

Guidelines *for* Choosing Adult Religious Education Materials



**United States Catholic Conference
Department of Education**

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Abbreviations Used

ACCC	<i>Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines</i> , with discussion guide, rev. ed. International Council for Catechesis (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1992).	GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)</i> , Second Vatican Council (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1965).
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1994).	NA	<i>Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)</i> , Second Vatican Council (Rome, 1965).
CGTM	<i>Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium</i> (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995).	NCCB	National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.).
ChL	<i>Christifidelis Laici (The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World)</i> , Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1988).	NCD	<i>Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States</i> , Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Second Office (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1979).
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi (On Evangelization in the Modern World)</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI (Rome, 1975).	SLF	<i>Serving Life and Faith: Adult Religious Education and the American Catholic Community</i> , USCC Department of Education (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1986).
GCD	<i>General Catechetical Directory</i> , Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (Rome, 1971).	TTJD	<i>To Teach As Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education</i> , National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973).
GDSCM	<i>Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials</i> , USCC Committee on Education (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1990).	USCC	United States Catholic Conference (Washington, D.C.).

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Principles for the Creation and Assessment of Resources for Adult Religious Education

Introduction

Comprehensive adult faith formation programs and processes require the development of quality resources that take into consideration sound catechetical principles and methods. In an effort to guide the development and to help in the assessment of these resources, this booklet offers specific principles and guidelines based on official church catechetical documents and sound adult education theory and practice.

The five sections of this booklet are Format, Cultural Sensitivity, Use, Content, and Methods/Processes. As a supplement to the introduction in each section and as rationale for some of the specific criteria listed, an Appendix provides additional relevant citations from church documents.

The principles as set forth in each section are intended to offer a solid foundation and reliable criteria for those who have the responsibility to create and assess resources for adult religious education.

The following scale can guide your assessment of the resource under consideration.

- 4 Excels in fulfilling the criterion; exemplary
- 3 Adequately fulfills the criterion
- 2 Partially or incompletely fulfills the criterion
- 1 Fulfills the criterion poorly or not at all
- X Not applicable

Format

People are drawn to a resource that is appealing, but not to one that is dull or sloppy. This is why contemporary catechetical materials must seek to "... do more than present information. Their graphics ... can foster learning and stimulate—or discourage—interest" (NCD, no. 264). People can understand material that is visually clear, not confusing or haphazard. Furthermore, people are used to quality—corporations spend billions on advertising and packaging of the highest technical quality and visual appeal; if our materials are not competently prepared, we create an unfortunate and unnecessary impediment in our ministry of communicating and exploring the good news with today's adults. Adult religious education materials with high-quality format foster rather than impede this ministry; accordingly, "[a]ll instructional materials used in catechesis should be artistically sensitive and technically competent" (NCD, no. 265).

Format: Print Resources

The resource

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Is attractive in appearance and appealing to the adult audience | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| 2. Uses print large and clear enough to be read comfortably | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| 3. Employs a good balance between print, graphics, and unused space .. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| 4. Enhances the meaning through the layout | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| 5. Is clearly written | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| 6. Uses pictures, illustrations, or charts to motivate and facilitate learning for adults | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource regarding print format 4 3 2 1 X

Format *continued*

Format: Media Resources

The resource

1. Has good audio and visual quality and images that are appealing to adults 4 3 2 1 X
2. Has a duration that is appropriate for the subject and audience 4 3 2 1 X
3. Contains enough variety to maintain interest 4 3 2 1 X
4. Presents the subject clearly and directly to the audience 4 3 2 1 X
5. Effectively uses
music 4 3 2 1 X
images 4 3 2 1 X
narrative 4 3 2 1 X
and characters 4 3 2 1 X
to engage an adult audience.
6. Presents up-to-date images, music, and characters 4 3 2 1 X

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource
regarding media format 4 3 2 1 X

Format: Electronic Media

The resource

1. Has a good organizational outline (e.g., by subject, format, audience, chronology, geography, author) 4 3 2 1 X
2. Has an index and table of contents that can be used to navigate within the resource 4 3 2 1 X
3. Identifies the sponsoring individual, group, or organization for the resource 4 3 2 1 X
4. States its mission, purpose, or scope along with the dates of the original copyright and most recent revision 4 3 2 1 X
5. Employs accepted graphic design principles (e.g., balance, unity, proportion, simplicity) to make the resource attractive and functional ... 4 3 2 1 X
6. Has visual effects that do not distract from or substitute for the content, but rather enhance the impact and usefulness of the resource 4 3 2 1 X

