

## CATECHIST FORMATION, CERTIFICATION AND RENEWAL

Throughout our history as a Church, catechesis has been an esteemed term. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "quite early on, the name *catechesis* was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help [people] believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ" (CCC, 4, citing *Catechesi Tradendae*). In the New Testament, the term is translated as "instruction" (Acts 18:25; Luke 1:4; 1 Corinthians 14:19). Coming from the Greek word *katechein*, catechesis means to "echo" or "resound" — the catechist is one who "echoes" or resounds the Word of God. Its purpose is to make a person's faith "become living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction" (CD, 14).

The General Directory for Catechesis, promulgated by the Vatican in 1997, situates catechesis as a "work of evangelization in the context of the mission of the Church" (GDC, 4) and "fully locates catechesis within the context of evangelization" (GDC, 5). The catechist participates in the Church's mission of evangelization and responds to the missionary mandate of the Church found in Matthew 28—to go out, to make disciples, and to teach. The General Directory makes it clear that catechists are called, first and foremost, to be evangelists—witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ. The General Directory summons the Church to prepare witnesses by developing "a profoundly religious catechesis, nourished on the Gospel, which will deepen [people's] encounter with God and forge a bond of permanent communion..." (GDC, 23).

Since catechesis is an integral part of the Church's evangelization ministry and the Church has always seen "catechesis as one of her primary tasks" (CT, 1), it follows that the formation, training and continued growth of catechists is a priority for diocesan and parish catechetical leadership.

Catechesis is so central to the Church's mission of evangelization that, if evangelization were to fail to integrate catechesis, initial faith aroused by the

*“Beg the harvestmaster to send laborers  
To gather the harvest” Matthew 9:37-38*

original proclamation of the Gospel would not mature, education in the faith through a deeper knowledge of the person and message of Jesus Christ would not transpire, and discipleship in Christ through genuine apostolic witness would not be fostered (NDC, pp. 67-68).

In order to promote an effective, “profoundly religious catechesis” and to standardize the quality of the formation of catechists under their jurisdiction, the California Catholic Conference of Bishops, in consultation with Directors of Catechetical Ministry, Superintendents of Catholic Schools and Directors of Youth Ministry, revised the Guidelines for the Formation and Certification of Catechists and Master Catechists (hereafter, California Guidelines) in 1996. In 2001, once again in consultation with the above mentioned groups, the Bishops approved specific Goals and Objectives for Content to be included in the California Guidelines.

Catechist formation programs in the Diocese of San Diego are in compliance with California Guidelines. The importance of formation of catechists for every age and grade, preschool through adult, is stressed in the Purpose, Goals and Objectives of the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry and reinforced in diocesan policy which states that all catechists should hold current certification or be in the process of obtaining certification.

See  
Guideline 11  
Goals of  
OECM

See  
Policy 230

## QUALITIES OF A CATECHIST

Catechists are persons of faith who "feel called interiorly by God" (GDC, 231) to minister as a catechist. Their ministry as catechist springs from the Sacrament of Baptism and is strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation (See NDC p. 228). “The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize” (GDC, 231). Catechists should “rise from within the community of faith, be invited to consider becoming a catechist, be known to the pastor and prayerfully consider becoming a catechist” (NDC, p. 236).

The catechist has a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as the center and grounding of his or her life and ministry and has a strong desire to make Jesus Christ

known to others. The catechist understands that "at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father" (CCC, 426). The catechist has the privilege of working toward the aim of all catechesis — "to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ" (GDC, 80; CT 5).

The catechist loves the Church and wishes to serve in it. He or she understands the importance of and is committed to catechizing within the Roman Catholic tradition. “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. Their commissioning by the Church is a participation in the divine calling to teach as Jesus did” (NDC pp. 228-229). The catechist is a witness in word and action who participates in the Church's liturgical and sacramental life, has a deep spirituality and is willing to continue his or her own education and formation.

Persons who wish to become catechists should have:

- a strong awareness of God’s presence and a growing faith in response to that grace;
- a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, who is the center of the message;
- a strong understanding of and love for the Church evidenced by a personal commitment to:
  - catechize within the Roman Catholic tradition, in light of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents and according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church;
  - participate actively and regularly in the Church's liturgical and sacramental life;
  - deepen an active prayer life;
  - respect the diversity of culture; and
  - serve with dedication;
- an ability to appreciate different types and stages of individual growth and development;
- an ability to communicate effectively with the persons to be catechized;
- a willingness to continue their own religious education and formation (California Guidelines, p. 4; see also NDC, pp 237-238).

