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Spiritual

Bringing Others to Jesus

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

How do I get started? The first step is to create the necessary space to make things happen. It is important to remember that “space” is physical but also personal. In other words, I have to attend to the layout of a place, but I also have to attend to the configuration of personal relationships. Sometimes this first step of establishing the right physical and personal space means using a creative process to make things work—seeing things differently, moving the parts in unexpected ways. At a deeper level, getting started also involves a spiritual process for the catechist, something on the inside that looks creatively at the place and the people in the light of faith.

This clustering of space, people, and creativity reminds me of a wonderful story near the beginning of Mark’s Gospel (2:1–12), the healing of a paralytic. A group of men have a friend who is paralyzed. We can read between the lines and speculate that they are young men, strong enough to carry their friend around. They are obviously attached to him, love him, and do not want him to remain suffering with his paralysis. It is also clear that they want to bring him to Jesus, because

they are confident that he can help, that he *will* help if only they can come in contact with him.

They know what they want, and it is the healing touch of Jesus. Still, they are perplexed. The crowd seems to make it impossible to get to Jesus, who is inside a house that is surrounded, maybe even packed outside, with anxious bystanders each one of whom has special needs. How can they bring their friend to Jesus?

There is no ordinary, conventional space, no way to get through the door. They are perplexed but not put off. They are undaunted and determined. Their hearts are set in the direction of Jesus. This intense focus on their goal pushes them to a creative option. They bring their friend to the roof of the house. They open the roof and lower their friend until he is within Jesus’ grasp.

Catechists ought to have one fundamental desire—to bring others to Jesus.

Catechists, as they get started, ought to have one fundamental desire—to bring those entrusted to their care to Jesus. They lead others to meet him,

Reflection

to know him, to be touched by him. It is a love of those in our care and a confidence in the power of the Lord that pushes us forward. Still, the circumstances can be daunting and truly challenging. What can be done? Where do we begin?

If it begins in love and confidence, as it did for the friends of the paralyzed man, we will find the right way. Perhaps we will follow a traditional way and organize things in an ordinary way. Perhaps our love coupled with determination and confidence will enable us to overcome formidable obstacles—both within ourselves and without—with creative solutions. Maybe we will climb the roof, create an opening, and lower our people before the feet of Jesus. We will embrace whatever it takes, because love and confident faith know no limits.

For Reflection

In your own life, who has helped you meet Jesus? What did they do to help you know his love for you?

Father Louis J. Cameli is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Norridge, Illinois. He completed his theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome and obtained a doctorate in theology with a specialization in spirituality. He is the former director of ongoing formation of priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago and director of the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House, Mundelein, Illinois. In February, 2002, he received the Pope John XXIII Award from the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) for his contributions to the continuing education and ongoing formation of priests. He has authored numerous books on spirituality and also served as a writer and theological consultant for RCL's *Faith First* Legacy Edition K-8 curriculum.

A Catechist's Prayer

*Lord God, you are the source of all love,
truth, and goodness.*

*You are the source of my being
and your word is the true path for my journey.*

*Grant me the **courage**
to live according to your word.*

*Instill in me through the gift of your Holy Spirit,
the **desire** and the **wisdom** to share your love, your truth,
and your goodness with my students.*

*Help me use my time to better prepare myself
for this sacred **responsibility**.*

*For I need to offer myself in your service
with all of the **patience, perseverance, and love**
that you have first shown to me.*

*I ask no more than this, Lord,
in the name of your Son
and my Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Overview: Getting Started Module

This module introduces you to some of the essential elements you will need to know as you begin your catechetical ministry. You will find the module easy to use in either a group or self-directed setting.

In this module you will use three components: a DVD, a companion booklet, and a CD-ROM. See page 5 for an explanation of how these components complement one another. You began on pages 6 and 7 with a spiritual reflection on the important role you play in leading others to Jesus. On the next page an exercise will allow you to reflect on and name your beginning assumptions about four important elements in getting started as a catechist.

The body of the booklet that follows is divided into four segments that parallel the divisions in the DVD.

- 1. Creating the Physical Environment:** Demonstrates simple ways in which you can create a positive physical environment for catechesis
- 2. Nurturing the Social Environment:** Addresses ways to develop a positive social environment that builds relationships and allows for faith reflection and prayer
- 3. Using Creative Activities:** Demonstrates creative activities that help your learners grow in an understanding and appreciation of their faith

- 4. Planning for Success:** Demonstrates steps in effective planning and offers suggestions for using your catechist guide

Each segment in the booklet leads you through a four-page process to reflect on the DVD content and choose ways to apply the content to your catechetical setting.

- 1. Introduction:** States the goal and objectives for the session and provides a question for personal reflection
- 2. Looking Ahead—Presentation:** Includes a video overview and space to write questions and comments during and after viewing
- 3. Looking Back—Reflection:** Includes three questions to check comprehension and offers a chance for group reflection
- 4. Looking Beyond—Application:** Includes an opportunity to summarize new insights and apply them to a practical setting

An enrichment article at the end of each segment process explores a topic related to the segment theme.

Catechists need the support and encouragement of other catechists. If you cannot participate in the learning process of this module in a group setting, find at least one other catechist with whom you can work and share your reflections.

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Jack McBride holds a BA from Marquette University and an MA in theology from Harvard University. He is past chair of USCCB's National Advisory Committee for Adult Religious Education (NACARE) and is chair of NCCL's Committee on Adult Faith Formation. He is the author of a number of articles related to Scripture, curriculum development, and organizational development. Jack also served as an advisor on the original Echoes of Faith project. Jack is married and the father of three children.