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource
regarding electronic format 4 3 2 1 X

Cultural Sensitivity

We live our lives not only as individuals but as members of a culture, and we are in relationship with persons who are members of diverse human communities with distinct cultural identities. "Catechesis is prepared to accommodate all social and cultural differences in harmony with the message of salvation" (NCD, no. 193). Indeed, everyone has a right "... to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person without any discrimination based on race, sex, nation, religion, or social condition" (GS, no. 60). Good adult education resources honor and promote this right by acknowledging and respecting persons and their cultures, and by consistently "... affirm[ing] the identity and dignity of ..." the members of diverse cultural groups (NCD, no. 194).

The resource

1. Encourages respect for all people regardless of age 4 3 2 1 X

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| race and culture | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| sex | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
| or family situation | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
2. Demonstrates understanding of and uses language and images familiar to the culture, race, and ethnicity of the intended audience 4 3 2 1 X
 3. Presents fairly and accurately different age groups 4 3 2 1 X
ethnic groups 4 3 2 1 X
genders 4 3 2 1 X
and families 4 3 2 1 X
 4. Demonstrates a sensitivity to the customs and traditions unique to various cultures 4 3 2 1 X

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource regarding cultural sensitivity 4 3 2 1 X

Use

Adult religious education resources should be usable in several ways. Those who plan adult religious education should know the resource's purpose and how it can serve the community's educational goals. Session leaders or group facilitators need a resource that provides them with the necessary tools to effectively carry out their adult education ministry. Participants need a resource that is clear, attractive, and helps them to live their faith in their daily lives—for example, share their faith, study Scripture, explore the Church's teaching, interact with and learn from their peers, and pray together.

The resource

1. Provides a clear statement of purpose 4 3 2 1 X
2. Clearly identifies the intended audience 4 3 2 1 X
3. Clearly indicates intended learning setting(s) 4 3 2 1 X
4. Is adaptable to a variety of adult learning settings (e.g., small group,

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| individual study, one-to-one dialogue, large group) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | X |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
5. Provides clear instructions and resources for leaders/facilitators 4 3 2 1 X
 6. Asks for a realistic time commitment on the part of adults using the resource 4 3 2 1 X
 7. Provides a list of additional references and resources 4 3 2 1 X
 8. Provides a tool for adults to evaluate what they have learned and experienced in using the resource, and to assess how well it helped them mature and grow in faith 4 3 2 1 X
 9. Is reasonably priced and affordable 4 3 2 1 X

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource regarding use 4 3 2 1 X

Content

“The content of adult catechesis is as comprehensive and diverse as the Church’s mission. It should include those universally relevant elements which are basic to the formation of an intelligent and active Catholic Christian and also catechesis pertaining to the particular needs which adults identify themselves as having” (NCD, no. 185a). Given this broad scope, it is helpful also to keep an eye on the focal point that identifies the goal of all our catechetical ministry: “The transmission of the Christian faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ in order to lead others to faith in him” (CCC, no. 425).

In designing or assessing content, catechists of adults will refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and will attend to the criteria and guidelines regarding content as set forth in the Introduction and in Part I of the U.S. bishops’ statement *Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials* (1990) and as indicated in the statement of the International Council for Catechesis, *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines* (1990).

The resource

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proclaims Jesus Christ, invites adults to faith in him, and nurtures that conversion and faith toward maturity 4 3 2 1 X 2. Supports an adult catechetical ministry that is comprehensive and diverse in content 4 3 2 1 X 3. Presents church teachings in an authentic and balanced manner 4 3 2 1 X | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Situates those church teachings it presents within the totality of God’s revelation; integrating them harmoniously with and relating them appropriately to central truths of Catholic doctrine: trinity, incarnation, paschal mystery, revelation, and Church 4 3 2 1 X 5. Uses the text and themes of Scripture 4 3 2 1 X 6. Draws appropriately upon the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> and other sources for catechetical ministry 4 3 2 1 X 7. Is life-centered and helps adults grow in human maturity 4 3 2 1 X 8. Helps laity respond to their calling to holiness 4 3 2 1 X
to community 4 3 2 1 X
to mission and ministry in the Church and society 4 3 2 1 X
to grow in Christian maturity 4 3 2 1 X 9. Presents the uniqueness and preeminence of the Christian message while acknowledging and affirming what is true and holy in other religions ... 4 3 2 1 X |
|--|--|

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource regarding content 4 3 2 1 X

Methods/Processes

On the one hand, there is no one “right” learning method because adult learners are diverse in their identities, experiences, perspectives, and preferred learning styles. This is why quality adult education promotes and incorporates “. . . a variety of strategies, activities, and auxiliary resources that can enrich instruction, deepen understanding, and facilitate the integration of doctrine and life” (GDSCM, no. 83).

