

THE CATECHIST AND CATHOLIC CULTURE

LESSON PLAN

- I. Opening Prayer (5 minutes)**
 - a. Read the Prayer

- II. Exploring Catholic Culture (30 minutes)**
 - a. Present Characteristics of Culture
 - b. Assign Cultural Iceberg Activity (Handout 1) and respond to the statement Catholic culture looks like...”
 - c. Share response to statements with the large group
 - d. Facilitators summarizes and highlights key insights

- III. The Culture of Catechesis (30 minutes)**
 - a. Present Characteristics of a Catholic Cultural
 - b. Assign sections from the Vision of Catechesis Activity (Handout 2) read and respond “What does a culture of catechesis look like...”
 - c. Share response to statements with the large group
 - d. Facilitators summarizes and highlights key insights

- IV. The Catechist and Catholic Culture (20 minutes)**
 - a. Lead a discussion on participating in Catholic culture.
 - b. Facilitator summarizes and highlights key concepts

- V. Fostering Catholic Culture in the Classroom (30 minutes)**
 - a. Present Characteristics of Community
 - b. Assign sections from the Catholic Community Activity (Handout 3) read and respond “Catholic Community is...”
 - c. Facilitator summarizes and highlights key concepts
 - d. Reactions, summary, and closing prayer

THE CATECHIST AND THE CATHOLIC CULTURE

FACILITATOR'S NOTES AND HANDOUTS

I. **Opening Prayer**

Facilitator may use their own prayer or the following.

Oh God, who gathers all people to yourself, help us to better live in community with our families, among our friends, in our neighborhoods, parish and school, in our country and in the world.

Guide us to be loving, compassionate and understanding so that we work together to create an environment that truly reflects the Body of Christ in our place of ministry.

We pray through Jesus, our Lord and savior. Amen.

II. **Exploring Catholic Culture**

A. The purpose of this section is to raise catechists awareness of what is unique about a Catholic environment.

B. Present the following information to the participants.

Culture is the environment that expresses patterns of assumptions, values, norms, and tangible symbols. By understanding the culture of the parish religious education program and Catholic school, catechists are able to participate in a framework of meaning that informs the way they perceive, believe, evaluate and act within the Church's ministry of catechesis.

In general, culture can be described as an iceberg. Like an iceberg, we see the portion that is visible above water, which is only a small piece of a much larger whole, that is unseen because of being under water. For example, culture has numerous observable characteristics like food, dress, dance, music, arts, and rituals on the surface. The reality is that these observable characteristics are merely external manifestations of the deeper and broader components of culture, which involve the complex core values that lie below the surface. These values are primarily learned ideas of what is good, right, desirable, and acceptable as well as what is bad, wrong, undesirable, and unacceptable.

A religious culture also exists at these two levels. On the surface, there are the visible symbols and observable behaviors, such as the way we act, celebrate, and pray based on the Church's beliefs, which we share in common as members of the Catholic Church. However, these visible characteristics of culture reflect deeper values in the hearts Catholics.

Understanding this distinction helps catechists recognize relevant patterns that provide information to help them participate in and contribute to the Catholic environment in which they are ministering.

Whether we are in the parish religious education program or a Catholic school, this environment places a high priority on handing on the faith. Due to this effort, there is a twofold expectation that we contribute to this environment by being engaged with our faith and participating in our own religious formation so that we are able to teach what is current and meaningful to our students, with passion and commitment.

C. Break into small groups and distribute handout H-1. *Cultural Iceberg*

Survey

In Box 1 list all of the observable characteristics of a culture like food, dress, customs, symbols, and ceremonies. In Box 2 list characteristics that are not visible such as values, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. When completed repeat the exercise by answering the same questions for our Catholic culture. Invite participants to answer the question “Catholic culture looks like...”

Sharing

Have a spokesperson from each group give a summary of the group discussion and how they answered the question.

Summary

Facilitator summarizes and highlights main ideas from the above sharing. In addition, the facilitator should stress the importance of the catechists responsibilities to contribute to the culture in their religious education program and school.

III. The Culture of Catechesis

- A. The purpose of this section is to help catechists recognize the ministerial environment in which they are teaching.
- B. Present the following information to the catechists.

