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# Program Overview

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Welcome to Catholic Connections for Middle Schoolers, Second Edition! This is a parish religious education program for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. This program will strengthen the participants' Catholic identity and inspire them to participate more fully in the Church's mission. The fifty sessions are based on the pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and arranged in four main parts: The Creed, Liturgy and Sacraments, Christian Morality and Justice, and Prayer. These sessions will help young adolescents to make connections between the Catholic faith and everyday life and will also strengthen their connection to the faith community.

## The Components of the Catholic Connections Program

The program includes three fully developed catechist guides, full of active, hands-on learning sessions. These guides and the sections of the handbook they support are:

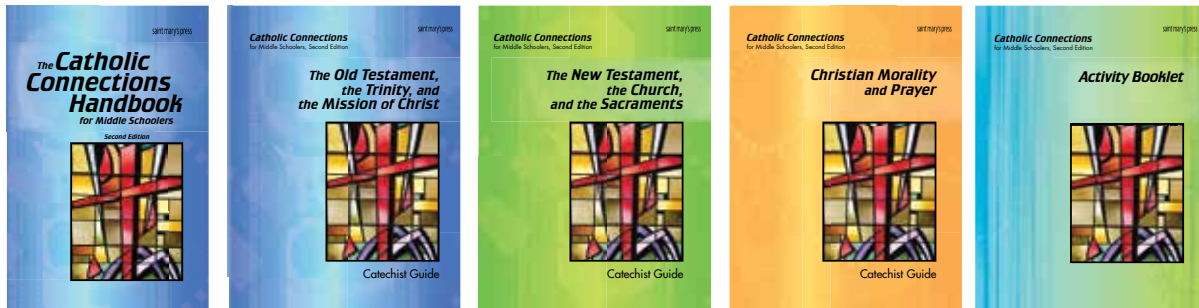
- *The Old Testament, the Trinity, and the Mission of Christ*  
(Part 1-A: The Creed: God, Revelation, and Faith; and Part 1-B: Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit)
- *The New Testament, the Church, and the Sacraments*  
(Part 1-C: The Creed: The Church; and Part 2: Liturgy and Sacraments)
- *Christian Morality and Prayer*  
(Part 3: Christian Morality and Justice; and Part 4: Prayer)

For each session, the participants use *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers, Second Edition* (Saint Mary's Press, 2014) as their textbook. The handbook is a visually appealing, youth-friendly presentation of the Catholic faith. The learning sessions in each of the three catechist guides work together with the handbook to equip parishes with an excellent resource for fostering the faith of young adolescents. Because the handbook has been declared in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, you can trust that its presentation of the faith is complete and authentic.

## Correlation with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The Catholic Connections program offers a comprehensive overview of the Catholic faith that is correlated with the four parts, or pillars, of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These pillars are: (1) The Profession of Faith, (2) The Celebration of the Christian Mystery, (3) Life in Christ, and (4) Christian Prayer.

## Catholic Connections Handbook and Guides



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The sessions in “Part 1: The Creed” courses that correspond to the *Catechism’s* first pillar—“God, Revelation, and Faith”; “Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit”; and “The Church”—follow the *Catechism* by using the framework of the Creed to explore the central beliefs of Catholics.

The *Catechism’s* second pillar corresponds with the sessions in “Part 2: Liturgy and Sacraments.” Several sessions are dedicated to the Eucharist because of its centrality and importance for the Catholic Church.

The third pillar of the *Catechism* corresponds with sessions in “Part 3: Christian Morality and Justice.” Prayer, the focus of the *Catechism’s* fourth pillar, is explored in several sessions in “Part 4: Prayer” as well as being integrated throughout the entire program.

In addition, this second edition offers several sessions based on Sacred Scripture. In the chapter titles, they are introduced by the words *The Bible*. In this way, Scripture study is integrated into the study of our Catholic faith.

