

Standard Operation Procedures

To offer feedback on the Standard Operating Procedures, scan the QR code below or click the link provided. The feedback form is designed to capture comments for one page or section. Feel free to return to the form as often as necessary.

Feedback will also be taken at each of the Zoom meetings throughout the year.

Thank you.

<https://bridgeport.leadlms.com/questionnaires/52>



1 **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

2 This initial draft is an attempt to help parish leaders know the *how* when it comes to offering
3 formation opportunities in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

4 It is not a discussion of the *why*. Nor is it promulgated policy. Each pastoral situation is different.
5 The purpose of this document is to help parishes achieve consistency and a spirit of hospitality,
6 while offering opportunities for growth and education to all of God’s children.

7 The suggested mandatory policies for parish faith formation programs are in bold. Once approved,
8 these are to be observed in all parishes throughout the Diocese.

9

1 **WHAT IS A STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE?**

2 A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is a detailed, written set of instructions designed to guide
3 individuals through a specific task or process. It outlines step-by-step actions, protocols, and
4 standards to ensure consistency, accuracy, and compliance with regulations. SOPs are commonly
5 used in organizations to ensure that processes are carried out efficiently, uniformly, and safely,
6 regardless of who performs the task. They are essential for maintaining quality control, meeting
7 regulatory requirements, and reducing the likelihood of errors.

8

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10

1 **STAGES OF FORMATION**

2 **Remote Preparation**

3 Remote preparation begins in early childhood, when the child is still at home and before formal
4 schooling begins. During this phase, children are introduced to the foundational teachings of the
5 Church, the sacredness of the liturgy, and the concept of God as a friend and companion. This stage
6 involves active participation in family and community life, engagement in early childhood
7 programs, and ongoing catechesis, setting a solid groundwork for future development.

8 **Proximate Preparation**

9 Proximate preparation typically starts when a child enters formal education – either in preschool or
10 kindergarten. It involves comprehensive catechesis on the teachings of the Church, the life of Jesus,
11 Sacred Scripture, and developing a moral life.

12 Proximate preparation is ongoing, lifelong, and should be woven throughout the fabric of a parish.
13 Formation does not end with the reception of a sacrament and parishes **must** ensure that
14 opportunities for discipleship are many and varied.

15 **Immediate Preparation**

16 Immediate preparation, for the purposes of this document, refers to sacramental preparation that
17 takes place just before the reception of a sacrament. For young children who reach the age of
18 reason, immediate preparation may involve a few workshops, classroom activity, and role playing.
19 For parents of young children, this is an opportunity for age-appropriate catechesis for parents and
20 caregivers, as well as a chance for spiritual formation and a sacramental check-in to ensure that
21 parents and guardians are themselves, up to date in their own sacramental journey.

22 For older children preparing for the sacrament of confirmation, more may be required, but
23 attention **must** be given so that immediate preparation *subsidizes* proximate preparation and does
24 not replace it.

25 The parish community plays a crucial role during this time, providing support and guidance to
26 ensure the child is spiritually ready for the sacraments he/she will receive.

1 **FORMATION AND SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

2 Ongoing faith formation and sacramental preparation, while both essential to the life of a Catholic
3 young person, serve distinct roles in their spiritual journey.

4 Ongoing faith formation is a continuous, lifelong process that fosters a deeper relationship with
5 Christ and a growing understanding of the Catholic faith. It spans the entirety of a person's life,
6 providing the foundation for living out their faith in everyday life, developing virtues, and engaging
7 in the Church's mission.

8 In contrast, sacramental preparation is a more focused, short-term process aimed specifically at
9 preparing individuals for the reception and celebration of a particular sacrament, such as First
10 Communion, Confirmation, or Reconciliation. It centers on the theology, rituals, and spiritual
11 significance of the sacrament to ensure readiness for the grace that it imparts.

12 While ongoing faith formation helps to form the Catholic identity over time, sacramental
13 preparation ensures that individuals fully understand and appreciate the sacrament they are about
14 to receive.

15 Both are integral, complementing each other in the lifelong journey of faith.

16 It is essential that parish catechetical leaders understand this and that this message is
17 communicated often to parents of those enrolled in formation.

1 **ELIGIBILITY FOR FAITH FORMATION**

2 Eligibility for faith formation at a Catholic parish generally depends on several factors, and the
3 specific rules might vary from parish to parish. Here’s a general guideline:

4 **Baptized Catholics:**

- 5 ○ Individuals who have been baptized in the Catholic Church are typically eligible.
- 6 ○ This includes children, youth, and adults.

7 **Non-Baptized Persons:**

- 8 ○ Non-baptized persons interested in the Catholic faith, often participating in the Rite of
9 Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) or a similar program for children.

10 **Members of the Parish:**

- 11 ○ Generally, members of a specific parish or those willing to become members can participate
12 in the faith formation programs.

13 **Age Groups:**

- 14 ○ Different age groups, usually starting from preschool age, going through adulthood.
15 Programs are often tiered as:
 - 16 ○ Children’s Catechesis
 - 17 ○ Youth Ministry
 - 18 ○ Adult Faith Formation

19 **Individuals Seeking Sacraments:**

- 20 ○ Individuals preparing for sacraments like Confirmation, Eucharist, or Reconciliation, even if
21 they are older.

22 **People from Other Christian Denominations:**

- 23 ○ Individuals from other Christian denominations who are interested in converting to
24 Catholicism or learning more about the faith.

