

Catechist Formation FAQ's for Pastors, Clergy and Parish Leaders

"Whatever be the level of his responsibility in the Church, every catechist must constantly endeavor to transmit by his teaching and behavior the teaching and life of Jesus."

Pope John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) #6

This website is directed towards pastors and parish leaders in children's catechesis, youth evangelization and RCIA/adult faith formation to help transition to our updated process of catechist formation in the Diocese of Phoenix. After consultation with parish leaders, pastors and specialists in catechesis, Bishop Olmsted approved our updated catechist formation process.

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I. ABOUT THE PROCESS

1. *What is a catechist? What levels of certification does the Diocese have for the certification of catechists and parish catechetical and youth evangelization leaders?*

- a. Volunteer Catechist:

A catechist is one, chosen by the pastor or his delegate, who helps others grow in their relationship with Christ by passing on the Deposit of Faith Christ left the Apostles.

After completing the course of catechist formation, Diocesan certification would mean that a catechist is qualified to pass on the Deposit of Faith to parishioners and other interested adults.

- b. Parish Catechetical and Youth Evangelization Leaders:

A leader in catechesis or youth evangelization is a person, publicly appointed by the pastor, with the responsibility of administering a particular parish program.

The two levels of parish leadership in catechesis and youth evangelization are:

1. Catechist Trainer:

After completing systematic catechetical formation on an undergraduate or certificate level (such as the Kino 'Prepare the Way' program) and catechist trainer formation, Diocesan certification means that the leader is qualified to form:

- a. Parish and school catechists.
- b. Catechetical/Youth Evangelization leaders in areas of specialization (specifically children's catechesis, youth evangelization and RCIA/Adult Faith Formation methodology).

2. Master Catechist:

After completing Master's level work in Catholic theology and catechist trainer formation, Diocesan certification means that the leader is qualified to form:

- a. Parish and School catechists.
- b. Catechetical/Youth Evangelization leaders in the areas of doctrine and in areas of specialization (specifically children's catechesis, youth evangelization and RCIA/Adult faith formation methodology).

2. Who falls under the definition of a catechist in our Diocese?

The Church's mission of catechesis is carried out primarily by the Bishops of the Church (General Directory for Catechesis #222), but also incorporates members of the entire Body of Christ. Catechesis is also the responsibility of priests, religious and the laity gathered in the parish community. John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) and the *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) recognize the calling of the laity to work as catechists.

In our Diocese, the definition of catechist includes the following:

- a. Catholic School Teachers
- b. Children's Catechesis Catechists
- c. Youth Evangelization Core Team
- d. RCIA/Adult Faith Formation Teams

3. What Church documents provide the guiding principles for catechist formation?

Since 1997, there has been a tremendous renewal in the catechetical documents of the Church. These documents include:

- a. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) – 1997
- b. General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) – 1997
- c. Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us – 1999
- d. National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) – 2005
- e. Compendium of the CCC -2006
- f. United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA) – 2006

Catechist formation in the Diocese of Phoenix has been updated to incorporate these documents in all aspects of catechist formation.

4. Why is it important to form and train catechists?

If a Catechist is to be capable of Passing on the Faith he/she must know it, understand it and live it. The GDC and NDC highlight the necessity of forming catechists:

“The quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel. The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists (GDC #234).”

“Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training (NDC p. 229).”

Formation of catechists begins with the Bishop and the Diocese.

“The organization of catechetical pastoral care has as its reference point the Bishop and the Diocese. The diocesan catechetical office is “the means which the Bishop as head of the community and teacher of doctrine utilizes to direct and moderate all the catechetical activities of the diocese” (GDC #265).”

5. *What are the major themes regarding Catechist Formation in the current catechetical documents?*

While not meant to be an exhaustive overview of the Church’s catechetical documents on catechesis and catechist formation, the following themes highlight what these documents are calling for in catechesis and catechist formation.

- a. Catechesis is Christ-Centered.

““The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ”. (236) All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ. Starting with the “initial” (237) conversion of a person to the Lord, moved by the Holy Spirit through the primary proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis seeks to solidify and mature this first adherence (GDC #80).”

- b. Catechesis today is to be missionary in nature.

