Environmental Education and Catholic Religious Education

*Exploring a Synthesis of Organizing Concepts, Standards and Best Practices*

A special report prepared with support from

The Jesuit Social and Pastoral Ministries Research Grant Program
and
The Congregation of Notre Dame

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1. Introduction

In recent years and following the leadership of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, Catholic institutions have invested increasing amounts of time and attention in issues related to the environment and environmental sustainability. In response, a growing number of Catholic educators have begun to teach Catholics of all ages about the environment, seeking to ground their education in Catholic doctrine and teachings.

This increased focus on the environment within Catholic religious education presents important opportunities and challenges.

- It represents a relatively new area of focus for Catholic religious education, in which there has not been a large number of curricula on the environment written.
- It creates an opportunity for Catholic religious educators to address a vitally important set of concerns, and to learn from practitioners in the field of environmental education, a field which has grown significantly over the past 40 years and which has developed standards and best practices of its own.
- It creates a challenge for Catholic religious educators to ensure that their curricula, catechesis and teaching integrate the best practices in both Catholic religious education and environmental education.

To respond to these opportunities and challenges, and with support from the Jesuit Social and Pastoral Ministries Research Grant Program and the Congregation of Notre Dame, GreenFaith has conducted a research project to analyze the field of Catholic religious education on the environment, to analyze existing Catholic environmental curricula, and to identify trends and priorities for the future development of this field. We structured this project around the following five stages.

**Stage 1: Identifying Environmental Education Standards**

GreenFaith has conducted research to identify commonly recognized organizing concepts, standards and best practices in the field of environmental education. These standards and best practices, we believe, represent an important resource for Catholic religious educators who seek to address environmental concerns.

**Stage 2: Identifying Catholic Religious Education Standards**

We have also conducted a survey of limited scope to identify organizing concepts, standards and best practices in the field of Catholic religious education. For the purposes of this report, we define Catholic religious education as the teaching of Catholicism and its varied aspects — its beliefs, doctrines, traditions, rites, personal roles and social responsibilities. In keeping with the scope of this project, we have gathered the organizing concepts and best practices for Catholic religious education with an eye to application in adult education or catechetical settings in parishes, though we believe that our findings will be of use for settings beyond this.
Stage 3: Exploring a Synthesis of Environmental and Catholic Religious Education Standards

To assist the authors of Catholic curricula or educational resources on the environment, we have sought to propose a rudimentary synthesis of the organizing concepts, standards and best practices of the two fields – Catholic religious education and environmental education. It is our hope that this synthesis will help curriculum developers while also serving to spur further research and development of standards in this area.

Stage 4: Evaluating Existing Catholic Religious Environmental Education

To test our synthesis of standards, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the field of Catholic religious environmental education, we have identified a select number of existing Catholic religious environmental education materials, and analyzed them in relation to our proposed standards for Catholic religious environmental education.

Stage 5: Sharing Findings

The final stage of the project involved sharing our findings – a set of eight observations on the field of Catholic religious environmental education which we wish to share.

Our research represents an initial, exploratory foray into this field. It is not an exhaustive survey of two professional fields with important histories and successes of their own. However, we believe that further attention to the relationship between these fields will result in more effective Catholic education on the environment in the years to come, a vital emerging ministry for the church.
2. Environmental Education – Overview, Organizing Concepts, Best Practices

a. History and Definitions of the Field

The modern environmental movement is recognized broadly as having its roots in the writings of 19th century American conservationists such as John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, and as having achieved contemporary prominence with the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring in 1962 and the celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970. During the 1960’s and 70’s, the field of environmental education developed as a part of this larger environmental movement.

Two particular formal declarations are widely recognized within the field of environmental education as having established definitions of this field and its goals.

First, the Belgrade Charter was adopted by a United Nations conference in 1976 and provides a widely accepted goal statement for environmental education:

“The goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward the solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.”

Second, in 1978, an intergovernmental conference on environmental education adopted the Tbilisi Declaration, which contains three broad goals for environmental education. These goals are acknowledged as having provided the foundation for most contemporary environmental education.

- To foster clear awareness of and concern about economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.

These foundational documents emphasize two fundamental themes.

