

ADAPTIVE PROGRAM

# Finding God

Our Response to God's Gifts

GRADES  
1-8



LOYOLAPRESS.  
A JESUIT MINISTRY

Program Coordinator Guide

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# Welcome

My Dear Program Coordinator,

God bless you for your interest and willingness to serve God's children by coordinating the *Adaptive Finding God Program*. This program is rooted in God's love and the relationship that develops among those who take this journey. You, the parish catechetical leader, the pastor, catechists, faith mentors, parents, and children will travel together, learning and living our Catholic faith. At the center of this shared endeavor is the child.

The *Adaptive Finding God Program's* components and approaches are designed to build on each child's strengths, meet each child's needs, and support those who are called by the Holy Spirit to catechize them. You may have some trepidation about undertaking this responsibility, but know this. The *Adaptive Finding God Program* was inspired and informed by those in disabilities ministry as well as by my own experience establishing and leading a one-on-one faith formation program serving those on the autism spectrum and those with other developmental disabilities. The components and ongoing support provided by the *Adaptive Finding God Program* will help you every step of the way.

Thank you for using your God-given talents to coordinate this program. Through your efforts, children will learn to use their own talents for the greater glory of God and in the service of his Church. God bless you in your work.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Deacon Larry Sutton, Ph.D.

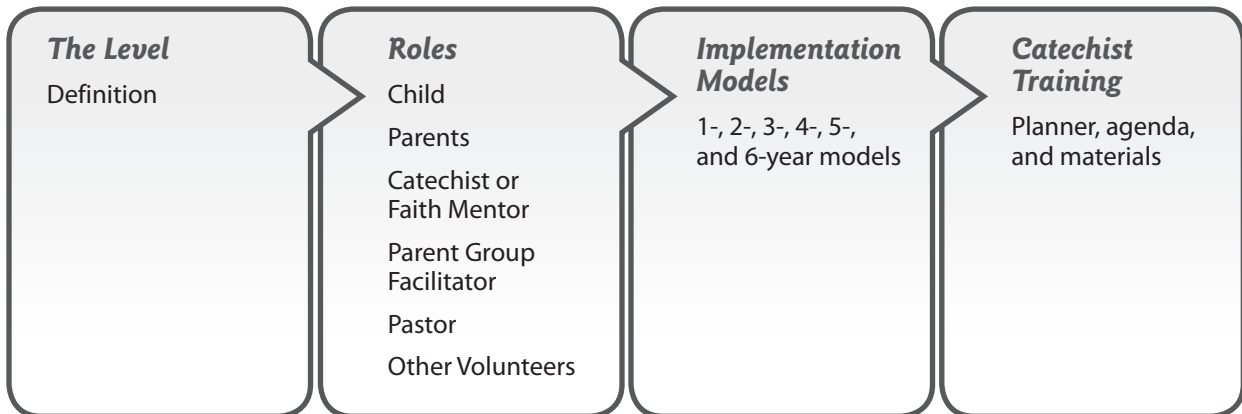


# Using This Guide

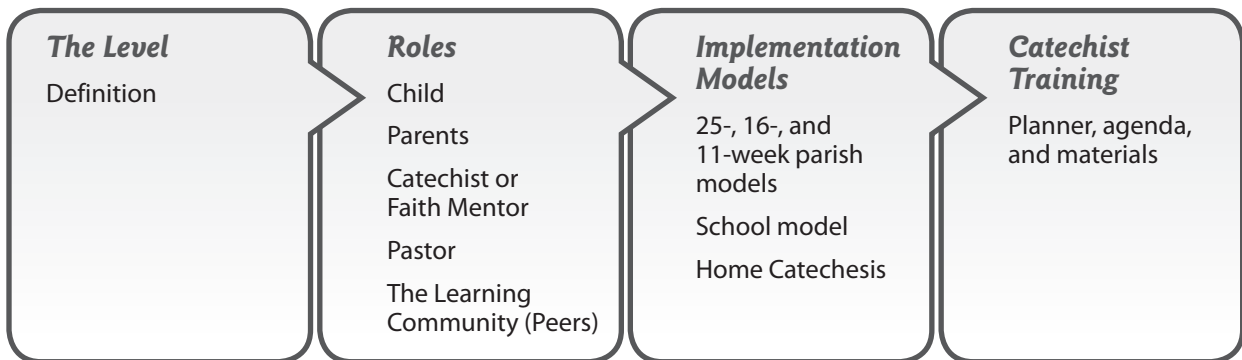
The *Adaptive Finding God Program* allows children with special needs to experience Catholic faith formation in a way that is best suited to each child’s needs. This *Program Coordinator Guide* provides you with the support and resources you will need to manage the program in your parish.

