

## PHILOSOPHY AND RATIONALE

### 1. The Mission of the Catholic School Today.

In the *Declaration on Christian Education*, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council stress that the special function of the Catholic school is “to develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel (that) enables young people, while developing their own personalities to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in Baptism (and finally) so directs the whole of human culture that the knowledge which the pupils acquire of the world, of life and of humanity is illumined by faith.” (§8)

The nature of this Gospel-centered orientation was further developed and articulated in the document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988. The curriculum offered by the Catholic school is distinctive; in one critical aspect, namely, it is infused with the faith of the believing community:

A Catholic school conforms to the generally accepted school programming of today, but *implements these programs within an overall religious perspective.* (§57, emphasis added)

Further, the school’s overall mission is both to introduce students to all aspects of the culture in which they live and at the same time to provide them with the tools they need to “orient the whole of human culture to the message of salvation.” (§28) This mission also assists students in understanding, acknowledging and affirming the rich diverse cultural expressions of Catholicism.

Finally, the Catholic school, by virtue of its unique orientation to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all aspects of its curriculum, focuses on enabling its members to become committed practitioners of the “new Christian ethic” (cf. §86), of which the basic elements are

... the human person, the central focus of the social order; justice, the recognition of the rights of each individual; honesty, the basic condition for all human relationships; freedom, the basic right of each individual and of society. (§89)

This objective is most completely realized, according to *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, in a “preferential option for the less fortunate, the sick, the poor, the handicapped, the lonely.” (§87)

### 2. Religious Education in the Catholic School.

The formation of the young person in the light of the Gospel is a unique form of education. It is concerned not only with the transmission of information but also with enabling each learner to achieve maturity in Jesus Christ. The contemporary religious

educator seeks both to provide the student with religious knowledge and to enable him/her to answer the call to join with the Lord in building the Kingdom. As *To Teach as Jesus Did* points out, there is a threefold dimension to the educational mission of the Catholic school:

... the message revealed by God which the Church proclaims; (and) fellowship in the life of the Spirit (and) service to the community and to the entire human community. (§14)

The religious education curriculum that follows reflects its authors' conviction that content must inform critical reflection and action while in turn being informed by them. Put another way, faith is both a life to be lived and a truth to be known – a dynamic dyad that the religious educator cannot and must not ignore.

This dynamic, however, can be realized only if the religious education program consists of content that is both faithful to the Gospel, appropriate to the age and abilities of each learner and taught in such a manner that it is being continually reinforced. As the *National Catechetical Directory* puts it:

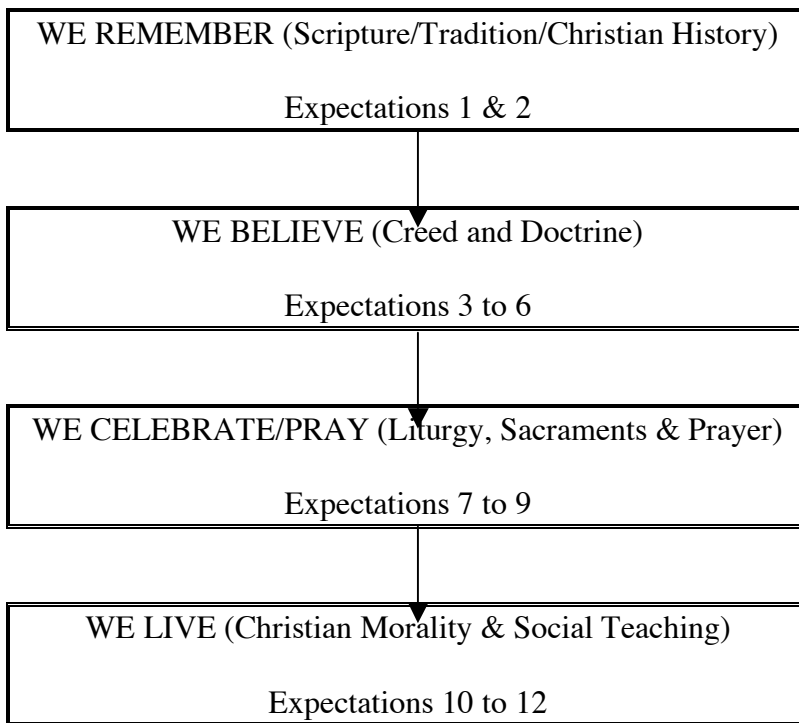
First and foremost, catechesis is Trinitarian and Christocentric in scope and spirit, consciously emphasizing the mystery of God and the plan of salvation, which leads to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Catechesis is centered in the mystery of Christ. The center of the message should be Christ, true God and true man. His saving work is carried out in his incarnation, death and resurrection. (§47)

The religious education program for the Diocese of Oakland seeks to invite both students and teachers, working in a collaborative, faith-sharing environment that includes as vital and involved partners the students' families and worshipping communities, to explore the mystery of Jesus Christ and to make his Gospel an integral part of their lives.