“In this way catechesis, situated in the context of the Church's mission of evangelization and seen as an essential moment of that mission, receives from evangelization a missionary dynamic which deeply enriches it and defines its own identity. The ministry of catechesis appears, then, as a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus (GDC #59).”

- c. The Baptismal catechumenate, as the model for all catechetical activity, shows us the progressive nature of conversion.

“Post-baptismal catechesis, without slavishly imitating the structure of the baptismal catechumenate, and recognizing in those to be catechized the reality of their Baptism, does well, however, to draw inspiration from “this preparatory school for the Christian life”, (295) and to allow itself to be enriched by those principal elements which characterize the catechumenate (GDC #91).”

- d. Catechesis is to be Biblical, rooted in Salvation History.

“Catechesis should attend to the presentation of salvation history by means of Biblical catechesis so as to make known the “deeds and the words” with which God has revealed himself to man: the great stages of the Old Testament by which he prepared the journey of the Gospel; (359) the life of Jesus, Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary who by his actions and teaching brought Revelation to completion; (360) the history of the Church which transmits Revelation: this history, read within the perspective of faith, is a fundamental part of the content of catechesis (GDC #108).”

For its part, “Sacred Scripture should be the very soul of this formation (GDC #240)”.

- e. Formation in the Deposit of Faith is to be systematic and complete.

“So as to respond to the more profound needs of our time, adult catechesis must systematically propose the Christian faith in its entirety and in its authenticity (GDC #175).”

“The context of this (the catechist) doctrinal formation should be drawn from the various areas that constitute every catechetical programme; the three great eras in the history of Salvation: the Old Testament, the life of Christ and the history of the Church. The great nuclei of the Christian message: the Creed, the Liturgy, the moral life and prayer (GDC #240).”

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church remains the fundamental doctrinal reference point together with the catechism proper to the particular Church (GDC #240).”

- f. Catechesis prepares the person for deeper participation in the liturgical life of the Church.

“Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action (GDC #30)”

- g. Catechesis is directed towards “the love that never ends (CCC #25).”

GDC #238 talks about the importance of the witness of the catechist, of being able to articulate a relationship with Christ, of being formed with the skills and know-how of passing on the Faith, and of having a sense of witnessing for Christ, of spirituality and of apostolic consciousness.

6. *What are the goals of the new catechist formation process?*

The updated Catechist Formation process seeks to:

- a. Facilitate conversion in the life of the catechist.
- b. Impart to the catechist the story of salvation history, developing the foundation for Biblical catechesis.
- c. Provide the catechist with an overview of the Church’s mission of evangelization and catechesis.
- d. Train the catechist in the necessary skills to assist in conversion of those they serve and to pass on to them the teachings of Christ.
- e. Help catechists know the Deposit of Faith through a systematic and complete study of United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA).

7. *What are the underlying principles of the new catechist formation?*

The following principles help to shape the new catechist formation process:

- a. Christ calls the person to be a catechist.

The Lord Jesus invites men and women, in a special way, to follow him, teacher and formator of disciples. This personal call of Jesus Christ and its relationship to him are the true moving forces of catechetical activity (GDC #231).

- b. Catechists lead busy lives.

The biggest obstacle and challenge of the formation of catechists is time. Given family and work responsibilities, formation of catechists must be accessible.

- c. Adults learn best through a systematic, theme-based curriculum.

This updated process is driven by learning objectives, not by hours, and is systematic and progressive in how catechetical content is learned. The primary reason for this is so that adults can understand the interconnectedness of the Church's major catechetical themes. The previous catechist formation process was driven by hours, in that the goal of the formation was to expose the catechist to 60 hours of content, composed of classes that lasted anywhere between 2 and 4 hours. Classes in this model were not taken in any systematic process but as the catechist had time or the parish offered them. In order to accomplish an objective-based formation, a variety of methods, formats and models will be used to serve the learning styles of the catechist.

- d. The best presenter/trainer of the catechist is the parish/school leader.

This updated process seeks to empower the parish catechetical and youth evangelization to be the primary trainer of his/her catechists.

II. FORMING CATECHISTS

1. *How should pastors and parish leaders discern a person's calling to serve as a catechist in a parish?*

How pastors and parish leaders discern a person's call to serve as a catechist is up to their discretion. That being said, the following elements will assist in this process. The period of initial discernment is done by the catechetical or youth evangelization leader at the school/parish setting. The Kino Institute offers tools to assist the leader in this process, and parish leaders are encouraged to develop and share their own resources in this area.

