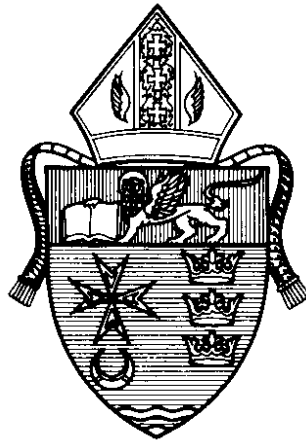


---

# Catechists In Our Time

*GUIDELINES  
FOR CATECHIST  
FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND CERTIFICATION*

(Revised Spring, 2000)



**Diocese of Venice in Florida  
Department of Education  
Office of Catechetical Ministry**

---

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus entrusted the disciples with the mission to proclaim what they had seen and heard, and to explain with authority what he had taught them, and he gave them the Spirit to fulfill this mission, this catechesis. In our time catechetical renewal has assumed a place of eminence. The person who shares faith in this ministry must be well prepared for this mission of making disciples of all nations. [CT, Ch. 1]<sup>1</sup>

The preparation of catechists is concerned with the faith development of the catechist as well as with doctrinal content and methodology so that the catechist may enjoy a faith-love relationship with God and continually strive to nurture this relationship.

The aim of catechetical activity consists in precisely this: to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith. [GDC 66]

### I. ELEMENTS OF CATECHESIS

#### Context

##### A. Evangelization

- 1.1 Evangelization is a dynamic reality that contains within it interdependent activities that are to be kept in creative tension: “*witness and proclamation, word and sacrament, interior change and social transformation*”. [GDC 46 from EN 18]
- 1.2 Catechesis is a basic evangelizing activity of every particular Church ... In all the ministries and services which the particular Church performs to carry out its mission of evangelization, catechesis occupies a position of importance. [GDC 218, 219]
- 1.3 Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. [GDC 220]

##### B. Parish

- 1.4 Studies reveal that each parish develops a vision and style of its own, and it is recognized that parish catechetical ministry is influenced by this style and vision since the entire parish is the place where catechetical ministry happens. Whatever style and vision the parish has, it needs to recognize that **catechesis is the responsibility of the entire parish community as is the preparation of catechists. *Catechists are the key to effective parish catechesis.*** [PCM, Ch. 1]
- 1.5 While catechesis implies the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples [CT 1], catechetical activity on a parish level needs attention. This activity on a parish level may be termed:

---

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations on page 14

- Informal; i.e. that which happens spontaneously when persons consciously avail themselves of the opportunities to catechize, or
- Formal or systematic; that which emphasizes understanding, reflection, and transformation, and which is deliberate, intentional and structured.

## II. IDEAL QUALITIES OF CATECHISTS

Catechists understand that they receive and respond to a ministerial call by the community, that they are fully committed to fostering community and service. Catechists seek to acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities to walk with individuals through their journey of faith. They have a solid grasp of scripture, the creed, liturgy, moral life and prayer [GDC 240], communication skills and a variety of methodologies [GDC 206].

## III. SIGNS OF CATECHESIS GROWTH AREAS

- 3.1 The vocation of the laity to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism. [GDC 231]
- 3.2 Diocesan pastoral programs must give absolute priority to the formation of catechists. [GDC 234]
- 3.3 Catechists working toward certification avail themselves of opportunities for personal development in faith growth, in understanding the development of individuals, and in content and process.
- 3.4 Catechists seek a balanced formation in each of the following growth areas:

### **Content**

- **Biblical**

Catechists study sacred scripture as a source inseparable from the Christian message. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures are to be studied.

- **Liturgical**

- **B<sub>1</sub> Mass, Sacraments, Prayer**

Catechists develop their own spiritual and faith life, practice and celebration, and share this with those with whom they walk on the faith journey. The connection between liturgy and catechesis is emphasized. **At least half of the hours in this area must be in liturgy (i.e. the study of Mass and Sacraments).**

- **B<sub>2</sub> Spiritual**

The other half may be acquired by retreats, parish missions, and days of recollection.

