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Spiritual

Living Your Catholic Faith with Young People

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

As a catechist or teacher, you face the incomparable task of guiding young people into a deeper grasp of their faith, so that they can live it out more fully. This extraordinary responsibility calls for study and preparation. You'll need to know what you are doing. You'll also need to know those whom you are called to serve. In developing the age-appropriate methods to communicate faith and to deepen its appropriation in our children, you must also look within yourself.

You do not stand outside of the faith experience of the young people you are serving. In fact, you share every phase and stage that they experience. For example, as children began their faith journey they had a foundational and immediate experience of the Lord presented to them. As they matured they deepened their faith through signs and symbols that mediated deeper dimensions of faith. Later, they explored ideas and conceptualizations that enabled them to understand the logic and consequences of faith. You too, have shared these steps and passages with them because, once

experienced, they remain with all believers throughout their lives.

Seventh- and eighth-graders are growing physically and emotionally. Their human development encompasses a readiness to put their convictions into practice, to move from thought to action. This human development has an impact in shaping their faith journey as well. Faith can be more than a direct experience, more than an experience mediated in sign and symbol, more than an experience that can be conceptualized in various ways. Faith can now be a way of living and acting, something of great practical consequence.

The teachers and catechists who assist learners at this level can profitably retrieve and renew in their own experience this practical and living dimension of faith. Thus, when you walk with the young people at this level, you are truly sharing more than an idea. You are sharing their very own faith as well.

Seventh- and eighth-graders are ready to put their convictions into practice.

Reflection

An outstanding biblical example of the practical consequence of faith—its implications for action, decision, and life—is the story of the Good Samaritan. (See Luke 10:25–37.)

Embedded in this account of mercy and compassion is Jesus' vision of the practical consequence of all of us finding common ground and relationship in him and in his Holy Spirit. We are neighbor to each other without qualification and without condition. The more we are in need, the more we are bound to each other. The power of this story and others like it in the Bible rests in the way it pushes us out of theory and general conviction into decision and action.

As you help young people of the seventh and eighth grades discover this dimension of faith, you have the opportunity to re-discover it within yourself.



For Reflection

- What is your first memory of putting your faith into action?
- As you read this reflection, what new insights did you gain about your role as a catechist?

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* and *Faith First Legacy Edition* K-8 curriculum.

A Prayer for Guidance

Loving God,

thank you for the opportunity to **grow**,
to **witness**, and to **serve** our brothers and sisters
in the Christian community.

Thank you for the opportunity to be with **young people**.

They remind us of your **love and hope** for the world.

Help us share with them what they will need
to be **courageous, compassionate, knowledgeable** disciples.

Help us have patience, enthusiasm, and daring
to **walk in dignity** with them on their faith journey.

Help us as catechists to offer the learners you send us
the **challenge and the joy** of living in and for Jesus Christ.

Remind us gently yet persistently
that we are **never alone** in our ministry,
that the Spirit is always present, and
that it is the Spirit who changes lives.

Amen.

Overview: Methods for Grades 7 and 8

The *National Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that growing in faith is a lifelong process. One of the first things to know about catechesis is that you and your learners are on a journey together. Your experience as their catechist can also be one of growth in faith for you. This module begins by describing the lifelong faith journey and invites you to reflect on your own place in that journey. It is by being in touch with your own faith that you will best be able to share faith with your learners.

In this module you will engage in a process of faith reflection using three components: a DVD, this companion booklet, and a CD-ROM. See page 5 for an explanation of how these components complement one another. You began on page 7 with a reflection on your earliest religious memories. On the next page an exercise will help you recall your spiritual, intellectual, social, and emotional development when you were twelve or fourteen years old.

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

- **The Faith Journey:** A brief overview of the whole life journey of faith
- **Growing as a Catholic Christian:** Ideas for introducing the Catholic Tradition to young people in ways that will help them build faith concepts as they grow
- **Responding to the Message of Jesus:** Creative activities to help

young people assimilate and respond to the Christian story

- **Praying in the Classroom:** A reflection on the importance of ritual prayer in your catechetical setting

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

There is an enrichment article at the end of each segment process that extends learning by exploring a topic related to the segment theme.

