

CATECHIST HANDBOOK

2017 - 2018

SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA CATHOLIC CHURCH OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Pastor.....Msgr. Desmond O'Connor
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Director of Faith Formation.....Mrs. Heidi Reale
Assist. to the Director.....Mrs. Diane McCoach

OFFICE HOURS

Monday: 10 – 8:00 pm
Tuesday: 10 – 6:30 pm
Wednesday: 10 – 8 pm
Thursday: 1 – 6:30 pm
when classes are in session.

INTRODUCTION

Mission Statement

Religious Education at Saint Kateri Tekakwitha is one of the most significant aspects of parish life. The goal of the program is to assist parents in the proper formation of their children in the rich tradition of the Roman Catholic Faith. To that end, an integrated experience of traditional classroom catechesis, personal prayer, communal liturgical worship, sacramental preparation and other community building activities is provided. The entire parish community is encouraged to participate in this effort.

Policy of Non-Discrimination

The guidelines followed by the Office of Religious Education reflect the Church's core belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, discrimination based on age, race, gender, national origin, disability, or marital status (except as it affects one's status as a practicing Catholic) is prohibited. The Office reserves the right, however, to act on the basis of its religious principles regarding the acceptance of volunteers and the supervision of their various activities.

I. THE CATECHIST

A. The Role of the Catechist

Our program is designed to assist parents in their sacred responsibility to educate their children in the Faith. It complements, but can never replace, parental obligations, for **“Parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children.”** (*National Catechetical Directory*) The purpose of a catechist, therefore, is to lend support to the parents by proclaiming within a traditional classroom setting the Good News of Jesus Christ. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the catechist provides an atmosphere appropriate for spiritual, intellectual and moral growth. Such growth may take place by using a variety of methods.

The six fundamental tasks of a Catechist are to:

1. Promote the knowledge of the Roman Catholic Faith
2. Direct moral formation.
3. Provide liturgical education.
4. Teach various forms of prayer.
5. Educate for community life.
6. Initiate into the missionary dimension.

The Catechist is essential to the mission of the parish. As stated in the *General Directory for Catechesis*:

No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the Catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to the catechist by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life constitute the soul of every method. Only his or her own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other catechetical instruments.

B. Requirements for Acceptance as a Catechist

The applicant must be a practicing Catholic, 18 years or older, who is faithful to, and living a lifestyle consistent with, the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Because catechists serve as role models for their students, it is important that they be Catholics in good standing, have a strong personal prayer life, attend Mass weekly and seek opportunities to enhance their own Religious Education wherever possible.

All catechists complete a volunteer application form, which requests information on the applicant's religious and educational background along with two references. In order to satisfy the *Archdiocesan Safe Environment Program* requirements, an "Addenda" form and a form authorizing a background check are also completed. An informal interview then takes place between the applicant and the Director.

C. Opportunities and Responsibilities outside the Classroom

Each catechist teaches 30 weeks of 90 minute classes. The maximum class size is 20. The catechist is *expected to read and abide by the policies stated in this handbook* and:

1. Attend two catechist meetings. The plenary session is held before Labor Day, and a grade-level meeting is held in January around Martin Luther King Day.
2. Spend a few hours each week preparing for class and writing a lesson plan to be used during class. The plan should be based on the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis*, the Catechist editions of the text, and additional materials found on the web or in the office.
3. Provide for a qualified substitute whenever absent.
4. Complete *Safer Spaces Training*, required of all new volunteers within the first 45 days of the school year. In addition, topics relating to the US Bishops' "no tolerance" policy must be discussed in the classroom at some point throughout the year at each grade level. The office supplies grade appropriate material in mid-October. It must be covered by April 1st.

The catechist is also *strongly encouraged* to:

1. Be formally commissioned during the morning Masses on Catechetical Sunday, September 17th. This year's theme is "Living as Missionary Disciples"
2. Take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Archdiocesan Catechist Formation Program (see **F** below), to become more knowledgeable in the Catholic Faith and, hence, a more effective catechist.
3. Attend the **Catechetical Forum** on Saturday, October 28th at Sacred Heart Church in Monroe or October 14th in the Bronx (see **G** below) and more local "Marathon" days throughout the year.