- Environmental Education seeks to cultivate a holistic collection of attributes that result in changed knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. Both statements emphasize that effective environmental education addresses not only the development of knowledge but also the development of a collection of attributes – cognitive, affective, and behavioral - that lead to new patterns of behavior and leadership to protect the environment.
- Environmental Education cultivates an understanding of the natural world and of humanity’s impact on it. Both statements call for environmental education which
empowers people to understand humanity’s impact individually and systemically, and which promotes a multi-disciplinary understanding of the ways in which human systems impact nature.

b. **Criteria for Effective Environmental Education**

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) is the leading North American organization which promotes and supports the development of the field of environmental education, and which promulgates guidelines and standards for high-quality environmental education.

NAAEE has produced a series of “Guidelines for Excellence,” which include six guidelines for the development of such resources. These guidelines, which are widely recognized within the field of Environmental Education, are described below and are found in NAAEE’s Environmental Education (EE) Materials - Guidelines for Excellence Report.¹

The following is a summary of the six guidelines, using language drawn directly from the Guidelines report.

**Guideline #1 - Fairness and accuracy**

EE materials should be fair and accurate in describing environmental problems, issues, and conditions, and in reflecting the diversity of perspectives on them.

1.1 Factual accuracy
1.2 Balanced presentation of differing viewpoints and theories.
1.3 Openness to inquiry
1.4 Reflection of diversity

**Guideline #2 – Depth**

EE materials should foster awareness of the natural and built environment, an understanding of environmental concepts, conditions, and issues, and an awareness of the feelings, values, attitudes, and perceptions at the heart of environmental issues, as appropriate for different developmental levels.

2.1 Awareness
2.2 Focus on concepts
2.3 Concepts in context
2.4 Attention to different scales

**Guideline #3 - Emphasis on skills building**

EE materials should build lifelong skills that enable learners to address environmental issues.

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¹ Environmental Education Materials - Guidelines for Excellence; NAAEE; Washington DC, 2004
3.1 Critical and creative thinking
3.2 Applying skills to issues
3.3 Action skills

**Guideline #4 - Action orientation**

EE materials should promote civic responsibility, encouraging learners to use their knowledge, personal skills, and assessments of environmental problems and issues as a basis for environmental problem solving and action.

4.1 Sense of personal stake and responsibility
4.2 Self-efficacy

**Guideline #5 - Instructional soundness**

EE materials should rely on instructional techniques that create an effective learning environment.

5.1 Learner-centered instruction
5.2 Different ways of learning
5.3 Connection to learners’ everyday lives
5.4 Expanded learning environment
5.5 Interdisciplinary
5.6 Goals and objectives
5.7 Appropriateness for specific learning settings
5.8 Assessment

**Guideline #6 - Usability**

EE materials should be well designed and easy to use.

6.1 Clarity and logic
6.2 Easy to use
6.3 Long-lived
6.4 Adaptable
6.5 Accompanied by instruction and support
6.6 Make substantiated claims
6.7 Fit with national, state, or local requirements

On the following page, Table 1 summarizes these guidelines.
In addition to the guidelines referenced above, NAAEE recognized that many groups within society provide environmental education outside of formal academic settings, and that guidelines for these groups represented a necessary and important resource.

Subsequently, NAAEE developed a set of “key characteristics” for Nonformal Environmental Education Programs—a category of programs that take place outside formal academic settings.

Because we believe that most religiously based environmental education activities fit within this category of Nonformal Environmental Education Programs, we have included a summary of the six Key Characteristics of Nonformal Environmental Education Programs below, excerpted directly from NAAEE’s report.

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2 Nonformal Environmental Education Programs – Guidelines for Excellence; NAAEE: Washington DC; 2009

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Key Characteristic #1 – Needs Assessment.

Nonformal environmental education programs are designed to address identified environmental, educational, and community needs and to produce responsive, responsible benefits that address those identified needs.

1.1 Environmental issue or condition;
1.2 Inventory of existing programs and materials; and
1.3 Audience needs.

Key Characteristic #2 – Organizational Needs and Capacities

Nonformal environmental education programs support and complement their parent organization’s mission, purpose, and goals.

2.1 Consistent with organizational priorities;
2.2 Organization’s need for the program identified; and
2.3 Organization’s existing resources inventoried.

Key Characteristic #3 – Program Scope and Structure

Nonformal environmental education programs should be designed with well-articulated goals and objectives that state how the program will contribute to the development of environmental literacy.

3.1 Goals and objectives for the program;
3.2 Fit with goals and objectives of environmental education;
3.3 Program format and delivery; and
3.4 Partnerships and collaboration.