Catechists need the support and encouragement of other catechists. Try to participate in the learning process of this module in a group setting. If circumstances require that you work independently, find at least one other catechist with whom you can work and share your reflections.

Mary Braitman has been a catechist in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for more than thirty years. She has worked with all age groups from early childhood through adult. She has served both as a parish director of religious education and as a parish adult education coordinator. She has been a master catechist and has served on many ministry formation teams. She has also served as regional consultant for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Religious Education, providing resources and consultation for Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

Growing as a Catholic Christian

Seventh- and eighth-graders are inquisitive, energetic, and increasingly independent in their thoughts and actions. This age is the beginning of a time of rapid physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. Twelve- to fourteen-year-olds require both structure and the opportunity to reflect upon and express their own opinions. Their growing ability to think abstractly allows the catechist to engage them in activities that can deepen their critical thinking and decision-making skills. This segment will help you lead them to a deeper understanding of the Church's heritage.

Goal

To demonstrate ways to help young people understand their role as a part of their faith community

Learning Objectives

- To provide examples of how young people deepen their understanding of belonging to the Christian community
- To describe activities that encourage twelve- to fourteen-year-olds to reflect upon issues and experiences and share their insights
- To develop an activity that allows the learners to be actively engaged in the learning process

Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions.

When you were twelve or fourteen, how strongly did you identify with your faith tradition? What are the experiences that have helped you deepen your identity as a Catholic Christian?

Prayer

Living God, your word is light for me. Thank you for the opportunity to share my Catholic faith with children. Help me be guided by the wisdom of your Spirit alive in the Church as I help young people grow in their love for the riches of our faith tradition. I ask this in the name of your Son, whose way I try to follow every day. Amen.

On the one hand, [the method chosen] must be faithful to God and to his Revelation; on the other, it must respect the liberty and promote the active participation of those being catechized.

NDC 28B

Watch Segment 2
of the DVD
or CD-ROM now.

Looking Ahead

This segment demonstrates how to introduce young people to the Catholic Tradition in ways that will help them remember and understand it more clearly. Below you will find an outline of the principal content of the DVD that accompanies this segment. You may wish to refer to this outline as you watch the DVD. Below the outline, there is space for you to jot down questions that occur to you during and after the viewing.

Video Outline

- An activity in which the skills and talents of the learners are used for the good of the Christian community
- Activities relating Catholic teachings to the learners' experience
- Examples of catechists actively engaging their learners in discussion and sharing

Comments and Questions

Use the space below to list questions, feelings, or ideas that occur to you as you view the video.

A large rectangular area with a vertical red line on the left side and horizontal lines, intended for writing comments and questions.

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 the group.

1. Recall the video activity in which young people engage in fundraising activities for others in need. What knowledge and skills did these twelve- to fourteen-year-olds learn from this activity about living as a Catholic Christian?
2. Recall the Confirmation activity in the video. How did this activity help the eight graders move from knowledge about the sacrament to a deeper understanding of its significance in the Christian life?
3. What strategies did you see the catechists in the video using that helped engage the young people with the faith concepts? What is an activity you would like to try with your own learners?

Remember . . .

- Acknowledge the changes of adolescence.**
-
- Offer role models.**
-
- Encourage critical reflection.**
-
- Support self-expression.**
-
- Help relate faith to life.**
-
- Encourage faith sharing.**
-
- Use personal and communal prayer.**
-
- Incorporate ritual and symbol.**

Looking Beyond

Twelve- to fourteen-year-olds can grow in understanding their faith by engaging in peer learning. The exercise below will help you develop an activity that will involve learners in demonstrating an understanding of their faith.

**Catechesis
nourishes a
living, explicit,
and fruitful
faith lived
in discipleship
to Jesus Christ.**

NDC 29B

PRACTICE FOR CATECHISTS

Relating Reconciliation to Life

Design an activity that will involve your learners in developing a deeper appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you describe your activity, include answers to the following four questions.

1. What do you want your learners to understand about the sacrament?
2. What will you do to involve them in critical thinking?
3. How will you incorporate peer learning?
4. What will they do to apply what they have learned?

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.



The article on pages 21 and 22 will give you practical tips for helping young people work with faith concepts.

