

The following reflects what has/is working well at parishes.

## BEST PRACTICES

Since formation of the whole person is accomplished most effectively in-person, and, since formation of our youth is at the heart of our mission of leading people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church, all parishes should plan to provide in-person Faith Formation for both grade school and high school students beginning in the fall. We realize that some parents will choose not to send their children, and, there might be extraordinary exceptions that limit full scale in-person, weekly sessions. Amid these times, let us stay focused on Jesus – our Savior – and our need for Him!

### ➤ **Guiding Students to a Relationship with Jesus and His Church**

#### **Always Begin by Engaging the Students**

It is always the case that before teaching young people in middle school and high school, they need to be engaged with the catechist, who needs to know their name, acknowledge them and listen to them so that they know and trust the adult. Begin with an opening prayer; allow each person to state a high point of the week; a difficult point of the week; and to voice an intention for which the group will pray. Then lift those intentions up in prayer before beginning the teaching session. Or consider some variation of this necessary component in order to develop personal rapport and trust that will allow for the young people to receive what will be taught.

“**Going Deeper in Prayer**” was developed in response to students’ requests, over the last 9 years, to encounter Jesus in prayer and grow in their relationship with Him, rather than easily falling into rattling off words that could have little or no meaning. “Going Deeper in Prayer” includes a prayer card for each grade level, with a format that opens the door to conversation with Jesus about what stood out for them in the prayer, and asking and thanking Him for something important. There is a focus on one prayer for the entire year so that students will come to realize how much Jesus knows and loves them, and in return, that the students come to truly know and love Jesus through all the various components included with the prayer card and resources. Go to [diolc.org/prayer](http://diolc.org/prayer) for Pre-school through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade downloadable resources. Young people in 12<sup>th</sup> Grade also requested to know how God guides them. At the same link, scroll to 12<sup>th</sup> Grade for 8 sessions. These are proven, helpful tools. As you/the catechist use them with the students, remember that your own/catechist personal enthusiasm in using these resources is probably the single most important part that will be offered that will facilitate the student’s willingness to become engaged.

**Praying with Scripture** also referred to as *Lectio Divina*, is a way of prayerfully pondering a Bible passage in which you encounter the Person of Christ. There is a progression that takes place that is not a method or technique but a way that incorporates the natural development of a relationship between two persons. In pondering the passage, there is a deepening process that starts in the head and goes to the heart as the Holy Spirit makes a connection between the persons and events in the Scripture and your own personal life by reminding you of something from your life. Further, you are ultimately led to simply rest in God, to be in His Presence and listen to what Jesus might whisper to your heart through a thought or a word. For a prayer worksheet, go to [diolc.org/catechesis](http://diolc.org/catechesis).

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### **The Good News – the Initial Proclamation, the Kerygma – leads to an opening of the heart.**

- God created you for an intimate personal relationship with Himself.
- Adam and Eve freely chose to reject God, passing on to their descendants a state of wounded separation from Him, moral and intellectual weakness, and physical suffering and death.
- In His great love for us, God did not take no for an answer, but launched a rescue mission for our salvation. This plan gradually unfolded in the course of history, culminating in God uniting His divine nature with our own, and becoming a man—Jesus Christ.
- Through His life death and resurrection, Jesus reconciled our sinful humanity with God.
- You are free to accept or refuse God’s love. Accepting God’s love leads to peace, joy, fulfillment and eternal life. Rejecting God’s love creates barriers to your relationship with Him, including the pain of separation, sin and even spiritual death.
- Through a personal relationship with Jesus in prayer, you will know that you can trust Him. You want to be committed to Christ by placing Him at the center of your life, cooperating with His grace to imitate Him by seeking to know, love and serve Him by serving your neighbor.
- You receive the incredible gift of Jesus Himself in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus also forgives your sins and strengthens you to follow Him through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Would you like to go deeper in your relationship with Jesus?

**The Story of the Bible** provides an overview of the entire Bible that helps students understand all the “seemingly” disconnected parts in one presentation. A power point and other resources can be emailed from the Office for Catechesis and Evangelization. Contact Ann: [alankford@diolc.org](mailto:alankford@diolc.org).

**Lesson plan format** provides two key elements in teaching for conversion. 1) After an opening prayer, the catechist provides a brief statement that explains what the students will learn that peaks the student’s interest because it is compelling. 2) An “application to life” component helps the teaching to become “alive” as it relates to the student’s daily life. Go to [diolc.org/catechesis](http://diolc.org/catechesis).

### **Adoration**

Students find great solace in quiet time before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Arrange a schedule so that students have time in church to speak with Jesus in their hearts and to listen to Him. Start with a small amount of time and slowly build. The students need to be prepared before going to church, through a brief explanation, that Jesus is truly present in the tabernacle with the red candle burning to remind us of this fact. Slowly, Jesus will give them, and us, the grace to become aware that the Holy Eucharist – Jesus Himself – is truly there in the tabernacle. While in church, our thoughts need to be focused on Him and our actions show our reverence that the God of the Universe is before us.

