



GUIDELINES FOR
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL RELIGION
TEACHER CERTIFICATION



Office for Evangelization
and Discipleship

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I. THE RELIGION TEACHER

The role of religion teacher in the Catholic high school is a special calling. Not only do teachers of religion strive to open the Catholic tradition to young people through formal religious instruction, but they also serve as witnesses of faith. This witness, always essential, is needed more than ever today.

Teachers of religion, therefore, must be men and women endowed with many gifts, both natural and supernatural, who are also capable of giving witness to these gifts; they must have a thorough cultural, professional, and pedagogical training, and they must be capable of genuine dialogue.¹

In view of this statement, the qualifications for Catholic high school teachers of religion set forth in these guidelines are both personal and professional. Those responsible for staffing should discern in prospective teachers those personal qualities needed for effectiveness in Catholic education.

Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation.²

A. PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Religion teachers share in a special way the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel to all people. To fulfill this ministry religion teachers must be committed Catholic Christians in full communion with the Church. They earnestly seek to understand the origins of the basic content of Catholic belief, the gradual development of personal faith, and the subsequent obligation to witness to Christ and to proclaim the good news of salvation. This is to say that teachers of religion are adults who have encountered Christ in their lives and who strive continually to grow in Christ. The primary goal of the religion teacher must be to teach authentically the message of Christ and his Church. In order to integrate religious and educational formation, the religion teacher strives to relate all human culture to the good news of salvation, so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of self, God, others, and all of creation.

The experience of a community of faith leads to service of others, prayer and worship, and to the practice of social justice, which are essential elements of the Gospel message. Modeling justice in everyday dealings with students and faculty, the religion teacher leads students in the investigation and promotion of the Reign of God on earth.

Most of all, students should be able to recognize authentic human qualities in their teachers. They are teachers of the faith; however, like Christ, they must also be teachers of what it means to be human. This includes culture, but it also includes such things as affection, tact, understanding, serenity of spirit, a balanced judgment, patience in listening to others and prudence in the way they respond, and finally, availability for personal meetings and conversations with the students. A teacher who has a clear vision of the Christian milieu and lives in accord with it will be able to help young people develop a similar vision, and will give them the inspiration they need to put it into practice.³

B. PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Religion teachers shall be professionally prepared. The selection of teachers requires that all applicants be personally interviewed by the principal and the department chairperson and that a systematic effort be made to evaluate their educational credentials and relevant experience. Prime consideration should be given to those candidates who fulfill archdiocesan certification requirements.

1. Obtaining Certification

To be certified by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, a high school religion teacher must meet the following requirements:

- a) A bachelor's degree with a major⁴ in Catholic theology, religious education, or religious studies. This degree must include a minimum of 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours of course work in theology, religious education, or religious studies. A well-balanced program of study must include courses in scripture, doctrine, Church history, moral theology⁵, and liturgical/sacramental theology. Courses in pastoral ministry, prayer, and spirituality will be recognized. However, these courses cannot constitute the majority of credits.

- b) An accredited college course in adolescent/developmental psychology, AND at least one accredited course in secondary teaching methods.
- c) Successful completion of a minimum of one quarter of student teaching or an equivalent practicum in teaching. This practicum must include observation of classes, lesson planning, and supervised teaching.⁶
- d) Review of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati policies regarding religious education, including legal and liability issues, and the *Archdiocese of Cincinnati High School Religion Graded Course of Study*.
- e) Complete a *Protecting God's Children* workshop and remain Virtus® compliant.
- f) Maintain engagement in the Vocare Certification Program of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, including 10 credits of ongoing faith formation annually and involvement in a Missionary Discipleship faith-sharing group. (See the Office for Evangelization and Discipleship website for Vocare details.)
- g) Attend at least one religious in-service program per year, and complete an *Event Submission* form in Vocare for credit.⁷

Part-time⁸ high school religion teachers must meet these same requirements.

Principals are strongly encouraged to make compliance to these standards a factor in determining the selection of teachers.

C. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

In accord with the above requirements, all teachers are expected to grow in professional competence. Reading professional journals is highly recommended. Other opportunities for professional development are encouraged such as contributing toward curriculum development, serving on committees, and serving in the broader community.

Inter-visitation of classes and sharing between members of the same religion department is strongly encouraged. Observing competent teachers in other schools is a recognized means of professional development. Teachers are encouraged to be active in this collaboration.

The spiritual growth of religion teachers will be fostered by an annual faculty religious in-service, days of renewal, days of recollection, frequent liturgical celebrations, and shared prayer. An annual retreat for members of the religion department is strongly recommended.

II. THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE RELIGION DEPARTMENT

A. SELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON

In the selection of a chairperson, careful consideration is to be given to personal qualities, academic preparation, and teaching experience. When a candidate is being considered for this important position, the opinions of current members of the department should always be sought and weighed.

B. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

All that has been said previously about personal and professional qualifications of religion teachers applies to chairpersons. That is, **the chairperson must be certified by the Office for Evangelization and Discipleship**. Moreover, the chairperson should have or should be working toward a master's degree in theology, religious education, religious studies, or pastoral studies before appointment and have at least three years of experience as a religion teacher at the high school level. Special consideration should be given to whether the candidate has demonstrated a personal commitment to ongoing in-service education.

Other special qualifications are expected of the chairperson. He or she should have a firm grasp of the philosophy and objectives of the school and the ability to relate the goals and objectives of the religion department to them.

The chairperson should be able to lead in building a community of faith among faculty and students not simply as a concept to be taught but as a reality to be lived in worship, service, and human relationships. The chairperson is responsible for the Missionary Discipleship aspect of Vocare for fellow department members.

