

Diocese of Saginaw Office of Faith Formation

To: Pastors and Pastoral Administrators, Parish Faith Formation Leaders
From: Peg McEvoy, Diocese of Saginaw Coordinator of Faith Formation
CC: Principals
Date: 10/11/2017
Re: Faith Formation Text Review

In response to requests from parish leaders regarding how best to choose texts for children in parish faith formation programs, I asked three members of the Faith Formation Advisory Board to carry out a review of a select number of texts with particular criteria as the focus. **This review does not constitute an endorsement of any specific text or series.** Instead, we sought to identify key criteria focused on missionary discipleship that will help the parish text review process. (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is not a text and, therefore, has not been included in this review process. CGS is accepted in the Diocese of Saginaw.)

Texts used in the Diocese of Saginaw must be doctrinally sound, provide methods which will engage students, provide adequate support for catechists to convey the material, and must provide opportunities for parents and families to engage with the students in the catechetical material presented. In addition to these standard criteria, the Office of Faith Formation of the Diocese of Saginaw, in support of Bishop Cistone as the primary catechist of the diocese, wishes to aid faith formation leaders and their pastors and pastoral administrators in determining how best to foster *discipleship* – to help the children and their families, whom we are forming in the Catholic faith, to continually encounter Jesus and to share his message with others. **It is this last characteristic, how to foster missionary discipleship, that will receive most of the attention in this memo.**

General Process

To jumpstart the review process, a task group of faith formation leaders from the Faith Formation Advisory Board was asked to choose a limited number of catechetical series, to help determine the best process for text review and then to each review one series. The members of this task group included: Annette Charchan, Resurrection Parish in Standish; Deacon Todd Lovas, Nativity of the Lord Parish in Alma; and Diane Seidel, All Saints Parish in Bay City. Each series chosen had to be published after the *Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal* was implemented in the U.S. and needed to identify discipleship as a key theme in its underlying approach. Within this document, you will find an abbreviated description of the process used and the results of the first three series reviewed. A blank template of the tool used by the reviewers is also included. Faith formation leaders and faith formation commissions are encouraged to utilize these concepts, as well as the process and the tool, to review any catechetical materials being used currently or being considered for future use.

Standard Criteria

In recent years, Catholic faith formation textbook publishers have become very attentive to both the doctrinal and methodological needs and requirements for children in faith formation. The following characteristics are required for text series used in parishes in the Diocese of Saginaw:

1. Doctrinally sound – that is, respecting the deposit of faith and the official teachings of the Catholic Church. Any text used must appear on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ “Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series.” This list can be found by searching on-line at the website www.USCCB.org with that title or by going directly to the link <http://www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/subcommittee-on-catechism/upload/Current-Conformity-List.pdf>. A recent update is included with this memo, but it is not recommended that you rely on this September 28, 2017 version more than three months from the listed date, as it is updated frequently. (Online resources are not reviewed by the USCCB. Please contact Coordinator of Faith Formation Peg McEvoy with any questions.)
2. Catechist support – that is, respecting the needs of catechists and Catholic school teachers as adult learners who are passing on the faith. It is critical that adequate material be provided, at an adult level, so that catechists have an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the material they are being asked to present to the learners. This step of preparation should be strongly encouraged by parish leadership.
3. Parent/family inclusion – that is, respecting the primary role of the parents in handing on the Catholic Faith. Although the methods can differ widely, the parish leadership should ensure that appropriate and adequate materials are provided to the parents/families of learners, so that the material can be supported in the home. This should include both adult-level materials to refresh or update the parents as well as specific ideas on how to engage the children in conversation and/or activities to support the material covered in the parish formation session.
4. Parish program/parish school coordination – that is, encouraging continuity and integration of catechetical materials when possible.
5. Engaging methodology – that is, respecting the God-given diversity and giftedness of learners. A faith formation textbook must provide solid Catholic content in a way that the learners are likely to be able to receive it and, with support, retain it. There is no “one-size-fits-all” method, so the approaches advocated in the text series must offer realistic and practical support for different learning styles.

Emphasis on Missionary Discipleship

In addition to the basic requirements for the texts and series used in faith formation, it is important to consider how well a text addresses the needs of the learners to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. A discipleship-building focus, looking at how specific characteristics related to discipleship were addressed in the texts, formed the basis of the review. (For an explanation of how these characteristics were determined, please request the full report.) These focus points for building disciples are:

- Personal encounter with Jesus Christ
- Continual conversion
- Growth in discipleship
- Embracing community
- Mission of discipleship

- Attention to the Holy Spirit
- Focus on the Grace/Love/Mercy of God
- Inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching
- Outreach to parents/families
- Catechist support
 - Helping a catechist recognize fruit (a response) in a child's encounter with Jesus
 - Catechist formation

You may notice that some of these characteristics overlap with those mentioned previously. It is important to note that Catechist support and outreach to parents and families are both good Catholic formation and critical to forming young disciples

Method

The task group did an abbreviated spot-check for the focus points for building disciples listed above. This approach did not yield a thorough review, but it provided some insights on the general approach utilized in specific faith formation texts which may help guide the parish review process. Additional series will be reviewed in the same way periodically.