D. Orientation of New Catechists

New catechists meet with the Director prior to the annual Catechist Meeting in late August. Wherever possible, materials are provided to the new catechist in advance. During the session with the Director, the new catechist has the opportunity to obtain detailed information about the program and share any concerns. At this time the new catechist will become familiarized with the classrooms, the office and the various instructional resources available

E. Professionalism

As educators entrusted with the sacred task of passing on the Faith, catechists should reflect their role appropriately by their appearance and their actions. Cell phones should not be used during class time for personal reasons. It is not appropriate to have other young children in the classroom. Class assistants should be 8th grade or older. Record-keeping should be neat, accurate and timely. Most importantly, all personal information about students and staff must be kept confidential at all times.

F. Catechist Formation and Certification

The Archdiocese of New York strongly encourages all catechists to actively pursue certification. The *General Directory for Catechesis* states that

Catechesis needs to consider, as its primary task, the preparation and formation of Catechists in the deep riches of the Faith.... 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.

Catechist Certification is a two-stage process by which catechists may acquire and refresh their basic knowledge of the Roman Catholic Faith and the catechetical principles needed to communicate it to others. Level I is phasing out of 20 two hour courses and into 5 course "clusters," or the equivalent thereof online. Level II consists of a series of 5 eight-hour courses (four sessions each). *There are no tests or extensive assignments given during these sessions, and any interested adult, whether catechist or not, is invited to attend.* The Archdiocesan Catechetical Office in New York determines the topics, and the Dutchess/Ulster Regional Office in Poughkeepsie arranges the dates and locations of these classes. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged for all Level I and Level II courses, including those offered online. Updated information may be obtained at www.nyfaithformation.org. After completing each traditional course, those in attendance are given a small blue attendance slip signed by the instructor. It is the catechist's responsibility to return it to our office, where it is recorded and filed in the catechist's folder. Online participants will print out a course completion form. Online courses run from Friday to Friday and fill quickly, so pre-register early. *Credit toward certification will not be given until the catechist submits the blue attendance slip or completion form to the Director.* In addition to the required number of courses, a classroom observation and subsequent conference and written evaluation are also mandated by the Archdiocese (see section **H.** below).

When the requirements for Level I and/or Level II are completed, copies of the application for certification, the record of attendance and the written classroom evaluation are forwarded to the Regional Office, which grants certification for five years.

G. The Catechetical Forum brings together all those involved in catechesis throughout the Archdiocese. This all-day Saturday program includes Mass, lectures, exhibits and a closing celebration. Check www.nyfaithformation.org and, if interested, inform the Director by mid-September. **Our parish will underwrite the cost.**

H. Classroom Observations and Written Evaluations of all catechists by the Director take place during the first year and occasionally thereafter. The catechist and Director agree in advance on the date of the first observation. During the actual 45 minute observation, the Director will note how the concepts were explained, what materials were used, how closely the written lesson plan was followed and the quality of the interaction between the catechist and his or her students. The Director will also note both commendable aspects of the classroom experience and any recommendations for improvement, including suggestions for implementation. Shortly thereafter, the completed Evaluation Form is given to the catechist. An opportunity is provided to meet with the Director. Once reviewed and signed, a copy of the form is given to the catechist and the original is placed in his or her file.

I. Communication: Group e-mails are mailed approximately weekly to all catechists. **On short notice, please call the office instead of using -email.** Please e-mail requests for copies several hours in advance to saintkateriparish@hotmail.com. (Diane) You may e-mail Heidi at any time or day at sktfaithform@optonline.net. Please read in a timely manner any materials found in the catechist mailboxes or "cubbies." Finally, please refrain from using catechist e-mail addresses for purposes other than Religious Education "business."

II. PLANNING THE LESSON

Because lesson planning is so critical to the success of the class and the program, **a one page written lesson plan is required each week.** Blank outlines will be provided at the beginning of the year for your convenience. Time for attendance, announcements and prayer should always be included in each lesson plan. The completed lesson plan should be left in the folder after class for the Director to review and eventually return.

A weekly lesson plan is a guide for the catechist and the key to a successful classroom experience. When writing a lesson plan, the catechist determines what experiences and activities will best communicate to the students the desired learning objective. It also gives a sense of the overall flow of things and helps to budget time. A good lesson plan includes:

1. Name, class, chapter title and number, and a specific Archdiocesan Guideline to be covered during class.
2. Additional objectives (What, specifically, will the student learn today?)
3. Directions for the various activities (How will he learn it?)
4. Scripture references, where appropriate.
5. A list of materials needed to fulfill the objective.
6. A chronological sequence of class activities, including the time each activity is expected to take.
7. A self-evaluation to be completed at the end of the class. (How did it go? What would you change?)