Key Characteristic #4 – Program Delivery Resources

Nonformal environmental education programs require careful planning to ensure that well-trained staff, facilities, and support materials are available to accomplish program goals and objectives.

4.1 Assessment of resource needs;
4.2 Quality instructional staff;
4.3 Facilities management;
4.4 Provision of support materials; and
4.5 Emergency planning.

Key Characteristic #5 – Program Quality and Appropriateness

Nonformal environmental education programs are built on a foundation of quality instructional materials and thorough planning.
5.1 Quality instructional materials and techniques;
5.2 Field testing;
5.3 Promotion, marketing, and dissemination; and
5.4 Sustainability.

**Key Characteristic #6 – Evaluation**

Nonformal environmental education programs define and measure results in order to improve current programs, ensure accountability, and maximize the effects of future efforts.

6.1 Determination of evaluation strategies;
6.2 Effective evaluation techniques and criteria; and
6.3 Use of evaluation results.

Table 2 summarizes these key characteristics of Nonformal Environmental Education Programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs Assessment</td>
<td>• Environmental issue or condition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Inventory of existing programs and materials</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Audience needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Needs &amp; Capacity</td>
<td>• Consistent with organizational priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organization’s need for the program identified</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Organization’s existing resources inventoried</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Scope &amp; Structure</td>
<td>• Goals and objectives for the program</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fit with goals and objectives of environmental education</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program format and delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Partnerships and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Delivery Structure</td>
<td>• Assessment of resource needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Facilities management</td>
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<td>• Provision of support materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Emergency planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Quality &amp; Appropriateness</td>
<td>• Quality instructional materials, techniques</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Field testing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Promotion, marketing, dissemination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>• Determination of evaluation strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effective evaluation techniques and criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of evaluation results</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In an effort to create a unified set of guidelines or best practices for environmental education, guidelines which would be relevant to a wide variety of Catholic settings, we have sought to synthesize NAAEE’s Guidelines for Excellence and Key Characteristics into one set of best practices for environmental education. This synthesis appears in Table 3, below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Needs Assessment**     | EE programs should address environmentally significant issues which are relevant to the priorities of the host organization and its audience. | • Identify the environmental issue(s) to be addressed.  
• Inventory existing programs which address these issues.  
• Seek input from community and potential audience(s). |
| **Goals & Objectives**   | EE programs should contain clear, measurable goals and objectives.             | • Establish clear goals and objectives and assess their fit with well-established EE goals.                                               |
| **Fairness & Accuracy**  | EE materials should be fair and accurate in describing environmental conditions, and in reflecting the diversity of perspectives on them. | • Use current, educational, “non-propagandizing” information from sources which are scientifically credible.  
• Ensure that materials and programs present major differing theories (where differences exist) and viewpoints of underrepresented groups. |
| **Depth**                | EE materials should foster awareness of the natural and built environment, of environmental concepts, conditions, and issues, and of the feelings, values, attitudes, and perceptions surrounding environmental issues. | • Ensure that materials increase participants’ awareness of various environments and related cultural, economic and political forces.  
• Ensure that materials provide a conceptual framework for the environmental issues addressed – not simply multiple facts.  
  ○ This framework should reflect an understanding of relevant socio-cultural-economic contexts, and local, regional, national, global scales. |
| **Skill Building & Action** | EE materials should help learners to develop and implement skills to assess and address environmental problems. | • Develop materials and programs that enable learners to use and improve critical thinking and creative skills, reach conclusions based on research and study, and learn basic skills for addressing environmental issues.  
• Develop materials that help learners to examine the environmental consequences of their behaviors and make choices to help resolve environmental issues. |
| **Instructional Methods and Materials** | EE materials should use a range of proven instructional techniques, well-designed and user-friendly materials, and physical settings that create an effective learning environment | • Assess logistical and resource needs.  
• Review pedagogical methods and identify methods to be utilized.  
• Assess staff competencies and training needs.  
• Arrange needed facilities, supplies, and equipment. |
| **Evaluation**           | EE programs should define and measure results in order to improve current programs, ensure accountability, and maximize the effects of future efforts. | • Develop evaluation strategies, techniques, and criteria.  
• Implement practical program evaluation and use results to modify EE programs and materials. |

a. Purpose of our Review of Catholic Religious Education Standards, Best Practices and Organizing Concepts

In addition to identifying standards, best practices and organizing concepts for environmental education, GreenFaith also sought to identify such standards, best practices and organizing concepts for Catholic religious education. Obviously, there are numerous and lengthy official, authoritative texts which address this topic. A full or comprehensive review of these is beyond the scope of this project.