In particular, it first of all offers students a curriculum that intentionally strives from one grade level to the next to build on the cognitive foundations established in the previous years' programs. Second, it presupposes that content serves basically to inspire and to inform a way of life. In other words, this curriculum is intended to address not only the cognitive growth of the students but their maturation into adult human beings committed to the betterment of their culture and world.

With this in mind, the authors of the curriculum have grouped the key learning objectives for each grade level under the rubric of twelve basic expectations. Each of these, in turn, has been grouped with one or more others under four major thematic headings that are intended to convey the essential philosophical underpinnings of the entire program.

Specifically, these four themes, and the expectations grouped within them, may be outlined schematically as follows:



3. Themes and Expectations of the Diocese of Oakland Religious Education Curriculum.

**THEME 1 – WE REMEMBER**

Christianity is fundamentally an *historical* faith. That is – as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews points out – “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things ...” (Heb. 1:1-2)

Although there are many sources of information as to the origins and development of the faith, two in particular stand out and are proposed by the Church as privileged: scripture and tradition. In the words of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* of Vatican II, §10:

Tradition and scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church. By adhering to it the entire holy people, united to its pastors, remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the communion of life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (cf. Acts 2:42).

With this in mind, the first two expectations of this program focus on the scriptures and on the history of the believing community.

**Expectation #1: The student will demonstrate the ability to read and reflect on scripture and its meaning for life today.**

RATIONALE: As Vatican II states: “God graciously arranged that what he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should last for ever in its entirety and be transmitted to all generations.” (*Dei Verbum* §7) Scripture is one of the two privileged sources of this revelation, a collection of books that, as the *National Catechetical Directory* puts it (§60), is “not just a book to be read and studied (but) should be the object of prayerful meditation.” In other words, scripture is intended both to be read and studied and to be lived by each generation of believers.

**Expectation #2: The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of the history of the Church.**

RATIONALE: The Church, understood as the “family of God,” is formed and takes shape during succeeding ages of human history, including that which we usually refer to as the Old Testament era. (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §759). A well-planned study of key events in this history, intended to enable the learner to see God at work through history, is an essential component of any religious education program that seeks to introduce young people to Christian faith:

“The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only ‘with the eyes of faith’ that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §770)

**THEME 2 – WE BELIEVE**

Over the centuries, as believers have reflected on the history of their faith and that of their faith community, they have become increasingly aware of a body of fundamental truths that God reveals to all people. This is the “deposit of faith” (*Dei Verbum* §10) that each is called to believe and that is continually being interpreted for and handed on (*traditio*) in each succeeding age by the Church.

With this indispensable link between scripture, history and the development of the Church’s tradition in mind, this religious education program moves next to consideration of what we believe and why.

**Expectation #3: The student will demonstrate an understanding that we are drawn to God who, in creating us, has placed a desire for happiness in our hearts.**

RATIONALE: According to ancient tradition, by virtue of their being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27), all human beings carry within themselves an innate desire for perfect union with their creator. As the *Catechism*

*of the Catholic Church* states: “The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it.” (§1718)

This expectation is intended to address the point that at the root of all belief and in a very real sense prior to any other creedal statement is our conviction that every human being is as it were “hard-wired” to seek the divine and to know it. In a properly Christian sense, this is understood as the work of God’s Spirit dwelling within every person. (cf. Rom. 8:26-27)

**Expectation #4: The student will demonstrate a basic understanding and appreciation of doctrine and dogma found in the Creedal statements.**

RATIONALE: According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the most appropriate human response to God’s revelation is the act of faith, i.e., the complete submission of intellect and will to God (cf. §§142-143). But in the Christian dispensation, faith is not an isolated act on the part of an isolated individual: each of us professes his or her faith within a believing community (cf. §166), which in turn enshrines its core beliefs in the Creeds, especially the Apostles’ and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds (§167).