A. Tips for Lesson Planning

Classes without the direction of a lesson plan become vulnerable to boredom, discipline problems, lackluster performance and poor participation.

1. **Look ahead.** Preview the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis* *and* the entire textbook to get the “big picture” for the entire year and to see how much time there is to accomplish your goals. Get a sense of how one lesson builds on the previous one and lays the foundation for the next.
2. **Know your primary resources.** Besides the *Guidelines* and the student/teacher texts, supplementary materials are also available at every grade level. Bibles, rosaries and many craft supplies are found in the office. Our resource library contains many delightful books for young readers and many “how-to” books with great suggestions for prayer services, games and other activities. Also, there are several excellent online websites. **The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) is the most important reference for any grade.** (Note that the numbers cited in the Guidelines refer to CCC paragraph numbers.)
3. **Examine the Teacher’s Notes in the Catechist’s Guide.** These are the beginning catechist’s best friend, for here the lesson is laid out like a blueprint, and step-by-step instructions are offered. Write in your catechist texts, use post-its, etc. It’s yours!
4. **Visualize yourself teaching the lesson.** Practice using your imagination to teach specific concepts and experience various classroom situations.
5. **Teach to various learning styles.** Visual learners enjoy attention-grabbing board work as they enter the room. Auditory learners love listening to CDs. Kinesthetic (“touchy-feely”) learners are fascinated with objects passed around the class. And everyone enjoys a short, appropriate DVD every month or so!
6. **Make adjustments to fit your particular class.** Your class may not be ready for a specific concept or the suggested method of teaching it. Be flexible and make the necessary adjustment.

7. **Remember your goals and objectives.** It is crucial that you know the purpose of your lesson. Goals and learning outcomes should be stated concretely and in measurable terms. I.e., when do you know a student has learned something?
8. **Have materials ready.** If supplies, videos or copies are needed from the office, *please e-mail Diane at saintkateriparish@hotmail.com or call several hours in advance* to ensure your request. When leaving a telephone message, be specific with your request.
9. **Have an alternate plan ready.** Decide on different ways to communicate the objectives of the lesson in case your plan isn't working. Also, in case the lesson needs to be shortened due to unforeseen circumstances, decide in advance what portions can be eliminated or delayed until the following week.
10. **Build community, especially among adolescents,** with ice breakers, small group sharing, real life applications, games and friendly competition.
11. **Do something different at the end of class.** Ordinarily a chapter or concept can be covered sufficiently within one hour. Every so often, take the extra 30 minutes to cover a completely different topic related to faith formation. Recite the required prayers, discuss the liturgical calendar in each room, the saint of the day or a current topic in the news (from a religious perspective). Visits to the church or chapel, the Rosary garden and the Stations of the Cross are always appropriate. Guest speakers are also allowed, but please check with the Director first.
12. **Avoid an excessive number of handouts.** Handouts should be clear and not patched together. It is advisable to be aware of copyright laws, but most publishers allow class sets to be made. Lots of great activities are available on the Loyola website.

B. Implementing the Lesson Plan in the Classroom

1. A lesson plan is an instructional “road map.” There are many routes to the destination, anyone of which may be suitable on a given day with your class.
2. Always start **on time** with prayer (formal and/or informal), followed by attendance and reminders. Announce what your plan is for the day. Collect and/or review homework whenever assigned.
3. Keep the activity varied and interactive. Stand or walk around the room wherever possible. The carpeted upstairs and carpets downstairs lend themselves to story-telling and sharing.
4. New catechists and substitutes may find comfort in following precisely the activities in the textbook. That’s fine, as long as it is covering a *Guideline* concept. More experienced catechists grow creative with time and use supplementary materials. The Holy Spirit is guiding your lesson, so feel free to follow your instincts and carry out *God’s* plan when prompted to do so!
5. Don’t feel duty bound to cover every point in exact order.
6. Never teach without an easily decipherable written or computer generated plan. It’s easy to forget or become confused in front of a group of children!
7. Attention spans of individuals and classes vary widely. Adjust your methods accordingly. **Over plan** to avoid dead and wasted class time at the end. Don’t stop five minutes early for students to put their coats on, etc. There is time for that after the dismissal announcement.
8. Be comfortable with your own teaching style. Don’t try to imitate other catechists or their lesson plans. It’s good for children to experience many teaching styles!
9. Be honest in your evaluation of the lesson, for the Director is particularly interested in finding out what worked and what didn’t.