At the same time, good adult education seeks to actively involve adults in the learning process. It “. . . empowers learners. It enables them to actualize their own learning, to take responsibility for it, to shape it according to their own needs and abilities” (SLF, no. 120). “Of fundamental importance is the *dialogical approach* which, while recognizing that all are called to the obedience of faith (Rm 1:5), respects the basic freedom and autonomy of adults and encourages them to engage in an open and cordial dialogue” (ACCC, no. 57).

In designing or assessing process, catechists of adults will attend to the criteria and guidelines regarding process as set forth in the Introduction and in Part II of the U.S. bishops’ statement *Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials* (1990) and as indicated in the statement of the International Council for Catechesis *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines* (1990).

The resource

1. Recognizes and values the life experience of adults 4 3 2 1 X
2. Encourages adults to gather in groups and share their experiences 4 3 2 1 X
3. Encourages adults to reflect critically on their life experiences in dialogue with the Church’s doctrine and tradition 4 3 2 1 X
4. Leads adults to look beyond their own personal experiences to the experiences of others in the world and to reflect critically on important global issues and events 4 3 2 1 X

5. Is inspired by the catechumenal model 4 3 2 1 X
6. Offers a variety of learning activities that reflect various learning styles of adults 4 3 2 1 X
7. Uses an active, involving, dialogical approach to adult religious learning 4 3 2 1 X
8. Incorporates a problem-centered approach that links learning to the questions and life tasks adults face 4 3 2 1 X
9. Helps adults discover practical applications for what they are learning 4 3 2 1 X
10. Allows adults freedom to be self-directive in their learning 4 3 2 1 X
11. Encourages responses that deepen understanding and commitment 4 3 2 1 X
12. Includes prayer suggestions to be integrated into the learning process 4 3 2 1 X
13. Employs a reading level appropriate for the average adult learner—or for the specific adult learners who will use the resource 4 3 2 1 X
14. Considers the psychological development and learning needs of adult learners—including adults with disabilities or special needs 4 3 2 1 X
15. Encourages life-long learning 4 3 2 1 X

Comments: _____

Overall evaluation of the resource regarding methods/processes 4 3 2 1 X

Appendix: Additional Citations from Church Sources

Cultural Sensitivity

- “Language and images must be adapted to the capacity of the learners in accord with their age levels and cultural backgrounds” (GDSCM, p. 4).
- “. . . authentic catechesis recognizes that Christian faith needs to be incarnated in all cultures; accordingly, it is expressed in diverse ways that witness to the catholicity of the Church without endangering its unity. John Paul II has stated, ‘The Gospel of Christ is at home in every people. It enriches, uplifts and purifies every culture’ (*Meeting with Native Americans*, September 14, 1987). Catechetical materials not only alert the faithful to the full meaning of catholicity and the cultural dimensions of the Christian faith experience, but they also facilitate the assimilation of the gospel message, using language, customs, and symbols familiar to those being taught” (GDSCM, pp. 8-9).
- “Publishers are encouraged to provide catechetical materials that take into consideration the needs of the Hispanic community and other ethnic and culturally diverse groups that comprise the Church in the United States. No single text or program can address the many cultures and social groups that make up society in the United States, but all catechetical materials must take this diversity into account” (GDSCM, p. 23).
- “Doctrinally sound catechetical materials . . . [26] present the Church as a community with a legitimate diversity in expressing its shared faith according to different ages, cultures, gifts, and abilities” (GDSCM, p. 15).
- “To present sound doctrine effectively, catechetical materials . . . [72] use language and images appropriate to the age level and developmental stages and special needs of those being catechized. . . (see NCD, nos. 177-88).
 “[80] are sensitive to the appropriate use of inclusive language in the text and avoid racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes in pictures (see NCD, no. 264).
 “[81] reflect the catholicity of the Church in art and graphics by presenting the diverse customs and religious practices of racial, ethnic, cultural, and family groups (see NCD, nos. 194, 264)” (GDSCM, pp. 24-25).