- a. Potential catechists should meet individually with the parish leader for a get-to-know-you appointment.
- b. There should be an initial observation period by the leader, in which the leader should evaluate the suitability of the person to serve as a catechist.
- c. After this, there should be a formal interview and application at which point the person would either begin service as a catechist or, through prayerful discernment, be asked to serve elsewhere in the parish.
- d. At the outset, the catechist should receive an introductory training in the initial skills needed to catechize. Catechists are mandated to go through Diocesan Safe Environment training.
- e. There should also be a time for an evangelistic and spiritual retreat, preferably at the beginning of their service as a catechist, in which the catechist reflects on the call to follow Christ on a daily basis. Cursillo, Christ Renews His Parish, and the retreats offered by Renew are an example of this kind of retreat and would provide a great spiritual foundation for the catechist.

2. *What role does Scripture have in the catechist formation process?*

Scripture is the soul of doctrine. Catechist formation equips the catechist with an understanding of the key themes of Scripture. This formation helps to make Scripture the driving force behind their catechetical work, encouraging basic Biblical literacy.

3. *What role does the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA) have in the catechist formation process?*

After the Scriptures, the USCCA will be the text for the majority of the formation process. Each participant is expected to have his or her own copy of it. It is available at www.usccbpublishing.org.

4. *What are the courses in the new catechist formation process?*

An overview of the entire process is available on the Kino Institute website at <http://www.kinoinstitute.org/catechetical>.

Because of the systematic nature of doctrine, courses 101 to 103 and 201 to 205 are meant to be taken sequentially. Courses 104 and 105 can be taken at any time and out of order.

5. *What happens if a person misses a course or a session? Can they continue in the formation process? Do they have to wait until the next time that missed session is offered?*

As stated above, courses 101 to 103 and 201 to 205 are meant to be taken sequentially. If they miss a session, catechists are encouraged to find the course at another location by going to the Kino Institute website. To assist catechists when they miss a session, sessions are currently being recorded as part of a future resource to help catechists received session content. The nature of this resource has yet to be determined, but will more than likely include an online delivery system.

6. *Isn't catechesis supposed to be a person-to-person handing on of the Deposit of Faith? Don't online sessions take away from that?*

Because catechists lead busy lives, it is important to meet them in a way that is respectful of the demands on their lives. That being said, this process is objective-based, so any formation that happens online must be processed with an authorized catechist trainer. To assist in this dialogue, assessment tools on the objectives will be developed for each session.

7. *Do the assessment tools mean that there will be a test for each catechist to take in order to be certified?*

No. Assessment will be done by a certified catechist trainer in a one-on-one format for the purpose of assisting the catechist in the learning of the course and session objectives.

8. *Can non-catechists, including parents and any interested adult, attend these sessions?*

With the exception of the above courses that deal with catechesis (Cat 104, 105), all of the other sessions can be open to any interested adult where these sessions are offered.

Non-catechists are encouraged but not required to go through the process in a systematic manner.

9. *This formation process appears to be all about content. Will the formation sessions be simply intellectual?*

The purpose of the sessions is to allow for a deeper conversion in the life of the catechist. While there will not be one methodology that a presenter has to use, the methodology needs to facilitate conversion. Sessions will include time for instruction, application of the content to one's life, and prayer.

10. *How will the curriculum be formatted and offered?*

There is not one way the formation will be formatted. Courses can be offered in a variety of ways, depending upon the needs of the catechists. Some sample formats include weekend retreats, weeknight sessions and intensive summer courses.

11. *What additional elements will be part of catechist formation?*

In addition to the completion of the courses above, to be certified by the diocese as a catechist, one must also undertake the following:

- Renewal Experience/Retreat (as done in the discernment stage).
- Observation of an experienced catechist (mentor).
- Observation while functioning as a catechist by a mentor.
- Final Interview with leader.
- Completion of one year of catechetical experience.

12. *Do Catholic School Teachers who are not catechists have to go through elements of the process that don't directly impact them?*

Catholic School Teachers who are not responsible for catechizing are exempt from Cat 105 sessions 1-6 and the additional formation elements listed above.

13. *How long will the old process continue to be recognized?*

Applications in the old process will be accepted until June 30, 2012.