The topics of Penance/Reconciliation and Eucharist were chosen as core topics that are likely to be covered at each grade level in some way. In the interest of a controlled review process, each series was reviewed at the second- and fifth-grade levels. Summaries for each series reviewed appear below. (For specific examples and comments by the reviewers, please request a full report.)

Results

Overall, each series reviewed incorporated both a sense of, and a direct encouragement for, an active faith among the learners. The approach to discipleship and focus differed between the series. The series chosen for the spot check were: *Alive in Christ*, Our Sunday Visitor, 2014; *Be My Disciples*, RCL/Benziger, 2013; and *Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts*, Loyola, 2013. Please refer to the chart on the final page of this memo for the results of this review. To get a more thorough discussion of all the components of this review process, including the results offered by each reviewer, please request the full report by contacting Peg McEvoy, Coordinator of Faith Formation for the Diocese of Saginaw, at 989.797.6608 or pmcevoy@dioceseofsaginaw.org.

Thank you to the Faith Formation Advisory Board for their input in this process, and especially to Diane Seidel, Annette Charchan and Deacon Todd Lovas for their hard work. May the Holy Spirit inspire those who participated in this process and all who will read the results to enliven us to begin anew the exciting work of building disciples of Jesus Christ. Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!

General Comments Regarding the Following Text Review Chart

- No text can make up for the need for catechists to focus on building young disciples. For this reason, a faith formation leader must take the time to help catechists understand the characteristics of discipleship: encounter with Jesus Christ; continual conversion; growth in discipleship within the Catholic Church; embracing community; the mission and vocation of a disciple; attention to the Holy Spirit; the grace, love and mercy of God; integration of Catholic social teaching.
- It is assumed that the second grade text is a support to the immediate* preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist, which should occur at the parish in addition to the standard text materials.
- When reviewers assessed the material in the texts, all components offered to catechists were considered (for example, family pages, manual sidebars, online offerings). If a catechist's preparation excludes any of these components, the emphasis on the characteristics of discipleship may be greatly diminished or absent.
- Please keep in mind that these reviews are only a simple and preliminary guide offered, to the best of their ability, by a group of individuals. This guide cannot replace a serious review those entrusted with parish faith formation when adopting a new series.

*Typically, "remote" catechesis includes the faith formation offered in the home, by going to Mass, by observing family members participating in the sacraments, and through the work of parish catechists. "Immediate" preparation for a sacrament is the spiritual and catechetical preparation led by the parents and parish staff in the weeks and days leading up to first reception of a sacrament.

GRADE 2*

Name of Series	Encounter with Jesus	Focus on Conversion	Focus on Discipleship	Focus on Community	Focus on Mission	Attention to the Holy Spirit	Focus on Grace, Love, Mercy of God	Inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching	Family Component	Catechist Formation
<i>Alive in Christ, Our Sunday Visitor</i>										
▪ EUCHARIST	***	**	***	***	**	0	**	***	**	***
▪ RECONCILIATION	***	**	**	**	**	***	***	***	**	***
<i>Be My Disciples, RCL/Benziger</i>										
▪ EUCHARIST	***	***	**	***	***	**	***	***	***	***
▪ RECONCILIATION	**	***	***	**	***	**	***	***	***	**
<i>Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts, Loyola</i>										
▪ EUCHARIST	***	**	**	**	*	0	***	***	***	**
▪ RECONCILIATION	***	***	**	*	*	0	***	***	***	***

GRADE 5*

Name of Series and Publisher	Encounter with Jesus	Focus on Conversion	Focus on Discipleship	Focus on Community	Focus on Mission	Attention to the Holy Spirit	Focus on Grace, Love, Mercy of God	Inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching	Family Component	Catechist Formation
<i>Alive in Christ, Our Sunday Visitor</i>										
▪ EUCHARIST	**	**	***	***	**	***	***	***	***	***
▪ RECONCILIATION	***	***	**	**	**	***	***	***	***	***
<i>Be My Disciples, RCL/Benziger</i>										
▪ EUCHARIST	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
▪ RECONCILIATION	***	***	***	***	**	**	***	***	***	***
<i>Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts, Loyola</i>										
▪ EUCHARIST	*	***	0	0	*	*	**	**	**	**
▪ RECONCILIATION	***	0	0	**	**	*	*	**	***	***

0 = Not Found

*** = Barely touched upon**

**** = Present but not strong**

***** = Strongly present**

Blank Template for Review of Missionary Discipleship Emphasis

_____ GRADE TOPICS	(Series Title – Publisher – Copyright year)	
Concept - Chapter	_____ – Chapter _____	_____ - Chapter _____
Encounter with Jesus Christ		
Conversion		
Discipleship		
Communion		
Mission		
Attention to the Holy Spirit		
Grace/Love of God/Mercy		
Catholic Social Teaching		
Parent/Family Component		
Catechist formation component		