



Catholic Schools

Religion Curriculum Priority Standards

Grades PreK–8, 2020 edition

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INVOCATION: THE GREAT COMMISSIONING

“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” —Matthew 28: 16–20

OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS MISSION AND VISION

Mission: The mission of the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools is to educate the whole child – academically, spiritually, physically and emotionally – through a faith-based learning environment. Our Catholic schools are igniting the light in future leaders.

Vision: Provide all people in the Archdiocese of Chicago with vibrant, high quality Catholic schools that are available, accessible and affordable.

RELIGION CURRICULUM STANDARDS HISTORY AND RATIONALE

The design and writing of the Religion Curriculum resulted from the 2002 Plan for Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Recommendations in the plan called for a more cohesive approach to imparting the faith of the Church for children and youth. The outcome of the recommendations is the Religion Curriculum of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

There are three goals for updating the Religion Curriculum Standards:

1. Identify **priority standards** for each grade level within six different content domains.
2. Design new standards at each grade level that specifically address the goals of **Renew My Church**. Standards that address the development of discipleship, practice of stated values, and evangelization efforts in the school community are part of this goal.
3. Provide access to formative and summative assessment resources to assist teachers in their evaluation of student learning. (pending)

Definition of a “priority standard”: Priority standards are those that have been identified as most essential to a particular grade level, content area, or course. Teachers devote significant time and resources to ensuring that prioritized standards are mastered.” Rather than superficially cover an extensive number of topics, focusing on a smaller number of priority standards allows teachers to provide deeper instruction and more focused support for students (Hoegh, Heflebower, Warrick. *A School Leader’s Guide to Standards Based Grading*. 2014. pp 16-19).

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGION CURRICULUM DOMAINS AND PRIORITY STANDARDS

The six domains used for organizing grade level priority standards are based, in part, on the “Six Tasks of Catechesis” as outlined by the USCCB in the National Directory for Catechesis (NDC). Three priority standards are identified for each domain in PK through Grade 8. Priority standards are those that are representative of knowledge and/or skills that are central to the understanding and practice of the Catholic faith. They are standards that can be leveraged in other content areas for the purpose of making connections between religion and other disciplines. The identified priority standards also serve as building blocks to prepare students for subsequent study and religious formation at the next grade level.

CATECHESIS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EVANGELIZATION

Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools exist primarily to evangelize and to educate students for the Church’s mission in the world. In the fall of 2017, the archdiocese released *Renewal and Hope: A Strategic Plan for Catholic School Vitality*. Within the plan are targeted goals and initiatives to foster quality and sustainability in the Catholic schools of the archdiocese. As part of the planning process, several “Collective Commitments” were defined. One of the commitments is “evangelizing mission.” Catholic schools exist to evangelize, to foster a relationship between each student and Jesus Christ and His Church. The mission of evangelization and discipleship remains a top priority for schools. (*Strategic Plan for Catholic School*, 2017, 3).

Within the context of evangelization, catechesis is a lifelong, ongoing process in which people are invited and formed to be in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ and with each other. The Religion Curriculum of the Archdiocese of Chicago incorporates through its stated goals the mission of the Church to evangelize and to catechize. Through the catechetical process of teaching and learning, students are called to respond to live their lives fully in Christ through active participation in the life of the Church and its mission to the world.

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF RENEW MY CHURCH

Called by Jesus Christ, Catholics and all Christians are commissioned to make disciples, build communities, and inspire witness. As the Catholic community in Chicago challenges itself to renewal in a “new missionary age,” our approach to evangelization and catechesis must also adapt to a changing world in which:

- Culture is more secular, is ambivalent to faith and dissuades people to live out their faith
- Christian beliefs and values cannot be assumed
- Transmission of faith and faith practice across generations cannot be presumed
- Faith cannot just be taught through proclamation and explanation (need discussion and experience)
- There is very limited understanding of Christian imagination and language
- Christian faith is not seen as the foundation for moral teaching

Consequently, the process of evangelization and catechesis is **relational**, that is, faith development happens in a community, which includes the family. The family is the first and most crucial community that impacts the faith formation of children. Significant personal and communal interaction make the catechetical process come alive for those being formed in the faith. It takes everyone in the family and faith community to support the catechetical process.

Catechesis and evangelization must also be **instructional**. Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life. Catechesis is part of the Church's effort to make disciples, deepen students' belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and to educate and instruct them as members of the Body of Christ (CCC pp. 4, 7). Through instructional catechesis, essential relationships are grounded in realities that must be known, comprehended, and absorbed by the student being formed for missionary discipleship.