## **SELECTION AND FORMATION OF CATECHISTS**

It is an important task of parish catechetical leadership to discern who has the gifts, talents and abilities to be a catechist. “The suggestion that anyone can be a catechist should be scrupulously avoided in all communication involving the recruitment of catechists” (NDC, p. 236). The Bishops of California maintain that it is the responsibility of pastors and catechetical leadership to:

- call forth and screen candidates and evaluate their potential to become faith-filled and dynamic catechists;
- require candidates to complete formation programs for catechist certification as sponsored/developed by the diocese within the time period specified by the diocese;
- select, orient, commission, supervise and annually evaluate catechists — both those who hold certification and those in the process of obtaining certification;
- provide catechists with opportunities for continued personal, spiritual and professional development (California Guidelines, p.4).

The National Directory asserts that catechists should be known by the parish catechetical leadership, should be invited to ministry and should receive initial and ongoing formation. This formation should not be improvised or left to the initiative of catechists themselves. The Directory further suggests that all catechists should be commissioned each year on Catechetical Sunday (See NDC, pp. 236-237).

### **CATECHIST CERTIFICATION IN THE DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO**

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry views catechist formation at every level—preschool through adult—as one of its primary goals and provides programs of formation, certification and renewal to meet that end.

Diocesan catechist formation programs are in accord with California Guidelines which state that "catechists should acquire the particular knowledge and skills that they need to assist adults, young people, and children, including those with special

needs, to grow in faith" (Guidelines, p. 4).

According to diocesan policy catechists, including RCIA catechists, may be certified in one of three ways:

- 1) by completing the Basic Catechist Formation Course **or**
- 2) by completing the catechist certification courses in the San Diego Diocesan Institute **or**
- 3) by completing those requirements identified by the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry through an evaluation of an individual profile.

See  
Policy 230

### **CERTIFICATION THROUGH THE BASIC CATECHIST FORMATION COURSE**

The Basic Catechist Formation Course is a 48-hour course intended to equip beginning catechists, or those needing renewal in contemporary theology and catechetics, with sufficient background and skill to begin teaching. The course incorporates the essential elements of message, prayer, community and service and provides an integrated program of doctrinal reflection, catechetical process, religious development and creative teaching methods for children through adults. Upon successful completion of the Basic Catechist Formation Course, catechists receive California Catechist Certification.

#### Goals of the Basic Catechist Formation Course

- To develop or deepen a sense of vocation to serve as a catechist and to explore the qualities needed to respond to the call.
- To develop basic knowledge, skills and abilities needed to communicate the Gospel message effectively.
- To understand basic Catholic doctrine as defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- To understand and implement the tasks of catechesis as described in the

NDC.

- To experience Christian community through prayer, liturgical experiences, witnessing and group learning situations.
- To encourage ongoing study, growth, conversion and renewal.
- To stimulate an evangelizing spirit and enthusiastic discipleship.

### Content of the Basic Catechist Formation Course

The Basic Catechist Formation Course presents an overview of Catholic doctrine using an approach which incorporates the six tasks of catechesis and develops an appreciation for the integral relationship of life experience, doctrine and response in faith. The course of studies is consistent with the General Directory for Catechesis, the National Directory for Catechesis and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It is offered for all catechists, preschool through adult, and is designed to provide a knowledge of the Catholic faith and Christian living as well as the skills and techniques which are necessary to hand on the faith, encourage a deeper relationship with Christ and promote discipleship and evangelization

Throughout the course, the catechist is expected to continue study and reflection after each class by means of additional reading of the course handouts, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which is the text for the course. Prospective catechists are expected to develop a lesson plan, prepare one or two brief reflections on foundational topics and complete the *Information for Growth* (IFG) survey indicating areas of strength and weakness. They are also encouraged to observe an experienced catechist in the teaching situation at least twice during the course.