10. It's OK not to know all the answers to the students' questions. They will respect you more if you research the answer and "get back to them" next week. **Please don't "make-up" an answer based on your opinion.** The clergy and the Director would love to help you out!
11. Expect the unexpected, and keep your sense of humor. Your calm demeanor will be reassuring to your class. Modeling Christianity is your main "task"!
12. The Director is always happy to come into class to assist with any difficult situations or concepts. Please use her as a resource. Also, *given advance notice*, Msgr. Desmond and Fr. Matthew MacDonald are happy to speak to a class for a portion of the period on a given topic.
13. Remember the importance of prayer. Sadly, for many children your class time may be their only experience of prayer all week. Vary the forms of prayer. Recite the required ones, but include spontaneous prayer.
14. Beware of becoming derailed by irrelevant, off-topic questions! You are not obliged to answer every question asked by every student!

III. THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

A. Supervision of Students

The catechist is responsible for all students assigned to them from the time of their entry into the classroom until they are dismissed. In addition to being physically present, the catechist should be attentive to the various needs of the students. *The catechist should:*

1. arrive 15 minutes early to obtain the catechist folder from the office, read through last minute notices, set up the classroom, put up board work, etc.
2. greet students as they arrive in the classroom.

3. **never** leave the classroom unattended. (An assistant or student should be sent to the office for any supplies.) Yell to the office or hall monitor if necessary.
4. ensure that each child leaves the building with a parent or an approved “carpool” person at dismissal.
5. **never** allow a parent to pick up a child directly from the classroom. A staff member or volunteer will escort the child from the classroom for an early pickup.
6. keep all absence notes loosely in front of the folder.

If an **emergency** occurs during class, such as a catechist illness or student accident, send an assistant or student to the office for immediate assistance. In extreme cases, send the entire class to the office or to another, supervised location. In all cases of emergency it is important that students remain calm, quiet and, preferably, in their seats.

In case of a **FIRE or fire drill**, students are to proceed according to the map and instructions in the catechist’s attendance folder. Drills are conducted in the early fall.

Silence and order must always be maintained during a fire drill. If not already in the office, attendance folders should be brought out. Attendance should be checked once the students are at their assigned stations outside the building.

B. Confidential Information

Each catechist’s attendance folder will include information about any student with special needs, such as medical conditions, physical or learning disabilities, custody issues, etc. *Such information must be used with discretion and kept strictly confidential.* Some special needs children may even be assigned an assistant to help them in class.

C. Curriculum

Our Religious Education Program follows the *Guidelines for Catechesis* developed by the Catechetical Office of the Archdiocese of New York. The themes, objectives and appropriate prayers for each grade level are found in these *Guidelines*. Because it is considered ***more important than the children’s textbooks***, a copy is

distributed to each catechist. It is a valuable resource that should be checked weekly, to determine whether required concepts are, indeed, being covered.

D. Doctrine

Because catechists are commissioned to teach the truths of the Catholic Faith, they should *never* offer their personal opinion about matters of faith or morals. If uncertainties arise, a priest, a deacon or the Director should be consulted.

E. Assessment of Student Progress

- 1. A small amount of homework** (15 – 30min.) is encouraged, because it reinforces classroom learning. Students should be tested on their required prayers, Commandments, Mysteries of the Rosary, etc.
- 2. Evaluation of students**, whether oral or written, should take place on a regular basis. Whether short, informal quizzes or longer unit tests, the objective is to monitor individual student growth, group progress and the overall effectiveness of the program.
- 3. Student Progress Reports** are distributed at the end of January and mid-May. Their purpose is to communicate to the parent the student's individual strengths and weaknesses within the academic setting. Detailed instructions on the use of this form will be given at the grade level meetings in January.
- 4. Accurate records** of completed homework assignments, test scores, prayer progress, etc. should be kept for *your* records throughout the year.

If a child has not fulfilled grade level requirements at year's end, the parents are informed and, along with the catechist and Director, determine the appropriate course of action.

F. Attendance

The attendance roster issued by the Office is a legal document, so ***must be kept complete and accurate at all times.*** Take attendance immediately and in **pen, using X if present only, otherwise leave blank.** An office volunteer will pick up the roster

5 minutes or so into the class and will check off Tardy students at the door. Please leave any excuse notes loosely in the front of the folder. The attendance rosters will be slipped back into the catechist folders by the next class.

