

Grade 4

BACKGROUND FOR CATECHISTS

Know Your Audience

Just like Jesus, every good catechist knows their audience.

“The catechist – must take into consideration all the human factors of a particular age level in order to present the Gospel message in a vital and compelling way.” (NDC #48)

Who Are Your Fourth Graders?

FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- ❖ Continue to grow in their relationship with God through prayer. Can take greater roles of responsibility in prayer and worship.
- ❖ View all events in their lives as part of faith.
- ❖ Understand symbols, stories, and religious images of God in a way that can be somewhat literal.
- ❖ Need help to develop their own unique God-given gifts.
- ❖ Catch the tradition of the past through stories (scripture, Jesus, stories of the Church). Can identify outstanding role models of the present.
- ❖ Begin to glimpse themselves in the future through observing the virtues and character of heroes and heroines and mature adults.
- ❖ Respond to lived faith witness by willingness to participate in more systematic presentation of the faith, liturgy, and religious practices.
- ❖ Need help to see the reasons behind Church rules, privileges, and responsibilities.
- ❖ Need help to understand that God desires the good and happiness of everyone.
- ❖ Vest greater importance in their expanding world of school, community, people, and events around the world (the latter brought closer through media).
- ❖ Can be introduced to care for the aged, persons with disabilities, the poor in the neighborhood and the world, through their expanded involvement with others outside the home.
- ❖ Gain a sense of responsibility and develop care for others by being involved in charitable collections, community clean ups, and other organized events.
- ❖ Begin to have a genuine sense of fairness and equality.
- ❖ Can take others' views into account in bargaining to meet their own needs.
- ❖ Grow in the ability to understand abstract qualities in the future such as justice and injustice by participating now in activities with sharp contrasts between good and evil.

Grade 4 Catechists

Guiding Principles

Catechists can:

- Provide reasonable explanations and increased group activities because the children have developed a longer attention span. Augment the docility and the unquestioning acceptance of adult explanations by capitalizing on the children's interest in sharing in small group discussions.
- Foster opportunities to replace interest in fantasy and fairy tale by interest in true-to-life stories that originate in the life of the Church, in their own communities and cultures, as well as in other areas.
- Provide group projects in which all the children can be involved because children learn most effectively when engaged in the learning process.
- Stimulate the children's creativity through music, art, drama, and related activities. Provide an opportunity for them to express and appreciate religious concepts.
- Encourage students to analyze facts and to explore the lived faith of believers, past and present, whose lives they can emulate.
- Continue to offer opportunities for meaningful memorization, particularly of certain essential doctrinal statements.
- Use daily situations and discussions to help students develop skills in moral decision making. Challenge the students to correlate what they say they believe with their actions. Encourage them to do what is right because it is right, whether it pleases the group or not. Stress the reasons and the values underlying the rules, as well as the importance of right motives.
- Include the element of social awareness in prayer experiences and reconciliation services. Move away from a simplified following of the rules and help the children to progress toward a faithful response to a call from the Lord. Make children aware of social ills and human need by helping them to become involved in social justice activities in various ways – e.g. recycling bottles and cans, learning not to waste natural resources. Teach that all are called to give of their time, talents, and earthly goods.
- Present Jesus as a model and friend. Identify biblical personalities, saints, and people in our own day who are living as Jesus did and who also serve as role models.
- Explore more fully doctrines of the creed, commandments, and sacraments. Emphasize the meaning behind law and ritual. Provide explanations that represent the effectiveness of Christ at work in the world today.
- Provide opportunities for fourth graders to seek and enjoy short periods of time when they can be alone. Support and nurture this desire and lead the children to prayer by

teaching them how to pray and by praying with them: i.e. communal prayer, rote prayers, silent or centering prayer, spontaneous prayer and petitions, meditative prayer, and prayer services.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- Show an improvement in athletic skills; have greater control.
- Experience a plateau of sorts in physical development.
- Begin to notice differences between boys and girls.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- Become group age "joiners;" enjoy team effort.
- Are full of enthusiasm; have a great sense of humor.
- Place more importance on conformity rather than individuality; need to belong to the "right" crowd; begin to be influenced by the teen culture.
- May experience an increased status with peers and a decrease in dependence on adults (grow beyond the influence of family and friends; however, still need adults for "direction" and approval).
- Work cooperatively and evaluate selves in relationship to peers; desire to choose their own play/work partners; like to work on group projects; are self-confident.
- Begin to be aware of the opposite sex (display giggling over uncertainty of how to handle these feelings).
- **Boys** join groups of boys and do not expect or experience difficulties.
- **Girls** are much more tentative with other girls; exercise a definite ritual of assimilation into the group (catechists need to pay attention to those who do not fit in and encourage acceptance).
- Are conscious of the world around them.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- Enjoy intellectual challenges and are beginning to be able to think abstractly
- have a longer attention span and are capable of hard work
- are developing a sense of time
- see the concrete, real world as more important than the imaginative world
- are curious and thirst for knowledge and stimulation
- like to collect and classify things and exercise ability to question and experiment
- grow in reasoning ability and are more able to make moral decisions

NOTES

- ❖ Pope John Paul II in **On Catechesis in Our Time** encourages the use of advances in pedagogy; biology, sociology as they help us to model God's Divine Pedagogy (teaching us gradually in stages according to our level of development). The above noted information is consistent with such documents as the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Catechetical Documents of the Church.

- ❖ The above sciences have limitations. While this information does provide references to typical age ranges, children continue to be viewed as individuals and individual differences need to be taken into account.

- ❖ For more information regarding curriculum or the faith development of children, please visit the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Christian Formation website <http://richmonddiocese.org/office/christian-formation/> or email us at cf@richmonddiocese.org.