

**2022**  
**UPDATED**  
**EDITION**

# **SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HANDBOOK**

For Parish SRE Co-ordinators & Catechists involved in the ministry of SRE  
in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle



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# THE MINISTRY OF SRE

The faith development of children has long been a central ministry within the life of the Catholic parish community. Catechists, in particular SRE volunteers, have long supported parents and caregivers as they educate their children in the faith. Faith development of children is vital to the wellbeing of young individuals as well as the community itself.

In New South Wales we are blessed with the privilege of providing Special Religious Education to the Catholic students in government schools. Each and every persuasion has the same rights under the law and Catholics have made the most of this opportunity.

In the modern Church SRE volunteers are not alone in their support of families. The Pastoral Ministries, Special Religious Education (SRE) provides support to parishes in the faith formation of children. Agencies such as CatholicCare and Catholic Schools also provide boundless support for families in the raising of children.

SRE volunteers are called to collaborative partnerships with other catechists who minister to children within the parish. Children's Liturgy of the Word and Sacraments of Initiation facilitators are all part of the parish community's endeavour to nurture children's faith.

As faith facilitators we realise that we are a small but vital part of the child's faith journey. Others contribute significantly in a variety of ways. Even within the SRE ministry we are supported and complemented by each other, those who have taught the children before us and those who will in the future. After school years their journey will be supported by youth ministry and adult faith formation.

This handbook reflects this integrated and collaborative approach to the SRE ministry. It is a tribute to the work of those who guided this ministry in the past as well as those presently engaged in this aspect of Christ's mission through the Church of Maitland-Newcastle. We acknowledge also our colleagues in other dioceses of NSW and the ACT with whom we work closely in the Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools (CCRESS). Likewise we give thanks for the co-operation with other Christian Churches both on the local Hunter Christian SRE Committee (HCSRE) and those across the state whom we meet at the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (ICCOREIS).

Thank you to our colleagues Peter Gilmore, Trish McCarthy and Jude Hennessy in the Diocese of Wollongong for the assistance given and allowing us to use and reproduce materials for this handbook.

Bishop William Wright and Teresa Brierley (Director Pastoral Ministries) supported and guided the development of the Formation and Education team as an outreach to Catholics who rarely engage with the worshipping community. Their influence has been to provide the mission context of the Church and of SRE ministry in particular. Currently, SRE is part of Pastoral Ministries Office, Formation and Education.

In faith we know that we are never alone in this ministry. Our most powerful partner is the Holy Spirit. If we stay true to the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Church and remain prayerful in the Spirit, then the blessings of our Creator will be realised, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

*"Life is often a desert, it is difficult to walk, but if we trust in God, it can become beautiful and wide as a highway. Never lose hope; continue to believe, always, in spite of everything. Hope opens new horizons, making us capable of dreaming what is not even imaginable."*

—Pope Francis





# OUR MISSION

## DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN

### OUR VISION

To live the joy of the Gospel and share it with the world.

### OUR MISSION

The Diocesan Synod of 1992-93, acting on behalf of the diocesan community, resolved to embrace and promote the Vatican II understanding of the Church's mission.

These goals, vision and mission were underpinned by a set of theological principles which the Diocesan Synod used as the basis of our life together and our pastoral planning activities.

### PASTORAL PLANNING

Pastoral Planning is a process by which a faith community – with a deep appreciation of its past, and an understanding of its present strengths and weaknesses – seeks to respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of people within, and beyond, the community.

In order to resolve particular pastoral issues, effective structures and processes are needed to facilitate communication and co-ordination, create opportunities for people to use their gifts and encourage all the baptised to participate in the life and mission of the local Church.

### LEADERSHIP FORUM

In January 2013 a Bishop's Leadership Forum was conducted around three pastoral priorities:

- Parishes as the Centres of Mission in the Life of the Diocese
- Clergy in Parish Leadership
- Linkages.