Building Faith Concepts Together

by Judith Deckers

Learning together is an integral part of the catechetical process for twelve- to fourteen-year-olds. When young people share their understandings of the truths and beliefs of their Catholic faith, they are learning to consider each others' views, to rethink their previous knowledge, and to deepen their understanding of their faith. However, good group discussions do not just happen. Young adolescents need to learn skills for this process we call collaborative learning.

One simple strategy is called "think, pair, and share." Present a question that requires thinking beyond facts. Invite your learners to think about the question silently, then to discuss their answers in pairs, and finally to join with the whole group for some total class sharing. This exercise is a good starting point for learners who are not accustomed to collaborative learning activities.

Another strategy is called the "jigsaw." Divide your class into groups of four and give each learner in each group a number from one to four. Give all the "ones" a Gospel passage, all the "twos" another passage, and so on.

Ask everyone to read their passage silently and to think about its message. The goal is for the learners with the same passage to form new groups and to discuss ways to express their Gospel message, then return to their "home base" and deliver the message. The home group then decides together ways to live these Gospel messages today. By using this strategy, learners are learning collaboration, synthesizing information, and imagining future behaviors.

Once your learners are comfortable with these strategies, invite them to work with moral dilemmas. Present a situation from the news, literature, or the electronic media for discussion. Divide them into groups and give each group member a task such as being a recorder, a reader, a time-keeper, or a leader who keeps the group on task. Give the group a time limit and specific questions that must be answered. The goal might also be to identify the moral issue involved, to brainstorm the consequences of different decisions, or to choose a solution. Moral dilemmas give your

The success of collaborative learning depends on the catechist's ability to ask questions well.

Judith Deckers is a retired professor of education at Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts, where she taught undergraduate and graduate courses in reading and education. She is the author of an early childhood curriculum and has presented workshops nationally on the faith development of young children. She was project editor on the original *Echoes of Faith* and currently serves as Educational Specialist for RCL. Judith holds a Master of Education degree from Boston University.

QUESTION STARTERS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

FACTUAL QUESTIONS

- What do you know about ... ?
- Have I told you about ... ?
- What/where is the ... ?
- Would you tell me about the time when ... ?

FEELING QUESTIONS

- How do you feel when ... ?
- Who/what is your favorite ... ?
- What do you think about ... ?
- Would you rather ... or ... ?
- Why?

MEANING QUESTIONS

- Why is it important to ... ?
- What does it mean to ... ?
- How is ... similar to ... ?
- What is the moral of ... ?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What would you do if ... ?
- What will happen if you ... ?
- How will you respond to ... ?
- When will you begin?

learners the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. Your role is to summarize and rename for them what they have learned and to show them where their insights connect with Scripture and Tradition.

The success of both small group collaborative learning and large group discussions depends on the catechist's ability to ask questions well. Through questions your learners move from an ability to know facts to an ability to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and apply the faith concepts they are learning. Before preparing your questions, determine what it is you want your learners to achieve in the session. Try to write two or three statements that express these intended outcomes. This process will help the questions you need to use to fall into place.

Different kinds of questions serve different purposes. "Factual questions" allow you to determine what your learners can recall about a subject. "Feeling questions" invite learners to express not only their feelings, but attitudes, values, and opinions as well. Allowing such questions creates an environment in

which young adolescents feel their thoughts are respected and welcomed. "Meaning questions" get at the significance of the facts. They help learners interpret what they know and deepen comprehension. "Application questions" address the ways your learners can apply their learning to their lives.

When asking higher-level questions, always give young adolescents the time to think before answering. The purpose of the questioning is to build a capacity for reflection about faith concepts and to make application to life. There is little value in the sharing of superficial opinions offered without thought. Acknowledge all answers and record the learners' main thoughts. This will allow all the learners to reflect on one another's answers and to deepen understanding.

Much of Jesus' ministry involved shared experience, dialogue, questioning, and challenge. Collaborative learning and effective questioning will work for you as they did for Jesus, inviting and encouraging your learners to a more deeply committed Christian life.

For Reflection

- In your own faith formation, what is a learning strategy that helped you engage with a faith concept?
- What new strategies were suggested in this article that you would like to try?