However, we determined that there was value in our identifying a small number of representative sources for standards, best practices and organizing concepts for Catholic religious education, and summarizing these. This summary could then be compared to and synthesized with the standards previously identified for environmental education, allowing us to achieve our goal of identifying standards, best practices and organizing concepts for Catholic religious environmental education.

We identified five sets of standards and/or organizing concepts, which appear to us to be representative of the field of Catholic religious education. These are

- The General Directory for Catechesis
- The National Directory for Catechesis
- Sustainability and Higher Education – A Toolkit for Mission Integration
- Diocese of Bridgeport Religious Education Standards
- Diocese of Madison Religious Education Competencies for Children

First, we will summarize leading, relevant concepts from each of these documents.

We will then propose a summary of organizing concepts for Catholic religious education solely for the purpose of comparison and exploratory synthesis with the best practices for environmental education which we established above. Again, we wish to emphasize that this summary is not intended as an authoritative summary of the key elements of Catholic religious education for any purpose beyond that described in this research report.

The General Directory for Catechesis

The Second Vatican Council prescribed that a "Directory for the catechetical instruction of the Christian people" be drawn up. The General Catechetical Directory was the result, and was released in 1971. Recognizing the numerous subsequent developments within church and

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3 Sustainability and Higher Education – A Toolkit for Mission Integration does not, in our opinion, fall into the category of a representative source on Catholic religious education. However, we included it because it represents one of the first efforts to establish a structure for the field of Catholic religious education on the environment.
society, in 1997 the Holy See released The General Directory for Catechesis\(^4\), which addresses the theological, theoretical and practical dimensions of catechesis.

Part 4, Chapter 2 of the General Directory for Catechesis is entitled “General and particular tasks of adult catechesis.” The following excerpt sets forth the organizing concepts for this field:

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\begin{align*}
\text{to promote formation and development of life in the Risen Christ by adequate means: pedagogy of the sacraments, retreats, spiritual direction}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{to educate toward a correct evaluation of the socio-cultural changes of our societies in the light of faith: thus the Christian community is assisted in discerning true values in our civilization, as well as its dangers, and in adopting appropriate attitudes;}
\end{align*}
\]

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\begin{align*}
\text{to clarify current religious and moral questions, that is, those questions which are encountered by the men and women of our time: for example, public and private morality with regard to social questions and the education of future generations;}
\end{align*}
\]

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\begin{align*}
\text{to clarify the relationship between temporal actions and ecclesial action, by demonstrating mutual distinctions and implications and thus due interaction; to this end, the social doctrine of the Church is an integral part of adult catechesis;}
\end{align*}
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\begin{align*}
\text{to develop the rational foundations of the faith: that the right understanding of the faith and of the truths to be believed are in conformity with the demands of reason and the Gospel is always relevant; it is therefore necessary to promote effectively the pastoral aim of Christian thought and culture: this helps to overcome certain forms of fundamentalism as well as subjective and arbitrary interpretations;}
\end{align*}
\]

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\begin{align*}
\text{to encourage adults to assume responsibility for the Church's mission and to be able to give Christian witness in society:}
\end{align*}
\]

The adult is assisted to discover, evaluate and activate what he has received by nature and grace, both in the Christian community and by living in human society; in this way, he will be able to overcome the dangers of standardization and of anonymity which are particularly dominant in some societies of today and which lead to loss of identity and lack of appreciation for the resources and qualities of the individual.

**The National Directory for Catechesis**

Written by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and first published in 2005, the National Directory for Catechesis is an authoritative guide to standards for Catholic religious education. USCCB describes it as a “companion to the General Directory for Catechesis

“GDC)” and notes that it “builds on some of the core themes of the GDC, like catechesis’s relationship to evangelization and worship, and provides practical tools for doing catechesis well.”

Because of the significance of this document in establishing the organizing principles, standards and best practices for Catholic religious education, we summarize here the Directory’s structure and content. The chapter headings listed below are the actual Directory chapter headings, while the subsequent bullet points represent our summary of the content of each chapter.