These priorities reflect the nature and purpose of the Catholic Church in Maitland-Newcastle looking forward to 2020. Special Religious Education in State Schools was specifically mentioned in the first of these priorities in Key Area 4 but it is Key Area 2, 'Re-engage and evangelise with communities', that relates most significantly to this ministry. Presenting SRE lessons in Government Schools is a very effective outreach to families who may not be engaged in the parish community. In this way catechists are a vital link between the parish community and the wider local community. Along with Catholic School teachers they are a significant method of evangelising and catechising families.

### 2021-2022 PLENARY COUNCIL

It is important to note that this diocese is part of the synodal process initiated by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The Diocese undertook to hold 3 Synods over 3 years, the first of which was held in November 2019. The November 2020 Synod has been postponed due to COVID-19.

## VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT FOR SRE

### VISION

Parishes striving to be Good News to the students they encounter in government schools, to live the joy of the Gospel and share it with the world.

### MISSION/PASTORAL GOALS

As the People of God and the Body of Christ enlivened by the Spirit, SRE volunteers are a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people to Government School students and their families. This union is extended through collaboration and co-operation with other denominations and faiths.

The SRE ministry exists to promote the Kingdom of God on earth (LG5) through parishes, into schools and homes, by proclaiming Christ's Gospel of justice, peace and reconciliation.

Our ministry finds its source and summit in the Eucharist (LG11) lived in everyday life and celebrated in liturgy. We are called to be a living symbol of Christ's life, death and resurrection, as we celebrate our deepest identity, Church as a communion of life, love and truth. (LG9)

As baptised Christians we exercise the right and duty to participate in the life and mission of the Church as a response to the Holy Spirit in our lives. We are called to live out the commandment of Jesus: 'Love one another as I have loved you.' (Jn 15:12)

Pastoral Ministries SRE and Family Ministry Co-ordinators are here to support parishes as they strive to be Good News to the students they encounter in Government Schools, to live the joy of the Gospel and share it with the world.



## A BRIEF HISTORY

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) is a world-wide organisation designed to further the religious education of children.

It was begun in 1556 and was promulgated to be established in every parish in the world by Pope Pius X in 1905.

In 1959 Cardinal Gilroy linked the many organisations doing catechetical work within a central diocesan organisation, thus affiliating all parish groups with the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine through a centralised body.

In the mid-1960s Father Driscoll began classes for lay people to train them as catechists.

Over 30 years ago Monsignor Cotter called together all interested parishes to meet together and work out how best to share resources and support.

Sister Joseph Mary Parmeter sj, a pioneer in the development and co-ordination of lay ministry, was appointed the first catechist co-ordinator for the City Schools Apostolate.

By the mid-1980s Father Paul Mulconry and Sister Rita Petherbridge sjm had oversight of the state schools apostolate as part of their role in the Catholic Schools Office.

In 1996 Bishop Michael Malone, concerned that SRE teachers in this diocese did not have the support of a diocesan structure, engaged Sister Pauline Burg sjm to conduct a survey. In 1997 he appointed Mary Smith the diocesan director to the state schools apostolate.

After consideration it was decided that rather than use the term Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the term Special Religious Education (SRE) would be used.

By 2003 the ministry was staffed by Mary, Loretta Heffernan (Myall Deanery Co-ordinator) and Jenny Harris (Administration Assistant).

SRE was incorporated in the broader area of Children's Ministries in 2009 under Diocesan Director for Evangelisation and Catechesis of Children, John Donnelly. Jennie Nolan joined the team in 2010 as a Deanery Co-ordinator.

The Office of Life and Faith was formed as an alliance of Children's Ministries, Marriage and Relationship Education, Seasons for Growth and Natural Fertility Services with Zoë Marr assisting John as Professional Officer in 2014. Currently SRE sits within Pastoral Ministries - Formation & Education, Manager Rose McAllister, Educational Officer Natasha Brotherton.

The scope of Children's Ministries (SRE) was broadened in 2017 and continues to incorporate the relationship between parishes and Catholic schools. Currently, Loretta Heffernan (Myall Deanery), Lucy Sneesby-Tooth (Hunter Deanery), Jennie Nolan (Watagan Deanery) and Helene O'Neil (Newcastle Deanery) are the Family Ministry Coordinators.