To recognize and interpret the content of Catholic culture requires that people experience it. Through active participation, one develops a Catholic Identity, which is composed of three fundamental characteristics that come from the Church’s doctrines, practices, pieties, and morality. They are sacramentality, mediation, and communion.

These three characteristics are the basis for the *Vision for Catechesis for the Diocese of Rockford* as summarized in handout H-2. We will look at this vision in more detail in a few minutes. First, let’s look at what these three characteristics mean.

- 1) Sacramentality refers to the sensibility that our God is not a God that is distant, but recognized in all creation through the beauty of nature, expressed in human love, grasped in community, and realized in the life of grace when experienced through the sacraments.
- 2) Mediation stresses the grace of God’s invisible presence, as experienced through some concrete symbol or event. First and foremost in the person of Jesus, then through other signs and instruments of salvation, such as natural, scriptural, and ecclesial.

This is what we call the Kerygma, which means first announcement or proclamation of the most foundational truths of our faith. These truths are that Jesus is the chosen Messiah, who would initiate the Kingdom of God. Through his death and resurrection, bought about this kingdom by forgiving our sins. He rose gloriously from the dead, appeared to his disciples, and having been exulted to the right hand of the Father through his ascension, now rules over all creation where he calls all people to himself, through the ministry of the Church.

This declaration of the Church requires a personal response from us by repenting from our sins, accepting baptism and living in the new life Christ offers through the Church.

- 3) Communion is the experience of sacramentality and mediation that is realized in community. Communion recognizes that our way to God is through the community of believers. Because God reveals God's self to us through others, we come to know that we cannot be Catholic alone.

For Catholics, the Church is always more than a community formed in response to a need, a voluntary assembly of believers, or a visible religious institution. The Church by its very nature mediates God's saving presence through its Scriptures, traditions, preaching, teaching, ministry, worship, and fellowship.

Therefore, a big part of our Catholic Identity includes the historical uniqueness of our Church because we understand it as a worldwide visible community that experiences itself as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

- C. Break into small groups, and distribute handout H-2 *Vision for Catechesis*, and then assign sections to each small group.

Survey

Invite participants to read the assigned section from the *Vision for Catechesis* as a group and answer the question, "What is the culture of catechesis according to this section?" Give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker to write their answer to the statement "Catholic culture is . . ." When finished invite them to hang the newsprint about the room. "

Sharing

Encourage the participants to walk around the room reading answers, choose one that best fits their image of Catholic culture, and stand by the newsprint they think/feel is most important. Once the participants have chosen, invite them to share with those clustered around the newsprint why they chose it. Reflections can also be shared with the large group if time permits.

Summary

Facilitator summarizes and highlights main ideas from the above sharing. In addition, the facilitator should make the comparison of the exercise to the ministry of catechesis.

IV. The Catechist and Catholic Culture

- A. The purpose of this section is to help catechists appreciate their contribution to the religious education program or Catholic school culture in which they are ministering.
- B. Lead a discussion by asking the following questions to participants. Be sure the basic understanding of what it means to participate in Catholic culture, as implied by the question, exist before moving to the explanation step.

1. *What is a Catholic Climate?*

The elements of a Catholic climate include an organic and systematic vision of people, space, time, relationships, curriculum, instruction, study, and faith development.

People who participate in the Catholic school or parish religious education program are to have the impression of entering a new space that is illumined by the light of faith, guided by Scripture, and embodies Church teaching.

2. *What is the environment of the parish religious education program and the Catholic school?*

The environment is to be warm and welcoming, but more importantly it is to be an extension of the student's homes.

Embracing the Church mandate that parents are the first and primary educators of their children, catechist's partner with families to help parents educate their children in the Catholic faith. This means creating an environment that invites participation from the family, proclamation of the Kerygma, invitation to a relationship with Christ, explanation of the Church's doctrinal tradition, and experience of the sacraments.

3. *What is the religious dimension of the parish religious education program and the Catholic school?*

The religious dimension or catechetical process is not simply a human activity it is a Christian journey to perfection.