### Instructors in the Basic Catechist Formation Course

The Basic Catechist Formation Course is taught by a team of two or more qualified instructors called Master Catechists. These instructors are selected by the Diocesan Office in accord with the California Guidelines. A DCM or Coordinator is not automatically considered an instructor in the Basic Catechist Formation

See  
Guideline 25  
Outline of  
Basic Catechist  
Formation  
Course

Course. All Master Catechists must be approved by the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry and complete the formation program offered by the diocese. All Basic Catechist Formation Course offerings are approved by the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry.

#### Basic Catechist Formation Course Centers

The Basic Catechist Formation Course is offered at centers throughout the diocese. A parish interested in having its facility used as a formation center should have an authorized person contact the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry. Enrollment of 15-20 persons is considered normative.

The teaching centers and scheduling of courses are set by the Diocesan Office in consultation with Directors of Catechetical Ministry and Master Catechists. There are various options available for scheduling. The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry publicizes starting dates and times of courses in office mailings and updates, in the diocesan newspaper and on the diocesan website.

#### Cost of the Course

The cost of the Basic Catechist Formation Course is \$60.00 per person which includes materials, handout packet and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

### **CERTIFICATION THROUGH THE DIOCESAN INSTITUTE**

The San Diego Diocesan Institute offers courses to provide foundational theology for persons interested in ministry. Most courses can be used toward obtaining diocesan ministry certificates and for renewal of catechist certification.

California Catechist Certification may be achieved through satisfactory completion of three Diocesan Institute courses as follows:

- C110 - Catechism of the Catholic Church (15 hours) **and**
- S120 - Catechetics (15 hours) (Prerequisite - C110-Catechism of the Catholic Church) **and**
- S100 - Faith Growth: Childhood and Early Adolescence (15 hours) **or**
- S105 Faith Growth: Adults (15 hours)

Information

For further information and course descriptions regarding the San Diego Diocesan Institute Courses, please visit the diocesan website or call the Institute Office at 858-490-8212.

See  
Diocesan  
Institute  
Website

**CERTIFICATION THROUGH EVALUATION OF  
AN INDIVIDUAL PROFILE**

In individual cases, persons who hold current certification from another diocese or persons with a rich background in catechetics, such as a recent degree in religious education, plus evidence of experience and ongoing enrichment, may petition the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry to have course requirements waived.

Catechists, who wish to waive course requirements, should complete a catechist profile available from the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry. The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry will identify appropriate courses or workshops needed to achieve certification, if applicable.

**BASIC CERTIFICATION PROCESS**

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry issues all California Catechist Certification in June of each year to those who completed requirements within the previous twelve months. The Office maintains a permanent record of each certified catechist and sends Catechist Record Cards indicating certification status to DCM’s and Coordinators.

In accordance with the California Guidelines, California Catechist Certification is recognized by every diocese in the State of California. Certification is granted to parish catechists for one year or three years depending on the fulfillment of the supervision requirements, as follows:

Certification is granted for one year upon completion of the course work and

recommendation of the Master Catechists. It means that the prospective catechist has attended the prescribed classes, has satisfactorily participated in the class and has completed the assignments.

Certification is granted for three years if the prospective catechist

1. has satisfied the requirements of the Formation Course **and**
2. has been teaching one year **and**
3. has been evaluated through observation by a qualified DCM, Coordinator or Supervisor and recommended for three-year certification.

An individual catechist may satisfy both the course requirements and the requirements for one year of supervised teaching in the same year.

Certification issued for one year can be extended for an additional two years by

1. fulfilling the requirement for one year of supervised teaching **and**
2. the recommendation of the DCM, Coordinator or qualified supervisor.

Upon completion of the Basic Catechist Formation Course, the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry will notify DCM's of parish catechists who have satisfactorily completed the course. It is the responsibility of the DCM to make arrangements for supervision of catechists and make recommendations for one-year or three-year certification. Forms are provided by the Office for this purpose.

## **ADVANCED CATECHIST CERTIFICATION**

Many parish catechists wish to continue their formation in a systematic way after they have completed basic formation. The process of Advanced Catechist Certification allows the catechist to continue systematic and ongoing formation by completing additional course work. It is not a requirement for catechists to pursue advanced certification, but highly recommended.