## THE RIGHT OF ALL CATHOLICS TO BE EDUCATED IN THEIR FAITH

All Christians, having become children of God by baptism, have a right to a Christian education<sup>1</sup>. While this is an ongoing process through the various phases of life, the education of children and young people has consistently held a privileged place in the mission of the Church. It has a heightened importance today as it is observed widely that the first victims of the spiritual and cultural crisis gripping the world are the young<sup>2</sup>.

Parents, and those who legitimately take their place, are rightly fully recognised as the prime educators of their children<sup>3</sup>. By choosing baptism for their child, they make a commitment to bring up the child in the Catholic faith. In fulfilling their responsibilities, parents have the right to be assisted by both society and the Church. A key institution in collaborating with parents is the school and the Church acknowledges that it is the parents' prerogative to decide the type of schooling for their child, be it secular or religious. Local parish programs, including Special Religious Education in Government Schools, aid a child's religious formation. Parents who are themselves involved in these programs find that their own faith is nourished and, in turn, that of their children.

Jesus declared that he was sent by the Father to preach the Good News of God's love to all people. In fact, in his very person, in all that he said and did, Jesus was the Good News of God<sup>4</sup>. Before returning to his Father, he gave his Church this same mission: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news..." (Mk 16:15)

The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Catechesis in Our Time*, places catechesis firmly within

the Church's mission and notes that evangelisation is a rich, complex and dynamic

reality which comprises essential but different "moments". Catechesis, it adds, "is one of these moments – a very remarkable one – in the whole process of evangelisation"<sup>5</sup>. Catechesis aims to nurture the faith of the believing Christian. This requires the teaching of Christian doctrine in an organic and systematic way, leading to the development of a faith that is living, conscious

and active<sup>6</sup>. While the pedagogy of catechesis is learning with the mind, the heart is to gradually put on the mind of Christ (Phil. 2), to live a truly Christian life<sup>7</sup>.

The vocation of the catechist is a response to a special invitation of Jesus to follow him, teacher and formator of disciples<sup>8</sup>. It is, too, a sharing in the vocation of Mary who rejoiced as her young Son "grew in wisdom and age and grace". (Lk 2:52)

### References

<sup>1</sup> Vatican II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum educationis* (GE), Rome, 1965, no. 2. See also The Code of Canon Law, cc. 213; 217.

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis (Dir.), Rome, 1997, Sydney, St. Paul's Publications, 1998, no. 181.

<sup>3</sup> GE nos. 3; 6. See also c. 793.

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Evangelisation in the Modern World (EN), Rome 1975, no. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Dir. no. 63

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), Rome, 1979, no. 18

## WHAT IS THE CONFRATERNITY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE?

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) is an organization that was founded in France in the 16th century by a concerned group of Catholics who noticed that many people were lacking in their knowledge of the faith. These dedicated people decided to form a group (Confraternity) whose main aim was to teach people about the Catholic faith (Christian doctrine). In the early twentieth century, Pope Pius X requested that all parishes throughout the world adopt CCD to make sure that all Catholic people had the opportunity to learn more about their faith. In Australia, CCD has become an integral part of the Church's mission, reaching out to Catholic children who attend government and independent schools.

In this diocese we have not adopted the use of the term CCD.

## WHAT IS SRE?

In New South Wales, Special Religious Education (SRE) is the name given to Religious Education which is faith-specific and is taught by Church volunteers/employees in government schools during school hours. SRE is mandated in government schools under the Education Act (1990). The Act specifies that education by Department of Education teachers in government schools must be secular, but Churches have the right to educate children whose parents request it in the tenets of their particular faith.

During the period 1970-1980 every Australian state undertook a major review of the place of religion in government schools. The report that came from the review in NSW made recommendations in the areas of General Religious Education (GRE) and Special Religious Education (SRE). GRE is taught by government school teachers in subject areas such as Human Society and Its Environment; it is about world religions. SRE is taught by volunteers/employees from various Churches and its teachings are about the particular religious persuasion's tenets and beliefs.