- “Sound catechesis also recognizes the circumstances—cultural, linguistic, etc.—of those being catechized” (NCD, no. 47).

Content

- “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 (cf. Eph 1:3-14). Catechesis is centered in the mystery of Christ. The center of the message should be Christ, true God and true man, His saving work carried out in His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection” (NCD, no. 47).
- “Adult catechesis includes the study of Scripture, tradition, liturgy, theology, morality, and the Church’s teaching authority and life. Church history is important for placing events in proper perspective.
 “Adult catechesis seeks to present the Church in all its dimensions. . . .
 “It addresses the Church’s mission to promote justice, mercy, and peace, including the vindication of religious, human, and civil rights which are violated.
 “Adult catechesis offers education for change, including the skills essential for dealing with the rapid changes typical of life today.
 “Adult catechesis gives special attention to spiritual life and prayer” (NCD, no. 185a; cf. ACCC, nos. 39-46).
- “Doctrinally sound catechetical materials . . . [1] help the baptized, as members of the Church founded by Christ, appreciate Catholic tradition, grounded in the Scriptures and celebrated in the Divine Liturgy, in such a personal way that it becomes part of their very identity.
 “[2] present the teaching of the Church in a full and balanced way that includes everything necessary for an accurate understanding of a particular doctrine and express it in a manner appropriate to the audience and purpose of a given catechetical text.
 “[3] situate the teachings of the Church in the context of God’s saving plan and relate them to one another so that they can be seen as parts of an organic whole and not simply as isolated and fragmented truths (see GCD, no. 39). . . .

“[9] present the uniqueness and preeminence of the Christian message without rejecting anything that is true and holy in non-Christian religions, show a high regard for all religions that witness to the mystery of divine presence, the dignity of human beings, and high moral standards (see NA, no. 2)” (GDSCM, pp. 12-13).

- “To present sound doctrine effectively, catechetical materials . . . [73] integrate biblical themes and scriptural references in the presentation of doctrine and moral teaching and encourage a hands-on familiarity with the Bible (see NCD, no. 60a)” (GDSCM, p. 24).
- “The special tasks of the Christian lay person in the Church and in society, which vary according to the widely different situations in which adults find themselves, should be given a prominent place in the formation program” (ACCC, no. 50; cf. SLF, no. 117).
- “Above all, it is indispensable that they [the lay faithful] have a more exact knowledge—and this demands a more widespread and precise presentation—of the Church’s social doctrine . . .” (ChL, no. 60).
- “Catechesis strives to awaken a critical sense, leading to reflection on society and its values and to assessment of the social structures and economic systems which shape human lives” (NCD, no. 170.4; cf. GDSCM, p. 24).
- “The Church provides her members ‘the kind of education through which their entire lives can be penetrated with the spirit of Christ, while at the same time she offers her services to all people by way of promoting the full development of the human person, for the welfare of earthly society and the building of a world fashioned more humanly’ (*Declaration on Christian Education*, 3)” (SLF, no. 21; cf. Canon 217).
- “Holiness, community, and ministry are facets of Christian life that come to full expression only by means of development and growth toward Christian maturity” (CGTM, p. 20).
- “The *National Catechetical Directory* refers to the Scriptures, the teaching life and witness of the Church, the Church’s liturgical life, and life experiences of various kinds as ‘signs of God’s saving activity’ in the world (NCD, no. 42). These biblical, ecclesial, liturgical, and natural signs should inform the content and spirit of all catechetical materials” (GDSCM, p. 7).

