

Appendix C: FAQs about the Diocese of Duluth Curriculum Standards

What is a curriculum standard?

A curriculum standard is a detailed outline of what the Diocese asks that students in our Catholic schools and religious education programs are taught, year by year. It includes the points that should be taught and resources and more information for teaching them. These standards ensure that our students are being given systematic and solid truth throughout their faith formation in our diocese.

Why do we need to have standards anyway?

We have been given a great blessing in the gift of our Catholic faith, in all of Her richness and tradition. The call to pass on the faith is a substantial responsibility, going back to Christ's Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) This is not a responsibility that can be taken lightly, and as such, we want to ensure that what we are teaching is the fullness of the Truth, as it has been safeguarded by the Magisterium throughout the ages. "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (On Catechesis in Our Times, 5). If our goal is truly to put people in intimacy and communion with Jesus Christ, the means by which we do this is through the rich teaching of what Holy Mother Church teaches, not our own personal interpretation of the teaching. The standards help ensure that we are in fact teaching the fullness and truth of our faith. We are warned in the Gospel of Matthew, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

This seems overwhelming, how do I use the standards?

The curriculum standards are best used when the Director of Religious Education or Catholic school teacher consults them in crafting their lesson plan/schedule for the year of what will be covered by their students. DREs and teachers should take care to ensure that the lessons they are providing to their students line up with what is laid out in the standards, and not simply matters of personal preference or ease of teaching. Recognizing that the standards are in fact very thorough and it very well may not be possible to cover everything in a given year (especially in the parish setting with limited meetings), there is an overview sheet available for each grade, giving the major points to be covered with the students. This overview sheet can be helpful in prioritizing lessons when there are limited meeting times, and can also be helpful to give to a catechist, for them to see the direction of their teaching for the year. However, these abbreviated standards are only complete within the context of the full standards.

What if we don't cover every point in a given year?

It's okay, do not panic. The standards are very thorough, providing a wonderful basis for each of the different grades. However, realistically, typical faith formation programs have about 20 – 25

sessions for the year and there are far more than 20 – 25 bullet points in the standards for a specific grade, so you will most likely not be able to cover every single point. The important thing is that you are doing the best you can in offering the students the richness of our faith, and lining up your teaching with what is laid out in the standards. The abbreviated standards offer a good overview of what is to be covered in a specific year, along with ideas for engaging the hearts of the students and their parents in that year. There are also many resources available on the Diocese of Duluth Catechesis and Evangelization Sharepoint Site that offer support to the catechist for teaching different topics.

Who are the standards for?

They are for all those who are teaching the faith in our diocese. However, we do not recommend handing the huge stack of the full standards to the volunteer catechist in the parish, lest we highly overwhelm them and send them running away from the parish. Often, if a DRE uses the standards in crafting their lesson schedule, it is not necessary for the catechist to deal with the full standards, unless they are looking for more information and background for certain lessons or topics. With that being said, it can be very helpful to share the abbreviated standard sheet with the catechist for the grade they teach so that they can see the higher level overview of what we are hoping to cover with the students that year. It can help them to see where we are trying to go, and the role they play in helping the student along that path.

How do we use the standards if we are doing family faith formation at our parish?

There is often confusion when it comes to using the standards in conjunction with family faith formation. It is first important to note that as the Catechism tells us, “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.” (CCC 2223) This is a very important point, that really, the parish should be the secondary place where students learn the faith, with the first being the home. In order to work to equip parents to be able to take on this role as primary educators of their children, many parishes are offering Family Faith Formation programs, which we very much encourage in our diocese. Every effort should be made to engage whole families and especially parents, as this plays a pivotal role in passing on our faith to children. These programs are organized in different ways, but overall they offer teaching for both the parents and the students. Sometimes they include components for parents to teach to their children at home. Sometimes students are grouped in different ways than in the traditional classrooms when this model is used. When it comes to the standards, again they should be consulted when crafting the lesson schedule for students. The student might receive certain lessons in grades outside of what is laid out for us in the standards, but the important thing is that they are receiving full and systematic teaching that lines up with what the standards organize for us. Some parishes have found it helpful to keep track of what topics are covered with students from year to year, to ensure they are receiving a full presentation of the faith throughout their time in the faith formation program.

How do we use the standards if we do a discipleship group format of faith formation at our parish?

This is another common area of confusion for those who work in the parish. The confusion in this often comes from the fact that students in a discipleship group format are not in a traditional

classroom with a teacher presenting a lesson, but rather in a smaller group with a leader who focuses intentionally on forming relationships with the students and leading discussion on lessons. This format bears much fruit, particularly in the middle school and high school age groups. Similar to the Family Faith Formation model, the standards should be consulted when crafting the lesson schedule for students. The student might receive certain lessons in grades outside of what is laid out for us in the standards, but the important thing is that they are receiving full and systematic teaching that lines up with what the standards organize for us. For example, if a parish is using YDisciple videos for their discipleship group format, they can line up the topics of the standards with videos from YDisciple, in such a way that when the student finishes the program, they have covered what they should.

What if a student is not ready to be taught what is in the standards?

Love the student where they are and engage the students in relationship. They need to leave knowing that they are loved by Jesus and by their catechist. When possible, in keeping with safe environment regulations, meet with them outside of the session regularly. Say hi to them outside of the session. Ask the question to yourself, “What does this student need?” Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and listen to His leading. Walk with this student. Show that you care through relational efforts such as attending their football game or performance. We don’t throw out the teaching or put students who aren’t ready in a different group (the Lord can touch hearts through teaching), but we do need to show them how cherished and valuable they are to the Lord.

What is the difference between curriculum and textbooks?

An easy way to understand this is the curriculum is the “what” and the textbooks are the “how” of the teaching. What we mean by this is that the curriculum standards (and their abbreviated sheets) outline what specifically should be taught in our faith formation programs. The textbooks offer a systematic way of delivering the content. They provide lessons for the teacher and often ways of applying the lessons to the students’ lives. They are organized in different ways from publisher to publisher, but the textbooks that have been approved by our diocese have been judged sufficient in passing on the standards for our diocese.