## SRE IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Special Religious Education (SRE) in government schools is governed by the following:

- The [1990 Education Act](#)
- The [2010 Ethics Amendment Act](#) enabling secular ethics (SEE) classes to be taught during SRE time.
- [Religious Education Policy](#)
- [Special Religious Education Implementation Procedures 2019](#).

In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion, but the total number of hours so allowed in a year is not to exceed, for each child, the number of school weeks for the year. (Par. 32)

In accordance with the Act and Departmental practice, the times for such education "are to be fixed by agreement between the principal of the school and the local member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion" (Education Act, 1990, Par. 32, Section 4).

In providing for the above and according to Departmental policy, schools are to provide SRE where authorised representatives of approved providers are available.





# MINISTRY ROLES

## CATECHIST

\* The common name for this role is "SRE teacher"

It is expected that a Catechist will be a practising Catholic, a member of a parish and good standing in the community. Catechists are expected to co-operate willingly with their parish priest in fulfilling their duties. The Catechist teaches with sensitivity to the needs of the children in the class and prepares age appropriate lessons in a diligent manner. Like any teacher,

it is the Catechist's responsibility to make sure that the children in their care are safe and happy. Given reasonable notice, Catechists should be available for meetings with parents when necessary. If the Catechist becomes aware of any serious personal problem a child may be having (for example: upset, injury or other problem) they should discuss the matter in strictest confidence with the school SRE Co-ordinator or with the school principal.

## CATECHIST ASSISTANT

\* The common name for this role is "SRE helper"

The Catechist Assistant's role is to support the Catechist in the classroom by helping the Catechist with the children. Such assistance may include, but not be limited to, marking work, giving out and collecting materials, reading stories to the class, helping with audio-visual materials and assisting in any other reasonable way.

## PARISH SRE CO-ORDINATOR

The Parish SRE Co-ordinator role includes:

- A strong commitment to the Catholic faith
- A willingness to work flexible hours
- Ability to communicate well with adults and children
- Ability to work with and lead a team of Catechists
- Ability to liaise with a number of parish groups
- Previous experience in catechetical work preferred
- A strong desire to share the Catholic faith
- Good communication skills
- Good organisational skills including the ability to:
  - prioritise and delegate
  - manage resources
  - prepare and chair meetings
  - complete necessary paperwork
- Having a good sense of humour
- Recruiting new Catechists
- Attending training courses and meetings
- Organising training sessions
- Liaising with parish priest, Catechists & schools.

\* Commonly all these roles are referred to as SRE Volunteers.

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MINISTRY

Teachers and Assistants are encouraged to continuously increase their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. There are many opportunities to do this including regular prayer, attendance at Mass, reading and reflection on the Scriptures and attendance at courses and retreats. Teachers and Assistants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own spiritual formation by following the suggestions above.

## CATECHIST CONDUCT

A Code of Conduct has been developed for Catechists and Assistants. Catechists and Assistants should familiarise themselves with this important document. A copy of the document can be found on our website.

What is expected of Catechists and Assistants?

- commitment to working at school and to the Catholic faith
- love for the children they teach
- as a minimum, enrolment and completion of the initial training course
- regular and punctual attendance at school
- authorisation from your Parish Leader
- attendance at courses of training and formation
- a basic understanding of Child Protection legislation and guidelines
- Agree to use approved curriculum materials and resources that are age appropriate and sensitive
- Comply with relevant Department of Education Policy and Procedures.

Catechists and Assistants are expected to present themselves in a professional manner when attending school or representing their parish. They will do this by the way they behave and dress.

Under the policy of the NSW Department of Education (and State Government legislation) there are certain behaviours that are unacceptable. Such behaviours may be of a serious or improper nature and include:

- missing lessons on a regular basis without explanation
- not following school policies and directives from staff in authority
- teaching students lessons that are not part of the approved curriculum
- reportable Conduct (that is, behaviour that is of a sexual, psychological or physical nature which is reportable under current NSW Child Protection legislation).



# CATECHISTS, THE PARISH LEADER & THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

This section outlines the roles of various key people in the parish and their roles in relationship to one another.