Methods/Processes

- “Learners are vastly different. They approach the learning process from different levels of development, motivation, social roles, cultural perspectives, and preferred learning styles. As much as possible, the educational design reflects these differences and affords learners a variety of learning experiences that meet their unique situations and abilities. We encourage an eclectic approach to programming to meet the varying needs of learners who make up today’s Catholic community” (SLF, no. 115).
- “. . . adult programs must be planned and conducted in ways that emphasize self-direction, dialogue, and mutual responsibility” (TTJD, no. 44).
- “Catechesis for adults respects and makes use of their experiences; their cultural, racial, and ethnic heritages; their personal skills; and the other resources they bring to catechetical programs” (NCD, no. 185b).
- “To present sound doctrine effectively, catechetical materials . . . [70] take into account the experience and background of those being catechized and suggest ways that the Christian message illumines their life (GDSCM, p. 23; see NCD, no. 176e). . . .
 “[76] provide for a variety of shared prayer forms and experiences that lead to an active participation in the liturgical life of the Church and private prayer (GDSCM, p. 24; see NCD, nos. 145, 264). . . .
 “[83] suggest a variety of strategies, activities, and auxiliary resources that can enrich instruction, deepen understanding, and facilitate the integration of doctrine and life. . . .
 “[85] instruct teachers and catechists on how to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities and individuals with special needs” (GDSCM, pp. 23-25; see NCD, nos. 195, 196, 264).
- “Adult religious education processes should respect the thoughts, feelings, learning needs, and life circumstances of learners by allowing them to influence the educational design” (SLF, no. 113).
- “Catechists should encourage people to reflect on their significant experiences and respond to God’s presence there” (NCD, no. 176d).
- “Where parishes are large and parishioners may struggle for genuine experiences of community, it is especially important that adult religious education gather learners into smaller communities. Educational processes should be contextualized in prayer and hos-

pitality, and utilize faith sharing and other means to help create genuine community among learners" (SLF, no. 125).

- "Finally, we need to say a word about the theological and pastoral tensions that many adult religious educators experience. In more than a few instances, adult religious educators find themselves caught in the middle between official church positions on one hand and the beliefs and practices of some learners on the other.

"As representatives of the Church, they have the responsibility of presenting the Church's teaching and tradition. At the same time, they need to be both open and sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of those learners who may be in sharp disagreement with those teachings. This is not to suggest, however, that the Church's teachings and the view of individual learners are accorded equal weight in the educational process. Rather, adult religious educators are committed to helping learners integrate, to the fullest extent possible, the Church's teaching and tradition into their lives.

"The task is not easy, and, in more than a few instances, it is accompanied with no little pain and frustration—for everyone involved. There are no easy answers to this problem; but, certainly, bringing both the Church's teachings and the learners' perspectives and experiences into critical dialogue is essential for authentic learning" (SLF, nos. 102-104).

- "It is essential that such programs [of adult religious education] recognize not only the particular needs of adults, but also their maturity and experience. Those who teach in the name of the Church do not simply instruct adults, but also learn from them; they will only be heard by adults if they listen to them. For this reason adult programs must be planned and conducted in ways that emphasize self-direction, dialogue, and mutual responsibility" (TTJD, no. 44).
- "Other requirements [for the catechist of adults] are the ability to listen and dialogue, encourage and reassure, form relationships, work in teams, and build community" (ACCC, no. 73).
- "When it comes to learning and attendance at educational programs, adults are primarily motivated by needs stemming from their life tasks (e.g., as family

provider, as parent, as seeker of personal growth, as professional, as child of aging parents, as members of the world community). These challenges or tasks are also key means by which the learner hears God's voice. For this reason, adult religious education should be life-centered" (SLF, no. 117).

- "Much effective learning comes from reflecting upon one's experiences in the light of faith. Adults must be helped to translate such reflection into practical steps to meet their responsibilities in a Christian manner" (NCD, no. 185b).
- "Adult religious education empowers learners. It enables them to actualize their own learning, to take responsibility for it, to shape it according to their own needs and abilities. Educational processes that leave learners in a posture of dependency do not serve them well" (SLF, no. 120).
- "The Synod of 1977 affirmed that 'the model of all catechesis' is the catechumenate which culminates in baptism (*Synod Message* 8; cf. EN 44; ChL 61). According to ancient tradition, every form of catechesis should be inspired by the catechumenal model. Precisely because the catechesis of adults aims at living the Christian life in all its fullness and integrity, the process outlined in the *catechumenate* seems the most appropriate model and should be encouraged everywhere, though it cannot be considered the exclusive model" (ACCC, no. 66).
- "Whatever the method, catechists are responsible for choosing and creating conditions which will encourage people to seek and accept the Christian message and integrate it more fully in the living out of the faith" (NCD, no. 176b).
- Catechists "are responsible for choosing and creating suitable conditions which are necessary for the Christian message to be sought, accepted, and more profoundly investigated" (GCD, no. 71; cf. NCD, no. 213).
- "Adult religious education is a lifelong process. As long as one is a disciple of Jesus, one will need to continue learning in the faith. Adult education programming should, therefore, be offered in ways that make this possible, affording learners developmental opportunities to grow in faith" (SLF, no. 133; cf. TTJD, no. 43).