25 **Special Cases:**

- 26 ○ In some instances, eligibility might be extended to non-Catholics interested in learning
27 about the faith, but not necessarily intending to convert.

28 **Parents and Families:**

- 29 ○ Parents and families participating in programs aimed at family or parental faith formation,
30 or programs designed to help them catechize their children.

31 **Individuals with Special Needs:**

- 32 ○ Inclusive programs might be available that cater to individuals with special needs, ensuring
33 accessibility to faith formation.

34

1 **Catechists and Volunteers:**

- 2 ○ Those willing to serve as catechists or volunteers, often participating in specific formation
3 processes themselves.

4 **Confirmation and Continuing Education:**

- 5 ○ Individuals, especially adults, looking for confirmation or continuous religious education to
6 deepen their faith.

7 All parishes are encouraged to clearly outline all that is offered for each age group on their website
8 and in regular parish communications.

9

1 **CROSS-PARISH FORMATION**

2 When a family is unable to participate in the formation program schedule at their local parish, and
3 the parish is unable to meet their specific needs, parish staff should take the initiative to assist in
4 establishing a cross-parish formation plan. Collaborating with neighboring parishes to share
5 resources is essential in providing a solution that not only meets the needs of the family but also
6 enhances the Church’s mission to evangelize and nurture lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

7 If formation is for immediate prep for a sacrament, the **pastor of the original parish should give**
8 **consent.**

1 **ENROLLMENT PROCESS**

2 Enrollment should be a **welcoming and accessible** process. It is crucial to have well-informed and
3 available staff, complemented by clear communication through parish bulletins, announcements,
4 and websites. These are effective methods to invite families into our parish and guide them through
5 the enrollment process for both parish membership and formation programs.

6 **Enrollment should be year-round and ongoing, with no cut-off dates, ensuring that all**
7 **families can participate.** Providing clear documentation, such as parish and formation registration
8 forms, along with a list of required materials, will assist both staff and families during enrollment.
9 This preparation helps address any eligibility questions that may arise, ensuring a smooth and
10 welcoming experience for all.

11 If, for pastoral or safety reasons, a parish deems it necessary to close registration, that parish **must**
12 notify The Institute for Catholic Formation and neighboring parishes. This is essential so that other
13 parishes may prepare to meet the needs of those who may seek formation.

14

1 **FORMATION OUT OF SEQUENCE**

2 From time to time, parishes will be approached by families whose children have not been enrolled
3 in ongoing formation. Reasons for this vary and, in many cases, are not as important as how to help
4 young people catch up.

5 Every parish **must** have a plan in place to assist families whose children have missed ongoing
6 formation. This may include volunteers who tutor students or small group formation opportunities
7 for those within one or two grades of each other, or even summertime take-home work that
8 families can do together.

9 In many cases, parishes can work together to help group those who find themselves in this
10 situation. Every effort must be made to help families feel welcomed and to assist the children in
11 formation.

1 **FAMILY HANDBOOK**

2 Each parish should **maintain a comprehensive policy handbook** that clearly outlines important
3 procedures and guidelines for parents and guardians. This handbook should include:

- 4 ○ Overview of the program
- 5 ○ Calendar for the year
- 6 ○ List of contact information for parents
- 7 ○ Policies for inclement weather
- 8 ○ Attendance expectations
- 9 ○ Clear instructions for the safe and secure pick-up of children*
- 10 ○ Dress codes
- 11 ○ Discipline policy
- 12 ○ Emergency contact procedures
- 13 ○ Health and safety protocols
- 14 ○ Ways parents can be involved

15 **It is not a requirement of the Bridgeport Diocese to ask who will pick up children; however, if you*
16 *choose to inquire, **you must ensure** that the child is only released to the person indicated on the form.*

17

1 **FAITH FORMATION TEXTS**

2 When selecting catechetical materials for use within parishes, it is essential to ensure that **only**
3 **approved texts** from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) are utilized. These
4 texts have been carefully reviewed and endorsed by the USCCB to align with the teachings and
5 doctrinal standards of the Catholic Church.

6 To access the most up-to-date list of approved catechetical materials, please refer to the official
7 website of the USCCB <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catechism/conformity-review-list>.
8 Utilizing these approved resources guarantees that catechetical instruction is both accurate and
9 faithful to the Church's mission of evangelization.

10

1 **HOME SCHOOLING**

2 The Diocese of Bridgeport recommends in-person faith formation at all grade levels to foster a
3 strong sense of community and engagement. However, if a parish, out of pastoral concern, chooses
4 to offer homeschooling as an option, it **must establish a clear policy** outlining the requirements
5 and expectations for this mode of instruction. This policy should detail:

- 6 ○ the curriculum to be used
- 7 ○ the frequency of check-ins with parish staff
- 8 ○ accountability measures for progress
- 9 ○ the involvement of parents in the faith formation process.

10 Parish leaders should also **ensure that homeschooled children are integrated** into the
11 sacramental preparation and parish life.

12

1 **BUDGET AND FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

2 Each year, the PCL/Director of Religious Education is responsible for proposing a budget to the
3 Pastor and Parish Finance Council. There is **no diocesan mandate** that this budget cover the costs
4 of religious education programs, as well as staff and volunteer enrichment and development
5 initiatives. Once reviewed by the Parish Finance Committee and approved by the Pastor, this budget
6 serves as the foundation for the program's implementation.

7 Parents contribute to the cost of their children’s parish catechetical program through tuition and
8 fees, which are determined by the Director of Religious Education. However, **no child should be**
9 **excluded** from the program due to financial hardship.