## THE PARISH LEADER

The Parish Leader, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders and of his ministry as pastoral leader in the parish, has a privileged role and a particular responsibility in relation to catechesis. The General Directory for Catechesis, following Vatican II, speaks strongly of both the role of the parish priest as an educator in the faith and of the parish community as providing the environment in which the Christian community is formed and expressed<sup>1</sup>.

As an educator in the faith, the parish priest is bound to ensure the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children<sup>2</sup>. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesis in Our Time*, leaves no doubt about the role and responsibility of the parish priest: "The Church expects you to neglect nothing with a view to a well-organised and well-oriented catechetical effort"<sup>3</sup>.

In making provision for the teaching of young people and children, the Parish Leader is assisted by Catechists whose vocation and ministry, consequent upon their baptism, he values and supports. His relationship with them is one of mutual collaboration. It is the Parish Leader who authorises and commissions Catechists to teach in government schools. He ensures that they are provided with the approved teaching materials. Many parishes include an allowance for the work of the SRE ministry within their overall budget and this is helpful. Regardless of whether this is done or not, it is important that the Parish SRE Co-ordinator be aware of the parish financial arrangements for the ministry so that available resources may be used effectively.

<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Dir.), Rome, 1997, Sydney, St Paul's Publications, 1998, nos. 224; 257.

<sup>2</sup> The Code of Canon Law, c. 776.

<sup>3</sup> Dir. no. 64.

## PARISH SRE CO-ORDINATOR

The Parish SRE Co-ordinator undertakes the leadership of the day-to-day operations of SRE in government schools in the parish. The Parish Co-ordinator is responsible to the Parish Leader for the recruitment, selection and arrangement for induction of Catechists. After consultation with the Parish Leader the Co-ordinator appoints Catechists to appropriate classes.

## THE CATECHIST

All Catechists are approved and authorised by the Parish Leader to teach the approved teaching program in government schools. Catechists are volunteers, who, once they accept the position of religious educator, have an obligation to prepare for and teach their class to the best of their ability. Some Catechists may also assist with parish sacramental programs.

## THE CATECHIST ASSISTANT

Catechist Assistants are volunteers who agree to help the Catechist in the classroom and they may also be people who are training to become a Catechist.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CO-ORDINATOR OF THE PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

It is worthwhile for the Parish SRE Co-ordinator to meet and, at times, work with the parish primary school Religious Education Co-ordinator. There are many benefits for both parties, especially for Catechists. Such sharing might include resource sharing, ideas about teaching, sharing on liturgical matters and, where appropriate, working with the parish priest organising sacramental programs. Meetings could be arranged between teachers in the parish primary school and Catechists from time to time including opportunities for spiritual growth and professional development.

## PARISH SACRAMENTAL CO-ORDINATOR

In some parishes there may be a person who is a member of the parish team whose responsibility is to co-ordinate sacramental programs. Part of their role would be to liaise with the Parish SRE Co-ordinator, Catechists, the parish primary school REC, parents and other stakeholders in the preparation of children for the sacraments.



# THE PARISH SRE CO-ORDINATOR

A Parish SRE Co-ordinator is the person who has been appointed by the Parish Leader to co-ordinate the activities of the parish SRE ministry. The Parish Co-ordinator's role is an extension of that of the Catechist and is a vital link between Pastoral Ministries SRE, the parish and Catechists.

The most important qualification for this work is the co-ordinator's own faith and enthusiasm. Anyone who wants to bring children closer to God, who enjoys working with others and who is willing to put in the time, will make a good co-ordinator.

The main role of a Parish SRE Co-ordinator is to build a team of enthusiastic, trained Catechists. Catechists need to be regularly informed of professional development opportunities and retreat days that are offered by Pastoral Ministries SRE and other providers.