- **Ecclesial**  
Catechists study doctrine and creedal formulations and witness to Christian moral living. Social justice and multi-cultural issues are included. [GDC 240, 241]
- **Natural**  
Catechists respond to opportunities to examine signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. This study includes the arts, human development, and methodologies. [GDC 244]

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is used as the basic reference for content of courses.

#### IV. CATECHIST CERTIFICATION

- 4.1 Motivating and training catechists is essential. The diocese has the responsibility, along with the parish, for establishing standards for the formation and certification of catechists and catechetical leaders. [PCM, p. 93]
- 4.2 The diocesan office establishes norms and takes both a direct and indirect role in the formation of catechists. The diocesan office provides workshops and training sessions, and works with local parishes by **promoting catechist formation sessions on a local level and by giving formal approval to these sessions**. The diocesan office establishes the norms to enable catechists to carry out these tasks of catechesis.
  - 4.2.1 The aim of catechetical activity consists in precisely this: to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith. [CCC 1229, GDC 66] and to put people, not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ. [ GDC 80]
  - 4.2.2 The fundamental tasks of catechists are: promoting knowledge of faith, liturgical education, moral formation, prayer, education for community life and mission. [GDC 85]
- 4.3 These norms are intended for all catechists who are involved in Catholic schools and parish catechetical programs in the Diocese of Venice. Fulfillment of the requirements results in one of the levels of certification or in credentials which are the official recognition by the Diocese of Venice, through the Catechetical Office, that a catechist/teacher has participated in the required formation experiences. These experiences enable the persons called to minister to use their gifts more effectively.
- 4.4 The purpose of the certification program is:

**To develop personal faith as well as each of the specific qualities and competencies that enable the catechist to place theological content at the service of effective catechesis. [RG, p.1]**

## V. LEVELS OF CERTIFICATION

### 5.1 *Basic Catechist Certification*

This level normally requires **40 Christian formation hours** to complete; 10 hours in each of the four growth areas.

- a) At least half of the hours toward each level of certification must be earned through diocesan sponsored courses and events.
- b) A total of 10 hours may be acquired through self study.
- c) Self study assignments must be submitted to the Office of Catechetical Ministry.
- d) Clock hours for this level of certification may also be acquired through the **Echoes of Faith** program. The last page of the booklet is sent to the Catechetical Office.

**In addition**, the catechists seeking certification for the first time are required to:

- observe two catechetical classes
- write observation forms of those classes
- have an interview with the DRE (form provided by diocese)

### 5.2 *Advanced Catechist Certification*

This level normally requires **100 Christian formation hours** to complete. Catechists will:

- acquire 60 hours within three years in addition to the 40 obtained in basic certification
  - acquire the hours in a balance of the growth areas
  - attend The Blessed Edmund Rice School for Pastoral Ministry courses for Advanced Certification when possible
- The Blessed Edmund Rice School for Pastoral Ministry courses will afford 30 hours toward certification (20 if audited)

- 5.2.1 Local parishes are encouraged to be creative in the ways which they offer catechists Christian formation hours; i.e., video cassette courses with group discussion and/or journal keeping,

scripture courses, workshops, retreats, and other **approved** formational activities. Parishes apply to the Office of Catechetical Ministry for clock hours **BEFORE** the course is offered.

5.3 **Professional Catechist Certification**

18 **academic** credits in theology and/or religious studies (graduate or undergraduate) with a minimum of three academic credits in each area of growth. Credits are granted by Catholic colleges and universities and are assessed and recognized by the Catechetical Office after submission of a transcript.

5.4 One academic credit equals 10 clock hours toward certification.

5.5 Clock hours are tallied in whole numbers. Portions of hours are dropped.

## VI. APPLICATION

6.1 **Application for Initial Certification**

Applicants for initial certification submit a recommendation from the Pastor, DRE, School Principal or High School Religion Department Chairperson indicating that the catechist is a practicing Catholic possessing the personal qualities of a catechist as indicated in Section II. This recommendation is part of the Catechist Certification Application.