Nurturing the Social Environment

Creating a hospitable, welcoming, and safe environment is foundational to everything else you do in catechesis, for it makes growth in faith a real possibility. Also, whether you are a catechist in a parish or a school setting, you will want to change the dynamics of the atmosphere in the classroom from that of other kinds of classes. This will ensure that your learners know that you are inviting them, not just to know about Jesus, but to truly encounter him. This segment will help you learn ways to develop an affirming social climate for catechesis.

Goal

To demonstrate ways to build appropriate relationships with and among your learners and to create a positive social climate in which faith can grow

Learning Objectives

- To describe strategies for developing a positive social environment
- To identify ways to affirm your learners in their faith formation
- To demonstrate a variety of techniques that achieves positive classroom management

Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect on the following topic. Then discuss it with another person or with your group.

Recall a time when you had the opportunity to make people feel welcome and comfortable enough to share their ideas and feelings.

List two or three actions you took to create a successful social environment.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You were both leader and companion to your disciples. By your presence and example, you modeled for them and for us how to be faithful to the God who loves us. Help us to teach as you did, gently yet firmly, and to create a loving community in which those in our care can come to deeper faith in you. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Looking Back

Reflect silently on one or more of the questions below and then jot down your response(s). Then share your thoughts with another person or with a group.

1. As a result of viewing this segment, explain some of the actions you observed that help create a more positive social climate.
2. List the things you observed the catechists doing that showed respect for their learners. Explain other ways you can offer your learners respect or positive reinforcement.
3. What examples of positive classroom management did you observe in the video?

Remember . . .

- Greet learners.**
-
- Use names.**
-
- Show your interest.**
-
- Honor diversity.**
-
- Use ritual and prayer.**
-
- Build relationships.**
-
- Focus the learners.**
-
- Work in groups.**
-
- Vary activities.**
-
- Ask questions.**
-
- Challenge learners.**
-
- Discipline with respect.**

Looking Beyond

Catechists are to identify and create "suitable conditions which are necessary for the Christian message to be sought, accepted, and more profoundly investigated" for each of the various groups they serve.

*NDC 54B, 8
(Cf. General Catechetical Directory 71)*



You may wish to read the article on pages 21–22 on "Nurturing the Social Environment" before continuing to Segment 3.

Your growth and competence in creating a positive social environment will be evident as you witness your learners engaging in cooperative learning and affirming one another. The following activity offers you an opportunity to imagine concrete ways to put into practice what you have learned in this segment.

PRACTICE FOR CATECHISTS

Developing a Positive Climate

Whether you catechize in a parish or school setting, you may find it difficult for your learners to appreciate the difference between regular classes, such as math or history, and catechetical sessions. What can you do to create a social environment that will help them see this difference?

Situation

Strategies

What Did I Learn?

In this space, summarize the most important insights you gained in this segment.

What Will I Change?

In this space, write one thing you will do differently as a catechist because of what you learned in this segment.

Nurturing the Social Environment

by Bea Cunningham

The relationship between the catechist and the learner is at the heart of the catechetical process. The social environment that catechists create in their catechetical settings can make growth in faith a real possibility.

In attending to this environment the catechist creates an atmosphere of sacred space. Whether your setting is a home, a church basement, or a school classroom, your learners should sense that they have entered a space that is different from an ordinary learning setting. Placing religious objects in that space will not be enough. It is your modeling of Jesus' quality of presence, your attentiveness, and your affirmation of each person that will create that sacred space.

Creating a positive social environment also means attention to the affective, or emotional, dimension of your learners. It is the whole person who responds to God's call. Therefore it is just as important to draw out of people their insights about what they have experienced in the session and in life as it is for them to understand on a cognitive level what you have

taught. For it is both knowledge and insight that will lead to new Christian behaviors.

In modeling the way of Jesus, the catechist creates a climate of mutual respect in which the learners are challenged to honor one another's ideas and insights, and to be particularly respectful of cultural and physical differences. The learners are invited by the catechist to be enriched by the diversity that exists among the members of the group, and challenged to carry these attitudes into their daily lives.

You may feel that you do not know enough about the traditions and customs of some of the members of your group to work well with them. It is important to read and learn more about the ethnic and cultural identities of your learners. But you can learn much of what you need to know by simply asking the members of your group to tell you about their traditions. Ask them to share with you how your "ways" may seem different to them. By listening respectfully and then honoring some of their

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If parishes welcome and respect children, creating an atmosphere of trust, then children will listen.

Judith Dunlap,
Practical Catechesis



The article on "Creating Sacred Space for Prayer" on pages 42 and 43 will assist you in making your setting a more hospitable space for prayer and reflection.

traditions within your setting, you affirm your learners and help them appreciate how special each of them is in God's eyes.

You reinforce this respectful climate by providing opportunities for the learners to interact with one another, to share their beliefs and ideas, and to engage in activities and problem solving related to the doctrines and values you are teaching. Allow the learners to work together in small groups. Ask open-ended questions and invite them to discuss answers

among themselves. As long as you offer clear directions and expectations, learners of all ages will respond well to group work.

You can never "cause" faith in another person. Faith is a gift from God. The time you spend with a particular learner is only a small moment in his or her faith journey, but it can be a significant moment. When you create a positive climate in which the seeds of faith can grow, you truly participate in the ministry of Jesus.

For Reflection

- What challenges do you face in responding in a positive way to the ethnic diversity in your classroom and parish?
- What can you do to make your catechetical setting a truly sacred space?