tuition costs associated with on-line courses. These costs are in the \$70 to \$100 range per course. If the participant is choosing to complete *Silo'am* using the reading option the participant and the parish will negotiate the division of the cost of books.
- c. The **Diocese** will cover two costs. The Diocese will pay the annual registration fee at Notre Dame so all diocesan participants are eligible for discounted course fees. The Diocese will also cover the stipends to Formation Directors. *Silo'am* has an arrangement with the Diocesan Endowment Board to discount courses taken at the University of Dayton.