The guide is organized to help you understand and implement both the Hands-On Level and the Adapted Grade Level of the program, to determine when one level or the other is appropriate for a given child, to train and support catechists, and to support and orient parents. The guide begins with introductory information about catechetical settings, program components, and your particular role as the program coordinator. It is then organized into two parts:

- **Part 1** focuses on implementing the Hands-On Level.



- **Part 2** focuses on implementing the Adapted Grade Level.



## The Program Coordinator's Role

The word *coordinate* means “to arrange or order with.” This phrase contains two keys to understanding the role of the Program Coordinator in the *Adaptive Finding God Program*.

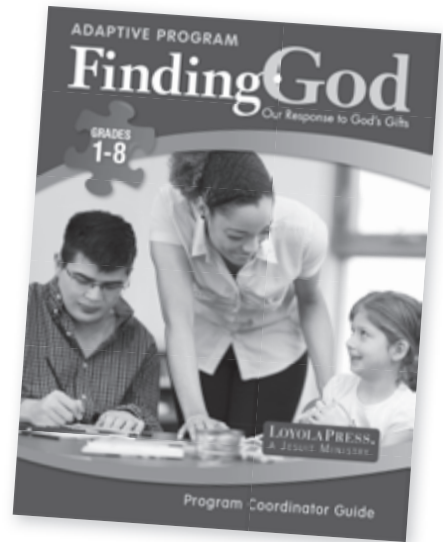
- One role of the coordinator is to arrange, order, or organize the program. This is an administrative task. It involves the logistics of planning, scheduling, assigning roles, and adapting the program to the needs of your participants.
- The other role is to be with. This is a human endeavor. It involves supporting the catechists emotionally and spiritually and providing them with the resources they need. It also involves nourishing the cluster of relationships among children, catechists, parents, and parishioners.

You may have already accepted the position of program coordinator. You may be thinking about accepting the role. Or, if you are the DRE in your parish, it may be your job to assign the role to another individual. In any of these cases, it is essential to know the qualities and characteristics that make an effective program coordinator for the *Adaptive Finding God Program*.

The effective *Adaptive Finding God* program coordinator

- may be a professional in the field of developmental disabilities.
- may be a member of the parish.
- is a Catholic in good standing.
- has religious education experience.
- is comfortable working with teenagers.
- has some knowledge of developmental disabilities and their effects on learning and social interaction.
- has administrative and managerial abilities.
- enjoys and is good at facilitating relationships.

A closer look at the qualifications listed above appears on the pages that follow.





## KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL NEEDS

The program coordinator doesn't need to be a professional in special education, but he or she does need a basic understanding of common developmental conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder, and how they affect learning, communicating, and relating to others. He or she must also be able to use this understanding to create both an environment and an approach that makes the content of the curriculum accessible to individuals with a broad range of special needs.

Program coordinators need not possess this knowledge beforehand, however. Any person with religious education experience and a heart for the work can acquire the needed training in a reasonable amount of time. Often, this training can be provided by local individuals and organizations that serve people with special needs. These organizations are often eager to assist other groups that aim to improve the lives and experiences of people with disabilities. Possible resources for training include

- social workers, psychologists, special education teachers, occupational therapists, and speech and language therapists.
- advocacy groups for people with disabilities.
- education and service institutions for people with disabilities.

These professionals and groups often offer workshops, training sessions, and individual consultation for those who want to learn more. Other people who may have expertise to share include the parents of children with special needs, diocesan staff in charge of disability services, and coordinators of other faith-based programs for children with special needs in your community.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Adapting a religious education program is an exercise in improvisation. Just as musicians need to have a thorough working knowledge of music before they can improvise, the program coordinator needs to have a thorough working knowledge of religious education—including preparation for the sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Confirmation—before he or she can adapt that curriculum for learners with special needs. In short, the effective program coordinator has

- a strong background in the religious education of young people.
- the ability to communicate clearly the basic principles of the curriculum to faith mentors and catechists on his or her team.
- the creative capacity to shape these concepts for reception by children with a range of disabilities.
- an open mind and is flexible and innovative while staying true to the core teachings of the Church.

## COMFORT WITH TEEN FAITH MENTORS

If your parish will be implementing catechesis in a one-on-one setting, teenagers can serve as faith mentors for individual children. Teenagers being asked to play this role may and usually do have misgivings on several levels.

