

A Multiple Case Study Investigation into the Instructional Methodologies utilized by Catholic School Religion Teachers to Implement the *Doctrinal Elements of Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*

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### **Main Concepts/Issue**

In 2008 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published the *Doctrinal Elements of Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age (Framework)*. Since the release of these guidelines, Catholic high schools have begun the process of adopting and integrating its tenants into their religious education and theology curricula across the country. As the *Framework* increasingly becomes the foundation on which Catholic high school religion curricula is based, more research is needed to understand how it is implemented and to what extent a religion teacher's unique experiences shape his or her presentation.

The *Framework* does not recommend a specific instructional method, but rather remains committed to allowing for religion teachers' faith and expertise to guide them in communicating its contents to students. Catholic high school religion teachers are not entirely without Church guidance however. Because religion teachers function as both "religious educators" and "catechists" they may look to the 1998 *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* and the 2005 *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)*. The catechetical directories describe the catechist's role in handing on the faith and endorse the use of various instructional methods for those who are well versed in Catholic doctrine and aware of the significance of their evangelizing role in student faith formation.<sup>1</sup>

Using the instructional methods described in the catechetical directories, this study categorizes, describes, and analyzes the instructional methods being used among religion teachers in one select diocese. Each of the seven cases described in this presentation includes rich detail regarding the types of instructional methods used and examines to what extent, in these cases, a religion teacher's formal education, professional development, and school environment may influence their choice of instructional methodology for implementing the *Framework*.

### **Methodology**

Data was gathered through a qualitative multiple case study approach. A qualitative methodology was chosen due to the descriptive emphasis of the study as well as its aim of providing readers with a deeper understanding of the incentive(s) behind a religious educator's pedagogical approach and its potential influence by factors such as formal education, professional development, and school environment.

The choice to perform a multiple case study was made in order to best illustrate the various perspectives taken by religion teachers to implement the *Framework*. Because this study's primary focus is to present detailed descriptions of the types of instructional methods

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Clergy. *General Directory for Catechesis*. Edited by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008), 148-162.

being used to implement the *Framework*, a case study with a descriptive focus was decidedly the most appropriate approach.

The decision to conduct a multiple case study was further supported by the fact that instructional methodology can be influenced by a variety of factors such as formal education, professional development or school environment.<sup>2</sup> In order to illustrate how these influences may shape a religion teacher's instructional methodology, this study required that multiple cases be studied and presented. Creswell points out that a multiple case study is often the most effective way to show various perspectives on the same issue. He states, "...the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue...Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the same issue."<sup>3</sup> For this reason, the researcher used a method of purposeful selection<sup>4</sup> to choose a diocese in which there was a large population of religion teachers. The variety in participants involved in this study helps to illustrate some of the diversity that exists among religion teachers in the U.S. These distinctions are highlighted in both their choice of instructional methodologies as well as formal education, professional development and school environment.

### **Primary Sources**

Congregation for Clergy. *General Directory for Catechesis*. Edited by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Adaptation of Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. Washington, DC: United States Council of Catholic Bishops Publishing, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_. *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington, DC: United States Council of Catholic Bishops Publishing, 2005.

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship between instructional methodology and factors such as formal education, professional development or school environment are explored in more detail within this presentation.

<sup>3</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 74.

<sup>4</sup> The term "purposeful sampling" referred to in this dissertation study is based on the definition for qualitative research put forth by Michael Quinn Patton. Patton describes purposeful sampling as "strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated." Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluative Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (SAGE Publications, Inc., London, UK: 2015), 265.