10

1 **SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS**

2 Sacramental preparation should be **fully integrated** into the Catholic school’s religious education
3 curriculum. This ensures that students receive a comprehensive understanding of the sacraments
4 as part of their overall faith formation.

5

6 **Collaboration with Parish Programs**

7 Even though Catholic school students receive religious education within the school, there should be
8 **close collaboration** between the school and the parish. This ensures that the preparation aligns
9 with the parish’s sacramental programs and that students are fully integrated into the sacramental
10 life of the parish community. While proximate preparation for a sacrament may occur at a Catholic
11 school, pastors **may require** that students attend immediate preparation for a sacrament at the
12 parish.

13

14 **Involvement of Parents and Families**

15 Parents and families play a crucial role in the sacramental preparation process. Schools should
16 provide resources and opportunities for parents to be involved, such as meetings, workshops, and
17 family activities related to the sacraments.

18

19 **Participation in Parish Sacramental Celebrations**

20 Catholic school students will celebrate all their sacraments **within the parish**, unless permission is
21 granted by the Bishop to do otherwise. This practice reinforces the essential connection between
22 the school and the broader parish community, emphasizing that sacraments are celebrated within
23 the communal context of the entire Church.

24

25 **Ongoing Formation**

26 Sacramental preparation is not just about receiving the sacraments, but also about ongoing
27 formation. Catholic schools should ensure that students continue to receive catechesis after
28 receiving the sacraments, fostering a deeper understanding and living out of their faith.

29

30 **Consistency with Diocesan Guidelines**

31 All sacramental preparation in Catholic schools **must be consistent** with diocesan guidelines and
32 the directives of the bishop. This ensures that the teachings and practices are in line with the
33 broader Church.

1 **DIOCESAN CONSENT AND RELEASE**

2 Since 2022, the Diocese of Bridgeport has **required** the use of the **Diocesan Consent and Release**
3 form, approved by diocesan legal department and the office of safe environments.

4 This form, available online, includes:

- 5 ○ Medical release
- 6 ○ Liability release
- 7 ○ Photography permission
- 8 ○ Emergency contact information
- 9 ○ Personal electronic device permission

10 These forms are available in four formats:

- 11 ○ Paper (English and Spanish)
- 12 ○ Online (fill and print, then sign)
- 13 ○ Via Link (parent fills, signs, and parishes access information online)
- 14 ○ Incorporated in LEAD registration

15

1 **SACRAMENTAL REPORTING**

2 **Recording Baptism**

3 The Sacrament of Baptism **must be recorded** in the parish Baptism register promptly after the
4 celebration. The entry should include the following information:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 5 Name of the Baptized: Last, First, Middle | 10 Place of Baptism: City, State |
| 6 Date of Birth | 11 Father’s Full Name |
| 7 Place of Birth: City, State | 12 Mother’s Full Maiden Name |
| 8 Date of Baptism | 13 Sponsor(s)/Witness Full Names |
| 9 Church of Baptism | 14 Name of the Minister |

15

16 The Baptism register serves as the “master record” for an individual's membership and Sacrament
17 history (CIC 83: c. 535, § 2). All entries **must** be in black ink and legible.

18 The Baptism register should also include notations for the reception of later Sacraments such as:

- 19 ○ Date of First Communion, Church, Place (City, State)
- 20 ○ Date of Confirmation, Church, Place (City, State)
- 21 ○ Marriage(s) (including convalidations)
- 22 ○ Profession of Vows
- 23 ○ Reception of Holy Orders

24 Other notations, such as a Declaration of Nullity, restrictions on future marriages, laicization from
25 the Diaconate or Priesthood, and dispensation from vows, should be entered when formally
26 requested by authorized officials.

27 A certificate of Baptism should be issued to the child’s parents, and they should be informed that
28 the parish where the child is baptized will be the **parish of record**.

29 For children baptized in an emergency, the Baptism is recorded at the parish with jurisdiction (e.g.,
30 the parish within whose boundaries the hospital is located). If the Ritual of Baptism is later
31 performed at the home parish, the Baptism will be recorded there with a notation regarding the
32 circumstances.

33 For purposes of registration, parishes are encouraged to ask for a Baptism certificate **only once**.
34 Those records should be maintained for all future sacraments.

35

36

1 **Recording Confirmation**

2 The Sacrament of Confirmation **must be recorded** in the parish Confirmation register as soon as
3 possible after the celebration (CIC 83: c. 895). The entry should include the following information:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 4 Name of the Confirmed: LAST, First, Middle | 10 Place of Baptism: City and State |
| 5 Confirmation Name | 11 Residence: Street Address, City, State |
| 6 Date of Confirmation | 12 Father’s Full Name |
| 7 Minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation | 13 Mother’s Full Maiden Name |
| 8 Date of Baptism | 14 Sponsor(s) Name(s) |
| 9 Church of Baptism | |

15

16 A record of the Sacrament of Confirmation **must be sent to the parish of Baptism**, and a notation
17 **must** be made in the Baptism register.

18 Confirmation can only be celebrated once and is typically verified by a Confirmation certificate, a
19 recent Baptism certificate with notations, or a letter from the Pastor of the Church where the
20 Sacrament occurred. If these documents are unavailable, the testimony of one reliable witness (e.g.,
21 the sponsor) suffices. For those who were at least seven years old with the use of reason at the time
22 of Confirmation, their own sworn statement is acceptable proof.