Chapter 1 – Proclaiming the Gospel in the United States
- General Characteristics of US Culture – Freedom, Pragmatism, Mobility
- Diversity in US Culture – Cultural, Religious, Regional
- Catholic and Family Life in the US

Chapter 2 – Catechesis within the Church’s Mission of Evangelism
- Revelation, Evangelism’s Process and Context
- Nature and Purpose of Catechesis
- Inculturation of the Gospel

Chapter 3 – This is our Faith; This is the Faith of the Church
- Instruments of Catechesis – Scripture, the General Catechism
- Criteria for Presentation of Authentic Christian Message

Chapter 4 – Divine and Human Methodology
- God’s Methodology
- Human Methodologies – Experience, Discipleship, Community, Family, Catechist’s Example, Commitment and Apprenticeship

Chapter 5 – Catechesis in a Worshipping Community
- Liturgy and Personal Prayer
- Sacraments
- Sacred Time and Space

Chapter 6 – Catechesis for Life in Christ
- Human dignity, formation of conscience and character
- Human community and communal conscience and character
- Catechesis on the Decalogue

Chapter 7 – Catechizing the People of God in Diverse Settings
- Catechesis and various age/ability levels
- Catechesis and other religions

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5 http://www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=317; accessed 12.28.11
Chapter 8 – Those Who Catechize
• Roles and Preparation

Chapter 9 – Organizing Catechetical Ministries
• Diocesan and parochial roles and responsibilities

Chapter 10 – Resources for Catechesis
• Texts – Scripture, General and Local Catechisms, textbooks
• Technology and Catechesis
• Preparation and Evaluation of Catechetical Materials

Sustainability and Higher Education – A Toolkit for Mission Integration

Sustainability and Higher Education – A Toolkit for Mission Integration⁶ was published in 2011 by the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, the Lasallian Association of College and University Presidents, the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, Catholic Relief Services College and the National Catholic Student Coalition, with support from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.

It provides guidance to help Catholic Colleges and Universities ensure that their efforts to address issues of environmental sustainability “are thoroughly grounded in Catholic mission and identity.”

It is organized around five criteria which represent potential organizing principles for defining best practices in Catholic religious environmental education. These criteria, which reflect the five components of the Catholic Climate Covenant: The St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor, are as follows:

• **Pray** and reflect on the duty to care for God’s Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
• **Learn** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of environmental degradation and climate change.
• **Assess** how we — as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations — contribute to environmental degradation and climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
• **Act** to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to environmental degradation and climate change.
• **Advocate** for Catholic principles and priorities in environmental and climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

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Catholic Education Standards for Children and Teenagers

We reviewed several standards for Catholic Religious Education for Children. Two examples of these – standards promulgated by the Diocese of Madison\(^7\) (WI) and the Diocese of Bridgeport\(^8\) (CT) – consist of organizing concepts which we found to be common among similar standards. These concepts are summarized in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diocese of Madison Religious Education Competencies for Children</th>
<th>Diocese of Bridgeport Religious Education Standards</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td>Scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctrine</td>
<td>Doctrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacraments</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Vocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Ten Commandments – Social Teachings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Having reviewed the documents described above, we now summarize their leading concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Directory for Catechesis</th>
<th>National Directory for Catechesis</th>
<th>Sustainability and Higher Education – A Toolkit for Mission Integration</th>
<th>Diocese of Madison Religious Education Competencies for Children</th>
<th>Diocese of Bridgeport Religious Education Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote formation … of life in Christ</td>
<td>Analysis of US culture</td>
<td>Pray</td>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td>Scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate towards … evaluation of societies …</td>
<td>Catechesis and Evangelism</td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Doctrine</td>
<td>Doctrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify … religious and moral questions</td>
<td>Theological Content</td>
<td>Assess</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify temporal vs. ecclesial action</td>
<td>Effective Methods of Catechesis</td>
<td>Act</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop rational faith foundations</td>
<td>Worship and Prayer</td>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Ten Commandments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage adults to give … Christian witness</td>
<td>Individual and Social Ethics</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administering Catechetical Ministry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
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</table>

\(^7\) [http://www.madisondiocese.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=i7qemz0pzgs%3d&tabid=434&mid=1518; accessed 11/1/11](http://www.madisondiocese.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=i7qemz0pzgs%3d&tabid=434&mid=1518)