- They feel as if they don't know enough about religion to teach it.
- They feel apprehensive about working with a child with a disability.
- They feel awkward relating to adults as peers—in this case, consulting with the child's parents about lesson progress and homework.

An effective program coordinator will be able to help teenagers overcome these fears through encouragement, reassurance, humor, and warmth. He or she will have a rapport with young people, sensing what they need to hear and offering support in relevant ways. In particular, the program coordinator is ready to offer plenty of reassurance that faith mentors

- know more than they think they do.
- will be thoroughly trained.
- will never be alone.
- will be carefully matched with a child.

The last point is an important one. The child will learn best when there is a spark of interest and connection between himself or herself and the mentor. Be sensitive to the energy between mentors and learners and do not hesitate to make adjustments or try new pairings as needed.



## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are at the heart of catechesis. It is your job to call people into relationship around the *Adaptive Finding God Program*, facilitate those relationships, and attempt to mend them when they are strained. Some of the most essential relationship-building tasks are as follows.

### Identifying Program Participants

Chances are, some potential families for the program have already been identified in your parish. Other families will need to be reached. Identifying these families and inviting them into the *Adaptive Finding God Program* can be accomplished in cooperation with the pastor. The process might look something like this:

- Announce the program at Sunday Masses.
- Schedule an informational meeting.
- Publicize the program and the meeting through the parish Web site, social media, e-mail lists, and bulletin.
- Talk with the counselor at your parish school or those in local schools.

Before and after the informational meeting, schedule conversations with parents. These conversations should be open, supportive, and family-centered, and should be used to gather information about the child's interests, gifts, abilities, and needs. Interview questions to ask parents are included in a BLM found on pages 105–106. For information about the formal enrollment process, see pages 26 of this guide.

### Defining Roles

Because the *Adaptive Finding God Program* is dynamic and multifaceted, the roles of various team members should be clearly defined to avoid confusion or tension that might affect the child. The program coordinator is responsible for communicating directly with catechists, parents, and any outside professionals (such as psychologists, aides, or therapists) regarding their roles and responsibilities in the program, as well as the rationales underlying those roles.

Roles in the Hands-On Level are described on pages 26–43 of this guide. Roles in the Adapted Grade Level are discussed on pages 66–71.

## **Supporting Catechists**

Support catechists and provide them with the emotional, spiritual, and material resources they need. These resources may come from within the *Adaptive Finding God Program*, from the parish, from the broader community, or from print or online sources. If certain resources are not available, the program coordinator works with the catechist to identify alternatives or substitutes. Meeting with each catechist individually, in person, and on a regular basis is the best way to ensure that his or her needs are being met.

## **Listening to and Engaging the Family**

Maintain active relationships with the families to encourage open lines of communication and mutual trust. The coordinator may also plan and facilitate opportunities for interaction with other parish families in both liturgical and social settings.

## **Working with Other Team Leaders**

The DRE, the school principal, and the pastor may act as co-coordinators for the *Adaptive Finding God Program*. As the program's point person, the coordinator will communicate regularly with each of these leaders, both to request support and to provide feedback about children's progress.

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGERIAL SKILLS

In an adaptive program, every learning situation is unique; changes and adjustments are continually being made, and questions constantly emerge. Respond efficiently to the steady flow of questions, challenges, and issues.

Specifically, lead in the following areas.

- **Calendar management.** The *Adaptive Finding God Program* schedule is established well in advance and coordinated with the parish religious education and liturgical calendars. A good deal of time will be spent juggling schedules and making accommodations.
- **Personal availability.** You are the go-to person who is available to parents, catechists, and staff and communicates an openness and a willingness to be contacted. You are also able to reach all members of the team quickly when there are unanticipated changes in the schedule.
- **Oversight of facilities.** You ensure that the physical spaces available for instruction are appropriate for this type of learning. You will often arrive early to make the necessary preparations and stay late to return the spaces to their original state.
- **Materials management.** The *Adaptive Finding God Program* is abundant in materials—Lesson Cards, Learning Tools, visual aids, resource books, handouts, and so on. You anticipate the need for materials, plan for them, acquire them, distribute them, collect them, and store them.
- **Contact with parents.** Especially at the beginning of the program, parents will look to you for direction, support, and information. Be ready and able to relate to parents in a direct, supportive, and respectful way. Oversee the logistics for the parents who accompany their children to one-on-one lessons. If the program will include a parent support or discussion group, designate a facilitator for that group and work closely with him or her to ensure parents' needs are met.