6.2 Applicants complete the application form provided by the Catechetical Office and attach observation forms and interview form signature. [5.1]

6.3 This application must be in the Diocesan Catechetical Office by **June 30** of each year.

## VII. CATECHETICAL CREDENTIALS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL

7.1 **Secondary School Teachers of Religion and/or Religion Department Chairs**

a) All high school teachers of religion are expected to earn within a three year period the **Diocesan Professional Certification** which requires 18 academic credits (graduate or undergraduate) in theology or related discipline<sup>2</sup> with a minimum of three academic credits in each area of growth.

b) Beginning with the 2000-2001 academic year it is desirable that all full-time teachers

---

<sup>2</sup> Related discipline is determined by the Diocesan Director of Catechetical Ministry in consultation with the teacher.

of religion at the secondary level possess a Masters Degree in theology or related discipline. In the absence of a Masters Degree the teacher is required to have a Bachelor's Degree in theology or related discipline.

In the absence of a Bachelor's Degree in theology or related discipline, the teacher is required to earn at least 18 academic credits (graduate or undergraduate) in theology or related discipline within a three year period from a Catholic college/university after submission of a transcript.

- c) If the teacher of religion possesses a Masters Degree but in a different subject area he/she is required to earn 18 academic credits (graduate or undergraduate) in theology or related discipline within a three year period.
- d) Renewal of **Diocesan Professional Certification** may be accomplished through academic undergraduate or graduate credits and/or diocesan, parish or national catechetical events.

### 7.2 **Elementary School Teachers Who Teach Three or More Religion Periods Per Day**

- a) Those who teach religion the major part of the day are to be certified on the **Advanced** level. Teachers have three years to complete diocesan requirements for **Advanced** level certification.
- b) Teachers should have an earned Bachelor's Degree, preferably in theology or related discipline.
- c) In the absence of a Bachelor's Degree in theology or related discipline, the teacher is required to earn at least 18 academic credits (graduate or undergraduate) in theology or related discipline within a three year period from a Catholic college/university after submission of a transcript.
- d) Renewal of **Diocesan Advanced Certification** may be accomplished through academic undergraduate or graduate credits and/or diocesan, parish or national catechetical events.

### 7.3 **Elementary School Teachers Who Teach One or Two Religion Periods Per Day**

- a) Teachers are to be certified on the **Basic** level. This level requires 40 Christian formation hours over a period of three years and 30 hours every three years thereafter. The 40 hours must include ten (10) hours each in Area A-Biblical, Area B-Liturgical, Area C-Ecclesial and Area D-Natural. Teachers automatically receive six (6) hours in Area D for classroom preparation. This is given at the time of **INITIAL** application. Area B requires 5 hours in Liturgy and 5 hours in Spiritual. One half of the 40 Christian formation hours may be earned in a combination of parish events or self-study. Self study hours are requested **BEFORE** the study begins.

### 7.4 **Catholic Elementary and Secondary Teachers Who Do Not Teach Religion**

- a) Catholics who teach in a Catholic school but do not teach religion are expected to earn 24 Christian formation hours over a period of three years and 18 hours every three years thereafter. The 24 hours must include 8 hours in each of the following growth areas: Area A-Biblical, Area B-Liturgical (4) / Spiritual (4) and Area C-Ecclesial. Retreat Days may be applied to Area B-Spiritual. The 18 hours needed for renewal are acquired in Areas A, B and C.

#### 7.5 **Non-Catholic Elementary and Secondary School Teachers**

- a) Non-Catholics who teach in a Catholic school are expected to earn 24 Christian formation hours over a period of three years and 18 hours every three years thereafter. The 24 hours include 8 hours in each of the following growth areas: Area A-Biblical, Area B-Liturgical (4) / Spiritual (4) and Area C-Ecclesial. Retreat Days may be applied to Area B-Spiritual. The 18 hours needed for renewal are acquired in Areas A, B and C.