\(^8\) [http://www.officeforpastoralservices.org/resources/standards.pdf; accessed 11.1.11](http://www.officeforpastoralservices.org/resources/standards.pdf)
Based on this summary, we propose the following as the concepts, standards and practices around which Catholic religious education is organized and structured. Again – note that we offer these concepts, standards and practices solely for the purpose of comparison and exploratory synthesis with those concepts, standards and practices for environmental education identified above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Evaluation of Context and Need | Catholic religious education should reflect an understanding of the cultural context in which it occurs, drawing on analysis from established Catholic sources. | - Identify the need(s) and/or issue(s) to be addressed  
- Review relevant Catholic analysis and teaching  
- Identify relevant teachings, points of analysis for use in curriculum development |
| Formation                  | Catholic religious education should help form its students in Christ’s image, shaping their thinking, attitudes, values, behaviors | - Identify the virtues/characteristics to be cultivated  
- Specify cognitive, emotional, moral, behavioral goals  
- Identify pedagogical methods to reach goals |
| Prayer and Worship         | Catholic religious education should incorporate and promote participation in the church’s worship and sacramental life, and strengthen and deepen the individual’s prayer life | - Identify and educate on connections between liturgy, sacraments, and the focus of specific Catholic religious education materials  
- Identify, educate on connections between prayer, spiritual practices and the focus of specific Catholic religious education materials |
| Knowledge                  | Catholic religious education should foster knowledge and understanding of Scripture, Catholic doctrine and Church teachings. | - Review Catholic sources to identify applicable texts and writings.  
- Feature reference to these sources into teaching on the need(s)/ issue(s) addressed by education |
| Community                  | Catholic religious education should support active participation and leadership in Catholic community | - Identify opportunities for application of what is learned in Catholic community  
- Consult with Catholic community leaders to plan for integration of new leadership |
| Witness and Vocation       | Catholic religious education should empower participants to adopt new behaviors and lifestyles and to offer public moral leadership. | - Identify opportunities for public witness, vocational development in relation to the focus of education  
- Develop methods to support students in engaging these activities |
| Methods                    | Catholic religious education should make use of a range of proven pedagogical methods suited for the context in which they are offered | - Identify range of methods  
- Analyze methods in relation to context  
- Identify effective methods for different educational goals |
| Administration             | Catholic religious education should be supported by sound planning, materials and publicity, and by well-prepared teachers. | - Identify needs for space, technology, materials, publicity  
- Identify needs for teacher training and preparation |

In Section 2, we presented a summary of best practices for environmental education. In Section 3, we proposed a summary of organizing concepts and best practices for Catholic religious education.

Now, we will propose a synthesis of these standards. The aim of this synthesis will be primarily functional, not academic. Our goal is twofold:

- To provide those with responsibility for the management of Catholic religious education programs with an easy-to-use tool to evaluate existing or newly created Catholic environmental curricula, or to guide the development of new curricula or educational programs for which they are responsible.

- To provide those who develop Catholic religious educational curricula, materials or programs with a user-friendly tool to assist their efforts, and to provide guidance that offers insight drawn from the fields of Catholic religious education and environmental education.

Drawing on our research on best practices for both environmental and Catholic religious education, we have structured our synthesis of standards and best practices around five commitments. We believe that Catholic religious education on the environment must demonstrate:

- Commitment to Context - Ecological, Social, and Ecclesial
- Commitment to Truth about the Earth
- Commitment to Faith
- Commitment to Action for Transformation
- Commitment to Quality

Commitment to Context – Ecological, Social, and Ecclesial

Catholic religious education on the environment begins with an analysis of context within which this education takes place. There are three importance contextual dimensions which need to be addressed in the creation of effective Catholic religious education on the environment (CREE).

- Ecological Context

Those developing CREE should analyze and understand the specific environmental concern that is the focus of education, the needs of the earth and its ecosystems for restoration and health, and varying scientific perspectives on these issues.
• **Social Context**

Those developing CREE should analyze and understand society’s impact on the earth through a range of cultural, economic, and political forces. In particular, analysis should be conducted about the impact of environmental degradation on culturally and economically vulnerable communities domestically and internationally.

• **Ecclesial Context**

Those developing CREE should analyze and understand the church’s needs in relation to ministry on the environment, at the parochial and broader level. They should also research and analyze how the church can become a community where care for the earth is modeled and taught, and where witness and vocation in relation to the earth are cultivated and supported.

**Commitment to Truth**

Those developing CREE should understand and respect the integrity of scientific findings on the environment. Because environmental topics are often controversial, respect for the integrity of sound science is vital.

