

Bishops approve framework for high school catechesis

BALTIMORE - A detailed framework for catechetical instruction for high school students will be given to publishing companies after being approved Nov. 14 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In a unanimous 220-0 vote, the bishops accepted the 80-page framework that outlines a core curriculum and electives for a four-year, eight-semester course of instruction.

The introduction to the document spells out that it is “a framework and not a tool for direct instruction.” As such, doctrines and topics listed are not necessarily defined or thoroughly developed, it said. Publishing houses are expected to submit their materials before publication for review of their conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, explained Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Catechesis, as he presented the text for approval.

In a brief period of discussion of the framework, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, N.M., questioned whether its design for use by Catholic schools was overlooking the many teens who receive their religious education through parish-based or youth ministry programs.

He said it would be a struggle to cover the material during the 20 hours of a typical parish religious education program per semester, in comparison to the 64 hours of religion classes students would have at a Catholic school in the same semester.

Archbishop Wuerl acknowledged it would be a challenge for publishers to write texts for religious education programs that cover the material thoroughly.

“But most publishers said they are prepared to take it on,” he said.

Cardinal-designate Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston said some publishers “have become restive about even publishing any text for youth ministry.”

The framework divides a core curriculum into six sections and electives into five sections. Each section cites references in the catechism and other texts to be used as reference.

It says core curriculum courses should address:

- The revelation of Jesus Christ in Scripture, including how one comes to know God and the history and study of Scripture.
- Learning about who Jesus is, through divine revelation, the incarnation and personal experience, and the challenges of belief.
- The mission of Jesus as messiah and instrument of redemption and the moral implications for believers.
- The continuing mission of Jesus in the church, touching on church history and structure, ecumenism and its involvement in the world.
- The sacraments, including definitions and in-depth study of each sacrament.
- Life in Jesus, or the discernment of how to live out one's faith.

Electives include sacred Scripture, church history, discipleship in contemporary society, responding to the call of Jesus, and ecumenical and interreligious issues.

Some sections of the framework are quite detailed about what should be included. For instance, the outline for the elective on church history lists specifically which topics to cover in each era.

Renaissance studies should include Erasmus and Thomas More, the revival of the studies of classical culture and languages, Christian humanism and a new translation of the Bible, it says. The course should also touch on specific artists, such as Fra Angelico, Giotto, Raphael, Michelangelo, Bramante and Bernini as well as the construction of St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel in Rome and the Duomo in Florence, Italy.

The final text of the framework, as amended by the bishops before final approval, is expected to be ready within a few weeks.