Intellectual development and spiritual growth in the Christian life complement one another. As students move up from one class to the next, it is necessary to help them become aware of their relationships within Catholic traditions and the church. In addition, this awareness is to be integrated into understanding how one lives their faith in a world that is often confused about the reality of God and understanding of Catholicism.

4. *What is the role of the catechist in fostering a Catholic environment?*

In addition to our Catholic faith, every parish program or Catholic school has its own heritage of accumulated wisdom, traditions, and relationships. Catechists should make every effort to learn these dynamics and guide their students in such a way that they would be able to discover the religious dimension of life within the parish they belong.

To this end, the catechist helps their students reflect on the fact that our lives take place within salvation history. Therefore, the aim of catechesis is the passing on the gospel message in doctrinal, spiritual, liturgical, sacramental, and apostolic efforts.

5. *How does participation in the Catholic faith improve the environment of the parish religious education program and Catholic school?*

By participating in the Catholic faith, our lives become patterned in the love of God, the salvation of the soul, and care for our neighbor. Consequently, these patterns are what our students see in us as models of faith.

The ways we participate are found in "The Precepts of the Church", which are certain laws that help us to fulfill our obligations as Catholics. While they are a description of the absolute minimum actions required as a participating Catholic, the Church uses these precepts to remind us that Christian life requires a commitment to prayer and active participation in the liturgy and sacraments. (CCC #2042-43)

- Attend mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation
- Confess sins at least once a year
- Receive Holy Communion at least during the Easter season
- Keep holy the holy days of obligation
- Observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence
- Provide for the material needs of the Church

In addition, we are to continue learning about our faith and participate in the Church's mission of evangelization.

V. **Fostering Catholic Culture in the Classroom**

A. The purpose of this section is to assist catechists recognize their role in developing community.

B. Present the following information to the participants.

There are a variety of ways to answer the question, what does it mean to be part of Catholic culture. The simplest definition is that of being part of a community, which is a union of people held together by an underlying principle. This underlying principle unites members in their very person, in a way that they come to know and care for one another.

One of the essential principles of the Roman Catholic Church is that we are a communal people. God is made manifest to us in community and through community. We express our love for God by loving and caring for one another.

Specifically, this underlying principle is found in the Acts of the Apostles, which present a four-fold dimension to Christian communal life:

1. They had a strong sense of community fellowship (koinonia).
2. They celebrated their shared faith in worship (liturgia).
3. They lived out their faith by imitating Jesus' life of compassionate service (diakonia).
4. They expressed their faith experience in teaching and preaching (didache and kerygma).

Today these characteristics are the traditional components of catechesis, which are known as community, worship, service, and message. To be part of the Catholic community and engage in these presumes that we accept the responsibility for one another by offering support in one another's physical, moral, and spiritual needs.

We see that the church in its very essence is a community of faith whereby Christ takes hold of the totality of our being and forms one body animated by the same Spirit.

C. Break into two groups, distribute handout H-3, *The Catholic Community*, and then assign one section to each small group.

Survey

Invite participants to read the assigned section from the "*Catholic Community*" and finish this statement, Catholic Community is... When the group has finished this statement, direct them to list the qualities and tasks of a community builder based on the statement that they just created.

If time permits, have the group develop strategies for community building and then share these strategies with the large group. If there is not enough time, invite them to do this on their own.

Sharing

Have a spokesperson from each group give a summary of the group discussion.

Summary

Facilitator summarizes and highlights main ideas from the above sharing.

D. Reactions, Summary, and Closing Prayer

If time permits invite participants to offer feedback. If there is no time summarize by making the following statement.