Co-ordinators need to maintain regular contact with their Parish Leader, the Family Ministry Co-ordinator, the local schools and the Catechists in the parish. In particular they should be mindful of the following:

- At the beginning of the year that all Catechists and Assistants have a valid Working With Children Check (WWCC), have completed and submitted an SRE authorisation form and have received their authorisation card, signed by the Parish Leader.
- At some stage of the year, co-ordinators should discuss recruitment with the Parish Leader and look to pursue a process which may include alerting parishioners of the need for more Catechists and/or Assistants. (For more information about the process of recruitment please contact your Family Ministry Co-ordinator).
- Co-ordinators need to supply government schools in their parish with details of the Catechists and Assistants who will be working in their schools. It is preferable for this letter to be written on parish letterhead and include the signature of the Parish Leader. Where new Catechists or Assistants begin work during the year, or where changes are made to those working in schools, a new, updated list should be given to the school principal.
- Co-ordinators need to discuss with the school SRE Co-ordinator arrangements for the school year, including

suitable teaching rooms.

- Co-ordinators should place notices throughout the year in the parish bulletin to keep parishioners informed and promote the work of Catechists and Assistants.
- Co-ordinators need to liaise with the principal or the religious education co-ordinator of the local parish primary school to discuss what collaboration, support and assistance the school may be able to provide.
- Co-ordinators should negotiate a suitable budget with the Parish Leader to ensure appropriate resourcing of the ministry. Such funds will cover the purchase of teaching books, other appropriate resources and out-of-pocket expenses.
- If necessary, co-ordinators should discuss with their Parish Leader arrangements for a suitable room to work in, storage space and resources needed to do the job adequately, e.g., the supply of name badges.

Co-ordinators should make sure that Catechists in the parish are teaching from the approved program and should be ready to offer encouragement and support. If necessary, the co-ordinator should discuss problems with their Parish Leader first. Support is also available from the Family Ministry Co-ordinators.

Information of interest will be forwarded to SRE volunteers during the year.

Team building is very important to maintain Catechists' enthusiasm and to enable them to learn from each other. A variety of strategies can be used including:

- information and support through regular meetings
- formation through attendance at professional development days (parish, regional and diocesan).
- affirmation through moments of celebration (parish and diocesan)
- spiritual nourishment and community building through prayer (at team meetings and at other appropriate times)
- social events from time-to-time which allow people to get to know one another and friendships to develop.





Co-ordinators also need to:

- Keep up-to-date with resources that are available within the parish and at the regional resource centre.
- Order teaching materials for Catechists at the beginning of the year as needed.
- Purchase suitable resources and materials and encourage their use.
- Complete and return the annual statistical return promptly each year.
- Liaise with the parish Sacramental Co-ordinator to discuss programs, meetings with parents, dates for meetings etc.

It is natural that Parish Co-ordinators will change from time to time.

Co-ordinators who will not be continuing in the position should contact the Family Ministry Co-ordinator to let him/her know well before they complete their duties.





# AUTHORISED, ACCREDITED AND APPROVED

## APPROVED SRE PROVIDER

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is approved by the NSW Department of Education to provide SRE in NSW Government Schools. There are clear procedures for providers to follow in order to ensure the protection of children and the smooth operation of SRE across the state. This diocese manages the provision of SRE through Pastoral Ministries - Formation & Education. [Approved Providers.](#)

## AUTHORISED PERSON

A catechist must be authorised by the Parish Leader to teach SRE in a local government school. There is a rigorous process of screening and training prior to any volunteer taking responsibility for a class. The parish will provide a name badge to new volunteers and issue authorisation cards annually. Catechists are required to wear their badge and carry their authorisation card. Catechists may also be requested to show photo identification at the school. [Authorisation Process](#)

## APPROVED OR RECOMMENDED PROGRAM

Bishop Bill has approved two programs for use in Catholic SRE lessons, they are Christ our Light and Life and Walking with Jesus, Pathways to Discipleship. He has also recommended GodSpace for use in combined arrangements (joint denominational or Christian SRE).

These programs consist of teacher manuals and student books. Catechists are to use these programs to ensure lessons are presented with sensitivity and in an age-appropriate manner.

## ACCREDITED TRAINING

Initial training is part of the authorisation process for all SRE volunteers. Child Protection training must be completed prior to entering a school. Within the first 12 months of ministry,

Catechists are required to complete an accredited initial training course. Ongoing formation and training is offered every year

and it is expected that Catechists attend at least one session per year. These opportunities are communicated through parish bulletins, emails, dio update and website.

