

3 Program Scheduling

The revised Catholic Connections program hinges on three easy-to-use catechist guides. These guides follow the sequence of the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and so in themselves create a structure of instruction for the program. See chapter 1, “Program Overview,” for a brief description of each guide and the handbook sections it covers.

The six sections in the Catholic Connections program provide an easy path in creating a two- or three-year program with weekly sessions. However, for those parishes using alternative scheduling formats, the six sections can be used to create programs that meet biweekly or monthly, or for retreat-based or weeklong programs. The structure of the sessions in each course allows for great flexibility in your scheduling.

This chapter suggests some possible scheduling formats, starting with those that are the most straightforward. Scheduling for the Sacrament of Confirmation is also considered, but first the sequence of the courses themselves are briefly discussed.

The *Catechism* Sequence

As was mentioned in the first chapter, the Catholic Connections program offers an age-appropriate, comprehensive overview of the Catholic faith that aligns with the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The *Catechism* follows a specific logical order. In the first pillar, we are introduced to our Trinitarian God and how God has revealed himself to us, ultimately through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are also introduced to the Church, the living Body of Christ. In the second pillar, we are introduced to the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. God’s salvation, introduced in the first pillar, is made present through the liturgy and the Sacraments. In the third pillar, the moral life is introduced. This follows the first two pillars because our moral life reflects the Law of Love revealed by God and is empowered by the Sacraments. The fourth pillar introduces the importance of prayer in the life of the believer. A personal and communal prayer life is the foundation for coming to know God (first pillar), for growing in communion with the Trinity (second pillar), and for asking for the grace to live God’s will (third pillar).

Thus, it follows that the most logical sequence for offering the sections in the Catholic Connections program is that which follows the order of the pillars of the *Catechism*:

1. God, Revelation, and Faith
2. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
3. The Church
4. Liturgy and Sacraments
5. Christian Morality and Justice
6. Prayer

You should feel free to offer the Catholic Connections program in whatever sequence makes the most sense in your parish situation. For example, if your students cover Christian morality in the year preceding your junior high program, you might decide to drop the Christian Morality and Justice section entirely from your junior high program. Or perhaps your parish has an intergenerational program that is focusing on the Sacraments for a year. So you may want to use the Liturgy and Sacraments section with all your middle school students in that year.

For simplicity, the following scheduling scenarios sequence the sections in the order that most directly follows the *Catechism*. But feel free to adapt this sequence in a way that makes the most sense in your pastoral situation.

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the doctrinal point of reference for education in the basic tasks of catechesis. However, it does not impose a predetermined format for the presentation of doctrine.” —National Directory for Catechesis (USCCB [Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005], page 72. Copyright © 2005 by the USCCB. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the USCCB.)

Scheduling for Two- or Three-Year Programs with Weekly Meetings

In our research we found that most parish catechetical programs for middle school or junior high met once a week, from September through May. These are mostly three-year programs for grades six, seven, and eight, or two-year programs for grades seven and eight. Catholic Connections works with either two- or three-year programs, using the catechist guides of your choice.

Three-Year Weekly Program without Confirmation

A three-year program offers the simplest and most straightforward implementation of the Catholic Connections program. If your program groups young people by grade, you would offer all six sections every year, two sections each year for each grade, as presented in the three guides. Your program schedule would look something like this:

	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
6th Grade	Guide: <i>The Old Testament, the Trinity, and the Mission of Christ</i> (sessions 1 through 18, with two life issues sessions)								
7th Grade	Guide: <i>The New Testament, the Church, and the Sacraments</i> (sessions 19 through 36, with two life issues sessions)								
8th Grade	Guide: <i>Christian Morality and Prayer</i> (sessions 37 through 50, with six life issues sessions)								

If the Sacrament of Confirmation is offered, usually in eighth grade, the sessions could be rearranged or adapted so that the second semester of the eighth grade program could be reserved for immediate preparation for Confirmation.

However you configure your program, the sessions on prayer could always be integrated into any of the sections, as prayer is always a component of every lesson.

Two-Year Weekly Program Without Confirmation

A two-year program would of course require a slightly different configuration of the guides and the sessions. For grade 7 for example, you would use the guide *The Old Testament* in the first half of the year and the guide *The New Testament* in the second half of the year. For grade 8 you would continue with *The New Testament* guide in the first half of the year and finish with the *Christian Morality* guide in the last half. Again, if necessary, make adjustments to include immediate preparation for Confirmation in your program.



Summer Program Model

The summer months offer a unique opportunity to provide catechetical programming for middle schoolers. Vacation Bible programs for elementary-age children are already popular. Providing a similar weeklong experience for middle schoolers takes advantage of their availability on weekdays. It also provides a safe and positive experience for young people while their parents are at work. And you have opportunities to take the young people on daylong field trips to nearby places for fun and service.

In creating such a summer program, you would focus on one section. The week will provide opportunities to cover most of the sessions in a section. Throughout the week you would also build in time for prayer, games, service projects, and a fun day. A schedule for a summer middle-school week might look something like this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Welcome	Morning prayer	Morning prayer	Morning prayer	Morning prayer
	Community-building games	Session 4	Session 6	All day fun activity	Service project
	Session 1	Snacks	Snacks	• theme park	
PM	Lunch	Session 5	Session 7	• water park	
	Gym or outdoor activities	Lunch	Lunch	• science center	Lunch
	Session 2	Afternoon service project	Movie		Session 9
	Snacks		Session 8		Session 10
	Session 3				Review games
					Closing prayer and celebration