G. Seating Plans

Classroom seating plans should always be used. Graph paper is provided for this purpose in your folders. Such charts are of great importance to substitutes, but also provide a sense of order and consistency, assist in the early identification of students and prove an important reference should an article be found or the tables misused. Arrange the room however you wish before class, but return them to the traditional position after class. Hint: it is preferable not to have friends sit together.

H. Late Arrivals

Always begin the class promptly after the PA announcement. Waiting for tardy children will only encourage future tardiness. Whenever possible, the assistant should deal with the tardy child, giving him or her any needed materials or instructions.

I. Trips outside of the Classroom

Unless the need is urgent, individual students should not leave the classroom routinely to use the restroom or water fountain. (This can be a tough call. When meeting with the parents during the first day, encourage them to attend to their children's needs prior to class.) *Please note that students must use the bathrooms on the same floor as their classrooms.*

On nice days, a portion of the class may be held outside! Also, feel free to take the children to the chapel frequently. (Please inform the office when you go.) **Schedule trips to the main church with the Director in advance, as it is locked during the day.** Show students how to bless themselves with holy water, genuflect and receive communion. Encourage silence and reverence. A guide to our beautiful stained glass windows, etc. is available in the office. During Lent, the class may *quietly* process between the Stations of the Cross, using the prayer books provided.

J. Food in Classrooms

Except for Christmas and end-of year parties, ***food and drink are not permitted in the classrooms*** except for the 2:30 "A" sessions.

Catechists should model this behavior. Some children have serious food allergies. Even small amounts of food attract mice and insects. Food packaging, spills and crumbs make more work for Mr. Piehler, who maintains our facilities.

Most children attend just before or after dinner. It is inappropriate to give food as a bribe for good behavior or as a reward. Stickers and holy cards are more appropriate, last longer and are more acceptable to the parents.

K. Respect for Clergy

When Msgr. Desmond, Fr. Matthew MacDonald or one of our deacons enters a classroom, the children should stand and say, "Good Afternoon, _____" as a sign of appreciation for the sacrifices the clergy have made to serve our parish.

L. Discipline

The Gospel values of charity, kindness, honesty, respect, sharing and obedience to legitimate authority should be exhibited in the classroom at all times. No violence, prejudice, abusive words or misbehavior will be tolerated.

A well-organized catechist and a well-prepared, skillfully executed lesson plan are the best defense against poor student behavior, but situations will invariably arise which force the catechist to take disciplinary action. To minimize such instances, the following guidelines may prove helpful:

1. Establish procedures immediately and adhere to them consistently. Be specific on what is expected of students and how to behave and act in class. Students generally already know what behavior is expected of them, and it is best to take a positive approach. **Also, all students are to bring the text and a sharpened pencil each week.**
2. Except for those attending the "A" sessions at 2:30 pm, students should bring nothing into the classroom except

their texts, pencils, homework assignments and other items assigned by the catechist. Set guidelines for cell phones at the beginning of the year; No personal use, class purposes only! **Catechists, also, should not access their cell phones while in the classroom unless use is part of a lesson.**

3. Get to know the students' backgrounds, especially any family, peer or social influences that may be affecting behavior. A conversation with the parents or the Director may prove helpful here.
4. Affirm good or improving behavior, and use minor misbehavior as a positive "teachable moment" whenever possible (e.g. "What would Jesus do?").
5. **Never** use physical discipline (corporal punishment) or verbal humiliation. Also, remember to avoid being alone with a child in a closed room.
6. Serious or persistent problems should be referred to the Director **as early as possible**. Students sent to the office should be accompanied by someone who can provide additional information about the incident.

M. Classroom Utilization

Each room is shared by many other classes and parish groups throughout the week. Use the cork strips for displaying student work. *Use push pins only (no staples) for mounting on cork. Use only blue painter's tape (available in the office) for mounting posterboard. Please do not tack or tape anything directly on the walls or in the hallway and especially not on the smartboards.* Student work may be displayed for a month. Class picture posters or prayer progress charts, however, may stay up for the year. Bring bulky materials back and forth wherever possible, since classroom cabinet space is very limited. Remind your students to respect the property of others with whom they share the room.

THANK YOU for answering the call to the catechetical ministry. May God reward your efforts and fill your heart and classroom with His love.