### Requirements for Advanced Catechist Certification

1. Current California Catechist Certification **and**
2. Three to five years experience as a catechist **and**

3. Sixty hours of course work as follows:

- 60 hours of Video/DVD series (e.g., *Mystery of Faith* or *What Makes Us Catholic or Echoes of Faith*) **or**
- 60 hours of courses in the San Diego Diocesan Institute **or**
- 2 specialization courses, (e.g. Preschool, Catechetical Methods, RCIA or Adult Faith Formation) **or**
- a combination of the above to equal 60 hours of course work **or**
- equivalent course work or programs of above as evaluated by the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry **and**

4. Letter of recommendation from the DCM or Coordinator.

#### Process for Obtaining Advanced Catechist Certification

Upon completion of requirements, candidates for advanced catechist certification should complete the Advanced Catechist Certification Form in collaboration with the parish DCM/Coordinator. The completed form and the letter of recommendation should be forwarded to the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry. Advanced Catechist Certification is issued in June of each year in which requirements are completed. Advanced Catechist Certification is issued for three years and supersedes Basic Certification.

### **RENEWAL OF CERTIFICATION**

According to Diocesan Policy, certification of the fully certified catechist (basic or advanced) expires at the end of three years from the date of issue. The catechist may earn renewal of certification by completing the approved courses or workshops before the date of expiration.

#### Methods of Renewal for Parish Catechists

Certification issued for three years is renewed in one of the following ways:

1. Completing 30 clock hours in Diocesan-sponsored or approved

conferences, workshops, congresses which are designated for renewal credit. The areas of these programs will be Scripture, Doctrine, Morality, Sacraments, Liturgy, Psychological Development, Church History or Administration skills.

Note: A combined total of 5 clock hours (in the three year period) will be granted for spiritual renewal experiences such as Cursillo, Life in the Spirit seminars, Renew, Marriage Encounter, Parish Renewal Weekends, Catholic Bible Study Groups, Small Faith Communities, etc. **or**

2. Completing 30 hours of course work in the San Diego Diocesan Institute. **or**

3. Completing an approved course in Religious Studies, Theology or Religious Education at a Catholic College or University. **or**

4. Completing a specialization in a given area, (e.g., Preschool, Catechetical Methods, Adult Faith Formation, Special Religious Education, RCIA, etc.).

#### Renewal Credit for Programs Offered at the Local Level

Programs which are offered at the parish level may be used toward renewal hours for catechists. The DCM or Coordinator is encouraged to submit a description of the program to the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry for prior approval if renewal credit is being requested. Criteria used in evaluating are:

- the catechetical nature of the program
- the qualifications of the instructor
- the quality of content and process
- the length of program.

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry will determine the number of clock hours of renewal credit to be granted for each program. It is suggested that no more than half of a catechist’s renewal credits be obtained through parish programs of this nature. In general, catechist meetings, though

highly valued for maintaining the program, do not qualify for renewal credit.

### Documentation

It is strongly recommended that renewal requirements be completed before the expiration date of the certification. It is the responsibility of each catechist, in communication with the DCM or Coordinator, to maintain documentation of courses or workshops taken for renewal purposes. The DCM or Coordinator should advise catechists of upcoming opportunities.

### Procedure

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry notifies all certified catechists of the expiration date of their certification.

In the spring, the Office will notify DCM’s of those catechists whose certification will expire in June of the current year. If the DCM is not responsible for maintaining all catechist certification records, she or he should forward the renewal form to the appropriate program coordinator, e.g. the RCIA Coordinator or Coordinator of Youth Ministry. The DCM or Coordinator should return the form indicating those catechists who have completed renewal requirements and whose certification should be renewed for an additional three years.

Catechists who are not currently teaching, but wish to maintain certification should forward documentation of the completed requirements for renewal to the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry by May 1 of each year.

### Renewing Certificates Which Have Expired

Persons whose certification has expired without renewal should consult the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry to determine how certification can be reinstated. Appropriate workshops or courses will be suggested at the time of consultation.

## **DIOCESAN SPECIALIZATION**

A Diocesan Specialization Certificate is awarded to persons completing requirements in a particular area of competence such as preschool catechesis or special religious education. Diocesan certification for preschool and special religious education catechists is issued for three years and is renewable by attendance at thirty hours of course work or workshops.