## When the DRE Serves as Program Coordinator

The tasks and problems demanding attention are fundamentally different than those found in typical classes. The best arrangement is for the DRE to oversee all religious education, including the adaptive program, but to leave the direction of the program to the coordinator.

If, however, the DRE finds himself or herself also serving as program coordinator, he or she should keep these priorities in mind.

**Building relationships.** If possible, delegate logistical tasks to an assistant and focus on building relationships. Strong bonds among catechists, parents, and children will ease some of the emotional and practical pressures on the program leader.

**Managing time.** Make sure you take the time—even a limited amount—to review, assess, and respond to issues within the program. Make it a priority to ensure that lesson time is being effectively managed by catechists; if it isn't, determine why and make adjustments. Organization tempered with flexibility is important.

**Ensuring the program is not an “add-on.”** Keep in mind that being treated like “add-ons” is the very thing many parents of children with special needs fear and resent most. Do whatever is needed to foster an environment of openness, attention, and responsiveness for the families in this program. Catechesis for all children, including those with special needs, is central to a parish's responsibility to its children.

# Implementation Models

## Sample One-Year-Only Plan

The following is a sample long-range plan for 25 faith formation sessions in one year. Each lesson represents one meeting time. Use this plan if you are likely to work with the child for **only one year**. You can adapt this plan to meet your yearly schedule.

### One Year Only

Learning Tool Lesson 1  
 Learning Tool Lesson 2  
 Learning Tool Lesson 3  
 Learning Tool Lesson 4  
 Learning Tool Lesson 5  
 Learning Tool Lesson 6  
 Learning Tool Lesson 7  
 Learning Tool Lesson 8  
 Learning Tool Lesson 9  
 Learning Tool Lesson 10  
 Learning Tool Lesson 11  
 Learning Tool Lesson 12  
 Learning Tool Lesson 13  
 Learning Tool Lesson 14  
 Learning Tool Lesson 15  
 Learning Tool Lesson 16  
 Learning Tool Lesson 17  
 Learning Tool Lesson 18  
 Learning Tool Lesson 19  
 Learning Tool Lesson 20  
 Learning Tool Lesson 21  
 Learning Tool Lesson 22  
 Learning Tool Lesson 23  
 Learning Tool Lesson 24  
 Learning Tool Lesson 25

**Add unit openers, sacramental preparation lessons, and seasonal lessons as time allows.**

## Sample Two-Year Plan

The following is a sample plan for a two-year program, consisting of 25 faith formation sessions per year. Each card and lesson represent one meeting time. Use this plan if you are likely to work with the child for **two years**. You can adapt this plan to meet your yearly schedule.

Year 1	Year 2
<b>Unit 1 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 1 Learning Tool Lesson 2 Learning Tool Lesson 3 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.	<b>Unit 1 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 4 Learning Tool Lesson 5 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.
<b>Unit 2 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 6 Learning Tool Lesson 7 Learning Tool Lesson 8 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.	<b>Unit 2 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 9 Learning Tool Lesson 10 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.
<b>Unit 3 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 11 Learning Tool Lesson 12 Learning Tool Lesson 13 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.	<b>Unit 3 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 14 Learning Tool Lesson 15 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.
<b>Unit 4 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 16 Learning Tool Lesson 17 Learning Tool Lesson 18 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.	<b>Unit 4 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 19 Learning Tool Lesson 20 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.
<b>Unit 5 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 21 Learning Tool Lesson 22 Learning Tool Lesson 23 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.	<b>Unit 5 Opener Card</b> Learning Tool Lesson 24 Learning Tool Lesson 25 Reteach any Learning Tool lesson that needs review.
	<b>Review Discrete Unit Concepts</b> Any Unit 1 Lesson Card Any Unit 2 Lesson Card Any Unit 3 Lesson Card Any Unit 4 Lesson Card Any Unit 5 Lesson Card
<b>Add unit openers, sacramental preparation lessons, and seasonal lessons as time allows.</b>	



# Planning in the Hands-On Level

The *Catechist Guide* provides the support and direction a catechist needs to select, plan, and teach each lesson.

