

***Parish Edition***

***Program  
Director Manual***

saint mary's press



***Catholic  
Connections***  
*for Middle Schoolers*

***Maura Thompson Hagarty  
Brian Singer-Towns***

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# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Welcome to Catholic Connections! This is a parish religious education program for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Catholic Connections will strengthen the participants' Catholic identity and inspire them to participate more fully in the Church's mission. The sessions in the six courses will help young adolescents to make connections between the Catholic faith and everyday life and to strengthen their connection to the faith community.

## The Components of the Catholic Connections Program

The program includes six fully developed courses, each with its own catechist guide full of active, hands-on learning sessions:

- God, Revelation, and Faith
- Jesus the Christ
- The Holy Spirit and the Church
- Sacraments and Prayer
- The Eucharist
- Christian Morality and Justice

In each course, the participants use as their textbook *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009). The handbook is a visually appealing, youth-friendly presentation of the Catholic faith. The learning sessions in the 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*.

## Catholic Connections Courses



## Catechism of the Catholic Church



The three courses that correspond to the Catechism's first pillar—God, Revelation, and Faith; Jesus the 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 two courses: Sacraments and Prayer and The Eucharist. An entire course is dedicated to the Eucharist because of its centrality and importance for the Catholic Church. The third pillar of the *Catechism* corresponds with the course Christian Morality and Justice. Prayer, the focus of the *Catechism's* fourth pillar, is explored in several sessions in the course Sacraments and Prayer as well as being integrated throughout the entire program.

*“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



## 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* 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 multiple 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 Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, 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.

### 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.

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

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.

*“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

## Why Six 10-Session Courses?

The Catholic Connections program offers six courses, providing parishes with a large degree of flexibility. Parishes that offer three-year programs (sixth through eighth grade) may want to offer two courses per year, while parishes that offer two-year programs (seventh and eighth grade) may opt for three courses per year. The length of each course is also flexible, enabling parishes a variety of options for implementing the program. Each course offers a total of ten sessions: seven core sessions, two life issue sessions, and one concluding session designed with the option of including parents.

## What You Will Find in This Manual

In the next chapter, you will find detailed descriptions of the features of the six courses in the Catholic Connections program. You will also find a checklist designed to help you implement the program.

Chapter 3 will walk you through a variety of scheduling options and offer guidance about course sequence.

Finally, the two appendices will provide you with a convenient way to share information with others. Appendix A provides overviews of the six courses. Appendix B provides tip sheets for catechists and parents on various topics related to the faith formation of young adolescents. Each course overview and each tip sheet is designed as a stand-alone reproducible handout, making it easy for you to share the information.

# 2 GETTING STARTED

This chapter will help you get started with Catholic Connections. First it describes details about the program and course features. Then it describes specific “getting started” tasks and provides a checklist for your planning.

## Features of Catholic Connections

### Course Design

Each of the six Catholic Connections courses offers the following:

- seven core sessions
- two life issue sessions
- a concluding session
- an optional course project

#### Core Sessions

Each of the seven core sessions uses a chapter topic from *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* as a starting point and incorporates active learning strategies to help the participants understand the topic and explore its significance for their lives. The program as a whole provides forty-two core sessions.

#### Life Issue Sessions

The two life issue sessions in each course focus on issues that relate to young people’s lives and explore those issues in light of material introduced during the seven core sessions. Both the core sessions and the life issue sessions aim to help the participants make important connections between the Catholic faith and their lives. The two types of sessions differ only in their starting points. The program as a whole provides twelve life issue sessions.

#### Concluding Session

Each course concludes with a tenth session that brings the course to a close and offers catechists the option of including the participants’ parents. These sessions are designed to work effectively with or without parents in attendance.

*“Catechesis most effectively promotes the faith development of . . . adolescents when the curriculum is focused on important faith themes drawn from the teachings of the Church and on the developmental needs and life experiences of adolescents.”—Renewing the Vision*