14. *For those trying to complete the old process, there are very few sites that offer courses in the old. Are there any equivalencies so that sessions in the new process can count towards the old?*

Sessions in the new formation process can be taken for those who are completing the old process. A list of equivalencies between the old and new process can be found on the Kino Institute Website at <http://www.kinoinstitute.org/catechetical>.

15. *Is there a cost to the new catechist formation process?*

Costs for formation are determined by each site that hosts the sessions. There will be a \$15 processing fee for completed applications turned in to the Kino Institute for final approval.

16. *When will catechist applications be processed and reviewed?*

While applications can be sent to the Kino Institute at any time, they will be reviewed as follows:

- September 1 of each year for Catholic School teachers.

- December 1 of each year for parish catechists.

17. Are the expectations for catechist recertification going to change? When does a certified catechist need to apply for recertification?

Catechist recertification will stay the same in terms of hours (24 hours over a three year period), however, there will be clarification added to the types of courses that will be accepted for catechist recertification. These requirements have not been finalized at this time.

18. Can certified catechists take the new formation process for recertification?

Yes. Previously certified catechists who take courses in the new formation process do not have to take them sequentially in order to receive credit for catechist recertification.

19. Does the Diocese offer catechist recertification sessions?

Yes. Kino 'Prepare the Way' courses can be taken individually and provide up to 15 hours of continuing education towards catechist recertification per course.

Other formation opportunities for catechist recertification currently include:

- Arizona Bible Class, with Kevin Saunders www.arizonabibleclass.com.
- Institute for Catholic Theology, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish www.theologyphoenix.com.

Other options will be publicized in the future.

20. What kind of equivalencies will exist for 'Echoes of Faith' and 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd'?

At this time, equivalencies for 'Echoes of Faith' and 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd' have not been determined. It remains a priority to establish these by June 30, 2012.

21. Where can I find a schedule of courses in the new process?

All of our schedules are posted on our Kino Institute website at <http://www.kinoinstitute.org/catechetical/catechist-certification-schedule> .

22. How can my parish offer this formation?

In order to offer this formation at your parish, please contact the Director for Parish Credentialing and Certification at the Kino Institute at 602-354-2300.

All formation must be presented by trainers who are approved for catechist formation in the Diocese of Phoenix.

III. QUALIFICATIONS OF CATECHIST TRAINERS

1. What are the qualifications for catechist trainers and presenters?

Catechist Trainers are to have the following qualifications:

- Kino 'Prepare the Way', BA or MA in Theology/Religious Education/Catechetics/Scripture/etc.
- Two to Three years catechetical and administrative experience
- References

All of this will be outlined in the Master Catechist/Catechist Trainer Certification process during the 2011-2012 year.

Formation can also be provided by priests (excluding cat 104 and 105, unless they have experience and training in catechesis).

2. *What training is provided for catechist trainers?*

Training qualified presenters in new formation process includes:

- One seminar day to cover principles and course objectives. Dates for these trainings will be made available as interested trainers are identified.
- Interview with Kino Institute coordinator.

As representatives of the Diocese, all presenters will be asked to take the 'Profession of Faith'.

3. *How much time will it take presenters to prepare for a session? What materials are provided for presenters?*

In order to assist in the process of session planning, the Kino Institute is providing for every session instructor notes, participant handouts and powerpoint slides. That being said, the amount of time preparing for sessions will vary from trainer to trainer.

4. *Why is the credentialing of parish leaders changing? When does this new process begin?*

Beginning in 2011-2012, 'Credentialing Guidelines for Catechetical and Youth Evangelization Leaders' will become the 'Master Catechist Certification Guidelines'. The standards inherent in the credentialing process will remain, but a few important changes will take place. In particular:

- Credentialed 'Director' becomes 'Master Catechist'
- Credentialed 'Coordinator' becomes 'Catechist Trainer'

This change of name eliminates a common tension between the diocesan offices and pastors that credentialing has often inadvertently caused. Many times pastors have given the title 'director' to an employee when the diocesan office has given the credentialing title of 'coordinator' that person. The change in titles will more clearly identify what the leader does in light of the our diocesan offices' task to form catechists.

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For more information, or if you are interested in becoming a host site for this process, please contact Eric Westby at ewestby@diocesephoenix.org.