In particular, those developing CREE should ask the following questions as they assess the scientific research behind issues they wish to address:

- For any environmental issue - what are the major positions around which a scientific consensus has emerged? How do groups respected for their scientific objectivity view a given issue?
- If consensus scientific views encounter resistance within wider society, what is the source of that resistance? Are there culturally, economically or politically power forces which are threatened by scientific findings? Are there legitimate areas of uncertainty in relation to the issue at hand?
- What does research demonstrate about ways in which the issues under consideration particularly impact vulnerable populations or communities?

**Commitment to Faith**

Those developing CREE should analyze and understand a range of ways that environmental concerns intersect with Catholicism. Educators should integrate the following into their teaching and curricula:

- Biblical and doctrinal teachings on the environment
- Liturgical, devotional, and spiritual practices which encourage care for the earth and which strengthen people’s relationship with God through the natural world.
- Teaching on the ways in which the Church’s sacramental life speaks to God’s care for Creation.
Commitment to Action and Transformation

Those developing CREE should build into their teaching and curricula a range of ways that participants can develop skills to help restore and heal the earth. These skills can include various forms of advocacy and public witness, skills related to the care of specific pieces of land or bodies of water, skills to foster environmentally sustainable consumption habits at home and work, and more.

In addition, educational programs and materials in this area should provide examples of ways in which individuals and Catholic communities have offered Christian witness on Creation’s behalf, and/or have lived out their vocation in relation to the environment.

Commitment to Quality

Those developing CREE should strive to create high quality materials, utilize appropriate and effective pedagogical methods, provide effective teacher training and quality facilities, and conduct evaluation of their educational programming so that future educational offerings can benefit from earlier experiences.

The following is a summary of the five commitments for Catholic religious environmental education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitments</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>• Ecological</td>
<td>• Identify the ecological issue and context for education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social</td>
<td>• Identify relevant characteristics of the social/economic/political context in which the education will take place, and the implications of this for the education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ecclesial</td>
<td>• Identify the needs and roles of the church in relation to the topic(s)/issue(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truth about the Environment</td>
<td>• Scientific consensus</td>
<td>• Consult research to identify areas of scientific consensus, respected scientific sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Resistance to scientific consensus</td>
<td>• Conduct research to identify and analyze resistance to scientific consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Impacts on vulnerable communities</td>
<td>• Consult research to identify impacts on vulnerable communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>• Biblical and doctrinal teachings</td>
<td>• Consult Catholic teachings to identify relevant Biblical passages and theological/magisterial statements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Liturgy</td>
<td>• Consult liturgical, sacramental resources to identify ways that ecological concerns can be integrated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sacraments</td>
<td>• Consult pastoral theologians, spiritual directors, devotional authors to identify ways to strengthen prayer life in relation to the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Devotional, prayer and spiritual practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action for Transformation</td>
<td>• Develop environmental skills</td>
<td>• Identify specific skills to be cultivated through the educational efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Highlight and encourage environment-related vocations</td>
<td>• Identify examples of environment-related vocations to be highlighted as part of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>• Materials</td>
<td>• Consult NAAEE EE Materials - Guidelines for Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pedagogical methods</td>
<td>• Develop criteria for quality in all relevant areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher training</td>
<td>• Develop clearly defined educational outcomes and evaluation tools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Evaluation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5. Trends and Needs in Catholic Religious Environmental Education

During our review of existing Catholic religious environmental education materials, we observed certain characteristics or trends within this field which, we believe, are of significance to those responsible for the development of future Catholic religious environmental education materials and curricula. We offer these findings here.

Finding #1: There are many more “informational resources” than educational resources.

In our research, we identified a number of on-line resources focused on Catholicism and the environment. Almost all of these on-line resources contain a series of Biblical quotes, references to Catholic Social Teaching, citations from various statements on the environment from the Vatican or US Conference of Catholic Bishops, references to various saints whose ministry was focused, in part, on the environment, and other similar informational resources. We developed the term “informational resources” for these because they provide information about Catholic teachings and their link to the environment.

While informative, these informational resources represent only an early stage in the development of Catholic religious environmental education, the “raw materials” out of which more effective Catholic religious environmental education can be developed.

Finding #2: Most excellent official Catholic statements on the environment have not been developed into educational curricula.

The Vatican and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops have, since the 1990’s, produced a series of important, excellent statements on the environment. Pope John Paul II’s 1990 World Day of Peace Message, Pope Benedict XVI’s 2010 World Day of Peace Message, and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 1991 Renewing the Earth represent three of these foundational statements.