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## ➤ Involving Parents

### **Parents are the primary educators of their children**

Parents need to be encouraged and equipped with good resources to participate in some way in leading their children to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church.

### **Boundaries for “walking with” parents (This aspect was specifically requested by a catechetical leader.)**

You are a first-line presence that is key to helping a seeking, or lonely or struggling parent. Your willingness to be there with the parent in conversation is important. However, your role is not to be a counselor, spiritual director or psychologist.

- 1) In conversation, encourage the parent in some way.
- 2) Listen a lot and don't try to “fix” the situation.
- 3) Ask the Holy Spirit in your heart, very simply, what to say in this situation.
- 4) Give the parent assurance of your prayer, and then be committed to praying for her/him.
- 5) If the matter is serious and obviously needs additional pastoral attention and help, encourage them to speak with a priest with whom they feel comfortable.
- 6) Lead the person to Jesus in some small way.
- 7) There needs to be time limits with these conversations: There is a way to spend a reasonable amount of attentive time with a parent. In the back of your mind, have a time limit of what is possible for your schedule. You might set a time limit in the beginning, so that they don't feel rejected if you must to end the conversation after listening for some time. You need to guard your time for your own personal needs and peace that you want to take home to your family.

### **Leading families to develop a daily habit of prayer**

At a parent meeting, open with prayer using the “Going Deeper in Prayer” prayer card so that parents can experience this simple process of prayer. Parents could relate to the person next to them at the meeting what stood out for them in the prayer, an intention, something for which they are thankful to God etc. This more personal process allows parents to be committed to praying with their family, and allows deeper bonding to take place. Go to [diolc.org/prayer](http://diolc.org/prayer) for resources Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup>. Each child in the Program needs to be given a prayer card to take home for regular use.

### **Sacramental Preparation**

#### **First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion**

It is recommended that preparation for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion involve a process of two years. Two parent meetings per year are necessary that involve ongoing formation with excellent speakers who engage the parents through evangelization and teaching on the Sacraments. Go to [diolc.org/catechesis](http://diolc.org/catechesis), and categorized under “Sacramental Prep” is a suggested, two-year plan with the necessary components for parents and child based upon Canon Law.

Provide the parents with resources each month to work through with their child, that consists of:

- a chapter from the textbook with discussion questions or a packet
- an online resource connected with the textbook

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Arrange for a return of the completed work to the parish for accountability reasons.

In conjunction with an approved textbook, formation may also include supplemental resources:

- Signs of Grace “You are Forgiven” (6 sessions)
- Signs of Grace “You are Loved” (7 sessions)

Both by Augustine Institute (purchase physical resources and/or complete online access; free online availability for parents if the parish has a subscription to FORMED)

There are short videos (3 min.) to help focus the student, but the Program is not video-based.

A webinar by Augustine Institute is available by contacting Ann at [alankford@diolc.org](mailto:alankford@diolc.org).

For Parent formation, there are a list of excellent sessions from DVD Programs for Parent formation at [diolc.org/catechesis](http://diolc.org/catechesis):

### **Scheduling First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion**

For the benefit of second-grade children, it is recommended that First Confession be received during late fall or early winter, and First Holy Communion be received in spring. If both Sacraments are received in close proximity, the preparation for one Sacrament will be greatly deficient, as children in second grade are unable to process the preparation for two Sacraments at one time. Further, when the second graders receive First Reconciliation in December or January, they can go to confession several times before receiving their First Holy Communion. This practice will help with developing the habit of going to confession on a regular basis.

### **Bible Story Books**

Provide a list of good Bible story books that parents/grandparents can purchase. Encourage parents to read a Bible Story every night with their children for ongoing formation and good conversation.

- *A Child’s Treasury of Bible Stories*
- *Bible Stories for Children* (3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up)
- *Modern Catholic Picture Bible* by Fr. Lovasick
- *The Action Bible* for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students
- *The Great Adventure Storybook*, Ascension Press: Written for children in grades K-8,

### **Faith Formation at Home**

Some parents may elect to not to send their children to Faith Formation due to COVID-19. The catechetical leader will want to provide care and support for these parents. What is needed:

- The textbook/workbook that is being used at the parish is to be provided for each child. An approved textbook provides an orderly presentation of the Faith, based upon a hierarchy of truths, which builds the necessary foundation for the student – like the image of a basement. If we merely coddle together various “good” resources, a foundation will not be developed.
- A year-long schedule
- Monthly “check ins” with completed work so that there is accountability for assignments
- A prayer card for each child from the “Going Deeper in Prayer” resources at [diolc.org/prayer](http://diolc.org/prayer)