- Before beginning a new unit, the catechist consults the unit lesson plan chart for an overview of session topics and Lesson Card themes. The catechist may also consider the Your Creative Side suggestions or brainstorm a few of his or her own.
- Before each lesson, the catechist prays in preparation and reads to gain background knowledge in Scripture, tradition, and catechesis.
- The 45-minute lesson planner then guides the catechist to choose a Lesson Card and prepare for the lesson. Four or five Lesson Cards are provided for each session theme. Catechists can present the cards in any order and adapt or repeat them as needed.
- General directions for teaching the Lesson Cards for a single session theme are provided in the Catechist Guide, and specific directions for teaching a given Lesson Card are provided on the card itself. (For sample implementation models, see pages 45–50 of this guide.)
- Each Lesson Card has two sides. Side A provides explicit directions for instruction, including the faith concept, a description of the activity, materials needed, an image of the finished activity, and an at-home activity suggestion. Side B features an activity, a pattern, or instruction that engages the child with simple designs and appealing illustrations.
- For each session theme, a Learning Tool lesson is also provided. This lesson presents a big-picture idea that sums up the five discrete concepts covered in a session’s Lesson Cards. Step-by-step instructions for teaching the Learning Tool lesson are provided.

## UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT 1 OPENER SAINT	SESSION 1: GOD CREATES THE WORLD	SESSION 2: GOD IS OUR FATHER
Saint Hildegard of Bingen	CARD 1A: God Creates the Earth and the Sky CARD 1B: God Creates the Sun, Moon, and Stars CARD 1C: God Creates Plants CARD 1D: God Creates Animals CARD 1E: God Creates People <b>LEARNING TOOL LESSON</b>	CARD 2A: God Made Us Good CARD 2B: God Loves All His Children CARD 2C: God Gives Us What We Need CARD 2D: God Gives Us the Bible CARD 2E: God Calls Us to Love <b>LEARNING TOOL LESSON</b>
SESSION 3: GOD IS THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT	SESSION 4: WE TALK TO GOD IN PRAYER	SESSION 5: WE PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER
CARD 3A: God Is Our Father CARD 3B: Jesus Is God the Son CARD 3C: God the Holy Spirit Guides Us CARD 3D: God Is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit CARD 3E: We Use Words, Pictures, and Gestures to Remind Us of the Trinity <b>LEARNING TOOL LESSON</b>	CARD 4A: We Tell God We Love Him CARD 4B: We Thank God CARD 4C: We Praise God CARD 4D: We Tell God We Are Sorry CARD 4E: We Ask God for Help for Ourselves and Others <b>LEARNING TOOL LESSON</b>	CARD 5A: We Honor and Respect God and His Name CARD 5B: We Ask God to Show Us How to Live and Act CARD 5C: We Ask God for What We Need CARD 5D: We Ask God for Forgiveness CARD 5E: We Ask God to Guide Us <b>LEARNING TOOL LESSON</b>

## Two-Hour Plan

Shown is a suggested schedule for a two-hour group session led by you, the program coordinator. You may wish to adapt it to your own needs. Before the session, familiarize yourself with the session plan and gather any materials you might need.

### TWO-HOUR ORIENTATION SCHEDULE

TOPIC	TIME
Gather and Welcome	10 minutes
Opening Prayer	10 minutes
Introduction	10 minutes
Program Overview	20 minutes
Lesson Components	30 minutes
Small-Group Sharing Activity	20 minutes
Wrap-Up and Closing Prayer	10 minutes



#### Orientation

Course notes and presentation slides are available at [www.findinggod.com/adaptive](http://www.findinggod.com/adaptive).

Register and access them with this **access code: AFG-2016**.

MATERIALS NEEDED	RELATED TASKS
The Effective Catechist Course (presentation slides available at <a href="http://www.findinggod.com/adaptive">www.findinggod.com/adaptive</a> )	If it is not possible to project the presentation slides, consider printing them two or six to a page in handout view.
Orientation Packets	Prepare orientation packets that contain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an <i>Adaptive Finding God</i> meeting schedule, including all dates of parent and class meetings</li> <li>• the Catechist Responsibilities checklist (found on page 100)</li> <li>• contact lists</li> <li>• other handouts such as the Welcome letter (page 103) and the Lesson Evaluation form (page 104) if you are using them (BLMs are also available at <a href="http://www.findinggod.com/adaptive">www.findinggod.com/adaptive</a>)</li> </ul>
Additional Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work tables for catechists</li> <li>• computer</li> <li>• computer projector</li> <li>• pens and paper or tablet for taking notes</li> <li>• Internet access (optional)</li> <li>• reflective music</li> <li>• device to play music</li> </ul>

## Sample Lesson-Plan Modifications

Here are sample lesson-plan modifications for two children who meet with catechists using the Adapted Grade Level in a group setting.