23

1 **Recording First Eucharist**

2 The Sacrament of Eucharist **must** be recorded in the parish First Communion register as soon as
3 possible after the celebration. If the child received both Baptism and Holy Eucharist at the same
4 parish, a notation **must** also be made in the Baptism register. If the child was baptized at another
5 parish, the Pastor **may** send notification of First Communion to the parish of Baptism.

6 The entry in the First Communion register should include

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 7 | Name of the Recipient: LAST, First, Middle | Date of Birth |
| 8 | Place of Birth: City and State | Age (at time of reception) |
| 9 | Date of Baptism | Church of Baptism |
| 10 | Place of Baptism: City and State | Residence: Street Address, City, State |
| 11 | Father's Full Name | Mother's Full Name |

12

13 A certificate of First Communion **should be issued** to the parents of the child.

14

1 **Recording First Penance**

2 The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is not recorded in a parish register. To foster an
3 appreciation for the Sacrament of Penance, parish leaders should provide several opportunities
4 throughout the year for its reception, especially during Advent and Lent.

5 Since the sacrament is a private one, there is to be **no certificate issued and no public listing** of
6 those who may or may not have celebrated this sacrament.

7

1 **RETREATS AND FIELD TRIPS**

2 Retreats and field trips may be organized to enhance the catechetical program and broaden the
3 religious experiences of children.

4 A signed permission form from the child’s parent(s), legal guardian(s), or the parent with legal
5 custody **is required** prior to the child’s participation in any field trip. Off-site events are **not**
6 **covered** by the Diocesan Consent and Release.

7 Every event **must be adequately supervised** to ensure the safety and well-being of all
8 participants.

9 Whenever possible, bus transportation **should be used**, and the carrier **must** be listed on the
10 Diocesan Vendor Insurance List (refer to the diocesan website for the current list). If Church
11 personnel, youth, or parents use their vehicles to transport children, drivers or vehicle owners
12 **must provide** proof of current liability, medical, and uninsured motorist insurance coverage.

13 **Overnight Events**

14 Overnight events, such as retreats and lock-ins, require the permission of both the Pastor and the
15 Office of Safe Environments. These events **must have adequate supervision**, with all supervisors,
16 including volunteers, complying with the policies established by the Office of Safe Environment.

17 Parents have the right to opt out of overnight events, and a suitable alternative for fulfilling faith
18 formation requirements **must** be provided.

19 Please see the diocesan policies regarding safe environments for complete details. This list is not
20 comprehensive.

- 21 ○ No adult-youth interactions should occur within sleeping quarters.
- 22 ○ Adults **must** not be alone with a child in a sleeping facility, restroom, dressing room, or any
23 other isolated area inappropriate for a ministry relationship. If an adult volunteer **must**
24 enter a sleeping area with young people, a second adult volunteer **must** be present.
- 25 ○ Unrelated adults **must** never share a bed with a child. If adults and children share a hotel or
26 sleeping room, the adult **must** have a separate bed, using a rollaway, cot, or other bedding if
27 necessary.
- 28 ○ Chaperones/Supervisors are responsible for establishing and enforcing a curfew during
29 overnight activities.
- 30 ○ Chaperones/Supervisors **must** regularly check rooms after curfew to ensure that young
31 people remain in their rooms.
- 32 ○ A designated Chaperone **must** be on watch throughout the night in a specific location,
33 responsible for monitoring sleeping arrangements, especially where adults are present with
34 minors.

35 *All employees and volunteers in the Diocese of Bridgeport who have substantial contact with children*
36 *are required to fully comply with the Policy on the Protection of Children/Young People and*
37 *Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and/or Child Abuse. Details on compliance requirements can be*
38 *found on the diocesan website: <https://www.Bridgeportdiocese.org/child-protection/>.*

39

1 **CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS**

2 All clearances **must** be regularly updated according to Diocesan policy.

3 The Director of Religious Education (DRE) is responsible for maintaining records for catechists and
4 ensuring that all background checks are renewed as required.

5 No one may begin ministry involving children until **all necessary clearances** have been obtained.

6

1 **CODE OF CONDUCT**

2 The Diocese of Bridgeport enforces a uniform *Code of Conduct* to create safe environments for
3 children. This Code clearly outlines unacceptable behaviors and ensures proper monitoring in
4 environments where youth are present.

5 These guidelines apply to all diocesan, parish, and Catholic school activities within the Diocese
6 where youth are present.

7 All adults involved in work, ministry, or volunteer service within the Diocese are expected to
8 adhere to these guidelines.

9 Violations of the Code of Conduct are serious matters and will be investigated and addressed
10 according to diocesan policy.

11 In 2020, a newly revised Policy and Procedures Relating to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by
12 Priests or Deacons or by Lay Employees or Volunteers was issued. This policy is in full accordance
13 with state and federal laws and meets the Standards set forth in the Charter for the Protection of
14 Children and Young people. All clergy, employees, volunteers and contract employees of the
15 Diocese of Bridgeport will receive a copy of the policy.

16 <https://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/safe-environments/safe-environments-handbook/>.

17

1 **MANDATED REPORTING LAWS**

2 A mandatory reporter includes any individual, whether paid staff or volunteer, who is a regular
3 participant in programs, activities, or services involving children, and who accepts responsibility
4 for a child. This also includes anyone supervised or managed by a mandated reporter. A child is
5 defined as anyone under the age of eighteen. Key roles such as Directors of Religious Education, Lay
6 Faith Formation Ministers, Catechists, and Coaches are all mandatory reporters.