This expectation seeks to reinforce the importance of the Creeds as the basic compendia of what we human beings can know of the God who seeks to draw us into union.

**Expectation #5: The student will demonstrate an appreciation of the Trinity as the central mystery of the Christian faith.**

RATIONALE: If the Creeds are the privileged and primary source of the essential content of our faith, the mystery of the Trinity is the paramount doctrine of Christianity. Indeed, of all the world’s great religions, Christianity is distinguished by this unique and in many ways baffling understanding of the nature of God. Put another way, the Trinity is the indisputable starting point of any catechesis.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes clear that “the mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God ... It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of the truths of faith.” (§234)

**Expectation #6: The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Church as people of God, body of Christ and community of faith.**

RATIONALE: Just as for our ancestors in faith, the Israelites, so for the followers of Christ: the life of faith is authentically lived out in the community of the People

of God, the *ekklesia*. Indeed, in Christian tradition, the Church as a community that is built upon the love of the members for God and for one another, is the concrete realization in our world of the very life of the Trinitarian God. In short, one cannot live authentic Christian life apart from the believing community.

Moreover, by virtue of its being a genuine *communio* of persons, the Church foreshadows here and now the Kingdom that the Lord will bring to fulfillment at the end of time: the Church “is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery.” (cf. *Lumen Gentium* §3) In other words, the Church is the concrete manifestation of the core of Jesus’ teaching – the Good News. From this perspective, the Church must be understood as standing next to the Trinity in the hierarchy of truth

### **THEME 3 – WE CELEBRATE AND PRAY**

When we accept the Gospel (and therefore all the mysteries of our faith) as truly “Good News,” then surely our natural response must be to *celebrate* what the Lord has done for his people. The Church’s liturgy (literally, a “public work” or a “service in the name of/on behalf of the people) is the pre-eminent means by which the People of God expresses its faith and its joy in receiving, living and proclaiming the Good News:

The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He accomplished this work principally by the Paschal mystery of his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead and glorious Ascension ... For this reason, the Church celebrates in the liturgy above all the Paschal mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1067; cf. also *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §2)

Further, while the liturgy is the public response to the saving work of God on behalf of all people, in the Christian tradition the prayer of the individual believer complements it. The pre-eminent model of this is the Mother of the Lord who, as Luke so succinctly states it, “pondered these things and treasured them in her heart.” (Lk. 2:19,51) As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it:

The tradition of Christian prayer is one of the ways in which the tradition of faith takes shape and grows, especially through the contemplation of believers who treasure in their hearts the events and words of the economy of salvation and through their profound grasp of the spiritual realities they experience. (§2651)

In keeping with this very natural progression, the religious education curriculum invites its participants to explore and deepen their understanding of the essential role that liturgy and prayer play in the life of the Church and of each believer.

**Expectation #7: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the sacraments as important moments in the life of the community, with an emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist.**

RATIONALE: As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* succinctly states, “The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments.” (§1113)

The centrality of the sacraments, and in particular of the Eucharist, is based on the Church’s belief that in each sacramental celebration the believers once again encounter Christ himself and truly experience his saving action, which is summed up in the Paschal mystery.

As the *Catechism* states, “Sacraments are ‘powers that come forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant.” (§1116)

In short, the sacraments and especially the Eucharist are the privileged means by which believers not only respond in faith to the work of Christ but also continue to experience and give witness to it.

**Expectation #8: The student will demonstrate an understanding that the Eucharistic Liturgy (the Mass) is the communal celebration of the Paschal Mystery in which each is called to full and active participation.**

RATIONALE: Continuing with the themes articulated above, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his body.” (§1362)

Moreover, the Eucharist is pre-eminently an action *of the Church*. As such, it is not a form of private devotion, nor even a grandiose form of “spectator sport” in which only the ministers are actively involved. Just as the Church is the body of all the faithful, so this most privileged activity of the Church by its very nature invites and indeed demands the active involvement of all members of the community.

**Expectation #9: The student will demonstrate a knowledge of and ability to participate in the Catholic tradition of prayer.**

RATIONALE: The place of prayer, including liturgical prayer, in the Christian dispensation is well summarized in a paragraph of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that reviews the basic structure of the *Catechism* itself:

“Great is the mystery of our faith!” The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles’ Creed (*Part One*) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (*Part Two*), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (*Part Three*). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.” (§2558)

Quite simply, prayer, in all its forms, is an essential component of the life of faith.

