

Policy on Hiring of High School Catechists

Policy No. 2009-01

Policy Statement

Principals of Catholic high schools geographically located within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis shall see to it that anyone hired to teach one or more sections of religion is selected according to guidelines established by the Office of Catholic Education in consultation with the Archbishop of Indianapolis. While maintaining local autonomy, these guidelines help ensure that catechists have appropriate academic background and are enthusiastic participants in an overall Archdiocesan catechetical plan.

Recommended: November 18, 2008 by the Archdiocesan Education Commission

*Ratified Date: January, 12, 2009 by: Most Rev. Daniel M. Buechlein, OSB
Archbishop of Indianapolis*

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Administrative Rules

1. Newly-hired high school catechists must have at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in Catholic theology—usually 30 college- or graduate-level credits. Conditional hiring—a written agreement between principal and catechist—may occur. Principals are to consult with the Archdiocesan Director of Catechesis before offering conditional employment. (Employees currently serving as catechists within the Archdiocese are exempt from this administrative rule.)
2. All candidates will be asked a brief series of specific questions by the principal and/or search committee during the interview process; these standard questions will complement the school-specific questions that serve well based on the wisdom and experience of each principal—as well as the unique identity and charism of each school. Preferred answer parameters for the Archdiocesan-wide questions are established by the Office of Catholic Education (attached).
3. Upon hiring by principals, catechists will be instructed to meet with the Archdiocesan Director of Catechesis at their earliest convenience. This will establish a line of communication and a professional relationship that will help individual efforts complement those of others in a well-orchestrated plan for comprehensive, systematic and pastoral catechesis.

*Promulgation Date: January 12, 2009 by Annette “Mickey” Lentz,
Executive Director, Catholic Education and Faith Formation*

Application

Applies to all Catholic Secondary Schools geographically located within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis under the ecclesiastical authority of the Archbishop in his role as chief teacher. While schools sponsored by religious orders have unique processes in place—processes addressing Catholic identity, including who is hired to teach religion—this policy complements such processes thereby bringing an appropriate and healthy consistency to high school catechesis throughout southern and central Indiana.

History/Rationale

All catechists teach in relation to the Ordinary (bishop) of their (arch)diocese—the chief shepherd and catechist for Catholics in that See. This relationship often manifests itself through diocesan pastoral staff who serve as liaisons regarding personnel, curriculum and catechist formation. While each school has a unique identity and charism, and various catechetical leaders guide a secondary religion teacher’s work, the Office of Catholic Education serves in an essential capacity of ensuring healthy and appropriate consistency for catechesis throughout the Archdiocese.

The academic preparation required to teach religion at a high school level is equally rigorous to that of secular subjects. Each year, graduates present themselves with impeccable academic credentials and, in more and more cases, methodological and pedagogical training.

Because catechists are witnesses as well as teachers, their interview process must ascertain fidelity to Church teaching and a genuine enthusiasm for living our Catholic faith. Principals have a responsibility to hire catechists who see themselves as part of a broad effort involving—among others—their fellow department members, school and religious community leaders, archdiocesan pastoral staff and the Archbishop of Indianapolis.

Guidance

Because methodology courses are an important complement to each teacher’s knowledge of her or his subject area, more college- and graduate-level theology programs are including pedagogy in their curricula. As time passes, more high school religion candidates will have both subject mastery and professional education background. Any questions regarding the theology credentials of a catechist candidate should be referred to the Archdiocesan Director of Catechesis.

An example of a conditional hiring—a written agreement between principal and catechist (with consultation between principal and Director of Catechesis)—would be as follows: A candidate has a minor in Catholic theology and the principal sees good classroom management and methodology skills. In consultation with the Director, the catechist is hired with an understanding that additional credits will be earned according to a written agreement and timeline. (The Director will offer guidance on achieving the credits

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efficiently. Principals are solely responsible for direct supervision and performance development of their teachers, including catechists, in accordance with each school's unique identity and charism.)

Interview Questions:

1. *As a catechist you lead others to Christ through your words and your actions. What you say and do, then, should conform to Church teaching. Is there any aspect of Church teaching as defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that you could not teach sincerely and authentically?*

The desired response is no. (This yes-no question complements open-ended, school-specific questions asked according to principals' experience and wisdom as well as each school's unique identity and charism.) Catechists are witnesses as well as teachers. Students readily perceive a lack of genuineness in communicating the truth and beauty of Catholic life. It would be unfair to place a teacher in the situation of having to convey beauty and truth in a way of life about whose basic doctrinal and moral teaching he or she has one or more grave, persistent doubts.

2. *What do you like best about being Catholic?*

Answers should indicate an upbeat attitude toward the Church as each principal ascertains such an attitude—based on this guidance: It isn't that living a Catholic life is always easy or that one has never struggled with any aspect of the Faith. But a catechist needs a mature, steady faith to help light the path for youth who are continuing to form their own beliefs, attitudes, practices and perceptions. An open loyalty to the Magisterium is a valued trait in catechists.

3. *Catechists do not create the basic content of their teaching. They represent the Magisterium and their bishop to students. How comfortable are you in being the face of our Church as well as representing the Archbishop and his message to your students?*

Catechists—as public proclaimers of our Church's teaching—formally represent the Ordinary in their (arch)diocese. They should see themselves as having a relationship with our Archbishop that may manifest itself in a variety of ways. While candidates may not be familiar with diocesan administrative structures, they should be predisposed toward favorable collaboration with pastoral staff—seeing their individual work as part of a multifaceted effort.

The appointment between catechist and the Director of Catechesis can occur at the Catholic Center or elsewhere. Discussion topics may include advice for ongoing professional development.

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It is understood that several catechetical leaders in religious communities and schools may guide a religion teacher's efforts over time. What is most important here is that the meeting between religion teacher and Director of Catechesis happens very soon after hiring to establish good communication, rapport and the professional relationship that helps each catechist best serve students and families in her or his school community.