7 Mandated Reporters **are required by law to report** directly to D.C.F. or to the Police any suspicion
8 of abuse of a minor, risk of injury to a minor, child pornography, exploitation or neglect. This
9 document is in addition to CT mandated reporting guidelines.

10 *As of Oct. 2015, mandated reporters who fail to report suspected abuse of a minor or risk of injury*
11 *within **12-hours** of becoming aware, will be reported to the Chief State's Attorney and may be charged*
12 *with a felony. Third party information is reportable to D.C.F. and proof is not a requirement for*
13 *reporting.*

14 All information will be handled with a high level of confidentiality however full anonymity cannot
15 be guaranteed in cases involving abuse of a minor. Mandated Reporters **must complete a written**
16 **report** within 48-hours.

17

18 Steps for reporting an incident are found here: [https://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/safe-](https://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/safe-environments/report-an-incident-of-abuse/)
19 [environments/report-an-incident-of-abuse/](https://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/safe-environments/report-an-incident-of-abuse/).

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1 **GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ASSIST IN CATECHESIS OR PARISH ACTIVITIES**

2 **Formation and Training**

3 Young people should receive proper formation and training before they begin assisting in
4 catechesis or parish activities. This includes understanding the basics of the faith, the purpose of
5 the activities they are helping with, and how to effectively engage with younger children or peers.

6 **Supervision and Mentorship**

7 Young assistants should always work under the supervision of an experienced adult catechist or
8 parish staff member. Mentorship is important to guide them in their role and to help them grow in
9 their own faith journey.

10 **Age-Appropriate Roles**

11 The roles assigned to young people should be appropriate for their age and maturity level. Tasks
12 may include helping to organize materials, assisting in leading prayers, or serving as role models
13 for younger children.

14 **Commitment and Responsibility**

15 Young people should be encouraged to take their role seriously, understanding the importance of
16 their contribution to the parish community. They should be punctual, reliable, and respectful in
17 their duties.

18 **Participation in Ongoing Faith Formation**

19 Even while assisting, young people should continue their own faith formation, participating in
20 catechetical sessions, youth groups, or other parish programs designed for their spiritual growth.

21 **Safety and Conduct**

22 Young people should be briefed on the importance of maintaining a safe environment for all
23 participants. This includes understanding and adhering to the parish's policies on child protection
24 and appropriate conduct.

25

26 These guidelines aim to ensure that young people who assist in catechesis or other parish activities
27 are well-prepared, supported, and able to contribute meaningfully to the life of the parish while
28 continuing to grow in their own faith.

29

1 **Communication Guidelines for Catechists**

2 Catechists are encouraged to maintain open and respectful communication with parents, as this is
3 vital to supporting the religious education of their children. Effective communication ensures that
4 parents are involved and informed about their child's progress and participation in catechetical
5 programs.

6 **Communication with Parents**

7 Catechists should regularly communicate with parents regarding their child's progress, upcoming
8 events, and any concerns. This can be done through newsletters, emails, or direct conversations.

9 **Confidentiality**

10 All communication **must** respect the confidentiality of the student and their family. Sensitive issues
11 should be handled discreetly, and information should only be shared with those who have a need to
12 know in accordance with diocesan safe environment and mandated reporting guidelines.

13 **Boundaries and Professionalism**

14 Catechists are expected to maintain professional boundaries in all communications with students
15 and parents. Communication should be appropriate and focused on the catechetical mission.

16 **Use of Technology**

17 When utilizing electronic communication (e.g., emails, social media), catechists **must** adhere to
18 parish or diocesan guidelines, ensuring that all interactions are transparent and compliant with
19 safe environment policies.

20 There is **no diocesan policy** prohibiting communication between a catechist and parents. If a
21 catechist chooses to communicate with parents, the following **must be followed**:

- 22 ○ Use of blind carbon copy to protect contact information of others
- 23 ○ Emails **must** be professional in nature and only related to faith formation activities
- 24 ○ The pastor and/or DRE **must** be copied on all communication
- 25 ○ Communication should be consistent and never include inappropriate information, personal
26 sharing, or names of minors

27 For parishes using LEAD for registration, the use of email and texting is built in to the diocesan
28 platform.

29 Catechists (and all parish leaders) **are prohibited** from emailing and texting minors directly.
30 Instead, the use of a third-party application is required (LEAD, Flocknotes, Remind).

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1 **FAITH FORMATION RECORD RETENTION**

2 Student registration, medical forms, and attendance records for each program year **must be**
3 **retained** for 50 years. Parishes have the option to scan these records and save them to a USB drive,
4 as there is **no requirement** to maintain them in paper format.

5 **Attendance Records**

6 These can be either the original handwritten roll or an end-of-year summary from ParishSoft.
7 Please note that ParishSoft does not retain records for the required 50-year period, so the summary
8 **must** be printed and scanned for long-term storage.

9 **Physical Records**

10 If a parish decides to keep physical records, they **must** be stored in clearly labeled boxes indicating
11 the program year. These boxes should be kept in a locked, weather- and fire-proof area. However,
12 this method is not recommended for long-term retention.