Such statements represent important resources for Catholic religious environmental education. They contain an astute assessment of the context within which the Church’s environmental efforts stand – ecologically, socially, and ecclesially. They do an excellent job of identifying environmental resources from within Catholic teaching and tradition. They make reference to the consensus of the scientific community on environmental concerns. They reflect concern for the poor.

Well-crafted adult discussion and study guides of these documents could, in our view, serve as vitally important introductory Catholic religious environmental education resources. Because the statements on which they would be based already exist, the discussion/study guides’ completion would represent a modest investment of resources, and could make these important teachings more widely accessible.
Finding #3: Climate Change dominates the list of environmental issues addressed by curricula.

In our review of existing Catholic religious environmental education, the topic of climate change was the focus of materials and curricula far more frequently than any other topic. This is due to several factors: the scale and urgency surrounding climate change, the amount of funding provided by foundations for climate-related outreach in the religious sector, and the need for US climate-related legislation. We recommend that, while maintaining a sense of urgency around climate change, that future curriculum development attend to the need for educational materials and curricula addressing a range of environmental topics, including but not limited to issues such as water, toxics, biodiversity and land conservation, environmental justice, and more.

Finding #4: Existing curricula use only a modest range of pedagogical methods.

Existing Catholic religious environmental education materials use a relatively modest range of pedagogical methods. These methods rely heavily on the sharing of information - about environmental threats of various kinds, quotes from the Bible or other Catholic sources, and statistics or stories about the impact of certain behaviors on the earth. While information sharing is certainly one valid approach to Catholic religious environmental education, we recommend that those developing new curricula in this area utilize a wider range of pedagogies, including role plays, outdoor education, and more. The North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) has a range of outstanding resource materials that describe various methods of environmental education, which can serve as a resource for Catholic religious educators.

Finding #5: Existing curricula pay more attention to promoting individual behavior change than systemic change.

Admirably, most Catholic religious environmental education materials emphasize the importance of behavior change in relation to the environment. However, much of the change which is encouraged takes the form of changes in personal consumption habits. While important, it is our view that encouraging individual change alone is an insufficient response to the range of environmental threats facing the human family, and that collective change – in the form of new government policies and corporate practices – is a sine qua non of meaningful environmental restoration. We recommend that

Finding #6: Existing Catholic religious environmental education appears to focus more on the Bible, doctrine and theology, and less on liturgy, prayer and the sacraments.

For reasons that are not clear to us, it appears that existing Catholic religious environmental education focuses to a greater degree on the Bible and theology than on liturgy, prayer and the sacraments. We encourage those responsible for the development of Catholic religious environmental education to focus an increased amount of attention on these three topics in relation to the environment.
Finding #7: There is no center for excellence in Catholic religious environmental education.

In our research, we found no single Catholic institution, let alone a network of institutions, committed to the development of high quality Catholic religious environmental education. This represents a remarkable opportunity for any number of Catholic institutions. It also represents an area of need that is without parallel within the Catholic community globally. The Church – and the world – need a center of excellence in Catholic religious environmental education.

6. Conclusion

It is our hope that the standards, best practices and organizing concepts that we have outlined in this document will help accelerate the growth and development of the field of Catholic religious environmental education.

Because of the increasing significance of environmental concerns globally, and because of growing interest in the environment by many Catholic and other religious leaders, we believe that it is inevitable that more curricula and educational materials in this area will be created.

It is not clear to us, however, that those responsible for the development of Catholic religious education are well informed about best practices for environmental education, about the many of environmental topics deserving engagement, and about the range of pedagogies that can help students of all ages learn about the environment in a manner that empowers them to become committed stewards of Creation.

Catholic leaders are not alone in this regard. Through our experience with those from many different religious backgrounds, we have found little awareness among religious educators about the field of environmental education.

We believe that the time has come for the Church to take up the challenge of creating educational curricula and materials on the environment and, in doing so, to take seriously the extensive research within the field of environmental education. The standards and best practices from this field have much to offer religious educators as they seek to develop curricula in an area that is, in almost every case, new territory for the Church.

We also believe that Church leaders are called to make their own mark on environmental education from a specifically Catholic perspective. Catholic religious educators have a remarkable and vitally important opportunity to teach millions of Catholics about God’s love for Creation, the church’s role as a steward of Creation, the importance of the environment as a matter of faith.

In closing, we hope that this document – its syntheses of standards for environmental education, Catholic religious education, and Catholic religious environmental education – will play a meaningful role in furthering dialogue and thinking that will enable the church to fulfill her calling as an educator on behalf of both Creation and Creator.
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