### **VIII. CATECHETICAL FORMATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Christian formation hours may be gained in a variety of ways. Some of which are:

- 8.1 Institutes, programs, workshops conducted or sponsored by the Catechetical Office which indicate a specific number of hours toward certification.
- 8.2 The Blessed Edmund Rice School for Pastoral Ministry.
- 8.3 Programs, workshops, in-service experiences offered by other departments of the diocese, or by parishes or schools which receive **PRIOR** written approval from the Catechetical Office according to these criteria:
  - The DRE or principal applies by completing the application form prior to the date of the offering.
  - The program, workshop or in-service is led by a qualified person with current knowledge and experience in theology and/or catechesis. The qualified person may be a presbyter or a person who has an MA in Theology from an accredited Catholic institution.
  - It is related to one of the areas of growth listed in Section III of this document.
  - It is conducted in accord with the principles and guidelines presented in the General Directory for Catechesis, and according to the principles of adult faith formation found in Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us.
  - It provides opportunity for personal interaction between leader and participants and among participants.

- It is in **addition** to the regular organization/planning sessions which are a normal part of involvement as a catechist in schools and parishes.
- 8.4 Other state, regional or national institutes, congresses or workshops directly related to catechetical ministry. The actual number of hours will be granted by the Catechetical Office after receiving and assessing information including the leader, the topic, and the length of time.
  - 8.5 Academic credits earned from Catholic colleges or universities; credits from other colleges or universities may be accepted after assessment by the Catechetical Office.
  - 8.6 Background and experience in a catechetical setting which are valuable assets of many persons presently serving as catechists in the diocese may be offered for evaluation. It is possible to initiate a process of assessment which will take into account an individual's catechetical experience, background in religious education, familiarity with current approaches in catechesis and effectiveness as a catechist. If additional formation is judged necessary, the development of an individualized learning plan approved by the Catechetical Office can be used to establish equivalency for the various levels of certification.
  - 8.7 Certificates of attendance are handed out after each approved session. Catechists accumulate these for reference when applying for certification. **These papers need not be sent with the application form.**

## IX. GRANTING OF CERTIFICATES

- 9.1 Certificates and Credentials will be sent to the DRE or Principal to grant at a recognition ceremony. Catechetical Sunday is the preferred time for this.

## X. BACHELOR OR GRADUATE DEGREES

- 10.1 Those who have earned a Bachelor or Graduate Degree in Religious Education, Theology, Pastoral Studies or an approved equivalent will be granted the **Professional Certificate** upon submission of:
  - Transcript from college/university granting the degree.
  - Evidence of continued enrichment in the growth areas listed in Section III.
  - Recommendation regarding the individual's personal qualities and effectiveness as a catechist from one of the following: Pastor, DRE, School Principal, or High School Religion Department Head.

## XI. CERTIFICATES FROM OTHER DIOCESES

- 11.1 Because of the wide variety of requirements, certificates from other dioceses will be

evaluated on an individual basis in accord with criteria described above.

## **XII. CONTINUED GROWTH AND ENRICHMENT OF CATECHISTS**

- 12.1 Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. [GDC 220]
- 12.2 While the entire Christian community is responsible for Christian catechesis and all of its members bear witness to the faith, only some receive the ecclesial mandate to be catechists. Together with the primordial mission which parents have in relation to their children, the Church confers the delicate task of organically transmitting the faith within the community on particular, specifically called members of God. [GDC 221]
- 12.3 All of these tasks are born of the conviction that the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel. The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists. ... Consequently, diocesan pastoral programs **must give absolute priority** to the *formation of lay catechists*. [GDC 234]
- 12.4 The Catechetical Office, Clergy, parish DRE, CRE, ARE and School Principals have an important responsibility to assist catechists in their efforts to renew themselves continually by providing opportunities for ongoing growth and enrichment. Catechists recognize the importance of continued renewal. They strive to move to the next level of catechist certification or to renew their current level according to the following guidelines.
- 12.5 **Renewal**
- The **Basic Catechist Certificate** and the **Advanced Catechist Certificate** are indications that persons have achieved important levels of ability as catechists. These certificates are granted for a **three year period**. Those who achieve either of these certificates are encouraged to move to the next level of certification, or to renew their certificate by acquiring **thirty hours** of formation during the three year period. The thirty hours are to be accumulated in a balance of the four growth areas.
  - The **Professional Catechist Certificate** is intended for those who are involved in catechetical ministry in a professional role. Achieving this certificate entails significant academic training, and those who have earned it are usually involved in researching and implementing ongoing developments in religious education. This involvement as catechetical leaders has an inherent dynamic towards ongoing growth. The Professional Catechist Certificate is granted for a period of **five years**, and may be **renewed** by gaining **six academic credits** or **sixty clock hours** of formation experiences or **any combination** of these (one academic credit equals ten hours of formation) within the five year period.
- 12.6 Catechists, in cooperation with local catechetical leaders, can best assess their needs for continued enrichment and ongoing catechetical formation. Opportunities for personal and professional growth which are offered on the local and diocesan level are encouraged. These

experiences can be a source of revitalizing and renewing one's faith commitment and catechetical skills.