Other Specialization Courses which are offered to refine skills in a given area of ministry include Catechetical Methods, RCIA, Adult Faith Formation, etc.

Diocesan Specialization courses do not qualify a person for California Catechist Certification, but automatically renew California Catechist Certification and may be applied to Advanced Catechist Certification for anyone who already holds California Catechist Certification.

## **SUPERVISION**

The supervision that is to take place during the parish catechist’s first year of teaching is to be conducted by qualified DCM’s, Coordinators or Supervisors who have been trained in supervision techniques. The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry provides training workshops for catechetical supervisors each year. Parishes in need of a qualified supervisor should contact the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry.

## **MASTER CATECHIST CERTIFICATION**

Master Catechists are those persons who are certified by the Diocese in accordance with Diocesan Policy and the Guidelines for Obtaining the California

Catechist Certificate or California Master Catechist Certificate (hereafter California Guidelines). Master Catechists teach in the name of the diocese and provide the specific formation and course of studies required by the diocese for catechists to obtain or renew a California Catechist Certificate. In the Diocese of San Diego, Master Catechists teach Basic Catechist Formation Courses at Centers throughout the Diocese. All Master Catechist Candidates must be interviewed and approved by the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry and must complete the Master Catechist Formation.

See  
Policy 232

### **QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS OF MASTER CATECHISTS**

It is assumed that the Master Catechist possesses the basic qualities already discussed for all catechists. In addition, the Master Catechist should have:

- an ability to communicate and work effectively with adult learners in a formation setting;
- a respect for individual growth, differences and learning styles in adults; and
- a desire to minister within the multicultural reality of the Church of San Diego.

#### Educational Background

A Master Catechist Candidate should:

- have obtained a recent degree in religious studies, theology, or religious education, or be working toward a degree, **or**
- have obtained a Certificate in Catechetical Ministry, or be near completion of a Certificate issued by the San Diego Diocesan Institute, **or**
- have obtained California Catechist Certification and equivalent of above as determined by the Director of the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry **and**
- be capable of study at the college level;

- give evidence of on-going self-education in formal or informal learning programs;
- have recent catechetical experience.

### Formation and Certification Process

The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry offers Master Catechist formation when there are enough qualified candidates. Master Catechist Candidates are expected to enter the program with an in-depth background in the content areas of the Basic Catechist Formation Course. In accord with the California Guidelines, the Master Catechist formation includes:

- a review of content and methodology used in the Basic Catechist Formation Course;
- faith development themes as outlined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church;
- the nature of catechesis and catechetical development; and
- spiritual development of the catechist.

Upon completion of the Master Catechist Formation, the Master Catechist receives California Master Catechist Certification. The Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry issues all California Master Catechist Certification in June of the year in which all requirements are met. California Master Catechist Certification is granted for three years and is recognized by all Dioceses in the State of California.

### Expectations

The Diocese of San Diego:

- screens candidates and evaluates their potential to become Master Catechists;
- provides Master Catechist Formation for the candidates;
- interviews, selects, orients, commissions, supervises and evaluates Master Catechists;
- certifies candidates with California Master Catechist Certification upon

- successful completion of the formation program;
- coordinates and approves all Basic Catechist Formation Course offerings;
- publicizes course offerings;
- provides course guidelines, written materials and texts for Basic Catechist Formation Courses;
- provides Master Catechists with opportunities for continued personal, spiritual and professional development;
- maintains a personnel file on all Master Catechists and tracks professional growth.

Master Catechists in the Diocese of San Diego are expected to:

- catechize within the Roman Catholic tradition, in light of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents and according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church;
- demonstrate and encourage team teaching—in preparations, presentations, styles, attitudes—and be present for all sessions;
- collaborate with the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry in obtaining materials, submitting paperwork and completing financial arrangements for courses taught;
- participate in and contribute to the community of Master Catechists through attendance at master catechist meetings, conference days, workshops, retreats and other professional growth experiences;
- participate in evaluation of the content and process of the course as needed;
- teach under the supervision of the Diocese;
- teach at least one course every three years, and no more than one course at a time without permission of the Office;
- maintain California Master Catechist Certification by obtaining at least 45 clock hours of renewal work before expiration of certificate.