### GRADE 4 SESSION 1 LESSON PLAN FOR ISABEL

**Engage** Whole class experiences chart adaptation, page 241 of the *Adaptive Finding God* Catechist Guide. Discuss page 3 of the *Finding God* Children's Book as we go on the Creation Walk.

**Explore** Pair Isabel with classmate Alex to read pages 4 and 5 of the Children's Book and complete the Art Print Art Studio activity on page 229.

**Reflect** Provide visual cues for the recorded guided reflection as described in the chart adaptation, page 243 of the *Adaptive Finding God* Catechist Guide.

**Respond** Complete Living My Faith page as a class, as described in the Grade 4 *Finding God* Catechist Guide, page 8.

**With My Family** Invite Isabel's parents to complete the first bullet on page 8 of the *Finding God* Children's Book.

### GRADE 4 SESSION 1 LESSON PLAN FOR LUCAS

**Engage** Whole class experiences page 3 of the *Finding God* Children's Book. Lucas is supported by a catechist's assistant for reading as needed.

**Explore** Lucas works with a catechist's assistant to use the Picture Cards and complete pages 4 and 5 of the Children's Book as described in the chart adaptation, page 242 of the *Adaptive Finding God* Catechist Guide. Lucas completes the Art Print Art Studio activity with the class.

**Reflect** Whole class experiences the recorded guided reflection together as described in the Grade 4 *Finding God* Catechist Guide, page 8.

**Respond** Complete the Living My Faith page as a class, as described in the Grade 4 *Finding God* Catechist Guide, page 8.

**With My Family** Invite Lucas's parents to share the faith experience described in the modification chart, page 245 of the *Adaptive Finding God* Catechist Guide.

# Implementation Models

The Adapted Grade Level curriculum schedule aligns with your parish or school's *Finding God* core curriculum schedule. The pages that follow include implementation models for parish, school, and home use. See the *Finding God Director Quick-Start Guide* for more information about creating a session schedule that meets your needs.

## Implementation Model 1

**Parish Weekly Sessions: 25 sessions (with blended approach using intergenerational events as unit openers)**

Month	Finding God Session	Intergenerational Sessions
September	1. Unit 1, Session 1 2. Unit 1, Session 2 3. Unit 1, Session 3	Intergenerational Event, Unit 1: God, Our Creator and Father
October	4. Unit 1, Session 4 5. Unit 1, Session 5 6. Unit 2, Session 6	Intergenerational Event, Unit 2: Jesus, Our Lord and Savior
November	7. Unit 2, Session 7 8. Unit 2, Session 8 9. Unit 2, Session 9	
December	10. Unit 2, Session 10 11. Unit 3, Session 11 12. Unit 3, Session 12	Intergenerational Event, Unit 3: The Church, Our Community in the Spirit
January	13. Unit 3, Session 13 14. Unit 3, Session 14 15. Unit 3, Session 15	
February	16. Unit 4, Session 16 17. Unit 4, Session 17 18. Unit 4, Session 18	Intergenerational Event, Unit 4: Sacraments, Our Way of Life
March	19. Unit 4, Session 19 20. Unit 4, Session 20 21. Unit 5, Session 21	Intergenerational Event, Unit 5: Morality, Our Lived Faith
April	22. Unit 5, Session 22 23. Unit 5, Session 23 24. Unit 5, Session 24	
May	25. Unit 5, Session 25	

# Catechist Training and Orientation

The plans in this section guide you in helping catechists prepare to implement the Adapted Grade Level of the *Adaptive Finding God Program*.

These materials supplement the Effective Catechist Course found on pages EC-1 through EC-42 of the Catechist Guide. Catechists can complete this course as a self-guided experience, interacting with you as prompted and needed or in a group setting led by you. Before the session, familiarize yourself with the session plan and gather any materials you might need.

The training and orientation materials are designed to help you give catechists an introduction and overview of the program and then guide them through the Effective Catechist Course as a group or invite them to complete it on their own. You may adapt your approach as needed.

TOPIC	TIME
Opening prayer, Welcome, and Introductions	10 minutes
<i>Adaptive Finding God Program</i> Overview	20 minutes
Children's Book	20 minutes
Catechist Guide	20 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Adapted Grade Level	15 minutes
With My Family Activities	10 minutes
Question-and-Answer Session	20 minutes
Wrap-Up and Closing Prayer	5 minutes
	2 hours 10 min. total



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