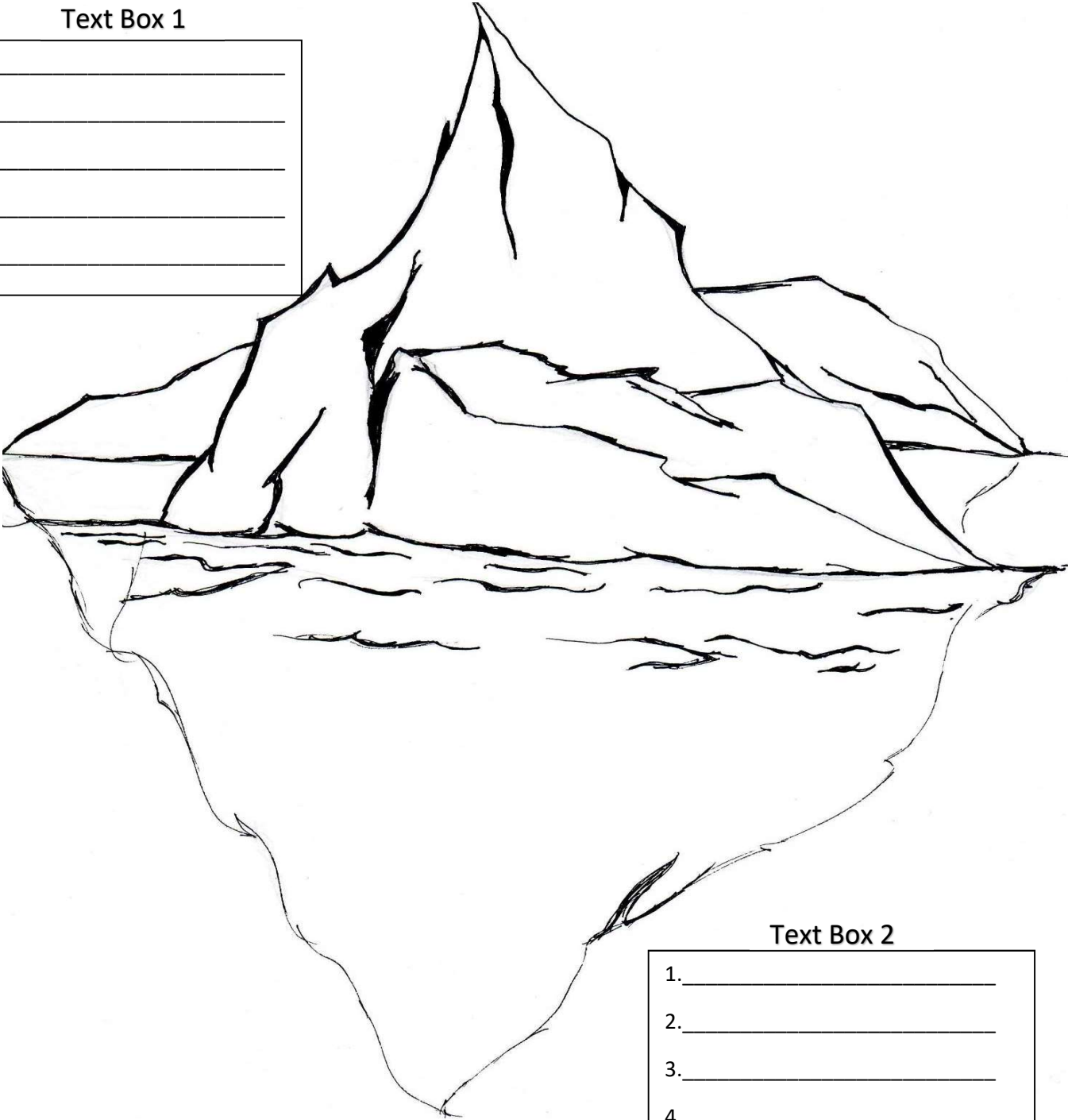
Catechist must take into account the Catholic culture they are now participating in as they move into a public ministry in the Church. The vocation and responsibility of the catechist and the needs of the learner, will be addressed in the next class.

Distribute the Catechist Learning Assessment form and encourage catechists to complete the form as soon as possible and return to their catechetical leader.

THE CULTURAL ICEBERG

Text Box 1

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____



Text Box 2

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____

VISION FOR CATECHESIS IN THE DIOCESE OF ROCKFORD

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reflects the insights of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Catechesi Tradendae* when it states that catechesis is “the totality of the Church’s efforts to make disciples, to help men 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” (#4).

More specifically, the *Catechism* goes on to say that catechesis “is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (#5).