- 12.7 Participation in catechetical events such as Catechetical Enrichment Day, Regional Catechetical Days, Catechist Formation Workshops, as well as those approved experiences offered by parishes and schools foster the ongoing growth of a catechist. Through such experiences, one can easily gain the necessary formation hours to renew a certificate or to move to the next level of certification.
- 12.8 Applications for renewal of certificate are to be signed by the appropriate person from among the following: Pastor, DRE, School Principal or High School Religion Department Head attesting to the successful completion of renewal requirements, and that the person is a Catholic in good standing striving toward the ideal qualities of catechists as described in section II of this document.
- 12.9 Renewal of certificates and credentials will be granted by the Catechetical Office to those whose applications for renewal are received and approved by **June 30** of any year.
- 12.10 Accumulation of hours for renewal may not include hours previously credited. In other words, hours are counted after the date of the last certification. Academic credits for renewal will have been acquired since the date of the last certification.

### **XIII. ROLE OF PARISH OR SCHOOL**

- 13.1 The Catechetical Office is charged with the task of providing services and guidelines for growth in catechetical formation. As important as this support task is, **it remains the role and privilege of the parish faith community to call forth, select and form its catechists.** Parishes provide the environment for personal growth, inspiration, education, spiritual nourishment and community building.

#### **13.2 Selection of Catechists**

Certification is granted by the Diocesan Catechetical Office. However, regardless of the level of certification a person may have been granted, the actual selection of persons to be involved in a parish or school catechetical program is the responsibility of the Pastor and the Parish DRE where appropriate, or Pastor and School Principal in Parish Schools or Diocesan High Schools.

- 13.2.1 The granting of certification is an indication that a person has sought to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to be more effective as a catechist. However, the reception of a certificate does not guarantee that a person will be successful as a catechist. Therefore, the decision about whether or not a person should serve as a catechist in a particular parish or school is properly the responsibility of appropriate leaders in the parish or school as given

above.

### 13.3 **Support of Catechists**

To recognize and affirm the important responsibilities which catechists have, parishes and schools are encouraged to support catechists by providing:

- Adequate facilities, budget, resources, library, and media equipment for the proper implementation of catechesis;
- Financial support to participate in opportunities for catechist certification and continuing enrichment as catechists;
- Encouragement and assistance in implementing these Catechist Guidelines;
- Public recognition and affirmation by the parish or school community of the important responsibilities of the catechists.
- Occasional social gatherings for catechists and their spouses to show appreciation for their service in this ministry.

## CONCLUSION

Neither catechesis nor evangelization is possible without the action of God working through God's Spirit.<sup>3</sup> In catechetical praxis neither the most advanced pedagogical techniques nor the most talented catechist can ever replace the silent and unseen action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> *"It is he who is in truth the protagonist of all the Church's mission,"*<sup>5</sup> it is he who is the principal catechist; it is he who is *"the interior teacher"* of those who grow in the Lord.<sup>6</sup> He is, in fact, *"the principal inspiring all catechetical work and all who do this work."*<sup>7</sup> [GDC 288]

---

<sup>3</sup> EN 75a

<sup>4</sup> EN 75d

<sup>5</sup> RM 21

<sup>6</sup> CT 72

<sup>7</sup> CT 72

## APPENDIX

### **Principles of Adult Religious Education**

1. Adults learn best when they are treated with respect as self directing persons.
2. Adults learn best when the learning situation is related to their past experience.
3. Adults learn best when they have participated in the planning of the learning activity and set their own goals.
4. Adults learn best when they are physically comfortable and can socialize with those in the learning group.
5. Adults learn best when they are with their peers, freely learning in groups.
6. Adults learn best when there are opportunities for a variety of learning activities.
7. Adults learn best in a problem-centered situation when a question needs resolving or when a task needs doing.
8. Adults learn best when they can see progress, immediate results and some rewards for the time they put in learning.
9. Adults learn best when they evaluate themselves.