Finally, evangelization and catechesis is a **process**. The teaching of religion to children is designed to be a process of socialization, so that students are drawn into ways of participating in the life of a community with its language, symbols, and core rituals, especially the Mass. Effective learning of the faith is a lifelong process that happens when structures are in place to help personal discipleship to deepen and grow.

Teachers need to encourage spiritual growth and nurture a spiritual home for those being formed as disciples.

Teachers need to assume that not everyone at any age is fully formed and use all moments as “teachable moments” for encounter with Jesus Christ and witness. Teachers and school leaders need to engage parents and families in the faith formation process. “Parents are the most influential agents for catechesis for their children” (NDC, p.234). When parents are engaged in their child's religious instruction, they can reinforce and help their child practice what is being taught in school.

Teachers and school leaders need to support parents and families in faith formation. “The Church promises to help parents foster their children's faith and assists them specifically in their role as catechists of their children” (NDC, p.235).

School leaders and teachers of religious instruction need to go out, meet, serve, and invite people into community. As missionary disciples themselves, “Religion teachers in Catholic schools not only teach the Catholic faith as an academic subject but also bear witness to the truth of what they teach” (NDC, p. 232).

(RMC: *Mission Imperatives and Strategic Initiatives*, renewmychurch.org).

MAGISTERIAL AND CATECHETICAL ALIGNMENT

The following sources from the Vatican, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) are used to align the religion curriculum domains and priority standards:

Directory for Catechesis. In response to the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation for the Clergy published the General Directory of Catechesis as a point of reference for context and pedagogy in the instruction of Catholic tradition and values. The GDC was first released in 1971 the next edition was released in 1997. The most recent edition of the Directory for Catechesis was released in July 2020.

Tasks of Catechesis: The Directory for Catechesis (2020) identifies “tasks” that provide the framework for religious education and discipleship formation to help students deepen their relationship with Christ through study and prayer.

National Directory for Catechesis (NDC). As a companion to the Directory for Catechesis, the USCCB provides the NDC to assist religious educators in the implementation of instructions for catechesis and evangelization in the context of the United States.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). Originally commissioned by St. John Paul II, the CCC is a summary of scripturally based, Catholic doctrine used for catechesis and formation.

Pillars of Catechesis: The organization of the CCC into four parts to give structure to the summary of catechetical teaching.

HOW TO USE THE RELIGION CURRICULUM PRIORITY STANDARDS

All Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago are required to choose primary instructional materials that are in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and approved by the USCCB Conformity Review.

[Click here](#) to see a complete list of approved USCCB texts for religion and catechism.

[Click here](#) to learn more from the USCCB about the Catechism of the Catholic Church and conformity review.

[Click here](#) to learn more about evangelization and catechesis from the USCCB.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the USCCB’s commitment to Catholic education.

In order for the Religion Curriculum Priority Standards to be utilized well, they need to be viewed as tools for student formation. Teachers plan their instruction around how to effectively help students understand, reflect upon, and respond to the encounter of Christ experienced through instruction.

Teachers will consider the following questions:

1. What is the intended learning, experience and/or message?
2. What strategies will be implemented to accompany students in their learning and/or encounter?
3. What evidence will students showcase to demonstrate their growth in learning and discipleship?

The Religion Curriculum Priority Standards provide a starting point for catechesis and evangelization. Teachers will make use of **USCCB approved instructional resources** to assist in classroom instruction.

Teachers may refer to the **appendix** for ideas and suggestions about how to incorporate the religion standards through **interdisciplinary connections** at each grade level.

Teachers may refer to the appendix for ideas about **formative assessment and performance based projects** for differentiation of instructional strategies.

RACIAL JUSTICE INSTRUCTION

Catholic schools are committed to racial justice in our Church, schools, and communities. As disciples of Christ we live, learn, work, pray, and worship in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters.

Teachers at all grade levels are requested to instruct about racial justice through a Catholic lens using resources provided by the USCCB. These resources are available on the [USCCB website](#). They are also embedded into the ideas for interdisciplinary connections in each grade level appendix:

Kindergarten: *We Are All Sacred* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 1: *Fr. Augustus Tolton Story* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 2: *What Makes a Person?* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 3: *How Do We Respect Human Dignity?* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 4: *The Beatitudes Show Us True Happiness* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 5a: *Racism Imperils the Unity of the Body of Christ* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 5b: *Implicit Bias and the Unity of the Body of Christ* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 6: *The Unity of God's Family* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 7: *Social Sin, Racism, and Our Response* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Grade 8: *Understanding Individual vs. Institutional Racism* ([ENG](#)) ([ESP](#))

Liturgy Resource: [A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land \(USCCB\)](#)