The Diocese of Rockford, guided by its chief teacher in the person of its Bishop, embraces these concepts which reflect our tradition from the very first days of the Church which have been continually re-articulated and re-emphasized by the Magisterium in its efforts to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The diocesan vision for catechesis believes that faith formation for parishioners of all ages should be guided and directed by the following theological and pastoral principles:

Catechesis Is Christ-centered – The heart of catechesis is Christ. To catechize is to reveal in the person of Jesus Christ the whole of God’s plan fulfilled in Him. Christ is the mediator and fullness of God’s revelation. The object of catechesis is to put people in intimate communion with Christ who is the way, the truth and the life and leads us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and makes us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (*CCC 426-427, GDC 36-41, NDC 19B, OHWB 7-11, RV 10*).

Catechesis Is Evangelizing – Catechesis is understood to be an essential moment in the process of evangelization. The Church exists in order to evangelize; it is Her deepest identity. Evangelizing catechesis aspires to foster a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith (*GDC 63-66, NDC 15-17, OHWB 45-63, RV 36-37*).

Catechesis Is Systematic and Comprehensive – Catechesis must be systematic and comprehensive such that a person receives knowledge of the entire content of the faith, especially: the creed, the liturgy and the sacraments, moral formation, prayer, community life and the mission of the Church (*GDC 85-87, NDC 20, OHWB 88-96, CCC 5, RV 19-20*).

Catechesis Is Modeled on the Catechumenate – Catechesis is more than instruction. It offers a complete initiation into a life of discipleship, which serves as an apprenticeship for the entire Christian life (*GDC 29, 65-69, NDC 19D-20, 29H, 35 D, OHWB 81*).

Catechesis Interprets and Illuminates Human Experience – Experience is a necessary medium of God’s revelation, and so, the catechist must assist the faithful in learning to interpret and illuminate their experience with the data of faith (*GDC 152, NDC 29A, OHWB 82-83*).

Catechesis Inculturates the Gospel Message – It is necessary to inculturate catechesis in such a fashion that the Gospel message retains its power and efficacy and resonates with the people to whom it is addressed (*GDC 112, 202-206; NDC 21C, 25 F, OHWB 84-87*).

Catechesis Is Lifelong – Catechesis of adults is a priority: it is the principal form of catechesis, the organizing principle and axis around which all other catechetical programs revolve (*NDC 48A, GDC 59, 275, OHWB 38-44, 129, RV 28-33*).

Catechesis Is the Responsibility of the Entire Parish - The Church is the natural environment for growth in the faith, i.e. the origin, locus and goal of catechesis, which necessitates that all parishioners have a role to play in the formation of its members. In this sense, the entire parish is responsible for catechesis and acts as the curriculum (*NDC 19C, 29 B, C; GDC 158; OHWB 118-121, RV 11-15*).

Catechesis Respects Human Dignity – All catechetical efforts must recognize, reveal and respect the inviolable dignity of every human person which is rooted in each person’s creation in God’s image and likeness (*GDC 19, NDC 41*).

Catechesis Necessitates Ongoing Catechist Formation – The call to ministry of catechist is a vocation, involving an interior call to serve as mediator, witness, teacher and educator for the mysteries of the faith. This role demands ongoing formation in doctrine, resources and methods for presenting the faith (*GDC 156, 238-245; NDC 54B, 55, 29E, OHWB 149-153, RV 40-42*).

With God’s blessing and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Catechetical Leaders and catechists throughout the Diocese of Rockford embrace these principles in such a fashion so as to revitalize catechesis, and in doing so, transform believers into disciples of Jesus Christ.

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

- A. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (*Hebrews 10:24-25*)
- B. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (*1 John 1:7*)
- D. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ... (*Romans 12:3-13*)
- E. In Christian usage, the word "church" designates the liturgical assembly,¹⁴¹ but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. "The Church" is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #752*)
- F. "By the saving word of God, faith . . . is nourished in the hearts of believers. By this faith then the congregation of the faithful begins and grows." The proclamation does not stop with a teaching; it elicits the response of faith as consent and commitment, directed at the covenant between God and his people. Once again it is the Holy Spirit who gives the grace of faith, strengthens it and makes it grow in the community. the liturgical assembly is first of all a communion in faith. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1102*)
- G. Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #2226*)

Qualities of a Community Builder

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Specific Tasks of a Community Builder

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

My Action Plan for Community Building

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.