— *Getting Started In Adult Religious Education*  
— James J. DeBoy, Jr.

## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this document:

- CT**            **Catechesi Tradendae**  
Vatican Polyglot Press, Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1979
- GDC**            **General Directory for Catechesis: Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticano**
- NCD**            **Sharing the Light of Faith, National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States.**  
Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1979.
- PCM**            **Parish Catechetical Ministry**  
Encino, CA: Benziger Publishing Company, 1986.
- RG**            **Resource Guidebook for Diocesan Directors of Religious Education**  
National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education,  
Washington, DC, 1983.
- EN**            **Evangelii Nuntiadi: Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticano**
- OHWB**          **Our Hearts Were Burning**, Washington, DC  
United States Catholic Conference, 1999
- CEM**            **Catechesis As An Evangelizing Moment**: Washington, DC: 1999
- GSA**            **Getting Started In Adult Religious Education**  
DeBoy, James J., Jr. Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1979.

*We are filled with great joy and expectation as the third millennium of Christian history dawns. Before us, in the wonder of God's gracious plan, stretch new opportunities to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to all the world. We are eager to witness and share the word of life about the reign of God faithfully, so that each new generation can hear this word in its own accents and discover Christ as its Savior.*

*Every disciple of the Lord Jesus shares in this mission. To do their part, adult Catholics must be mature in faith and well equipped to share the Gospel, promoting it in every family circle, in every church gathering, in every place of work, and in every public forum. They must be women and men of prayer whose faith is alive and vital, grounded in a deep commitment to the person and message of Jesus.*

***Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us***

*- A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States  
Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops  
Washington, DC: 1999*

We wish to thank the Catechist Certification Committee which drew up the original guidelines for certification in 1987.

*Mary Lea Abell, SSND*

*Ms. Roslyn Corrigan*

*June Denne, IHM*

*Elizabeth Gorvin, SHCJ*

*Ms. Diane Lampitt*

*Sally Latkovich, SCJ*

*Harry McGovern, OSFS*

*Mary John Sullivan, OLVN*

*Representatives of the Department of Education  
Carmella DeCosty, SNJM and Regis Krusniewski, SSND*

After a three year period the guidelines were reviewed, revised or renewed as necessary by the Religious Education Advisory Council. We are grateful for the work of the Council which consisted of the following members:

*Ana Luisa Cespedes, OP*

*Beverly DiStefano, OP*

*Rev. Jacques Fabre, CS*

*Mr. John Garisto*

*Rev. Mark Heuberger*

*Mr. Timothy O'Connor*

*Rev. George Ratzmann*

*Elaine Robbins, OP*

*Ms. Roberta Tischer*

*Ms. Patricia White*

*S. Donna Marie Wilhelm*

*Representatives of the Department of Education  
Carmella DeCosty, SNJM and Regis Krusniewski, SSND.*

The Religious Education Advisory Council members who revised the guidelines in 2000 consists of the following members:

*Ms. Kathleen Kirley, President*

*Martha Flores, MHML*

*Monica Paul Fraser, OP*

*Ms. Joan Kamm*

*Ms. Kathy Kleinlein*

*Ms. Catherine LaDisa*

*Frances Lalor, RSM*

*Ms. Nina Liwski*

*Rev. John Ludden*

*Rev. Anthony Pastucci*

*Ms. Patricia Powers*

*Jamesine Riley, SSJ*

*Ms. Lorraine Smith*

*Patrick Wilson, BCS*

*Representatives of the Department of Education  
Roberta Schmidt, CSJ and Regis Krusniewski, SSND*

The work of the original Religious Education Advisory Council has been updated in light of significant new catechetical documents, but the original work is the foundation of this updated version. We are grateful to the present Religious Education Advisory Council for undertaking the project.