*“The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends.”*<sup>1</sup> —*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America, second edition, number 25. Copyright © 1994 by the United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana [LEV]. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* copyright © 1997 by the United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—LEV. *Endnote: 1. Roman Catechism, Preface, 10; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8.*)

## Why Just One Book for the Program Participants?

The Catholic Connections program features a single book for the participants for a number of reasons:

### 1. Comprehensive Overview

*The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers, Second Edition (CCH)* offers a comprehensive overview of the Catholic faith in one handy volume.

Providing young people with a one-volume overview helps to demonstrate that the Catholic faith is a unified, organic whole.

## 2. Maximum Program Flexibility

The Catholic Connections program is designed to suit a variety of program schedules and formats. Because the whole program is connected to just one participant handbook, coordinators can custom-design courses using material from the three catechist guides without having to buy multiple participant books. See chapter 3 for more about scheduling options.

## 3. Personal Keepsake

Though the handbook is written specifically for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, it is ungraded, meaning that a young person can keep it year after year and use it as his or her own personal guide to the Catholic faith.

## 4. Resource for Catechists

Because the course content is drawn from the *CCH*, the handbook serves as a handy resource for catechists to use as they prepare for their sessions. The sessions include talking points for the catechists, but if catechists are able to do some additional reading in the handbook, they will be well prepared to summarize the doctrinal points covered by the sessions. In addition, every session in the handbook has a corresponding session in its appropriate guide, including a chapter summary sheet that outlines the points of doctrine presented in the handbook chapter. The chapter summary sheets are presented in handout form so that they can be distributed to the students and their families.

## 5. Vehicle for Connecting with Parents

If the participants have their own copies of the handbook and can take them home between sessions, the book has the potential to function as a bridge between parish and home. When the book goes home, parents have an informal opportunity to read about the topics their children are learning about or other topics of interest. Again, the chapter summary sheet for each session can also be sent home, as noted above.

## 6. Anchor for the Catechetical Dimension of Other Aspects of Youth Ministry

*“While the catechesis offered within the family is ordinarily informal, unstructured, and spontaneous, it is no less crucial for the development of the child’s faith.”*

—National Directory for Catechesis (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB] [Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005], pages 202–203. Copyright © 2005 by the USCCB. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the USCCB.)

Because it is just one volume, the handbook is easy to use in conjunction with programs such as retreats or service work that take place outside of formal religious education programs.

## What about Scheduling?

The Catholic Connections program offers a complete overview of the Catholic faith in fifty lessons, divided into four parts (or six sections), based on the four pillars of faith outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This simple structure provides parishes with a large degree of flexibility. Parishes that offer three-year programs (sixth through eighth grade) may want to offer two sessions per year, while parishes that offer two-year programs (seventh and eighth grade) may opt for three sections per year. The length of each section is also flexible, enabling parishes a variety of options for implementing the program. In addition to the sessions offered in each section, life issues sessions, which are presented in each guide, are offered in every section. See chapter 3 for more scheduling options.

To support this second edition of the *Catholic Connections Handbook* are three catechist guides. Each guide covers two courses. The guides with courses covered are:

*The Old Testament, the Trinity, and the Mission of Christ*

- God, Revelation, and Faith
- Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

*The New Testament, the Church, and the Sacraments*

- The Church
- Liturgy and Sacraments

*Christian Morality and Prayer*

- Christian Morality and Justice
- Prayer

## What You Will Find in This Resource

To find detailed descriptions of the features of the six sections in the Catholic Connections program, click on “Getting Started.” There you will also find a checklist designed to help you implement the program.

For a variety of scheduling options and guidance about course sequence, click on “Program Scheduling.”

To find overviews of the six sections, click on “Section Overviews.” To find tip sheets for catechists and parents on various topics related to the faith formation of young adolescents, click on “Tip Sheets.” Each section overview and each tip sheet is designed as a stand-alone reproducible handout, making it easy for you to share information with parents or others.