13 **Digital Records**

14 If the parish chooses to scan documents, the PDF files should be clearly named to include the parish
15 name, program year, and type of record. For example:

16 StAugustine.2023.2024.attendancerecords

17 StAugustine.2024.2025.registrationrecords

18 Once the records have been scanned, the USB drive should be placed in an envelope labeled with
19 the corresponding program year. This envelope should then be securely stored in the same safe as
20 the sacramental record books

21 For further information, please contact the Diocese of Bridgeport Institute for Catholic Formation.

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1 **MULTICULTURAL AND BILINGUAL CATECHESIS**

2 The Diocese of Bridgeport is home to many parishes that are multicultural and bilingual. To
3 effectively serve these diverse communities, it is essential to foster knowledge, hospitality, and
4 intercultural skills that promote unity and support the Church’s mission of evangelization. As stated
5 in the *Directory for Catechesis*, “As part of evangelization, inculturation inserts the Gospel message
6 into cultures...It is the process by which catechesis takes flesh in the various cultures” (DC 43).

7 **Unified Programs for Multicultural/Bilingual Communities**

8 Parishes should strive to serve multicultural and bilingual communities through unified programs
9 that maintain the integrity of faith formation. Catechetical programs **must** ensure that the full
10 content of the faith is conveyed without allowing cultural elements to obscure or compromise the
11 deposit of faith.

12 **Language Considerations**

13 Religious education should be offered in the primary language of the students, whether they are
14 adults or children. In cases where parents and children speak different primary languages (e.g.,
15 parents speak Spanish, while children speak English), bilingual resources should be made available.
16 Frequent communication with parents is crucial to ensure they understand what their children are
17 learning and can support their faith formation.

18 **Key Guidelines for Multicultural Catechesis**

- 19 ○ Respect for Cultural Diversity: Multicultural catechesis emphasizes the importance of
20 recognizing and respecting the cultural diversity within our Church community. It involves
21 valuing the different cultural expressions of faith that individuals bring to the community.
- 22 ○ Incorporation of Cultural Elements: Catechetical programs should integrate elements from
23 various cultures to make Church teachings accessible and relevant to people from diverse
24 backgrounds. This may include using cultural symbols, languages, and traditions in
25 catechetical materials and practices.
- 26 ○ Promotion of Unity in Diversity: While acknowledging cultural differences, multicultural
27 catechesis seeks to promote unity within the Church. It highlights the shared faith and
28 identity of all Catholics as members of the universal Church.
- 29 ○ Adaptation of Catechetical Methods: Catechetical methods should be adaptable to different
30 cultural contexts, ensuring that the Gospel message is effectively communicated and
31 understood across various cultural settings.
- 32 ○ Formation of Catechists: Catechists should receive training that equips them to engage with
33 cultural diversity. This includes developing cultural sensitivity and the ability to present the
34 faith in ways that resonate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.
- 35 ○ Focus on Inculturation: Multicultural catechesis involves the process of inculturation, where
36 the Gospel message is conveyed in a way that is meaningful and transformative within a
37 particular culture, while preserving the integrity of the Catholic faith.

38 These guidelines ensure that catechesis is inclusive and reflective of the cultural richness within
39 our Church, fostering a deeper understanding and unity among all members of the faith community.

40

1 **RESPONSIBILITIES FOR FAITH FORMATION**

2 The Great Commission extends to all baptized persons, commanding them to “Go forth and teach all
3 nations.” From the first proclamation of the Gospel through a lifetime of discipleship, “[c]atechesis
4 is the word used to describe the essential ministry of the Church through which the teachings of
5 Christ have been passed on to believers throughout the ages” (DC 55).

6 **Pastor**

7 As a ministry of the Church “[t]here is a proper and serious duty, especially on the part of the
8 Pastors of souls, to provide for the catechesis of the Christian people so that the faith of the faithful
9 becomes living, explicit and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of
10 Christian living” (CIC, Can. 773).

11 Within the parish community, the Pastor oversees a comprehensive faith formation program in his
12 parish, including liturgical and Sacrament formation, in accord with diocesan current Faith
13 Formation Handbook. The Pastor collaborates with other priests and deacons assigned to the
14 parish, as well as with parents, school, and other catechetical personnel to fulfill the catechetical
15 mission.

16 The parish **must** offer catechetical instruction and programs which (cf. CT 19):

- 17 ○ Support parents, who are the primary educators of the faith;
- 18 ○ Address the faith-needs of the members of the parish, from childhood through adulthood,
19 with consideration of various life circumstances;
- 20 ○ Are age and developmentally appropriate, and welcoming those with diverse needs;
- 21 ○ Proclaim the Gospel, expound upon its initial proclamation, form the whole person and lead
22 to an identification with Christ and true discipleship;
- 23 ○ Are systematic and complete in the teaching of the faith in accord with the Magisterium of
24 the Catholic Church;
- 25 ○ Lead to membership in the Church and the reception of the Sacraments; and
- 26 ○ Are directed to the sanctification and salvation of souls.

27 The role of the priest in catechesis is substantial and multifaceted, deeply rooted in his pastoral
28 ministry. The priest, especially the parish priest, acts as an essential catechetical leader within the
29 parish community.

30 **Sacramental Ministry:**

31 The priest plays a crucial role in sacramental catechesis, preparing the faithful to receive the
32 sacraments meaningfully.

33 He ensures that catechesis is intrinsically linked to the sacramental life of the Church,
34 guiding the faithful towards active participation in the sacraments.

35 **Teaching and Preaching:**

36 Priests are entrusted with the responsibility of preaching the Gospel and ensuring that the
37 faithful receive sound doctrinal formation.

38 They facilitate processes to help people deepen their understanding of the faith through
39 homilies, teachings, and various catechetical activities.