#### **THEME 4 – WE LIVE**

The final major theme of this religious education curriculum focuses attention on the all-encompassing nature of belief in Jesus Christ. That is, Christian faith not only consists of more than an intellectual assent to a series of creedal statements but also transcends even that intimate relationship with God that we know as prayer. Christianity is a profoundly *ethical* faith that makes its impact felt in every aspect of the day-to-day life of the believer – even (and perhaps especially) the most routine and trivial.

The place of the moral or ethical life in the overall economy of salvation as understood in Christian tradition, is very clearly expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

“The Symbol of the faith (i.e., the Creed) confesses the greatness of God’s gifts to man in his work of creation, and even more in redemption and sanctification. What faith confesses, the sacraments communicate: by the sacraments of rebirth, Christians have become ‘children of God’, ‘partakers of the divine nature’. Coming to see in the faith their new dignity, Christians are called to lead henceforth a life ‘worthy of the Gospel of Christ’. They are made capable of doing so by the grace of Christ and the gifts of his Spirit, which they receive through the sacraments and through prayer.” (§1692)

The Christian moral life, then, in a very real sense brings the curriculum full circle.

**Expectation #10: The student will demonstrate an understanding of moral teaching, and an ability to make good moral decisions and act in a responsible, Christian manner.**

RATIONALE: A central concept of Catholic moral teaching for centuries has been the “natural law” that, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, reflects “the voice of God which urges (a person) ‘to do what is good and avoid what is evil’. Everyone is obliged to follow this law, which makes itself heard in conscience and is fulfilled in the love of God and of neighbor. Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person.” (§1706)



In the Christian dispensation, the Beatitudes stand at the center of Jesus' teaching as it relates to the way the human person is to live out his or her faith. They reflect the human person's innate drive to seek out what is good, and provide the basic model for acting in a properly "Christian" manner:

"The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it. ... The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§1718-19)

**Expectation #11: The student will demonstrate comprehension of seven key principles of Catholic social teaching and have the ability to apply them to personal and societal situations.**

RATIONALE: The place of social teaching within the corpus of Christian doctrine has been a major focus of papal and other Church teaching during the past century. The importance of social action rooted in this teaching was clearly and forcefully stated in the document *Justice in the World*, which reflects the discussions that took place at the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1971:

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation." (§6)

The seven social principles that follow seek to focus attention on specific elements of this essential aspect of the Christian moral life.

- 1) **The life and dignity of the human person.** The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of any moral vision for society. Catholics believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the person.
- 2) **The call to family, community and participation.** The person is not only sacred but social. As such, each person has both the right and the duty to participate in and support social structures, beginning with the family, that promote the common good and the welfare of all – especially the poor and vulnerable.

- 3) **The rights and responsibilities of the human person.** The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community established only if basic human rights are protected and each individual recognizes and lives up to basic responsibilities.
- 4) **Option for the poor and vulnerable.** Perhaps the ultimate moral test of a society is how well its most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by a widening gap between rich and poor, Catholic social teaching recalls the Parable of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.
- 5) **The dignity of work and the rights of workers.** In Catholic social teaching, work is far more than simply a way to eke out a living; it is a way of participating in God's creative activity itself. Correspondingly, if the dignity of work is to be respected, so must the basic rights of all workers, especially the rights to productive work, to a just wage, to organize and join a union, to private property and to economic initiative.
- 6) **Solidarity of the human family.** We are one human family, regardless of national, ethnic, racial, economic or ideological differences. Practicing the virtue of solidarity is rooted in an understanding that, in an interdependent world such as ours, loving one's neighbor has global implications.
- 7) **Care for God's creation.** The true nature of the believer's relationship with God is mirrored in the way in which he or she exercises stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not simply a pious wish, but a moral imperative for the faithful Christian.

**Expectation #12: The student will demonstrate an appreciation for and understanding of the basic principles of Catholic teaching on the family.**

RATIONALE: For centuries, Catholic teaching has stressed the importance of the family in nurturing and supporting the life of every human person. In our own time, John Paul II has re-affirmed the centrality and the sanctity of the family, and of family life, in the Christian dispensation:

“The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity.” (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* §2) In short, family life education comprises an essential element of the religious education curriculum, and reinforces for the religious educator the critical role of the family in the religious upbringing of young persons.