The chairperson should be able to discern talents, attributes, strengths, and weaknesses of religion teachers and to work with them appropriately. He or she should be approachable, receptive to change, and should possess administrative ability and strong moral leadership.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Each school has its own unique set of responsibilities assigned to all department chairpersons. In addition, the religion department chairperson plays a key role in the building of a community of faith in the school and beyond.

1. School Community

The chairperson serves as liaison between the religion department and many other individuals and groups. Among these are the school administration and staff, other departments, and the director of campus ministry. Whenever possible, information about the religion department, its program and its activities should be given not only to these persons but to parents, area pastors, feeder schools, other Catholic high schools, and the Office for Evangelization and Discipleship. It is hoped that this sharing will lead to greater cooperation, mutual respect, and enrichment among all concerned.

2. Departmental

A chairperson can function successfully only in a climate of willing cooperation among members of a department. The chairperson's responsibility to promote and maintain a spirit of teamwork is of capital importance. Teachers need to agree on goals, objectives, and expected results of their program. Teachers in a religion program must work together to form a community of persons supporting each other and giving witness to their students. It is here where the Missionary Discipleship aspect of Vocare becomes most important in fostering the growth of teachers in their faith.

The departmental responsibilities of the chairperson can be grouped into three major categories: administrative tasks, curriculum supervision and evaluation, and teacher supervision and evaluation. Examples of the kinds of duties related to each category are listed below.

a) Administrative Tasks

- overseeing the design and implementation of religion curriculum⁹
- attending departmental chair meetings within the school
- facilitating communications between the department and the administration
- conducting regularly scheduled departmental meetings
- preparing a budget in consultation with department members
- monitoring departmental expenditures
- coordinating teaching assignments in conjunction with the staff and school administration
- interviewing and recruiting prospective teachers in association with school administrators
- handling correspondence, communications, and requests to and from the department

b) Curriculum Supervision and Evaluation

- Reviewing and evaluating curriculum materials
- Reviewing religion course outlines, descriptions, syllabi and making suggestions for improvement
- Coordinating the use of *NCEA IFG: ACRE*¹⁰
- Preparing, in consultation with the department members, revisions of department objectives, goals, and course outlines
- Regularly leading members in a review and evaluation of the religion curriculum to ensure its conformity to the *Archdiocese of Cincinnati High School Religion Graded Course of Study*
- Working with the department members in developing long-range plans for the department to improve instruction

c) Teacher Supervision and Evaluation

- Observing and providing feedback to department members
- Conducting orientation of new teachers
- Encouraging professional growth for each department member
- Designing or facilitating departmental in-service programs or retreats

- Overseeing with the principal the archdiocesan certification of department members in Vocare.

D. REDUCED CLASS LOAD FOR THE CHAIRPERSON

The chairperson must have sufficient time to discharge the above responsibilities. Some reduction in class load is strongly recommended.

NOTES

¹ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 96.

² *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, par. 97.

³ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, par.96.

⁴ A bachelor's degree with a major other than the three here specified is acceptable. But to be certified by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, a high school religion teacher must have a minimum of 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours of college-level course work in Catholic theology, religious education, or religious studies from an accredited Catholic college or university. These hours may be undergraduate or graduate, **and** some of them **must** be in scripture, doctrine, Church history, moral theology, and liturgical/sacramental theology.

⁵ "Moral" here would include studies in Catholic social teaching and in education for justice and peace, as well as Catholic sexual morality.

⁶ For the purpose of archdiocesan certification, if a high school religion teacher already in service has not completed student teaching, she/he may consider her/his first semester of teaching in fulfillment of this requirement provided that the religion department chairperson or another qualified person supervises and mentors the new teacher. A letter must be sent by the religion department chairperson to the Office for Evangelization and Discipleship asking that this supervised teaching fulfill the requirement.

This student teaching requirement may be waived for veteran teachers who have demonstrated satisfactory teaching ability at the high school level during a five-year period immediately preceding the date of their application for certification.

⁷ This requirement may be fulfilled by participation in workshops, institutes, conventions, lectures, lecture series, and school-sponsored spiritual enrichment and in-service programs.

⁸ A part-time religion teacher is one who: a) teaches in one or more departments or who serves as counselor, campus minister or administrator, and b) whose religion classes are less than one-half the normal full teaching load.

Religion department chairpersons who carry reduced teaching loads, because of their added responsibilities as chairpersons, are considered full-time religion teachers.

- ⁹ The department's most important activity is the design and implementation of a religion curriculum which prepares students to live as disciples of Jesus Christ and supports the development of their relationship with Him and their participation in the Church. A curriculum dedicated to these goals will incorporate cognitive, affective, and behavioral objectives. Further, the department will maintain a close association with those charged with leading liturgical, spiritual, retreat, and service programs so that students will receive comprehensive faith formation.

The curriculum will have three points of reference: first, the archdiocesan curriculum guidelines contained in the document *Archdiocese of Cincinnati High School Religion Graded Course of Study 9th – 12th Grades* (2013); second, the needs and circumstances of the student body in a particular school; third, the special gifts of the members of the religion department implementing it. The chairperson, with the teachers, must determine the methods, texts and materials for their particular program of studies and learning activities. In addition, the chairperson will direct an annual evaluation of the program and arrange for necessary changes and revisions.

- ¹⁰ NCEA IFG: ACRE is available from the National Catholic Educational Association, Washington, D.C.

Special Note

These *Guidelines* were originally prepared in 1993 by a committee of volunteers from the Catholic high schools along with members of the central offices staffs of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. The *Guidelines* were revised in 2000. The contents of this document were updated in July of 2017 to reflect changes in the religion teacher certification requirements.