1 **Catechist Formation and Support:**

2 Priests are instrumental in the recruitment, formation, and ongoing support of catechists.
3 They provide spiritual guidance and theological formation to catechists, enhancing the
4 effectiveness of their ministry.

5 **Community Building:**

6 They nurture a sense of community within the parish, fostering an environment conducive
7 to faith formation and sharing.

8 Their leadership helps in building a vibrant faith community that is supportive and
9 engaging.

10 **Promoting Missionary Spirit:**

11 Priests inspire and cultivate a missionary spirit within the community, encouraging
12 evangelization efforts.

13 They guide the community towards being outward-facing in their mission, engaging with
14 broader societal and ecumenical contexts.

15 **Guidance in Spiritual Growth:**

16 Through pastoral care, spiritual direction, and the sacraments, priests guide the faithful in
17 their spiritual journey.

18 They facilitate opportunities for prayer, reflection, and spiritual encounters.

19 **Collaboration and Coordination:**

20 Priests collaborate with various catechetical agents, including bishops, deacons, religious,
21 and lay catechists, ensuring a unified and cohesive approach to catechesis.

22 They coordinate various catechetical activities, ensuring that they align with the overall
23 pastoral plan and vision of the diocese.

24 **Fostering the Domestic Church:**

25 Priests support families in their role as the domestic Church, empowering parents in their
26 responsibility as the primary catechists of their children.

27 They promote family-centered catechesis and family participation in liturgical and parish
28 life.

29 The Pastor oversees the Faith Formation Team of his parish, some of whom will be employees and
30 some volunteers. He also ensures the suitable formation and training of catechists in his parish,
31 including teachers in Catholic school, volunteer catechists in the religious education program, those
32 who assist in youth ministry, and those who assist in other catechetical programs.

33

1 **Role of the Catechist**

2 Catechists are those who teach the faith in a classroom setting, whether in a school or parish faith
3 formation program; they may be paid or volunteer.

4 **Witness to the Faith:**

5 Live as a witness to the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, embodying the moral and
6 ethical principles of Catholicism (DC 113).

7 **Transmitter of Doctrine:**

8 Faithfully transmit Church doctrines and teachings, ensuring that catechesis is an echo of
9 the faith (DC 56, 63).

10 **Promoter of Communion:**

11 Promote communion with the Church, fostering a sense of belonging and unity in the
12 community of believers (DC 176).

13 **Facilitator of Encounter with Christ:**

14 Facilitate genuine encounters with Christ through prayer, Word, and sacrament in the
15 catechetical journey (DC 175, 112).

16 **Educator and Guide in the Faith Journey:**

17 Educate and guide catechumens and the faithful in their faith journey, adapting catechesis
18 to various ages and stages of life (DC 113b, 113c).

19 **Accompanier and Spiritual Mentor:**

20 Accompany individuals in their spiritual growth, discernment, and moral formation (DC
21 113c).

22 **Steward of the Liturgy and Sacraments:**

23 Collaborate in the preparation of liturgical celebrations and sacraments, fostering active
24 participation (DC 74, 263).

25 **Promoter of the Missionary Spirit:**

26 Cultivate a missionary spirit, encouraging the faithful to be evangelizing disciples in society
27 (DC 113a).

28 **Innovator and Catechetical Renewer:**

29 Use innovative pedagogical and catechetical methods that respect the principles of the
30 Directory (DC 148-149).

31 **Professional and Continuous Learner:**

32 Engage in ongoing formation and update oneself on catechetical trends and theological
33 developments, as encouraged by the Directory (DC 147-148).

1 **Collaborator in Pastoral Ministry:**

2 Collaborate with other pastoral works and ministries within the parish, integrating
3 catechesis into the broader pastoral activity of the Church (DC 112).

4 All Catechists **must:**

- 5 ○ Be a practicing Catholic in good standing
- 6 ○ Be 18 years or older
- 7 ○ Be in full compliance with the Office of Safe Environments before beginning and while
8 serving in ministry
- 9 ○ Be committed to present and witness to the authentic teachings of the Church
- 10 ○ Be willing to continue their ministry training, and work towards certification
- 11 ○ Enrolled in formation in LEAD

12

1 **DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (PCL, DRE, CRE, DD)**

2 The single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a
3 professionally trained parish catechetical leader. While the Pastor is responsible for the work of
4 catechesis in the parish, he may delegate others to function on his behalf. He provides the parish
5 with qualified personnel who can assist him in this catechetical work. Depending on the size and
6 scope of the parish faith formation program, parishes should allocate their resources so that they
7 are able to acquire the services of a competent and qualified Director of Religious Education (or
8 someone in the process of becoming qualified and competent) or to share those services with
9 another parish.

10 Here is a structured overview of the responsibilities of a Director of Faith Formation based on the
11 principles and guidelines from the Directory for Catechesis:

12 **Strategic Planning and Vision:**

13 Develop a strategic vision for catechesis in the parish that aligns with the directives and
14 guidelines of the Directory for Catechesis (DC 422 to 424).

15 **Curriculum Development:**

16 Ensure that the catechetical curriculum is comprehensive, organic, and in line with the
17 magisterium of the Church, as suggested by the Directory (DC 422 to 424).

18 **Community Building and Fostering Communion:**

19 Promote a sense of ecclesial communion and active participation in the liturgical life of the
20 Church among catechists and participants (DC 218-220).

21 **Organizing and Overseeing Catechetical Initiatives:**

22 Organize various catechetical initiatives in alignment with the pastoral guidelines given in
23 the Directory, ensuring adaptability and relevance (DC 417).