## SRE IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

The NSW Department of Education requires authorised and trained SRE volunteers to present lessons from an authorised curriculum (approved or recommended) in a sensitive and age-appropriate manner.

The diocese makes an annual assurance that all Catechists are compliant with these procedures.







# SAFEGUARDING

Catechists are parish volunteers and therefore are required to complete and submit all documents/declarations before working with or near children in the parish. From mid- 2013 all new Catechists have been required to attain the new Working with Children Check in NSW. As of 31 March 2015, all Catechists have made the transition to acquiring the new WWCC clearance number.

These checks are in place to ensure persons prohibited from working with children because of prior behaviour or conviction are not authorised to be Catechists. Training in Child Protection legislation and guidelines are a compulsory part of initial and ongoing training for Catechists and updates are provided annually. When working with children it is suggested that Catechists adhere to the following suggestions:

- It is better not to touch a child unless it is absolutely necessary. Although quite innocent some children may misconstrue your intention. The best advice is to use common sense and avoid any unnecessary personal contact.
- Never be alone in a room with one or two children.
- Do not contact children outside class. Such contact, when necessary, should be made by the parish in some official capacity (example: supplying information about sacramental program via a letter).
- If a child confides a concern to a Catechist the information should be referred to the school SRE Co-ordinator or the principal. Assisting children with personal matters is a specialist area and is better handled by the school and its support personnel. The support person could be the Parish Leader, SRE Parish Coordinator, SRE Deanery Coordinator but can be anyone.

## What happens if an allegation is made against a Catechist?

If an allegation is made, the matter may be investigated by either the Department of Education or the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle's Office of Safeguarding. The agencies will make a determination as to whether any investigation will occur jointly, or which organisation will take carriage of it. Chapter 16A of the Children & Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 enables prescribed bodies to share information for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children. The organisation undertaking the investigation may pass on the outcome of the investigation to the other organisation. If an investigation does occur, the Catechist is entitled to have a support person during any interview or meeting that may take place. The support person could be the Parish coordinator but can be anyone.

For more information, please refer to the [Office of Safeguarding](#).



For information about the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse, the findings and the Catholic Church in Australia's response, please go to [www.tjhcouncil.org.au](http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au)





# LEGAL MATTERS

## STATUS OF VOLUNTEERS

Catechists are parish volunteers acting with the approval of the Parish Priest. NSW DoE policy says they must be approved, accredited, and trained. The parish priest is charged with the management of CCD/SRE volunteers in his parish. While working in government schools Catechists are requested to follow the directions of school staff. Catechists remain volunteers for the parish and not the school, unless they take on other duties as member of the community.

## NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Education Act (1990) imposes an obligation on the Department of Education to make arrangements for provision of SRE. The Department has a policy and guidelines for managing SRE in schools (Parish Co-ordinators have a copy of the guidelines). Under the Act, registered religious persuasions (including the Catholic Church) have right of access to government schools to teach SRE.

## DUTY OF CARE

Duty of Care in government schools resides with the NSW Department of Education. This responsibility is shared during the SRE class. Catechists are expected to provide a suitable Duty of Care to their class during the time they are teaching. According to Departmental Guidelines a briefing session provided by the principal or his/her delegate should be provided at the start of each year, especially for new Catechists. This briefing session should include such topics as the school discipline plan, the school emergency plan and other topics as deemed necessary by the school. Catechists are required to comply with school policies, especially when managing children.

## PRIVACY

There are State and Commonwealth laws in relation to privacy. State law governs the NSW Department of Education. Commonwealth law governs the diocese. Under NSW DoE policy, Catechists are entitled to receive a class list at the beginning of the year (but not other private information). Data

can be collected (for a variety of purposes) but only within the guidelines of the law. No photographs may be taken of individuals or small groups of students without written permission from parents and therefore the permission of the school. Photographs may only be taken of larger groups of students with the permission of the school. In the course of their work Catechists may hear or learn confidential information about the school or individual students. This information must be kept confidential and should not be communicated generally.

## WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

Catechists are covered by the WH&S Act (2011) and Regulations (2017) as volunteers. As owner and operator of the school, the NSW DoE must provide a safe working environment and safe premises. There is an obligation on Catechists to comply with the NSW DoE and school policies. Catechists have an obligation to act in a safe manner, to report accidents and serious incidents that relate to WH&S matters. At the school briefing session Catechists need to be aware of such matters as processes for reporting accidents, evacuation procedures, fire and emergency plans, responsibility for children in emergencies.

## INSURANCE

Catholic Church Insurances covers volunteers in the diocese acting in the course of an approved voluntary activity. Volunteers are covered by insurance travelling directly to and from school.

## EXCURSIONS

Organised excursions must have the approval of the school principal and the parents of the children. A staff member should accompany students on any excursion during school hours.

It is preferable that excursions (such as a visit to a church) occur outside school hours. Such excursions should have the approval of the parish priest and be communicated to parents in writing on parish letterhead, signed by the parish priest.



# KNOW YOUR SCHOOLS

Get to know details about your schools so that you understand whom to contact, what to do and where to go when you visit the school.

The following details will help you when the need arises:

## SCHOOL DETAILS

- Name
- Location
- Contact details (phone, fax, email address, website)
- Office Hours
- SRE arrangements
- Principal's name
- School secretary's name
- School SRE Co-ordinator's name
- Classroom teacher
- Librarian's name.

## SCHOOL PROCEDURES

- Movement from an assembly area
- Entry to a classroom
- Ways children address their teachers
- Routines for using classroom equipment
- Answering questions
- Seating arrangements
- Movement within the room during lessons
- Leaving the room
- Strategies for dealing with minor discipline
- Strategies for dealing with major problems
- Child Protection procedures
- Emergency or evacuation procedures
- Booking and using school equipment.

If you can, it is worthwhile making arrangements with a teacher from the school to sit in on a lesson or session so that you can gauge or learn about teaching styles, classroom management procedures, preferred learning styles of students and interpersonal dynamics of the children.





## SUPPORT FOR CATECHISTS

Support for Catechists is available in a variety of places and at many levels.

The first level of support for Catechists is at the local level. First, they should seek out their Parish SRE Co-ordinator or Parish Leader.

Diocesan support:

Jenny Harris- Administration Assistant Formation and Education

[jenny.harris@mn.catholic.org.au](mailto:jenny.harris@mn.catholic.org.au)

02 4979 1334

Nicki Graham- Officer Formation and Education

[nicola.graham@mn.catholic.org.au](mailto:nicola.graham@mn.catholic.org.au)

0417773444

Rose McAllister- Manager Formation and Education

[rose.mcallister@mn.catholic.org.au](mailto:rose.mcallister@mn.catholic.org.au)

0408796252

Other people to contact may include the parish primary school Religious Education Co-ordinator or, at your local government school, the School SRE Co-ordinator.

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Resources can be purchased through a variety of suppliers.

In Sydney the following store sells Catholic teaching resources:

- The Mustard Seed Bookshop & Cafe, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney. (Phone: 9307 8350), Website: [www.mustardseed.org.au](http://www.mustardseed.org.au)

Resources can also be sought from the Internet. Following is a list of suitable suggested sites:

[www.4catholiceducators.com](http://www.4catholiceducators.com)

[www.catholiccatechist.org](http://www.catholiccatechist.org)

[www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org)

[www.ccdsydney.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ccdsydney.catholic.edu.au)

[www.dltk-bible.com](http://www.dltk-bible.com)

[www.faithfirst.com](http://www.faithfirst.com)

[www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)

[www.TeachingCatholicKids.com](http://www.TeachingCatholicKids.com)

### Online Curriculum Resources

CCRESS resources:

[Walking with Jesus](#)

[Christ our Light and Life](#)





(02) 4979 1200  
841 Hunter Street  
Newcastle West 2302  
NSW Australia

**[www.mn.catholic.org.au](http://www.mn.catholic.org.au)**

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