24 **Formation and Support for Catechists:**

25 Ensure ongoing formation and support for catechists, in line with the ecclesial and
26 pedagogical principles outlined in the Directory (DC 425).

27 **Sacramental Preparation Oversight:**

28 Oversee sacramental preparation processes, ensuring a catechesis that is liturgical and
29 rooted in the celebration of the sacraments (DC 86)

30 **Promotion of Missionary Discipleship:**

31 Foster a missionary spirit within catechesis, encouraging the community to be active agents
32 of evangelization (DC 48).

33 **Engagement with Families and Different Age Groups:**

34 Engage families in catechesis and ensure that catechetical programs cater to various age
35 groups, adapting methods and contents accordingly (DC 229-231).

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Liaison with Diocesan Directives:

Maintain active liaison with diocesan directives and guidelines, ensuring that parish catechesis is in harmony with the broader ecclesial community (DC 417).

Fostering Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue:

Foster an openness to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in catechesis, in light of the directives given in the Directory (DC 344-346).

Use of Technology and Media in Catechesis:

Implement the effective use of media and technology in catechesis, as encouraged by the Directory, ensuring discernment and critical evaluation (DC 213-216).

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:

Evaluate and continuously improve the catechetical programs, ensuring responsiveness to the needs of the community and the signs of the times (DC 424).

While parishes may use various titles for this position, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) works closely with the Pastor and oversees the catechetical mission of the parish.

Directors of Religious Education **must possess** the necessary personal qualities, catechetical understanding and skills, organizational and administrative abilities, academic preparation, and professional experience to direct the entire faith formation program of the parish. They **must be able** to recruit volunteers and provide catechist training, select curriculum resources, provide program design for all age levels, and manage and supervise staff (both paid and volunteer).

The following are the general qualifications for a Director of Religious Education:

- **Must** be approved by the pastor;
- Be a practicing Catholic in good standing;
- Have the skills necessary to effectively fulfill this position, including but not limited to catechetical expertise, leadership and team-building skills, and relational skills that bear witness to the love of Christ;
- A Master's degree in Religious Education, Theology, or related field is preferred;
- Be willing to continue professional development in areas that will benefit the faith formation program of the parish;
- Be willing to serve and build up the faith formation program in the parish, including the school and homeschool communities, so to bring the Good News to all who live within the parish boundaries;
- Ensure the formation of catechists, who are called to share in this ministry;
- Coordinate various faith formation programs and ministries;
- Supervise catechists and other lay faith formation employees (e.g. Adult Faith Formation Minister, High School Faith Formation Minister, etc.); and
- Follow all guidelines and requirements established by the Diocese of Bridgeport, and submit an annual evaluation.
- Enroll and participate in ongoing formation in LEAD.

1 **THE ROLE OF PARENTS**

2 The 2020 Directory for Catechesis reaffirms the role of parents as the primary educators in the faith
3 of their children, echoing the teachings from previous Church documents. It emphasizes the family's
4 central role in the transmission of faith and the nurturing of a domestic Church. Here's an outline of
5 what the Directory says regarding the role of parents in catechesis:

6 **Primary Educators in Faith:**

7 Parents are recognized as the first and foremost educators of their children in the faith.
8 Their role is irreplaceable and fundamental in nurturing the faith from the earliest years.

9 **Witnesses of Faith:**

10 Parents are called to be authentic witnesses of the Gospel in their family life. Their lived
11 faith provides a practical and influential example that shapes the spiritual and moral
12 development of their children.

13 **Creating a Domestic Church:**

14 Parents are entrusted with cultivating the domestic Church by creating a faith-filled
15 environment, fostering prayer, love, and the practice of Christian virtues in family life.

16 **Participation in Sacramental Life:**

17 Parents play a critical role in preparing their children for the sacraments and in
18 participating actively in the liturgical life of the Church. They are collaborators with the
19 parish community in sacramental preparation.

20 **Continuous Formation:**

21 Parents themselves need ongoing formation to fulfill their role effectively. The Directory
22 emphasizes the necessity of providing formation opportunities for parents to grow in their
23 understanding of the faith.

24 **Collaboration with the Wider Community:**

25 Parents are encouraged to collaborate closely with the parish and the wider ecclesial
26 community, benefiting from the support, resources, and catechetical initiatives of the
27 broader Church.

28 **Customized Catechesis:**

29 Recognizing the unique needs, questions, and faith journey of each child, parents are
30 encouraged to engage in a catechesis that is person-centered and adapted to the
31 developmental stages of their children.

32 **Social and Cultural Mediation:**

33 Parents help in mediating the influences of society and culture in the faith development of
34 their children, guiding them in discernment and the integration of faith and life.

1 The role of the parent is indispensable and privileged in catechesis that requires pastoral support,
2 accompaniment, and formation. Parish leaders **must** encourage a partnership between the
3 domestic Church and the wider ecclesial community in the shared responsibility of faith formation.

4 For parish faith formation programs to be effective, parents **must accompany** their children in
5 their faith experience: parents **must** make the home a domestic church where Jesus is truly the
6 Lord. In so doing, from their family experience, children have a context for classroom instruction,
7 and the truths of the faith which are taught in faith formation classes are reinforced.

8 Sadly, when evangelization has not occurred, or the faith has been taught only superficially, there is
9 no solid foundation upon which to provide catechesis. As such, a comprehensive parish vision for
10 evangelization and catechesis **must** be implemented for both children and adults, so that the entire
11 parish community may grow in faith and discipleship.

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